**History of Russia**

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**The history of** [**Russia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) begins with that of the [East Slavs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Slavs). The first East Slavic state, [Kievan Rus'](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kievan_Rus%27), adopted [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) from the [Byzantine Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire) in 988, beginning the synthesis of Byzantine and [Slavic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavs) cultures that defined Russian culture for the next millennium. Kievan Rus' ultimately disintegrated as a state, finally succumbing to [Mongol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol) invaders in the 1230s. During this time a number of regional magnates, in particular Novgorod and Pskov, fought to inherit the cultural and political legacy of Kievan Rus'

After the 13th century, [Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow) gradually came to dominate the former cultural center. By the 18th century, the [Grand Duchy of Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duchy_of_Moscow) had become the huge [Russian Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire), stretching from [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland) eastward to the [Pacific Ocean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Ocean). Expansion in the western direction sharpened Russia's awareness of its separation from much of the rest of Europe and shattered the isolation in which the initial stages of expansion had occurred. Successive regimes of the 19th century responded to such pressures with a combination of halfhearted reform and repression. [Russian serfdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_serfdom) was [abolished in 1861](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_reform_of_1861_in_Russia), but its abolition was achieved on terms unfavorable to the [peasants](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peasant) and served to increase revolutionary pressures. Between the abolition of serfdom and the beginning of [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) in 1914, the [Stolypin reforms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stolypin_reform), the [constitution of 1906](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Constitution_of_1906) and [State Duma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duma) introduced notable changes to the economy and politics of Russia, but the [tsars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsar) were still not willing to relinquish [autocratic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autocracy) rule, or share their power.

The [Russian Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Revolution_of_1917) in 1917 was triggered by a combination of economic breakdown, war weariness, and discontent with the autocratic system of government, and it first brought a coalition of liberals and moderate socialists to power, but their failed policies led to seizure of power by the [Communist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_the_Soviet_Union) [Bolsheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik) on October 25. Between 1922 and 1991, the history of Russia is essentially the [history of the Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Soviet_Union), effectively an ideologically based state which was roughly conterminous with the Russian Empire before the [Treaty of Brest-Litovsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Brest-Litovsk). The approach to the building of socialism, however, varied over different periods in Soviet history, from the mixed economy and diverse society and culture of the 1920s to the command economy and repressions of the [Stalin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalin) era to the "era of stagnation" in the 1980s. From its first years, government in the Soviet Union was based on the one-party rule of the Communists, as the Bolsheviks called themselves, beginning in March 1918. However, by the late 1980s, with the weaknesses of its economic and political structures becoming acute, the Communist leaders embarked on major reforms, which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The [history of the Russian Federation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_post-Soviet_Russia) is brief, dating back only to the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991. Since gaining its independence, Russia was recognized as the legal successor to the Soviet Union on the international stage. However, Russia has lost its [superpower](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superpower) status as it faced serious challenges in its efforts to forge a new post-Soviet political and economic system. Scrapping the socialist [central planning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planned_economy) and state ownership of property of the Soviet era, Russia attempted to build an economy with elements of market [capitalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism), with often painful results. Even today Russia shares many continuities of political culture and social structure with its tsarist and Soviet past.

**Early history**

[Kurgan hypothesis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurgan_hypothesis): South Russia as the [urheimat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urheimat) of [Indo-European peoples](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Europeans)

**Pre-Slavic inhabitants**

*Further information:* [*Steppe nomads*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steppe_nomads)*,*[*Scythians*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scythians)*,*[*Bosporan Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosporan_Kingdom)*, and*[*Khazaria*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khazaria)

During the prehistoric eras the vast [steppes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steppe) of Southern Russia were home to [tribes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribe) of [nomadic pastoralists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomadic_pastoralists). In classical antiquity, the [Pontic Steppe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontic_Steppe) was known as [Scythia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scythia). Remnants of these long-gone steppe civilizations were discovered in the course of the 20th century in such places as [Ipatovo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ipatovo_kurgan), [Sintashta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sintashta), [Arkaim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arkaim), and [Pazyryk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pazyryk). In the latter part of the eighth century BC, Greek merchants brought [classical civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_civilization) to the trade emporiums in [Tanais](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanais) and [Phanagoria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phanagoria). [Gelonus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gelonus) was described by [Herodotos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herodotos) as a huge (Europe's biggest) earth and wood fortified [grad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grad_%28Slavic_settlement%29) inhabited around 500 BC by Heloni and [Budini](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Budini). Between the third and sixth centuries [AD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anno_Domini), the [Bosporan Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosporan_Kingdom), a Hellenistic polity which succeeded the Greek colonies, was overwhelmed by successive waves of nomadic invasions, led by warlike tribes which would often move on to [Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe), as was the case with the [Huns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huns) and [Turkish Avars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurasian_Avars). A Turkic people, the [Khazars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khazars), ruled the lower [Volga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga_River) basin [steppes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steppe) between the [Caspian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caspian_Sea) and [Black Seas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sea) through to the 8th century. Noted for their laws, tolerance, and cosmopolitanism, the Khazars were the main commercial link between the Baltic and the [Muslim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam) [Abbasid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbasid) empire centered in [Baghdad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baghdad) They were important allies of the [Byzantine Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire), and waged a series of successful wars against the [Arab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab) [Caliphates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caliphate). In the 8th century, the Khazars embraced [Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism).

A general map of the cultures in European Russia at the arrival of the Varangians

**Early East Slavs**

Main articles: [Early East Slavs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_East_Slavs) and [Rus' Khaganate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rus%27_Khaganate)

The ancestors of the [Russians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russians) were the [Slavic tribes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavic_peoples), whose original home is thought by some scholars to have been the wooded areas of the [Pripet Marshes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pripet_Marshes). The [Early East Slavs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_East_Slavs) gradually settled Western Russia in two waves: one moving from [Kiev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiev) toward present-day [Suzdal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suzdal) and [Murom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murom) and another from [Polotsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polotsk) toward [Novgorod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novgorod) and [Rostov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rostov). From the 7th century onwards, the East Slavs constituted the bulk of the population in Western Russia and slowly but peacefully assimilated the native [Finno-Ugric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finno-Ugric) tribes, such as the [Merya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merya), the [Muromians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muroma), and the [Meshchera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meshchera).

**Kievan Rus'**

Kievan Rus' in the 11th century

Main article: [Kievan Rus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kievan_Rus)

[Scandinavian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scandinavia) Norsemen, called "[Vikings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikings)" in Western Europe and "[Varangians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varangian)" in the East, combined [piracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piracy) and trade in their roaming over much of Northern Europe. In the mid-9th century, they began to venture along the waterways from the eastern [Baltic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_Sea) to the [Black](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sea) and [Caspian Seas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caspian_Sea). According to the [earliest Russian chronicle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Primary_Chronicle), a Varangian named [Rurik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rurik) was elected ruler ([*knyaz*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_prince)) of Novgorod in about 860, before his successors moved south and extended their authority to [Kiev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiev), which had been previously dominated by the Khazars.

Thus, the first East Slavic state, [Kievan Rus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kievan_Rus)', emerged in the 9th century along the [Dnieper River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dnieper_River) valley. A coordinated group of princely states with a common interest in maintaining trade along the river routes, Kievan Rus' controlled [the trade route for furs, wax, and slaves](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_route_from_the_Varangians_to_the_Greeks) between Scandinavia and the Byzantine Empire along the [Volkhov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volkhov_River) and Dnieper Rivers.

The name "Russia", together with the [Finnish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finnish_language) *Ruotsi* (which means "Sweden") and [Estonian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estonian_language) *Rootsi* (which means "Sweden"), are found by some scholars to be related to [Roslagen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roslagen). The [etymology of *Rus* and its derivatives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etymology_of_Rus_and_derivatives) are debated, and other schools of thought connect the name with Slavic or [Iranic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_languages) roots.

By the end of the 10th century, the [Norse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Norse_language) minority had merged with the Slavic population, which also absorbed [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Greece) [Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) influences in the course of the multiple [campaigns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rus%27%E2%80%93Byzantine_War) to loot [Tsargrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsargrad), or [Constantinople](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantinople). One such campaign claimed the life of the foremost Slavic [druzhina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Druzhina) leader, [Svyatoslav I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svyatoslav_I), who was renowned for having crushed the power of the [Khazars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khazars) on the Volga. At the time, the [Byzantine Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire) was experiencing a major military and cultural revival; despite its later decline, its culture would have a continuous influence on the development of Russia in its formative centuries.

Kievan Rus' is important for its introduction of a Slavic variant of the [Eastern Orthodox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Orthodoxy) religion, dramatically deepening a synthesis of Byzantine and Slavic cultures that defined Russian culture for the next thousand years. The region adopted [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) in 988 by the official act of public [baptism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptism_of_Kievan_Rus%27) of Kiev inhabitants by [Prince Vladimir I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_I_of_Kiev). Some years later the first code of laws, [Russkaya Pravda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russkaya_Pravda), was introduced From the onset the Kievan princes followed the Byzantine example and kept the Church dependent on them, even for its revenues, so that the Russian Church and state were always closely linked.

By the 11th century, particularly during the reign of [Yaroslav the Wise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaroslav_the_Wise), Kievan Rus' could boast an economy and achievements in architecture and literature superior to those that then existed in the western part of the continent. Compared with the languages of European Christendom, the [Russian language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_language) was little influenced by the [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language) and [Latin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin) of early Christian writings. This was due to the fact that [Church Slavonic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Slavonic) was used directly in [liturgy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy) instead.

A nomadic Turkic people, the [Kipchaks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kipchaks) (also known as the Cumans), replaced the earlier [Pechenegs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pechenegs) as the dominant force in the south steppe regions neighbouring to Rus' at the end of 11th century and founded a nomadic state in the steppes along the Black Sea (Desht-e-Kipchak). Repelling their regular attacks, especially on Kiev, which was just one day's ride from the steppe, was a heavy burden for the southern areas of Rus'. The nomadic incursions caused a massive influx of Slavs to the safer, heavily forested regions of the north, particularly to the area known as [Zalesye](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zalesye).

Kievan Rus' ultimately disintegrated as a state because of in-fighting between members of the princely family that ruled it collectively. Kiev's dominance waned, to the benefit of [Vladimir-Suzdal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir-Suzdal) in the north-east, [Novgorod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novgorod_Republic) in the north, and [Halych-Volhynia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halych-Volhynia) in the south-west. Conquest by the [Mongol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol) [Golden Horde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Horde) in the 13th century was the final blow. Kiev was destroyed. Halych-Volhynia would eventually be absorbed into the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth), while the Mongol-dominated Vladimir-Suzdal and independent [Novgorod Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novgorod_Republic), two regions on the periphery of Kiev, would establish the basis for the modern Russian nation.

**Mongol invasion**

Sacking of [Suzdal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suzdal) by [Batu Khan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batu_Khan) in February, 1238: a [miniature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miniature_%28illuminated_manuscript%29) from the sixteenth century chronicle

Main articles: [Mongol invasion of Rus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol_invasion_of_Rus) and [Tatar invasions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatar_invasions)

The invading Mongols accelerated the fragmentation of the Rus'. In 1223, the disunited southern princes faced a Mongol raiding party at the [Kalka River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Kalka_River) and were soundly defeated. In 1237–1238 the Mongols burnt down the city of [Vladimir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir) (February 4, 1238) and other major cities of northeast Russia, routed the Russians [at the Sit' River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Sit_River), and then moved west into [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland) and [Hungary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungary). By then they had conquered most of the Russian principalities. Only the Novgorod Republic escaped occupation and continued to flourish in the orbit of the [Hanseatic League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanseatic_League).

The impact of the Mongol invasion on the territories of Kievan Rus' was uneven. The advanced city culture was almost completely destroyed. As older centers such as Kiev and Vladimir never recovered from the devastation of the initial attack, the new cities of [Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow), [Tver](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tver) and [Nizhny Novgorod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nizhny_Novgorod) began to compete for hegemony in the Mongol-dominated Russia. Although a Russian army defeated the [Golden Horde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Horde) at [Kulikovo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kulikovo) in 1380, [Mongol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol) domination of the Russian-inhabited territories, along with demands of tribute from Russian princes, continued until about 1480.

**Russo-Tatar relations**

Prince [Michael of Chernigov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_of_Chernigov) was passed between fires and ordered to prostrate himself before the tablets of [Chingis Khan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chingis_Khan). [Batu Khan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batu_Khan)'s Mongols stabbed him to death for his refusal to do obeisance to unliving person in the pagan ritual.

[Alexander Nevsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Nevsky) in the [Horde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Horde)

Main articles: [Volga Bulgaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga_Bulgaria) and [Golden Horde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Horde)

After the fall of the [Khazars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khazars) in the 10th century, the middle Volga came to be dominated by the mercantile state of [Volga Bulgaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga_Bulgaria), the last vestige of [Greater Bulgaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Bulgaria) centered at [Phanagoria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phanagoria). In the 10th century the Turkic population of Volga Bulgaria converted to [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam), which facilitated its trade with the Middle East and Central Asia. In the wake of the [Mongol invasions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol_invasion_of_Volga_Bulgaria) of the 1230s, Volga Bulgaria was absorbed by the [Golden Horde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Horde) and its population evolved into the modern [Chuvashes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuvash_people) and [Kazan Tatars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatars).

The Mongols held Russia and Volga Bulgaria in sway from their western capital at [Sarai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarai_%28city%29), one of the largest cities of the medieval world. The princes of southern and eastern Russia had to pay tribute to the Mongols of the Golden Horde, commonly called [Tatars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatars); but in return they received charters authorizing them to act as deputies to the khans. In general, the princes were allowed considerable freedom to rule as they wished, while the [Russian Orthodox Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Orthodox_Church) even experienced a spiritual revival under the guidance of [Metropolitan Alexis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolitan_Alexis) and [Sergius of Radonezh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergius_of_Radonezh).

To the Orthodox Church and most princes, the fanatical [Northern Crusaders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Crusades) seemed a greater threat to the Russian way of life than the Mongols. In the mid-13th century, [Alexander Nevsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Nevsky), elected prince of Novgorod, acquired heroic status as the result of major victories over the [Teutonic Knights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teutonic_Knights) and the [Swedes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swedish_people). Alexander obtained Mongol protection and assistance in fighting invaders from the west who, hoping to profit from the Russian collapse since the Mongol invasions, tried to grab territory and convert the Russians to [Roman Catholicism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholicism).

The Mongols left their impact on the Russians in such areas as military tactics and transportation. Under Mongol occupation, Russia also developed its postal road network, census, fiscal system, and military organization. Eastern influence remained strong well until the 17th century, when Russian rulers made a conscious effort to modernize their country. In popular memory, this period left a very unpleasant impression, and is referred to as the Tataro-Mongol Yoke.

**Grand Duchy of Moscow**

Main article: [Grand Duchy of Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duchy_of_Moscow)

**The rise of Moscow**

During the reign of [Daniel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_of_Russia), [Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow) was little more than a small timber fort lost in the forests of Central [Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia).

[Daniil Aleksandrovich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniil_Aleksandrovich), the youngest son of Alexander Nevsky, founded the principality of Moscow (known as Muscovy), which eventually expelled the Tatars from Russia. Well-situated in the central river system of Russia and surrounded by protective forests and marshes, Moscow was at first only a [vassal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vassal) of Vladimir, but soon it absorbed its parent state. A major factor in the ascendancy of Moscow was the cooperation of its rulers with the Mongol overlords, who granted them the title of Grand Prince of Moscow and made them agents for collecting the Tatar tribute from the Russian principalities. The principality's prestige was further enhanced when it became the center of the [Russian Orthodox Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Orthodox_Church). Its head, the [Metropolitan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolitan_bishop), fled from Kiev to [Vladimir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir-Suzdal) in 1299 and a few years later established the permanent headquarters of the Church in Moscow under the original title of Kiev Metropolitan.

By the middle of the 14th century, the power of the Mongols was declining, and the Grand Princes felt able to openly oppose the [Mongol yoke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol_yoke). In 1380, at [Kulikovo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulikovo) on the [Don River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_River%2C_Russia), the Mongols were defeated, and although this hard-fought victory did not end Tatar rule of Russia, it did bring great fame to the Grand Prince [Dmitry Donskoy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitry_Donskoy). Moscow's leadership in Russia was now firmly based and by the middle of the fourteenth century its territory had greatly expanded through purchase, war, and marriage.

**Ivan III, the Great**

Ivan III tears off the Khan's missive letter demanding the tribute in front of Khan's mission

In the 15th century, the grand princes of Moscow went on gathering Russian lands to increase the population and wealth under their rule. The most successful practitioner of this process was [Ivan III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_III_of_Russia) who laid the foundations for a Russian national state. Ivan competed with his powerful northwestern rival, the [Grand Duchy of Lithuania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duchy_of_Lithuania), for control over some of the semi-independent [Upper Principalities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_Principalities) in the upper [Dnieper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dnieper_River) and [Oka River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oka_River) basins. Through the defections of some princes, border skirmishes, and a long war with the Novgorod Republic, Ivan III was able to annex Novgorod and Tver. As a result, the [Grand Duchy of Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duchy_of_Moscow) tripled in size under his rule. During his conflict with Pskov, a monk named [Filofei](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filofei) (Philotheus of Pskov) composed a letter to Ivan III, with the prophecy that the latter's kingdom will be the [Third Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Rome). The [Fall of Constantinople](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Constantinople) and the death of the last Greek Orthodox Christian emperor contributed to this new idea of Moscow as 'New Rome' and the seat of Orthodox Christianity.

Fall of [Novgorod Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novgorod_Republic) in 1478. On the right stands [Marfa Boretskaya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marfa_Boretskaya).

A contemporary of the [Tudors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tudor_dynasty) and other "new monarchs" in Western Europe, Ivan proclaimed his absolute sovereignty over all Russian princes and nobles. Refusing further tribute to the Tatars, Ivan initiated a series of attacks that opened the way for the complete defeat of the declining [Golden Horde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Horde), now divided into several [Khanates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khanate) and hordes. Ivan and his successors sought to protect the southern boundaries of their domain against attacks of the [Crimean Tatars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khanate_of_Crimea) and other hordes. To achieve this aim, they sponsored the construction of the [Great Abatis Belt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Abatis_Belt) and granted manors to nobles, who were obliged to serve in the military. The manor system provided a basis for an emerging horse army.

In this way, internal consolidation accompanied outward expansion of the state. By the [16th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th_century), the rulers of Moscow considered the entire Russian territory their collective property. Various semi-independent princes still claimed specific territories, but Ivan III forced the lesser princes to acknowledge the grand prince of Moscow and his descendants as unquestioned rulers with control over military, judicial, and foreign affairs. Gradually, the Russian ruler emerged as a powerful, autocratic ruler, a tsar. The first Russian ruler to officially crown himself "[Tsar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsar)" was [Ivan IV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_IV).

**Tsardom of Russia**

Main article: [Tsardom of Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsardom_of_Russia)

Ivan IV

**Ivan IV, the Terrible**

The development of the Tsar's autocratic powers reached a peak during the reign (1547–1584) of [Ivan IV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_IV_of_Russia) ("Ivan the Terrible"). He strengthened the position of the monarch to an unprecedented degree, as he ruthlessly subordinated the nobles to his will, exiling or executing many on the slightest provocation. Nevertheless, Ivan is often seen a farsighted statesman who reformed Russia as he promulgated a new code of laws ([Sudebnik of 1550](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudebnik_of_1550)), established the first Russian feudal representative body ([Zemsky Sobor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zemsky_Sobor)), curbed the influence of clergy, and introduced the local self-management in rural regions.

Although his long [Livonian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livonian_War) for the control of the Baltic coast and the access to sea trade ultimately proved a costly failure, Ivan managed to annex the [Khanates of Kazan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khanate_of_Kazan), [Astrakhan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khanate_of_Astrakhan), and [Siberia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siberia_Khanate). These conquests complicated the migration of the aggressive nomadic hordes from Asia to Europe through Volga and Ural. Through these conquests, Russia acquired a significant Muslim Tatar population and emerged as a [multiethnic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiethnic) and [multi-confessional](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/multiconfessional) state. Also around this period, the mercantile [Stroganov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stroganov) family established a firm foothold at the [Urals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urals) and recruited Russian [Cossacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cossacks) to colonize Siberia.

In the later part of his reign, Ivan divided his realm in two. In the zone known as the [*oprichnina*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprichnina), Ivan's followers carried out a series of bloody purges of the feudal aristocracy (which he suspected of treachery after the betrayal of prince Kurbsky), culminating in the [Massacre of Novgorod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massacre_of_Novgorod) (1570). This combined with the military losses, epidemics, poor harvests so weakened Russia that the [Crimean Tatars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean_Tatars) were able to sack central Russian regions and [burn down Moscow (1571)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo%E2%80%93Crimean_War_%281571%29). In 1572 Ivan abandoned the *oprichnina*.

At the end of Ivan IV's reign the Polish-Lithuanian and Swedish armies carried out a powerful intervention in Russia, devastating its northern and northwest regions.

**Time of Troubles**

[Kuzma Minin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuzma_Minin) appeals to the people of [Nizhny Novgorod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nizhny_Novgorod) to raise a volunteer army against the Poles.

Main article: [Time of Troubles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_of_Troubles)

The death of Ivan's childless son [Feodor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feodor_I_of_Russia) was followed by a period of civil wars and foreign intervention known as the "[Time of Troubles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_of_Troubles)" (1606–13). Extremely cold summers (1601–1603) wrecked crops, which led to the [Russian famine of 1601–1603](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_famine_of_1601%E2%80%931603) and increased the social disorganization. [Boris Godunov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Godunov)'s(Борис Годунов) reign ended in chaos, civil war combined with foreign intrusion, devastation of many cities and depopulation of the rural regions. The country rocked by internal chaos also attracted several waves of interventions by the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth). The invaders reached Moscow and installed, first, the impostor [False Dmitriy I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_Dmitriy_I) and, later, a Polish prince [Władysław IV Vasa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W%C5%82adys%C5%82aw_IV_Vasa) on the Russian throne. Moscow revolted but riots there were brutally suppressed and the city was set on fire.

The crisis provoked a patriotic national uprising against the [invasion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invasion), and in autumn 1612 a volunteer army, led by the merchant [Kuzma Minin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuzma_Minin) and prince [Dmitry Pozharsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitry_Pozharsky), expelled the foreign forces from the capital.

The Russian statehood survived the "Time of Troubles" and the rule of weak or corrupt Tsars because of the strength of the government's central bureaucracy. Government functionaries continued to serve, regardless of the ruler's legitimacy or the faction controlling the throne. However, the "[Time of Troubles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_of_Troubles)" provoked by the dynastic crisis resulted in the loss of much territory to the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth) in [the Russo-Polish war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Polish_War_%281605-1618%29), as well as to the [Swedish Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swedish_Empire) in the [Ingrian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingrian_War).

**The accession of Romanovs and early rule**

Election of 16-year old [Mikhail Romanov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_I_of_Russia), the first Tsar of the [Romanov dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanov_dynasty)

In February, 1613, with the chaos ended and the Poles expelled from Moscow, a [national assembly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zemsky_Sobor), composed of representatives from fifty cities and even some peasants, elected [Michael Romanov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_I_of_Russia), the young son of [Patriarch Filaret](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarch_Filaret), to the throne. The [Romanov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanov) dynasty ruled Russia until 1917.

The immediate task of the new dynasty was to restore peace. Fortunately for Moscow, its major enemies, the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth) and [Sweden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweden), were engaged in a bitter conflict with each other, which provided Russia the opportunity to make peace with Sweden in 1617 and to sign a truce with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1619. Recovery of lost territories started in the mid-17th century, when the [Khmelnitsky Uprising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chmielnicki_Uprising) in Ukraine against Polish rule brought about the [Treaty of Pereyaslav](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Pereyaslav) concluded between Russia and the [Ukrainian Cossacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_Cossacks).

[Stenka Razin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stenka_Razin) Sailing in the [Caspian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caspian_Sea)

According to the treaty, Russia granted protection to the [Cossacks state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cossack_Hetmanate) in the [Left-bank Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left-bank_Ukraine), formerly under Polish control. This triggered a prolonged [Russo-Polish War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Polish_War_%281654-1667%29) which ended with the [Treaty of Andrusovo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Andrusovo) (1667), where Poland accepted the loss of Left-bank Ukraine, [Kiev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiev) and [Smolensk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smolensk).

Rather than risk their estates in more civil war, the great nobles or [*boyars*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boyar) cooperated with the first Romanovs, enabling them to finish the work of bureaucratic centralization. Thus, the state required service from both the old and the new nobility, primarily in the military. In return the tsars allowed the *boyars* to complete the process of enserfing the peasants.

[Patriarch Nikon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarch_Nikon)'s reform of the Church Service caused [schism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raskol) in the [Russian Orthodox Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Orthodox_Church) and appearance of [Old Believers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Believers)

In the preceding century, the state had gradually curtailed peasants' rights to move from one landlord to another. With the state now fully sanctioning [serfdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_serfdom), runaway peasants became state fugitives, and the power of the landlords over the peasants "attached" to their land have become almost complete. Together the state and the nobles placed the overwhelming burden of taxation on the peasants, whose rate was 100 times greater in the mid-17th century than it had been a century earlier. In addition, middle-class urban tradesmen and craftsmen were assessed taxes, and, like the serfs, they were forbidden to change residence. All segments of the population were subject to military levy and to special taxes.

Under such circumstances, peasant disorderswere endemic; even the citizens of Moscow revolted against the Romanovs during the [Salt Riot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt_Riot) (1648), [Copper Riot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper_Riot) (1662), and the [Moscow Uprising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow_Uprising_of_1682) (1682). By far the greatest peasant uprising in 17th century Europe erupted in 1667. As the free settlers of South Russia, the [Cossacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cossacks), reacted against the growing centralization of the state, serfs escaped from their landlords and joined the rebels. The Cossack leader [Stenka Razin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stenka_Razin) led his followers up the Volga River, inciting peasant uprisings and replacing local governments with Cossack rule. The tsar's army finally crushed his forces in 1670; a year later Stenka was captured and beheaded. Yet, less than half a century later, the strains of military expeditions produced another [revolt in Astrakhan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulavin_Rebellion), ultimately subdued.

**Imperial Russia**

Main article: [Russian Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire)

**Peter the Great**

Peter I disbanded the old [streltsy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streltsy) army; thousands of streltsy were executed after their mutiny.

[Peter the Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_the_Great) (1672–1725) brought [autocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autocracy) into Russia and played a major role in bringing his country into the European state system. From its modest beginnings in the 14th century principality of Moscow, Russia had become the largest state in the world by Peter's reign. Three times the size of continental Europe, it spanned the Eurasian landmass from the [Baltic Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_Sea) to the Pacific Ocean. Much of its expansion had taken place in the 17th century, culminating in the first Russian settlement of the Pacific in the mid-17th century, the reconquest of Kiev, and the pacification of the Siberian tribes. However, this vast land had a population of only 14 million. Grain yields trailed behind those of agriculture in the West (that can be partly explained by the more challenging climatic conditions, in particular long cold winters and short vegetative period) compelling almost the entire population to farm. Only a small fraction of the population lived in the towns. Russia remained isolated from the sea trade, its internal trade communications and many manufactures were dependent on the seasonal changes.

Peter's first military efforts were directed against the [Ottoman Turks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Empire). His attention then turned to the north. Peter still lacked a secure northern seaport except at [Archangel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arkhangelsk) on the [White Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Sea), whose harbor was frozen nine months a year. Access to the Baltic was blocked by [Sweden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweden), whose territory enclosed it on three sides. Peter's ambitions for a "window to the sea" led him in 1699 to make a secret alliance with the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth) and [Denmark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denmark) against Sweden resulting in the [Great Northern War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Northern_War). The war ended in 1721 when an exhausted Sweden sued for peace with Russia. Peter acquired four provinces situated south and east of the Gulf of Finland, thus securing his coveted access to the sea. There, in 1703, he had already founded the city that was to become Russia's new capital, [Saint Petersburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Petersburg), as a "window opened upon Europe" to replace Moscow, long Russia's cultural center. Russian intervention in the Commonwealth marked, with the [Silent Sejm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_Sejm), the beginning of a 200-year domination of that region by the Russian Empire. In celebration of his conquests, Peter assumed the title of emperor as well as tsar, and Russian Tzardom officially became the [Russian Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Empire) in 1721.

Peter the Great leading the Russian army in the [Battle of Poltava](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Poltava)

Peter reorganized his government on the latest Western models, molding Russia into an [absolutist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_absolutism) state. He replaced the old *boyar* [Duma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duma) (council of nobles) with a nine-member senate, in effect a supreme council of state. The countryside was also divided into new provinces and districts. Peter told the senate that its mission was to collect tax revenues. In turn tax revenues tripled over the course of his reign. As part of the government reform, the Orthodox Church was partially incorporated into the country's administrative structure, in effect making it a tool of the state. Peter abolished the [patriarchate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchate) and replaced it with a collective body, the [Holy Synod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Synod), led by a lay government official. Meanwhile, all vestiges of local self-government were removed, and Peter continued and intensified his predecessors' requirement of state service for all nobles.

Peter the Great died in 1725, leaving an unsettled succession and an exhausted realm. His reign raised questions about Russia's backwardness, its relationship to the West, the appropriateness of reform from above, and other fundamental problems that have confronted many of Russia's subsequent rulers. Nevertheless, he had laid the foundations of a modern state in Russia.

**Ruling the Empire (1725–1825)**

The monument to [Catherine II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_II) in [Saint Petersberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Petersberg)

Nearly forty years were to pass before a comparably ambitious and ruthless ruler appeared on the Russian throne. [Catherine II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_II_of_Russia), the Great, was a German princess who married the German heir to the Russian crown. Finding him incompetent, Catherine tacitly consented to his murder. It was announced that he had died of "[apoplexy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apoplexy)", and in 1762 she became ruler.

Catherine contributed to the resurgence of the Russian nobility that began after the death of Peter the Great. Mandatory state service had been abolished, and Catherine delighted the nobles further by turning over most government functions in the provinces to them.

Catherine the Great extended Russian political control over the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with actions including the support of the [Targowica Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Targowica_Confederation), although the cost of her campaigns, on top of the oppressive social system that required lords' serfs to spend almost all of their time laboring on the lords' land, provoked a major peasant uprising in 1773, after Catherine legalized the selling of serfs separate from land. Inspired by another Cossack named [Pugachev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemelyan_Pugachev), with the emphatic cry of "Hang all the landlords!" the rebels threatened to take Moscow before they were ruthlessly suppressed. Catherine had Pugachev [drawn and quartered](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanged%2C_drawn_and_quartered) in [Red Square](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Square), but the specter of revolution continued to haunt her and her successors.

Russian troops under [Generalissimo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generalissimo) Suvorov crossing the [Alps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alps) in 1799

Napoleon's retreat from Moscow

Catherine successfully waged war against the decaying Ottoman Empire and advanced Russia's southern boundary to the Black Sea. Then, by allying with the rulers of [Austria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austrian_Empire) and [Prussia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussia), she incorporated the territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where after a century of Russian rule non-Catholic mainly Orthodox population prevailed) during the [Partitions of Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partitions_of_Poland), pushing the Russian frontier westward into Central Europe. By the time of her death in 1796, Catherine's expansionist policy had made Russia into a major European power. This continued with [Alexander I's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_I_of_Russia) wresting of [Finland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finland) from the weakened kingdom of [Sweden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweden) in 1809 and of [Bessarabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bessarabia) from the Ottomans in 1812.

[Napoleon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napol%C3%A9on_I_of_France) made a major misstep when he declared war on Russia after a dispute with Tsar Alexander I and launched an [invasion of Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon%27s_invasion_of_Russia) in 1812. The campaign was a catastrophe. Unable to decisively engage and defeat the standing Russian armies, Napoleon attempted to force the Tsar to terms by capturing Moscow at the onset of winter. The expectation proved futile. Unprepared for winter warfare in the cold Russian weather, thousands of French troops were ambushed and killed by peasant guerrilla fighters. As Napoleon's forces retreated, Russian troops pursued them into Central and Western Europe and to the gates of Paris. After Russia and its allies defeated Napoleon, Alexander became known as the 'savior of Europe,' and he presided over the redrawing of the map of Europe at the [Congress of Vienna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_Vienna) (1815), which made Alexander the monarch of [Congress Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_Poland).

Although the Russian Empire would play a leading political role in the next century, secured by its defeat of Napoleonic France, its retention of serfdom precluded economic progress of any significant degree. As West European economic growth accelerated during the [Industrial Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution), sea trade and [colonialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonialism) which had begun in the second half of the 18th century, Russia began to lag ever farther behind, creating new problems for the empire as a great power.

**Imperial Russia following the Decembrist Revolt (1825–1917)**

**Nicholas I and the Decembrist Revolt**

The Decembrists at the [Senate Square](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decembrists_Square).

Russia's great power status obscured the inefficiency of its government, the isolation of its people, and its economic backwardness. Following the defeat of Napoleon, Alexander I was willing to discuss constitutional reforms, and though a few were introduced, no thoroughgoing changes were attempted.

The tsar was succeeded by his younger brother, [Nicholas I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_I_of_Russia) (1825–1855), who at the onset of his reign was confronted with an uprising. The background of this revolt lay in the Napoleonic Wars, when a number of well-educated Russian officers traveled in Europe in the course of the military campaigns, where their exposure to the liberalism of Western Europe encouraged them to seek change on their return to autocratic Russia. The result was the [Decembrist Revolt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decembrist_Revolt) (December 1825), the work of a small circle of liberal nobles and army officers who wanted to install Nicholas' brother as a constitutional monarch. But the revolt was easily crushed, leading Nicholas to turn away from the Westernization program begun by Peter the Great and champion the [doctrine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctrine) "[Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodoxy%2C_Autocracy%2C_and_Nationality)."

In the early decades of the 19th century, Russia expanded into [South Caucasus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Caucasus) and the highlands of the [North Caucasus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Caucasus). In 1831 Nicholas crushed [a major uprising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/November_Uprising) in [Congress Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_Poland); it would be followed by [another large-scale Polish and Lithuanian revolt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January_Uprising) in 1863.

**Ideological schisms and reaction**

[Mikhail Bakunin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Bakunin)

In this setting [Michael Bakunin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Bakunin) would emerge as the father of [anarchism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchism). He left Russia in 1842 to Western Europe, where he became active in the socialist movement. After participating in the [May Uprising in Dresden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_Uprising_in_Dresden) of 1849, he was imprisoned and shipped to Siberia, but eventually escaped and made his way back to Europe. There he practically joined forces with [Karl Marx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx), despite significant ideological and tactical differences. Alternative social doctrines were elaborated by such Russian radicals as [Alexander Herzen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Herzen) and [Peter Kropotkin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Kropotkin).

The question of Russia's direction had been gaining steam ever since Peter the Great's program of Westernization. Some favored imitating Europe while others renounced the West and called for a return of the traditions of the past. The latter path was championed by [Slavophiles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavophile), who heaped scorn on the "decadent" West. The Slavophiles were opponents of bureaucracy, preferred the [collectivism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collectivism) of the [medieval](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages) Russian [*mir*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mir_%28social%29), or [village community](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obshchina), to the [individualism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individualism) of the West.

**Alexander II and the abolition of serfdom**

The manifesto of the [abolition of serfdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_reform_of_1861_in_Russia) is being read to people.

Tsar Nicholas died with his philosophy in dispute. One year earlier, Russia had become involved in the [Crimean War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean_War), a conflict fought primarily in the [Crimean peninsula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimea). Since playing a major role in the defeat of Napoleon, Russia had been regarded as militarily invincible, but, once pitted against a coalition of the great powers of Europe, the reverses it suffered on land and sea exposed the decay and weakness of Tsar Nicholas' regime.

When [Alexander II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_II_of_Russia) came to the throne in 1855, desire for reform was widespread. A growing humanitarian movement, which in later years has been likened to that of the [abolitionists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abolitionism) in the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) before the [American Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War), attacked serfdom. In 1859, there were 23 million [serfs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serfs) (total population of Russia 67.1 Million) living under conditions frequently worse than those of the peasants of [Western Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Europe) on 16th century [manors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manorialism). Alexander II made up his own mind to abolish [serfdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_serfdom) from above rather than wait for it to be abolished from below through revolution.

The [emancipation of the serfs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_reform_of_1861_in_Russia) in 1861 was the single most important event in 19th century Russian history. It was the beginning of the end for the landed aristocracy's monopoly of power. Emancipation brought a supply of free labor to the cities, industry was stimulated, and the middle class grew in number and influence; however, instead of receiving their lands as a gift, the freed peasants had to pay a special tax, called redemption payments, for what amounted to their lifetime to the government, which in turn paid the landlords a generous price for the land that they had lost. In numerous instances the peasants wound up with the poorest land. All the land turned over to the peasants was owned collectively by the *mir*, the village community, which divided the land among the peasants and supervised the various holdings. Although serfdom was abolished, since its abolition was achieved on terms unfavorable to the peasants, revolutionary tensions were not abated, despite Alexander II's intentions.

In the late 1870s Russia and the Ottoman Empire again clashed in the Balkans. [The Russo-Turkish War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Turkish_War_%281877%E2%80%931878%29) was popular among Russians, who supported the independence of their fellow Orthodox Slavs, the Serbs and the Bulgarians. However, the war increased tension with Austria-Hungary, which also had ambitions in the region. During this period Russia expanded its empire into [Central Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Asia), which was rich in raw materials, conquering the [khanates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khanate) of [Kokand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kokand), [Bokhara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bokhara) and [Khiva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khiva). as well as the Trans-[Caspian region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caspian_Sea).

**Nihilism**

In the 1860s a movement known as [Nihilism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nihilist_movement) developed in Russia. A term originally coined by [Ivan Turgenev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Turgenev) in his 1862 novel [*Fathers and Sons*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fathers_and_Sons), Nihilists favored the destruction of human institutions and laws, based on the idea that such institutions and laws are artificial and corrupt. At its core, Russian nihilism was characterized by the belief that the world lacks comprehensible meaning, objective truth, or value. For some time many Russian liberals had been dissatisfied by what they regarded as the empty discussions of the [intelligentsia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligentsia). The Nihilists questioned all old values and shocked the Russian establishment. They moved beyond being purely philosophical to becoming major political forces after becoming involved in the cause of reform. Their path was facilitated by the previous actions of the Decembrists, who revolted in 1825, and the financial and political hardship caused by the Crimean War, which caused large numbers of Russian people to lose faith in political institutions.

The Nihilists first attempted to convert the aristocracy to the cause of reform. Failing there, they turned to the peasants. Their campaign, which targeted the people instead of the aristocracy or the landed gentry, became known as the [Narodnik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narodnik) movement. It was based upon the belief that the common people, known as the [Narod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narod), possessed the wisdom and peaceful ability to lead the nation..

While the Narodnik movement was gaining momentum, the government quickly moved to extirpate it. In response to the growing reaction of the government, a radical branch of the Narodniks advocated and practiced [terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism). One after another, prominent officials were shot or killed by bombs. This represented the ascendancy of [anarchism in Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchism_in_Russia) as a powerful revolutionary force. Finally, after several attempts, Alexander II was assassinated by anarchists in 1881, on the very day he had approved a proposal to call a representative assembly to consider new reforms in addition to the abolition of serfdom designed to ameliorate revolutionary demands.

**Autocracy and reaction under Alexander III**

Unlike his father, the new tsar [Alexander III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_III_of_Russia) (1881–1894) was throughout his reign a staunch reactionary who revived the maxim of "[Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and National Character](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodoxy%2C_Autocracy%2C_and_National_Character)". A committed Slavophile, Alexander III believed that Russia could be saved from chaos only by shutting itself off from the subversive influences of Western Europe. In his reign Russia concluded the [union with republican France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Russian_Alliance) to contain the growing power of [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany), completed the conquest of [Central Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Asia), and exacted important territorial and commercial concessions from [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China).

Retreat of the Russian Army after the [Battle of Mukden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Mukden)

The tsar's most influential adviser was [Konstantin Pobedonostsev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantin_Pobedonostsev), tutor to Alexander III and his son Nicholas, and procurator of the Holy Synod from 1880 to 1895. He taught his royal pupils to fear freedom of speech and press and to hate democracy, constitutions, and the parliamentary system. Under Pobedonostsev, revolutionaries were hunted down and a policy of [Russification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russification) was carried out throughout the empire.

Ethnic map of European Russia before the [First World War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_World_War)

**Nicholas II and a new revolutionary movement**

[Bloody Sunday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_%281905%29) massacre in Saint Petersburg.

Alexander was succeeded by his son [Nicholas II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_II_of_Russia) (1894–1917). The Industrial Revolution, which began to exert a significant influence in Russia, was meanwhile creating forces that would finally overthrow the tsar. Politically, these opposition forces organized into three competing parties: The liberal elements among the industrial capitalists and nobility, who believed in peaceful social reform and a constitutional monarchy, founded the [Constitutional Democratic party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_Democratic_party) or *Kadets* in 1905. Followers of the Narodnik tradition established the [Socialist-Revolutionary Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist-Revolutionary_Party) or *Esers* in 1901, advocating the distribution of land among those who actually worked it—the peasants. A third and more radical group founded the [Russian Social Democratic Labour Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Social_Democratic_Labour_Party) or *RDSLP* in 1898; this party was the primary exponent of [Marxism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism) in Russia. Gathering their support from the radical intellectuals and the urban working class, they advocated complete social, economic and political revolution.

The [October Manifesto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Manifesto) granting [civil liberties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_liberties) and establishing first [parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Duma).

In 1903 the RDSLP split into two wings: the radical [Bolsheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolshevik), led by Lenin, and the relatively moderate [Mensheviks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menshevik), led by Lenin's former friend Yuli Martov. The Mensheviks believed that Russian socialism would grow gradually and peacefully and that the tsar’s regime should be succeeded by a democratic republic in which the socialists would cooperate with the liberal bourgeois parties. The Bolsheviks, under [Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin), advocated the formation of a small elite of professional revolutionists, subject to strong party discipline, to act as the vanguard of the proletariat in order to seize power by force.

The disastrous performance of the Russian armed forces in the [Russo-Japanese War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Japanese_War) was a major blow to the Russian State and increased the potential for unrest. In January 1905, an incident known as "[Bloody Sunday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_%281905%29)" occurred when [Father Gapon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Father_Gapon) led an enormous crowd to the [Winter Palace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_Palace) in [Saint Petersburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Petersburg) to present a petition to the tsar. When the procession reached the palace, Cossacks opened fire on the crowd, killing hundreds. The Russian masses were so aroused over the massacre that a general strike was declared demanding a democratic republic. This marked the beginning of the [Russian Revolution of 1905](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Revolution_of_1905). [Soviets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet) (councils of workers) appeared in most cities to direct revolutionary activity.

In October 1905, Nicholas reluctantly issued the famous [October Manifesto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Manifesto), which conceded the creation of a national Duma (legislature) to be called without delay. The right to vote was extended, and no law was to go into force without confirmation by the Duma. The moderate groups were satisfied; but the socialists rejected the concessions as insufficient and tried to organize new strikes. By the end of 1905, there was disunity among the reformers, and the tsar's position was strengthened for the time being.

**Russian Revolution**

Main article: [Russian Revolution of 1917](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Revolution_of_1917)

[Vladimir Lenin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Lenin) speaking to Red Army troops before their departure to the Polish front

Bound by treaty, Tsar Nicholas II and his subjects entered [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) at the defense of [Serbia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serbia). At the opening of hostilities in August 1914, the Russians took the offensive against both [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany) and [Austria-Hungary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria-Hungary) in support of her French ally.

Later, military failures and bureaucratic ineptitude soon turned large segments of the population against the government. Control of the Baltic Sea by the German fleet, and of the Black Sea by combined German and Ottoman forces prevented Russia from importing supplies and exporting goods.

By the middle of 1915 the impact of the war was demoralizing. Food and fuel were in short supply, casualties kept occurring, and inflation was mounting. Strikes increased among low-paid factory workers, and the peasants, who wanted land reforms, were restless. Meanwhile, public distrust of the regime was deepened by reports that a semiliterate mystic, [Grigory Rasputin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigory_Rasputin), had great political influence within the government. His assassination in late 1916 ended the scandal but did not restore the autocracy's lost prestige.

On March 3, 1917, a strike occurred in a factory in the capital [Petrograd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrograd) (formerly Saint Petersburg). On February 23 (March 8) 1917, International Women's Day, thousands of women textile workers in Petrograd walked out of their factories protesting the lack of food and calling on other workers to join them. Within days, nearly all the workers in the city were idle, and street fighting broke out. When the tsar ordered the Duma to disband, ordered strikers to return to work, and ordered troops to shoot at demonstrators in the streets, his orders triggered the [February Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/February_Revolution), especially when soldiers openly sided with the strikers. On March 2 (15), Nicholas II abdicated. To fill the vacuum of authority, the Duma declared a [Provisional Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Provisional_Government), headed by [Prince Lvov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgy_Lvov). Meanwhile, the socialists in Petrograd organized elections among workers and soldiers to form a soviet (council) of workers' and soldiers' deputies, as an organ of popular power that could pressure the "bourgeois" Provisional Government.

In July, following a series of crises that undermined their authority with the public, the head of the Provisional Government resigned and was succeeded by [Alexander Kerensky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Kerensky), who was more progressive than his predecessor but not radical enough for the Bolsheviks or many Russians discontented with the deepening economic crisis and the continuation of the war. While Kerensky's government marked time, the socialist-led soviet in Petrograd joined with soviets that formed throughout the country to create a national movement.

Lenin returned to Russia from exile in [Switzerland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland) with the help of Germany, which hoped that widespread strife would cause Russia to withdraw from the war. After many behind-the-scenes maneuvers, the soviets seized control of the government in November 1917, and drove Kerensky and his moderate provisional government into exile, in the events that would become known as the [October Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_Revolution).

When the national Constituent Assembly, elected in December 1917 and meeting in January 1918, refused to become a rubber-stamp of the Bolsheviks, it was dissolved by Lenin's troops. With the dissolution of the constituent assembly, all vestiges of bourgeois democracy were removed. With the handicap of the moderate opposition removed, Lenin was able to free his regime from the war problem by the harsh [Treaty of Brest-Litovsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Brest-Litovsk) (1918) with Germany, in which Russia lost the territories of Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, the parts of the territories of Latvia and Belarus (line Riga-Dvinsk-Druia-Drisvyaty-Mikhalishki-Dzevalishki-Dokudova-r.Neman-r.Yelvyanka-Pruzhany-Vidoml), and the territories captured from the Ottoman Empire during World War I. On November

**Russian Civil War**

Main article: [Russian Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Civil_War)

The Bolshevik grip on power was by no means secure and a lengthy struggle broke out between the new regime and its opponents, who included the Socialist Revolutionaries, right-wing "Whites" and large numbers of peasants. At the same time the [Allied powers sent several expeditionary armies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_intervention_in_Russia) to support the anti-Communist forces in an attempt to force Russia to rejoin the world war. The Bolsheviks fought against these forces and against national independence movements in the former Russian Empire. By 1921, they had defeated their internal enemies and brought most of the newly independent states under their control, with the exception of Finland, the Baltic States, the [Moldavian Democratic Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldavian_Democratic_Republic) (which joined [Romania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania)), and Poland (with whom they had fought the [Polish-Soviet War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish-Soviet_War)). Finland also annexed the [region Pechenga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Region_Pechenga) of the Russian [Kola peninsula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kola_peninsula); Soviet Russia and allied Soviet republics conceded the parts of its territory to Estonia ([Petseri County](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petseri_County) and [Estonian Ingria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingria#Estonian_Ingria)), Latvia ([Pytalovo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pytalovo)) and Turkey ([Kars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kars%2C_Turkey)). Poland incorporated the contested territories of [Western Belarus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Belarus) and [Western Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Ukraine), the former parts of the Russian Empire (except [Galicia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galicia_%28Central_Europe%29)) east to [Curzon Line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curzon_Line).

**Soviet Union**

Lenin and Stalin

Main articles: [History of Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union (1917–1927)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Soviet_Russia_and_the_Soviet_Union_%281917%E2%80%931927%29) and [History of the Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Soviet_Union)

**Creation of the Soviet Union**

The history of Russia between 1922 and 1991 is essentially the history of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union). This ideologically-based union, established in December 1922 by the leaders of the Russian Communist Party, was roughly coterminous with Russia before the [Treaty of Brest-Litovsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Brest-Litovsk). At that time, the new nation included four constituent republics: the [Russian SFSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_SFSR), the [Ukrainian SSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_SSR), [Belarusian SSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belarusian_SSR), and the [Transcaucasian SFSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcaucasian_SFSR).

The constitution, adopted in 1924, established a federal system of government based on a succession of soviets set up in villages, factories, and cities in larger regions. This pyramid of soviets in each constituent republic culminated in the All-Union Congress of Soviets. But while it appeared that the congress exercised sovereign power, this body was actually governed by the Communist Party, which in turn was controlled by the [Politburo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politburo_of_the_CPSU_Central_Committee) from Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union, just as it had been under the tsars before Peter the Great.

**War Communism and the New Economic Policy**

The period from the consolidation of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 until 1921 is known as the period of [war communism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_communism). Land, all industry and small businesses were [nationalized](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalized) and the money economy was restricted. Strong opposition soon developed. The peasants wanted cash payments for their products and resented having to surrender their surplus grain to the government as a part of its civil war policies. Confronted with peasant opposition, Lenin began a strategic retreat from war communism known as the [New Economic Policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Economic_Policy) (NEP). The peasants were freed from wholesale levies of grain and allowed to sell their surplus produce in the open market. Commerce was stimulated by permitting private retail trading. The state continued to be responsible for banking, transportation, heavy industry, and public utilities.

Although the left opposition among the Communists criticized the rich peasants or [kulaks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulak) who benefited from the NEP, the program proved highly beneficial and the economy revived. The NEP would later come under increasing opposition from within the party following Lenin's death in early 1924.

**Changes in Russian society**

The 1932 Soviet poster symbolizing the reform of "old ways of life" is dedicated to liberation of women from traditional role of the oppressed housekeeper. The text reads: "8th of March is the day of the rebellion of the working women against the kitchen slavery". "Say NO to the oppression and [Babbittry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babbitt_%28novel%29) of the household work!".

While the Russian economy was being transformed, the social life of the people underwent equally drastic changes. From the beginning of the revolution, the government attempted to weaken patriarchal domination of the family. [Divorce](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divorce) no longer required court procedure; and to make women completely free of the responsibilities of childbearing, [abortion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion) was made legal as early as 1920. As a side effect, the emancipation of the women increased the labor market. Girls were encouraged to secure an education and pursue a career in the factory or the office. Communal nurseries were set up for the care of small children and efforts were made to shift the center of people's social life from the home to educational and recreational groups, the soviet clubs.

The regime abandoned the tsarist policy of [discriminating](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discrimination) against [national minorities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_minorities) in favor of a policy of incorporating the more than two hundred minority groups into Soviet life. Another feature of the regime was the extension of medical services. Campaigns were carried out against [typhus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Typhus), [cholera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cholera), and [malaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaria); the number of doctors was increased as rapidly as facilities and training would permit; and [infant mortality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infant_mortality) rates rapidly decreased while [life expectancy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_expectancy) rapidly increased.

The government also promoted [atheism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism) and [materialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Materialism), which formed the basis of Marxist theory. It opposed organized religion, especially to break the power of the Russian Orthodox Church, a former pillar of the old tsarist regime and a major barrier to social change. Many religious leaders were sent to internal exile camps. Members of the party were forbidden to attend religious services and the education system was separated from the Church. Religious teaching was prohibited except in the home and atheist instruction was stressed in the schools.

**Industrialization and Collectivization**

*Further information:* [*Collectivisation in the USSR*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collectivisation_in_the_USSR)

The years from 1929 to 1939 comprised a tumultuous decade in Russian history—a period of massive industrialization and internal struggles as [Joseph Stalin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Stalin) established near total control over Russian society, wielding virtually unrestrained power. Following Lenin's death Stalin wrestled to gain control of the Soviet Union with rival factions in the Politburo, especially [Leon Trotsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky)'s. By 1928, with the [Trotskyists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trotskyist) either exiled or rendered powerless, Stalin was ready to put a radical program of industrialization into action.

In 1928 Stalin proposed the [First Five-Year Plan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Five-Year_Plan). Abolishing the NEP, it was the first of a number of plans aimed at swift accumulation of capital resources through the buildup of heavy industry, the [collectivization of agriculture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collectivisation_in_the_USSR), and the restricted manufacture of [consumer goods](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consumer_goods_in_the_Soviet_Union). For the first time in history a government controlled all economic activity.

As a part of the plan, the government took control of agriculture through the state and collective farms ([*kolkhozes*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolkhoz)). By a decree of February 1930, about one million individual peasants ([*kulaks*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulaks)) were forced off their land. Many peasants strongly opposed regimentation by the state, often slaughtering their herds when faced with the loss of their land. In some sections they revolted, and countless peasants deemed "kulaks" by the authorities were executed. The combination of bad weather, deficiencies of the hastily-established collective farms, and massive confiscation of grain precipitated a serious famine, and several million peasants [died of starvation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_famine_of_1932-1934), [mostly in Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holodomor) and parts of southwestern Russia. The deteriorating conditions in the countryside drove millions of desperate peasants to the rapidly growing cities, fueling industrialization, and vastly increasing Russia's urban population in the space of just a few years.

The plans received remarkable results in areas aside from agriculture. Russia, in many measures the poorest nation in Europe at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, now industrialized at a phenomenal rate, far surpassing Germany's pace of industrialization in the nineteenth century and Japan's earlier in the twentieth century.

While the Five-Year Plans were forging ahead, Stalin was establishing his personal power. The [NKVD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NKVD) gathered in tens of thousands of Soviet citizens to face arrest, [deportation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_transfer_in_the_Soviet_Union), or execution. Of the six original members of the 1920 Politburo who survived Lenin, all were purged by Stalin. Old Bolsheviks who had been loyal comrades of Lenin, high officers in the Red Army, and directors of industry were liquidated in the [Great Purges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Purges). Purges in other Soviet republics also helped centralize control in the USSR.

Stalin's repressions led to the creation of a vast system of [internal exile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forced_settlements_in_the_Soviet_Union), of considerably greater dimensions than those set up in the past by the tsars. Draconian penalties were introduced and many citizens were prosecuted for fictitious crimes of sabotage and espionage. The labor provided by convicts working in the [labor camps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labor_camp) of the [Gulag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulag) system became an important component of the industrialization effort, especially in [Siberia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siberia). An estimated 18 million people passed through the Gulag system, and perhaps another 15 million had experience of some other form of forced labor.

**The Soviet Union on the international stage**

The Soviet Union viewed the 1933 accession of fervently [anti-Communist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Communist) [Hitler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler)'s government to power in [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Germany) with the great alarm from the onset, especially since Hitler proclaimed the [Drang nach Osten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drang_nach_Osten) as one of the major objectives in his vision of the German strategy of [Lebensraum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebensraum). The Soviets supported the republicans of Spain who struggled against the fascist German and Italian troops in the [Spanish Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Civil_War) In 1938–1939, immediately prior to the WWII, the Soviet Union successfully fought against [Imperial Japan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_Japan) in the [Soviet-Japanese Border Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet-Japanese_Border_Wars) in the [Russian Far East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Far_East), which led to the [Soviet-Japanese neutrality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet%E2%80%93Japanese_Neutrality_Pact) and the tense border peace that lasted until August 1945.

In 1938 Germany [annexed Austria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anschluss) and, together with major Western European powers, signed the [Munich Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munich_Agreement) following which Germany, Hungary and Poland divided the Czech territory between themselves. German plans for further eastward expansion as well as the lack of resolve from the Western powers to oppose it became more apparent. Despite Soviet Union strongly opposed the Munich deal and repeatedly reaffirmed its readiness to militarily back the Soviet commitments given earlier to Czechoslovakia, the [Western Betrayal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Betrayal) of Czechoslovakia reached over the Soviet opposition further increased fears in the Soviet Union of a coming German attack, which led the Soviet Union to rush the modernization of Soviet military industry and carry its own diplomatic maneuvers. In 1939 the Soviet Union signed the [Non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molotov-Ribbentrop_Pact) dividing spheres of influence between themselves in [Eastern Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Europe). Following the agreement, the USSR normalized the [relations with Nazi Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet-German_relations_before_1941) and resumed the Soviet-German trade.

**World War II**

[Katyusha rocket launcher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katyusha_rocket_launcher) at the [Battle for Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_for_Moscow).

Soviet POW's starving in a Nazi camp. The Soviet Union lost around 27 million people during the war, about half of all [World War II casualties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties).

Main article: [Eastern Front (World War II)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Front_%28World_War_II%29)

On September 17, 1939, seventeen days after the start of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) and victorious German advance deep into the Polish territory, the [Red Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Army) [invaded eastern portions of Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_invasion_of_Poland_%281939%29) stating the protection of Ukrainians and Belarusians as their operation's primary goal and Poland's "seizure to exist" as the justification of the action. As a result, the Belarusian and Ukrainian Soviet republics' western borders were moved westward and the new Soviet western border was drawn close to the original [Curzon line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curzon_line). In the meantime the negotiations with [Finland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finland) about the Soviet-proposed land swap that would redraw the Soviet-Finnish border further away from [Leningrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leningrad) failed; and in December, 1939 the USSR started a campaign against Finland, known as the [Winter War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winter_War) (1939–40). The war took a heavy death toll on the [Red Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Army) but forced Finland to sign a [Moscow Peace Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow_Peace_Treaty) and cede the [Karelian Isthmus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karelian_Isthmus) and [Ladoga Karelia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ladoga_Karelia). In summer 1940 the USSR issued an [ultimatum to Romania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/June_1940_Soviet_Ultimatum) forcing it to cede the territories of [Bessarabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bessarabia) and [Northern Bukovina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Bukovina). At the same time, the Soviet Union also occupied the three [formerly independent Baltic states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupation_of_Baltic_states) ([Estonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estonia), [Latvia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latvia) and [Lithuania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithuania)).

The peace with Germany was tense, as both sides were preparing for the military conflict, and abruptly ended when the [Axis forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axis_forces) led by Germany [swept across the Soviet border](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Barbarossa) on June 22, 1941. By the autumn the [German army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wehrmacht) had [seized Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kiev_%281941%29), laid a [siege of Leningrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Leningrad), and [threatened to capture the capital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Moscow), Moscow, itself. Despite the fact that in December 1941 the Red Army [threw off the German forces from Moscow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Moscow) in a successful counterattack, the Germans retained the strategic initiative for approximately another year and held a deep offensive in the south-eastern direction, reaching the [Volga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga) and the [Caucasus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasus). However, two major German defeats in [Stalingrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Stalingrad) and [Kursk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Kursk) proved decisive and reversed the course of the entire [World War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) as Germans never regained the strength to sustain their offensive operations and the Soviet Union recaptured the initiative for the rest of the conflict. By the end of 1943, the Red Army had broken through the German siege of Leningrad and [liberated much of Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Dnieper), much of Western Russia and [moved into Belarus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Smolensk_%281943%29). By the end of 1944, the front had moved beyond the 1939 Soviet frontiers into eastern Europe. Soviet forces drove into eastern Germany, [capturing Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Berlin) in May 1945. The war with Germany thus ended triumphantly for the Soviet Union.

Soviet wartime poster by [Kukryniksy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kukryniksy)

As agreed at the [Yalta Conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yalta_Conference), three months after the [Victory Day in Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victory_Day_%28Eastern_Europe%29) the USSR launched the [Soviet invasion of Manchuria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_invasion_of_Manchuria), defeating the [Japanese troops](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperial_Japanese_Army) in neighboring [Manchuria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchuria), the last Soviet battle of World War II.

Although the Soviet Union was victorious in [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), the war resulted in around 26–27 million Soviet deaths (estimates vary) and had devastated the Soviet economy in the struggle. Some 1,710 towns and 70 thousand settlements were destroyed. The occupied territories suffered from the ravages of German occupation and deportations of [slave labor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slave_labor) in Germany. Thirteen million Soviet citizens became victims of a repressive policy of Germans and their allies on an occupied territory, where died because of mass murders, [famine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Famine), absence of elementary medical aid and slave labor. The [Nazi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazism) [Genocide of the Jews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust) carried by German [*Einsatzgruppen*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Einsatzgruppen), along the local collaborators resulted in almost complete annihilation of the Jewish population over the entire territory temporary occupied by Germany and [its allies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axis_forces). During occupation, Russia's [Leningrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leningrad), now [Saint Petersburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Petersburg), region lost around a quarter of its population. Soviet Belarus lost from a quarter to a third of its population. 3.6 million Soviet [prisoners of war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoners_of_war) (of 5.5 million) died in German camps.

**Cold War**

Main article: [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War)

Collaboration among the major Allies had won the war and was supposed to serve as the basis for postwar reconstruction and security. However, the conflict between Soviet and U.S. national interests, known as the [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War), came to dominate the international stage in the postwar period.

Chairman [Leonid Brezhnev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid_Brezhnev) talks to president [Richard Nixon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Nixon) on his visit to USA, the high water mark of [detente](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Detente)

The Cold War emerged out of a conflict between Stalin and U.S. President [Harry Truman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Truman) over the future of Eastern Europe during the [Potsdam Conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potsdam_Conference) in the summer of 1945. Russia had suffered three devastating Western onslaughts in the previous 150 years during the Napoleonic Wars, the First World War, and the Second World War, and Stalin's goal was to establish a buffer zone of states between Germany and the Soviet Union. Truman charged that Stalin had betrayed the [Yalta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yalta) agreement. With Eastern Europe under Red Army occupation, Stalin was also biding his time, as his own [atomic bomb project](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_atomic_bomb_project) was steadily and secretly progressing.

In April 1949 the United States sponsored the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic_Treaty_Organization) (NATO), a mutual defense pact in which most Western nations pledged to treat an armed attack against one nation as an assault on all. The Soviet Union established an Eastern counterpart to NATO in 1955, dubbed the [Warsaw Pact](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Pact). The division of Europe into Western and Soviet blocks later took on a more global character, especially after 1949, when the U.S. nuclear monopoly ended with the testing of [a Soviet bomb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe-1) and the [Communist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_China) takeover in [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Republic_of_China).

The foremost objectives of Soviet foreign policy were the maintenance and enhancement of national security and the maintenance of hegemony over Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union maintained its dominance over the Warsaw Pact through crushing the [1956 Hungarian Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1956_Hungarian_Revolution), suppressing the [Prague Spring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prague_Spring) in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and supporting the suppression of the [Solidarity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solidarity) movement in Poland in the early 1980s. The Soviet Union opposed the United States in a number of [proxy conflicts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proxy_conflicts) all over the world, including [Korean War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_War) and [Vietnam War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War).

As the Soviet Union continued to maintain tight control over its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, the Cold War gave way to [*Détente*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A9tente) and a more complicated pattern of international relations in the 1970s in which the world was no longer clearly split into two clearly opposed blocs. Less powerful countries had more room to assert their independence, and the two superpowers were partially able to recognize their common interest in trying to check the further spread and proliferation of nuclear weapons in treaties such as [SALT I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SALT_I), [SALT II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SALT_II), and the [Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Ballistic_Missile_Treaty).

U.S.-Soviet relations deteriorated following the beginning of the nine-year [Soviet War in Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_War_in_Afghanistan) in 1979 and the [1980 election of Ronald Reagan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._presidential_election%2C_1980), a staunch anti-communist, but improved as the Soviet bloc started to unravel in the late 1980s. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia lost the [superpower](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superpower) status that it had won in the Second World War.

**The Khrushchev and Brezhnev years**

[Yuri Gagarin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Gagarin), the first human in space.

Main article: [History of the Soviet Union (1953–1985)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Soviet_Union_%281953%E2%80%931985%29)

In the power struggle that erupted after Stalin's death in 1953, his closest followers lost out. [Nikita Khrushchev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikita_Khrushchev) solidified his position in a speech before the [Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/20th_Party_Congress) in 1956 detailing Stalin's atrocities.

In 1964 Khrushchev was [impeached](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impeachment) by the Communist Party's Central Committee, charging him with a host of errors that included Soviet setbacks such as the [Cuban Missile Crisis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Missile_Crisis). After a brief period of collective leadership, a veteran bureaucrat, [Leonid Brezhnev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid_Brezhnev), took Khrushchev's place. Brezhnev followed Stalin's [emphasis on heavy industry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalinism), and also attempted to ease relationships with the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States). In the 1960s the USSR became a leading producer and exporter of [petroleum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petroleum) and [natural gas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_gas).

Khruschev and Brezhnev years were time when Soviet science and industry peaked. The world's first [nuclear power plant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_power_plant) was established in 1954 [in Obninsk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obninsk_Nuclear_Power_Plant). [Baikal Amur Mainline](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baikal_Amur_Mainline) was built.

The [Soviet space program](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_space_program), founded by [Sergey Korolev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergey_Korolev), was especially successful. On October 4, 1957 Soviet Union launched the first [space satellite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space_satellite) [Sputnik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sputnik). On April 12, 1961 [Yuri Gagarin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Gagarin) became the first human to travel into space in the Soviet spaceship [Vostok 1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vostok_1). Other achievements of Russian space program include: the first photo of the [far side of the Moon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Far_side_of_the_Moon); exploration of [Venus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus); the first [spacewalk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spacewalk) by [Alexey Leonov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexey_Leonov); first female spaceflight by [Valentina Tereshkova](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valentina_Tereshkova). More recently, the Soviet Union produced the world's first space station, [Salyut](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salyut) which in 1986 was replaced by [Mir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mir), the first consistently inhabited long-term space station, that served from 1986 to 2001.

**Breakup of the Union**

Two developments dominated the decade that followed: the increasingly apparent crumbling of the Soviet Union's economic and political structures, and the patchwork attempts at reforms to reverse that process. After the rapid succession of former KGB Chief [Yuri Andropov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Andropov) and [Konstantin Chernenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantin_Chernenko), transitional figures with deep roots in Brezhnevite tradition, [Mikhail Gorbachev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikhail_Gorbachev) announced [perestroika](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perestroika) in an attempt to modernize Soviet communism, and made significant changes in the party leadership. However, [Gorbachev's social reforms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perestroika) led to [unintended consequences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unintended_consequence). Because of his policy of [*glasnost*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasnost), which facilitated public access to information after decades of government repression, social problems received wider public attention, undermining the Communist Party's authority. In the [revolutions of 1989](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutions_of_1989) the USSR lost its satellites in Eastern Europe. *Glasnost* allowed ethnic and nationalist disaffection to reach the surface. Many constituent republics, especially the [Baltic republics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baltic_republics), [Georgian SSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgian_SSR) and [Moldavian SSR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldavian_SSR), sought greater autonomy, which Moscow was unwilling to provide. Gorbachev's attempts at economic reform were not sufficient, and the Soviet government left intact most of the fundamental elements of communist economy. Suffering from low pricing of petroleum and natural gas, ongoing [war in Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_war_in_Afghanistan), outdated industry and pervasive corruption, the Soviet [planned economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planned_economy) proved to be ineffective, and by 1990 the Soviet government had lost control over economic conditions. Due to [price control](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Price_control), there were shortages of almost all products, reaching their peak in the end of 1991, when people had to stand in long lines and to be lucky enough to buy even the essentials. Control over the constituent republics was also relaxed, and they began to assert their national sovereignty over Moscow.

The tension between Soviet Union and Russian SFSR authorities came to be personified in the bitter power struggle between Gorbachev and [Boris Yeltsin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Yeltsin). Squeezed out of Union politics by Gorbachev in 1987, Yeltsin, who represented himself as a committed democrat, presented a significant opposition to Gorbachev authority. In a remarkable reversal of fortunes, he gained election as chairman of the Russian republic's new Supreme Soviet in May 1990. The following month, he secured legislation [giving Russian laws priority over Soviet laws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_of_State_Sovereignty_of_the_Russian_Soviet_Federative_Socialist_Republic) and withholding two-thirds of the budget. In the [first Russian presidential election](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_presidential_election%2C_1991) in 1991 Yeltsin became president of the Russian SFSR. At last Gorbachev [attempted to restructure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Union_Treaty) the Soviet Union into a less centralized state. However, on August 19, 1991, a [coup against Gorbachev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Soviet_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat_attempt), conspired by senior Soviet officials, was attempted. The coup faced wide popular opposition and collapsed in three days, but disintegration of the Union became imminent. The Russian government took over most of the Soviet Union government institutions on its territory. Because of the dominant position of Russians in the Soviet Union, most gave little thought to any distinction between Russia and the [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) before the late 1980s. In the Soviet Union, only Russian SFSR lacked even the paltry instruments of statehood that the other republics possessed, such as its own republic-level Communist Party branch, [trade union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_union) councils, [Academy of Sciences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academy_of_Sciences), and the like. The [Communist Party of the Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_the_Soviet_Union) was banned in Russia in 1991–1992, although no [lustration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lustration) has ever taken place, and many of its members became top Russian officials. However, as the Soviet government was still opposed to market reforms, the economic situation continued to deteriorate. By December 1991, the shortages had resulted in the introduction of food [rationing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationing) in Moscow and Saint Petersburg for the first time since World War II. Russia received humanitarian food aid from abroad. After the [Belavezha Accords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belavezha_Accords), the [Supreme Soviet of Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Soviet_of_Russia) withdrew Russia from the Soviet Union on December 12. The Soviet Union officially ended on December 25, 1991, and the [Russian Federation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) (formerly the [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Soviet_Federative_Socialist_Republic)) took power on December 26. The Russian government lifted price control on January 1992. Prices rose dramatically, but shortages disappeared.

**Russian Federation**

Main article: [History of post-Soviet Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_post-Soviet_Russia)

Although Yeltsin came to power on a wave of optimism, he never recovered his popularity after endorsing [Yegor Gaidar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yegor_Gaidar)'s "[shock therapy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shock_therapy_%28economics%29)" of ending Soviet-era price controls, drastic cuts in state spending, and an open foreign trade regime in early 1992 (*see* [Russian economic reform in the 1990s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Russia#Economic_Reform_in_the_1990s)). The reforms immediately devastated the living standards of much of the population. In the 1990s Russia suffered an economic downturn that was, in some ways, more severe than the United States or Germany had undergone six decades earlier in the Great Depression Hyperinflation hit the ruble, due to [monetary overhang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monetary_overhang) from the days of the planned economy.

Meanwhile, the profusion of small parties and their aversion to coherent alliances left the legislature chaotic. During 1993, Yeltsin's rift with the parliamentary leadership led to the [September–October 1993 constitutional crisis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_constitutional_crisis_of_1993). The crisis climaxed on October 3, when Yeltsin chose a radical solution to settle his dispute with parliament: he called up tanks to shell the [Russian White House](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_House_of_Russia), blasting out his opponents. As Yeltsin was taking the unconstitutional step of dissolving the legislature, Russia came close to a serious civil conflict. Yeltsin was then free to impose the [current Russian constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_the_Russian_Federation) with strong presidential powers, which was approved by referendum in December 1993. The cohesion of the Russian Federation was also threatened when the republic of [Chechnya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chechnya) attempted to break away, leading to the [First](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Chechen_War) and [Second Chechen Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Chechen_War).

Economic reforms also consolidated a semi-criminal oligarchy with roots in the old Soviet system. Advised by Western governments, the [World Bank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Bank), and the [International Monetary Fund](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Monetary_Fund), Russia embarked on the largest and fastest [privatization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privatization) that the world had ever seen in order to reform the fully [nationalized](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalized) Soviet economy. By mid-decade, retail, trade, services, and small industry was in private hands. Most big enterprises were acquired by their old managers, engendering a new rich ([Russian tycoons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_oligarch)) in league with [criminal mafias](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Mafia) or Western investors. That being said, there were [corporate raiders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_raider) such as [Andrei Volgin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrei_Volgin) engaged in [hostile takeovers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hostile_takeover) of corrupt corporations by the mid-1990s.

By the mid-1990s Russia had a system of multiparty electoral politics. But it was harder to establish a representative government because of two structural problems—the struggle between president and parliament and the anarchic party system.

[Dmitri Medvedev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitri_Medvedev) with [Vladimir Putin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Putin)

Meanwhile, the central government had lost control of the localities, bureaucracy, and economic fiefdoms; tax revenues had collapsed. Still in deep depression by the mid-1990s, Russia's economy was hit further by the [financial crash of 1998](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1998_Russian_financial_crisis). After the 1998 financial crisis, Yeltsin was at the end of his political career. Just hours before the first day of 2000, Yeltsin made a surprise announcement of his resignation, leaving the government in the hands of the little-known Prime Minister [Vladimir Putin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Putin), a former KGB official and head of the KGB's post-Soviet successor agency [FSB](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FSB_%28Russia%29) In 2000, the new acting president defeated his opponents in the presidential election on March 26, and won a landslide 4 years later. International observers were alarmed by late 2004 moves to further tighten the presidency's control over parliament, civil society, and regional officeholders. In 2008 [Dmitri Medvedev](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitri_Medvedev), a former [Gazprom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gazprom) chairman and Putin's head of staff, was elected new President of Russia.

Nevertheless, reversion to a socialist command economy seemed almost impossible, meeting widespread relief in the West. Russia ended 2006 with its eighth straight year of growth, averaging 6.7% annually since the [financial crisis of 1998](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1998_Russian_financial_crisis). Although high oil prices and a relatively cheap ruble initially drove this growth, since 2003 consumer demand and, more recently, investment have played a significant role. Russia is well ahead of most other resource-rich countries in its economic development, with a long tradition of education, science, and industry.

**See also**

* [Timeline of Russian history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Russian_history)
* [Timeline of the Tataro-Mongol Yoke in Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Tataro-Mongol_Yoke_in_Russia)
* [Exploration of Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exploration_of_Russia)
* [History of Siberia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Siberia)
* [Russian colonization of the Americas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_colonization_of_the_Americas)
* [Caucasian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasian_War)
* [History of the administrative division of Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_administrative_division_of_Russia)
* [Military history of the Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_the_Soviet_Union)
* [World War II casualties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties)

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