

# Russia



**2016 Country Review**

**COUNTRY WATCH**

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Country Overview**

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## Country Overview

### RUSSIA

Spanning 11 time zones, Russia is the largest country on earth in terms of surface area, although large tracts in the north and east are inhospitable and sparsely populated. In 1547, Ivan IV (the Terrible) was crowned czar of Russia, beginning a tradition of czarist rule and expansionism. Czarist rule continued until the 1917 Russian Revolution that overthrew the imperial household and the Communists, under Vladimir Lenin, seized power. Civil war broke out in 1918 between the Red Army and White Russians, or anti-communists, and lasted until 1920 when the Bolsheviks triumphed. After the Red army conquered Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, a new nation, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.), was formed in 1922. The brutal rule of Josef Stalin (1928-53) strengthened Communist rule, and in the 1930s the country saw the forced collectivization of tens of millions of its citizens in state agricultural and industrial enterprises. Millions died in the process, and millions more died in political purges. The Soviet Union emerged from World War II with extended influence, occupying many Eastern European nations. Mikhail Gorbachev took office in 1985 and introduced openness and a restructuring of the government. The new political climate resulted in the ultimate breakup of the Soviet Union, and by late 1991 Russia and 14 other former Soviet republics emerged as independent states. Russia is endowed with vast natural resources, including oil, natural gas, coal, and timber. It holds the world's largest natural gas reserves, the second largest coal reserves, and the eighth largest oil reserves. Russia is also the world's largest exporter of natural gas, and the second largest oil exporter.

Editor's note --

Ukraine's "Maidan" uprising of 2013 and 2014, resulting in the removal of the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich from office and the dismantling of his authority in 2014, were signs that Ukraine was actively resisting influence from Moscow. They were also clear signals that Ukraine was determined to set its own course -- and quite likely in the direction of Europe. The people of Ukraine were delivering Russia a clear message that they would be the agents of their own self-determination. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin was not in a mood to receive that message.

The invasion and de facto annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea by Russia, under the guise of "protecting" the Russian ethno-linguistic population, showed that Russia felt entitled to

stake a claim on Ukraine. For the wider world, this action recalled alarming memories of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, under the aegis of the Brezhnev Policy, to subdue the independence-minded Prague Spring. It also evoked suggestions that Putin was attempting to recraft a Cold War Russian quasi-empire in the mold of the former Soviet Union.

While the "Maidan" or Independence Square in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev would be stamped in the history books as "Ground Zero" of Ukraine's 2014 unrest, the battleground had clearly move eastward with Crimea as a new flashpoint. But with fighting going on elsewhere in eastern Ukraine, and with "new Russia" enclaves been declared in Donetsk and Luhansk later in 2014, it was evident that Russia would not end its Ukrainian adventure at the borders of Crimea.

At stake were Russian ambitions to regain territory lost following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The reality was that Russia was attempting to destabilize Ukraine by supporting pro-Russian cabals in eastern Ukraine, and with an eye on establishing southern and eastern Ukraine as part of Vladimir Putin's "new Russia."

It was to be seen if the landscape in eastern Europe represented the foundation for a renewed Cold War between the East and West. Given the geopolitical and geostrategic stakes, the outcome was clearly being textured by bloodshed and tears. Russian President Putin was banking on the West's rationality and its reluctance to be drawn into another conflict -- especially one on European soil. From the point of view of United States President Barack Obama, the very notion of a Cold War being in the offing was to be dismissed. According to President Obama, Russia was no longer a superpower and was now operating from a position of weakness as it intimidated neighbors such as Ukraine. But the tragic downing of a commercial airliner in eastern Ukraine in July 2014 raised the geopolitical stakes, and has since spurred the West to apply economic sanctions to Russia.

Economic pressures may have played a hand in forcing Russia to the negotiating table and the forging of two separate ceasefire agreements in the Belarusian capital of Minsk. But, to date, neither Minsk ceasefire agreement has managed to stem the flow of blood, and the encroachment of pro-Russian forces into eastern Ukrainian territory.

In the long run, the outcome to this story was yet to be written.

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## Key Data

Key Data	
<b>Region:</b>	Asia/Europe
<b>Population:</b>	136009984
<b>Climate:</b>	Ranges from steppes in the south through humid continental in much of European Russia; subarctic in Siberia to tundra climate in the polar north; winters vary from cool along Black Sea coast to frigid in Siberia; summers vary from warm in the Steppes to cool along Arctic coast.
<b>Languages:</b>	Russian other
<b>Currency:</b>	1 rouble (R\$) = 100 kopeks
<b>Holiday:</b>	Independence Day is 12 June (1990), Christmas is 7 January, Constitution Day is 12 December
<b>Area Total:</b>	17075200
<b>Area Land:</b>	16995800
<b>Coast Line:</b>	37653



## Russia

### Country Map

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Asia/Europe

Regional Map

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# **Chapter 2**

## **Political Overview**

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## History

### Early History

Human inhabitation of the region surrounding Russia dates back to Paleolithic times. Early written history notes that Greek traders conducted extensive commerce with Scythian tribes around the shores of the Black Sea and the Crimean region. In the third century B.C.E., the Scythians were displaced by Sarmatians, who, in turn, were overrun by waves of Germanic Goths. In the third century C.E. Asiatic Huns replaced the Goths and were in turn conquered by Turkic Avars in the sixth century. By the ninth century, Eastern Slavs began to settle in present-day Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

The first Slavic state was known as Kievan (Kyivan) Rus and was established in what is now Ukraine in 862 C.E. In 988 C.E., Kievan Rus was Christianized, and Orthodoxy became the state religion. Consequently, Byzantine culture became the predominant cultural influence on Russia during this period.

Over the next three centuries, various invaders, including the princes of Muscovy, assaulted Kyivan Rus, while the Mongols under Batu Khan succeeding in taking control over Russia in 1237. The Mongols, also known as the Golden Horde, brought the scattered Russian principalities under unified control.

Kyivan Rus struggled on into the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but was decisively destroyed by the arrival of a new invader-the Mongols. In 1237, Batu Khan, a grandson of Genghis Khan, launched an invasion into Kyivan Rus' from his capital on the lower Volga (at present-day Kazan).

Over the next three years the Mongols (or Tatars) destroyed all of the major cities of Kyivan Rus' with the exceptions of Novgorod and Pskov. The regional princes were not deposed, but they were forced to send regular tribute to the Tatar state, which became known as the Empire of the Golden Horde. Invasions of Russia were attempted during this period from the west as well, first by the Swedes (1240) and then by the Livonian Brothers of the Sword (1242), a regional branch of the fearsome Teutonic Knights. However, luckily for Russia, both were decisively defeated by the great warrior Aleksandr Nyevisky, a prince of Novgorod who earned his surname from his victory over the Swedes on the Neva River.

## Ivan the Terrible

For more than 100 years, very little seems to have happened in Russia. In fact, because of the payments demanded by the Tatars, there wasn't much money available for building, military campaigns, or anything else of that sort. With the Tatars off to the southwest, the northeastern cities gradually gained more influence—first Tver, and then, around the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Moscow. As a sign of the city's importance, the patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church was transferred to the city, making it the spiritual capital of Russia. By the latter part of the century, Moscow felt strong enough to challenge the Tatars directly, and in 1380 a Muscovite prince named Dmitri Donskoy attacked them. His decisive victory at Kulikovo Field immediately made him a popular hero, though the Tatar retaliation two years later maintained their rule over the city. It was not until 1480, after another century had passed, that Moscow was again strong enough to throw off Tatar rule for good. Its ruler at that time was Grand Duke Ivan III, better known as Ivan the Great. Ivan began by subjugating most of Moscow's rival cities, and by the time he tore up the charter binding it to Tatar taxation he was effectively in control of the entire country. However, it wasn't until the reign of his grandson, Ivan IV (the Terrible), that Russia became a unified state.

Ivan the Terrible succeeded his father Vasily III as grand duke of Moscow in 1533 at the age of three. His mother served as regent until she died, when Ivan was eight. For the next eight years, the young grand duke endured a series of regents chosen from among the "boyars" (the nobility). Finally in 1547, at age 17, he adopted the title of tsar (czar) and set out to crush the power of the boyars, reorganizing the military, and preparing to defeat the Tatars. In 1552, he conquered and sacked Kazan, and in 1556 Astrakhan, having thus destroyed the lingering power of the Golden Horde. Ivan's Tatar campaigns opened vast new areas for Russian expansion, and it was during his reign that the conquest and colonization of Siberia began.

Ivan was not supposed to have been very terrible at all during the early years of his reign. However, as he grew older his temper worsened, and by the 1560s he carried out a horrific campaign against the boyars, confiscating their land and executing or exiling those who displeased him. In 1581, in a rage, he struck his son and heir, Ivan, with an iron rod, killing him.

When Ivan the Terrible died in 1584, his son Fyodor, who was not exactly up to filling the shoes of an autocratic legendary father, succeeded him. Fyodor left most of the management of the kingdom to his brother-in-law, Boris Godunov, and it was not long before Godunov began to work to secure the succession for himself. In 1591, he murdered Fyodor's younger brother Dmitri in the ancient town of Uglich, a spot now marked by the magnificent Church of St. Demetrius on the Blood. When Fyodor died in 1598, Godunov was made tsar, but his rule was never accepted as entirely legitimate. Within a few years a pretender arose in Poland, claiming to be Dmitri, and in 1604 he invaded Russia. Godunov died suddenly the next year, and the "Time of Troubles" began.

## The Romanovs

For the next eight years both the first and the second, false Dmitri laid claims to the throne, both supported by invading Polish armies. Finally, in 1613, the Poles were ousted from Moscow, and the boyars unanimously elected Mikhail Romanov as tsar. The Romanov dynasty was to rule Russia for the next 304 years, until the Russian Revolution brought an end to the Tsarist state.

For the first few generations, the Romanovs attempted to maintain the status quo in Russia. They continued to centralize power, but they did very little to bring Russia up to speed with the rapid changes in economic and political life that were taking place elsewhere in Europe. Peter the Great was to change all of that.

## Peter the Great

Peter was youngest son of Tsar Alexis and the child of his second wife, neither of which promised great things. Tsar Alexis also had three children by his first wife: Fyodor, an invalid; Sofia; and Ivan, a semi-imbecile. When Alexis died in 1676, Fyodor became tsar, but his poor constitution brought an early death in 1682. The family of Peter's mother succeeded in having him chosen over Ivan to be Tsar, and the 10-year-old boy was brought from his childhood home at the country estate of Kolomenskoye to the Kremlin. No sooner was he established, however, than the Ivan's family struck back. Gaining the support of the Kremlin Guard, they launched a coup d'etat, and Peter was forced to endure the horrible sight of his supporters and family members being thrown from the top of the grand Red Stair of the Faceted Palace onto the raised pikes of the guard. The outcome of the coup was a joint leadership, with both Peter and Ivan placed under the regency of Ivan's elder and sister Sofia. Peter had not enjoyed his stay in Moscow, a city he would dislike for the rest of his life.

With Sofia in control, Peter was sent back to Kolomenskoye. It was soon noticed that he possessed a penchant for war games, especially military drill and siege craft. He became acquainted with a small community of European soldiers, from whom he learned western European tactics and strategy. Remarkably, neither Sofia nor the Kremlin Guard found this disturbing. In 1689, just as Peter was to come of age, Sofia attempted another coup-this time, however, she was defeated and confined to Novodevichiy Convent. Six years later Ivan died, leaving Peter in sole possession of the throne. Rather than taking up residence and rule in Moscow, his response was to embark on a "grand tour of Europe." He spent about two years there, not only meeting monarchs and conducting diplomacy but also traveling incognito and even working as a ship's carpenter in Holland. He amassed a considerable body of knowledge on western European industrial techniques and state administration, and became determined to modernize the Russian state and to westernize



its society.

In 1698, still on tour, Peter received news of yet another rebellion by the Kremlin Guard, instigated by Sofia despite her confinement to the convent. He returned without any sense of humor, decisively defeating the guard with his own European-drilled units, ordering a mass execution of the surviving rebels, and then hanging the bodies outside Sofia's convent window. She apparently went mad. The following day Peter began his program to recreate Russia in the image of Western Europe by personally clipping off the beards of his nobles.

Peter's return to Russia and assumption of personal rule hit the country like a hurricane. He banned traditional Muscovite dress for all men, introduced military conscription, established technical schools, replaced the church patriarchy with a holy synod answerable to himself, simplified the alphabet, tried to improve the manners of the court, changed the calendar, changed his title from tsar to emperor, and introduced scores of other reforms, restrictions and novelties (all of which convinced the conservative clergy that he was "the antichrist"). In 1703 he embarked on the most dramatic of his reforms—the decision to transfer the capital from Moscow to a new city to be built from scratch on the Gulf of Finland. Over the next nine years, at tremendous human and material costs, St. Petersburg was created.

Peter generated considerable opposition during his reign, not only from the conservative clergy but also from the nobility, who were attached to the status quo. One of the most notable critics of his policies was his own son Alexis, who became the focus of oppositional intrigue. In fact, Alexis seemed to desire no such position and in 1716 he fled to Vienna after renouncing his right to the succession. Having never had much occasion to trust others, Peter suspected that Alexis had in fact fled in order to rally foreign backing. After persuading him to return, Peter had his son arrested and tried for treason. In 1718 he was sentenced to death, but died before the execution from wounds sustained during torture.

Peter himself died in 1725. Although he was deeply committed to making Russia a powerful new member of modern Europe, it is questionable whether his reforms resulted in significant improvements to the lives of his subjects. Certainly he modernized Russia's military and its administrative structure, but both of these reforms were financed at the expense of the peasantry, who were increasingly forced into serfdom. After Peter's death Russia went through a great number of rulers in a distressingly short time, none of whom had much of an opportunity to leave a lasting impression. Many of Peter's reforms failed to take root in Russia, and it was not until the reign of Catherine the Great that his desire to make Russia into a great European power was in fact achieved.

### Catherine the Great



On Dec. 25, 1761, Peter III, a grandson of Peter the Great, was crowned tsar. Peter was 34 years old, dissolute, and imperceptive. His wife Catherine, a year younger but far more mature, did not accompany him. Catherine was neither dissolute nor puritan. The couple had been married for 18 years. Both had been newcomers to the Russian court as teens, and for a few years after their marriage they had been on friendly terms. By 1762, however, their marriage had long since been in name only. Peter had grown into a fool, while Catherine had become a complete success, respected as much for her intellect as for her winning personality. Although the court atmosphere in which they lived was much more cosmopolitan than that inhabited by their royal predecessors, politics was as always a deadly serious pursuit and everyone knew that Catherine was the more capable politician.

By the summer of 1762 the conflict between Peter and Catherine had become quite serious. In only six months of rule, he had managed to offend and outrage virtually the entire court by diplomatic bumbling and large segments of the population through his hostility to the church and his evident disdain for Russia. Support for Catherine was widespread, and Peter was suspicious. Early on the morning of June 28, Catherine left her estate at Peterhof, outside of St. Petersburg, and departed for the city. Everything had been prepared in advance, and when she arrived she was greeted with cheers by both the troops of her factional supporters and the populace. By the next morning, Peter was confronted with a *fait accompli* and a prepared declaration of his abdication. A week later, he was dead.

Catherine went on to become the most powerful sovereign in Europe. She continued Peter the Great's reforms of the Russian state, further increasing central control over the provinces. Her skill as a diplomat, in an era that produced many extraordinary diplomats, was remarkable. Russia's influence in European affairs, as well as its territory in Eastern and Central Europe, were increased and expanded. Catherine was also an enthusiastic patron of the arts. She built and founded the Hermitage Museum, commissioned buildings all over Russia, founded academies, journals, and libraries, and corresponded with the French intelligentsia, including Voltaire, Diderot, and d'Alembert. Although Catherine did in fact have many lovers, some of them trusted advisors and confidants; stories alleging her to have had an excessive sexual appetite are unfounded.

With the onset of the French Revolution, Catherine became strikingly conservative and increasingly hostile to criticism of her policies. From 1789 until her death, she reversed many of the liberal reforms of her early reign. One notable effect of this reversal was that, like Peter the Great, Catherine ultimately contributed to the increasingly distressing state of the peasantry in Russia.

### Napoleon in Russia

When Catherine the Great died in 1796, she was succeeded by her son Paul I. Catherine never really liked Paul, and her son reciprocated her feelings. Paul's reign lasted only five years and was

by all accounts a complete disaster. His most notable legacy is the remarkable and tragic Engineer's Castle in St. Petersburg. Paul was succeeded by his son Alexander I, who is remembered mostly for having been the ruler of Russia during Napoleon Bonaparte's epic Russian Campaign.

In June 1812, Napoleon began his fatal Russian campaign, a landmark in the history of the destructive potential of warfare. Virtually all of continental Europe was under his control, and the invasion of Russia was an attempt to force Tsar Alexander I to submit once again to the terms of a treaty that Napoleon had imposed upon him four years earlier. Having gathered nearly half a million soldiers, from France as well as all of the vassal states of Europe, Napoleon entered Russia at the head of the largest army ever amassed. The Russians, under Marshal Kutuzov, could not realistically hope to defeat him in a direct confrontation. Instead, they began a defensive campaign of strategic retreat, devastating the land as they fell back, a tactic to be called "scorched earth," and harassing the flanks of the French. As the summer wore on, Napoleon's massive supply lines were stretched ever thinner, and his force began to decline. By September, without having engaged in a single key battle, the French Army had been reduced by more than two thirds from fatigue, hunger, desertion, and raids by Russian forces.

Nonetheless, it was clear that unless the Russians engaged the French army in a major battle, Moscow would be Napoleon's in a matter of weeks. The tsar insisted upon an engagement, and on September 7, with winter closing in and the French army only 70 miles from the city, the two armies met at Borodino Field. By the end of the day, 108,000 soldiers had died, but neither side had gained a decisive victory. Kutuzov realized that any further defense of the city would be senseless, and he withdrew his forces, prompting the citizens of Moscow to begin a massive and panicked exodus. When Napoleon's army arrived on Sept. 14, they found a city depopulated and bereft of supplies, a meager comfort in the face of the oncoming winter. To make matters worse, fires broke out in the city that night, and by the next day the French were lacking shelter as well.

After waiting in vain for Alexander to offer to negotiate, Napoleon ordered his troops to begin the march home. Because the route south was blocked by Kutuzov's forces (and the French were in no shape for a battle) the retreat retraced the long, devastated route of the invasion. Having waited until mid-October to depart, the exhausted French army soon found itself in the midst of winter, in fact, in the midst of an unusually early and especially cold winter. Temperatures soon dropped well below freezing, Cossacks attacked stragglers and isolated units, food was almost non-existent, and the march was 500 miles. Ten thousand men survived. The campaign ensured Napoleon's downfall and Russia's status as a leading power in post-Napoleonic Europe. Yet even as Russia emerged more powerful than ever from the Napoleonic era, its internal tensions began to increase.

### Power and Resistance

Since the reign of Ivan the Terrible, the Russian tsars had followed a fairly consistent policy of

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drawing more political power away from the nobility and into their own hands. This centralization of authority in the Russian state had usually been accomplished in one of two ways: either by simply taking power from the nobles and braving their opposition (Ivan the Terrible was particularly adept), or by compensating the nobles for decreased power in government by giving them greater power over their land and its occupants. Serfdom, as this latter system was known, had increased steadily in Russia from the time of Ivan the Terrible, its inventor. By the time of Catherine the Great, the Russian tsars enjoyed virtually autocratic rule over their nobles. However, they had in a sense purchased this power by granting those nobles virtually autocratic power over the serfs, who by this time had been reduced to a status closer to slaves or serfs than to villagers or farmers.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both of these relationships were under attack. In the "Decembrist" (Dekabrist) revolt in 1825, a group of young, reformist military officers attempted to force the adoption of a constitutional monarchy in Russia by preventing the accession of Nicholas (Nikolai) I. They failed, and Nicholas became the most reactionary leader in Europe.

Nicholas' successor, Alexander II, seemed by contrast amenable to reform. In 1861, he abolished serfdom, though the emancipation didn't in fact bring on any significant change in the condition of the peasants. As the country became more industrialized, its political system experienced even greater strain. Attempts by the lower classes to gain more freedom provoked fears of anarchy, and the government remained extremely conservative. As Russia became more industrialized, larger, and far more complicated, the inadequacies of autocratic tsarist rule became increasingly apparent. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century conditions were ripe for a serious convulsion.

At the same time, Russia had expanded its territory and its power considerably since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its borders extended to Afghanistan and China, and it had acquired extensive territory on the Pacific coast. The foundation of the port cities of Vladivostok and Port Arthur there had opened up profitable avenues for commerce, and the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway (constructed from 1891-1905) linked the European Russia with its new eastern territories.

### Reform Movement

In 1894, Nicholas (Nikolai) II acceded to the throne. He was not the most competent of political leaders, and his ministers were reactionaries. To make matters worse, the increasing Russian presence in the Far East provoked the hostility of Japan.

In January 1905, the Japanese attacked, and Russia experienced a series of defeats that dissolved the tenuous support held by Nicholas' already unpopular government. Nicholas was forced to grant concessions to the reformers, including most notably a constitution and a parliament, the latter of which was called the Duma. In this way, the power of the reform movement characterized

emerging Russian politics of the time. The industrialization of the major western cities and the development of the Baku oil fields had brought together large concentrations of Russian workers, and they soon began to organize into local political councils, or soviets. It was in large part the power of the Soviets, united under the Social Democratic party that had forced Nicholas to accept reforms in 1905.

After the war with Japan was over, Nicholas attempted to reverse the new freedoms, and his government became more reactionary than ever. Popular discontent gained strength, and Nicholas countered it with increased repression, maintaining control but worsening relations with the population.

In 1912, the Social Democrats split into two camps—the radical Bolsheviks and the comparatively moderate Mensheviks. This move would set the stage for significant future developments.

Then, in 1914, another disastrous war once again brought on a crisis. If the Russo-Japanese war had been costly and unpopular, it was at least remote. The first World War, however, took place right on Russia's western doorstep. Unprepared militarily or industrially, the country suffered demoralizing defeats, suffered severe food shortages, and soon suffered an economic collapse.

By February 1917, the workers and soldiers had had enough. Riots broke out in St. Petersburg, then called Petrograd, and the garrison there mutinied. Workers councils were set up, and the Duma approved the establishment of provisional government to attempt to restore order in the capital. It was soon clear that Nicholas possessed no support, and on March 2, 1917, he abdicated the throne in favor of his brother Mikhail (Michael). Michael renounced his claim the next day.

The provisional government set up by the Duma attempted to pursue a moderate policy, calling for a return to order and promising reform of worker's rights. However, it was unwilling to endorse the most pressing demand of the Soviets: an immediate end to Russia's involvement in the war. For the next nine months, the provisional government, first under Prince Lvov and then under Aleksandr Kerensky, unsuccessfully attempted to establish its authority. In the meanwhile, the Bolsheviks gained increasing support from the ever more frustrated soviets. On October 25, led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, they stormed the Winter Palace and deposed the Kerensky government.

### The Bolshevik Revolution

Although the Bolsheviks enjoyed substantial support in St. Petersburg and Moscow, they were by no means in control of the country as a whole. They succeeded in taking Russia out of the war (though on very unfavorable terms), but within months civil war broke out throughout Russia. For the next three years the country was devastated by civil strife, until by 1920 the Bolsheviks had finally emerged victorious, despite foreign intervention on the side of the monarchists. After the

Red Army conquered Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, Moscow formed a new state in 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, also known as the U.S.S.R.

The first few years of Soviet rule were marked by an extraordinary outburst of social and cultural change. Although the Bolsheviks had maintained complete control of the economy during the civil war, Lenin decided at its end that a partial return to a market economy would help the country recover from the destruction of the previous three years. His New Economic Policy, or NEP, brought about a period of relative prosperity, allowing the young Soviet government to consolidate its political position and rebuild the country's infrastructure. This was also the period during which the Russian avant-garde reached its height, developing the radical new styles of constructivism, futurism, and suprematism. Although the country still faced enormous challenges, there was a widespread sense of optimism and opportunity.

### Stalinism

Lenin's death in 1924 was followed by an extended and extremely divisive struggle for power in the Communist Party. By the latter part of the decade, Joseph Stalin had emerged as the victor, and he immediately set the country on a much different course. NEP was replaced by an economic plan dictated from the top. Agricultural lands were collectivized, creating large, state-run farms. Industrial development was pushed along at breakneck speed, and production was almost entirely diverted from consumer products to capital equipment. Art and literature were placed under much tighter control, and the radical energy of the Russian avant-garde was replaced by the solemn grandeur of Soviet realism. Religion was violently repressed, as churches were closed, destroyed, or converted to other uses. Stalin purged all opposition to himself within the party as well as all opposition to party policy in the country. By the end of the 1930s, the Soviet Union had become a country in which life was more strictly regulated than ever before. Experimentation had ended, and discipline was the rule of the day. Arrests, trials and executions were commonplace. The confiscation of wheat and other food products from the agricultural regions of the U.S.S.R., notably Ukraine, resulted in the death of some seven to 10 million men, women and children.

### World War II

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the Soviet Union found itself unprepared for the conflict. Political purges had stripped the military of much of its experienced leadership, and industrial production was slow in converting from civil to military production.

On Aug. 23, 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact, which secretly provided for the division of Poland into Nazi and Soviet controlled zones. On Sept. 1, 1939, Hitler ordered his troops into Poland. On Sept. 17, Soviet troops invaded, and then

occupied, eastern Poland under the terms of this agreement. By June 1941, the agreement between the U.S.S.R. and Germany had broken down, and Germany had invaded the Soviet Union, which subsequently joined the Allies.

Although its non-aggression pact with Germany served for a while to forestall an attack by Hitler, the Soviets were caught by surprise by the invasion of June 1941. By the end of the year, the Germans had seized most of the Soviet territory in the west, surrounded Leningrad (formerly St. Petersburg), and advanced to within a few hundred miles of Moscow. With tremendous effort, a Soviet Russian counter-offensive pushed back the advance on the capital, but in the summer of 1942, the Germans launched a new invasion against the southern front in an attempt to gain control of the rail center of Stalingrad on the Volga and the vital Caucasus oil fields. Despite an overwhelming disadvantage in numbers and inferior weaponry, the Red Army succeeded in holding out against the enormous Nazi army. In November, a relieving force managed to encircle the attackers and compel the surrender of the entire force, marking a decisive turning point in the war. From that point onward, the Russian army remained on the attack. By 1944, they had driven the Germans back to Poland, and on May 2, 1945, Berlin fell.

### Post-War Developments

As was the case with the Napoleonic Wars, the Soviet Union emerged from World War II considerably stronger than it had been before the war. Although the country suffered enormous devastation and lost more than 20 million lives, it had gained considerable territory and now ranked as one of the two great world powers along with the United States. Nonetheless, the standards of living in the country continued to decline. Industrial production was once again concentrated on heavy industry, agricultural failures produced widespread famine, political freedoms were restricted even further, and another huge wave of purges was carried out.

### The Cold War Years

As the Cold War got underway, an increasing proportion of the Soviet Union's resources were funneled into military projects, further exacerbating the quality of life. Stalin remained in power until 1953, when he died of a cerebral hemorrhage.

Almost immediately after the death of Stalin, many of the repressive policies that he had instituted were dismantled. Under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev, a thaw ensued and political controls were to some degree relaxed, and cultural life experienced a brief period of revival. This gave rise to independence movements in the satellite republics, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, all of which was quashed by Soviet tanks. Intellectuals continued the drive for human, religious and national rights within the U.S.S.R. and throughout the Eastern bloc. However, opposition to Khrushchev



gradually gained strength within the party, and in 1964 he was ousted.

In a notable break with historical traditions, Khrushchev was permitted to quietly retire. He was replaced by Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksei Kosygin but within a couple of years Kosygin's role was diminished and he was retired. In 1968, Brezhnev, the sole leader of the USSR, proclaimed the so-called Brezhnev Policy, which stated that if any of the eastern European satellite republics swayed from communism, it was Moscow's duty to bring them back into line. Thus, the Soviet army, together with armies of satellite republics, attacked Czechoslovakia in order to subdue the independence-minded Prague Spring movement.

By the early 1970s, Leonid Brezhnev, as general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, or CPSU, had become the next prominent Soviet leader. His tenure was marked by a determined emphasis on domestic stability and an aggressive foreign policy. The country entered a decade-long period of stagnation, its rigid economy slowly deteriorating and its political climate becoming increasingly pessimistic.

### The Helsinki Accords

In an attempt to have the West formally recognize Moscow's control over its own Soviet territory as well as the post-World War II Eastern European borders, Moscow had more than 30 Western democracies, including the United States, sign the so-called Helsinki Accords in August 1975. Even though the West agreed, it demanded that the agreement include a separate section on human and religious rights, to which Russia agreed. This agreement became the bane of the Soviet Union until its demise.

Based on the tenets of the Helsinki Accords, national and regional Public Groups to Promote the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords sprang up in Moscow, Ukraine and across the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe. Intellectuals, dissidents, clergy, former freedom fighters and the average man and woman in the street took advantage of the principles incorporated in this document and pressed Moscow for more freedoms. Some even used the Helsinki Accords to push for the decolonization of the U.S.S.R. and independence for their countries. Consequently, repression and arrests of human-rights activists across the U.S.S.R. and in Eastern Europe increased in the 1970s.

### Movement Toward Democracy

When Brezhnev died in 1982 he was succeeded as general secretary in quick succession first by Yuri Andropov, head of the intelligence service, Committee for State Security (known in the West by the acronym KGB), and then by Konstantin Chernenko, neither of who managed to survive long enough to effect significant changes. In March 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev became

general secretary, the need for reforms was pressing.

Gorbachev's platform for a new Soviet Union was founded on two now-famous terms: "glasnost" (openness) and "perestroika" (restructuring). Like Khrushchev, Gorbachev intended to revitalize the Soviet economy by loosening its centralized control, opening some room for new ideas, and relaxing control of the economy. Restructuring began in earnest, with a vigorous housecleaning of the bureaucracy and a significant investigation into corruption. Nonetheless, he was determined to preserve the Soviet Union. Glasnost, however, lost some credibility right at the outset when it was discovered in April 1986 that the government had waited several days before begrudgingly admitting to the infamous nuclear disaster at Chernobyl (Chornobyl, some 90 miles north of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine), a reactor explosion that had thrown radioactive material over a wide area of the country. For days after the explosion life went on as if nothing had happened. Outdoor school activities, including public salutes to Lenin, in Ukraine and Belarus continued even as radioactive particles settled on the children and the ground. Backed into a corner on Chernobyl, Gorbachev ultimately permitted news of the disaster to be reported.

For the first time in decades, the problems of the country became subjects for open public discussion. Poverty, corruption, the enormous mismanagement of the country's resources, the unpopularity of the Afghan war, and a host of other problems and grievances were raised. Radical reform leaders emerged, including the new Moscow Party chief Boris Yeltsin, and prominent dissidents like Andrei Sakharov were able to voice their views for the first time. The government found it was the target of most of the criticism, but it also found that it wasn't any longer in much a position to do anything but try to move with the flow of events. Early in 1989, Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan. In the spring of 1989, the first open elections since 1917 were held, allowing voters a choice of more than one candidate for seats in the Congress of People's Deputies. The governments of the Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe, subjected to the same rising tide of public criticism, fell one after the other in a rapid series of revolutions culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In 1990, the Soviet Union itself began to unravel. Its own constituent republics began to issue declarations of independence. In the Russian Republic, Yeltsin was elected chairman of the parliament, taking a lead in the independence movement. Large-scale strikes shattered the Communist Party's traditional claim to be the representative of workers' rights. Demonstrations against the government and the party intensified. The economy worsened, food shortages became a problem, and the crime rate began to skyrocket. Gorbachev, caught between popular demands for more radical reform and party demands for the re-imposition of strict control, failed to satisfy either side.

The following summer, the radical reform movements became strong enough to openly defy the government. In the press, criticism of Gorbachev intensified. Yeltsin, on the other hand, was the overwhelming victor in June elections for the Russian presidency. On August 18, party



conservatives made a desperate bid for power. A group led by Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov and Vice President Gennady Yanayev detained Gorbachev at his country retreat in the Crimea. After he refused to support the imposition of military law, the head of state was placed under house arrest. The next morning the coup leaders issued the announcement that Gorbachev had resigned and that a state of emergency had been declared. Military units were dispatched to enforce the authority of the new government, but they were met with overwhelming popular protest led by Yeltsin and the other presidents of the republics. After three days the attempted coup had collapsed. Gorbachev was reinstated, only to realize that his position had become completely obsolete.

### The Collapse of the Soviet Union

By the end of the year the Soviet Union had been voted out of existence. Out of the union's ashes a loose association, called the Commonwealth of Independent States, or CIS, was established. Its full effectiveness has yet to be determined. On December 25, Gorbachev resigned, and at midnight on Dec. 31, 1991, the Soviet flag atop the Kremlin was replaced by the Russian tricolor.

After the December 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation became by default its largest successor state, inheriting its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, as well as the bulk of its foreign assets and debt. The popularly elected government of Boris Yeltsin emphasized the need for radical economic reform and a restructuring of Russia's relations with the West.

### The 1990s

In June 1992, Yeltsin appointed Yegor Gaidar, a pro-reform economist, as acting prime minister, to correct for Yeltsin's dual role as president and prime minister. In December 1992, the Congress of People's Deputies opposed Gaidar's appointment and a compromise candidate, Viktor Chernomyrdin, was chosen in his place.

The communist-controlled Congress of People's Deputies continued to oppose many of the government's economic reforms, and relations between the Yeltsin presidency and the Congress of People's Deputies deteriorated. A contributing factor to the poor state of executive-legislative relations was the unclear power balance between the two branches in the constitution. In March 1993, Yeltsin threatened to rule by decree after the Congress of People's Deputies voted against Yeltsin's proposed referendum on the powers of president and legislature. Later in March, a motion to impeach Yeltsin for violating the constitution, for his use of decree powers, was defeated in the Congress of People's Deputies.

On Sept. 12, 1993, Yeltsin suspended the Congress of People's Deputies and announced elections

to a bicameral Federal Assembly. The Congress of People's Deputies met in an emergency session beginning on Sept. 23, 1993, which was subsequently cordoned off by police forces. On Oct. 4, 1993, Yeltsin ordered the army to oust the recalcitrant legislators in the face of anti-Yeltsin, pro-legislature demonstrations. Numerous people were killed in the ensuing conflict, and tanks shelled the so-called White House (the building housing the legislature), forcing the legislators to succumb to arrest. After dismissing the Constitutional Court, Yeltsin decreed a national referendum be held on a new constitution on the same day as elections to the, as yet unapproved, Federal Assembly.

On Dec. 12, 1993, the new Yeltsin-drafted constitution was approved by 58 percent of the participating voters. Pro-Yeltsin forces, however, fared worse in the Federal Assembly elections. Although the pro-reform Russia's Choice, led by Yegor Gaidar, won the largest number of seats of all the winning parties, the balance was held by a combination of anti-reform parties. Nevertheless, the strong presidential powers granted by the new constitution, along with the fragmentation and political rivalries of the anti-reform, anti-Yeltsin forces, afforded Yeltsin considerable more power to enact economic reforms.

In October 1994, the Russian ruble collapsed, losing overnight almost one-fourth of its value. The collapse of the ruble exacerbated the deteriorating economic situation. Yeltsin was simultaneously faced with a worsening situation in the (Russian) republic of Chechnya, where the president, Dzhokhar Dudayev, had claimed independence in 1991. Opposition forces supported by Moscow had begun fighting against Dudayev's pro-independence forces. In November 1991, Russian planes attacked the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, and in December, Yeltsin ordered a full invasion of Chechnya.

Although the Russian forces had an advantage in numbers and weapons, the Chechen forces resisted the initial Russian invasion with small, highly mobile units. When Russia sent tanks into the capital, Grozny, on Dec. 31, 1991, the small Chechen units were able to trap and systematically destroy the Russian tanks in the narrow city streets. While Russia continued to bomb Chechen positions in Grozny, the Chechens continued their small guerrilla attacks on the Russian forces. Once Russia gained control over much of the Chechen territory, the Chechen rebels launched attacks from mountain hideouts. Russian public opinion at the time was in strong opposition to the war.

In June 1995, Chechens under the leadership of Shamil Basayev took 2,000 people hostage in the southern Russian town of Budennovsk. Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin agreed to new peace talks with the Chechen insurgents and granted Basayev safe passage back to Chechnya in return for the release of hostages.

One week later, the State Duma, the lower house in the Federal Assembly, passed a no-confidence vote against the Chernomyrdin government, but a subsequent call for his impeachment in July failed.

In December 1995, new elections were held for the State Duma. The Communist Party won the largest number of seats, 157 out of 450 seats, and with other allied leftist parties, controlled the largest faction in the State Duma. The nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, or LDPR, led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, came in second in the percentage of popular votes received. The pro-Yeltsin Our Home is Russia party, led by Chernomyrdin, won the second largest number of seats; however, the pro-Yeltsin groups remained outnumbered in the new parliament.

The unpopular war in Chechnya appeared to end with a cease-fire agreement that went into effect just two weeks before the scheduled presidential elections. In addition to the thousands of casualties suffered by both armies in the conflict, tens of thousands of civilian deaths were reported as well. The Russian government and military were strongly criticized in Russia and abroad for the indiscriminate use of force against Chechen civilians. The conflict was generally considered a humiliating defeat of the Russian military.

Despite the unpopular war, the continued decline of the Russian economy, and questions about his health, Yeltsin won reelection in the second round of presidential voting on July 3, 1996, with 54 percent of the vote. Yeltsin's rival in the second round was Gennady Zyuganov of the Communist Party. Yeltsin's victory was made possible after Aleksandr Lebed, a popular former general, who commanded Russian troops in the Trans-Dniesteria region, won 15 percent of the vote in the first round and endorsed Yeltsin's candidacy in return for a government position.

In August 1996, Chechen insurgents, under the leadership of Aslan Maskhadov, attacked Russian forces in Grozny. Aleksandr Lebed, as Secretary of the Security Council, succeeded in negotiating a new cease-fire by agreeing to withdraw Russian forces from Chechnya. The Chechens and Russians also agreed to suspend (temporarily) the issue of Chechen independence.

Yeltsin's popularity rapidly declined as allegations of corruption grew. Many of Yeltsin's allies had grown immensely wealthy as state industries were sold off, often to former Communist Party "apparatchiks" (Soviet bureaucrats). Simultaneously, questions of Yeltsin's health and his ability to govern became more frequent. In November 1996, Yeltsin temporarily handed presidential power to Prime Minister Chernomyrdin while he underwent heart surgery. By December 1996, large numbers of Russian miners were striking and calling for Yeltsin's resignation because of wage arrears.

In March 1997, Yeltsin responded to the national unrest by criticizing Chernomyrdin and reshuffling the government in favor of more reformist ministers. Nevertheless, the relationship between Yeltsin and the legislature continued to be highly antagonistic.

In March 1998, the unpopular Chernomyrdin government was abruptly dismissed by Yeltsin who appointed a relative unknown, Sergei Kiriyenko, as the new prime minister. After rejecting

Kiriyenko's appointment in two separate votes, the State Duma finally approved the new government in April.

In June and July 1998, the Communist Party pursued impeachment proceedings against Yeltsin for alleged constitutional violations. As Yeltsin and the Kiriyenko government battled the anti-reform parties in the State Duma, the already deteriorating Russian economy worsened due to low oil prices, one of Russia's principal exports, and the Asian financial crisis. In August 1998, the government was forced to devalue substantially the ruble. In an attempt to halt a further decline in the Russian currency, Yeltsin dismissed Kiriyenko in August 1998 and re-appointed Chernomyrdin. The State Duma rejected the appointment twice, and Yeltsin was forced to nominate a compromise candidate, the Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov.

While Primakov was not appointed as a radical reformer, the Primakov government did witness an increase in political stability due to better relations between the government and the legislature. Although Primakov succeeded in getting an austerity budget passed, the government made little progress in changing Russia's poor tax collecting record or in reforming the banking system. Nevertheless, the slowing of Russia's economic decline and the political prominence of Primakov during a long Yeltsin absence, presumably due to reasons of health, did much to bolster the public's approval of the government.

Additionally, Primakov was credited with reigning in the influence of the "oligarchs," a small group of Russians made extremely wealthy through the privatization of Russian industries. Boris Berezovsky seemed to especially benefit. It was rumored that Berezovsky, a media tycoon, sometime government official, and Yeltsin supporter, was closely tied to the president through Yeltsin's daughter, Tatiana Dyachenko. Tatiana, in turn, was known to be Yeltsin's most important political adviser. Public perception of the close connection between the oligarchs and the Yeltsin administration, as well as a growing scandal related to Kremlin property holdings, were key factors in Yeltsin's substantial unpopularity. Yeltsin also faced renewed problems with the State Duma as the Communists continued to push for Yeltsin's impeachment, and many others pushed for his resignation.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Primakov's popularity, Yeltsin dismissed Primakov on May 12, 1999. Sergei Stepashin replaced Primakov as prime minister. Stepashin had previously commanded ministry of internal affairs forces and had been one of the architects of the failed Chechen war in 1994-96. His nomination was quickly confirmed by the Duma even though his government program was based on the demands of the International Monetary Fund. In particular, this program included higher taxes and reforms of the tax collection bureaucracy. Both had previously been opposed by the Duma. Stepashin was eventually dismissed and succeeded by Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister.

## Putin Comes to Power

Later in 1999, Yeltsin unexpectedly announced his resignation as president of Russia and named the prime minister, Vladimir Putin, as acting president and successor. Putin went on to win the presidency in a subsequent election and continues as president to date.

*Note on History: In certain entries, open source content from the State Department Background Notes and Country Guides have been used. A full listing of sources is available in the Bibliography.*

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## **Political Conditions**

### **Introduction**

Islamic insurgency and a decade of transitional economic orchestrations have politically bedeviled the Russian Federation. Today, still amid those concerns, it continues its evolution from the Boris Yeltsin administration to a new cadre of leaders.

First came the August 1999 firing of Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin, who had been prime minister since May 1999. In Stepashin's place, President Yeltsin nominated Vladimir Putin, the former head of the Federal Security Service (previously known as the KGB). Putin won Duma approval on Aug. 16, 1999, on a program of restoring law and order, continuing the fight against Islamic separatists, and pursuing the economic policies of Stepashin. The continuation of Stepashin's policies was also evident in the reappointment of most of the previous government's ministers.

Seven months following his appointment, Putin was elected president by 53 percent of the vote in March 2000. Following his victory, Putin nominated an ally, Mikhail Kasyanov, as his choice for prime minister.

The State Duma, the lower house of Russia's parliamentary system, approved Kasyanov as the country's new prime minister on May 17, 2000. As a former finance minister it was expected the pro-Putin Kasyanov would earmark economic recovery as his chief responsibility. Kasyanov made a name for himself earlier in 2000 by negotiating and winning a large reduction in the portion of debt owed to creditors, The London Club. He was also credited with increasing the salaries of state employees and for maintaining the federation's schedule of payments to foreign creditors.

Much of his acumen for fiscal reform was expected to continue. "Reforms must be energetic, consistent and balanced," the newly installed prime minister said in his acceptance speech on May 17, 2000. He added there were some tough political decisions ahead to be forged and that the will, support and consensus of the Russian people would be required. "Even the strongest government of professionals can't resolve national problems without the support of the whole of society," Kasyanov said.

Fortunately for the Putin administration, its political voyage began on a high note. Russian oil prices had been increasing, leading to a replenished treasury. However, what is past is prologue: the breakaway republic of Chechnya (discussed in the Appendix of this review) and the transition from a closed-system economy to a more open one paved the road ahead.

To appreciate what Putin, Kasyanov and federation ministers faced, what follows is an exploration of the political conditions, which has set the stage for today's reform in Russia. This exploration begins with the elections in the period of 1999 and 2000 and moves toward the post-Putin era at the end of the decade, followed by the return of Putin to the forefront of the Russian political scene from 2012 and beyond. Other domestic, regional and international issues are also considered in the discussion following.

### **Duma and Presidential Election Atmosphere (1999-2000)**

Although Russia faced numerous political and economic challenges, such as combating organized crime and strengthening tax collection efforts, the Chechen war dominated as the major issue of the December State Duma election campaign. The approval of the initial Russian attacks in Chechnya resulted in most candidates expounding support of the war effort. There was, however, some opposition to the ongoing attack; many candidates publicly opposed a ground war. In the early days of the conflict, Putin, too, had stated his intention to avoid a long ground war. Other political leaders who supported military action short of a ground war included Grigory Yavlinsky of the liberal "Yabloko" party, former Prime Minister Primakov, and the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov.

Many analysts viewed the Duma elections as a foretaste of the presidential election scheduled for June 2000. Undeclared presidential candidates used the Duma election campaigns of their various parties or factions as a means of testing the public's appetite for their own candidacies. Although Prime Minister Putin was not a leader of any political party, a new pro-Kremlin party, "Unity," or MEDVED, was formed under the leadership of the Emergencies Minister, Sergey Shoygu (or Shoigu). Other major contenders in the Duma elections included: the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, or KPRF, under Zyuganov; Fatherland-All Russia, or OVR, led by the mayor of Moscow, Luzhkov, and former prime minister, Primakov; the liberal "Yabloko" party, led by Grigory Yavlinsky; and the pro-Kremlin, Union of Right Forces, or SPS, under the leadership of



former prime minister Kiriyenko and other reformers. The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, or LDPR, which espouses strongly nationalistic and xenophobic policies, was barred from registering the party's list of candidates by the Central Election Commission because several of the LDPR candidates were undergoing criminal prosecution. The leader of the LDPR, Zhirinovskiy, formed a new association, "Zhirinovskiy's Bloc," or BZ, to replace the banned LDPR and removed the offending candidates from the party list.

The media played a very central role in the campaigning, with various candidates closely allied with various media companies. The centrist party of Fatherland-All Russia viewed as being attacked by Kremlin-controlled state media, but Fatherland-All Russia responded to the attacks with media in Moscow influenced by Luzhkov. The campaigns were also characterized by the candidacy of a number of the oligarchs and criminal figures that allegedly ran for seats in the Duma to win immunity from prosecution. Media mogul Boris Berezovskiy, who had been seen as a pivotal political actor behind Yeltsin's administration while also routinely facing investigation, ran for and won a seat in the Duma.

Eleven parties or party alliances, plus a large group of non-partisans, won seats in the Dec. 19, 1999, Duma elections. The "Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Rossiyskoyi Federatsiyi" (Communist Party of the Russian Federation or KPRF) won the highest percentage of popular votes with 24.3 percent and won the greatest number of seats at 113. The pro-Kremlin "Mezhregional'noye Dvizhenie Yedinstvo" party (Inter-Regional Movement Unity, "Unity" or MEDVED) came in second with 23.3 percent of the votes, winning 72 out of the 450 Duma seats. The centrist "Otechestvo Vsyia Rossiya" (Fatherland-All Russia or OVR) won 13.3 percent of the votes and 66 seats. The other major parties to pass the five-percent threshold included: "Soyuz Pravykh Sil" (Union of Right Forces or SPS) winning 8.5 percent and 29 seats; the former Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, now "Blok Zhirinovskogo" (Zhirinovskiy's Bloc or BZ), winning six percent and 17 seats; and "Yabloko" winning 5.9 percent and 21 seats.

Other parties which failed to pass the five percent threshold but still won seats in the single-seat constituencies include: "Nash dom Rossiya" (Our Home is Russia or NDR) with seven seats; "Obshcherossiyskoye Politicheskoye Dvizhenie v Podderzhku Armii" (All-Russian Political Movement in Support of the Army or DPA) with two seats; "Partiya Pensionerov" (Pensioners' Party or PP) with one seat; the "Kongress Russkikh Obshchin i Dvizhenie Y. Boldyreva" (Congress of Russian Communities and Yuri Boldyrev's Movement or KRO-DYB) with one seat; and "Russkaya Sotsialisticheskaya Partiya" (Russian Socialist Party or RSP) with one seat. Additionally, non-partisans won 106 seats. In another important election at the time, Yuri Luzhkov won reelection as Moscow's mayor by a large percentage.

On Dec. 31, 1999, Yeltsin unexpectedly announced his resignation as president of Russia and named the prime minister, Vladimir Putin, acting president. While apologizing for many of his failed policies, Yeltsin also endorsed Putin as his successor. Abiding by the constitutional

requirement that presidential elections be held within three months of a president's resignation, Yeltsin also announced that the presidential elections previously scheduled for June would be held on March 26, 2000, a date later approved by the upper house of the parliament. In addition to providing opponents less time to organize presidential campaigns, Yeltsin's resignation allowed Putin to take advantage of incumbency and the popularity that resulted from the Chechen war.

Upon taking over as president, Putin attempted to change some of the impressions of cronyism created by the Yeltsin administration by dismissing Tatiana Dyachenko, Yeltsin's daughter and key adviser. Putin also dismissed the manager of Kremlin properties, Pavel Borodin. Issues concerning the Kremlin's vast holdings had given rise to most of the impressions of corruption in the Yeltsin administration, and Borodin, as the person in charge, had been under investigation for receiving bribes. However, Putin also granted immunity to Yeltsin against prosecution for alleged crimes that occurred during his years in power.

On Jan. 18, 2000, the Duma re-elected a Communist deputy, Gennady Seleznyov, as speaker of the lower house. Seleznyov's re-election was made possible by cooperation between the Communists, the largest faction in the Duma, and the Unity party, the pro-Kremlin party formed in September prior to the Duma elections. More than 100 deputies began boycotting Duma sessions in protest against the alliance made between the Communists and Unity. Among those boycotting were the centrist Fatherland-All Russia, led by Primakov, who also ran for speaker of the Duma, the liberal Union of Right Forces, and the liberal "Yabloko." In addition to Seleznyov's reelection, many deputies were upset by Zhirinovskiy's elevation to deputy speaker of the Duma. On Jan. 27, 2000, the deputies ended their boycott. Nevertheless, an odd situation had arisen in which political parties whose political programs complement the goals of the Kremlin were compelled to enter into opposition to Putin and a government appointed by Putin.

While the politics of the Duma elections, Yeltsin's surprise resignation, and its aftermath were being played out, the military action in Chechnya had entered a new phase. Russian forces were no longer engaged in just bombardment of Chechen positions, but were also actively engaging Chechen separatists with ground troops in an attempt to capture Chechen strongholds. While Russian forces were successful in capturing key towns in Chechnya as well as parts of the capital, Grozny, fighting in the capital continued.

The change in tactics from only artillery shelling and air attacks to bombardment in tandem with ground assaults increased Russian casualty numbers. Although the exact numbers were under much dispute, it was evident that Russian forces were suffering substantial casualties as the intensity of the fighting increased.

On March 26, 2000, Russia held its second post-Soviet presidential elections; acting President Vladimir Putin won the election with 52.6 percent of the votes. His opponents received the following: Gennady Andreyevich Zyuganov (KPRF) 29.3 percent, Grigoriy Alekseyevich



Yavlinsky (Yabloko) 5.8 percent, Amman M. Tulane 3 percent, Vladimir Vol'fovich Zhirinovskiy (LDPR) 2.7 percent, Konstantin A. Titov 1.5 percent, Ella A. Pamfilova 1 percent, Stanislav S. Govorukin 0.5 percent, Yuri I. Skuratov 0.4 percent, Alexei I. Podberyozkin 0.1 percent and Umar A. Dzhabrailov 0.1 percent. Although the election was supervised by a group of international mediators, which judged the election fair, it should be noted there was widespread speculation of the media's bias toward Putin.

President Putin's determination to resolve the problem in Chechnya became the focal point of his presidential campaign. Prior to the election, Russian forces captured two of the main Chechen guerrilla commanders Salman Raduyev and Salautdin Timirbulatov. In addition, Putin visited Russian troops stationed in Chechnya to boost morale. Polls suggested that voters looked favorably on these actions.

### **Domestic Political Landscape**

Since taking office, President Putin's government faced several pressing issues on the domestic landscape, including a weak economy, decentralized power and waning international recognition. In terms of the economy, one third of the population lives in poverty while the country's wealth is concentrated in a small percentage. President Putin announced his intention to modernize the economy with the hope of rescuing Russia's economy from several years of depression. President Putin suggested that his government would espouse market reform. According to Putin, state intervention would increase, inevitably forcing Russia's 89 regions to become less autonomous. Finally Putin announced plans to bolster Russia's military capacity with an emphasis on nuclear weapons. This decision to increase Russia's nuclear arsenal could significantly hurt Russia's foreign relations with certain countries such as the United States and Great Britain.

Russia has suffered from very high criminal activity ranging from petty street crime to white collar and bureaucratic corruption. Although early in his presidency, President Putin announced his intention to fight corruption at all levels, little improvement has been made. In mid-2001, Transparency International ranked Russia as a corrupt country giving it a score of 2.3, with 10 being highly "clean" and one being highly corrupt. Organized crime has influenced politics in Russia; often, political parties are funded with mafia money. Corruption and organized crime have also affected foreign investment in the country. In 2001, over 7,000 murderers escaped punishment and remain free; and 30,000 people have disappeared. In a February 2002 speech directed at law enforcement officials, Putin harshly criticized the current state of law enforcement and demanded that changes be made to ensure the safety of the Russian citizens in business and daily life.

Critics have suggested that Putin's ability to push through land reform has been a vital indicator of his ability to enact and secure economic reform and his commitment to attracting foreign and domestic investment. Although since 1993 it has been legal for Russian citizens to own land, there

had been no legal means for land to be bought or sold. In October 2001, the Russian Land Code, the legal framework for selling and buying urban land and land for industrial use, was approved by President Putin and became law. This law is a milestone in Russian political and economic life as it makes provisions for foreign ownership, taxation, the methods of placing value on land, the legal rights of landowners and enacts measures to protect the environment on industrialized lands.

Although the framework for urban and industrialized land has been in place for several months now, agricultural land reform has been slower in developing, as it is considered a very controversial subject. Putin's biggest critics of this reform have been the communists and agrarians who are firmly against the selling of farmlands to foreigners. Other worries that surround private ownership include the concern that agricultural lands will be used for speculation and how much land can be sold to an individual. Putin is insisting that agricultural reform be pushed forward and that individual regions put forth their recommendations on the restrictions and procedures on private land acquisition. Legislation on a new agricultural land code was expected to be completed in the next few years.

The accidental sinking of the Russian submarine Kursk in August 2000 and the death of more than 100 crewmembers rattled the Putin administration. The families of the victims, who apparently suffocated in the submerged vessel, declared Putin and other Russian officials cold and unconcerned. Ultimately a military commission determined the accidental cause of the disaster and the vessel was raised and returned to his home base of Murmansk. The Kremlin demoted three top navy commanders and sacked another eight admirals on Dec. 1, 2001, in an expulsion that some observers said was punishment for the Kursk nuclear submarine catastrophe in which 118 crew died a year and a half earlier. Senior military officials denied a direct link with the Kursk disaster, saying the sanctions related to "serious failures in the organization of the military training activities of the fleet." The disaster, the worst in modern Russian naval history, saw Putin publicly berated for failing to end his holiday and take personal charge of the crisis.

Russia, a country of about 145 million people, had in December 2001 about 163,000 patients infected with HIV/AIDS, a fraction of the four million cases registered, for example, in South Africa, according to government health officials.

However, experts say these statistics hide a catastrophic epidemic, with real figures up to five times those on government files. A bigger problem is the number of young people affected by the disease. More than 80 percent of recorded cases affect people under 30 years old. Initially, HIV spread heavily through Russia's gay community, though drug addicts contracting the disease from infected needles soon came to represent the vast majority of cases. HIV/AIDS is now spreading rapidly among heterosexuals, doctors have noted. Many heterosexuals remain off the record books, their contamination with the virus registered only as "reason unknown."

The issue of media freedom in Russia has also been a key concern for the country. The June 2003 closure of the last of Russia's three independent television stations has resulted in charges of

political influence. TVS, like TV6 and NTV before, had been critical of the Russian government and Russian leaders. Its sudden closure was described as being reminiscent of "Soviet-style" machinations when critical and contestatory voices were silenced. Other news agencies across the expanse of Russian media expressed dismay at the closure of TVS. They warned against state monopolization of media channels. Some observed that Russia's national television had been reduced to state-run channels and entertainment channels. Certainly, in the case of TVS, the plan is to have it replaced with a sports channel.

Meanwhile, the Russian press ministry explained that the closure of the station had been due to financial, personnel and management problems. Indeed, before being shut down completely, TVS had earlier been dropped from Moscow's main cable company's offering. Nevertheless, TVS insisted that aside from the obvious financial, personnel and management problems, there was also a political element that led to the station's closure. Representatives from TVS charged that instead of allowing the operational challenges to bring an end to the station, it had been pulled off the air instead. Questions about media freedom have thusly been a concern in recent years.

### **Elections in 2003 and 2004**

In December 2003, approximately 23 party lists participated in the fourth elections since the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Half of the 450 seats in the Duma were at play, while the other 225 seats were contested by individual candidates. The results of the election determined the composition of the Duma for the next four years.

Early results showed that the United Russia Party, which has backed President Putin and the Kremlin, appeared headed for victory with over 36 percent of the votes cast. The nationalist party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, ironically named the Liberal Democrats, appeared to have secured 12 percent of the votes -- just slightly less than the Communists, who garnered 12.8 percent of the votes cast. Other sources, however, suggested that the Communists may have acquired as much as 15 percent. The Homeland bloc obtained close to 9 percent. According to some sources, the two liberal, free market parties each carried less than the 5 percent required to control party list seats in parliament. Other election sources, however, showed a range of results for the Union of Right Forces -- from 4 percent to 9 percent of votes, and Yabloko -- from 5 percent to 7 percent of votes.

Turnout for the election was over 30 percent and therefore exceeded the 25 percent threshold required to validate the election poll.

The overwhelming success of the United Russia Party resulted in criticism by observers and opposition. They charged that the election campaign had been dominated by media bias in favor of the leading party.

On Feb. 24, 2004, Russian President Putin announced the dismissal of the government led by Prime Minister Mikhail Kasayanov. Having sacked his entire cabinet, Russian President Putin named European Union envoy and former tax police chief, Mikhail Fradkov, as his new prime minister. Reports suggested that Putin decided to remove Kasayanov because of his close relationship with Russia's oligarchs and his ties to the administration of Boris Yeltsin. The move came in anticipation of the March 14 elections, which Putin was expected to win by a landslide victory.

In those presidential elections, President Vladimir Putin won more than 70 percent of the votes cast. Putin's closest opponent, Communist candidate Nikolai Kharitonov, achieved a distant second with 13.7 percent of the vote. None of the other four candidates acquired more than 5 percent of the votes cast. Many of Putin's rivals expressed frustration about the fact they were denied access to the state media. Meanwhile, European election observers said that Russia's presidential election failed to meet democratic standards. Observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe took part in the election observation mission.

In the aftermath of the election, President Putin said he would proceed with economic reforms and promised to protect democracy. He also dismissed criticism from the United States government, and particularly that of Secretary of State Colin Powell, about the lack of media access afforded to his rivals. In this regard, Putin noted that Powell's remarks were made because of the domestic political agenda in the United States, which included an election later in the year. Putin also referenced the controversial decisions and flawed ballots in the United States election process in 2000, which led to George Bush becoming president over Al Gore, saying, "In many so-called developed democracies there are also many problems with their own democratic and voting procedures."

### **International Landscape: The Issue of Iraq**

In early 2003, international politics took center stage as the world grappled with disarming Iraq. France and Germany put forth a plan aimed at averting a war with Iraq. The plan included a provision tripling the number of United Nations weapons inspectors on the ground in Iraq, the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers, and the establishment of a country-wide "no fly" zone. Russia, which, in addition to France has veto power within the United Nations Security Council, stated it would likely support the Franco-German plan.

As these issues were being discussed, the United Kingdom was in the process of drafting a new resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq. Such a resolution was at odds with the joint declaration developed by France, Russia and Germany, which demanded the reinforcement of weapons inspections, aided by human and technical capacity, within the wider context of peaceful Iraqi disarmament. Specifically, the declaration asserted that while Iraq must be disarmed and

neutralized, war should be used only as a final measure. Russia consistently stated that it was in favor of the peaceful disarmament of Iraq.

Diplomatic negotiations surrounding the Iraq crisis collapsed in March 2003. Efforts to modify elements of the draft of a second United Nations Security Council Resolution failed, despite efforts by the United Kingdom to create an agreement that would satisfy the misgivings of most of the Security Council members. France and Russia decried the provisions for an automatic trigger resulting in war if Iraq failed to accomplish various benchmarks in disarmament. Both France and Russia earlier warned that they would veto any resolution containing such language.

Following a meeting in the Azores between the leaders of the United Kingdom, the United States and Spain (the sponsors of the existing United Nations Resolution 1441), Blair announced there would be a final round of informal discussions to try to resolve the impasse between the three allies and the rest of the Security Council. A deadline of March 17, 2003, was given to the rest of the Security Council to decide on a possible course of action, before military force against Iraq would be exerted. France's Ambassador to the United Nations, Jean Marc de la Sabliere, responded that in one-on-one discussions with council members, it was clearly apparent that most did not endorse a use of force against Iraq at this time.

With no progress made in regard to a second resolution, or in building consensus among the Security Council by the March 17 deadline, the United States, the United Kingdom and Spain reversed their original commitment to seek a vote on its passage in the Security Council and, instead, withdrew the draft resolution. In a media conference a week prior, United States President George W. Bush had promised a vote in the Security Council, whether or not the resolution passed, stating that council members would have to "show their cards." Now, in an effort to pursue military action without overt illegality, which the defeat of a second resolution would surely signify, the allies took cover under the original United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441, which augured "serious consequences" for Iraqi non-compliance. Experts on international jurisprudence, however, are not at all agreed on this reasoning.

Several hours after the withdrawal of the draft resolution, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan announced the withdrawal of United Nations personnel, including weapons inspectors, from Baghdad in preparation for an imminent war against Iraq. Russia condemned military action against Iraq and noted that it would only jeopardize international security. The Russian Foreign Minister called for the convening of the Security Council. Apart from the humanitarian and ecological disasters looming on the horizon for Iraq, the Russian Foreign Ministry also vocalized its belief that the current war violates the United Nations Charter. Russian officials have also been clear that they do not believe in the exportation of democracy -- "by way of tomahawks" -- to sovereign nation states. Nevertheless, United States and United Kingdom forces launched its war against Iraq in mid-March 2003.

A week into the war, the United States declared that Russian firms provided anti-combat

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equipment to Iraq. Russia emphatically denied any such involvement. The United States White House said that such provisions would be in violation of United Nations sanctions and United States President George Bush telephoned Russian President Vladimir Putin to register his displeasure over the matter. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov responded to the charges by telling reporters, "Russia rigorously observes all its international obligations and has not supplied Iraq with any equipment, including military, in breach of the sanctions regime."

This development was only one more in a list of issues contributing to deteriorating bilateral relations between Russia and the United States. Another key issue was the matter of United States spy flights. In 2003, up to three U2 strategic reconnaissance flights by the United States reportedly occurred along the Russian border with Georgia. Russia has angrily described the spy flights as a quasi-return to the Cold War period.

In the aftermath of the war in Iraq, Russia continued to urge greater United Nations participation and expressed the view that legitimacy in Iraq could only be realized with the crucial involvement of the international body.

### **International Landscape: Kyoto Protocol**

In the fall of 2004, amidst arguments of impending harm to the Russian economy, President Putin's cabinet endorsed the Kyoto Protocol, which seeks to limit greenhouse gas emissions across the globe. The measure was sent to the Duma to be ratified. Russia's endorsement effectively breathes new life into the international protocol, which had suffered a severe blow after the United States' decision (under President Bush) to withdraw from participation.

### **International Landscape: Nuclear Politics**

In early 2005, the nuclear issue also took center stage as Iran and Russia signed an agreement by which Moscow would supply fuel for Iran's new nuclear reactor in Bushehr. Under the terms of the agreement, Iran must return spent nuclear fuel rods from the reactor, which had been designed and built by Russia. This condition was implemented in response to growing anxiety by the United States, Israel and others about Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Against the backdrop of this development was a meeting in Slovakia between Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President George W. Bush in which both leaders agreed that Iran should not develop nuclear weapons. Russia, however, refused to acquiesce to United States's pressure to completely halt cooperation with Iran on nuclear power.

From around 2002 through the next several years, Russia worked with several other countries within a multilateral framework to deal with the threat of nuclear proliferation by North



Korea. Those talks stalled soon thereafter.

In mid-2006, North Korea test-fired a number of short-range missiles and one Taepodong-2 long-range missile into the Sea of Japan. The situation sparked international condemnation and threats of punitive measures by some countries, including sanctions. Others, including Russia, called for a return to multilateral talks on North Korea.

For its part, North Korea said that further missile tests would be launched. North Korea also warned that it would react strongly to punitive pressures from the international community, and it threatened to carry out an "annihilating" nuclear strike if its atomic facilities were pre-emptively hit by the United States.

The missile tests, in conjunction with dire promises of further tests and a nuclear strike, have intensified the widely-held view that North Korea is a threat to global security. Moreover, these moves by North Korea effectively served to further isolate the country and confirm its pariah status within the international community.

The matter resulted in the passage of a resolution by the United Nations Security Council members, including Russia, mandating inspections on cargo going to and from North Korea to search for weapons, a ban on the sale or transfer of materials related to North Korea's unconventional weapons program, and a freeze on the transfer of funds connected with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Absent from Resolution 1718 was the Chapter Seven [of the United Nations charter] provision, which would enforce the sanctions via military force.

December 2006 marked the resumption of multilateral talks regarding North Korea's controversial nuclear program. North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States indicated their interest in returning to the negotiating table after a year-long hiatus. While the news of the recommencement of six-party talks was welcomed, there was also a pervasive sense of caution. Experts conveyed limited optimism about the prospects of forging a resolution amenable to all parties.

By February 2007, the multilateral discussions were ongoing. Progress was quickly made during the six-party talks in Beijing when North Korea agreed to move closer toward the position of disarmament. Of particular interest was an agreement reportedly requiring Pyongyang to shut down its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon over the course of the ensuing months, in lieu of aid, such as fuel oil provided by the United States and South Korea. The draft agreement, which had been drafted by China, also called for the return of international inspectors to North Korea. On February 13, 2007, it was announced that concurrence on the matter had been reached. Yet to be seen was whether or not the agreement would be ratified by all six parties, and also whether or not North Korea would fully comply with the provisions of the deal.

## **Devolving Relations with the United States**

Meanwhile, relations with the United States took center stage in 2005 when United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Russia. During her visit, Rice took time to criticize President Vladimir Putin's political weight by suggesting that he had too much personal power. In this regard, Rice expressed concern over the lack of an independent media in Russia, and she also repudiated the accumulation of political power that Putin had gathered since taking office.

A year later in May 2006, on the heels of sharp criticism by United States Vice President Dick Cheney of Russia's human rights record, the Kommersant business newspaper said that the matter augured the start of a new Cold War. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov offered no comment on the content of Cheney's position, however, he criticized the forum in Lithuania where Cheney spoke. He noted that such meetings were convened for the purpose of uniting a cadre of interest groups against someone. Meanwhile, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev said that Cheney's speech appeared to be "a provocation and interference in Russia's internal affairs in terms of its content, form and place."

The matter preceded a scheduled meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President George W. Bush at a key industrial summit to be convened in St. Petersburg. At that meeting in July 2006, during a joint press address by Putin and Bush, the American president called on Russia to democratize, and said that he hoped that the country would enjoy the kind of freedom now being enjoyed by Iraq. Putin responded to this statement by asserting that the example of Iraq -- now embroiled in what some were calling a civil war -- was not one he thought Russia should emulate.

Relations with the United States would further be strained as a result of foreign investment issues (discussed below under the title "The Yukos Story") and a controversial missile plan for eastern Europe (discussed below under the title "Recent Developments").

## **The Yukos Story**

Perhaps most important to the Bush administration in the United States, however, was the matter of foreign investors' rights. Openness to foreign investment, for the Bush administration, has been viewed as a sign of market capitalism, which it has linked with notions of freedom. By contrast, the Bush administration has looked unfavorably on government power in the realm of business. In this regard, the Bush administration would apparently be watching closely the fraud and tax evasion trial of the founder of the Yukos oil company, Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Some, perhaps even including those within the Bush administration, had been of the mind that the case against



Khodorkovsky was manufactured purely to punish him for his political ambitions. Naturally, those in the Kremlin viewed the situation quite differently. Nevertheless, the verdict, due in April 2005, was to be watched closely by Washington.

In early May 2005, no verdict had been given in the Yukos case against Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Then, on May 16, 2005, a Russian judge adjourned court midway through the verdict in the trial of the Yukos former chief, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, following a reiteration of the indictments. The verdict stage of the trial was to resume the next day. Khodorkovsky's lawyers said they expected a guilty verdict since they viewed all the charges as being political. They also criticized the Russian judicial process. Several of Khodorkovsky's supporters were seen on the streets around the court. Although the anti-Khodorkovsky contingent was less visible, public opinion of Russia, according to recent surveys, showed little sympathy for the Russian tycoon. The surveys contained little good news for either private corporations or the government; indeed, they also showed the public losing trust in both arenas. By May 31, 2005, Khodorkovsky was found guilty and sentenced to nine years in jail for fraud and tax evasion.

The Yukos issue came to the fore again in mid-2006 and again evoked questions about Russia's economic and political position. Was Russia's treatment of Yukos a sign of some kind of backward slide toward government authoritarianism? This was a question that captured the attention of many in the West, and particularly, the United States.

In July 2006, Yukos commenced court action against the Russian state energy firm Rosneft. The court action was oriented toward stopping Rosneft's flotation on the London Stock Exchange (LSE), which was expected to be Russia's biggest initial public offering (IPO) and one of the largest in the world. Yukos petitioned the court to impose a temporary injunction on the sale of shares, while a full investigation of the flotation was carried out. Yukos argued that Rosneft's key oil producing subsidiary, Yuganskneftgaz, had been taken from Yukos by the Russian government. In fact, Rosneft purchased Yuganskneftgaz in 2004, after it was seized from Yukos and was being auctioned for the purpose of paying unpaid taxes. The Economist (in the July 12-21, 2006 edition), contended that the auction was rigged. Regardless, Rosneft responded to Yukos' court action by saying that its float would not be impeded; it also announced that its main share buyers would include BP of the United Kingdom, Petronas of Malaysia, and CNPN of China. Meanwhile, Rosneft was already trading on the Moscow market. For its part, the London Stock Exchange said that it intended to list Rosneft unless it was blocked by the courts.

Also in July 2006, creditors of Yukos voted convincingly in favor of the liquidation of company assets. The issue would now go before a bankruptcy court in August 2006 for consideration, where it was expected that the court would appoint a supervisor to sell Yukos' assets. The creditors also soundly rejected a company plan aimed at rescuing the company from its likely financial demise. Among the creditors have been Russian tax agencies and the state-owned oil company, Rosneft, which was discussed above and which was likely to benefit handily from the

sale of Yukos' refineries.

On Aug. 1, 2006, the Russian firm Yukos was declared bankrupt by a court in Moscow. The court decision effectively ends the company's bid to survive. The next step was expected to be liquidation and allocation of the firm's remaining assets.

### **Domestic Political Tensions**

In late December 2005, Economic Advisor Andrei Illarionov offered his resignation to Russian President Vladimir Putin. His withdrawal from service as a political aid to the Russian leader was intended to protest what he perceived as the retrenchment of political freedom. Illarionov charged that Russia was now being run by state corporations and as a result, the country was no longer politically free. Illarionov said to journalists, "It is one thing to work in a country that is partly free. It is another thing when the political system has changed, and the country has stopped being free and democratic." He also noted that the economic model of the Russian state had changed. He went on to suggest that the expression of his viewpoint had also been curtailed. As such, he asserted that remaining in his post would have been impossible.

Illarionov had been a strenuous critic of Putin and the Russian government for some time. Indeed, a year earlier, he referred to the Russian government's actions against Yukos as being inappropriate. Still, the timing of Illarionov's latest remarks was unfortunate for the government since they were uttered just as Russia was about to assume the presidency of the G-8 group of industrialized countries. Nevertheless, Viktor Chernomyrdin, the ambassador to Ukraine and a former Russian prime minister, eschewed Illarionov's criticisms of the Russian government. In an interview with Interfax News Agency, he characterized Illarionov as malicious and "overly negative." He went on to state that it had been a mistake to keep Illarionov at the Kremlin for as long as he had been in that post. Indeed, several observers have suggested that Illarionov had little remaining influence on the Kremlin for some time. In fact, many of his duties at the Kremlin had become increasingly limited and his role as Russia's representative to the G-8 had ended. Still, he was never entirely pushed out since his presence appeased Western concerns about increasing state control over economic policy.

### **Energy Politics**

In other developments, Russia was embroiled in a dispute with Ukraine over a gas deal in 2006. The Ukrainian Energy Minister Ivan Plachkov traveled to Moscow to try to resolve the dispute ahead of the expiration of the negotiating deadline. The issue has revolved around the price of gas. The Russian gas entity, Gazprom, raised the price of 1,000 cubic meters of gas from \$50 to \$230 -- a rate that would involve the quadrupling of gas prices for Ukraine. Ukraine refused to

pay while Gazprom threatened to cut off Ukraine's supplies completely if a new agreement was not forged by the start of 2006. Indeed, Russia said that no new proposals would be advanced and that Ukraine should pay market rates. For its part, Ukraine has said that while it would agree to payment of market rates, such increases should be introduced in a phased cycle over a period of several years.

With no progress made in forging an agreement, Gazprom effectively cut off energy supplies to Ukraine. Because Gazprom supplies a full 20 percent of all the gas consumed by the European Union, the cut-off of Ukraine's gas provisions led to a shortage of gas supplies elsewhere across Europe in the first days of 2006. Countries directly affected by the situation were themselves pumping less gas to their own customers down the line.

Even as Ukraine lost 100 percent of its Russian gas supplies, Moldova was also cut off after refusing to go along with the price increase proposed by Gazprom. In Hungary, gas supplies from Russia were down by 40 percent, although supplies were later restored. In Poland, gas supplies from Russia decreased by around 14 percent, leading the country to consider gas supplies from a different pipeline. In Austria, Slovakia and Romania, gas supplies from Russia decreased by around 33 percent, however, Austrian sources said that the gas flow had since been normalized. In France, which is highly dependent on Russian gas, supplies encountered a 25 percent to 30 percent fall. In Germany, where 30 percent of all gas provisions come from Russia, there was also a reported decrease. German authorities called on Moscow to "act responsibly" in the face of the energy challenges facing the region.

In response, Gazprom announced it would carry out checks on gas volumes and that it would utilize "all possible measures" to ensure that Western consumers continued to receive gas as per contractual agreements. The Russian government said that it would pump more gas to Europe -- a move intended to compensate for gas "stolen" by Ukraine.

On Jan. 1, 2006, Alexander Medvedev, the deputy head of Gazprom, alleged that Ukraine had stolen 100 million cubic meters of gas. Ukraine denied the accusation that it had siphoned off \$25 million worth of gas from the pipeline crossing its territory after Russia cut off its gas supply. Still, Ukraine's Fuel and Energy Minister, Ivan Plachkov, asserted that Ukraine had the right to a portion of the gas transported by the pipeline that exports Russian gas across its territory. Indeed, that pipeline carries 90 percent of Gazprom's exports across Europe.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko said he was willing to enter a process of international arbitration to resolve the dispute. In this regard, European Union Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs said in a media interview that he had called on Russia and Ukraine to return to the negotiating table. He also described the complexity of the situation, carefully noting that no one was to blame. On Jan. 3, 2006, ahead of a meeting of energy officials from the European Union, Russia notified the European Commission of its opinion of the gas dispute with Ukraine.

At the geopolitical level, the Ukrainian government in Kiev suggested that it was being punished by the Russian government in Moscow for trying to develop stronger ties with the West. Relations between Russia and Ukraine have been strained ever since President Yushchenko came to power. As a pro-Western politician, Yushchenko has appeared to steer the country out of Russia's sphere of influence.

Russia and Ukraine were eventually able to forge an agreement that satisfied both parties and ensured that gas supplies were not hampered.

In December 2006, tensions rose between Azerbaijan and Russia over energy supplies. At issue was the proposed price increase for gas supplies to Azerbaijan by Russia's Gazprom.

In reaction to Gazprom's decision to more than double the price of its supplies, President Aliyev of Azerbaijan threatened to reduce his country's oil exports to Russia. To this end, Aliyev said, "I have decided to find a way out of the situation with minimum losses for Azerbaijan, and at the same time with dignity. I cannot allow Azerbaijan to be turned into a country subject to elements of commercial blackmail."

For its part, Russia's Gazprom explained that the new price of gas was the result of an end to the subsidies that had once benefitted former Soviet republics. As well, Russia's Gazprom maintained that the price of gas was now dictated by the global marketplace and was bereft of political machinations.

Earlier, Georgia had also reacted angrily to the price increase. Indeed, Georgia accused Russia of raising gas prices as a punitive measure against its pro-Western policies. However, because it was unable to secure an alternative supply of gas, and with Gazprom threatening to cut off supplies without agreement on the updated price of gas, Georgia eventually acquiesced to the new arrangement.

Late 2006 and early 2007 saw a similar imbroglio involving Russia and Belarus. In late 2006, an agreement was forged in which Belarus was largely compelled to accept Russian gas supplies at double the previous price. Belarus subsequently retaliated by imposing a new tax on Russian oil shipments that traversed the country, while Russia reacted by refusing to pay the new taxes.

The situation became increasingly heated in the second week of January 2007 when the Russian state-owned pipeline firm Transneft closed the Druzhba or "Friendship" pipe. Russia also accused Belarus of siphoning off oil supplies as an illicit means of payment for unpaid taxes and duties. Representatives of the two countries held talks and the situation was eventually resolved. The flow of Russian oil resumed, along with assurances being advanced that such stoppages would not occur again.

The situation was reminiscent of Russia's earlier argument with Ukraine (discussed above) and various other countries in Eastern Europe, which was also spurred by the increased price of gas supplies. As before, Russia said that the price increase was in keeping with market rates, while other countries complained that the new pricing structure was untenable.

### **Regional Concerns**

Russia has had to deal with its post-Soviet relationship with former republics. For example, in the case of Estonia, tensions have dominated the relationship. First, nearly 30 percent of Estonia's total population is ethnic Russian. Estonia's citizenship laws - which require knowledge of Estonia - have angered Russia, as it views these laws as discriminatory against ethnic Russians in Estonia. Second, Estonia has been investigating and prosecuting former Soviet officials for alleged crimes against humanity during World War II and the Soviet occupation thereafter. Russia resents what it sees as a fervent pursuit of former Soviet officials in the face of a less than equally fervent pursuit of Estonians who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. Estonia's tendency to give convicted war criminals suspended sentences (as opposed to actual prison sentences) has somewhat ameliorated the situation.

In 2000, relations between Estonia and Russia took center stage as the two countries expelled diplomats from within their own borders over a spying imbroglio.

In March 2005, there was something of a diplomatic flap when President Ruutel decided to decline an invitation to attend the celebrations in Moscow scheduled for May to mark the anniversary of the end of World War II. Nevertheless, in May 2005, the two countries signed a treaty delimiting their shared border. The treaty was ratified a month later by parliament, however, an amendment was introduced in the language of the legislation that referenced Soviet occupation. The Russian government in Moscow said it would not accept such language and withdrew from the agreement in June 2005.

In February 2007, the Estonian parliament passes legislation banning the display of monuments valorizing the period of Soviet rule. The law effectively set in motion a series of actions, that would ultimately result in political unrest within Estonia and served to strain bilateral relations.

Meanwhile, Chechnya has been the most pressing regional concern for Russia in recent years. In recent years, Chechnya continued to be a major consideration and the core of Putin's fight against terrorism. The death of the central figure within the Chechen resistance in July 2006, however, functioned as a literal coup for Putin's government. (See the Appendix of this review for more about the situation in Chechnya.)

Chechnya aside, President Putin still faces other geopolitical problems. There are an estimated

3,400 rebels scattered throughout Chechnya and the area around Georgia and the Pankisi Gorge has become a strategic area for the rebels. Tensions between the two countries increased in tandem with Russia's accusation that Georgia has allowed Chechen rebels to move freely and enact terrorist attacks in the area. Russia also claims that after carrying out attacks, the rebels usually flee across the border into Georgia, including the Pankisi Gorge, where they enjoy a safe haven. For its part, Georgia accuses Russia of violating its airspace as it attempts to deal with the rebel threat. Although joint patrols have been established to deal with this transborder issue, at the time of writing, there was no clear resolution. It remains unclear how Putin intends to handle the situation in the long-term, but international observers have expressed increased concern.

Relations with Georgia have also been deleteriously affected by the existence of two Soviet-era bases in that country (set to be closed in 2008), tensions over Russian ties to separatist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the new Georgian government's pro-Western stances that would orient the country away from Russian influence. These issues came to the fore in September 2006 following a diplomatic imbroglio between Russia and Georgia over spying.

At issue was the arrest of five Russian officers in Georgia on the basis of allegations of spying. The Russian government in Moscow demanded their release, however, the Georgian government in Tbilisi was itself compelling the handover of a sixth Russian officer. That officer was apparently within Russian army headquarters, which was surrounded by police in the Georgian capital. The Georgian Interior Ministry claimed that it had evidence showing that the Russian officers had been "personally carrying out intelligence activities." It also linked Russia with separatist activities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In response, Russia ordered the withdrawal of diplomatic officials, including the Russian ambassador, from Georgia using emergency aircrafts. Russia additionally urged its citizens to refrain from travel to Georgia and stopped processing visa requests from Georgian nationals. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Georgia's actions were a manifestation of an anti-Russian policy and he warned that he would refer the matter to the United Nations. The situation was not helped by Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili's dismissal of Russia's reaction as being "hysteria."

By the start of October 2006, Russian President Vladimir Putin entered the fray, saying that Georgia's arrest of the Russian army officers for spying was tantamount to "an act of state terrorism with hostage-taking." His remarks came following a meeting with the security council of his government and a day after his government said that it would halt its scheduled withdrawal of troops from Georgia. The presence of Russian troops in Georgia had been a source of consternation for Georgians and their exit in 2008 had been highly-anticipated. Georgian Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili responded to that bit of news by saying that his government expected Russia to honor its prior commitment on troop withdrawals.



On October 2, 2006, Georgia said that it was releasing the Russian military officers. The situation was not automatically resolved, however, as Russia went forward with sanctions against Georgia, including the aforementioned travel restrictions, but also including deportations of Georgians and raids on Georgian-owned businesses. Georgia protested Russia's actions, with Foreign Minister Bezhuashvili characterizing it as being beyond xenophobia. On October 9, 2006, Georgia said that it would turn back any aircraft with deported Georgians from Russia.

By March 2007, ties between the two countries -- Georgia and Russia -- were not helped by the poor medical conditions and deaths of several ethnic Georgians who were deported from Russia during the aforementioned diplomatic imbroglio, which started with the detainment of Russian officers on charges of spying in the fall of 2006. Georgians expressed outrage at the deaths of the deportees, and the Georgian government in the spring of 2007 launched charges of human rights violations against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The Georgian Justice Ministry said in a statement, "The lawsuit is based on hundreds of cases of flagrant abuses of the human rights of Georgian citizens and ethnic Georgians by the Russian Federation during their deportations." Russia responded by saying that it believed that it had the right to deport illegal migrants, and as such, it was doubtful that the court would consider the case. A spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, Mikhail Kamynin said, "Actions of this kind are not conducive to the normalization of relations between Russia and Georgia."

On Aug. 22, 2007, Georgia accused Russia of violating its airspace for a second time within weeks. The Georgian Foreign Ministry said that a Russian fighter jet had flown a few miles into its territory, according to tracking data from the country's air defense system. The Russian government in Moscow denied the incursion saying that its planes were not flying close to the border with Georgia on the day in question. The incident followed a similar episode earlier in the month when Georgia accused Russia of violating its border and dropping a missile close to the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. Russia vociferously denied that accusation as well. Two days after the second claim by the Caucasus country that Russia had violated its border, the Georgian Interior Ministry announced that it had fired on what it claimed to be a Russian aircraft after it allegedly violated Georgian airspace. Russia again denied the claim and noted that there were no reports of missing Russian aircraft.

Editor's Note: These incidences have been indicative of a further devolution of poor relations between the two countries. In the background, various issues have worked to sour Russian-Georgian relations. Of grave importance has been the Georgian region of Abkhazia, which has been held by Russian-backed separatists. Georgia views Russia's decision to back the separatists as a virtual annexation. As well, the two countries have been involved in imbroglios involving spying, the expulsion of ethnic Georgians from Russia as a result, as well as a dispute over the price of Russian gas to Georgia. Another source of tension comes from Russian accusations that Georgia is hiding Chechen militants in the Pankisi Gorge area, the home of Chechen kin people, the Kists.



Meanwhile, there has also been tension with Moldova over the presence of Russian troops in the breakaway Trans-Dnestr region where there is a large number of ethnic Russians living. In March 2005, at the time of the Moldovan election, about 100 Russians were barred from entering the country. While the Russians claimed they were election monitors, Moldovan authorities said they were not registered as such and they were likely to disrupt the election. A month prior, several Russians were expelled from Moldova under suspicion of spying, while Russia threatened sanctions against Moldova. The region returned to the political landscape in March 2006 when new customs regulations were instituted by Moldova requiring exporters in Trans-Dniester to register with the Moldovan authorities. Officials in Trans-Dniester administration said that the new rules constituted a blockade of sorts. Months later in July 2006, an explosion on a bus in the city of Tiraspol left several people dead and around 20 people injured.

### **Violence and Intrigue**

On Aug. 21, 2006, an explosion in a market in the Russian capital city of Moscow demolished a two-storey building and left 10 people dead and over 40 people injured. Among those killed were two children and six foreign nationals. At first, it was surmised that the explosion was caused by a faulty gas cylinder, however, police subsequently said that a bomb had been placed in a bag and deposited inside a cafe. Security forces said that a simple bomb device was used and they alleged that the blast was the result of a gang feud. Gang feuding has been the stated cause behind a number of small-scale market bombings in the past. Of course, Chechen rebels have also used bombings at markets to further their cause. As such, there was no conclusion about who was responsible. Nevertheless, two people were detained for questioning in regard to the incident.

In mid-September 2006, Andrei Kozlov, the first deputy chairman of the Russian Central Bank, was shot to death by two gunmen. The motive for the apparent murder remained unknown at the time of writing, but there was speculation that it was a contract-type assassination. Prosecutors surmised that Kozlov may have been killed because of his leadership in the decision to revoke the licenses of several banks believed to be guilty of money laundering. The move by the Central Bank to revoke these licenses was likely intended to deter corruption in a country seeking to build better transparency while curtailing corruption. The killing of Kozlov, however, suggested that such efforts were likely to be resisted, perhaps even with deadly force.

October 2006 was marked by the murder of a prominent journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, who had been a strong critic of the Kremlin's policies in Chechnya. See "Appendix: Chechnya" for details.

In November 2006, a former Russian spy, Alexander Litvinenko, died in a hospital in London. He was the victim of an apparent poisoning, according to reports by British investigators. Indeed, traces of the radioactive substance polonium-210 were found in his body. Further traces were

subsequently found at various locations in London, which were presumed to have been frequented by Litvinenko.

Speculation as to who was responsible for his death was ongoing. As a vocal critic of Putin and the Kremlin, and also because of his recent work investigating the aforementioned murder of an anti-Putin journalist, the immediate assumption was that the Russian government was responsible. The fact that Litvinenko blamed Putin for the poisoning -- from his hospital bed -- only added to this particular theory. But the slow, painful, and rather exotic nature of the poisoning suggested that the incident was not the usual case of politically-motivated assassination.

For its part, the Kremlin rejected any intimations that the Russian government was involved in Litvinenko's death and, instead, encouraged the investigation by law enforcement agencies in the United Kingdom (U.K.). To this end, a spokesperson from President Putin's office said, "Any death is always a tragedy. Now it's up to U.K. law enforcement agencies to investigate what happened."

Other theories were beginning to surface about who might have orchestrated Litvinenko's death. Among them was the notion that rogue elements of the Russian intelligence service may have been responsible. A similar theory postulated that former KGB -- now carrying out more shady activities -- might have been responsible. Given Litvinenko's past role as an agent investigating corruption, there was the suggestion that he may have been the victim of a contract killing carried out by enemies made during that period. Yet another rationale centered on the possibility that the poisoning was carried out for the purpose of implicating the Russian government, presumably to discredit it.

By early December 2006, several British Airways airliners were said to be contaminated with the radioactive substance that caused Litvinenko's death. As well, an Italian contact of Litvinenko, Mario Scaramella, was hospitalized after traces of polonium-210 was found in his body. Scaramella had reportedly met with the former agent on the very day he [Litvinenko] was taken ill. Consequently, the investigation into the matter was widening well beyond British shores, according to British Home Secretary, John Reid. In fact, counter-terrorism experts were expected to travel to Russia to advance the investigation.

In May 2007, the British authorities named a former Russian KGB officer as the likely person behind the poisoning death Litvinenko. Sir Ken MacDonald, the director of public prosecutions in the United Kingdom, said Andrei Lugovoi should be held responsible for the murder. During a press conference, McDonald said, "I have today concluded that the evidence sent to us by the police is sufficient to charge Andrei Lugovoi with the murder of Mr. Litvinenko by deliberate poisoning."

In response, Lugovoi denied being involved in the death of Litvinenko and said that the accusations being made against him were "politically motivated." To this end, he said in interviews

with the Russian media, "I consider that this decision to be political, I did not kill Litvinenko, I have no relation to his death and I can only express well-founded distrust for the so-called basis of proof collected by British judicial officials."

Meanwhile, a power struggle was unfolding between the United Kingdom and Russia over the possible extradition of Lugovoi. While the British authorities intended to formally request that Lugovoi be extradited, the Kremlin was saying that the extradition of Russian nationals to foreign jurisdiction was unconstitutional. At the same time, Russian authorities suggested that there was room for the prosecution of a Russian citizen accused of a crime in another country within Russia, using "evidence provided by the foreign state." A spokesperson from the office of British Prime Minister Tony Blair countered by noting that Russia had signed the European Union 1957 convention on extradition.

In July 2007, Russian Prosecutor-General Yuri Chayka ruled against the extradition of a former KGB agent Andrei Lugovoi, whom the British authorities said was responsible for Litvinenko's death. Chayka said that extradition of Lugovoi to the United Kingdom would contradict the Russian constitution.

Now with the official Russian decision on the extradition issued, the British authorities responded by expelling four diplomats from the Russian embassy in London. The British Foreign Secretary David Miliband noted that his country was also reviewing its cooperation with Russia on a number of issues. Soon thereafter, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko noted that the expulsion of its diplomats from London could very well hinder bilateral cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts. As well, Russia announced that it would also expel four staffers from the British embassy in Moscow. The United Kingdom responded to this action by noting that Russia's decision to retaliate in kind was "not justified."

Consequently British-Russian relations were at one of their lowest points in recent history.

### **Other Developments**

April 2007 saw anti-Kremlin rallies in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Moscow rally ended in some small clashes with authorities as well as some arrests. The St. Petersburg rally was contained within a square at the city center since riot police prevented demonstrators from marching in the streets. Again, there were small clashes with police and the arrests of some opposition figures, including Eduard Limonov, the leader of the radical National Bolshevik party, Andrey Sidelnikov, the leader of the Pora youth movement, and Olga Kurnosova, the local head of United Civil Front.

The rallies were arranged by these and other opposition groups working under the auspices of the

"Other Russia" coalition. They have accused President Vladimir Putin of political repression. In response, President Putin denied charges that he has tried to curtail democracy and instead said that the opposition forces were attempting to destabilize the country.

On April 23, 2007, Boris Yeltsin -- Russia's first democratic leader -- died due to heart failure at the age of 76 years. Russian President Vladimir Putin reportedly telephoned Yeltsin's widow to convey his condolences. Putin also declared a national day of mourning in honor of his predecessor. In a national address, Putin said, "We will do everything we can to ensure that the memory of Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin, his noble thoughts and his words 'take care of Russia' serve as a moral and political benchmark for us."

Then, on April 25, 2007, at a solemn state funeral at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, Yeltsin was laid to rest. It was the first religious funeral for a Kremlin leader since the 1890s. Russian and foreign dignitaries, including former Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev, former United States President Bill Clinton, former United Kingdom Prime Minister John Major, and the British Duke of York, were in attendance.

Yeltsin was noted for being Russia's first democratic leader, as well as being the driving force behind the establishment of the new Russian federation in the post-Soviet era. But he has also been associated with the economic chaos that plagued Russia in the immediate period after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As such, Yeltsin's legacy will likely be a matter of debate among historians torn between the notion of Yeltsin as the driving force behind democratic change in Russia, and Yeltsin as the force behind the rise of the wealthy oligarchs. His military campaign against independent activists in Chechnya, which led to the razing of Chechen towns, the killing of tens of thousands of civilians, and the horror of the international community, were collectively expected to be matters of grave consternation for decades to come.

Also in April 2007, Russia responded negatively to plans by the Bush administration in the United States (U.S.) to develop a missile defense system in eastern Europe. Russian President Vladimir Putin decried the notion, indicating that he viewed such a missile system as being more than simply a defense plan. To this end, he said, "This is not just a defense system, this is part of the U.S. nuclear weapons system." President Putin went so far as to warn the U.S. that its plans in this regard would run the risk of mutual destruction, saying, "The threat of causing mutual damage and even destruction increases many times." Making clear its hard-line opposition to the notion of a U.S. missile defense system, President Putin also threatened to withdraw participation in a treaty limiting conventional weaponry in Europe.

NATO responded to Russia's threat to suspend its membership in the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) with its own concern. Indeed, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer made it clear that the treaty was a keystone of security and stability in Europe.

With the United States planning to construct missile defense facilities in Europe, Russia had already expressed its opposition to such a plan. But in early June 2007, ahead of the G-8 summit of key world leaders, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that his country could be forced to point weapons at Europe for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Russia also announced that it had tested an RS-24 ballistic missile a week prior.

Both moves appeared oriented toward the maintenance of "strategic balance" in the region. To this end, Putin pointed to the fact that the United States had already altered the strategic balance by withdrawing from the anti-ballistic missile treaty in 2002. In an interview published in the Italian newspaper, *Corriere Della Sera*, he made the Russian position clear by asserting, "If the American nuclear potential grows in European territory, we have to give ourselves new targets in Europe."

The climate of bilateral relations thawed somewhat at the summit when United States President Bush said, "They're [Russians] not a military threat." He also called for the United States to work with Russia in dealing cooperatively on the issue.

Then, Russian President Putin proposed an alternate solution to the missile defense issue when he suggested that both countries utilize the radar system at Gabala in Azerbaijan to develop a shield that would cover Europe. In this plan, incoming missiles from hostile countries could be detected. Putin noted that "This work should be multi-faceted with the engagement of the states concerned in Europe." He also added that if his country and this United States worked together in an open manner to develop missile defense capabilities, "then we will have no problems."

Bush responded to the proposal by saying that it was an interesting option and noted that he and Putin would engage on a "strategic dialogue" on the subject in a forthcoming visit of his Russian counterpart to the United States. Bush' senior advisor on national security, Stephen Hadley's characterization of the Russian proposal as "a positive development" augured a possible productive resolution to the matter.

On Oct. 12, 2007, missile talks between the United States (U.S.) and Russia ended in failure with no resolution was in sight. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described the bilateral talks with Russia saying, "We discussed a range of proposals we hope they will accept." Her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, said that the proposals required study and in the interim, the U.S. should not work on the missile defense system. But the U.S. rejected Russia's request to put an end to the plan, with Rice asserting that discussions with Poland and the Czech Republic on the deployment of system would go on as anticipated. Responding to the U.S. position, Putin said, "One day you and I may decide that missile defense systems can be deployed on the Moon, but before we get there the possibility of reaching an agreement may be lost because you will have implemented your own plans."

Meanwhile, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates argued that that the missile defense system was not directed at Russia but at rogue states including Iran and North Korea. However, Russian

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the very idea of the missile defense shield system was based on the false assumption that Iran presented a nuclear threat. Lavrov also criticized the U.S. for hinting at the use of force against Iran, saying that such an approach contravenes against the notion of a negotiated solution to the Iranian problem. Russia also reiterated its position that its own early warning radar systems in Azerbaijan could easily be used by the U.S. But Gates responded that radar was incapable of guiding interceptor missiles.

U.S. intransigence on the matter thus paved the way for Russia to make good on its earlier threat to withdraw its participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which was aimed at limiting conventional weaponry in Europe. Russia also warned that it could withdraw its participation in the 20-year old Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which limits both U.S. and Russian short and medium range missiles, and resulted in the elimination of thousands of missiles in both countries.

### **Parliamentary Elections of 2007**

September 2007 saw Russian President Vladimir Putin dissolve government following a request from Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov. Putin soon put forth a new name for the position of head of government. That person was Viktor Zubkov -- the financial intelligence chief who had been at the helm of the anti-money laundering entity called Rosfinmonitoring.

For his part, following Putin's announcement of his appointment, Zubkov told legislators that he intended to form a government in which the composition would likely change from the current membership. After his meeting with lawmakers, Zubkov met with members of the media and said that there was a possibility that he might eventually run for the presidency in forthcoming elections, which would result in a successor to the widely-popular Putin. To that end, Zubkov said, "If I achieve something as prime minister then I do not rule out that possibility." Zubkov's nomination was scheduled to be confirmed in parliament on Sept. 14, 2007.

With Russian President Vladimir Putin expected to step down from office, attention shifted to whether or not he would try to remain in the domain of politics. Because he could not run for another term as president, there was speculation about what his role might be.

In October 2007, a hint of Putin's aspirations was revealed when he talked about the possibility of running for a seat in parliament as a candidate of the United Russia party in forthcoming elections. Should such a path be pursued, and assuming that his United Russia party won the parliamentary elections, Putin would be well-positioned to take on the role of prime minister. As discussion was evoked about this possible path, Putin said, "Heading the government is realistic, but it is too early to consider it."



On Dec. 2, 2007, voters went to the polls in Russia to cast ballots in the country's parliamentary elections. Results showed an overwhelming victory for Russian President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party, amidst accusations that the election was not carried out in a fair and fully competitive manner.

Nevertheless, with the majority of ballots counted, Putin's United Russia had 64.1 percent of the vote share. The Communists carried about 11.6 percent of the vote share and were poised to secure some seats in parliament as well. The right-leaning Liberal Party of Russia appeared to have garnered around 8.2 percent of the vote, while A Fair Russia (Mothers/Pensioners/Life) acquired approximately 7.8 percent. Other parties won the remaining vote share but were unable to cross the seven percent threshold needed to enter parliament. Since the Liberal Party and A Fair Russia were both allied with United Russia, parties aligned with the Kremlin were expected to hold up to 348 seats in the 450-seat Gosudarstvennaya Duma (State Duma). Should that number hold steady, the Kremlin would likely have a constitutional majority -- that is, control over enough seats in parliament to push through constitutional changes.

The Communists said the election outcome was fraudulent, however, the Central Electoral Commission dismissed this claim. Communist Party leader, Gennady Zyuganov, said, "We do not trust these figures announced by the central elections commission and we will conduct a parallel count." On the other side of the equation, the leader of victorious United Russia, Boris Gryzlov, acknowledged that there may have been some violations, but nothing significant enough to place the final result in doubt. To this end, he said, "They in no way put in doubt the final result. The fact that these violations have been registered shows that we have a transparent ballot."

Delays in the procurement of necessary visas allowed only a limited number of monitors from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to observe the election. Nevertheless, the OSCE subsequently issued a statement characterizing the election as "not fair" and noting that it did not meet European standards, although it did not go so far as to issue charges of fraudulence. Instead, the group noted that the election "took place in an atmosphere which seriously limited political competition" and that "there was not a level political playing field." For his part, Putin asserted that the poll was both "legitimate" and a vote of the public's confidence in him.

Indeed, the landslide election victory for United Russia appeared to be illustrative of popular support for Putin's leadership. United Russia leader, Gryzlov noted that the election was "a referendum on President Putin so I think we can say he has won a victory."

With such resounding ratification, it appeared likely that even after the end of Putin's presidential term in 2008, and even though constitutional provisions prevented him from running for another successive term as president, he could nonetheless remain on the political scene. Indeed, the parliamentary victory for his party opened up a path for Putin in which his leadership role could well transition from that of head of state to head of government. As noted above, current Prime



Minister Viktor Zubkov -- a Putin ally -- was touted as being a possible contender for the post-Putin presidency, thus leaving the prime minister's role vacant. With Zubkov as president and Putin as prime minister, the political orientation of the country was likely to continue on course. At the same time, Putin could also decline to take on the job of prime minister and simply remain politically active behind the scenes.

In other developments, Liberal Democratic Party candidate, Andrei Lugovoi, could well join parliament if the vote count was sustained. A seat in parliament would immunize Lugovoi from both prosecution and extradition in a notorious spy poisoning case. Indeed, Lugovoi had been named in the United Kingdom in connection with the murder of former Russian operative Alexander Litvinenko, discussed above.

### **Presidential Election of 2008**

In anticipation of presidential elections to be held in 2008, attention turned to possible presidential contenders. The appointment of Zubkov as prime minister in 2007 had fueled speculation about whether he would be Putin's choice of successor. But on Dec. 10, 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin nominated First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev to be the presidential candidate in forthcoming elections, scheduled for March 2008. Putin noted that Medvedev had his "full support."

As of 2008, Medvedev, backed by Putin, was hoping to slingshot far into the lead over the rest of the candidates. He had the support of not only the president's party, United Russia, but also A Just Russia, Agrarian Party of Russia, and the Civilian Power party. As before, there was speculation that he would appoint Putin as his prime minister if he was elected to the presidency. Another strong candidate was Gennady Zyuganov -- a familiar face in the presidential campaign in Russia, having run twice before. He had served as the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy was also a candidate with experience in the Russian government, holding the position of the Nationalist Deputy Speaker of the State Duma. He ran for the presidency three times, and was the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia.

The full slate of candidates in the presidential election, which was set to take place on March 2, 2008 were: Vladimir Bukovsky, Alexander Donskoi, Viktor Geraschenko (Other Russia-Rodina), Sergei Gulyayev (Other Russia), Garry Kasparov (Other Russia-United Front), Mikhail Kasyanov (Popular Democratic Union), Gennadiy Seleznyov, Oleg Shenin (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (Liberal Democratic Party), Gennady Zyuganov (Communist Party of the Russian Federation), Grigory Yavlinsky (Yabloko), Dmitry Medvedev (United Russia) and other candidates.

In pre-election polls taken in December 2007, Dmitry Medvedev had a very strong lead over any

other candidate, with 79 percent of the vote. Gennady Zyuganov and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy were at the bottom of the poll with 9 percent each. If this trend stayed consistent, it was believed that Medvedev would take the presidency, and Putin would remain in power via the office of prime minister for at least another term.

On election day in March 2008, turnout was high at almost 60 percent. Exit poll data showed that Putin's chosen successor, Dmitry Medvedev, was on track to capture the presidency with 69.6 percent of the vote share. Early election results were in line with the exit poll data and indicated that he was carrying just short of 70 percent of the votes cast. Communist leader, Gennady Zyuganov, was headed for a distant second place finish, garnering close to 20 percent.

While he noted that the election result was not official, Medvedev suggested that his presidency would follow the path set by his predecessor, outgoing President Putin. To this end, Medvedev said his policies and programs would be "a direct continuation of that path which is being carried out by President Putin." He suggested he would work in tandem with Putin, who could move into the office of the prime minister. As well, he noted that in the realm of foreign policy, his core priority would be to defend Russian interests.

### **Leadership in Russia in 2008**

On May 7, 2008, Dmitry Medvedev was inaugurated into office and formally replaced Vladimir Putin in the role of president and head of state. His inauguration took place some months after his landslide election victory.

A stalwart ally of Putin, Medvedev (like Putin) studied law at Leningrad State University in the 1980s and went on to become a law professor at that very institution. In the 1990s, he moved into the realm of politics, working at the external affairs committee in the St. Petersburg government under Putin's leadership. By the close of the 1990s, he became the deputy chief of the government's staff, and in 2000, he became the first deputy chief of the president's office. He was appointed as First Deputy Prime Minister in 2005, and was reappointed to that position in 2007. Medvedev crafted his image into one of a working-class candidate who could relate to those around him. On the issues, he was concerned about the unemployment rate, and was hoping that the rate reductions would continue into his presidency. Medvedev also expressed his intent to continue the policies set by Putin, particularly with regard to Russia's economic growth and prosperity.

Putin, who was constitutionally barred from a third consecutive term as president after eight years in office, remained in the political spotlight. A day after Medvedev's inauguration, Putin was approved by the lower house of parliament as the new prime minister and head of government. Putin was approved by a decisive 392-56 margin and was backed by three of the four main

factions within the Duma: United Russia, Just Russia and the Liberal Democratic Party. Only the Communists voted against him. Striking a similar tone to Medvedev, Putin said his government would concentrate on economic and social matters. He also noted that he intended to cut Russia's inflation rate, lower taxation and create a favorable business environment. But foremost on Putin's agenda was the formation of a new government. To that end, he was expected to put forth a cabinet list.

With the new President Medvedev being only age 42 at the time of inauguration, and with Prime Minister Putin in his early fifties, the two leaders of the Russian Federation embodied youthful leadership. Together, it was expected that they would continue to chart the policy course that had prevailed since the start of the Putin era.

### **Special Report:**

#### ***France negotiates truce agreement for Georgia and Russia as fighting dies down in separatist enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia***

On August 8, 2008, the Georgian military launched an attack against separatist targets in South Ossetia. The military offensive ensued only hours after the Georgian authorities and South Ossetia's separatists agreed to a Russian-brokered ceasefire.

The situation began when Georgian military troops and Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists were ensconced in violent clashes over the course of several days. Georgian tanks then attacked the separatist stronghold of Tskhinvali, presumably in an effort to regain control of the region.

According to Russian media, several people were reported to have been killed in the shelling. As well, Georgian forces and South Ossetian separatists were reported to be exchanging heavy fire. To that end, explosions and rocket fire were heard in the area around Tskhinvali. The British newspaper, The Independent, reported that "the assault is coming from all directions."

For its part, Georgia said that it was taking this action to stabilize the territory [South Ossetia]. Georgian Minister for Integration, Temur Yakobashvili, said that his country was compelled to terminate South Ossetia's "criminal regime" and to "restore constitutional order" to the breakaway region. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili himself called for an end to bloodshed to end, but warned the South Ossetian separatists that Tbilisi's patience was not limitless.

On the other side of the equation, South Ossetian rebel leader Eduard Kokoity said that Georgia was carrying out "a perfidious and base" attack on Tskhinvali. He also confirmed the assault on Tskhinvali saying, "The storming of Tskhinvali has started." Eyewitnesses on the ground said that the city was being attacked, the hospital was destroyed and the university was on fire. The Red Cross reported that there were numerous casualties needing medical attention.

In response, Russia was said to be deploying troops to South Ossetia to assist peacekeepers operating there. Indeed, an aide to the Russian Land Forces commander confirmed that Russian tanks and troops had entered South Ossetia and were approaching Tskhinvali, which was reported to have been already devastated by the Georgian offensive there.

Russia's military presence in the region was not well-received by Georgia, given the fact that the Georgian government has long accused Russia of arming South Ossetian separatists. But Russia has its own counter-argument to levy against Georgia. It has accused Georgia of deliberately ramping up its own military presence in breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and assuming a hard-line posture against these enclaves. Russia's tensions with Georgia have been partially rooted in another concern. Specifically, Russia has been opposed to pro-Western Georgia's ambitions to join NATO. This geopolitical element has textured the larger context of the territorial struggle being played out in South Ossetia.

It should be noted that Russia has enjoyed strong ties with South Ossetia, largely due to the fact that the ethnically-related province of North Ossetia is located within its borders, and both the south and the north have long hoped to unite. Indeed, many South Ossetians hold Russian citizenship. As such, with vested interests on both sides of the border, Russia called for an end to the ongoing violence. Russia also urged the international community to work cooperatively "to avert massive bloodshed and new victims."

However, the prospects for peace were not likely to be easily advanced, given the emerging situation in the region a day later. On August 9, 2008, Georgian authorities said that Russian jets had bombed military targets inside its territory – specifically in the Georgian town on Gori to the south of South Ossetia. They also said that one attack ensued close to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which is known to supply Caspian oil to the West. Georgia described the air strikes as "a full-scale military invasion" and Georgian President Saakashvili claimed that Russia was at war with his country.

Russia had a very different perspective and placed the blame squarely on the Georgians. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov indicated the dire nature of the situation by asserting that already 1,500 people had died in the conflict and more than 30,000 South Ossetians had fled into Russia to escape the threat of death. The Russian government said that it had to act to protect the South Ossetians, many of whom hold Russian citizenship. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev said that Georgia also bore a responsibility for "protecting the [South Ossetian] population" and that his country's military action was intended "to force the Georgian side to peace."

By August 9, 2008, the Russian army had advanced to take complete control South Ossetia's capital of Tskhinvali. General Vladimir Boldyrev, the head of the Russian ground forces said, "Tactical groups have completely liberated Tskhinvali from the Georgian military." Boldyrev also said that Russian forces would keep up the pressure on Georgian military units. Russian President

Dmitry Medvedev explained his country's objectives in South Ossetia saying, "Under these circumstances, Russia is guided by one task -- to immediately stop violence and defend civilians and restore peace as soon as possible." President Dmitry Medvedev also demanded the withdrawal of Georgian troops from the conflict zone, saying that it was the only way to settle the "tragic crisis."

That same day, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili called for an end to hostilities saying, "We propose an immediate ceasefire and the beginning of the withdrawal of troops from the contact line." On the home front, the Georgia's parliament approved a presidential decree that essentially imposed two weeks of martial law in the country.

A day later on August 10, 2008, Georgia said that it was withdrawing its troops from the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali in the face of Russia's counter-offensive. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said his country's troops were returning to the positions they held before the conflict erupted days earlier. There was, however, some confusion about whether Georgian troops were pulling out of Tskhinvali or withdrawing entirely from South Ossetia. Georgian Reintegration Minister Temur Yakobashvili confirmed that the troops left Tskhinvali but were remaining in other areas of South Ossetia. Russian sources said that Georgian military units were still active in South Ossetia.

Presumably due to the continued activity by Georgian military units in South Ossetia, and what Moscow described as continued Georgian offensive action, Russian forces were continuing to carry out its own military action into Georgian territory. Reports from the region suggested that Russia carried out an air strike on a military airfield near the Tbilisi International Airport.

With the situation grim despite the earlier declaration of a withdrawal of troops from Tskhinvali, Georgia said that it had submitted a note to the Russian embassy in Tbilisi calling for immediate negotiations with Russia regarding "an end to all hostilities and a ceasefire." Russia confirmed that the note had been received. Russia at the time also denied Georgia's claims that Russian air strikes had targeted populated areas.

But movement toward a resolution seemed no closer by August 11, 2008. Georgian authorities said that Russian air strikes hit communications facilities to the west of Tbilisi and the port city of Poti in the Black Sea. As well, Russian forces were reported to have led a raid through the other breakaway enclave of Abkhazia into the western Georgian town of Senaki. On the other side of the equation, Russia said that the Georgian military was still targeting positions in Tskhinvali, despite claims of a withdrawal and overtures of a ceasefire. In this way, both sides accused one another of continuing the hostilities and exacerbating the conflict.

On the international front, the United Nations Security Council had earlier convened an emergency session to consider the rapidly deteriorating security crisis in the Caucasus. Little was actually accomplished at that session. Likewise, a spokesperson from NATO had already called on both

sides -- Georgian and Russian -- to exercise restraint. However, with the violence ongoing, clearly restraint was not at hand.

Nevertheless, the United States said that it was sending a delegation to the region to try to negotiate a resolution. The United States Department of States said that the envoys would "engage with the parties in the conflict." As well, a European Union delegation was en route to the region and said that it was hoping to procure a ceasefire and withdrawal agreement from both Georgia and Russia. A separate Council of Europe delegation was also hoping to advance dialogue.

In the same time period, according to news reports, Russian President Medvedev reiterated the death toll -- in the thousands -- during a conversation with United States President George W. Bush. For his part, Bush, who was attending the Beijing Olympics, called for an end to the violence, warned of escalation beyond the zone of conflict, and endorsed the notion of international mediation.

Indeed, the international community's objective appeared to be focused on averting the prospects of a war in the restive Caucasus, which has long been regarded as something of a powder keg. Yet to be determined was the question of whether or not such efforts would actually yield positive results.

Days later, Russia noted that its military activity in the area was ending and Russian troops were seen retreating from the area. The hostilities flared again when Georgia sent in troops to try to regain control of South Ossetia. Nevertheless, witnesses said that the full brunt of the fighting in South Ossetia appeared to be ending. Elsewhere in the region, Russian troops were withdrawing from the other breakaway region of Abkhazia, however, separatist there were reported to be ensconced in some continuing clashes with the Georgian military in the Kodori Gorge.

Yet even with an official truce in the offing (as discussed below) and an end to the fighting, the situation was not peaceful. A war of words continued. On an official day of mourning in his country, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev charged that Georgia had launched "genocide of the South Ossetian people." At issue were the deaths of thousands of South Ossetians, many of whom hold Russian passports, as well as the deaths and injuries to scores of Russian soldiers, including one general. The Russian leader used the Russian word "otmorozki," which roughly translates to "thugs" in English, to characterize Georgian troops. Meanwhile, Georgian President Saakashvili addressed a crowd of thousands gathered in Tbilisi's main and accused Russia of the "ruthless, heartless destruction" of Georgians. The Georgian leader also warned that his country would no longer be a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) -- a group consisting of former Soviet republics.

On August 13, 2008, French President Nicolas Sarkozy was leading diplomatic negotiations to help Georgia and Russia resolve the crisis that had been sparked when Georgian military troops



and Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists were ensconced in violent clashes over the course of several days. Georgian tanks then attacked the separatist stronghold of Tskhinvali, presumably in an effort to regain control of the region, and went onto gain military supremacy over large swaths of Georgian territory.

Sarkozy put forth a peace agreement that both sides signed days later. Central to the proposed plan for a truce was that all forces would pull back to pre-conflict positions. Other elements of the plan included an end to the use of force, an end to military action in perpetuity, as well as the free access of humanitarian aid. France, as the head of the European Union, has called on the European bloc to endorse the peace initiative ahead of its submission to the United Nations Security Council. The European Union was also expected consider deploying peacekeepers to the region to maintain peace and security, and also to protect the supply of humanitarian aid.

The remaining thorny issue, which was not included in the framework of the truce, was the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Neither Russian President Medvedev nor Georgian President Saakashvili was likely to find common ground on that matter in the immediate future. Indeed, the Georgian leader asserted, "The territorial integrity and belonging of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Georgia can never be put under doubt."

On August 17, 2008, Russia officially pledged to withdraw its forces from Georgian territory in keeping with the agreement. At the time, however, its forces had control over large swaths of Georgian territory, including the main east-west highway through that country. There was speculation that Russian troops might withdraw only as far as South Ossetia since Russia said it would only fully withdraw when Georgian police were ready to take over responsibility for security. NATO responded to anxieties that Russia would not abide by the withdrawal requirements of the agreement by warning that relations would be compromised if Russian troops remained in Georgia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia was not occupying Georgia and would not annex South Ossetia. However, he also characterized NATO as biased and intent on saving the "criminal regime" of Tbilisi.

Meanwhile, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev told his French President Nicolas Sarkozy that the Russian withdrawal would be complete by August 22, 2008, although approximately 500 troops would be installed as peacekeepers on both sides of South Ossetia's border. Russian troops were soon identified exiting Gori -- the largest town in Georgia located close to the border of South Ossetia. Sarkozy, during talks with Medvedev, acknowledged this withdrawal but noted that Russian troops were yet to exit Poti and Senaki. Russia had earlier indicated that it would not soon leave the port city of Poti, and claimed that this would be in keeping with the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Medvedev's government said that Russian peacekeepers were allowed to take "additional security measures." However, the United States and the United Kingdom countered this claim noting that such buffer zones would violate the deal.

In other developments, the first United States ship with humanitarian aid was expected to dock in



Georgia by the last week of August 2008. Two more ships were expected to arrive in Georgia as well.

In the last week of August 2008, Russia's Kremlin officially recognized the breakaway enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. South Ossetians and Abkhazians celebrated the news of this recognition of their self-proclaimed sovereignty. However, without wider international recognition of sovereign status, and with many countries of the West committed to the notion of Georgia's territorial integrity, the actual status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia remained in the zone of "contested independent status."

By the start of September 2008, the European Union (EU) had decided to suspend talks on a new partnership pact with Russia, given the still-incomplete withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. EU-Russian negotiations on the partnership agreement had been scheduled for mid-September 2008 but were based on a shared understanding that Russian troops would withdraw to pre-conflict positions. The lack of progress on that withdrawal front, followed by the EU's response, signaled that relations between the EU and Russia were moving into highly challenging territory.

Following a meeting in the Belgian capital city of Brussels, EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said that the bloc that he represented could not "continue as if nothing had happened." As well, the European bloc's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, said that the EU could deploy civilian monitors to Georgia to determine whether or not Russia was complying with the ceasefire agreement that had been brokered earlier. Meanwhile French President Sarkozy said, "The EU would welcome a real partnership with Russia, which is in the interests of all, but you have to be two to have a partnership."

On the other side of the equation, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that unchecked support by the EU and the United States for the government of Georgian President Saakashvili would be a "historic" mistake. He also introduced the notion of an embargo on arms supplies to Georgia until a new regime was established there. These declarations came in the background of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's assertion that his country's foreign policy principles would not be dictated by the hegemony of any single country, such as the United States.

In October 2008, months after the Russian-Georgian conflict over South Ossetia, Russia removed a checkpoint near the town of Gori. The removal of the checkpoint at Gori -- located in Georgian territory close to the separatist region of South Ossetia -- marked the first significant sign that Russia intended to comply with its withdrawal pledge, which was part of the ceasefire deal negotiated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Indeed, Russia also pledged to withdraw troops from two buffer zones within Georgia -- now under European Union observation -- by October 10, 2008.

At the same time, Russia increased its troop presence in South Ossetia -- largely a result of an explosion that left eight Russian soldiers and three civilians dead in the early part of the month. Russia accused Georgia of orchestrating the attack; Georgia denied the accusation. Russia also maintained its troop presence in the other separatist region of Abkhazia. Russia has recognized both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent while Western countries have backed Georgian territorial integrity. The matter of sovereignty has remained unresolved.

Editor's Note:

August 2009 marked the one year anniversary of the war between Georgia and Russia over the breakaway republic of South Ossetia.

On August 13, 2009, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Abkhazia, where he promised to build a military base along the border with Georgia. Putin also said that such a move would help guarantee the stability of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian head of government said: "Russia is going to deploy its armed forces in Abkhazia and take the necessary efforts to build a modern border guard system in cooperation with the relevant Abkhazian authorities." He continued, "All these factors are serious guarantees of the security of Abkhazia and South Ossetia." Putin's pledge came on the first anniversary of the cease-fire, which ended Russia's war with Georgia over South Ossetia. As might be expected, Georgia decried the move, characterizing it as "yet another provocation," that could potentially "escalate tensions" in the region of the Caucasus.

In October 2009, a report commissioned by the Council of the European Union placed the blame for the start of the 2008 war over the semi-autonomous region of South Ossetia on Georgia. The report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia found that the war, which erupted on August 7, 2008, was spurred when Georgian forces attacked the breakaway republic of South Ossetia, in an attempt to re-establish sovereign control. Still, the report did not cast Georgia as being the only guilty party. It noted that the hostilities between the two sides led to provocative actions by both Georgia and Russia. The report also acknowledged that after Georgia shelled South Ossetia, Russia responded by not only repelling the assault but, in fact, pressing further into Georgian territory.

Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia declared independence from Georgia during a war in the 1990s, which followed on the heels of the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are recognized by Russia as sovereign states, but have nonetheless remained internationally-recognized as Georgian territories. They have increasingly become flashpoints in the region.

See appendices of this Country Review on South Ossetia and Abkhazia for more details.

### **Other Developments in 2008-2010**

October 2008 saw Russia test-fire three intercontinental ballistic missiles. One launch took place from the Barents Sea, east of Norway; a second was launched from north of Japan; the originating location of the third was not specified. These developments came one day after Russia said that another missile fired from a submarine had traveled a record distance of 7,145 miles. President Dmitri Medvedev, who witnessed one of the missiles being test-fired from the north-western region of the country and who watched the missile being test-fired from the submarine from an aircraft carrier, noted that they were illustrative of Russia's defensive and military strength. The show of military might by the Kremlin appeared to be in reaction to the United States' plans to establish missile defense centers in eastern Europe. In a similar attempt to flex military muscle, Russian ships were en route to Venezuela to participate in joint naval exercises with that country in waters of the Western Hemisphere.

In November 2008, the issue of relations with the United States came to the fore following the election of Democrat, Barack Obama, as president in that country. In a speech delivered to the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States capital of Washington D.C., Russian President Dmitry Medvedev expressed hopes that his country would enjoy improved relations with the United States under an Obama administration. Russian President Medvedev said that United States President-Elect Barack Obama had the potential to rebuild "necessary mutual trust" that had waned during the Bush years. The Russian president also hinted at possible compromise with the United States over the controversial plan for a United States missile shield in Europe. He said, "We have a chance to solve the problem through either agreeing on a global system or, as a minimum, to find a solution on the existing programs, which would suit the Russian Federation."

Relations with Georgia returned to the fore due to the chaos that marked the fifth anniversary of that country's Rose Revolution, which swept President Mikhail Saakashvili to power. As the Georgian president traveled in a motorcade with Polish President Lech Kaczynski close to the breakaway republic of South Ossetia, shots were fired.

Although no one was hurt in the incident, both the Georgian president and his Polish counterpart accused Russian troops of being behind the apparent attack in an area that has been the site of much cross-border violence. According to Reuters, one individual in Saakashvili's entourage said that South Ossetians fired warning shots when their motorcade came close to a checkpoint at the quasi-border area. Meanwhile, President Saakashvili said that the situation was a "reminder" that Russia was in flagrant violation of the European Union-brokered ceasefire between Tblisi and Moscow. President Saakashvili also railed against the Russians saying, "Twenty-first Century occupiers, who have no legal, moral or other right to be there and oppress people, are stationed in the heart of Georgia."

On the other side of the equation, however, the Russian military as well as South Ossetian forces denied an involvement in the gunfire incident. In an interview with RIA Novosti, a South Ossetian spokeswoman, Irina Gagloyeva, asserted the following: "The South Ossetian side has nothing to do with it. There was no shelling from our side." A Russian spokesperson said to the Interfax news agency, "The claims that Russian servicemen were implicated in the shelling of the cortege do not correspond with reality."

In December 2008, the Russian Federation Council, which is the upper house of the parliament, approved the extension of the presidential term from four years to six years. The legislative body also passed the amendment of the Constitution, which will increase the mandate of the deputies of the State Duma, lower house of the parliament, from four years to five years. The draft legislation was pending because for it enter into force, it required approval of two-thirds of regional legislatures. Given the ruling United Russia party's influence and popularity, it was believed that the constitutional amendments would successfully be formalized. These constitutional changes were put forth by President Dmitry Medvedev during his first state-of-the-nation address.

In early 2009, Russia and Ukraine were at odds over a gas deal. At issue was Russia's refusal to implement an agreement with Ukraine to resume the flow of gas to Europe.

Russian President Dmitri Medvedev accused Ukraine of adding a declaration to the text of the agreement that contradict Russia's position. The central issues in Ukraine's declaration relate to its gas debts to Russia and accusations that it has siphoned off gas intended for other European customers. Meanwhile, there was no agreement about how much Ukraine should pay Russia for gas, or, how much Russia should pay Ukraine for transporting gas to other European destinations.

The dispute has left several countries in the region without gas, and with Russian energy company Gazprom unwilling to restart gas supplies, even as wintry conditions prevailed in the region. As such, the European Union intervened in an energetic shuttle diplomacy effort to resolve the matter.

On January 12, 2009, it was announced that Russia would resume gas supplies to other European countries via Ukraine. The announcement came as the EU was successfully able to broker an agreement between Russia and Ukraine. Central to the agreement were new provisions for (1) pricing for the purchase of Russian gas by Ukraine, and (2) the rate to be charged by Ukraine for the transit of Russian gas. But by the third week of January 2009 began, the EU warned that the energy crisis would not be resolved unless the flow of gas actually resumed.

In April 2009, ahead of the G-20 summit in London, United States President Barack Obama met with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. The two leaders agreed to restart negotiations aimed at reducing nuclear warheads.

Nuclear politics took center stage when, ahead of a meeting with European Union leaders in the Czech Republic, United States President Barack Obama called for a world free of nuclear weaponry and cooperative action on global security. President Obama said that his administration was committed to ultimately reducing the United States' nuclear arsenal, noting that the very existence of thousands of nuclear weapons was "the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War." Acknowledging that a nuclear weapons-free world was unlikely to be realized in his lifetime, President Obama made clear that he intended to work toward that outcome.

In April 2009, Russian authorities announced that Moscow was ending its "counter-terrorism operation" against separatist rebels in Chechnya. The move would end military operations in the semi-autonomous republic with a majority Muslim population after more than a decade. It would also set the foundation for "normalizing the situation," according to Russia's anti-terrorism committee. Russian authorities said that after years of violent unrest, Chechnya was not stabilized under the leadership of its pro-Kremlin leader, Ramzan Kadyrov.

For his part, Kadyrov responded to Moscow's announcement saying, "We received the news about cancelling the counter-terrorism operation with great satisfaction." He continued, "Now the Chechen Republic... is a peaceful, developing territory, and cancelling the counter-terrorism operation will only promote economic growth in the republic."

Critics of Kadyrov have said that stability in Chechnya has come at a grave price -- via fear of violence. They alleged that he has used torture and death to intimidate his opponents. Human rights groups concurred that such allegations were not without merit. For his part, Kadyrov has dismissed such charges as untrue. Meanwhile, occasional unrest prevailed in parts of Chechnya as well as the nearby regions of Dagestan and Ingushetia.

In June 2009, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, the leader of the southern Russian republic of Ingushetia, was critically wounded and hospitalized following an assassination attempt. Yevkurov's brother was injured and three of his bodyguards reportedly died in the attack on their convoy, which was traveling on a highway close to the city of Nazran. Reports on the ground indicated that a car bomb exploded just as Yevkurov's car drove by.

This attack was the third such incident in June 2009. On June 10, 2009, the deputy chief supreme court justice of the Russian republic was assassinated by gunmen. Just days later, the former deputy prime minister was shot to death. Both attacks took place in Nazran. Ingushetia -- like neighboring Chechnya -- has been the site of violence in recent years. While Chechnya, which was beset by a militant Islamic insurgency, has seen increased stability in the last year, Ingushetia has absorbed a number of refugees from the Chechnya conflict.

In July 2009, prominent human rights activist, Natalia Estemirova, was abducted in the Chechen capital of Grozny and later shot to death. Her body was discovered in a woodland in neighboring

Ingushetia. Estemirova's apparent assassination was met by outrage in Russia and across the globe. She was the latest victim in a string of murders that appeared to target activists and journalists trying to bring attention to the human rights situation in Chechnya where a long-standing conflict between Muslim separatists in the semi-autonomous republic and Russian authorities intent on preserving territorial sovereignty. In recent times, that conflict has waned and, in fact, Russian authorities announced earlier in the year that Moscow was ending its "counter-terrorism operation" against separatist rebels in Chechnya. The abduction and murder of Estemirova was therefore seen as a blight on the increasingly stable political situation in Chechnya.

In reaction, the human rights agency, Memorial, as well as Russia's longest standing non-governmental organization, the Helsinki Group, both placed the blame for Estemirova's death on Chechnya's Kremlin-backed President Ramzan Kadyrov. For his part, Kadyrov denied any involvement and vowed to investigate the killing. Meanwhile, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev also promised a full investigation as well as justice. But the Russian president went further in acknowledging that Estemirova was likely assassinated for political reasons. He said: "It is obvious to me that this murder is linked to her professional work and this work is necessary for any normal state." The Russian president then paid tribute to that work saying, "She did something very useful. She spoke the truth, she gave a very open and sometimes very tough evaluation of what's happening in the country. And that is the value of human rights campaigners, even if they make those in power feel uncomfortable." In so doing, President Medvedev broke new ground by rapidly, expressly and publicly condemning the assassination of a human rights activist with ties to Chechnya.

August 2009 saw Construction Minister Ruslan Amerkhanov murdered in the volatile Russian republic of Ingushetia. Amerkhanov was reported to have been shot dead in his office. It was the latest manifestation of political violence in the Muslim enclave. Only ten days prior, three employees of the Russian ministry charged with dealing with emergencies were themselves shot to death. Moreover, several months earlier, Ingushetia's President Yunus-Bek Yevkurov was critically injured in an attempted assassination.

Then days after the murder of Amerkhanov, a suicide bomber in an explosives-laden truck charged through the gates of the Nazran police station in Ingushetia, killing more than 20 people and injuring at least 100 others. The explosives were detonated just as police officers were gathering in the morning courtyard. It was the single most violent attack in Ingushetia in years.

Note that Ingushetia -- like neighboring Chechnya -- has been the site of violence in recent years. While Chechnya, which was beset by a militant Islamic insurgency, has seen increased stability in the last year, Ingushetia has absorbed a number of refugees from the Chechnya conflict. In fact, during the second Chechen war which began in 1999, Ingushetia was the destination for thousands of Chechen refugees. The United Nations refugee agency has reported that approximately 13,000 displaced people remain in Ingushetia today. Analysts have said that in addition to the refugee



crisis, the emerging wave of violence in Ingushetia has been spurred by a mixture of Islamic radicalism, frustration with the high level of poverty, as well as outrage over corruption and the repressive actions by the local security forces.

Prospects of a Russian loan to Venezuela to help finance the purchase of Russian arms were being discussed on September 9, 2009. Chief Russian foreign policy aide, Sergei Prikhodko, said that the Kremlin was considering such a loan to Venezuela. The announcement came as Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez arrived in Moscow for meetings with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

In addition to the possibility of an arms deal, the meeting was intended to establish multiple areas for bilateral cooperation. To that end, President Medvedev's Press Secretary Natalya Timakova said, "There are plans for the conclusion of documents and agreements on oil and gas cooperation, on ecology in the oil and gas industry, and also an agreement between the Justice Ministries."

After his trip to Moscow, President Chavez confirmed in a weekly televised address that Russia had agreed to lend Venezuela over \$2 billion for the purchase of weapons, such as 100 tanks and a series of anti-aircraft rocket systems, and were intended to boost the country's defensive capacity. President Chavez noted that the anti-aircraft rocket systems would make it difficult for Venezuela to be attacked. He said, "With these rockets, it is going to be very difficult for them to come and bomb us. If that happens, they should know that we will soon have these systems installed, [and] for an enemy that appears on the horizon, there it goes." The move appeared to be in retaliation to a deal struck between Colombia and the United States to allow American troops access to Colombian military bases.

Also in September 2009, Iran put forth its package of proposals to the five permanent United Nations Security Council members and Germany. According to the independent United States-based entity, ProPublica, the five-page proposal, Iran called for "comprehensive, all-encompassing and constructive" negotiations on a range of security issues, including global nuclear disarmament. However, the document detailing Iran's latest proposals on its nuclear ambitions conspicuously failed to mention Iran's own nuclear program.

The United States reacted by registering dissatisfaction with the proposal package. Philip Crowley, the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, said that the proposed measures failed to address the status of Iran's nuclear program. He said, "Our concern is that the response itself did not really address what is the core issue of the international community and the core concern, which is Iran's nuclear ambitions."

Conversely, Russia reacted by suggesting that the Iranian proposals signaled positive progress. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, "Based on a brief review of the Iranian papers my impression is there is something there to use." Lavrov also indicated that there would be no oil



sanctions against Iran. "Some of the sanctions under discussion, including oil and oil products, are not a mechanism to force Iran to co-operate, they are a step to a full-blown blockade and I do not think they would be supported at the UN Security Council."

The American and Russian responses showed divergent approaches to the Iranian nuclear issue, and suggested that consensus on the matter would not be easily achieved.

The controversy surrounding Iran's nuclear program took on greater significance after the IAEA meeting, as discussed above. If Russia was indicating that it would not support strong oil sanctions against Iran, then what options would be available to countries such as the United States, which has made clear that consequences were in the offing if Iran failed to resolve the international community's concerns about its nuclear ambitions?

Indeed, neither the United States nor Israel have ever actually foreclosed the possibility of targeted air strikes against Iran, which would be specifically aimed at preventing that country from obtaining a nuclear weapon. But Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin entered the fray, speaking against not only the imposition of new sanctions, but also targeted military action against Iran. Prime Minister Putin characterized any attack on Iran as "very dangerous" and warned that it would lead to "an explosion of terrorism." That said, he also called on Iran to show "restraint" in its nuclear program and to be mindful of Israel's security concerns. Prime Minister Putin said, "This is a dangerous region and Iran should show responsibility, especially by taking into account Israel's concerns."

Earlier, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was reported to have made a secret visit to Moscow to discuss the matter of Russian arms sales to Iran and Syria. At issue has been rising tensions between Israel and Russia over Moscow's arms sales to Iran and Syria. Of particular concern have been the transfers of weapons to the extremist Islamic organization, Hezbollah, in Lebanon -- a particular flashpoint even since the 2006 between Israel and Lebanon-based Hezbollah.

On Dec. 4, 2009, an attack by Islamic militants on a Russian express train left 26 people dead. The militants targeted the luxury Nevsky Express that traverses Moscow and St. Petersburg in what was one of the worst attacks in recent years. A letter from the rebels claimed responsibility for the attack saying, "This operation was prepared and carried out ... pursuant to the orders of the Emir of the Caucasus Emirate Doku Umarov." It was a clear reference to the Umarov enclave, led by Russia's most sought after rebel leader of the same name who has led a jihadist insurgency aimed at removing the predominantly Islamic North Caucasus region from Russian rule.

While attacks in the North Caucasus have taken place with some degree of frequency, attacks in major Russian cities have been fairly rare. Now, Russia plunged into a state of anxiety as a result of promises from the terrorists to carry out further "acts of sabotage" via its website. Indeed, the rebels noted that they sought to sabotage strategic economic targets across Russia saying, "These

acts of sabotage will continue for as long as those occupying the Caucasus do not stop their policy of killing ordinary Muslims."

For over a decade, Russia has been dealing with a violent Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia. As well, it has fought two wars against Islamic separatists in Chechnya. While the security situation in Chechnya has improved in recent years, the situation has not been nearly as positive in Dagestan and Ingushetia where violent insurgent attacks have increased, leading President Dmitry Medvedev to cast the North Caucasus as Russia's biggest domestic problem.

As if to underscore this claim, only days after the railway bombing on Dec. 4, 2009, another bomb exploded under a train traveling from Siberia to Azerbaijan in Dagestan region. While that incident yielded no deaths, it was deemed to be a "similar act of terror" by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. According to Russian intelligence experts, the use of follow-up attacks has been a hallmark of terrorists in the North Caucasus.

On Jan. 10, 2010, a raid by Russian security forces resulted in the killing of Madrid Begov -- a notorious terrorist in the restive territory of Dagestan. Russian authorities have said that Begov -- the leader of a subversive terrorist enclave, Shamkhal-Makhachkala -- had died after he refused to surrender to security forces. Police have accused Begov of participating in a 2009 attack on a Dagestani security officer near the security service's headquarters in Makhachkala.

February 2010 saw explosions at a house in Russia's restive region of Ingushetia leave at least two people dead and 28 others injured. One of the dead was a police officer while the other was a civilian. Police were searching the area and investigating reports that an improvised explosive device had been planted in the house. The incident was attributed to the ongoing conflict between Islamist insurgents and militants against the pro-Moscow governing authorities.

In early March 2010, an Islamist rebel leader in Ingushetia was killed during a raid by Russian troops. Seven other rebels also died in the incident, according to the Russia's Federal Security Service. Alexander Tikhomirov, also known as Said Buryatsky, was believed to have been responsible for the bombing of a train in November 2009 that left 26 people dead. While Tikhomirov had actually acknowledged his involvement in that attack, which was officially claimed by "Causasian Mujahadeen," he did admit his involvement in the suicide attack on police headquarters in Nazran in August 2009. In that attack, 20 policemen were reported to have died.

In the early morning rush hour of March 29, 2010, female suicide bombers carried out attacks at two Moscow subway stations, killing at least 40 people and injuring more than 80 others. The first blast struck the Lubyanka subway station, followed by a blast at the Park Kultury station. The blasts appeared timed to maximize damage and casualties. Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov said, "It

was a terrorist act carried out by ... female suicide bombers." To that end, suspicion fell on the Chechen "Black Widows" who lost their husbands during the conflict with the Islamic separatist republic in Chechnya. According to CNN, a group associated with Chechen separatists indeed claimed responsibility for the attacks. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev promised that his country "will fight terrorism without hesitation and to the end," while Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said those behind the attacks would be punished. According to RIA Novosti, he said: "It is well known that today a terrible crime against civilians in its effects and disgusting in its character was carried out. I am sure that police will do their best to find and punish the criminals. The terrorists will be destroyed."

Days after that attack, a teenage widow of a senior Caucasus militant was identified as one of the Moscow subway bombers. Dzhennet Abdurakhmanova was believed to be from the Khasavyurtzky region of Dagestan and was married to Islamist militant, Umalat Magomedov, who was killed by Russian security forces at the end of 2009. The second Moscow subway bomber was believed to have been the widow of another Chechen Islamic militant. Also in the days after the subway attacks there were two more suicide bombings -- this time in Kizlyar, leaving 12 people dead, the vast majority of whom were police officers. As before, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev struck a hard tone as he spoke from Russia's restive North Caucasus region. He said, "We must deal sharp dagger blows to the terrorists; destroy them and their lairs." He continued, "The list of measures to fight terrorism must be widened. They must not only be effective but tough, severe and preventative. We need to punish."

On July 2, 2010, a suicide bombing ensued in Grozny, the capital of Russia's restive Chechnya region. Three police officers and two civilians were injured as a result. The attack took place close to Grozny's theatre where a musical performance was set to take place. While the Russian military has not been involved in offensive against militant extremist separatists in recent times, with Russian authorities declaring success in the breakaway republic, clashes and incidences of violence have nonetheless flared occasionally. In addition to Chechnya, neighboring regions of Ingushetia and Dagestan have also seen similar clashes and incidences of violence over the years.

Earlier, on June 28, 2010, ten individuals using aliases were arrested in the United States for allegedly spying for the Russian government. According to the Justice Department of the United States, the ten individuals were charged with conspiracy to act as unlawful agents of a foreign government. Eight of the ten suspects were reported to have had "long-term, deep-cover assignments" in the United States. As well, nine of the ten suspects were charged with conspiracy to launder money. Five of the suspects appeared in a New York federal court where they were ordered to remain in jail pending hearings set for the end of July 2010. Other suspects soon faced court in Virginia. The arrests came after an investigation that went on for several years and, if convicted, the suspects could face five years in prison.

Authorities said they were in pursuit of an eleventh suspect. That eleventh suspect was soon

arrested in Cyprus and released on bail; he was subsequently reported to be missing after failing to present for a scheduled "check in" meeting with the Cypriot police. An arrest warrant was issued for that individual as a result but reports soon emerged that he may have fled that country. The Cypriot authorities were now under fire for mishandling the situation; members of the opposition party in that Mediterranean country railed against the fact that an alleged spy was allowed bail rather than being subject to a detention order.

Meanwhile, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, on a trip to Eastern Europe, made clear that the U.S. was committed to positive ties with Russia, the emerging spy scandal notwithstanding. Secretary Clinton said, "We're committed to building a new and positive relation with Russia." She continued, "We're looking toward the future." For its part, Russia has also indicated that the scenario would not affect closer bilateral relations with the United States.

Indeed, only weeks ago, Russia backed the United States in advancing a plan for further international sanctions against Iran for its controversial nuclear program. The United States-drafted proposal was passed in the United Nations Security Council with Russian support, effectively imposing harsh sanctions against Iran.

By the first week of July 2010, plans were in the works for a Cold War era "spy swap" in which ten Russian agents would be deported in exchange for the return of United States agents being held in Russia. Those agents sought by the United States included a Russian nuclear scientist, a former Russian military intelligence agent and a former KBG agent who were jailed for spying on behalf of the United States. There was also a former military intelligence agent jailed for spying for the United Kingdom.

The exchange ensued in Austria with the ten Russian agents boarding a flight to Moscow, and the four agents released by the Kremlin boarding an American aircraft close to the main passenger terminals at the airport in Vienna. The entire exchange took a total of 90 minutes.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the two countries involved cast the spy swap in positive terms. Russia said that the ten persons in United States custody facing charges there had been freed "for humanitarian considerations." Russia also lauded the move as being illustrative of "the general improvement of Russia-United States relations." Meanwhile, the United States was dismissing claims that only four agents were released in exchange for the ten Russians. United States authorities made clear that the four in question were "high value" and garnered far more usable information in comparison to the ten Russians. Moreover, the White House in the United States was playing up the fact that knowledge of the spy ring and plans for the spy swap had been in the works for several months before the Russians were ever arrested.

On September 5, 2010, a suicide car bombing at a military base in the restive Russian republic of Dagestan left three soldiers dead and 32 others wounded. The suicide bomber was driving an

explosives laden vehicle and charged through the gates of the base in the Dagestan city of Buinaksk. Soldiers opened fire on the attacker before he could get to the center of the base, but the attacker was able to strike a military truck, followed by the explosion. There was speculation that the actions of the soldiers likely decreased the carnage on the scene. Magomedislam Magomedov, the leader of Dagestan, said in an interview with Interfax: "Today's terrorist attack indicates that militants in the republic still have the power to conduct such treacherous attacks."

In Moscow, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev again reiterated his oft-expressed view that violent insurgencies in the North Caucasus have prevailed as Russia's most significant domestic challenge and a threat to national security. The Russian leader has in the past offered the view that poverty alleviation in the region should be part of the solution aimed at stabilization of the area. Indeed, expert analysts have likewise noted that poverty has been a driving motivator behind the decision of many youth to join extremist Islamic militant groups in the North Caucasus.

Days later on Sept. 9, 2010, another suicide bombing took place at a crowded marketplace in the North Caucasus city of Vladikavkaz. At least 17 people died as a result of that attack while close to 140 others were wounded. According to the independent Kavkazsky Uzel website, the bomber was identified as a resident of neighboring Ingushetia. Alleged accomplices of the bomber were apprehended, according to the federal security chief, Alexander Bortnikov. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said of this attack, "The crimes like the one that was committed in the North Caucasus today are aimed at sowing enmity between our citizens. We mustn't allow this." He continued by placing the blame for the violence on "people without souls, without hearts." of them Putin said, "They literally hold nothing sacred. Our common duty is to fight these crimes, these criminals."

While there were no official claims of responsibility for these bombings, they were the latest manifestations of almost-daily violence in the North Caucasus region, usually by Islamic militants. In Dagestan, clashes between security forces and insurgents likely linked with separatists in Chechnya have become regularized fare. Despite successful offensive operations in the North Caucasus, violence by militants has been ongoing for some time, effectively plaguing areas in the region, such as Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan. Of note was the fact that while Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan have predominantly Muslim populations, thereby fueling the possibility that attacks there contain a religious motivation, Vladikavkaz -- located in North Ossetia -- has been home to a predominantly Christian Orthodox population. In Vladikavkaz case, there was speculation that the motivation for that attack resided with the prevailing tensions between ethnic Ossetians and ethnic Ingush. But the North Ossetian city of Beslan was the site of the horrific 2004 siege where Chechen militants took hundreds of hostages at a school, leading to the tragic deaths of more than 330 people, at least half of whom were children.

On September 16, 2010, Chechen separatist leader Akhmed Zakayev was arrested in Poland. He was in that European country to attend a two-day Chechen summit when he was detained. Zakayev was then subject to several hours of interrogation by Polish police, who were acting on



the basis of an international arrest warrant issued by Russia, which sought his extradition on terrorism, murder and kidnapping charges. For his part, Zakayev has denied being involved in terrorism, and indeed, could be considered something of a moderate since he has called for negotiations with Russia -- a position not embraced by most extremist Chechen separatists. Since being granted asylum in the United Kingdom in the first part of the 2000s, Zakayev has been known to travel within Europe. But in this case, he was arrested by Polish authorities who had no choice but to act on the decision by Interpol to place Zakayev on its most wanted list, at Russia's request.

Attention was soon focused on the question of if Zakayev would actually be extradited to Russia to face charges. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that although the Chechen separatist leader had been arrested, there was no guarantee that Polish courts would rule in favor of extradition to Russia. Meanwhile, the head of the international affairs committee of the Russian Duma or lower house of parliament, Konstantin Kosachev, applauded Poland for taking its international obligations seriously.

A day later on September 17, 2010, a Polish court ruled that Zakayev could be released pending its decision on the matter of extradition. But even if the Polish court eventually ruled in favor of extradition, according to Polish Finance Minister Jan Rostowski, the government of Poland still had the power to intervene on behalf of Zakayev. Russia responded to events unfolding in Poland in a less than favorable manner this time. Konstantin Kosachev warned Poland that its failure to act in accordance with international law would yield deleterious consequences.

In mid-October 2010, Islamic militants stormed the parliament in Chechnya, killing several people and injuring even more. Two guards and an official were among the dead. The militants shouted Islamic slogans, detonated a bomb and opened fire using guns as members of parliament arrived at the compound for work. Many people, included members of parliament already inside the building, were able to avoid the bloodshed by running to upper floors. This was the latest episode of violence erupting in Chechnya, despite Moscow's official declaration ending counter-terrorism operations in the breakaway republic more than a year prior. Since then, Moscow has relied on the pro-Moscow efforts of Chechnyan leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, to eradicate the remaining threat by Islamist separatist rebels. However, recent times have seen an increase in insurgent violence not only in Chechnya but also other regions of the North Caucasus such as Ingushetia. As well, only days after the attack on the Chechnyan parliament, explosives were discovered and defused close to a bus station in the republic of Kabardino-Balkariya, while the director of a children's rehabilitation centre in Dagestan was shot to death.

Despite successful offensive operations in the North Caucasus, violence by Islamist separatist militants has been ongoing for some time, as discussed above, effectively plaguing areas in the region, such as Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has often expressed the view that violent insurgencies in the North Caucasus have prevailed as



Russia's most significant domestic challenge and a threat to national security. The Russian leader has in the past offered the view that poverty alleviation in the region should be part of the solution aimed at stabilization of the area. Indeed, expert analysts have likewise noted that poverty has been a driving motivator behind the decision of many youth to join extremist Islamic militant groups in the North Caucasus.

### **Special Entry**

#### ***U.S. and Russia forge agreement to cut stockpiles of nuclear weapons as Obama and Medvedev set new tone for bilateral relations***

On July 6, 2009, United States President Barack Obama met with his Russian counterpart, President Dmitry Medvedev, for talks on their countries' respective nuclear arsenals. Following three hours of discussion, the two world leaders signed an outline agreement aimed at reducing their countries' stockpiles of nuclear weapons. The "joint understanding" was signed in a public ceremony in Moscow and would cut deployed nuclear warheads to under 1,700 on both sides within seven years of a forging new accord. That new accord would stand in replacement of the 1991 Start I treaty, which was set to expire at the close of 2009.

A statement from the White House explained that the new treaty would "include effective verification measures" and "enhance the security of both the US and Russia, as well as provide predictability and stability in strategic offensive forces."

While the terms of the new concord would still leave both countries with enough weaponry to destroy one another, the move was intended to stop the diplomatic "drift" away from cooperation on shared interests, which had occurred in recent times.

To that end, President Obama said the United States and Russia were both "committed to leaving behind the suspicion and the rivalry of the past." He also noted that the new agreement was part of an initiative "to reset U.S.-Russian relations so that we can co-operate more effectively in areas of common interest."

For his part, President Medvedev said that the talks had been "very frank and very sincere" and were "without any doubt, the meeting we had been waiting for in Russia and the United States." The Russian leader went on to state, "I would like particularly to stress that our country would like to reach a level of cooperation with the United States that would really be worthy of the 21st Century, and which would ensure international peace and security."

In addition to reduced levels of nuclear warheads and delivery systems, including intercontinental ballistic missiles, there were also provisions for submarine-launched missiles and bombers.

In a separate agreement, Russia said it would allow the United States military to transport troops and weaponry across its territory to Afghanistan, where the war against resurgent Taliban and al-Qaida was ongoing. This use of Russian territory to move troops and equipment into the conflict zone would foreclose the use of routes through Pakistan, which have been the target of attacks by militants on a frequent and increasing basis.

In another development, Russia and the United States agreed to establish a joint commission, which would facilitate greater cooperation on energy, fighting terrorism and dealing with narcotics trafficking.

In a particularly significant move, the two countries agreed to resume military cooperation, which was suspended in 2008 as a result of the conflict between Russia and Georgia.

Yet unresolved was the prevailing source of controversy on both sides -- the United States' plan to develop a missile defence shield system in Eastern Europe. This proposal has been strenuously resisted by Russia, which eschews greater American domination in its own backyard. In a move aimed at gradually moving the two countries toward consensus on the issue, both Obama and Medvedev said that they backed a joint study on the threat of ballistic missiles and the institution of a data exchange center.

President Obama, who characterized former President Vladimir Putin as having "one foot in the old ways of doing business and one foot in the new," met with the prime minister of Russia on July 7, 2009.

### ***U.S. President Obama abandon's Bush era missile shield; Russia lauds move***

On September 17, 2009, United States President Barack Obama announced that his administration was abandoning the Bush-era missile defense shield program in Eastern Europe, which caused the grave consternation of Russia. In its place, President Obama unveiled a "phased, adaptive approach" for missile defense on the European continent. At a news conference in the White House, President Obama said, "This new approach will provide capabilities sooner, build on proven systems and offer greater defenses against the threat of missile attack than the 2007 European missile defense program."

President Obama explained that he made the decision based on an assessment of Iran's missile threat and the Pentagon's "phased and adaptive" approach, which would ensure the American homeland defense. While President Obama acknowledged the threat posed by Iran, and although he insisted that he was committed to "deploying strong missile defense systems which are adaptable to the threats of the 21st century," he also wanted to institute a plan that would be appropriate and effective in responding to the current intelligence assessment of Iran's missile programs. To that end, recent intelligence appeared to indicate that Iran's capacity to attach

warheads to long-range missiles would not pose an immediate strategic threat to the United States and its allies. Indeed, Iran was more likely to pursue short-range and medium-range missile development.

President Obama noted, "The best way to responsibly advance our security and the security of our allies is to deploy a missile defense system that best responds to the threats that we face and that utilizes technology that is both proven and cost-effective." He explained that the new missile defense architecture would provide "stronger, smarter and swifter defenses. "

The plan would essentially nullify former President George W. Bush's plan to deploy 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar system in the Czech Republic as part of its European missile shield, charged with preventing European allies from missile threats by "rogue states," such as Iran. Bush's plan had been criticized by some as being impractical to implement. Perhaps more significantly, Russia strongly opposed the missile defense shield concept and argued that it posed a security threat to the region. The matter caused a devolution in positive relations between the United States and Russia at the time, with Russia warning of retaliatory moves.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Russia was now lauding the decision by the Obama administration to dispense with the Bush missile defense shield system. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev welcomed the shift as "positive" and made clear that there were now "good conditions" for United States-Russia talks on dealing with missile proliferation. It was apparent that the "reset button" on bilateral relations between the two countries had, indeed, been pressed.

Meanwhile, Russia quickly announced that it would now scrap its own controversial plans to deploy missiles close to Poland. That proposal had been advanced in response to the Bush missile shield plan. But now, as noted by Deputy Defense Minister Vladimir Popovkin during an radio interview in Moscow, "Naturally, we will cancel the measures that Russia planned to take in response to the deployment of U.S. missile defense systems." He continued, "Common sense has finally prevailed over ambitions."

For his part, President Obama said on an interview with CBS on September 20, 2009, that his decision was not dictated by Russian opposition. He said, "The Russians don't make determinations about what our defense posture is." He continued, "If the by-product of it is that the Russians feel a little less paranoid... then that's a bonus." President Obama also noted that one of the bonus effects could be that the Russians might be more willing to work with the United States in dealing with ballistic missiles from Iran or nuclear development in Iran.

### ***Missile defense talks to commence between Russia and the United States; geopolitics and arms control also on agenda***

United States officials were expected to be in Russia on Oct. 12, 2009, for missile defense

negotiations with Russian counterparts. The Russian were led by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov while Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Ellen Tauscher, was to head the United States delegation. After the groundwork has been established, further talks were set to take place later in the week between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Speaking ahead of the negotiations, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said the United States and Russia must advance strategic arms reduction. In an interview with Russia's Channel Once, President Medvedev said, "While dealing with non-proliferation, we must simultaneously deal with the limitation and reduction of strategic offensive potentials -- both carriers and nuclear warheads." Medvedev continued, "Today we have the chance to advance this process. We will be dealing with this. And I call on our American partners to do the same."

With the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty set to expire on Dec. 5, 2009, President Medvedev said he believed Russia and the United States could reach a new strategic arms reduction accord. He observed, "There is definitely a chance for the agreement, since the new U.S. administration has demonstrated interest in this issue." Medvedev also said he did not support the expansion of nuclear weapons states recognized by the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. Striking a tone harmonious with his American counterpart, President Barack Obama, president Medvedev said, "We are against the extension of the nuclear club. Otherwise the situation will get out of control. The world without nuclear weapons is an ideal which should be on our agenda."

President Medvedev also reiterated his appreciation for President Obama's decision to scrap the Bush-era missile defense shield plan, calling President Obama's new missile shield plans "sensible." He additionally noted that Russia was eager to extend missile defense cooperation with the United States and Europe.

On October 13, 2009, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton traveled to Moscow to meet with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. In addition to the issues related to missile defense and a new successor treaty aimed at strategic arms reduction, the two diplomats were reported to have discussed approaches to dealing with geopolitical challenges in Iran, the wider Middle East, and Afghanistan, as well as possible joint work on climate change.

In an interview with the Newsweek's Russian edition, which was published in the German daily, Die Welt, and translated by Reuters, Secretary Clinton said that her country and Russia found broad agreement on the issue of Iran's controversial nuclear program. While there was no specific promise from Moscow to impose harsh sanctions on Iran if diplomacy failed, Secretary Clinton said, "We have agreed to make diplomacy the priority with Iran. But if we are not successful, we will consider other steps." She described her talks with Russian leaders as "very constructive" and noted that the United States and Russia were in "full agreement" on the path before them. The

United States' top diplomat also lauded Russia for not following through with plans to deliver high-grade S300 air defense missiles to Iran. Secretary Clinton additionally addressed the Obama administration's plan to scap the Bush-era missile defense system in Eastern Europe saying, "On the question of the missile shield, we are very open to cooperation with the Russians. We have made this clear to them. We believe that a joint missile defense would make sense."

On Dec. 21, 2009, Russia and the United States were reported to have made good progress on negotiations on a new strategic arms agreement. In an off-side meeting at the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit, United States President Barack Obama met with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and expressed confidence that a new treaty would soon be signed. At issue was the impending expiration of the existing Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and the need to forge a new agreement.

### ***Russia and United States Sign New Arms Treaty***

On Feb. 24, 2010, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged her Russian counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, to move forward with efforts to finalize a new arms reduction treaty. During a briefing, State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said the United States' top diplomat "emphasized to the foreign minister that our negotiators are close to reaching an agreement and encouraged Russia to continue to move ahead, push hard so we can reach an agreement in the next couple of weeks." That timeline seemed to coincide with Russian expectations, since a Russian lawmaker, Konstantin Kosachyov, noted that discussions were underway on a new treaty to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which expired on Dec. 5, 2009.

In March 2010, Secretary of State Clinton was in Moscow for meetings with Foreign Minister Lavrov. From Moscow, Clinton and Lavrov noted that a new START would soon be finalized. At a joint press conference with Lavrov, Clinton said, "The results of the latest negotiation rounds lead us to believe we'll be reaching a final agreement soon." At issue is a plan that would reduce the United States' stockpile of 2,000 strategic nuclear weapons, and Russia's stockpile of close to 3,000, be reduced to between 1,500 and 1,675 warheads respectively. There was, however, some dissonance on verification measures aimed at quantifying weapons and launch systems.

Meanwhile, as progress was being made on a successor treaty to START, United States President Barack Obama called for a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons, as part of a changing national security strategy. To this end, he said: "The United States reaffirms our resolve to strengthen the non-proliferation regime to meet the challenges of the 21st century as we pursue our ultimate vision of a world without nuclear weapons." As President Obama marked the 40th anniversary of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, he intimated new post-Cold War policy, saying: "Our forthcoming Nuclear Posture Review will move beyond outdated Cold War thinking and

reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, even as we maintain a safe, secure and effective nuclear deterrent." President Obama also said he would work to seek ratification on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1996, but which had yet to be enforced. These statements appeared to reify President Obama's vision of a nuclear-free world, which was laid out in a keynote speech in Prague in 2009. It also came ahead of a nuclear security summit, set to take place in Washington D.C. in April 2010.

On March 24, 2010, the United States and Russia announced they had arrived at a breakthrough agreement that would pave the way for the establishment of a new START. Titled "Measures to Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms," the new agreement was a milestone in the decades-long thrust to decrease the chances of nuclearized warfare. Indeed, it could arguably be characterized as one of the most important treaties forged in a generation.

Both President Obama and his Russian counterpart, President Dmitry Medvedev, were expected to sign the landmark accord, which provides for the reduction of long-range nuclear weapons on both sides, and sets the path for further disarmament in the future. The accord was illustrative of the new texture of bilateral relations, marked by an increased level of cooperation and trust between the United States and Russia in the last two years. "Measures to Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms" was expected to be signed on April 8, 2010, in the Czech capital of Prague, symbolically marking President Barack Obama's call for a world without nuclear weapons in that very city a year earlier. The timing would also ensure that both the United States and Russia would be able to enter the forthcoming Summit on Nuclear Security with a joint claim of accomplishment. They would also have the moral high ground in their efforts to pressure Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

Lauding the treaty as the most comprehensive weapons control accord in two decades, President Obama declared: "With this agreement, the United States and Russia - the two largest nuclear powers in the world - also send a clear signal that we intend to lead." He continued, "By upholding our own commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, we strengthen our global efforts to stop the spread of these weapons, and to ensure that other nations meet their own responsibilities." Via his spokesperson, President Medvedev said the treaty "reflects the balance of interests of both nations." As well, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the treaty marked a "new level of trust" between the two countries.

That being said, on April 8, 2010, President Obama and President Medvedev held private talks at Prague Castle ahead of the signing ceremony. Later, both leaders signed their names on the new document that would significantly reduce the arsenal of nuclear weapons held by their respective countries. The two leaders of the countries controlling 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons made it clear that membership in the global nuclear club came with extraordinary responsibility, and a vision of non-proliferation. President Obama said, "This day demonstrates the determination of



the United States and Russia... to pursue responsible global leadership. Together, we are keeping our commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which must be the foundation of global non-proliferation." Meanwhile, President Medvedev said: "This is a win-win situation. No one stands to lose in this agreement. Both parties won ... the entire world community won." In effect, the fact that the two countries were able to find consensus on such a complex matter, and the two leaders were able to sign one of the most important treaties in decades, signaled the anticipated "re-setting" of United States-Russian relations sought by the Obama administration in the United States when it came to power.

The difficult process of forging and signing such a bilateral agreement would be followed by the equally challenging process of ratification in the United States Senate. With an eye on this process, President Obama met in the Oval Office with the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the United States Senate, Senator John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) and the ranking republican, Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana) to discuss this imperative. To the end, Senator Kerry said, "A well-designed treaty will send an important message to the rest of the world that America is prepared to lead efforts with key stakeholders to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons." It should be noted that the new START would also have to be ratified by the Russian Duma. Nevertheless, ahead of a global security summit scheduled to take place in Washington, Russia and the United States would be able to claim the high ground on leadership and responsibility among nuclear-armed nation states.

### ***Latest Developments --***

In November 2010, President Obama was calling on the United States Senate to ratify the treaty. He characterized the need to do so as "a national security imperative" on November 18, 2010, demanding that the upper chamber of Congress act affirmatively before departing at the close of the year. Bringing as much pressure to bear, President Obama drew upon support from former secretaries of states and secretaries of defense from both political parties in the United States -- Republican and Democratic -- to emphasize the urgency in ratifying the treaty. President Obama noted that his country would not "afford to gamble" with the matter. He emphasized that the United States could not risk alienating Russia, whose support would be needed in pressuring Iran, given that country's suspected program of nuclear proliferation. But delay was on the mind of some Republican senators who rejected the president's call for a review process during the Senate's lame duck session of the outgoing Senate. Speaking to this issue, President Obama said: "Every month that goes by without a treaty means that we are not able to verify what's going on on the ground in Russia. And if we delay indefinitely, American leadership on nonproliferation and America's national security will be weakened." Note that despite heavy Republican opposition in the United States, the treaty was ratified in the United States Senate and then went through the ratification process at home in Russia.

The new arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russia went into effect on Feb. 5, 2011, effectively replacing the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his United States counterpart, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, exchanged ratification documents pertaining to "Measures to Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms" or "New START" at a conference in Germany. Secretary of State Clinton said that the treaty was "another example of the kind of clear-eyed co-operation that is in everyone's interests." Foreign Minister Lavrov characterized the new treaty as "a product of the understanding that unilateral approaches to security are counterproductive." He continued, "The treaty that enters into force today will enhance international stability."

The "New START" would significantly reduce the arsenal of nuclear weapons held by the United States and Russia; it would limit the United States' stockpile of 2,000 strategic nuclear weapons, and Russia's stockpile of close to 3,000, to between 1,500 and 1,675 warheads respectively. "New START" was regarded as a milestone in the decades-long thrust to decrease the chances of nuclearized warfare. Indeed, it could arguably be characterized as one of the most important treaties forged in a generation

### **2011 - 2012 Update:**

On Jan. 24, 2011, a bomb attack at Moscow's Domodedovo airport left more than 35 people dead and at least 170 others wounded -- many of them critically. Russian authorities said the explosion that took place in the international arrivals hall of the airport, was carried out by a suicide bomber and appeared to be an act of terrorism. The location of the suicide bomb attack was not a restricted area of the airport; instead, it was open to non-passengers. Eyewitnesses reported that the suicide bomber yelled, "I'll kill you all!" before presumably detonating the explosives strapped to his body.

The Federal Investigative Committee said the bombing was aimed "first and foremost" at foreign citizens. Indeed, among the dead were citizens from the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Russia. Perhaps not surprisingly, suspicion in this case quickly fell on North Caucasus Islamist extremists, with a record of terror attacks, as the likely culprits.

President Dmitry Medvedev delayed his impending trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos, increased security across Moscow, convened an emergency meeting with officials, and said that a commission of inquiry would be activated "to conduct urgent on-the-spot investigations." The Russian president also warned that those behind the attack would be hunted down and punished to the full extent of the law. President Medvedev demanded that the organizations responsible for the attack be "eliminated." To that end, three suspects were being pursued in connection to the airport bombing. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was echoing the president's hard line, saying

that "retribution is inevitable." He continued, "This was an abominable crime in both its senselessness and its cruelty."

At the close of January 2011, Russian investigators said they had identified the Domodedovo Airport suicide bomber as a 20-year-old man from the North Caucasus. As well, at least two people were arrested on allegations that they were involved in the bombing. As well, Russian authorities said that several other suspects in possession of pertinent information about the terror attack had been detained.

Blame was also expanding to the authorities who may not have properly responded to threats of a potential act of terrorism at the airport. The news organization, RIA Novosti, reported that Russian authorities were warned in advance that an "act of terror" was in the offing at one of Moscow's airports. President Medvedev attributed blame to airport officials for "clear security breaches," and said that a shake-up was likely if the evidence pointed toward criminal negligence by transport officials. To that end, the federal Security Service later announced that several officers had been fired.

President Medvedev also seemed to hint toward major changes in Russia's security system, including the establishment of Israeli-style airport security. He appeared to be referring to Israel's Ben Gurion airport, which is generally regarded as one of the safest in the world, and the wider airport security apparatus in Israel, which depends on "smart profiling," spot checks by armed guards, preliminary checkpoints, multiple rounds of surveying of luggage, intense vigilance, and other measures oriented toward to maximizing security.

By the second week of February 2011, a Chechen warlord, Doku Umarov, had claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing at the Moscow airport. He also threatened further attacks, insinuating that the extremist Islamic insurgency would intensify with more "special operations" in the future if Russia refused to allow theCaucasus to become an independent Islamic state. In a videotaped message, he warned, "Among us there are hundreds of brothers who are prepared to sacrifice themselves." Umarov, who has been seen more of a philosophical separatist leader rather than a military figure, has claimed responsibility for a number of terrorist attacks, including the double suicide bombing of the Moscow subway system in 2010.

The threat emanating from the Caucasus has long been Russia's most pressing internal challenge. Speaking of the difficulty in keeping the Russian people safe from the threat of terrorism from extremist Islamic separatists, Dmitri Peskov, a government spokesperson said, "The government is taking all necessary measures. But the nature of terror is that none of us, none of the countries in this world, are free from this threat. None of us could ensure 100 percent security level." Vladimir Vasilyev, the head of parliament's security committee, issued a similar warning. In an interview with the media, he said, "All residents of our country need to realize that we will have to live under the threat of terror for a long time to come."

Terrorism in Russia was not a new phenomenon with militant Islamic North Caucasus terrorists behind a number of attacks over the years. In October 2010, militant extremists stormed the parliament in Chechnya. In March 2010, the Moscow underground transit system was hit by two female suicide bombers from Dagestan. In November 2009, the express train from Moscow to St. Petersburg was hit by North Caucasus Islamic terrorists. Years earlier in 2004, Chechen terrorists carried out a brutal and bloody attack on a school in Beslan. Even earlier, Chechen rebels fought two wars with the Russian military since the 1990s in the fight for Chechen independence. But that effort seemed to have yielded some success for Russian authorities who, with the help of Moscow-backed strongman, Ramzan Kadyrov, claimed that the war in Chechnya was over. Clearly, that success had been concentrated in Chechnya with resistance spreading to other areas in the Caucasus region. Abject poverty in the wider area of the Caucasus only served to create more fertile socio-political soil for extremism.

Returning to Umarov's claim of responsibility, it was becoming increasingly clear that the ambitions of Islamist extremists had expanded from the goal of Chechnya's independence to a broader Jihadist ambition of creating an Islamic state across the Caucasus, governed by Shar'ia law.

On Feb. 27, 2012, Ukrainian authorities in the port city of Odessa said that they foiled an assassination plot against Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

According to the Russian news agency, Ria Novosti, two suspects were shown on Russian television detained admitting their involvement in an assassination plot that targeted Putin. One suspect, Ilya Pyanin, claimed that he had been hired by Chechen militant leader, Doku Umarov, and tasked with killing Putin. A second suspect, Adam Osmayev, was identified as being on an international wanted list since 2007. It should be noted that a third suspect, Ruslan Madayev, died in an explosion in Odessa that appeared to have sparked the discovery of the assassination conspiracy. That conspiracy supposedly involved a plan to plant mines on Kutuzovsky Avenue in Moscow, which has been regularly traversed by Putin. Details of the plan were reportedly discovered on laptops seized at the Odessa apartment where the aforementioned explosion occurred.

It should be noted that if Umarov was, indeed, shown to be the central orchestrator of this plot, the motivation for the attempted assassination could lie with the Chechen separatist movement. That movement has long sought to impose an Islamist state throughout the North Caucasus and has been embroiled in a bloody and lengthy fight with Russian security forces in the region. As the principal architect of Russia's military campaign in Chechnya, it was conceivable that Putin might be at the top of the Chechen rebels' target list.

### **Primer on 2011 Parliamentary and 2012 Presidential Elections in Russia**

## Parliamentary elections report (Dec. 4, 2011) --

A parliamentary election in Russia was scheduled to take place in December 2011. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev confirmed this timeline when he announced that the country's parliamentary elections would be held on Dec. 4, 2011. Although the Russian Federal Assembly, known as the Federalnoye Sobraniye, was a bicameral entity composed of the Sovyet Federatsiyi (Federation Council) and the Gosudarstvennaya Duma (State Duma), in fact, only the 450 seats in the State Duma were up for election. Typically, members of the State Duma are elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms. The last elections were held in December 2007; the United Russia Party of President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have dominated Russian politics, and won an overwhelming victory of 64 percent in those previous elections. Clearly, United Russia hoped to continue its reign on supremacy following the 2011 elections.

Ahead of the parliamentary contest, the head of Russia's only independent election monitoring group, Golos, was detained for several hours. Lilya Shibanova, who was held at Moscow's main airport after refusing to hand over her laptop to authorities to be checked, said that the move constituted political pressure and intimidation. While she was subsequently released, her group, Golos, was fined for allegedly violating election law. The violation involved the release of "election-related opinion polls and research" in the days ahead of the election -- a time period when such opinion survey research is not allowed to be published.

This scenario notwithstanding, the elections went forward as scheduled and Russians went to the polls to express their political voices. Indeed, President Medvedev noted that Russia's political parties enjoyed "free and equal competition" in elections. His pronouncement would prove to hold some merit as the outcome was not the one that the president might have ideally preferred. With the votes counted, it was clear that the composition of the Duma would be somewhat different in the new parliament. Specifically, it would no longer be as heavily dominated by the United Russia Party of Putin and Medvedev.

Indeed, United Russia appeared to have garnered just under a bare majority in the Duma (49.6 percent) in terms of the popular vote, but 238 seats of the 450-seat lower chamber. In this way, the ruling United Party of Russia would claim victory, albeit with reduced support. The new parliament would see representation by the Communist Party with 19.8 percent, and 92 seats as well as the social-democratic Fair Russia with 12.8 percent and 64 seats, and the nationalist Liberal Democrats, with 11.42 percent and 56 seats. Prime Minister Putin parlayed the election results into populist political rhetoric, noting that the outcome reflected the "real situation" in the country. Meanwhile, President Medvedev said that the United Russia would have to close ranks with other political parties on certain issues in the new Duma, in order to get some things done. He said, "We will have to take into account the more complex configuration of the Duma and for some issues we will have to join coalition bloc agreements."

Following the outcome of the 2011 parliamentary elections that returned Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's United Russia party to power by a slim parliamentary majority, Russians took to the streets of Moscow in pro-government and anti-government rallies. Anti-government demonstrators were claiming that the elections were flawed and subject to both vote rigging and ballot box stuffing. Indeed, tens of thousands of Russians took to the streets in Moscow on Dec. 10, 2011, to protest the election results. Protests were also reported in St. Petersburg, the southern Siberian city of Barnaul, Krasnoyarsk, Vladivostok, Chita and Khabarovsk. The spirit of discontent was heightened when the Communist Party posted a notice on its website stating that it did not recognize the results of the elections as valid. But supporters of the United Russia Party were also in the streets to rally support for Putin. As well, Russian authorities deploying thousands of police and Interior Ministry troops for the purpose of "ensuring the security of the citizens."

As the mass action continued, according to Amnesty International, more than 420 people were arrested in the demonstrations across Moscow and St. Petersburg, including several journalists and activists. Amnesty International urged the release of the detainees, which were referred to by the human rights group as "prisoners of conscience." Russia's presidential Council for Human Rights also expressed concerns over the election results and the detainment of protesters. Even former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev entered the fray, calling for new elections, given the strong sense of irregularities that had taken hold in Russia.

For his part, on Dec. 11, 2011, Russian President Medvedev posted on his Facebook page that he had called for an investigation into the alleged elections fraud; he also expressed disagreement with the protesters' slogans. His post read as follows: "Under the Constitution, Russian citizens have the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly. People have a right to express their positions and that is what they did yesterday. It is good that everything was held within the law. I agree neither with the slogans, nor the statements made in the protests. Nevertheless, I have ordered probes into all reports from polling stations regarding the compliance with the electoral laws." The Russian president was met by hostile Russian Facebook posters who expressed vituperative scorn for his pledge.

With the Russian citizenry in a less than amiable mood as regards the governing leadership, President Medvedev on Dec. 23, 2011, announced a series of political reforms that would relax restrictions on political parties and presidential candidates. The proposals were enconced in draft bills that were sent to the State Duma for approval. According to the Kremlin, the proposal was intended to "liberalize the requirements" for the creation and activities of political parties." Certainly, the changes would make it easier for small political blocs to be registered with the party membership threshold reduced from 50,000 to 500.

The comprehensive reform proposal was not expected to deter protesters from again taking to the streets to register discontent over the entrenched political interests in Russia. Certainly, it was clear that the protest movement was alive and well in Russia on Dec. 24, 2011, when tens of thousands of people gathered in Moscow to once again protest the outcome of the parliamentary elections



held weeks earlier.

Presidential Election (March 4, 2012) --

Summary:

Russians voted in a presidential election on March 4, 2012. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who previously served as president, was looking to return to the helm as president of Russia. On election day, after the votes were cast, exit poll data and preliminary results indicated that Putin was on track to win the presidency in the first round with around 60 percent of the vote share.

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In Detail:

Note that a presidential election in Russia was expected to be held in 2012. In September 2011, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who previously served as president, said he intended to contest that election with an eye on returning to that post. Current President Dmitry Medvedev indicated support for his mentor, Putin, and that he would consider taking on the role of prime minister himself. President Medvedev said that he was interested in "engaging in the practical work of the government." It was apparent that both Putin and Medvedev wanted to remain in the top posts of Russian government but did not want to contest elections against one another. In mid-October 2011, the ruling United Russia Party confirmed that it would formally nominate Putin as its presidential candidate for the presidential election scheduled to be held on March 4, 2012. On Nov. 27, 2011, as expected, the United Russia party officially nominated Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as its presidential candidate in the forthcoming election.

For his part, Putin made clear that since he intended to resume his post as president, he expected the current president -- Medvedev -- to hold the post of prime minister in the future. Putin said, "I would like to once again stress that if the voters trust us with forming the government, that they vote for the United Russia and me as the Russian president... Dmitry Anatolyevich (Medvedev) would undoubtedly head the government." Putin called for a national modernization plan to be implemented in Russia as part of an economic development strategy. To that end, he noted, "Russia should end its dependence on oil and gas and perform a transition to the innovative development model."

On Dec. 11, 2011, Russian billionaire and leading industrialist in the precious metals sector Mikhail Prokhorov announced he would contest the presidential election to be held in 2012. Speaking at a news conference, Prokhorov said, "I made probably the most serious decision in my life. I will run for president." Prokhorov seemed realistic about his prospects at the polls against Putin.

Indeed, Prokhorov acknowledged that his bid for the presidency was unlikely to receive popular support in 2012, but that he could potentially see inroads over the course of "the next 10 or 15 years."

Another candidate was also known to be contesting the presidential election -- Sergei Mironov, leader of the center-left A Just Russia party. Other candidates included Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov and Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) chief Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. However, Yabloko leader Grigory Yavlinsky was barred from contesting the election as some of the signatures collected in the process of registration were deemed to be invalid.

Note that in January 2012, polling data showed diminishing support for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's presidential bid. The state-run polling agency, VTsIOM, said that Putin commanded about 48 percent in popular support -- far less than his landslide-levels of support in previous elections. Still, that 48 percent -- while diminished in comparison to previous levels of support for Putin -- was nonetheless an improvement over VTsIOM's previous polling data, which showed Putin with only 42 percent of voters' support. Another polling outfit, the independent Levada Center, indicated less optimistic election results for Putin. Indeed, Levada Center forecast Putin to carry only 42 percent of the vote -- not enough for victory in the first round of voting. Meanwhile, VTsIOM said that support for other candidates was holding fairly stable -- with 10 percent for Zyuganov, nine percent for Zhirinovskiy, five percent for Mironov, three percent for Prokhorov, and two percent for Yavlinsky.

By February 2012, VTsIOM found momentum on the side of Putin, with 53.3 percent of respondents saying they support the prime minister who was seeking to return to the presidency. The VTsIOM survey showed Zyuganov was significantly behind with 10 percent of support, while Zhirinovskiy had 8.2 percent, and Prokhorov had 4.6 percent of support. Since Putin would need at least 50 percent of the vote share in the March election to avoid a second-round runoff, this polling result at the start of February 2012 was encouraging for his ambitions.

A week ahead of the Russian presidential election, polling data indicated that Putin was enjoying momentum and was on track to win Russia's presidential election in the first round. According to Levada Center's poll, Putin was expected to receive about 63 percent of the vote share -- well over the 50 percent majority. Following the trends of the weeks before, Zyuganov would come in significantly behind in second place with about 15 percent, while Zhirinovskiy continued to track with about eight percent.

Also in February 2012, tens of thousands of people participated in a number of political rallies in Moscow. The rallies appeared to be roughly divided into two categories: pro-Putin events and anti-Putin demonstrations. The anti-Putin contingent alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections held in December 2011 and urged voters to deny the former president a return to power. Pro-Putin elements accused the opposition of fomenting discord and seeking a revolution that would ultimately result in Russia being too closely linked with Western powers. On Feb. 17, 2012, a pro-

Putin rally was organized by Federation of Trade Unions of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region and attracted tens of thousands of participants. The organizers called on Russians to vote for Putin in the interests of the political stability of Russia. As February 2012 was coming to a close, further such rallies were ongoing. It should be noted that Russian authorities made it clear that even after the presidential election was decided, it would not try to stop protests or such mass action, which could well ensue.

The political landscape of Russia at the time in late February 2012 was also dominated by news of a foiled plot, apparently by Chechen rebels, to assassinate Putin. That news was likely to remind Russians of Putin's leading role in the fight against Chechen Islamic militant separatists. While human rights activists have criticized Putin for orchestrating a harsh crackdown against the movement, many Russians have applauded him for his hard line actions in this regard, given Chechen militants' willingness to use terrorism to further their aims. Accordingly, Putin's national security record could well be beneficial to him at the polls.

As March 2012 began, and as the Russian presidential election loomed only days away, the Russian Central Electoral Commission (CEC) rejected complaints submitted by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and the League of Voters about the unbalanced provision of broadcast time by a number of channels to presidential candidates. The CEC resolution determined that the complaints lacked objective foundation and concluded that there was "no evidence of equality violations of the candidates for the post of Russian president in the placing of informational materials on Channel One, Rossiya 1, Centre TV or REN TV, or of any discrimination concerning their access to airtime."

That case, along with the aforementioned political rallies, drew attention to the matter of a functioning opposition in Russia. Was there an effective opposition force in Russia presenting a serious challenge to the traditional power base in this country? Does Russia embrace the notion of vigorous and open debate, common in mature democracies? Or does Russia's autocratic legacy prevail at the socio-cultural level? Is Russia a venue for thriving political activism, or, it is a country that continues to adhere to a sense of order?

While not a direct response to these questions, the news agency, Interfax, released a survey on the matter of opposition forces and political mass action. The survey showed that the majority of Russians -- 55 percent -- believe that political opposition should exist in the country. The survey, which was conducted by Public Opinion Foundation, also found that most Russians believe that the country's authorities should be more responsive to the opposition. That being said, 12 percent of respondents expressed a penchant for autocracy, saying that there was no need for an opposition. About a quarter of respondents said that they did not believe a political opposition actually existed in Russia. Close to 80 percent of those who replied to the survey questions said that they were not interested in participating in protest action; only 13 percent responded positively to the idea of protest participation. That all being said, an overwhelming 84 percent of respondents said that they did not believe Russia was in need of any kind of revolution at this time.

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Perhaps those last two data points would prove to be the most salient indicators of the outcome of the forthcoming Russian presidential election. Stated differently, with the vast majority of Russians not enthused about either the notion of radical change, or, participating in protest action, it was quite possible that they would vote in favor of the status quo. The status quo would, more than likely, line up with Putin as president.

Heading into the Russian presidential election, the main question would be whether or not Putin could win outright victory in the first round. Polling data right before election day gave Putin a clear majority; it was yet to be seen if this would hold on March 4, 2012. Note also that according to Russia's Central Elections Commission, almost 670 international monitors from various international, national, and regional agencies, were accredited to observe the Russian presidential election to be held on March 4, 2012.

On election day, turnout was reported to be high at 58 percent -- notably higher than the level of turnout in the 2008 election. After Russian voters had cast their ballots, exit poll data and preliminary results indicated that Putin had won election, having secured around 60 percent of the vote share. Other candidates were trailing significantly behind, including Putin's toughest rival, Gennady Zyuganov. Given the fact that he had crossed the 50 percent majority threshold outright, Putin avoided having to contest a second round.

In an appearance with current President Dmitry Medvedev, Putin claimed victory declaring, "I promised you we would win, and we won," he said. "Glory to Russia!" He continued saying, "We have won in an open and honest battle. We proved that no-one can force anything on us." Outside the Kremlin, pro-Putin supporters gathered in the tens of thousands with flags and banners with messages such as "We believe in Putin," to celebrate the election victory for their standard bearer and his imminent return to the helm of the Russian presidency.

Not all Russians were celebrating the election outcome, though, as opposition groups reported widespread fraud and charged that there were incidences of multiple voting by individual persons. Indeed, activists were outraged about the level of voting violations, while election observers were pointing to a phenomenon called "carousel voting," whereby busloads of voters were driven around to different polling stations to cast ballots on a repeated basis. Still, Putin's campaign chief, Stanislav Govorukhin, disputed these claims, instead asserting that this 2012 election was "the cleanest in Russian history."

International monitors from the the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe had its own assessment of the Russian presidential contest. The OSCE said that although Putin's challengers were able to compete openly, the election conditions favored Putin's election. In response, the British government called for Russia to consider this finding seriously. British Foreign Secretary William Hague said in a statement. "A Russia with greater political freedoms, including the registration of political parties, freedom of assembly and freedom of the media is in

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the interests of Russians and of the wider world." Striking a similar chord, Human Rights Watch called on Putin to undertake key reforms once he begins his new term as president.

There were reports that Moscow was under tight security after the election, and all expectations were that anticipated opposition protests would ensue in the future. For his part, opposition leader, Zyuganov, characterized the elections as "unfair and unworthy," but encouraged Russians to take comfort from the knowledge that Putin "would not be able to rule like he used to." Zyuganov appeared to be referring to a hitherto reluctance of opposition-aligned Russians to take to the streets to register their discontent. As discussed above, though, mass action in Russia, while on the rise in recent times, remains a relatively infrequent occurrence in this country, with many Russians seemingly ambivalent about it at a constituent level.

#### Post-Election Developments --

In May 2012, Vladimir Putin was sworn into office as Russia's president. The first week of May also saw outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev positioned to become Russia's prime minister. The joint moves were a reversal of the outgoing hierarchy in the executive branch of government, which for years saw Putin serve as prime minister and Medvedev as president. Those years were sometimes understood as Medvedev functioning as a place holder for Putin, who was constitutionally barred from serving more than consecutive terms as president, and who had already held the presidency from 2000 to 2008. The year 2012 heralded Putin's return to the helm of the Russian political scene as head of state. That being said, Medvedev was not expected to quickly exit the executive branch of government himself.

In fact, in April 2012 -- a month after the Russian presidential election -- Putin indicated he would announce his choice of prime minister around the same time of his inauguration. Under Russia's constitution, the candidacy of prime minister is proposed by the president but has to be approved by the State Duma. Given the continued majority of the ruling United Russia Party in parliament, Putin's choice was likely to be ratified. To that end, all eyes were on Medvedev as Putin's likely choice. Putin's decision in the last week of the month to hand over leadership of the United Russia Party on to Medvedev augmented expectations that the outgoing head of state was set to move in the position of head of government

In early May 2012, ahead of Putin's return to power as head of state, the country was rocked by virulent protests, leading ultimately to the arrests of hundreds of people demonstrating against the incoming president. Among those arrested were anti-corruption activist, Alexey Navalny, leftist activist, Sergei Udaltsov, and former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov. Protesters hurled rocks, bottles, and flares at police, who responded using pepper spray and clubs to beat back the crowds. Several people were injured in the fracas while a journalist was killed when he fell from a fire escape as he tried to film the unrest.

On May 7, 2012, as scheduled, Putin was sworn into office as president of Russia at a heavily-fortified ceremony at the Kremlin States Palace. In his inauguration speech, Putin said that it was his "life's meaning" to serve the country and its people. He also augured democratic progress in Russia saying, "We are entering a new stage of national development. We want to live in a democratic country ... in a successful Russia." With the constitution of the country having been amended to provide for longer presidential terms, Putin would now serve as head of state for a six-year term.

A day later on May 8, 2012, Russia's State Duma (the country's lower house of parliament), overwhelmingly approved Medvedev's candidacy as prime minister in the new government. Medvedev was supported by two of the four Duma factions -- the United Russia Party and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia -- while members of parliament belonging to the Communists and A Just Russia lawmakers voted against him. In a speech to the State Duma, Medvedev said his new government intended to focus on economic and social issues, and that he would engage all political parties in dialogue.

Note that at the close of May 2012, Medvedev was formally approved as the new leader of the United Russia Party. The new party leader said that his objective was to ensure that in 2016, the United Russia Party "must be at the top again and win a parliamentary majority."

## **Special Entry**

### Nuclear Politics

March 2012 was marked by the Nuclear Security Summit in South Korea, and attendance of global leaders from Russia, China, and the United States. The summit agenda aimed at reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism.

Ahead of the Nuclear Security Summit, United States President Barack Obama reiterated his call for "a world without nuclear weapons" and advanced his foreign policy agenda that advocates non-proliferation and the reduction of nuclear weapons through increase diplomacy.

In a speech to students at South Korea's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, President Obama said the United States -- the only nation to have ever used nuclear weapons -- was fully committed to reducing its stockpile of nuclear arms. The United States leader said his country had a "moral obligation" to pursue strategic arms cuts. President Obama also drew thunderous applause from the audience of students when he said that, as a father, he did not wish to see his daughters growing up in a world with nuclear threats.

"I say this as president of the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons," Obama said. "I say it as a commander in chief who knows that our nuclear codes are never far from my side. Most of all, I



say it as a father, who wants my two young daughters to grow up in a world where everything they know and love can't be instantly wiped out."

President Obama acknowledged his country's unique position in the world, but he noted that "serious sustained global effort" was needed to achieve his expressed hope for a nuclear weapons-free world.

The issue of nuclear proliferation has been at the forefront of the international purview given the ongoing concerns about North Korea's nuclear arsenal as well as Iran's nuclear ambitions. To that latter end, President Obama was expected to meet with Russia's outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev on the matter of Iran's nuclear program -- an issue that has not always seen progress due to divisions among countries with veto power on the United Nations Security Council. With an eye on working cooperatively with such countries, President Obama pledged to work with Russia and China at reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism.

With regard to China, President Obama noted that he has called on Beijing to work directly with Washington and this offer "remains open." He further noted that the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul presented an opportunity for the United States and China to fortify bilateral relations. He said, "I think this is also an opportunity to build on the excellent cooperation and dialogue across all the dimensions of our relationship that we've been able to establish over the last three years" The United States leader observed that the summit "shows the progress that the international community has made in preventing nuclear proliferation and making sure that we've secured nuclear materials." He continued, "And I know that's in the interest of both the United States and China."

With regard to Russia, the United States president said he hoped to follow up on the New Start Treaty (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty).

The "New START" provided for the significant reduction of the arsenal of nuclear weapons held by the United States and Russia; it would limit the United States' stockpile of 2,000 strategic nuclear weapons, and Russia's stockpile of nearly 3,000 to between 1,500 and 1,675 warheads respectively. "New START" was regarded as a milestone in the decades-long thrust to decrease the chances of nuclearized warfare. Indeed, it could arguably be characterized as one of the most important treaties forged in a generation.

President Obama expressed hope there could be a deal forged with Russia for further strategic arms cuts with Russia as part of the nuclear disarmament agenda. "Going forward, we'll continue to seek discussions with Russia on a step we have never taken before -- reducing not only our strategic nuclear warheads, but also tactical weapons and warheads in reserve," President Obama said.

That being said, President Obama was overheard telling his Russian counterpart President Dmitry

Medvedev that dealing with the European missile defense shield would have to wait until after the election. The White House explained that President Obama was expressing the political reality of the campaign season where rigorous diplomacy and negotiations would be difficult to accommodate.

President Obama addressed the issue of Iran's controversial nuclear development program, saying that time remained to resolve the deadlock through diplomacy. "But time is short," said President Obama. "Iran must act with the seriousness and sense of urgency that this moment demands," he continued.

For its part, Iran has insisted that it has the right to develop nuclear development for peaceful civilian purposes. On the other side of the equation, the West has asserted that Iran is seeking to build nuclear weapons via its clandestine nuclear arms development program. While Iran has been subject to sanctions as a result of its failure to fulfill its international obligations, international concurrence has not come easily due to objections from China and Russia. However, President Obama made it clear that he intended to work with these two countries as he stated: "Today, I'll meet with the leaders of Russia and China as we work to achieve a resolution in which Iran fulfills its obligations."

Addressing the matter of North Korea's nuclear ambitions, President Obama made it clear that the United States held "no hostile intent" to that country, but warned that there would be "no rewards for provocation."

Note: In addition to the controversial and difficult issues of nuclear development in Iran and North Korea, the summit would also address the threats posed by nuclear terrorists, as well as radiological materials that could be used to construct a "dirty bomb" (i.e. a bomb that would spread radiological contamination rather than causing a nuclear explosion). Also on the agenda was a plan for nuclear power stations to convert to low-enriched fuel. Due to the complexity of these issues, it was unlikely that new agreements and concurrence would be found anytime soon despite the participation of 50 countries at the Nuclear Security Summit. Notably absent from the list of participants at the summit were North Korea and Iran.

### **Special Entry**

Russian President Putin says missile deal more likely with Obama than Romney

In the first week of September 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin entered the fray of American presidential politics, characterizing United States President Barack Obama as "a very honest man" while disparaging Republican nominee Mitt Romney as being politically craven.

In an interview with state media, President Putin said that if President Obama was re-elected in the November 2012 elections in the United States, he believed it was possible for a compromise agreement to be forged over the difficult issue of a United States' proposal for missile defense system in Europe. Russia has been opposed to the establishment of such a missile system in its geopolitical neighborhood; however, President Putin was signaling that a deal could be reached with an Obama administration in the United States that would satisfy the interests of both countries. He said, "Is it possible to find a solution to the problem, if current President Obama is re-elected for a second term? Theoretically, yes." The Russian president went on to state the following: His desire to work out a solution is quite sincere. I met him recently on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Los Cabos, Mexico, where we had a chance to talk. And though we talked mostly about Syria, I could still take stock of my counterpart. My feeling is that he is a very honest man, and that he sincerely wants to make many good changes." He continued, "But this isn't just about President Obama."

The Russian head of state pivoted to talk about President Obama's rival for the presidency saying that although he could work with any American administration, there were limits to be considered. He said, "We'll work with whichever president gets elected by the American people. But our effort will only be as efficient as our partners will want it to be." President Putin then launched into a sharp rebuke of Mitt Romney's claim that Russia was "without question" the United States' "Number one geopolitical foe."

Putin said: "As for Mr. Romney's position, we understand that this is to a certain extent motivated by the election race. But I also think that he was obviously wrong, because such behavior on the international arena is the same as using nationalism and segregation as tools of U.S. domestic policy. It has the same effect on the international arena when a politician, a person who aspires to lead a nation, especially a superpower like the U.S., proclaims someone to be an enemy." Returning to the contentious matter of the missile shield, President Putin posed the following rhetorical question: "But what happens if Mr. Romney, who believes us to be America's No. 1 foe, gets elected as president of the United States? In that case, the system will definitely be directed against Russia."

It should be noted that President Putin's rare praise for President Obama stands in contrast to his attitude towards other American officials, or, American foreign policy in general. Russia has blocked a number of United State-backed Security Council resolutions against Syria at the United Nations, has at times stymied efforts to pressure Iran on its nuclear development program, and has even accused the United States' Department of State of providing tacit verbal support of anti-government demonstrations after Russia's recent disputed parliamentary elections.

### **Update:**

In the second week of February 2013, a well-known opposition activist Sergei Udaltsov was placed under house arrest by a Russian court, pending an investigation into the case against him. Udaltsov, the leader of the Left Front coalition, was charged with organizing "mass disorder" during a May 2012 protest in Moscow. For his part, Udaltsov has rejected the accusations against him, accusing Russian authorities of carrying out a political vendetta against him. But the Russian television channel, NTV, broadcast footage allegedly showing Udaltsov and others, including an official from the neighboring country of Georgia, discussing a plan to depose the Russian government. For years, Georgia and Russia have had a fractious relationship. Should Udaltsov ultimately be convicted of the charges against him, he would face up to ten years in prison.

On May 20, 2013, Russian authorities announced they had foiled an attempted terror attack on Moscow following a raid on a home in the town of Orekhovo-Zuyevo to the east of the Russian capital. The raid sparked a gunfight that ended in the death of two suspects and the arrest of a third individual. All three of the suspects were Russian citizens who were believed to have recently returned from an Islamic militant training camp along the Afghan-Pak border. According to Russian security sources, the three Muslim suspects had been under surveillance for approximately one month leading up to the raid. They were allegedly planning to carry out an attack at a large public gathering in central Moscow. With Russia's Independence Day occurring on June 12 and attracting large crowds for independence celebrations, there was speculation that this particular occasion may have been a possible target date.

Five days later on May 25, 2013, a female suicide bomber carried out an attack close to an interior ministry compound in Makhachkala, the capital of the southern Caucasus semi-autonomous republic of Dagestan. The suicide bomber, a so-called "black widow," whose spouse was believed to have been killed in the extremist Islamic separatist campaign against Russia, was the only person to have died in the attack, while as many as 15 people, including five police officers, however, were injured. Identified as Madina Aliyeva, she was actually married twice and both times to members of militant entities in the North Caucasus.

Whereas Chechnya has long been viewed as the center of militant Islamic separatist violence in the North Caucasus against Russia, in recent years, it was Dagestan that had seen a steady stream of violence and bloodshed in recent times, related to the separatist agenda of Islamic extremists against Russian rule. As if to illustrate that reality, on May 26, 2013 -- only a day after the "black widow" attack -- four people died and several others were wounded in two car bomb explosions in Makhachkala. The government of Dagestan said that it believed the incidences were all related.

### **Special Report:**

Boston terror bombings intersects with challenge of Islamic separatism and extremism in Russia

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On April 15, 2013, two bombs exploded along the path to the finish line of the Boston Marathon in the state of Massachusetts in the United States. The explosive devices were believed to have been placed inside backpacks and detonated remotely. Three people died as a result of these apparent terrorist acts. Meanwhile, there were more than 130 people hospitalized due to the intensely grave nature of so many injuries. It should be noted that due to the placement of the explosive devices, many of the victims endured horrific injuries to their lower extremities, with limbs severed as a result. Indeed, the scene of the tragedy displayed a traumatizing scene of dismembered and bloodied body parts along with the injured victims and shocked bystanders.

Thanks to the sheer quantity of photographic evidence from witnesses at the marathon taking pictures of the day's events, as well as cameras installed on commercial buildings, authorities were able to get a sense of the perpetrators and their actions. On April 18, 2013, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) released photographs of two suspects and actively sought the public's assistance in apprehending those responsible.

Later on the night of April 18, 2013 -- presumably agitated by the realization that their pictures were being shared with the world -- the two suspects became engaged in a spate of violent activities with deadly consequences. The two killed a police officer on the campus of MIT University, carjacked a man in a Mercedes-Benz SUV, held him by gunpoint, identified themselves as the Boston marathon bombers, and used his ATM card to withdraw \$800 in cash from the car owner's bank account, before releasing him at a gas station in Cambridge. The suspects then exchanged gunfire with police, with many stray bullets landing in the homes of people who lived in the hitherto quiet residential neighborhood of Watertown. As well, one transit officer was seriously wounded in the mayhem. The situation became even more intense when, during their attempted getaway, the two suspects hurled explosive devices at the police. Residents of the neighborhood who witnessed the events said in interviews with the media that the devices looked like a combination of grenades and pressure cooker bombs. Bomb detecting robots were soon dispatched to the scene to determine the security of the area since the two men reportedly hurled an arsenal of weapons and explosive devices on the Watertown residential street. Meanwhile, the firefight between the suspects and police was ongoing. One suspect was shot in the exchange of gunfire with police and then was run over by a car as his accomplice made his escape. The first suspect ultimately died as a result of his injuries, while the second suspect was captured after Boston and its surrounding areas was placed under lockdown for several hours. The second suspect would later be charged in the United States with using a weapon of mass destruction.

In the early hours of April 19, 2013, details regarding the identities of the two suspects were beginning to surface. The suspect seen in the FBI photographs wearing the black cap, and who had died as a result of the firefight with police, was identified as 26-year old Tamarlan Tsarnaev. The surviving suspect, who was seen in the FBI photographs wearing the white cap, was identified as his brother, 19-year old Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev. The young men were of Chechnyan and Avar

(Dagestani) ethnicity. The father of the two brothers had worked in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan, which is now independent; the Tsarnaev brothers spent some of their younger years there. Anzor Tsarnaev was fired from his government job in Bishkek (the capital of Kyrgyzstan) when the war sparked again in Chechnya in 1999; the general view was that he lost his job due to his Chechen ethnicity. The Tsarnaev family then moved to the Russian semi-autonomous region of Dagestan, close to the breakaway Russian region of Chechnya, which has been the site of an extremist separatist Islamic insurgency for about two decades. The entire family emigrated to the United States about ten years ago and settled in the suburban Boston area of Somerville and Cambridge. Tamarlan Tsarnaev was a legal resident of the United States and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev had become a United States citizen in 2012.

Information about Tamarlan Tsarnaev suggested that he had a difficult time adjusting culturally to life in the United States, despite some success with a boxing career. His decision to stop boxing on religious grounds appeared to have angered and perplexed his father, who had been socialized in the Soviet system and culture to hold a far more permissive and moderate attitude towards Islam. Influenced by his mother's religious transformation to Islamic orthodoxy, Tarmalan Tsarnaev reportedly became increasingly hard line in his Islamic and extremist views, even alienating some members of his extended family. Ruslan Tsarni, an uncle to the Tsarnaev brothers, was on the record with the media saying that as far back as 2009, Tamerlan Tsarnaev was becoming more of an extremist Muslim, expressing what he described as "this radical crap." This trend appeared to have fueled a break in contact among family members.

It should be noted that the Russian government had Tamarlan Tsarnaev on its radar, having requested that the United States authorities investigate him as early as 2011, due to suspicions of involvement with Islamic extremists and unspecified underground groups. The FBI confirmed that they interviewed Tamerlan Tsarnaev in 2011, as requested, but found no cause for alarm at the time.

Tamarlan Tsarnaev certainly traveled out of the country for extended periods of time, most recently in 2012 to visit his father who was now living in the Dagestan region of Russia. However, the actual time Tamarlan Tsarnaev spent with his father in Dagestan was limited to one month, leaving the rest of the period a mystery and open for interpretation. It was possible (although not confirmed) that he attended a terrorist training camp -- perhaps in the Caucasus region or elsewhere. But even without such an expedition, Tamarlan Tsarnaev may very well have been radicalized in a less "official" manner. While politicians in the United States were eager to suggest that Tamarlan Tsarnaev was radicalized out of the country, it was apparent that his increasingly extreme Islamic views were part of a personal transformation taking place in the home he shared with his mother. Still, it was after an overseas trip more recently that Tamarlan Tsarnaev created YouTube postings called "Terrorists," which featured videos from a militant extremist in Dagestan known as Amir Abu Dudzhan. In one posting, Dudzhan is shown holding a Kalashnikov rifle and declaring: "Jihad is the duty of every able-bodied Muslim." It was apparent



that Tamarlan Tsarnaev was ideologically inspired by Islamic extremism and radicalism, while being sympathetic to the Chechnyan and Dagestani separatist and Jihadist causes.

Of course, the motivation for Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev to join his brother in carrying out terrorist attacks remained more of a matter for debate. Significantly more well-adjusted to American life than his brother, the younger Tsarnaev was a seemingly successful student at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, with a number of American friends, an active social life, and hopes for a medical career. It was difficult to determine if Dzhokhar Tsarnaev shared his brother's Jihadist views, or, if he was simply motivated by his relationship with his brother. To that end, there were some suggestions that Tamerlan Tsarnaev may have "brainwashed" his younger brother into participating in his terrorist agenda. For his part, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's posts on the Russian social media site, Vkontakt, made it clear that he self-identified as Islamic in terms of religion and "world view," and Chechnyan in terms of ethnicity and culture. He also posted links to Islamic and pro-Chechnyan independence websites.

There seemed to be bewilderment among United States intelligence circles about the idea that the Chechnyan drive for independence and war with Russia should be transported to American terrain. But it was not clear that Chechnyan independence was the driver for the two Tsarnaev brothers to commit acts of terror.

In fact, it should be noted that Islamic militants operating under the aegis of the Caucasian Mujahedeenin denied any involvement in the Boston marathon terror attacks, emphasizing that their conflict was with Russia. However, as discussed below, the militant Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus has steadily expanded past Chechnya's borders to neighboring territories, such as Dagestan and Ingushetia, and the cause itself has moved past establishing an independent Chechnya to a broader Jihadist goal in the Caucasus. It was quite possible that personal transformation to radical Islam meshed with the Jihadist agenda for the older Tsarnaev brother, and he drew the younger one into the fold.

But it was also possible that these two young men -- neither of whom were victims of economic strife as is the case for many Chechens, Dagestanis, and Ingushetians at home -- were motivated for different reasons. It was possible that they were inspired by a broader ideological (read: global Islamic Jihadist) sensibility, reminiscent of the September 11, 2001 hijackers, or the Nigerian Christmas Day bomber. All the young men in these cases were well-educated, spent several years in Western countries, quite possibly suffered from cultural alienation to some degree as a result of the experience, thus driving them to take on radicalized Islamic extremist identities, and ultimately - - to terrorist actions on the basis of religion.

On April 22, 2013, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was reported to have told investigating authorities that he and his brother acted alone, rather than in concert with an organized Jihadist or terror enclave, and that their actions were motivated by their Islamist beliefs, and inspired by the goal of global

Jihadism. By the last week of April 2013, a clearer picture of the motivation for the bombings was emerging as reports surfaced about the radicalization of Tarmalan Tsarnaev as early as 2010 -- a track that seemed to run parallel with the increasingly religious orientation of his mother. Both mother and son, as noted above, were wiretapped by Russian intelligence and appeared to have discussed the possibility of participating in Jihad. As such, it was apparent that Islamic extremism within the Tsarnaev family fueled the terrorist actions of the two brothers.

### **Special Entry**

Russian president accused of repression as opposition leader is sentenced to five years in jail

In mid-July 2013, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was convicted of stealing and sentenced to five years in jail. At issue were accusations that Navalny orchestrated a scheme to steal approximately 16 million roubles (\$494,000) from a timber company when he was advising the governor of Kirov in 2009. Judge Sergei Blinov delivered the verdict saying, "The court, having examined the case, has established that Navalny organized a crime and ... the theft of property on a particularly large scale."

Political analysts had anticipated a suspended sentence; the particularly harsh five-year jail sentence was, therefore, being regarded with shock by political observers. Supporters of Navalny gathered outside the court in Kirov, to the northwest of Moscow, to register their outrage over the conviction and jail sentence. Other mass gatherings attracted thousands of protesters in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. They railed in outrage against Russian authorities, screaming "Shame!" and "Disgrace! Indeed, some critics were comparing the Navalny case to political "show trials" under Soviet leader, Josef Stalin. To be sure, Navalny has the distinction of being the most prominent opposition leader to be prosecuted in Russia since the Soviet era.

For his part, Navalny gained notoriety in Russia as a vociferous anti-corruption campaigner and as one of the leading voices behind anti-government protests. He was also regarded as one of incumbent President Vladimir Putin's most formidable rivals. Accordingly, critics of the Russian president decried the legal case against Navalny, placing the blame on the president for the conviction and jail sentence, and further accusing Putin of political oppression.

At the practical level, it was certainly true that a five-year jail sentence would ensure that Navalny was unable to contest the next presidential election in 2018. Thus, anti-Putin critics perceived the legal case against Navalny as a campaign to sideline one of Putin's toughest political rivals.

Navalny was not one to shy away from criticisms of Putin, even referring to the Russian president as a "toad" and accusing him of using the country's oil revenues to retain power. With the knowledge that he would soon be outside the political purview, Navalny urged his supporters to

keep up the opposition fight. Via Twitter, he said: "Okay, don't miss me. More important - don't be idle. The toad will not get off the oil pipeline on its own."

The international community was also weighing in on the situation with both the United States and the European Union expressing concerns over Navalny's conviction and noting that it raised questions about the rule of law and Russia's treatment of Putin's opponents. The White House called it part of a "disturbing trend aimed at suppressing dissent."

Irrespective of criticism from the West, or even pressure from Navalny at home, however, the fact of the matter was that President Putin remained the most popular political figure on the Russian landscape. Survey data by an independent pollster, Levada, showed that Putin had a 63 percent job approval rating in mid-2013 -- certainly higher than post heads of state in democratic countries across the world.

### **Special Entry**

NSA leaker finally escapes Russian airport purgatory and accepts asylum in new homeland of Russia

Mid-2013 was dominated by questions about the fate of Edward Snowden -- a former contract employee of the National Security Agency (NSA) -- who leaked classified information to the public and then fled the United States. The revelations about the United States' secret surveillance program highlighted the post-September 11, 2001, debate over privacy rights versus national security interests in the United States.

The matter emerged in the public purview via an article in the United Kingdom-based Guardian newspaper. The Guardian's piece focused on a phone records monitoring program by the National Security Agency (NSA), which gathers millions of phone records in the United States as part of a database for national security purposes. The phone records or so-called "meta-data" theoretically do not include the actual content of conversations. Instead, the meta-data concentrates on points of contact, frequency of contacts, location data, call duration, and other such patterns that could presumably assist in determining whether terror suspects are in communication with persons in the United States.

The United States soon took legal action against Snowden for absconding with sensitive intelligence documents and then disclosing that classified information. Snowden was charged with theft of government property, unauthorized communication of national defense information to someone without a security clearance, and willful communication of classified intelligence. The latter two charges were violations covered under the Espionage Act.

After fleeing the United States, Snowden headed to the Chinese territory of Hong Kong, and from there he was in Russia en route to his final destination -- political asylum in another country. With the United States making it difficult for the NSA leaker to reach his final destination for asylum, Snowden was quite literally trapped at the "in transit" area of Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport, which was not technically Russian territory.

United States authorities were demanding the NSA leaker's extradition to face justice for the crimes outlined above. But while Russian President Vladimir Putin did not seem particularly enthused with Snowden's presence at the Sheremetyevo Airport, he nonetheless quickly foreclosed the notion of honoring United States requests for Snowden to be returned to the United States, saying the fugitive leaker had not broken any Russian laws.

Meanwhile, the motives behind Snowden's leaking activities were receiving even greater scrutiny. Snowden expanded his leaking agenda beyond the realm of exposing the NSA's surveillance activities to sharing information about the clandestine infiltration of the Chinese computer network intelligence with the Chinese themselves. Accordingly, it seemed that Snowden crossed the line into the realm of foreign espionage.

Snowden offered a sense of his motivation for this line-crossing during a live online chat with the Guardian newspaper on June 24, 2013. Snowden declared: "All spying is wrong." Apparently, from the perspective and personal judgment of Snowden, no covert activities by the United States targeting foreign governments were acceptable. Left unconsidered for Snowden was the matter of whether or not his fellow Americans concurred with his stance, or, if Americans might appreciate the utility of long-standing clandestine intelligence services in the interests of keeping the citizenry safe. Still, Snowden believed he was on a mission to expose this "wrongdoing" to the world.

The matter of how to go about accomplishing that goal was revealed in an interview with Snowden that was published by the South China Morning Post on the morning he departed Hong Kong. In that South China Morning Post interview, the fugitive leaker admitted that he took the job as an NSA contract worker with Booz Allen Hamilton for the specific purpose of acquiring and releasing sensitive classified intelligence. Snowden was now on the record stating the following: "My position with Booz Allen Hamilton granted me access to lists of machines all over the world the NSA hacked. That is why I accepted that position about three months ago." This admission was unlikely to strengthen his credibility, since it suggested that Snowden did not simply happen upon data he believed should be shared with the citizenry. Instead, he actively sought employment as a contractor to the NSA for the expressed purpose of acquiring classified intelligence data, which he then illegally released not only to the public -- but also to foreign powers.

For his part, President Barack Obama weighed in on the Snowden affair on June 27, 2013, when he dismissed the notion of personally pressuring his Chinese and Russian counterparts regarding extradition. Speaking from a news conference in Senegal (Africa) where he was on an overseas

trip, the president said that he was concerned about the documents Snowden might have in his possession. "That's part of the reason why we'd like to have Mr. Snowden in custody," Obama said. The president continued, said. "But what I think we're going to continue to do is make sure that we are following the various channels that are well established and the rules that are well established to get this thing done." President Obama dismissed the notion of using tactics beyond the traditional outlets available, saying that he was "not going to be scrambling jets to get a 29-year-old hacker."

Snowden appeared to draw closer to a future in Russia in July 2013, when the fugitive leaker applied for political asylum in Russia. Snowden indicated that he would pursue temporary refuge in that country until he could be guaranteed "safe passage" to an unspecified Latin American country in the future.

Noteworthy was the fact that around the same time, Russian President Putin pugnaciously asserted that Moscow had "no intention" of handing over Snowden to the United States. The Russian leader opened the door for Snowden to successfully find asylum in his country, pending one condition. Putin said: "If he [Snowden] wants to stay here, there is one condition: He must stop his activities aimed at inflicting damage on our American partners, no matter how strange it may sound coming from my lips."

For his part, United States President Obama addressed the unfolding imbroglio with Russia over the Snowden affair as follows: "We don't have an extradition treaty with Russia. On the other hand, Mr. Snowden, we understand, has traveled there without a valid passport and legal papers. And we are hopeful the Russian government makes decisions based on the normal procedures regarding international travel and the normal interactions law enforcement have."

It should be noted that in a statement released via Wikileaks, Snowden had argued that the United States condemned him to a life of "the extra-legal penalty of exile" as a punishment for his crimes. He continued, "Although I am convicted of nothing, it has unilaterally revoked my passport, leaving me a stateless person." Left unstated by Snowden was the fact that on June 21, 2013, the United States government levied legal charges of theft of government property and two violations covered under the Espionage Act. Clearly, in so doing, there was nothing "extra-legal" being undertaken by the United States government. It should also be noted that the revocation of a passport is standard procedure for persons charged with crimes and deemed to be flight risks. According to federal law, an American citizen's passport can be revoked due to "an outstanding federal warrant of arrest for a felony" as provided under Title 22 of the U.S. Code. Thus, despite Snowden's claim that he was now left a stateless person due to the revocation of his passport, in truth, he remained a citizen of the United States, retaining all constitutional rights as a United States citizen, while at the same time being subject to prosecution on United States soil for his violations of the law. Moreover, United States Attorney General Eric Holder expressly noted that Snowden would not be facing draconian legal consequences, such as the death penalty, if he were extradited

to face justice.

Snowden made the announcement to seek asylum in Russia while meeting with human rights activists and politicians at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport where he also condemned the West for preventing him from reaching his ultimate destination in Latin America. This was in apparent reference to the fact that the Bolivian president's aircraft was denied access to certain European countries' air space on suspicion that Snowden was aboard. Snowden said, "Some governments in Western European and North American states have demonstrated a willingness to act outside the law, and this behavior persists today... This unlawful threat makes it impossible for me to travel to Latin America and enjoy the asylum granted there in accordance with our shared rights." In fact, sovereign states are fully within their rights to control access to their air space, even if the outcome produces diplomatic imbroglios.

Left unsaid by Snowden was whether or not he would be meeting the conditions of the Russian government that he refrain from further harming the interests of the United States if he wanted to take refuge in Russia. It was not known how Russia intended to respond to this request from Snowden, given an impending meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President Barack Obama at a summit in Russia in September 2013. Obviously, by granting Snowden even temporary asylum in Russia, there would be a deleterious effect on relations with the United States. Indeed, the decision to allow Snowden to meet with human rights activists and political figures at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport was already raising the ire of the United States.

As noted by the White House itself, the prospect of Russian asylum would violate Moscow's own stated position that Snowden should avoid further damage to American national security. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said: "Providing a propaganda platform for Mr. Snowden runs counter to the Russian government's previous declarations of Russia's neutrality and that they have no control over his presence in the airport. It's also incompatible with Russian assurances that they do not want Mr. Snowden to further damage U.S. interests."

On Aug. 1, 2013, Edward Snowden was finally able to leave Russian airport purgatory and enter asylum in new homeland of Russia. Snowden's Russian lawyer said that his client received the legal documents necessary to exit the Sheremetyevo Airport's in-transit zone and enter Russian territory. Anatoly Kucherena declined to comment on the details of Snowden's Russian living arrangement, saying, "His location is not being made public for security reasons, since he is the most pursued man on the planet." He did, however, disclose that Snowden would be staying in a private home of American expatriates. Kucherena also acknowledged that Snowden intended to "build a new life in Russia" and noted that the NSA fugitive leaker was looking forward to learning about Russian culture. Kucherena added that while Snowden's legal permit allowed him temporary asylum for one year, the fugitive leaker did not foreclose the possibility of pursuing Russian citizenship in the future.



The movement of Snowden into Russian territory, and with Snowden's activities indicating a clear pursuit of a life in his new Russian homeland, marked a shift in Snowden's status. Indeed, it reflected Russia's official decision to support the NSA leaker wanted by the United States government. The move would invariably and deleteriously affect United States relations with Russia.

Yury Ushakov, foreign policy adviser to President Putin, tried to make light of the situation, saying the Snowden affair was "rather insignificant" and should not negatively impact relations with the United States. However, the United States seemed to be taking Russia's decision to grant asylum to Snowden quite seriously. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said: "We're extremely disappointed that the Russian government would take this step despite our very clear and lawful requests in public and in private to have Mr. Snowden expelled to the United States to face the charges against him."

With United States President Barack Obama due to travel to Russia to attend the G-20 summit, the fact of the matter was that the Snowden affair could potentially cause the United States leader to cancel his planned private meeting with Putin, his Russian counterpart. As noted by White House Press Secretary Jay Carney, "We're evaluating the utility of a summit in light of this and other issues." Democrat Senator Chuck Schumer was more forthright in his assessment of the situation. He said Russia's decision to grant Snowden asylum was a "stab in the back" and recommended that President Obama consider relocating the G-20 summit to a country other than Russia.

Not surprisingly, in the first week of August 2013, President Obama cancelled his meeting with President Putin, although the United States president did intend to travel to Russia to attend the G-20 summit in St. Petersburg. A statement from the White House read as follows: "We have reached the conclusion that there is not enough recent progress in our bilateral agenda with Russia to hold a U.S.-Russia Summit." The White House statement continued, "We believe it would be more constructive to postpone the summit until we have more results from our shared agenda."

The Russian Kremlin expressed disappointment over President Obama's decision. As before, Putin's foreign policy adviser, Ushakov, tried to downplay the situation and move toward more productive ground, saying, "Russian representatives are ready to continue working together with American partners on all key issues on the bilateral and multilateral agenda." But at home in the United States, it seemed that White House national security advisers had unanimously backed the decision to cancel the meeting with Putin.

## **Special Report**

Syrian Crisis and U.S.-Russian deal:

Report of chemical weapons usage surfaces and exacerbates Syrian Crisis; has the "red line" been crossed and will international powers now involve themselves in the Syrian civil war?

Summary:

Since early 2011, anti-government protests have spread and escalated across the Arab world; Syria emerged as an addition to the list of countries experiencing unrest in March 2011. At first, protesters stopped short of demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, instead demanding greater political freedom and efforts to end corruption. For his part, President Assad announced he would advance a reform agenda, which would include lifting the emergency laws that had been in place for decades, and increased rights to the country's disenfranchised Kurdish population. These moves were aimed at quelling the rising climate of unrest gripping the country. But over time, as protests continued, and as the Assad regime carried out a hard line crackdown on dissent, tensions escalated between the government and the protesters.

In mid-2011, the United Nations Security Council and the Arab League respectively issued condemnations of the violence in Syria. As well, the United Nations Human Rights Council called for an independent inquiry into the violent crackdown on dissent. Meanwhile, global leaders were calling for President Assad to step down from power, given the brutality of the Syrian regime's crackdown on protesters. As of 2012, the bloody crackdown by the Assad regime on anti-government protesters was ongoing. In fact, the crackdown appeared to become more relentless in places such as Homs and Aleppo. Despite widespread condemnation from the West, a United Nations Security Resolution on the situation in Syria was subject to veto by Russia and China. A subsequent vote in the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly condemned Syria for its brutal crackdown. A prevailing truce, brokered by the joint United Nations/Arab League envoy, Kofi Annan, was established in the interests of preventing further bloodshed; however, it was revealed to be an exercise in theory rather than practice and eventually the United Nations monitoring mission ended in failure.

Syria has, meanwhile, been subject to sanctions by various countries and was sliding into pariah status in the international community. Assassinations, alleged massacres, geopolitical tensions with Turkey and Israel, and most recently, suspicions about the use of chemical weapons, have since mired the Syrian landscape. Indeed, it was increasingly clear that Syria had slipped into a state of civil war and was facing a devastating humanitarian crisis. That crisis reached new heights in August 2013 with claims that Syrian forces launched a chemical attack on the outskirts of Damascus. Was this the clear sign that United States President Barack Obama's "red line" had definitively been crossed? And would the international community become more involved in the Syrian crisis? The answers to those questions were yet to be determined.

Chemical weapons issue resurfaces:

On Aug. 21, 2013, Syrian opposition activists and rebels said that chemical weapons had killed hundreds of people on the outskirts of Damascus. They said that government forces launched a major bombardment on rebel forces in the area of Ghouta using rockets with toxic agents. The Syrian government dismissed the accusations as "illogical and fabricated." The Syrian military further said that rebel forces were suffering major defeat and were using claims of chemical attacks to draw attention away from the fact that they were losing the war.

The claims and counter-claims set up rival theories that could not be verified simply by looking at the videotaped footage of victims that immediately surfaced online. Stated differently, while the international media was able to obtain visual evidence of victims who had died, that footage could not prove whether they died as a result of conventional military bombardment or due to exposure to toxic substances. However, there was an increasing chorus of disturbing assertions by medical staff that the victims, particularly children, appeared to have suffered suffocation and blurred vision. As well, further videotaped footage was starting to surface about the purported attacks, this time showing victims enduring convulsions or distinctly encountering breathing problems. In an interview with BBC News, Professor Alexander Kekule of the Institute for Medical Microbiology at Halle University in Germany, admitted that the videotaped images of the victims certainly suggested they had been subject to a chemical agent of some kind. However, he made a point of noting that none of the victims showed signs that they had been exposed to chemicals such as sarin or organophosphorous nerve agents.

The international community seemed initially wary to accept the claims of chemical attacks, perhaps with the memory of the inconclusive chemical weapons claims so fresh in their minds from earlier in the year (2013). Only recently, United Nations investigators traveled to Syria to look into those earlier claims. In August 2013, the United Nations convened an emergency meeting to discuss the newest chemical attack claims and its immediate response was to seek clarification on the situation in Syria. As noted by Maria Cristina Perceval, Argentina's United Nations Ambassador, "There is a strong concern among council members about the allegations and a general sense that there must be clarity on what happened and the situation must be followed closely."

That being said, individual countries -- such as France and the United Kingdom-- were going further and demanding that United Nations inspectors who were already investigating the earlier allegations of chemical attacks in Syria now look into these fresh claims. The United States echoed their call via White House spokesperson Josh Earnest, who said: "The United States is deeply concerned by reports that hundreds of Syrian civilians have been killed in an attack by Syrian government forces, including by the use of chemical weapons, near Damascus earlier today. We are formally requesting that the United Nations urgently investigate this new allegation. The United Nations investigative team, which is currently in Syria, is prepared to do so, and that is consistent with its purpose and mandate." Both the European Union and the Arab League entered the fray, adding their own voices to the call for United Nations inspectors to go look into the

matter.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Russia had a different view and noted that the timing of the fresh claims of chemical attacks came just as United Nations inspectors were in Syria to investigate the chemical claims from earlier in 2013. The Russian foreign ministry said, "This makes us think that we are once again dealing with a premeditated provocation." Indeed, there was a legitimate question as to why the Syrian government would choose to use chemical weapons at a time when United Nations inspectors were "in country" and especially given United States President Barack Obama's 2012 famous statement that his country would not be involving itself in the Syrian crisis unless the Assad regime used chemical weapons -- essentially crossing a vital "red line" -- that could augur international military action.

There was incremental movement in that direction on Aug. 22, 2013, when the United Kingdom, France, and Turkey all demanded that the international community take a strong stand against the Syrian regime, if the chemical weapons attack was verified. France went further with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius saying that if the claims of a chemical attack proved to be true, a "reaction of force" would result. The United Kingdom issued a similar threat via the British Foreign Office, noting, "We believe a political solution is the best way to end the bloodshed" but also warning that the government of Prime Minister David Cameron "has said many times we cannot rule out any option that might save innocent lives in Syria." Meanwhile, Turkey goaded the United Nations about its symbolic "foot dragging" as Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu declared: "All red lines have been crossed but still the United Nations Security Council has not even been able to take a decision."

On Aug. 23, 2013, United States President Barack Obama offered comments on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria saying that the claims constituted a "big event, of grave concern." In an interview with CNN, President Obama noted that the conflict in Syria would have a bearing on United States national interests "both in terms of us making sure that weapons of mass destruction are not proliferating, as well as needing to protect our allies, our bases in the region." Nevertheless, the United States leader struck a cautious note, reminding journalists that his country was still in the process of seeking confirmation on the matter of chemical weapons usage; however, he asserted that if the allegations proved to be true, the crisis would "require America's attention." Left unsaid was the nature of that attention. For his part, President Obama urged prudent action, tacitly reminding people of the consequences of the reckless military intervention of his predecessor, George W. Bush, into Iraq. The United States president said: "Sometimes what we've seen is that folks will call for immediate action, jumping into stuff, that does not turn out well, gets us mired in very difficult situations, can result in us being drawn into very expensive, difficult, costly interventions that actually breed more resentment in the region."

Around this time, Russia maintained its belief that the use of chemical agents might be a provocation by the opposition. Still, Russia was now urging Syria to cooperate with an "objective

investigation" by United Nations chemical weapons experts. United Kingdom Foreign Secretary William Hague indirectly addressed this suggestion that the use of chemical agents was a provocation by rebel forces saying, "I know that some people in the world would like to say this is some kind of conspiracy brought about by the opposition in Syria. I think the chances of that are vanishingly small and so we do believe that this is a chemical attack by the Assad regime on a large scale."

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon demanded an immediate investigation to clear up the matter. He said: "I can think of no good reason why any party -- either government or opposition forces -- would decline this opportunity to get to the truth of the matter." Ban also emphasized the fact that any use of chemical weapons -- by any actor or party -- would be a violation of international law, which would inevitably result in "serious consequences for the perpetrator."

United States weights its options:

Meanwhile, even as the evidence was increasing to support the claim of a chemical weapons attack in Syria, the political will to build an international coalition to act against Syria was eroding. At issue was a parliamentary vote in the United Kingdom's House of Commons urging an international response to the Syria chemical weapons crisis. The vote came amidst British Prime Minister David Cameron's vociferous condemnation of Syria's apparent use of chemical weapons, and his suggestion that the United Kingdom would join the United States and France in delivering some kind of punitive action against Syria. But when the parliamentary vote went down to defeat in the House on Commons on Aug. 29, 2013, it was apparent that the United Kingdom would not be a player in any kind of military intervention.

Irrespective of the political developments across the Atlantic, in the United States, President Barack Obama on Aug. 30, 2013, made clear that he was still considering the full range of options in response to Syria's use of chemical weapons against its own citizens. Referring to the aforementioned report on the suspected chemical weapons usage in Syria released by Secretary of State Kerry, President Obama said, "As you've seen, today we've released our unclassified assessment detailing with high confidence that the Syrian regime carried out a chemical weapons attack that killed well over 1,000 people, including hundreds of children. This follows the horrific images that shocked us all."

With an eye on showing why the use of chemical weapons required a response, President Obama said, "This kind of attack is a challenge to the world. We cannot accept a world where women and children and innocent civilians are gassed on a terrible scale." He continued, "So, I have said before, and I meant what I said that, the world has an obligation to make sure that we maintain the norm against the use of chemical weapons." In this way, the United States president was making it clear that the international community had an obligation to respond to Syria's use of chemical

weapons -- an act that was undertaken in defiance of international law and in contravention to international norms.

President Obama indicated that several options were under review, as he noted, "Now, I have not made a final decision about various actions that might be taken to help enforce that norm. But as I've already said, I have had my military and our team look at a wide range of options." That being said, President Obama noted that a long-term campaign involving a ground force in Syria (reminiscent of Iraq) were not among those possibilities. He expressly said, "We're not considering any open-ended commitment. We're not considering any boots on the ground approach. What we will do is consider options that meet the narrow concern around chemical weapons." Evidently, although President Obama believed there was a moral obligation to act against Syria for its use of chemical weapons, he was not eager to see the United States mired in another war in the world's most volatile region. Stated differently, it was through the prism of the Iraq debacle that the United States leader was viewing his options for dealing with Syria.

Syria's stance:

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has repeatedly denied that his forces launched any chemical attacks. The Syrian leader has warned of a wider Middle Eastern war if foreign countries decide to move forward with military action against Syria. That wider war could occur if Assad decided to react to a yet-to-occur military strike by international powers on Syria. Some of the possibilities available to Assad would include retaliatory attacks on pro-Western allies of the United States, such as Israel, Jordan, and Turkey. But the reality was that Syria's military already had its hands full fighting the civil war at home. Moreover, Syria likely could not risk sparking the ire of Israel, with its own well-armed military, or Jordan, which hosts United States fighter jets, missiles and troops, or Turkey -- a NATO member state. Indeed, an attack on any NATO country, such as Turkey, would prompt a response from the entire security alliance.

Note on Russia's position:

Russia has maintained the view that the notion of a chemical attack by the Syrian government was inconceivable. Russia has also indicated that it would block a resolution in the United Nations Security Council authorizing a use of force against Syria. However, in early September 2013, Russian President Putin indicated some softening of his stance as he noted that he could be persuaded to change his mind if provided with clear evidence of a chemical attack. Russia has also long advocated for a negotiated or diplomatic settlement to the Syrian crisis.

Status update:

On Sept. 8, 2013, the European Union called for no action to go forward with regard to Syria until the findings on the chemical agents were made available by the United Nations investigative team.



As well, plans for a full vote in the United States Congress authorizing use of force against the Syria regime were cancelled.

At issue was an unexpected diplomatic breakthrough that emerged when United States Secretary of State John Kerry uttered a (seemingly) off-hand remark during a news conference in London on Sept. 9, 2013 with British Foreign Secretary William Hague. Secretary of State Kerry said that President Assad could prevent a military strike on Syria if he handed over "every single bit" of his chemical weapons to the international community. At the time, Secretary of State Kerry said that he did not expect Assad to respond to this call; but, in fact, the remark appeared to have sparked fresh possibilities for a diplomatic solution with Russia championing the idea of subjecting Syria's chemical weapons stockpile to international auditors, and then placing them under the aegis of international jurisdiction. Syria -- Russia's client state in the Middle East -- was almost immediately scrambling to say that it would be willing to move in this direction. That stance by Syria functioned also as an admission by the Syrian regime that it was, in fact, in possession of chemical weapons. Until that moment, the Assad regime would not even acknowledge that reality.

On Sept. 10, 2013, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem offered a public admission of the Assad regime's chemical weapons stockpile when he said: "We are ready to inform about the location of chemical weapons, halt the production of chemical weapons, and show these objects to representatives of Russia, other states and the United Nations." He continued, "Our adherence to the Russian initiative has a goal of halting the possession of all chemical weapons."

On the night of Sept. 10, 2013, United States President Obama delivered a national address on the Syrian issue. Originally, the speech had been regarded as an opportunity for the president to build congressional support -- then, at anemic levels -- for authorizing strikes against Syria, and assuring a war-weary and skeptical nation that such action was necessary. Now, however, the speech had a two-fold purpose -- to bolster that aforementioned case against Syria, but also to address the emerging diplomatic channel.

As regards the former objective, President Obama presented a succinct case for acting against Syria. President Obama emphasized his conviction that the Assad regime was responsible for the chemical toxins attack that ensued around Ghouta on Aug. 21, 2013, characterizing the scene of death as "sickening," reminding the global community that such an attack was a violation of international law, and warning Americans that it posed a threat to United States national security.

But the president also opened the door to a negotiated settlement on the issue of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal and usage. He said that the Russian plan to report Syria's chemical weapons arsenal and place them under the aegis of international jurisdiction constituted "encouraging signs" and announced that he would pursue a "diplomatic path." The president said that his top diplomat, Secretary of State Kerry, would travel to Geneva in Switzerland to meet his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, with an eye on pursuing a negotiated settlement on the issue of dealing with Syria's

chemical weapons.

President Obama offered cautious support for this path forward, saying, "It's too early to tell whether [the plan] would succeed, and any agreement must verify that the Assad regime keeps its commitments. But this initiative has the potential to remove the threat of chemical weapons without the use of force, particularly because Russia is one of Assad's strongest allies." President Obama defended his decision to consider military strikes against Syria, arguing that the current diplomatic opening was only possible as a result of the credible threat of military force by the United States. Accordingly, the United States leader made it clear that his country's armed forces would maintain their posture, saying: "Meanwhile, I've ordered our military to maintain their current posture, to keep the pressure on Assad and to be in a position to respond if diplomacy fails."

On Sept. 11, 2013, Russia officially handed over its plan for placing Syria's stockpile under international control to the United States. Discussion over its contents was expected to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, between United States Secretary of State Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. Those negotiations would be of a bilateral nature. The Obama administration announced that in addition to Secretary of State Kerry's meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov, the United States' top diplomat would also meet with the United Nations-Arab League special envoy on Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi.

The diplomatic path was not without serious obstacles. Russia was demanding that the United States withdraw its threat of force, while France -- the United States' ally on the issue of action against Syria -- was crafting a United Nations Security Council resolution that would include a provision for precisely such action, should Syria fail to comply with the dictates of the plan. At issue was France's inclusion of a Chapter VII provision (of the United Nations charter), which would effectively authorize the use of force if Syria failed to adhere to its stated obligations. For its part, Russia advocated for a non-binding declaration supporting its initiative.

At stake in that initiative was a demand for Syria to provide a full audit of its chemical weapons -- including varieties of toxins and storage locations -- within 15 days, as well as procedures facilitating the transfer of control over those chemical substances, and ultimately, their destruction. Of course, the issue of destruction itself presented a disagreement between Russia and Syria with the latter not keen on that aspect of the plan. Still, with the client state of Syria reliant on Russia to save the regime from United States strikes, it was likely that the arsenal of chemical toxins would ultimately be set for elimination.

Complicating the diplomatic path was an opinion editorial piece penned by Russian President Vladimir Putin, which was published by the New York Times. At the more conventional level, the piece included a fulsome plea for diplomacy by Putin as follows: "The potential strike by the United States against Syria, despite strong opposition from many countries and major political and

religious leaders, including the pope, will result in more innocent victims and escalation, potentially spreading the conflict far beyond Syria's borders."

Putin also urged international action via global instruments of jurisprudence, noting that any actions should go through the United Nations Security Council, which stood as "one of the few ways to keep international relations from sliding into chaos." Putin also offered the reasonable argument that the United Nations could go down the road of obsolescence as its precursor, the League of Nations, if "influential countries bypass the United Nations and take military action without Security Council authorization." Left unstated by the Russian leader, however, was the fact that his country's penchant for United Nations authorization for the use of force was not at play during the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Afghanistan, or even its limited engagement in the Georgian territory of South Ossetia most recently.

The most incendiary element in Putin's editorial was perhaps his chastisement of President Obama's declaration on United States' exceptionalism. Putin argued against that claim, stating: "And I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism, stating that the United States' policy is What makes America different...it's what makes us exceptional. It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation." This statement was a stunning example of irony coming from a world leader who declared to his fellow Russians in February 2013: "We are a victorious people! It is in our genes, in our genetic code!"

The Obama administration responded to this provocative opinion piece by Putin a day later on Sept. 12, 2013 with White House Press Secretary Jay Carney saying, "It's worth also pointing out there's a great irony in the placement of an op-ed like this, because it reflects the truly exceptional tradition of this country of freedom of expression." Carney then went on to note that freedom of expression and free speech were "on the decrease in Russia." Carney also used the occasion to place the burden of the success of a diplomatic path on Russia, noting that the Russian president had placed his "prestige and credibility on the line" in offering a proposal to Syria to turn over its chemical weapons.

The Putin versus Obama contretemps aside, the diplomatic channels remained open. On Sept. 12, 2013, the United Nations announced that it had received documents from Syria, effectively acceding to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits the production and use of chemical weapons. Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afar, said, "Legally speaking Syria has become, starting today, a full member of the (chemical weapons) convention."

Meanwhile, negotiations were ongoing in Geneva (Switzerland) between the top diplomats from the United States and Russia respectively -- Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov -- with leaks indicating that the two men enjoyed good rapport. The negotiations were being characterized as "constructive" and went late into the wee hours of Sept. 14, 2013, suggesting that

climate was ripe with the possibility of forging a deal.

### Chemical Weapons Deal

On Sept. 14, 2013, United States Secretary of State Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov announced that a breakthrough agreement had been reached and that diplomacy had won the day. Speaking at a joint news conference with his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Lavrov, Secretary of State John Kerry said of the concord: "If fully implemented, this framework can provide greater protection and security to the world."

The agreement, titled "Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons," calls for a full accounting of its chemical weapons stockpile within one week, the destruction of all production equipment by November 2013, and the elimination or transfer of the arsenal of chemical weapons by the middle of 2014. Achieving the objectives of the agreement promised to be difficult. A one week deadline for a full audit of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal was strenuously aggressive. As well, the destruction of production equipment and chemical toxins by 2014 was considered unprecedented since previous processes of this nature have typically taken several years to complete. Moreover, there would be complicated questions yet to address, such as how to ensure the safety of international inspectors in Syria.

It should also be noted that agreement on a United Nations Security Council resolution mandating Syrian disarmament on chemical weapons still promised to be potentially fractious. Russia was reluctant to the notion of adding a Chapter VII provision (authorizing the use of force if Syria reneged on its obligations) to the resolution, although Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov intimated that the provision could be added in the future in a worse case scenario. As such, the United States was not expected to press for that particular inclusion at this time.

The diplomatic breakthrough and the agreement itself were thus being lauded by all veto-wielding members of the United Nations Security Council (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China), as well as the broader United Nations and NATO. But with the same lack of diplomatic restraint shown by Russian President Putin in his opinion editorial in the New York Times, Syria's Assad regime hailed the breakthrough agreement as a "victory" for that country. Syrian Reconciliation Minister Ali Haidar declared in an interview with Russian media, "It's a victory for Syria achieved thanks to our Russian friends."

United States Secretary of State Kerry quelled Assad regime's bravado warning on Sept. 15, 2013 that the United States retained its right to carry out punitive strikes against Syria, if that country did not meet its publicly stated international obligations. Secretary of State Kerry said, "If diplomacy has any chance to work, it must be coupled with a credible military threat." "We cannot have hollow words in the conduct of international affairs," Kerry added.

Already, President Obama in the United States had reminded the Syrian regime that while the agreement was "an important step" in the right direction, his country reserved the right to act against Syria for failing to meet its obligations. The United States leader said, "If diplomacy fails, the United States remains prepared to act." Indeed, the United States Pentagon noted that the United States military remained in a posture poised for military strikes against Syria.

Within the rebel ranks, the agreement was being regarded with scorn and bitterness. Indeed, the military leader of the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army, General Salim Idriss, dismissed the deal as irrelevant, saying, "All of this initiative does not interest us. Russia is a partner with the regime in killing the Syrian people." Idriss also cast the deal as a Russian plan intended to gift the Assad regime with more time, and as such, he vowed to keep up the fight.

### **Special Report:**

Suicide bomber attacks train station in Russia; trolley bus attack follows the next day

#### Summary

An attack on a train station in Volgograd in southern Russia on Dec. 29, 2013, left at least 15 people dead and scores more injured. A day later on Dec. 30, 2013, another bomb attack ensued in the very same Russian city of Volgograd. This time, the explosion struck a trolley bus. The blast, which occurred just as people were going to work in the morning rush hour, left between 10 and 15 people dead and more than 20 others injured. All eyes were on Islamist extremists, who have been carrying out an insurgency in the North Caucasus region, as the likely culprits. With the attacks occurring only six weeks ahead of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, there were increased anxieties over the threat of terrorism in Russia. To that end, the Russian government called on the international community to close ranks in the fight against extremism and terrorism.

#### In Detail

An attack on a train station in Volgograd in southern Russia on Dec. 29, 2013, left at least 15 people dead and scores more injured. Children were among the victims. The bomb reportedly contained more than 20 pounds of explosives and contained shrapnel; it was detonated close to the metal detectors at the entrance of the train station. The conventional wisdom was that the presence of security personnel at the location of the blast likely ensured the death toll was not higher. Not surprisingly, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that security at airports and train stations would be increased in response to the attack

At first, Russian authorities said that a female suicide bomber -- possibly from Dagestan -- was likely responsible for the attack, which they made clear was an act of terrorism. A government

spokesperson said the suicide attacker was likely looking to another target but having seen security personnel on the scene, she opted to detonate the bomb in her possession at the train station entrance. Subsequently, contradictory reports were emerging suggesting that the suicide bomber may have been a backpack-wearing male.

The issue of who might be responsible became more mysterious a day later on Dec. 30, 2013, when another bomb attack ensued in the very same Russian city of Volgograd. This time, the explosion struck a trolley bus close to a busy market in Volgograd's Dzerzhinsky district. The blast, which occurred just as people were going to work in the morning rush hour, left between 10 and 15 people dead and more than 20 others injured. Children were among the victims. As was the case the day before, Russian authorities emphasized that the violence was the result of terrorism, and noted that because the same type of explosives were used in both the train station and trolley bus attacks, both incidences were clearly linked together.

It should be noted that only days before the Volgograd train station and trolley bus attacks, there was a car bombing in the southern Russian city of Pyatigorsk. The attack, which was reported to have been carried out by Islamic extremists, left three people dead. Noteworthy was the fact that Pyatigorsk has been the focus of a federal administrative district aimed at stabilizing the North Caucasus region. As well, Volgograd was the site of a previous terrorist attack at a bus station in October 2013. In that incident, the female suicide bomber was believed to be a member of an Islamic separatist group known as Caucasus Emirate and detonated the explosives strapped to her vest on a bus in Volgograd; that attack killed eight people.

It should be noted that so-called "Black Widows" have increasingly been responsible for terrorist acts linked with the North Caucasus. The women -- mostly the widows or female relatives of militants killed in action -- have become more active in the ongoing Islamic extremist insurgency and the effort to create an Islamic Caliphate in the North Caucasus region. Indeed, "Black Widows" could trace their activism to bombing attacks in the late 1990s although they entered the public purview in 2002 following their involvement in the 2002 terrorist attack on the Dubrovka theater in Moscow. It was to be seen if they were involved, once again, in the Volgograd bloodshed.

Regardless of the precise identity of the main actors in the Volgograd attacks in December 2013, all eyes were on Islamist extremists as the likely culprits. With the attacks occurring only six weeks ahead of the 2014 Winter Olympics in the Russian city of Sochi, there were increased anxieties over the threat of terrorism in Russia. Earlier, in July 2013, Doku Umarov -- an Islamic extremist Chechen leader, called on other militants to deploy "maximum force" in the effort to target civilians, and even to interrupt the 2014 Olympics.

In truth, the connection between Volgograd and Sochi was a bit murky. Nevertheless, the fact of the matter was that the city of Volgograd was located 600 miles from Sochi and was regarded as a



gateway to the Caucasus. Indeed, Volgograd -- once known as Stalingrad -- has been the main railway hub along the route connecting European Russia with central Asia.

For its part, the government of Russia called for international solidarity in the fight against terrorism, which was characterized as "an insidious enemy that can only be defeated together." The international community was quick to respond to this call with British Prime Minister David Cameron saying via Twitter, "I've written to President Putin to say the UK will help Russia in whatever way we can." On behalf of the Obama administration in the United States, the White House National Security Council issued the following statement: "The United States stands in solidarity with the Russian people against terrorism. The U.S. government has offered our full support to the Russian government in security preparations for the Sochi Olympic Games, and we would welcome the opportunity for closer cooperation for the safety of the athletes, spectators, and other participants."

### **Special Entry**

Sochi winter Olympics begin; Russian government's attention focused on North Caucasus terrorism threat

Summary:

On Feb. 7, 2014, the Winter Olympics began in the Russian city of Sochi on the Black Sea. The 2014 Olympiad would be known as the most expensive in history -- largely as a result of the security threat posed by Islamist extremist separatists from the North Caucasus region. Fears of attacks by militant terrorist cast a shadow on the highly anticipated games, which Russian President Vladimir Putin hoped would highlight his country's emerging dominance on the world stage. Nevertheless, President Putin has insisted that visitors to Sochi for the Winter Olympics would be safe. He pointed to the experience Russia has had in carrying out secure international events, such as the G8 and G20 summits, as well as the extraordinary security measures (discussed below) being taken to ensure that the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi went off in a successful manner.

In Detail:

In the second week of January 2014, Russian authorities announced the arrest of five North Caucasus terror suspects. The arrests were made in the town of Nalchik, 185 miles to the east of the city of Sochi on the Black Sea, where the 2014 Winter Olympics were set to start two weeks later. According to the National Anti-Terrorist Committee in Russia, the five suspects were reported to be in possession of a massive arsenal of weapons, including "grenades, ammunition, and a homemade explosive device packed with shrapnel." The particular items in this cache indicated plans for some sort of bombing operation and rang alarm bells about the possibility of not

only the threat of terrorism at the hands of Muslim extremists from the North Caucasus, but also their targeted sabotage of the impending Olympic Games.

Only a few weeks earlier in late 2013, terrorism emanating from Muslim extremists of the North Caucasus struck Russia in the form of an attack on a train station in Volgograd, which left at least 15 people dead and scores more injured. A day later on Dec. 30, 2013, another bomb attack -- this time on a trolley bus -- ensued in the very same Russian city of Volgograd. The blast, which occurred just as people were going to work in the morning rush hour, killed between 10 and 15 people dead and injured more than 20 others.

As Russian authorities carried out a security sweep ahead of the Sochi Olympics, they became engaged in a shootout in the Dagestan region of the North Caucasus. According to Russia's National Anti-terrorism Committee (NAC), the episode resulted in the deaths of three Russian servicemen and several gunmen including one man accused of orchestrating a car bombing in the city of Pyatigorsk in late 2013. Around the same period in mid-January 2014, Russian security forces also announced the arrest of five members of a banned militant group in southern Russia. Officials said the militants were in possession of a homemade bomb packed with shrapnel that had to be defused.

On Jan. 17, 2014, there was a grenade attack outside a restaurant in Makhachkala -- the regional capital of Dagestan -- followed by the detonation of a car bomb timed to coincide with the arrival of police on the scene. Several people were injured in that episode. A day later on Jan. 18, 2014, a siege at a house in Makhachkala left several militants dead. Those militants, which included one trained female suicide bomber, were suspected of being behind the restaurant attack in Makhachkala.

All eyes at the time were on Islamist extremists, who have been carrying out an insurgency in the North Caucasus region, as the likely culprits. With the attacks occurring only weeks ahead of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, there was increased anxiety over the threat of terrorism in Russia. Those anxieties were fueled by the recollection that Doku Umarov -- an Islamic extremist Chechen leader -- had called on other militants to deploy "maximum force" in the effort to target civilians, and even to interrupt the 2014 Olympics.

With the threat of Islamic militants from the separatist North Caucasus region threatening to disrupt and even sabotage the Olympics, and with the record of attacks in Volgograd in late 2013, followed by the attack in Makhachkala in early 2014, as well as the discovery of the weapons cache in Nalchick in January 2014, Russia announced a draconian safety and security plan. That security plan -- reported to be the biggest of any Olympics to date, included the deployment of 30,000 police and interior ministry troops, backed by anti-aircraft missiles, war ships, and military aircraft, all of which were placed on combat-ready status. As well, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed as security decree that effectively established two security zones; one "controlled" zone would

apply stringent security and document protocols to visitors and vehicles, while a second closed or "forbidden" zone was established from the border with Abkhazia all across major portions of the mountainous Sochi national park. Presumably, the intent was to ensure safety at a time when the world's eyes would be on Sochi in Russia.

By the third week of January 2014, Russian authorities turned their attention towards a suspected female suicide bomber with an alleged plan to attack the Sochi Olympics. Wanted posters depicting Ruzanna "Salima" Ibragimova from Dagestan in the North Caucasus region have been circulated in Russia with authorities fearing that the widow of an Islamist militant may have already slipped into Sochi. Two other potential female suicide bombers -- quite likely so-called "Black Widows" as well -- were said to be in the region. (Note that the Russian authorities later took back these claims, suggesting that the Olympic city was safe.)

The Volgograd attacks resurfaced in late January 2014 -- just weeks ahead of the Sochi Olympics -- with an ominous videotaped warning by two young Islamic militants believed to be the suicide bombers in those two episodes of terrorism that plagued Russia in December 2013. The footage, which was posted on a Jihadist website, showed the (now deceased) militants issuing the following warning: "We've prepared a present for you and all tourists who'll come over. If you will hold the Olympics, you'll get a present from us for the Muslim blood that's been spilled."

Intensifying the climate of anxiety was the news that North Caucasus Islamic militants dispatched email threats to the national teams of certain European countries and the United States at the Sochi Olympics. In response, United States President Barack Obama offered his "full assistance" in ensuring the Olympics at Sochi were "safe and secure." To that end, two United States warships and several transport aircraft would be on standby in the Black Sea for the opening of the Sochi Olympics; the United States would also supply Russia with technologically sophisticated equipment able to detect improvised explosives.

For his part, Russian President Putin insisted that visitors to Sochi for the Winter Olympics would be safe. He pointed to the experience Russia has had in carrying out secure international events, such as the G8 and G20 summits, as well as the extraordinary security measures (discussed above) being taken in preparation for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

By the first week of February 2014, Russian security forces announced the elimination of a militant they said may have orchestrated the suicide bombings at Volgograd discussed above. Russian security forces said that Dзамалтин Mirzayev had been killed during a gun battle with law enforcement officers outside a house in the North Caucasus province of Dagestan. Located on the Caspian Sea about to the southeast of Sochi, Dagestan has been known for its notorious record of daily violence associated with the ongoing separatist aspirations of militant Islamists. According to Russian authorities, Mirzayev was thought to have been responsible for dispatching two assailants to Volgograd to carry out back-to-back attacks in late December 2013.

While this development was a boon for Russian authorities, who were beset by negative Olympic publicity over the security concerns (as well as unfinished or "problem" infrastructure and controversial anti-gay legislation), there were further wrinkles on the security scene. On the eve of the opening of the Sochi Olympics, the United States Department of Homeland Security issued a warning to airlines flying to Russia, saying that terrorists might attempt to smuggle explosives on board aircrafts by hiding them in toothpaste tubes. Law enforcement experts suggested that the explosives transported in this manner could be assembled either "in flight" or upon arrival at the Olympics in Russia. Due to the looming threat, United States authorities went so far as to ban liquids on all flights from the United States to Russia.

Note that on Feb. 7, 2014, the Opening Ceremony of the Winter Olympics began at Fisht Olympic Stadium in Sochi. The event was marked -- as is traditional -- by the parade of nations, the athletes' oath, addresses by dignitaries, and performances aimed at highlighting Russia's illustrious cultural contributions to world history. Notably, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared the games of the Winter 2104 Olympiad open. Various international heads of state were in attendance including Chinese President Xi Jinping of China, Prince Albert of Monaco, Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg, King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, President Serge Sarkisian of Armenia, President Sauli Niinisto of Finland, President Filip Vujanovic of Montenegro, President Tomislav Nikolic of Serbia, President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson of Iceland, and President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj of Mongolia, among others. Conspicuously absent were the leaders of the leading Western nations, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Canada.

### **Special Note on Chechnya**

In December 2014, ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's annual state of the union address, violence broke out in Chechnya. At issue was an incident in which gunmen opened fire on security forces and then stormed a media office building in the Chechen capital Grozny. The ambush led to a violent gun battle, which ultimately resulted in the deaths of six gunmen and three police officers. Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-backed leader of Chechnya, remarked on the developments via social media, writing that "six terrorists were annihilated" following the fracas.

For their part, Muslim extremists claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that it was carried out as an act of retaliation against the oppression of Muslim women in the Islamic separatist republic. While Chechnya has been under the harsh hand of Kadyrov, Islamic insurgency and terrorism continues to plague the North Caucasus region. Indeed, only two months prior in October 2014, a suicide bomber killed five policemen and injured a dozen other individuals when he strategically detonated the explosives strapped to his body just as police officers walked up to him to request identification.

## Editor's Note:

The militant Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus has steadily expanded past Chechnya's borders to neighboring territories, such as Dagestan and Ingushetia, and the cause itself has moved past establishing an independent Chechnya to a broader Jihadist goal in the Caucasus. To be clear, an Islamic insurgency emanating from the North Caucasus has bedeviled the Russian Federation for close to two decades. Despite successful offensive operations by the Russian military in the North Caucasus, violence by Islamist separatist militants has been ongoing. At issue has been the Chechen mandate to create an independent Islamic state and the willingness of the Chechen militants to use terrorism and violence to achieve their ends.

While the mainstream media has focused on this separatist war carried out by extremist Islamic insurgents from Chechnya, the neighboring restive provinces in the North Caucasus have also been engulfed in the conflict. The epicenter of the Islamic separatist insurgency is, of course, Chechnya, which has been in state of war for some time; however, neighboring Dagestan and Ingushetia have been intensely affected and a discussion of Islamic insurgency in Russia can not ensue without including all three territories. Dagestan is the site of militant activity, and a frequent target of terrorism and violent criminality, with attacks occurring on a daily basis. Meanwhile, Ingushetia is a literal war zone. Other parts of the North Caucasus have also seen violence -- North Ossetia is the site of militant activity, while Kabardino-Balkaria is often caught in the crossfire of violence between government forces and Chechen rebels.

The area is beset by daunting poverty and Russian leaders, such as Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, have offered the view that poverty alleviation in the region should be part of the solution aimed at stabilization of the area. Indeed, expert analysts have, likewise, noted that poor socio-economic conditions constitute the stimulus for many youth to join extremist Islamic militant groups in the North Caucasus. At the same time, it must be emphasized that revenge and resistance against the brutal tactics of the Russian military are part of the equation, ultimately serving to augment extremism and militancy, and create more fertile political soil for radical action.

Of particular note has been the militancy of so-called "Black Widows" who have increasingly been responsible for terrorist acts linked with the North Caucasus. The women -- mostly the widows or female relatives of militants killed in action -- have become more active in the ongoing Islamic extremist insurgency and the effort to create an Islamic Caliphate in the North Caucasus region. Indeed, "Black Widows" could trace their activism to bombing attacks in the late 1990s although they entered the public purview in 2002 following their involvement in the terrorist attack on the theater in Moscow (mentioned below).

The motivation of extremism and militancy aside, it should be noted that terrorism by Islamic extremists on Russian terrain is not a new phenomenon. Militant Islamic extremists from the North

Caucasus have been behind a host of terrorist attacks over the years. In 2002, Chechen rebels carried out a siege on a theater in Moscow. The Chechen militant rebels who took over the Dubrovka theater demanded an end to the war in Chechnya, and threatened to kill the hostages if their demands were not met. The grave situation demanded a rapid and overwhelming response by Russian authorities and, indeed, most of the hostages were eventually freed when Russian forces stormed the theater. However, 116 hostages were killed in the rescue operation, due to the indiscriminate use of an unspecified sleep-inducing agent by the Russians to deal with the Chechen rebels. In 2004, Chechen terrorists carried out a brutal and bloody attack on a school in Beslan, in which hundreds of people were taken hostage. A two day siege ended with a bloodbath in which more than 300 people were killed under the most horrific conditions. At least half the victims in that case were children. In 2009, the express train from Moscow to St. Petersburg was hit by North Caucasus Islamic terrorists. In 2010, militant extremists stormed the parliament in Chechnya. That same year, the Moscow underground transit system was hit by two female suicide bombers from Dagestan. In 2011, a bomb attack at Moscow's Domodedovo airport left more than 35 people dead and at least 170 others wounded -- many of them critically. The suicide bomber in that attack was identified as a 20-year-old man from the North Caucasus although a Chechen warlord, Doku Umarov, had claimed responsibility for orchestrating the attack at the Moscow airport. As discussed here, December 2013 brought terrorism in the form of an attack on a train station in Volgograd, which left at least 15 people dead and scores more injured. A day later, another bomb attack -- this time on a trolley bus -- ensued in the very same Russian city of Volgograd and left 10 and 15 people dead. At the start of 2014, a grenade attack ensued outside a restaurant in Makhachkala followed by the detonation of a car bomb timed to coincide with the arrival of police on the scene. North Caucasus terrorists were said to be responsible for this latest episode of violence.

The Chechen leader, Doku Umarov, who has been seen as more of a philosophical separatist leader than a military figure, claimed responsibility for a number of these terrorist attacks, including the double suicide bombing of the Moscow subway system in 2010 and an attack on the Moscow airport in 2011. In fact, Umarov has threatened further attacks, insinuating that the extremist Islamic insurgency would intensify with more "special operations" in the future if Russia refused to allow the Caucasus to become an independent Islamic state. In a videotaped message in 2011, he warned, "Among us there are hundreds of brothers who are prepared to sacrifice themselves." Umarov's warning served as both a clarifier of sorts. Specifically, it was becoming increasingly clear that the ambitions of Islamist extremists had expanded from the goal of Chechnya's independence to a broader Jihadist ambition of creating an Islamic state across the Caucasus, governed by Shar'ia law. This broader objective explained the widening of the Jihadist cause -- from a concentrated geopolitical center in Chechnya to a broader claim across the Northern Caucasus. By 2013, Umarov had cancelled a moratorium on killing civilians and was urging militants to use "maximum force" in the effort to sabotage the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. While those games passed without incident, attacks by Islamic separatist terrorists continued to plague the region as of the close of 2014.



## **Special Entry on Ukraine's Uprising and Russian annexation of Crimea**

### Special Report:

Following landmark uprising in Ukraine, Russia annexes Crimea in new East-West confrontation; anxieties raised over Russian nationalist ambitions to recapture Soviet-era territory

### Summary:

Turbulence and turmoil have characterized the landscape in Ukraine. Tensions initially flared in late 2013 in response to Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's decision not to move forward with a pending association agreement with the European Union. That decision brought more than 100,000 protesters to the streets to rally against what they saw as Ukraine's movement towards greater control by Russia. Indeed, the general consensus was that President Yanukovich had bent to pressure by President Vladimir Putin of Russia to step away from the European Union Association Agreement and instead embrace a customs union with Russia.

By the start of 2014, another flare of protests ensued in Ukraine in response to legislation passed by members of parliament loyal to President Yanukovich. The laws at stake were intended to curb the free expression of political opposition and curtail public protests. The passage of such legislation raised the ire of Ukrainians, particularly those aligned with the opposition, and alarmed the West with the United States and European Union worried about the Ukraine's slide into autocracy under Yanukovich. In a twist of irony, the very laws intended to suppress mass action actually spurred exactly that end as mass protests attracting tens of thousands of people once again rocked Ukraine. As January 2014 entered its final week, concessions by President Yanukovich to include members of the opposition in government yielded no positive results. Instead, the unrest spread to the eastern part of the country. With the situation deteriorating, the prime minister and the government resigned, and the Ukrainian parliament repealed the controversial anti-protest laws.

In mid-February 2014, the turmoil re-ignited as police tried to clear the main protest camp. Ukraine was again thrust into a renewed state of turbulence and turmoil. A truce was forged on Feb. 19, 2014, but only after more than two dozen people died. That truce collapsed a day later, effectively returning the capital city of Kiev to a battle zone and leading to an increasing death toll. Yet another agreement was forged in which the president conceded to many of the demands of the opposition. But the deal appeared to have come too late to appease an enraged populace. By Feb. 22, 2014, President Yanukovich had fled to the eastern part of the country while his party abandoned him and joined the opposition to officially impeach him, while his political nemesis - former Prime Minister Tymoshenko - was freed from captivity.

The move was a clear message to Moscow that Ukraine would not be controlled by Russia and

that Ukraine instead was looking toward Europe as it charted its future path. Indeed, to the chagrin of Russia, the new interim president of Ukraine declared the country would pursue closer ties with the European Union. The winds of change had swept across Ukraine with the "Maidan" or Independence Square stamped in the history books as "Ground Zero" of Ukraine's 2014 battleground.

But the celebration in Ukraine did not last long. The battleground terrain shifted eastward at the start of March 2014 when the Russian parliament granted Russian President Putin authorization to use force in Ukraine, and Russian forces annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Clearly, Putin and Russia felt entitled to reclaim their foothold in Ukraine, thus recalling alarming memories for the rest of the world of the Soviet invasion of then-Czechoslovakia in 1968 to subdue the independence-minded Prague Spring. Adding to the crisis was the perplexing decision by Russian President Putin to refuse to acknowledge that Russian troops were even in Crimea.

In response to Russia's actions against Ukraine, and particularly in the direction of controlling Crimea, the G7 countries (G8 minus Russia) pulled out of preparations for the G8 summit set to take place in Russia and the United States instituted targeted sanctions against Russian officials.

Talks aimed at resolving the crisis yielded no results. Indeed, an East-West conflict was intensifying as Crimea scheduled a referendum for mid-March 2014 when residents would decide whether or not to join Russia. A meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and United States Secretary of State Kerry ended in failure. Because Russia viewed the overthrow of Yanukovich as illegal, and because the West viewed Crimea's decision to join Russia as in violation of international law, an impasse was at hand.

The United States and the European Union respectively warned that such a unilateral action would run counter to international law, and thus they would not recognize the likely ratification of Crimean unification with Russia. For its part, Ukraine insisted that it would not accept the fracturing of its territorial integrity.

Meanwhile, the West attempted to condemn Crimea's secession referendum, and issue its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, by moving forward with a resolution in the United Nations Security Council. As expected, Russia -- as a veto-wielding permanent member -- vetoed the draft. Every other Security Council member voted in favor of the measure, with the exception of China, which abstained from the vote. The inaction at the Security Council was reminiscent of the Cold war era in which both sides habitually vetoed the other's measures, essentially creating a state of diplomatic paralysis.

On March 16, 2014, ethnic Russians in Crimea voted overwhelmingly to secede from Ukraine and unite with Russia. Crimea then officially requested that the "Republic of Crimea" be admitted as a new subject to the Russian Federation. On the Russian side of the equation, Russia recognized

Crimea as a sovereign entity. Russian President Putin soon responded by officially annexing Crimea.

The United States and the European Union imposed personal sanctions on Russian and Crimean officials. This punitive action was intended as a rebuke against the actions in Crimea; however, there was no sign that Russia was even slightly daunted by its decision to seize control of a territory belonging to Ukraine under the established system of international jurisprudence. As stated above, Russia justified its moves by asserting that the interim post-Yanukovich government in Ukraine was illegitimate.

Russian ambitions to regain territory lost following the collapse of the Soviet Union soon entered into the equation. Of note was the fact that in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russian attention was glancing towards other parts of eastern Ukraine. Eruptions of unrest in this Russian-speaking part of Ukraine were blamed on Russia, and reminiscent of what had transpired in Crimea. Indeed, Ukraine was accusing Russia of carrying out its Crimea formula by orchestrating unrest further into Ukrainian territory.

It was to be seen if the landscape in eastern Europe in the spring of 2014 represented the foundation for a renewed Cold War between the East and West. It was also possible that President Barack Obama of the United States was correct in dismissing such a notion on the basis of the fact that Russia was no longer a super power and, instead, a regional power acting as a bully against its neighbors.

Note that a presidential election was held in Ukraine on May 25, 2014. Petro Poroshenko claimed victory in Ukraine's presidential contest but turmoil continued to rock Ukraine. Entering the fray at the start of June 2014, NATO moved to bolster its security presence in eastern Europe as a deterrent against Russian aggression.

In June and July 2014, Ukrainian forces made some progress in retaking the rebel-held parts of eastern Ukraine, while the United States intensified its sanctions against Russian companies as a punitive measure against Russia for failing to de-escalate the conflict.

The landscape in eastern Ukraine took a disturbing turn on July 17, 2014, when a civilian passenger aircraft traveling from Netherlands to Malaysia went down in eastern Ukraine. All 298 people aboard the Boeing 777 airliner perished when Malaysian Airlines flight 17 crashed in the rebel-held territory of Donetsk close to the Russian border. That event augured a geopolitical land mine as Ukraine said the Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down and placed the blame on pro-Russian separatists battling Ukrainian forces. The tragedy of the Malaysian Airlines flight occurred one day after the Obama administration in the United States unveiled harsh punitive sanctions against major Russian firms aligned with Russian President Putin.

In the aftermath of the tragic downing of the Malaysian Airlines flight, and because the majority of the victims with Dutch nationals, Europe's stance against Russia hardened. Accordingly, the West -- including the United States and the European Union -- intensified its sanctions regime against Russia.

Meanwhile, in August 2014, Ukrainian forces at first held the momentum in the fight to regain control over the pro-Russian eastern part of the country, particularly in separatist strongholds of Donetsk and Luhansk. However, Russian-backed separatists were vigorously defending what they viewed as their own territory later in the month. By the close of August 2014, NATO said that Russian forces had violated Ukraine's territory while the Ukrainian president warned that his country was on the brink of war with Russia.

At the start of September 2014, NATO announced a rapid reaction force as well as military exercises in eastern Europe. Pressure from NATO and the threat of fresh sanctions by the European Union appeared to have spurred pro-Russian separatists to go to the negotiating table with Ukrainian authorities. There, a fragile truce was soon established but sporadically violated as fighting continued in Donetsk and Luhansk, and as Ukrainian forces fought to hold the port city of Mariupol.

In September 2014, with the ceasefire still in effect, Ukraine concentrated on the process of trying to retain its territorial integrity while meeting the needs of the pro-Russian separatists. To that end, Ukraine unveiled a proposal that would convey "special status" for eastern part of country, conveying greater autonomy. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian parliament advanced its pro-Western orientation by ratifying the Association Agreement with European Union (the basis of the uprising that caused the ousting of Yanukovich in the first place), while Ukrainian President Poroshenko unveiled a package of reforms aimed at securing membership in the European Union.

By October 2014, Russian President Putin was calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian border. However, NATO was warning that there was no sign of Russian troops actually retreating from the border in any significant fashion; as well, Russian forces remained active within Ukraine in violation of that country's sovereignty. Ukrainian President Poroshenko viewed the strong election performance of allied pro-Western parties as a ratification of, and a mandate for, his security plans for eastern Ukraine. However, that eastern portion of the country was moving forward with illegal elections of their own, which were rejected by Ukraine and the larger international community, but which were (unsurprisingly) being backed by Russia.

By November 2014, fighting had erupted in the east, there were reports of a build up of pro-Russian reinforcements there, and it was fair to say that the fragile ceasefire that had been in place since September 2014 was on the brink of collapse.

December 2014 saw a prisoner exchange occur between the Ukrainian government and pro-

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Russian separatists. As well, Ukrainian President Poroshenko said that he intended to meet with his Russian, French, and German counterparts in early 2015 for discussions on the restoration of peace in the eastern part of the country. These actions were regarded as positive steps in the arena of regional relations. However, Ukraine's decision to revoke its neutral status -- a move that could potentially facilitate future NATO membership -- was likely to raise the ire of Russia, which has opposed Ukraine's westward drift from the onset. Ironically, it was Russia's own aggressive interventions in eastern Ukraine, particularly marked by the annexation of Crimea, that actually catalyzed Ukraine's haste to move out of Russia's orbit.

At the start of 2015, the Minsk ceasefire agreement was effectively dead as fighting resumed around Donetsk and as pro-Russian separatists carried out an assault on the strategic port city of Mariupol, prompting Ukrainian President Poroshenko to warn that his forces would not bend to pro-Russian rebels and that Ukraine would protect its sovereignty. Fighting had extended to other areas in Ukraine's east as pro-Russian separatists aggressively sought to consolidate control over what they have termed "New Russia."

As the month of February 2015 began, there were reports that the Obama administration in the United States was considering additional support for Ukrainian forces in protecting Ukraine from the pro-Russian offensive. As well, NATO was considering the establishment of special command units in eastern Europe to respond rapidly to threats in the region.

Note that on Feb. 12, 2015, a new Minsk ceasefire agreement and a roadmap for peace were forged. But later in February 2015, peace in eastern Ukraine remained elusive as pro-Russians took control over the town of Debaltseve and forced Ukrainian forces into retreat. Pro-Russian forces were reportedly attacking government-held positions in eastern Ukraine -- including the area around the strategic port of Mariupol -- while Ukraine accused Russia of dispatching more troops and tanks to the region, specifically in the direction of the town of Novoazovsk on the southern coast.

Meanwhile, a year after the original Maidan uprising in Kiev ousted former pro-Russian President Yanukovich from power, Ukraine's second largest city of Kharkiv was struck by a bomb attack as demonstrators marched in a national unity rally. Despite the existence of the second Minsk ceasefire agreement, Ukraine was still occasionally mired by war and bloodshed. Europe warned of further sanctions to come if violations to the truce occurred and, indeed, a fragile peace appeared to take hold in the region. Juxtaposed against this background came a surprising admission from Russian President Putin that he had long-standing ambitions to regain Russian control over Crimea.

By mid-2015, despite the existing new Minsk ceasefire agreement, key areas of eastern Ukraine were beset by heavy fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists. Tension were also rising over the findings of a multinational investigation into the aforementioned tragedy of

Malaysian Airlines Flight 17. The inquest, led by the Dutch Safety Board, indicated that a Russian Buk surface-to-surface missile was fired from a village in eastern Ukraine under pro-Russian control and struck Malaysian Air Flight 17, precipitating the crash. As such, there were rising calls for an international tribunal to ensure justice was served. For his part, Russian President Vladimir Putin cast the move as "premature."

Around the same period of mid-2015, Ukraine's parliament was moving forward with constitutional reforms aimed at establishing temporary self-rule in the eastern part of the country under pro-Russian rebel rule. The changes to the constitution were aimed at meeting Ukraine's obligations under the prevailing Minsk peace accord. While the legislative progress in Ukraine signaled to some that the government in Kiev was adhering to its Minsk peace accord commitments, Russia objected to the changes, arguing that they did not go far enough to fulfill the obligations of the Minsk. There were also objections at home in Ukraine by nationalists to the deal that would grant autonomy to pro-Russian rebels. Those protests in Kiev turned deadly, effectively expanding the landscape of unrest in Ukraine.

In September 2015, the schedule for local elections in the pro-Russian eastern part of Ukraine threatened to upend the Minsk peace accord. In the same period, Ukraine was calling on NATO to provide it with military weapons; however, NATO made clear that its priority was to ensure the implementation of the Minsk peace agreement.

See below for further details related to Russia's invasion, occupation, and annexation of Crimea following the ousting of Yanukovich from power, as well as the ongoing unrest in eastern Ukraine, which has been blamed on Russia.

Russia stakes its claim in Crimea:

Irrespective of the ethos of celebration in Kiev following the ousting of Yanukovich, the close of February 2014 was also marked by an ominous warning from Ukraine's new interim president, Turchynov, who said there were "signs of separatism" in Russian-speaking Crimea in the eastern part of the country. That warning seemed prescient as residents of Crimea were soon demanding that the region secede from Ukraine.

Occupied by the Nazis in World War II, Crimea has long been a historic battleground through the course of history. It was the central locus of the Crimean War involving Russia and the French-British-Ottoman alliance in the 19th century. Further back, Scythians, Greeks, Huns, Bulgars, Turks, Mongols, and others occupied or invaded the territory, which was also part of the Roman and Byzantine empires in ancient times.

Crimea came under Russian/Soviet jurisdiction but was transferred to Ukraine as a "gift" by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954. In more recent times, the Russian naval base has been located at Sevastopol



in Crimea, with the Russian Black Sea Naval Fleet based on the Crimean coast.

To date, the population of Crimea has remained heavily ethno-linguistically Russian, however, ethnic Tartars -- as the indigenous people of Crimea -- also call the region home, and do not necessarily align with the dominant pro-Russian sentiment there. Indeed, ethnic Tartars take a dim view of Russia and the Soviet past, even harboring deep resentment over the dark days of Stalin's rule when their people were deported en masse to Central Asia.

Given this complex socio-cultural composition of Crimea, the Russian role in the region was emerging as a primary concern in the initial days after Ukraine's 2014 uprising. Moscow made it clear that it would not engage with the new government of Ukraine, which it viewed as illegitimate, and also pointed to the ethno-linguistic Russian population of eastern Ukraine, suggesting that they might need "protection" from Russia in the face of the new pro-Western leadership in Kiev. Going a step further in the direction of sabre rattling, Russia soon placed 150,000 combat troops on alert for war games close to the border with Ukraine -- presumably in preparation to take up the mission of "protecting" the Russian ethno-linguistic population of Crimea. The fact that there was no sign of violence against ethno-linguistic Russians, this move by Moscow was regarded with great suspicion.

The West had a very different view and wasted no time in expressing support for the interim leadership of Ukraine, and warning Russia from intervening into Ukrainian affairs. At a meeting of the European parliament, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said, "I launch from here an appeal to all our international partners, in particular Russia, to work constructively with us to guarantee a united Ukraine that can be a factor for stability in the European continent." He also expressed the European view that the removal of Yanukovich was the result of the will of the Ukrainian people and an act of self-determinism, saying, "The winds of change are knocking again at Ukraine's doors; the will of the people must prevail." The United States struck a similar chord, with the Obama white House urging Russia to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity. White House spokesperson Josh Earnest said, "We urge outside actors in the region to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, to end provocative rhetoric and actions, to support democratically established transitional governing structures and to use their influence in support of unity, peace and an inclusive path forward." Meanwhile, in an interview with MSNBC, United States Secretary of State John Kerry said, "We're hoping that Russia will not see this as sort of a continuation of the Cold War...We do not believe this should be an East-West, Russia-United States (issue)."

But the landscape in Ukraine was quickly turning tumultuous. The stakes in an East-West confrontation intensified on Feb. 26, 2014, when rival groups of demonstrators -- some of whom were pro-Russian and others who were anti-Russian -- erupted at the parliament building in Ukraine's Crimea region. The scene devolved further when armed men seized control of the parliament of Crimea in the regional capital Simferopol, declared Crimea to be an autonomous

entity with its own constitution, and raised the Russian flag.

The area was soon being patrolled by Russian-speaking persons clothed in military garb but without specific insignias. Reporters on the scene asked some of these individuals where they were from and were told "Russia" in response. A Ukrainian official, Sergiy Kunitsyn, said in an interview with the media that Russian jets carrying troops had landed at a military air base near Simferopol. This claim by Kunitsyn was being treated as an unconfirmed report; however, videotaped footage soon emerged that appeared to show Russian planes flying into Crimea. Subsequently, further reports emerged suggesting that two Russian anti-submarine warships were spotted off the coast of Crimea in violation of prevailing agreements that limit the presence of Russia's Naval Fleet in the Black Sea.

Alarmed at the prospect of Russia either surreptitiously or even actively advancing into Ukraine, three former Ukrainian presidents -- Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma, and Viktor Yushchenko - - crossed partisan lines to jointly accuse Russia of "direct interference in the political life in Crimea." Meanwhile, Ukraine's interim President Turchinov demanded that Russia remain within its military confines at the naval base saying, "I am appealing to the military leadership of the Russian Black Sea fleet...Any military movements, the more so if they are with weapons, beyond the boundaries of this territory (the base) will be seen by us as military aggression."

At the international level, NATO joined the fray as it urged Russia to refrain from doing anything that would "escalate tension." As well, United States Secretary of State John Kerry reminded Russia that it has eschewed foreign intervention into the affairs of sovereign countries, saying: "For a country that has spoken out so frequently ... against foreign intervention in Libya, in Syria, and elsewhere, it would be important for them to heed those warnings as they think about options in the sovereign nation of Ukraine." Kerry added, "I don't think there should be any doubt whatsoever that any kind of military intervention that would violate the sovereign territorial integrity of Ukraine would be a huge -- a grave -- mistake."

On Feb. 28, 2014, United States President Barack Obama also registered his own warning to Russia, noting that "any violation of Ukraine sovereignty... would be deeply destabilizing" and pointing to the potential "costs" of Russian intervention into Ukraine.

This warning fell on deaf ears. It was now evident that pro-Russian cadres of armed men were controlling major swaths of Crimea. Ukrainian interim President Turchynov thus accused Russia of trying to provoke an "armed conflict" in his country. Turchynov suggested that Russian President Putin was trying to get the new interim government of Ukraine to react to Russian provocations in a way that would justify the Russian annexation of Crimea. Turchynov pointed to the fact that this modality had been used before by Russia in the Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008, which also were home to large ethno-linguistic populations but were legally under Georgian jurisdiction. Indeed, the Ukraine/Crimea issue was clearly reminiscent of the

Russian intervention into the Georgia/South Ossetia crisis in 2008 since both scenarios involved a Russian ethno-linguistic population in semi-autonomous enclaves of countries that were longer part of the Soviet Union. The only conclusion was that Russia believed it was entitled to control swaths of territory where there was a Russian cultural connection.

Interim President Turchynov's claim that Russia was trying to provoke conflict found resonance a day later on March 1, 2014 when the Russian parliament voted unanimously to approve the use of military force "in connection with the extraordinary situation in Ukraine, the threat to the lives of citizens of the Russian Federation, our compatriots" and also to protect the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea. Russian President Vladimir Putin said his request for authorization to use military action in Ukraine would endure "until the normalization of the socio-political situation in that country." Of concern was the fact that the authorization was for the use of force in Ukraine as a whole -- and not just the flashpoint area of Crimea.

In response, Ukrainian President Turchynov ordered troops to be placed on high combat alert, while the new foreign minister, Andriy Deshchytsya, said Ukraine had lodged a request with NATO to "examine all possibilities to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine." Still, the new government in Ukraine -- in that job for a week -- displayed remarkable restraint. During a live address that was broadcast nationally, President Turchynov urged Ukrainians of all backgrounds to stand united and not succumb to provocations. On the issue of provocation, the Ukrainian leader had already told contingents in Ukraine not to resist Russian armed operatives in Crimea.

#### International Response:

European countries registered dismay at these developments in their backyard. United Kingdom Foreign Secretary William Hague expressed "deep concern" over Russia's actions while Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt characterized Russia's actions as "clearly against international law." Czech President Milos Zeman poignantly noted that the crisis in Ukraine was a disturbing reminder of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in order to subdue the independence-minded Prague Spring movement.

United States President Barack Obama reportedly shared a 60-minute telephone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin in which he repeatedly accused Russia of violating international law and violating the sovereignty of Ukraine. Putin apparently told Obama that Russia reserved the right to protect its interests and the interests of the Russian ethno-linguistic population in Ukraine. Stated differently, Putin was affirming his belief that Russia had the right to invade Ukraine on the basis of national interests. As a point of clarification, these concerns by Russia could certainly be addressed with the presence of international monitors rather than via an uninvited intervention of Russian forces into Ukraine. Moreover, the fact of the matter was that the interim government of Ukraine had already offered assurances that minority (i.e. Russian) populations within Ukraine

would be respected.

For its part, Ukraine was said to be "mobilized for war," having called up its military reserves. Arseny Yatseniuk -- now at the helm of the interim Ukrainian government in the position of acting prime minister -- declared that Russia's actions constituted "the beginning of war and the end of any relations between Ukraine and Russia." As regards the effective annexation of Crimea by Russia, Prime Minister Yatseniuk said: "This is not a threat: this is actually the declaration of war to my country."

At the international level United States Secretary of State John Kerry condemned Russia for its "incredible act of aggression" saying in an interview with CBS News, "You don't just, in the 21st century, behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on a completely trumped-up pretext." Kerry also floated the possibility of sanctions against Russia and promised that Western countries would "go to the hilt to isolate Russia."

Already, the United States had announced it would suspend participation in preparing for the G8 summit set to take place in mid-2014 in Sochi, Russia. The United States also made clear that it would consider having Russia removed from the G8 grouping -- generally believed to be the political and economic leading nation states of the world. Canada soon joined the United States in suspending participation in preparatory meetings for the G8 summit and also recalling its ambassador to Russia. The United Kingdom followed by becoming the third country to end its participation in preparatory meetings for the G8 summit. It was to be seen if the remaining G8 nation states -- France, Germany, Italy, and Japan -- would be taking the same stance.

Russia, however, was undeterred by these moves. Indeed, its mission may have well been accomplished as it now had a firm hold on Crimea and a foothold on Ukrainian territory. Reports that the new head of the Ukrainian navy, Rear Admiral Denis Berezovsky, had defected to Russian separatists in Crimea on March 2, 2014, only augmented that Russian foothold. Although the Ukrainian government in Kiev immediately fired Berezovsky from his post and charged him with treason, the damage was done. Around the same time, the Kremlin in Russia was resolute as it asserted its right to intervene in Ukraine, charging that the country was under threat from "ultra-nationalists" in the aftermath of the ousting of Yanukovych from power.

Russia's stance was publicly augmented by Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, Vitali Churkin, who submitted a letter to the United Nations Security Council, which was supposedly from ousted President Yanukovych. That letter cast Ukraine as on the precipice of a civil war and Russian speakers suffering harsh persecution -- a characterization denied by the new government of Ukraine. Nevertheless, the letter from Yanukovych called on Russia to intervene, and read as follows: "I would call on the president of Russia, Mr. Putin, asking him to use the armed forces of the Russian Federation to establish legitimacy, peace, law and order, stability and defending the people of Ukraine." According to Churkin, since Yanukovych was Ukraine's legitimate leader, and

not interim President Olexander Turchynov, Russia's actions in Ukraine were justified rather than a violation of international law, as charged by the West.

United States ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, dismissed Russia's rationale, saying, "Russian mobilization is a response to an imaginary threat." She continued, "Military action cannot be justified on the basis of threats that haven't been made and aren't being carried out." United Kingdom ambassador to the United Nations, Mark Lyall Grant, struck a similar note saying, "It is clear that these claims have simply been fabricated to justify Russian military action." Indeed, as noted above, there was no actual sign of persecution or intimidation of Ukraine's ethnolinguistically Russian population. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen joined the fray in condemning Russia for continuing to "violate Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," and thus creating "serious implications for the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area."

Clearly, the East-West division was hardening -- but at a time when Russian military forces were on the ground in Ukraine and in control of Crimea. An anonymous Western official was cited by Reuters News as saying, "This is probably the most dangerous situation in Europe since the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968... Realistically, we have to assume the Crimea is in Russian hands. The challenge now is to deter Russia from taking over the Russian-speaking east of Ukraine." The Russian grip on Crimea was confirmed on March 2, 2014, when United States officials noted that Russia had "full operational control" over the entirety of Crimea.

Late on the night of March 2, 2014, a joint statement of the world's seven major industrialized powers expressed harsh condemnation of Russia's invasion and apparent occupation of Crimea in the Ukraine. The statement, which was released from the Obama White House in the United States, read as follows: "We, the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and the President of the European Council and President of the European Commission, join together today to condemn the Russian Federation's clear violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine... We have decided for the time being to suspend our participation in activities associated with the preparation of the scheduled G8 Summit in Sochi in June." The G7 nations also offered de facto support for Ukraine by declaring that they were ready "to provide strong financial backing to Ukraine."

To that end, United Kingdom Foreign Secretary William Hague had departed for Kiev for talks with the new Ukrainian government for the purpose of solidarity. United States Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Kiev on March 4, 2014 to show support for the new interim government of Ukraine, but also armed with a package of \$1 billion in loan guarantees for Ukraine and pledges of technical assistance for Ukraine's national bank and finance ministry. He also offered assistance in preparations for fresh elections. While Kerry was in flight, the United States Department of State was in the process of putting together punitive sanctions against Russia. As well, the European Union was considering its own sanctions, including possible travel bans and targeted economic



measures, if Russia failed to "de-escalate" its threat of military force against Ukraine. The European Union was also floating the notion of paying Ukraine's bill to Russia for gas bills totaling \$2 billion. Collectively, the effort was aimed at ensuring that Ukraine was positioned to withstand the reduction of energy subsidies from Russia, which was almost certain to occur in short order.

It was apparent that the diplomatic isolation -- however symbolic -- of Russia had begun. Of course, there was no sign that Russian President Putin was viewing the situation through the lens of economic pragmatism. While the Russian ruble had plunged to an all-time low amidst the chaos, Putin was buoyed by the national support he was getting from Russians at home for taking a hardline approach to Ukraine. In fact, Putin continued to advance the view that Ukraine was embroiled in a state of chaos, having been taken over by extremists, and that Russia was simply doing its duty by protecting the Russian population. Making the matter more perplexing was the Russian president's claim that the troops that seized control of Crimea were not actually under Russian command, but simply inspired activists functioning organically in the face of Ukrainian oppression. Of course, the West reacted to this claim with utter disbelief and ridicule.

From Kiev, United States Secretary of State Kerry deconstructed Putin's stance on Ukrainian oppression of Russian speakers saying, "I think that it is clear that Russia has been working hard to create a pretext for being able to invade further. " He continued, "Russia has talked about Russian-speaking minority citizens who are under siege... They're not. It is not appropriate to invade a country and dictate what you want to achieve at the end of the barrel of a gun." Kerry also praised the new government of Ukraine, headed by interim President Turchynov, noting that he had shown Herculean restraint in the face of provocation.

Later on March 4, 2014, there were high level efforts being made at the diplomatic level in Paris between envoys from Russia, Ukraine, United States, United Kingdom, and France, to find a resolution to the Ukraine/Crimea crisis. Those meetings ended without any progress being made. United States Secretary of State Kerry tried to place a positive spin on his meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov as he said, "Don't assume that we did not have serious conversations which produced creative and appropriate ideas on how to resolve this, we have a number of ideas on the table." Kerry continued, "I don't think any of us had an anticipation that we were coming here at this moment, in this atmosphere of heightened tension and confrontation, that we were suddenly going to resolve that here, this afternoon."

But the truth was the Russia had defiantly ignored the West's calls for its forces to withdraw from Crimea and return to military barracks and bases. As well, the Russian delegation refused to acknowledge -- far less meet with -- the Ukrainian delegation. Moreover, Russian authorities were also advancing the erroneous notion that an agreement was reached with Western powers over returning to the European Union-brokered peace deal that was on the table prior to the ousting of Yanukovich. The United States Department of State thus responded by denying that such a deal existed, with an official saying: "There were no agreements in this meeting, and there never will be



without direct Ukrainian government involvement and absolute buy-in."

The lack of progress, coupled with Russian defiance, spurred NATO to announce from Brussels that it would curtail cooperation with Russia. Instead, NATO announced that it would intensify its engagement with the new government of Ukraine. As well, the United States also announced that it would double the number of fighter jets it furnishes for NATO air patrol missions in the Baltic regions and increase air force training with Polish forces. Furthermore, the United States Pentagon was deploying a Navy destroyer to the Black Sea. These moves were sure to aggravate Russian authorities, who certainly did not wish to see a heavier American military footprint in their backyard. Once again, the underlying theme was ongoing East-West dissonance.

Meanwhile, the United States, Canada, and various European countries were moving forward with punitive actions against Russia. President Barack Obama of the United States delineated his first concrete punitive measures against Russia for "threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine" by freezing the United States assets of Ukrainians deemed to have undermined the democratic process in Ukraine, and instituting a travel ban in the form of visa restrictions on several Russian and Ukrainian officials. Various European Union countries announced they would also freeze the assets of Ukrainians suspected of misappropriating state funds and human rights abuses; the list included ousted Ukrainian President Yanukovich, former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov. The European Union also warned again that if Russia failed to de-escalate tensions, then the regional body was prepared to move forward with sanctions. French President Francois Hollande said, "There will be the strongest possible pressure on Russia to begin lowering the tension and in the pressure there is, of course, eventual recourse to sanctions." Canada announced economic sanctions on members of the ousted government of Yanukovich. Already Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper had recalled his ambassador from Russia.

### Flashpoints

While at this point there was no bloodshed in the Ukrainian-Russian crisis, it should be noted that on March 5, 2014, a United Nations special envoy -- Robert Serry of the Netherlands -- was detained in Russian-occupied Crimea outside the naval headquarters in Simferopol. Serry was forced to depart the region without even having the chance to collect his belongings. United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson expressed outrage over the incident, saying that Serry was "seriously threatened." As well, a mission of unarmed military observers from the pan-European Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was prevented from entering Crimea.

Also on March 5, 2014, Russia intensified its provocation of the Ukrainian/Crimean crisis by test-firing an intercontinental ballistic missile -- the Topol RS-12M -- from Russia's Kapustin Yar test range near the Caspian Sea in the direction of the Sary Shagan range in Kazakhstan. The Russian defense forces said that the missile launch was intended to test the payload of the nuclear missile

and went off successfully using a dummy warhead. The Russian armed forces also said that the United States had been notified in advance of the missile test, in keeping with prevailing bilateral arms treaties. Still, the action only served to heighten tensions further in the region where Cold War memories were being stirred at a furious rate.

Anxiety over the future of Ukraine, and the fate of Crimea in particular, dramatically increased on March 6, 2014, when Crimea's parliament voted unanimously to secede from Ukraine and "to enter into the Russian Federation with the rights of a subject of the Russian Federation." A date for a referendum was set for mid-March 2014. Following that referendum, whose outcome was almost certainly ratification, all state property would be "nationalized" and the Russian ruble would be adopted. As well, all Ukrainian troops in Crimea would be forced to either depart or surrender, or face captivity as foreign occupying forces. The move served only to cast further turmoil into the cauldron of Crimea.

Western countries made it clear that they would not accept the outcome of the Crimean referendum, noting that it would be in contravention to international law. For its part, Ukraine said that the referendum was illegal and warned that Ukraine's armed forces was prepared to respond if Russian intervention escalated any further into Ukrainian territory.

On March 8, 2014, the international stakes heightened when pro-Russian soldiers in Crimea fired warning shots at a team of international observers from the Vienna-based OSCE. Although there were no casualties in the incident, it showed continuing intransigence on the part of the pro-Russian forces who asserted that the OSCE, which was invited by the Ukrainian government, did not have its permission to enter Crimea. As noted above, previous attempts made by the OSCE to enter Crimea were also met with resistance.

A day later on March 9, 2014, pro-Ukrainian activists were attacked and beaten by pro-Russian and Cossack cabals during a rally in the Crimean city of Sevastapol. The rally centered on the celebration of Taras Shevchenko, a Ukrainian poet and national hero. The pro-Russians and Cossacks attacked those attending the rally, presumably for their pro-Ukrainian inclinations. The incident highlighted the irony of Russia's position in noting that its presence was needed in Crimea to "protect" the ethno-linguistic Russian population of the region. Indeed, the persons needing protection in Crimea on this day were Ukrainians and pro-Ukrainians and not ethnic Russians.

For its part, Moscow dismissed the notion that it played any role in the escalating the Ukrainian crisis, even rejecting the notion that it sent troops into Crimea, and saying instead that it simply supported the local defense forces who happen to be pro-Russia. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov even suggested that the Ukrainian crisis was "artificially" created by Kiev "for purely geopolitical reasons."

International Action (and Inaction)

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Together, the events at the start of March 2014 likely strengthened the resolve of the West to enact further measures against Moscow for failing to defuse the crisis. To that end, the United States announced that it would be welcoming interim Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk to Washington for talks on how to end turmoil rocking Europe.

Meanwhile, the countries of Europe along with the United States emphasized its views of Russia's action as aggression against Ukraine and again warned that any active annexation of Crimea would end the diplomatic track. The West also reminded Russia and pro-Russian entities controlling Crimea that most of the world would not recognize the results of the illegal referendum in Crimea. The European Union on March 12, 2014, also agreed on a framework for sanctions against Russia. The sanctions would mirror United States measures, as they would include travel bans and asset freezes.

As well, NATO determined that it would cease cooperation with Russia, while deploying reconnaissance planes in Poland and Romania to monitor the Ukrainian crisis. This measure by NATO was sure to annoy Russia, which has long eschewed the presence of Western powers in eastern Europe, which it considers to be its own "backyard."

Despite these moves, the fact of the matter was that NATO has not been eager to enter into the Ukrainian/Crimean crisis. It has tread lightly into this landscape, noting that because Ukraine was not a NATO member state, there was no actual obligation to protect it. However, Ukrainian acting Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk has noted that under a 1994 disarmament treaty, known as the Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine agreed to give up its Soviet nuclear weapons in return for assistance from Russia and the West in defending Ukraine's sovereignty. He posed the following question: "What does the current military aggression of the Russian Federation on Ukrainian territory mean?" He then continued, "It means that a country which voluntarily gave up nuclear weapons, rejected nuclear status and received guarantees from the world's leading countries is left defenseless and alone in the face of a nuclear state that is armed to the teeth.

In truth, the United States and the European Union were more likely to offer financial aid and public declaration of solidarity than military support to an encroaching Russia, which was quite likely to officially annex Crimea following the ratification of Russian unity on March 16, 2014. But that move would inevitably highlight the fact that European countries unfortunate enough to be on Russia's radar could also be subject to annexation while facing no serious consequence for violating the modern international order, which it founded on the notion of sovereignty.

Tensions were on the rise in Crimea in the second week of March 2014 as troops believed to be Russian, in conjunction with local militias, seized control of a military hospital in the regional capital Simferopol. As well, pro-Russian armed troops, described as "self defense forces," blockaded Ukrainian troops from entering Crimea, even as Russia itself denied that it was

participating in such blockades.

Tensions were on the rise elsewhere in eastern Ukraine as pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian activists clashed in the cities of Kharkiv and Donetsk, where at least one person was killed.

Sensing that the scene was taking a dark turn, Ukraine's interim President Oleksander Turchinov had established a new National Guard and called on the international community for assistance in dealing with what it cast as Russian aggression. Acting Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk vociferously blamed Russia for the current crisis, and for actively undermining the global security structure as he declared, "This is not a two-sided conflict. These are actions by the Russian Federation aimed at undermining the system of global security.

United States President Barack Obama promised to "stand with Ukraine" and chastised Russia saying, "It is absolutely unacceptable to have Russian boots on the Ukrainian ground in the 21st century, violating all international deals and treaties." President Obama also warned his Russian counterpart, President Vladimir Putin, that the international community would be forced "to apply costs" if Russia did not remove its troops from Crimea. However, the actual value of those costs was a matter of debate. Given Russia's reserves, the combination of travel bans, asset freezes, and sanctions were unlikely to do much damage to a country more intent on reconstituting its Soviet domain.

That being said, President Obama was not alone. The leaders of most of the world's leading industrialized countries -- the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, and Japan -- issued similar stances in repudiation of Russia's actions in Crimea and in solidarity with Ukraine.

A statement from the leaders of the G7 nation states -- the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, and Japan -- demanded that the referendum not go forward. That statement included the following declaration: "In addition to its impact on the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea could have grave implications for the legal order that protects the unity and sovereignty of all states." Warning Russia of consequences, the statement continued, "Should the Russian Federation take such a step, we will take further action, individually and collectively."

Far from being chastened by such promises of condemnation at the international level, Russia appeared to suggest there was a need for increased -- rather than decreased -- involvement in Ukrainian affairs. Signaling even further encroachment into Ukrainian territory, Russia expressed "deep concern" over the activities of "nationalists" in eastern Ukraine and the need to provide security in that country against a backdrop of "radicals.

It was to be seen how Russia would explain its incursion into Ukrainian territory and its audacious seizure of a gas plant in the eastern part of the country as being a measure of "protection" against

radicals. Indeed, on March 15, 2014, approximately 80 Russian troops landed by helicopter in Ukrainian territory and seized control over a natural gas terminal. Ukraine responded by stationing its own troops outside the facility and issuing a statement that read as follows: "Ukraine reserves the right to use all necessary measures to stop the military invasion by Russia."

One glimmer of hope emerged in the form of a temporary truce over the blockade of Ukrainian military units in Crimea; on March 21, 2014, that blockade was scheduled to be lifted.

Meanwhile, the West attempted to condemn Crimea's secession referendum, and issue its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, by moving forward with a resolution in the United Nations Security Council. As expected, Russia -- as a veto-wielding permanent member -- vetoed the draft. Every other Security Council member voted in favor of the measure, with the exception of China, which abstained from the vote. Normally, China has joined Russia in controversial votes at the Security Council, such as action on the Syrian civil war. But in this case, with territories such as Tibet in mind, China was seemingly interested in delivering the message of its pro-sovereignty/non-interventionist stance.

The inaction at the Security Council was reminiscent of the Cold war era in which both sides habitually vetoed the other's measures, essentially creating a state of diplomatic paralysis.

The United States ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, characterized Russia's veto of the measure as a "sad and remarkable moment" and cast Russia as "isolated, alone and wrong." Undaunted, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, asserted that Crimea's referendum was needed to fill the "legal vacuum" in the aftermath of Ukraine's "coup d'etat."

With Crimea's referendum only days away, there were last minute talks between Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and United States Secretary of State Kerry to find a negotiated settlement. That meeting ended in failure with Lavrov declaring that Kerry's package of solutions were "not suitable: because they take "the situation created by the coup as a starting point." Because Russia viewed the overthrow of Yanukovich as illegal, it was not swayed by the arguments of the West. Clearly, an impasse was at hand.

Crimea votes for secession from Ukraine and unity with Russia

On the eve of the referendum in Crimea, the United States and the European Union repeated their threats to slap further sanctions on Russia, and warned that the ratification (i.e. an affirmative vote to unite with Russia) would not be internationally recognized.

Nevertheless, on March 16, 2014, voters went to the polls in Crimea to participate in a hastily organized referendum aimed at ratifying its breakaway from Ukraine and its union with Russia.

The move was largely viewed as an illegal move that contravened against international law, and as discussed above, it was guaranteed to be rejected by most countries of the world.

The referendum itself was being regarded as something of a sham as no international monitors were present to witness the event, while accredited journalists were required to pledge not to report "negative news." Meanwhile, with the region's original but minority Tartar population boycotting the vote, the outcome was almost guaranteed to be ratification of a proposed union with Russia.

Indeed, once the votes were counted, as many as 95 percent of voters in Crimea had backed secession from Ukraine and unity with Russia. Celebratory crowds were on the streets rejoicing the move to join with Russia, with many people expressing the view that they would now be "protected" by Russia. Sergey Aksyonov, the businessman who actually won only five percent in the Crimean assembly in the previous elections but who installed himself as Crimea's regional leader following Russia's de facto takeover of Crimea was also celebrating the vote in favor of unity with Russia. He also insisted that the vote was free and fair, irrespective of the fact that there were no monitors and a prevailing boycott by the Tartar population.

On March 17, 2014, one day after Crimea voted to join Russia, the United States and the European Union imposed personal sanctions on Russian and Crimean officials believed to be involved in the annexation of Crimea. This punitive action was intended as a rebuke against the illegal vote. But these moves were being regarded as insignificant by Russia, which some officials making sport of them via social media.

For its part, Crimea officially requested that the "Republic of Crimea" be admitted as a new subject to the Russian Federation. On the Russian side of the equation, Russia recognized Crimea as a sovereign entity. Russian President Putin was set to address the Russian parliament at which time, presumably, he would make clear whether or not his country intended to officially annex Crimea. Finally, Ukraine insisted that it would not accept these moves by Crimea and Russia, and that its sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected.

United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron urged the European Union to send "a very clear warning" to Russia, and suggested that Russia be permanently expelled from the G8 group. As well, United States Vice President Joe Biden, on a trip to Europe, warned Russia that it was on a "dark path" to isolation. Vice President Biden asserted, "As long as Russia continues on this dark path, they will face increasing political and economic isolation." During a session of the United Nations Security Council, United States Ambassador Samantha Power declared, "Russia it seems has re-written its borders but it cannot rewrite the facts." Likewise, NATO condemned Russia for attempting to "redraw the map of Europe."

But the admonishments and warnings from the United States, the United Kingdom, and NATO fell on deaf ears. Indeed, around the same time, Russian troops consolidated their hold on Crimea



by seizing Ukrainian naval bases in Crimea, including the headquarters in Sevastopol where the Russian flag was raised. As pro-Russian forces took control of the Ukrainian naval headquarters in Sevastopol, they also managed to capture the commander of the Ukrainian navy, Admiral Serhiy Haiduk, along with several others. Haiduk was only released after Russian authorities in Moscow intervened.

### Russia formally annexes Crimea

On March 19, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin -- in defiance of international condemnation and Western sanctions, signed a treaty making Crimea part of Russia. President Putin delivered a triumphant address to the Russian parliament in the Kremlin celebrating the return of Crimea to the Russian fold. Side-stepping the reality that the Crimea referendum had been held under Russian occupation, and with nary a word for Crimea's ethnic Tartars, Putin said the referendum result showed the will of the Crimean people to reunite with the Russian homeland. He said, "The hearts and minds of people, Crimea has always been and remains an inseparable part of Russia."

Putin also excoriated the West for its hypocrisy, pointing to the fact that many of those Western countries had supported the independence bid of Kosovo (home to a predominantly ethnic Albanian population) from Serbia (an ethnically Slavic nation state). Putin claimed that the West now wanted to deny Crimea the same right to follow its own identity-driven path. To raucous applause in the Kremlin, Putin declared: "You cannot call the same thing black today and white tomorrow." He also had harsh words for Ukraine's new government, casting them as "neo-Nazis, Russophobes, and anti-Semites."

Putin had a message for Ukraine, suggesting that Russian aggression against that country had now ended and there was no reason to fear a Russian push further into Ukrainian territory. He said, "Don't believe those who try to frighten you with Russia and who scream that other regions will follow after Crimea...We do not want a partition of Ukraine. We do not need this."

For its part, Ukraine seemed to accept the reality that it had lost Crimea. Ukrainian authorities announced that they would be withdrawing soldiers and their families from Crimea in an orderly manner. As well, Ukraine with its far less superior military sought to lessen the prospects of further Russian encroachment by stating that it had no intention of joining NATO and vowing to disarm nationalist militias.

Perhaps these assurances and the plan for withdrawal were driven by the fact that the first death associated with the crisis had been a Ukrainian soldier who died when his base came under attack by Russian forces in the Crimean town of Simferopol. Although Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk cast the death of the soldier as a "war crime," and even as President Oleksander Turchinov instructed Ukrainian troops in Crimea "to use weapons to defend and protect the lives of Ukrainian servicemen," the fact of the matter was that the losses of life and territory were being

experienced on the Ukrainian side of the equation.

Indeed, one could argue that Russia had effectively "won" this round of confrontations, by seizing Crimea from that country and by not having to pay a price for the violation of sovereignty. Russia was gaining even further rewards with these aforementioned assurances from Ukraine.

Note that on March 21, 2014, having secured parliamentary support for the move, Russian President Vladimir Putin formally signed into law the annexation of Crimea.

### Ukraine Moving Forward

Regardless of its effective loss of Crimea, Ukraine was moving forward with its pro-European stance and signed an association agreement with the European Union on March 21, 2014. European Union President Herman Van Rompuy hailed the agreement, saying, "Today, we are signing the [association] agreement's political provisions. It shows our steadfast support for the course the people of Ukraine have courageously pursued. Today is but the opening act. We expect to soon sign the agreement's remaining parts, not least the economic provisions. Together with the political ones, they form a single instrument."

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk celebrated the signing of the agreement, saying, "This deal covers the most existential and most important issues, mainly security and defense cooperation. This deal will establish a joint decision-making body, which is to facilitate the process of real reforms in my country. And this deal meets the aspirations of millions of Ukrainians that want to be a part of the European Union." Underlining Europe's commitment to Ukraine was the statement by the president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, who asserted: "This is the democratic choice that Ukraine has made. It is our firm intention to sign the remaining parts of the agreement in due course. Europe is committed to Ukraine for the long term."

Of course, that association agreement was the very foundation of the unrest in Ukraine in late 2013 through 2014, that ended in the ousting of Yanukovych, and ultimately spurred Russian encroachment into Crimea. To that latter end, on the same day as Ukraine signed the Association Agreement with the European Union, having secured parliamentary support for the move, Russian President Vladimir Putin formally signed into law the annexation of Crimea.

Meanwhile, at the political level, opposition figure, Klitscho, who played a central role in the protests of 2013 and 2014 in Ukraine announced that he would not be pursuing the presidency. Instead, he said that he intended to run for the post of mayor of Kiev and placed his support for the presidential contest behind businessman Petro Poroshenko, who also was a central player in Ukraine's anti-Russian/pro-European uprising. It was to be seen if the consolidation of support around Poroshenko would stave off victory by Tymoshenko, who also announced her bid for the presidency. Now released from prison under the presidency of Yanukovych for largely political

reasons, it was to be seen if Tymoshenko -- still, a polarizing figure -- could secure the most painful revenge against ousted Yanukovich by winning the post he held only a few months prior.

Is Russia setting its sight on the Moldovan territory of Trans-Dniestr?

As March 2014 entered its final week, and as Russia had its foot firmly implanted in Crimea, anxieties about Russian territorial ambitions were sparked again -- but this time on the former Soviet republic of Moldova. At issue was the disputed territory of Trans-Dniestr which resides under the jurisdiction of Moldova while harboring separatist ambitions.

Shortly after Moldova declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Trans-Dniestr declared its independence from Moldova, sparking an armed conflict between Moldovan and Trans-Dniestrian forces. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has remained involved in negotiations over Trans-Dniestr's status since the conflict began, though a long series of negotiations have thus far failed to produce a final status agreement. Moldova has tried to accommodate its ethn-linguistic Russian minority in the region by offering broad cultural and political autonomy. But given Russia's success in Crimea, it was to be seen if the Russian argument that it must act to "protect" ethno-linguistic Russians would hold sway in Moldova. The Russia argument in that direction would be aided by the call from the speaker of Trans-Dniestr's parliament for Russia to incorporate the region.

The attention of Trans-Dniestr emerged in late March 2014 as speculation arose about Russia using its many political and economic levers to prevent Moldova from moving forward with its Western integration effort. At the top of Russia's list of objectives was likely to be the derailment of Moldova's proposed association and trade agreements with the European Union. Moldova completed the initial rounds of signatures in late 2013 during a summit in Vilnius (Lithuania) -- the same meeting at which former Ukrainian President Yanukovich rejected the deals. With Moldova set to sign on to the association agreement officially in mid-2014, it was to be seen if Russia would leverage its power to prevent that from occurring.

Meanwhile, on March 25, 2014, Russia held military exercises in Trans-Dniestr. NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, United States Air Force General Philip Breedlove has noted that Russia had built up a "very sizeable" force on its border with Ukraine, that could easily be activated elsewhere in the region. Chief among the possibilities for expanded Russian encroachment, according to Breedlove, was the Moldovan territory of Trans-Dniestr. In his remarks to the Marshall Fund think tank, Breedlove said, "There is absolutely sufficient (Russian) force postured on the eastern border of Ukraine to run to Trans-Dniestr if the decision was made to do that, and that is very worrisome." Breedlove thus added, "We need to think about our allies, the positioning of our forces in the alliance and the readiness of those forces ... such that we can be there to defend against it if required."

Of course, given the lack of international action -- including on the part of NATO -- in punishing Russia for seizing Crimea, it was barely conceivable that NATO would act to save Moldova's territorial integrity, should Russia choose to incorporate Trans-Dniestr. To date, Russia has paid no price for its action in the Russian-speaking regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which remain officially under Georgian jurisdiction. As well, sanctions and condemnations against Russia for annexing Crimea has resulted in only mocking responses from the Russian political class.

UN General Assembly declares Crimean independence referendum to be invalid:

On March 27, 2014, the United Nations General Assembly passed a non-binding resolution declaring Crimea's independence referendum, and its associated secession from Ukraine, to be invalid. The approved declaration dismissed the vote in Crimea as "having no validity" and noted that it "cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or of the City of Sevastopol." The resolution further stated that the United Nations General Assembly "calls upon all States, international organizations and specialized agencies not to recognize any alteration of the status" of Crimea and Sevastopol.

There were 100 votes in favor, 11 votes against it, 58 abstentions, while 24 countries did not participate at all. The countries of the West wasted little time in noting that the overwhelming vote at the General Assembly to invalidate the Crimean independence referendum showed Russia's global isolation. Indeed, with only 10 countries willing to officially place themselves on the record as being in Moscow's corner, the vote in the United Nations General Assembly was a rebuke of sorts. That short list included certain "rogue" nations such as North Korea, Sudan, and Syria, along with countries not known for their democratic records, such as Cuba, Venezuela, Belarus, and Zimbabwe. Indeed, the vote outcome was illustrative of the fact that Russia held waning influence on the global stage.

The Russian ambassador to the United Nations Churkin, seemed unwilling to accept the condemnation by the global community, saying instead, "Historical justice has been vindicated." He also took comfort in the 58 abstentions, which included China, saying that they implied tacit support for Russia. In truth, however, there were reports of countries being bullied by Russia into abstentions. In particular, several Eastern European and Central Asian states were threatened with retaliation if they voted in favor of the resolution declaring invalid Crimea's referendum on seceding from Ukraine. Reuters News reported that in interviews with United Nations diplomats, many of the countries targeted with political and economic threats by Russia included Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Given the geopolitical and geostrategic stakes, it was not surprising that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan opted not to cast a vote at all.

The West was meanwhile making the most of the strong "yes vote." French Ambassador Gerard Araud declared: "When you lose, you have to be a good loser...I think Russia is a bad loser. They lost and they did by 100 votes."

Two days before the vote in the United Nations General Assembly, United States President Barack Obama was himself employing strong language to diminish Russia's standing in the world. During a joint news conference with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, President Obama dismissed Russia as simply a "regional power," which was threatening its neighbors out of a position of weakness rather than strength. President Obama added that his country, the United States, had no need to invade any of its immediate neighbors to maintain its influence on them or force a cooperative relationship. The following day, speaking from Belgium, President Obama emphasized his perception that Russia was a waning influence -- no longer a super power on the world stage -- and thus the conflict over Ukraine did not constitute the beginning of another Cold War. President Obama relentlessly noted that Russia did not lead a bloc of nations, and did not possess a global ideology that a large number of other countries wished to follow or emulate.

Despite the edgy rhetoric, the diplomatic track continued to move forward with United States Secretary of State John Kerry holding meetings with his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, on March 30, 2014. Those talks were characterized as "frank" but ended without any agreement on Ukraine being forged. Russia was reportedly making demands that Ukraine be a neutral and federal entity while the United States advocated for Ukraine to be at the table where its own future was being discussed. As noted by Secretary of State Kerry, "This principle is clear: no decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine." Kerry also expressed "strong concerns" about the presence of Russian troops on the Ukraine border, while Lavrov insisted that Russia had not plan for an invasion of Ukraine. For its part, the Ukrainian foreign ministry cast Lavrov's demands for a future federal system of government in Ukraine as "patronizing." Clearly, the diplomatic track had a lengthy distance to be traversed.

NATO suspends cooperation with Russia while looking towards military exercises with Ukraine:

A further blow to Russia's standing internationally came via the news that NATO would be suspending "all practical civilian and military cooperation" with that country. NATO foreign ministers made the decision at a meeting in the Belgian capital of Brussels on April 1, 2014, saying it was in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea. NATO, however, said it would continue with some degree of political dialogue with Moscow through the NATO-Russia Council, and it would continue to work with Russia on counter-narcotics efforts.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said, "I would expect the [NATO-Russian] counter-narcotics project to continue. It also involves other countries than Russia and I think Russia has a very strong interest in continuing our strong efforts in countering drugs trafficking. I would also expect the Afghanistan-related cooperation projects to continue -- the [troop] transit arrangement as well as the helicopter projects."

Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen also noted that while NATO would be prepared to

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assist Ukraine in its effort to ameliorate its military, it would not be in a position to provide Ukraine with weapons since all military equipment was actually owned by NATO member states. Any arms assistance to Ukraine would have to be rendered via "bilateral arrangements between NATO allies and their partners."

Nevertheless, NATO announced that it would intensify cooperation with Ukraine through military training. To this end, Ukraine's parliament approved conducting military exercises with NATO countries later in 2014. NATO would additionally consider the deployment of military assets in eastern European NATO countries, such as the Baltic states and Poland, which in the post-Soviet era have consistently been eager to move out of Moscow's orbit and were now disturbed by Russia's actions in Ukraine.

For its part, Russia continued its campaign of intimidation against Ukraine as it warned that country not to consider accession to NATO. Russia also threatened Ukraine's economic fortune by saying future economic ties would depend on Ukraine's foreign policy decisions. Russia's state-controlled gas company, Gazprom, underlined that threat by increasing the price of gas for Ukraine by 40 percent.

#### Eastern Ukraine is new Flashpoint in Crisis

In the first week of April 2014, eastern Ukraine emerged as a new flashpoint with pro-Russian cabals taking control over government buildings in cities such as Luhansk, Donetsk, and Kharkiv. These pro-Russian separatists were urging Russia and President Vladimir Putin to intervene, even calling for a Crimea-style referendum in which they could unite with Russia. The government of Ukraine was in no mood to entertain such notions and, instead, made clear it would restore order forcibly if necessary.

With an eye on a some sort of resolution, Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said, "A resolution to this crisis will be found within the next 48 hours." He continued, "For those who want dialogue, we propose talks and a political solution." But Avakov also issued a warning as he said, "For the minority who want conflict they will get a forceful answer from the Ukrainian authorities."

The Obama administration in the United States accused Russia of being behind the effort to destabilize and ultimately fragment Ukraine. Indeed, United States Secretary of State John Kerry went so far as to accuse Russian agents of fomenting the separatist sentiment and turmoil in eastern Ukraine, with the goal of ultimately justifying military action further into Ukrainian territory. He said, "It is clear that Russian special forces and agents have been the catalyst behind the chaos of the last 24 hours."

The United Kingdom also joined the chorus with Foreign Secretary William Hague saying that the mass protests and occupation of government interests in eastern Ukraine bore "all the hallmarks of



a Russian strategy to destabilize Ukraine."

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk cast the developments as follows: "An anti-Ukrainian plan is being put into operation ... under which foreign troops will cross the border and seize the territory of the country." He went on, "We will not allow this."

These claims were not, in actuality, farfetched since it was this very mode of operation that led to the referendum in Crimea, and ultimately, its annexation by Russia, as discussed above. In fact, in the second week of April 2014, Anders Fogh Rasmussen -- the head of NATO -- echoed the view that the unrest in eastern Ukraine was reminiscent of what had transpired in Crimea and placed the blame on Russia. Rasmussen made note of the "reappearance of men with specialized Russian weapons and identical uniforms without insignia, as previously worn by Russian troops during Russia's illegal and illegitimate seizure of Crimea." United States Secretary of State John Kerry went further, noting that the uprisings in eastern Ukraine "could potentially be a contrived pretext for military intervention just as we saw in Crimea."

For its part, Russia dismissed the accusations, insisting that any uprising in eastern Ukraine was merely a natural development on the political scene. Left unmentioned was the fact that Russia was maintaining its buildup of military forces on the border with Ukraine. In an interview with ABC News, Samantha Power, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, rejected Russia's claim that unrest in eastern Ukraine was an organic occurrence. Pointing to the systematic manner in which pro-Russian militants were able to take control of government interests in Ukraine, she said, "It's professional, co-ordinated. Nothing grassroots about it."

Meanwhile, plans were afoot for a meeting that would include representatives from Russia, Ukraine, the United States and the European Union. On the agenda was a negotiated resolution to the Ukrainian crisis, although the actual feasibility of such an agreement was a matter of debate. According to United States diplomat, Victoria Nuland, there were no high hopes for a resolution being forged; however, she expressed the view that it was important to keep the "diplomatic door open."

But by mid-April 2014, the diplomatic door appeared to be closing. Pro-Russian forces were holding sway over an increasing number of government buildings, and the unrest was spreading to other eastern Ukrainian cities, such as Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and Druzhkivka. Outraged over what they perceived as Russian intervention into Ukrainian affairs, by backing pro-Russian mobs in eastern Ukraine, Acting President Oleksandr Turchynov drew a symbolic line in the sand and declared that a military operation would be launched to oust the pro-Russian cabals.

In a national address that was broadcast in the media, Acting President Turchynov warned that the government of Ukraine would not allow pro-Russian forces to repeat what was done in Crimea, and which ultimately ended with the annexation of that region by Russia. Referring to

Russia directly as the source of unrest in eastern Ukraine, the president said: "The aggressor... is continuing to sow disorder in the east of the country." He continued, "We will not allow Russia to repeat the Crimean scenario in the eastern regions of Ukraine." Unwilling to cede any further Ukrainian territory to Russia, Acting President Turchynov thus issued a decree demanding that pro-Russian militants relinquish their weapons and vacate government buildings in eastern Ukrainian flashpoint cities, or, face a full-scale military assault.

Presumably alarmed by this news, Russia accused Ukraine of "waging war against its own people" and demanded an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council. At that emergency meeting on April 12, 2014, Russia called for dialogue with Ukraine, while its ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, demanded that "the henchmen of Maidan" -- a reference to Ukraine's protest movement -- "stop attacking their own people." He also warned that neo-Nazis and anti-Semites were now sitting in "the self-proclaimed government in Kiev."

For its part, Ukraine reiterated its accusation that Russia had orchestrated the crisis unfolding in eastern Ukraine, while Russia denied the allegations that its agents were responsible for fomenting unrest in eastern Ukraine.

Meanwhile, despite the Ukrainian promise of an "anti-terrorism" operation to come in eastern Ukraine if pro-Russian cabals did not withdraw from government buildings, and in defiance of a deadline for action imposed by the Ukrainian government, pro-Russian militants expanded their control into other towns.

Of note was the storming and occupation of a police station in the town of Horlivka, close to Donetsk. In Donetsk itself, pro-Russian militants said they intended to seize control of the local government infrastructure there and declare themselves to be an independent "People's Republic of Donetsk."

In Sloviansk, where the Ukrainian government said it would begin its "anti-terrorism" operation, pro-Russian militants held Russian flags, shouted "Russia! Russia!" and made it clear they retained control of the city council offices. They even placed Ukrainian troops on a bus and sent them back to their base at Dnipropetrovsk.

In the city of Kramatorsk, where Ukrainian forces were supposed to be regaining control, the effort was curtailed. Soon after Ukrainian forces recaptured an airfield, pro-Russian militants seized and disarmed Ukrainian military vehicles. The humiliation of Ukrainian authorities at the hands of pro-Russian forces continued in Pchylkino, where again Ukrainian military vehicles were subdued by pro-Russian forces. In some cases in the eastern part of the country, Ukrainian forces quite literally surrendered to pro-Russian militants.

It was apparent that the so-called "anti-terrorism" operation was, if not a humiliating failure for the

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Ukrainian authorities, then certainly an embarrassing illumination of Kiev's weakness in confronting Moscow's aggression.

Amidst criticism of the Ukrainian authorities' ineffectual response to the Russian threat, Vitaly Tsyhanok, the head of Ukraine's anti-terror operations, was sacked from his post. Those criticisms included the question as to why the government had not yet declared a state of emergency over the crisis in the eastern part of the country. In response, the government said it had not yet taken that action since it would require the suspension of the presidential election set for May 25, 2014, which was a priority for the political stabilization of the country.

While Ukrainian interim President Turchynov railed against the apparent encroachment by Russia again into Ukrainian territory, he nonetheless suggested he was open to the idea of transforming Ukraine from a republic to a federation, effectively conveying greater autonomy on the Russian-speaking eastern part of the country. To this end, he said he would support the notion of a national referendum on the matter. Of course, ratification was not guaranteed since western Ukraine was supportive of a fully unified republic. Clearly, Turchynov was banking on the pro-republic/anti-federation vote winning the day. The president mentioned this reality as he said, "We are not against holding a national referendum... I am certain that a majority of Ukrainians will support an indivisible, independent, democratic and united Ukraine."

Deepening the crisis was the news in the early hours of April 17, 2014, that pro-Russian separatists attacked a national guard base in Mariupol on the Sea of Azov; three of them were killed in the ensuing fracas with Ukrainian forces.

Adding even further to the sense of chaos and turmoil were disturbing reports that members of the Jewish community in eastern Ukraine were being targeted. At issue was the release of leaflets in the city of Donetsk instructing Jews to "register" with the new authorities or face deportation and having their citizenship revoked. It should be noted that the self-appointed authorities in Donetsk distanced themselves from the leaflets and made it known that it was not their work. Still, the fact of the matter was that such leaflets did exist and were circulated in the city. The irony in this alarming event was the fact that Russia had long accused Kiev of repressing the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. In fact, this case showed that other minorities were being subject to repression by the Russian ethno-linguistic population of eastern Ukraine.

With the United States and NATO making it clear they had no intention of involving themselves in the burgeoning Ukrainian civil war, and with the European Union unlikely to support such a course of action on its doorstep, there were few quivers in the arsenal of the West against Russia. Instead, further economic sanctions and a symbolic show of force were in the offing.

The United Kingdom had already called for the imposition of further sanctions by the European Union against Russia as a result of its actions in the ever-escalating Ukrainian crisis. With the

scenario in Ukraine devolving further, foreign ministers from the European Union agreed to expand their sanctions against Russia, while the Obama administration in the United States said it was exploring means to impose more painful "costs" on Russia. The United States also said it was approving non-lethal aid for Ukraine.

On the military end of things, NATO announced it would reinforce the security of alliance member states. NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said, "You will see deployments at sea, in the air, on land, to take place immediately. That means within days." Of course, the truth was that the action was not in NATO member states but in vulnerable Ukraine, which had the rhetoric - but not practical -- support of the West in its fight against Russian territorial ambitions.

It was to be seen if peace conference set to convene on April 17, 2014, in Geneva between representatives of Ukraine, Russia, the United States, and the European Union would actually yield results. Going into the meeting, there was no sense of optimism. Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk said he had limited expectations and added, "I don't trust the Russian side."

That sense of trust was not likely helped by the leader of Russia on the eve of the peace conference. Indeed, President Putin did little to rhetorically calm the situation. While paying lip service to his preference for diplomacy, Putin insisted that Russia had the right to militarily intervene in neighboring countries. He said, "The Federation Council granted the president the right to use military force in Ukraine. I really hope that I do not have to exercise this right and that we are able to solve all today's pressing issues via political and diplomatic means." He continued, "We must do everything to help these people (in eastern Ukraine) defend their rights and independently determine their own destiny." Putin set off alarm bells across the region as he intimated that such Russian help would not stop with Ukraine but extend elsewhere in the region. To this end, Putin looked to Trans-Dniestr and said that the people of that Moldovan separatist enclave should also be permitted to "determine their own destiny." Putin also had sharp words for the new Ukrainian government, which he accused of dragging that country into an abyss. He said, "I hope that they are able to realize what a pit, what an abyss the current authorities are in and dragging the country into."

### Agreement forged to end Ukraine Crisis

Despite the low expectations regarding the potential success of that meeting, the hard work of diplomacy won the day on April 17, 2014, when an agreement was reached to de-escalate the crisis in Ukraine. The agreement was forged between United States Secretary of State John Kerry, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, as well as acting Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsia.

The four joint parties in Geneva released a statement announcing the agreement as follows: "The Geneva meeting on the situation in Ukraine agreed on initial concrete steps to de-escalate tensions

and restore security for all citizens.”

Central to the Geneva agreement were the following elements --

- all illegal militant groups in Ukraine should be dissolved immediately-
- all separatists occupying government buildings should be disarmed and depart those compounds
- amnesty would be granted to all anti-government protesters

The agreement also demanded that the violence end in Ukraine, and in an apparent reference to the circulation of reprehensible leaflets urging Jews to "register" in eastern Ukraine, it also condemned racism, extremism, racism, and religious intolerance, including anti-Semitism.

Baroness Ashton said the agreement contained "concrete steps" that should be implemented "immediately." But with an eye on ensuring that the agreement were not simply guiding principles but mandated actions, these steps were to be overseen by monitors from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Beyond the immediate goals of the deal, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov espoused the Russian view that long-term constitutional reforms would have to be implemented in Ukraine. Left unsaid was what those constitutional reforms would entail although Russia has, for some time, advocated that Ukraine be transformed from a republic to a federation.

Meanwhile, regardless of the apparent success of diplomacy (at least on April 17, 2014), United States Secretary of State Kerry retained a bitter tone when he praised Ukraine for showing extreme restraint in regards to provocation from pro-Russian cabals. Kerry warned that the deal was only useful if its provisions were actually applied in practice. He said, "What is important is that these words are translated into actions and none of us leave here with the sense that the job is done, because the words are on the paper...The job will not be done until these principles are implemented and are followed up on."

While there were suggestions that the deal might result in a halt on further sanctions being levied against Russia, Kerry made sure to point out that such measures remained on the table. Kerry warned that Russia could be presented with "further costs" if de-escalation, as set forth in the agreement discussed here, did not emerge. Kerry also called on Ukraine to do its part to subdue heightened tensions.

In the third week of April 2014, mediators from Europe were set to commence negotiations aimed at securing the surrender of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. That effort by mediators from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) promised to be difficult since the pro-Russian cabals in the region were refusing to recognize the Geneva accord (discussed here). As noted by Envoy Christian Schoenenberger of Switzerland (the country chairing the

OSCE at the time): "For the time being the political will is not there to move out." He continued, "That's the task of the monitors, to create this political will, inform the people, so eventually they will understand that the best option for them is to move out." Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsia said that if there was no progress, the Ukrainian government would look to the OSCE to "work out practical steps for the implementation of the Geneva agreement."

Note that as of April 21, 2014, the viability of the Geneva accord seemed a matter of debate. Pro-Russian militants showed no interest in withdrawing from government facilities, and meetings with OSCE mediators yielded no productive results. Instead, both sides (pro-Moscow and pro-Kiev respectively) accused each other of breaching the terms of the agreement.

On one side of the equation, pro-Russian activists blamed Ukrainian nationalists from the group, Right Sector, for the killing of three people at a security checkpoint. On the other side of the equation, activists in Slaviansk indicated that they intended to "dig in" their proverbial heels as they moved to reinforce their barricades. In Kramatorsk, masked gunmen ousted the local police chief and took control of the security services office. Elsewhere in eastern Ukraine, pro-Russian militants told international journalists that they had no intention of disarming unless Ukrainian nationalist groups in the western part of the country disarmed first.

While the OSCE mediators had not yet abandoned their mission to get the provisions of the agreement implemented, the United States and the European Union made it clear that they would impose new sanctions on Russia if pro-Russian separatists did not soon disarm and remove themselves from government buildings. Some Western diplomats were indicating that the entire deal was an exercise in the futility and only served the purpose of buying time for Russia to extend its grip in Ukraine. As noted by one European diplomat in a conversation with Reuters News over Putin's interest in seeing the Geneva accord implemented: "Talks and compromises are just part of his tactics...He wants to have Ukraine." The fact that Western diplomats were actually expressing such views -- admittedly "off the record" -- was a signal that the political climate for compromise was grim.

Meanwhile, in a fresh show of support for Ukraine, United States Vice President Joe Biden arrived in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev where he was set to unveil technical assistance measures. Vice President Biden's presence was also aimed at stressing the importance of moving forward with the provisions of the Geneva accord. As noted by a spokesperson from the White House, "He will call for urgent implementation of the agreement reached in Geneva... while also making clear ... that there will be mounting costs for Russia if they choose a destabilizing rather than constructive course in the days ahead."

On the issue of Russia's "destabilizing" course, Ukraine release photographs that seemed to prove that the masked combatants in eastern Ukraine were under the control of Moscow. Throughout, Russia has passionately dismissed the charges that it was orchestrating the unrest in eastern



Ukraine, and has insisted that masked gunmen bearing no military insignia were simply local activists who were driven to extreme action out of fear of the new authorities in Kiev. However, photographic evidence indicated that the gunmen were actually Russian operatives of the same type believed to have carried out the takeover of Crimea. One gunman was even identified as Igor Ivanovich Strelkov -- a well known Russian intelligence agent with a long career in clandestine activities on behalf of the Russian government.

The White House in the United States endorsed the photographic evidence, with State Department spokesperson, Jen Psaki, saying, "There has been broad unity in the international community about the connection between Russia and some of the armed militants in eastern Ukraine, and the photos presented by the Ukrainians... only further confirm this."

By April 22, 2014, Ukraine's interim President Turchinov had called for government forces to resume its offensive operation against pro-Russian rebels. The Ukrainian leader made the decision after the gruesome discovery of the dead body of Volodymyr Rybak -- a politician from Turchinov's own Batkivshchyna political party. Tybak's body bore signs of torture. Another body showing signs of being subject to torture was also found in Sloviansk. These discoveries, along with the failure of pro-Russian militants to abandon their occupation of government buildings in eastern Ukraine in violation of the Geneva deal, appeared to have spurred the Ukrainian leader to take a more hardline stance. For his part, President Turchinov blamed Russia for the brutal killings as he said, "These crimes are being carried out with the full support and indulgence of the Russian Federation...I call on the security agencies to re-launch and carry out effective anti-terrorist measures, with the aim of protecting Ukrainian citizens living in eastern Ukraine from terrorists."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov tried to redirect the blame for the crisis in eastern Ukraine onto the United States when he said, "There is no reason not to believe that the Americans are running the show." A statement from Lavrov's ministry went further as it said, "Instead of taking effective measures to implement the ... agreements, Kiev, Washington and a series of European capitals continue to insist that it is only Ukrainian citizens defending their rights in the south-east of Ukraine who need to give up their weapons."

By April 24, 2014, Ukrainian forces had killed five pro-Moscow rebels in the eastern part of the country and Russia was flexing its military might as it carried out military exercises close to the Ukrainian border, presumably to show that it could invade Ukraine at will.

With the news emerging as well about Ukrainian commandos carrying out raids on pro-Russian checkpoints in Sloviansk, and the ensuing deaths of at least two pro-Russian separatists, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that if the interim Ukrainian authorities in Kiev used its army to attack the people of eastern Ukraine, it would be carrying out a crime against its own people deserving on consequences. Speaking from St. Petersburg, he said, "It is just a punitive operation and it will of course incur consequences for the people making these decisions, including (an

effect) on our interstate relations."

But even as Russia was threatening consequences for Ukraine, the United States was trained on Russia. United States President Obama warned that his country was ready to impose fresh sanctions on Russia if it did work to end the crisis in eastern Ukraine. Speaking from Japan where the United States leader was on an official visit, President Obama said, "We have prepared for the possibility of applying additional sanctions." President Putin dismissed the threat of sanctions as being "dishonorable" but unlikely to strike critical damage on Russia.

It was to be seen if Putin would be equally dismissive of the increased presence of United States forces in eastern Europe on behalf of its NATO allies. To that end, a contingent of 600 United States troops arrived in Poland as an effort to shore up NATO support in the region, even as Russia built up its own military presence on the Ukrainian border. As well, United States Secretary of State John Kerry sharpened his rhetoric against Russia as he declared on April 25, 2014 that Russia was responsible for "deception and destabilization" in eastern Ukraine. "This is a full-throated effort to actively sabotage the democratic process through gross external intimidation that has been brought inside Ukraine," he said. Kerry also accused Russia of "playing an active role in destabilizing eastern Ukraine" with personnel, weapons, money and operational planning."

Meanwhile, pro-Russian militants in eastern Ukraine acknowledged on April 23, 2014, that they had an American journalist Simon Ostrovsky in their custody. A spokesperson for the pro-Russian militants in the eastern city of Slovyansk, Stella Khorosheva, said Ostrovsky was being held in captivity for "bad activities" and that he would have to be investigated. The United States Department of State issued a demand for the safety and release of Ostrovsky, who was ultimately freed on April 24, 2014.

However, the news was not so good on April 26, 2014, for the OSCE observers who were in eastern Ukraine to ensure the Geneva accord was implemented. Eight OSCE observers were abducted by pro-Russian militants in the eastern Ukraine city of Sloviansk under spurious charges of spying and held in captivity. United States Secretary of States John Kerry demanded that Russia use its influence to ensure the release of the observers. By the start of May 2014, most of the OSCE observers being held in Sloviansk remained in captivity despite requests from the West that Russia intervene into the matter, and secure their release.

Latest Developments --

- Dozens killed in clashes in the southwestern city of Odessa marking worst death toll in a single incident since outbreak of unrest
- Pro-Russia activists, armed with automatic rifles, stormed several official buildings in the eastern Ukrainian city of Luhansk
- Several separatists were reported to have been killed in a government offensive in Sloviansk

- Pro-Russia activists, armed with clubs, broke up a pro-Kiev rally in Donetsk
- The self-declared leader of Donetsk said the region would not participate in the presidential election scheduled for May 2014
- Ukrainian President Olexander Turchynov condemned local security personnel in Luhanski and Donetsk for "inaction" and "criminal treachery"
- Four soldiers and about 30 separatists were killed in an "anti-terrorism operation" in the eastern town of Sloviansk
- Gunfire was reported in the port of Mariupol, which was taken over by pro-Russian militants
- Accusations emerged about former President Yanukovych and his associates stealing billions of dollars worth of assets
- Norway's defense ministry suspended all defense co-operation with Russia except on border controls
- The European Union published a new list of 15 individuals facing travel bans and asset freezes including major Russian intelligence officials
- The United States issued sanctions against individuals and companies with links to President Putin's "inner circle"
- The United States said it would deny export licenses for any high-technology items that could conceivably contribute to Russian military capabilities

At the end of the first week of May 2014, due to the violence in Odessa, Ukrainian authorities were trying to regain control there while locals buried their dead. Meanwhile, the negative rhetoric between Ukraine and Russia was on the upswing with both sides accusing the other of tearing Ukraine apart. Indeed, there was a fairly open discourse about the high possibility of war in eastern Europe. Even previously cautious European leaders were speculating about that outcome with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier saying, "The bloody pictures from Odessa have shown us that we are just a few steps away from a military confrontation."

By the second week of May 2014, in the port city of Mariupol, fierce fighting between Ukrainian forces and separatists ended in the deaths of several people. Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov explained that 20 "terrorists" were killed when pro-Russian militants tried to take control over the police headquarters.

Meanwhile, Russia was attempting to advance the image of a country stepping back from the Ukrainian conflict as it announced it was pulling back its military forces from the border with Ukraine. Russia also urged the separatists in the eastern region to refrain from holding referenda on secession similar to the one that ensued in Crimea and ended in the Russian annexation of that region. Russia also expressed support for the presidential election in Ukraine set for May 25, 2014. Previously, Russia had disparaged the notion of that election taking place in a climate of civil strife. Now, Russian President Vladimir Putin was saying that Ukraine's presidential election was a step "in the right direction."

It was not known if these statements from Russia were to be regarded as a ploy. Such a possibility loomed large when NATO said that satellite imagery showed no evidence of a Russian pull back.

As well, Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Crimea on May 9, 2014, to celebrate the anniversary of the allied victory over the Nazis in World War II. The presence of Putin in Crimea, which had been annexed by Russia only a month before, was a sign that the Russian leader wanted to flaunt his effective "victory" over the Ukrainians with regard to Crimea. Clearly, he also wanted to extrovert his Russian nationalist agenda. Putin made this purpose for his presence in Crimea clear when he declared: "I am sure that 2014 will go into the annals of our whole country as the year when the nations living here firmly decided to be together with Russia, affirming fidelity to the historical truth and the memory of our ancestors."

It should be noted that Putin's presence in Crimea was frowned upon by the West, with NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen saying, "His visit to Crimea is inappropriate."

By the second week of May 2014, separatists in eastern Ukraine made clear that irrespective of Russia's call for them to hold off on a breakaway referendum, they were going forward with that vote anyway. To that end, self-rule" referenda ensued in eastern Ukraine in the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk on May 11, 2014. Reports from the ground indicated an overwhelming affirmative vote ratifying self-rule in Donetsk. In fact, the separatist leader in Donetsk, Denis Pushilin, warned that with announcement of the results in favor of self-rule, all Ukrainian military troops in the region would be regarded as "occupying forces." The next step for Donetsk was, apparently, to go down the road of Crimea and petition for Donetsk to be "absorbed" by Russia.

In Luhansk, following the self-rule referendum there, rebels declared independence. A statement by rebel leaders read as follows: "The people of Luhansk Region declare the creation of a sovereign state -- the Luhansk people's republic." The rebel leaders in Luhansk also said that the impending presidential election in Ukraine would not take place within its new self-declared independent borders.

Of course, it was to be seen if Ukraine would let wide swaths of eastern Ukrainian territory be lost to Russia as quietly as it assented to Russia's annexation of Crimea. With Donetsk and Luhansk providing significant industrial production and more than 15 percent of Ukraine's GDP, Ukraine was not likely to accept such a loss easily. In fact, the International Monetary Fund has warned that its aid package to Ukraine would have to be renegotiated if that country loss significant industrial territory in the eastern part of the country.

The vote -- largely cast as both illegal and a sham by Ukraine and the West -- was marked by disorganization, no electoral oversight, and violence, with at least one death reported. As well, persons with Ukrainian loyalties complained of death threats and intimidation, probably contributing to a scenario in which the only persons casting (unregulated) ballots were likely in the

self-rule or pro-Russian corners anyway. For his part, Ukraine's acting president said in an address to the parliament, "The farce that terrorist separatists call a referendum is nothing more than propaganda to cover up murders, kidnappings, violence and other serious crimes." The United States and European Union joined the chorus of international powers condemning the referenda, with Herman Van Rompuy, the president of the European Council of European Union leaders, saying, "We will not recognize the so-called referendums of yesterday. They are illegal, illegitimate and incredible."

### Presidential election in Ukraine

A presidential election was set to be held in Ukraine on May 25, 2014. The election was intended to democratically decide a new head of state for the country, following the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014. There were also high hopes that the vote would settle the political landscape in Ukraine that deteriorated to a state of turmoil in the eastern part of the country. Indeed, the period following Yanukovich's ouster has been marked by the refusal of Russia to accept the new pro-European government of Ukraine, a pro-Russian uprising in eastern Ukraine, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and ongoing turbulence in Russian-speaking parts of the country.

Ahead of that election, Russian President Vladimir Putin promised his country would work with whatever new Ukrainian administration emerged following that election. Putin said: "We will respect the choice of the Ukrainian people and will be working with the authorities formed on the basis of this election." The Russian leader made this pledge presumably with an eye on easing tensions in eastern Europe even as pro-Russian separatists continued to lobby for Russian integration and rail against the Ukrainian presidential election. Putin's tone of cooperation was welcomed by the West, which has been bedeviled by questions of how to deal with nationalist Russian ambitions in recent times.

Meanwhile, in Ukraine, all eyes were on a billionaire businessman and former cabinet minister Petro Poroshenko as a favorite to win the Ukrainian presidency although veteran politician, former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, was also viewed as one of the more significant players in the political game. In truth, however, the attention was less on which politician would emerge as the victor, and more on the matter of the election being a proxy sign for stabilization in the Ukrainian political scene.

### Election result:

After the ballots were counted, it was the business tycoon, Petro Poroshenko, who claimed victory in Ukraine's presidential contest. The man known as the "chocolate king" because of his confectionary business enterprise, Roshen Chocolates, was also the owner of a television station and manufacturing interests. He was on track to secure 55 percent of the vote share and, thus,

outright victory. Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko was in a distant second place with 12 percent of the vote share; however, she was quick to concede defeat and offered gracious congratulations to Poroshenko and to Ukraine, declaring: "I want to congratulate the whole of Ukraine since despite external aggression, despite the Kremlin's intent to disrupt this election we had an honest and democratic election in Ukraine."

Meanwhile, former boxing champion-turned opposition politician Vitaliy Klitschko was on track (according to exit poll data) to become the new mayor of Kiev. Klitschko had abandoned his bid for the presidency, turning instead to the mayorship as his first main foray into the political heavyweight scene in Ukraine; however, he was quick to endorse Poroshenko prior to the presidential contest, who was headed for the presidency.

The defeat of former Prime Minister Tymoshenko indicated that Ukrainians were ready for fresh leadership. To that end, Poroshenko also called for fresh parliamentary elections later in the year. Poroshenko additionally promised closer ties with the European Union -- effectively consolidating the pro-Western bent of Kiev since the ouster of Yanukovich at the start of the year. The new president also promised to work to restore peace and stability in the volatile eastern zone of the country, although Poroshenko made it abundantly clear that he would never recognize Russia's "occupation of Crimea." The new president also warned that in regards to relations with Russia, his biggest priority would be the "sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Ukraine. Clearly, Poroshenko was a fierce patriot, aware of the nationalist overtones of the citizenry in recent times, and was determined to send the message that he would defend his country.

It should be noted that the election did not go off smoothly in those restive eastern regions where pro-Russian separatists did their best to disturb and disrupt the democratic process there. Indeed, there were no polling stations open in Donetsk where separatists hold sway.

That being said, the election was regarded as a positive development on Ukraine's difficult and tumultuous political landscape in recent times. As noted by United States President Barack Obama, the election in Ukraine was an "important step forward in the efforts of the Ukrainian government to unify the country."

#### Post-election Developments:

In the days after the election of a new president, Ukraine was subject to bloodshed and violence. On May 27, 2014, pro-Russian separatists tried to seize the airport in the eastern city of Donetsk. Newly-elected President Poroshenko made good on his promise to take a hardline approach to separatists and launched a rapid air and land assault. While dozens of people -- mostly separatist fighters -- were killed as a result, Ukrainian forces were able to regain control over the Sergei Prokofiev airport in Donetsk. The action shifted only two days later to the eastern city of Sloviansk when pro-Russian separatists shot down a Ukrainian army helicopter, killing 12



people including an army general. Ukraine's newly elected President Poroshenko warned that the pro-Russian rebels responsible for the attack would be punished. He said, "These criminal acts of the enemies of the Ukrainian people will not go unpunished. This is the moment of deep sorrow, and I express my sincere condolences to the families and relatives of the victims. We must make every effort to make sure that no more Ukrainians die at the hands of terrorists and bandits."

In the first week of June 2014, the bloodshed and violence in eastern Ukraine was ongoing. Ahead of the presidential inauguration ceremony, battles between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists sparked the landscape in the areas of Sloviansk and Donetsk. As well, pro-Russian separatists claimed they brought down an army surveillance helicopter close to Sloviansk and seized a hospital in Donetsk.

#### Inauguration:

On June 7, 2014, Petro Poroshenko was officially inaugurated as the new president of Ukraine. The day before, Poroshenko had a brief and unofficial meeting with his Russian counterpart, Putin, in France where world leaders marked the 70th anniversary of the D-Day invasion. Putin appeared to strike a conciliatory tone as he expressed support for Poroshenko's plans to end the violence in eastern Ukraine, saying he "overall has the right approach" to the crisis. That being said, Putin urged Poroshenko to end "punitive" military operations against pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

#### Multilateral action:

With an emphasis on security and stability in eastern Europe, United States President Barack Obama soon announced a \$1 billion fund earmarked for security in eastern Europe. The gesture was welcomed by NATO allies in Europe.

Entering the fray at the start of June 2014, NATO moved to bolster its security presence in eastern Europe as a deterrent against Russian aggression. According to NATO head Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO defense ministers forged an agreement to develop a "readiness action plan... to respond to the changed security environment" that had evolved in eastern Europe as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. He added, "We agreed that we will continue to reinforce NATO's collective defense with more air and sea patrols and more exercises and training, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean."

Rasmussen also took the opportunity to note that Russia's annexation of Crimea was "a blatant breach of the 1997 Founding Act." This reference was to the fact that the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act formalized post-Cold War borders in Europe and made clear that the West, the United States, and Russia would refrain from deploying forces or arms in the newly-independent nation states of eastern Europe in an aggressive mode.

With no small measure of irony, Russia responded to the news of NATO's decision to increase its security presence in eastern Europe by accusing NATO of breaching the same 1997 treaty. Left unaddressed by Russia was its own actions in Ukraine and its adherence (or lack thereof) to the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act. But Rasmussen was adamant that NATO had no choice but to take measures to counteract the threat posed by Russia.

On the matter of the threat posed by Russia, United States President Barack Obama publicly condemned Russia's aggression in Ukraine. During a trip to Europe at the start of June 2014, President Barack Obama said, "We will not accept Russia's occupation of Crimea or its violations of Ukraine's sovereignty. As we've been reminded by Russia's aggression in Ukraine, our free nations cannot be complacent in pursuit of the vision we share -- a Europe that is whole and free and at peace."

President Obama also took the opportunity to meet with newly-elected Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and pledge support for that country's path towards stability. That pledge included \$5 million in military assistance to Ukraine (separate from an earlier disbursement of aid funding in March 2014).

Meanwhile, leaders of the world's industrialized nations at a meeting in Belgium warned they were prepared to levy further sanctions against Russia for its actions in Ukraine. In a joint statement, the leaders from G7 countries also excoriated Russia for its violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. The statement read as follows: "We are united in condemning the Russian Federation's continuing violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We stand ready to intensify targeted sanctions and to consider meaningful additional restrictive measures to impose further costs on Russia should events so require."

Perhaps faced with the reality that further international action might be at play, Russia moved in a conciliatory direction in the second week of June 2014. At issue was a series of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine that was being brokered by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Following the talks between Moscow and Kiev, the authorities in Ukraine said they would work towards "mutual understanding" with Russia in actualizing newly-elected Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's stabilization plan.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry issued a brief statement noting that Russian and Ukrainian representatives had met several times to discuss Poroshenko's plan to end the violence in the eastern part of the country. The statement read as follows: "As a result of the work, the sides reached a mutual understanding on key stages of the implementation of the plan and on a list of priorities which will contribute to a de-escalation of the situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine."

In the background of these negotiations were threats by Russia that it would turn off its gas supplies if a satisfactory agreement with Ukraine was not reached. Clearly, this was Russia's "back pocket" ammunition that it was willing to use as a counterpoint to the West. This threat was itself a concern to European countries who receive significant gas imports from Russia -- and via Ukraine.

Note that on June 12, 2014, Russia indicated it would submit a draft resolution to the United Nations Security Council pressuring Ukraine to move forward with the OSCE's "roadmap" to peace. That roadmap was actually drafted in May 2014 and according to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Ukraine was not adhering to the agreement's provisions. Of course, from the point of view of Ukraine, the obstacles to peace were emanating from Moscow and not Kiev.

Alert:

Attempts to return Ukraine to stability were severely marred by an incident in mid-June 2014 when pro-Russian separatists shot down a Ukrainian army transport plane in the eastern part of the country, killing as many as 50 troops. The incident took place at the Luhansk airport as the aircraft was coming in for a landing. While the government held control over the airport, pro-Russian separatists held sway elsewhere in the city. Already, there were claims by pro-Russian separatists that they shot down a Ukrainian air force bomber in the Donetsk region.

President Petro Poroshenko responded by convening his security team for talks and promising of an "adequate" response to the killing of some 50 servicemen. He declared a period of mourning and warning, "All those involved in cynical acts of terrorism of this magnitude must be punished." He continued, "Ukraine needs peace. Counterterrorism receives an adequate response."

It should be noted that pro-Russians showed little regret, with one separatist saying to Reuters News, "This is how we work. The fascists can bring as many reinforcements as they want but we will do this every time. We will talk to them on our own terms."

In more positive news for the Ukrainians, their forces were able to reclaim control over the major port town of Mariupol, with the Ukrainian flag returned to its place -- flying above the regional government compound.

Meanwhile, the global community was not ignoring the fact that pro-Russian separatists had access to significant military equipment -- a disturbing revelation for a so-called "grassroots" separatist movement. All eyes were on Russia as the likely source of such military resources. The United States Department of State spokesperson, Marie Harf, noted: "We assess that separatists in eastern Ukraine have acquired heavy weapons and military equipment from Russia, including Russian tanks and multiple rocket launchers." Harf added that a convoy of tanks, rocket launchers, and other military vehicles crossed from Russia into eastern Ukraine in mid-June 2014.

She said, "Russia will claim these tanks were taken from Ukrainian forces, but no Ukrainian tank units have been operating in that area. We are confident that these tanks came from Russia."

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen had said that if these reported deployments were verified, they would constitute an "escalation" of the Ukrainian crisis. Unsaid by Rasmussen was the matter of how NATO would respond although he demanded that Russia withdraw its military forces on the border with Ukraine, "stop the flow of weapons and fighters across the border," and "exercise its [Russian] influence among armed separatist to lay down their weapons and renounce violence."

By the third week of June 2014, eastern Ukraine was beset by fierce fighting between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian separatists. The advantage appeared to be with Ukrainian forces as a pro-Russian commander admitted that the separatists were suffering heavy losses.

While President Petro Poroshenko had been considering a resolution plan to end the uprising and violence in the eastern part of the country, he was nonetheless prepared to take a hardline approach against pro-Russian separatists. On the domestic agenda, Poroshenko also confirmed he would sign the association agreement with the European Union officially moving his country westward and further out of Moscow's orbit. It was the status of that very agreement that sparked the turmoil in Ukraine from late 2013 well into 2014.

It should be noted that Poroshenko's moves were finding resonance among Ukrainians in other parts of the country who were tired of being at the mercy of Moscow and its pro-Russian factions in Ukraine.

By June 20, 2014, the Ukrainian president called for a ceasefire as part of his aforementioned resolution plan. Also included in the plan's provisions was an amnesty for separatists willing to lay down their weapons, the release of hostages, and the establishment of a "regime of control" on the Ukrainian-Russian border.

On paper, the plan appeared to be a reasonable attempt to garner Russian support and on June 21, 2014, Russian President Putin issued a handful of statements in favor of the ceasefire, although he noted that there would have to be negotiations with the separatists to ensure the truce did not collapse. The statement by Putin was released officially by the Kremlin and read as follows: "The opportunity which the ceasefire opens up should be used to start meaningful negotiations and political compromise between the opposing sides in eastern Ukraine."

But the Ukrainian government was soon forced to accept that the separatists were not interested in disarmament and a new burst of fighting broke out. Pro-Russian separatists stormed a Ukrainian military base and attacked border posts by on the very night the ceasefire was to go into effect. As noted by a government forces spokesperson, Vladyslav Seleznyov, "We issued an ultimatum to

the terrorists overnight to surrender their weapons. We guarantee their safety and investigation in line with Ukrainian law ... They refused." As a consequence, Ukrainian forces responded militarily, with most of the losses being suffered by the rebel side, as noted above.

Meanwhile, speaking on behalf of his country, United States Vice President Joe Biden made clear to Ukrainian President Poroshenko there would be "further costs on Russia" if it failed to use its influence to halt the violence by separatists in the eastern part of Ukraine.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen was at the same time signaling the alarm about the deployment of thousands of Russian troops along Ukraine's eastern border. He said, "I consider this a very regrettable step backwards. It seems Russia keeps the option open to intervene further in Ukraine." he added a warning: "The international community would have to respond in a firm manner if Russia were to intervene further in Ukraine."

It should be noted that Russian officials have denied that they built up forces on the joint border with Ukraine, just as they denied that they provided military equipment to pro-Russian separatists, and certainly in much the same way as they have dismissed accusations that Russia has fomented separatist unrest in eastern Ukraine.

Adding to the pressure on Russia was the warning from the European Union and other Western powers that it would impose further sanctions on Russia if it failed to defuse tensions and more pro-actively support the peace process in eastern Ukraine.

United States Secretary of State John Kerry warned that his country was collaborating with European partners to prepare a new round of sanctions against Russia. United Kingdom Foreign Secretary William Hague cautioned that if Russia did not "stop the flow of arms across the border and stop supporting illegally armed separatist groups," the argument in favor of for harsher sanctions would "of course become stronger." German Chancellor Angela Merkel joined the chorus, noting during a discussion in parliament : "Progress is slow... Diplomatic solutions are always preferable but, if nothing else works, sanctions can be put back on the agenda."

Later Developments:

Perhaps with an eye on reducing the possibility of further international action, on June 24, 2014, Russian President Putin called on Russia's upper parliamentary house to revoke the right it had granted him authorizing military intervention into Ukraine to defend the Russian ethno-linguistic population there. The upper parliamentary chamber soon granted that request although some members of parliament noted that it would rapidly reinstate that authorization, if the need arose. A spokesperson for the Russian leader said that the move was aimed at facilitating the peace process in eastern Ukraine. Regardless of the actual intent, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko welcomed the move, calling it a "first practical step." Signaling that he was ready to extend his own

olive branch, the Ukrainian president said that there were plans afoot to establish more regional autonomy in eastern Ukraine.

These moves by global power-brokers notwithstanding, pro-Russian separatists continued to act in a provocative manner. Despite the fact that they had agreed to a temporary ceasefire with the Ukrainian government, the militant activists continued to engage in fighting with Ukrainian forces. In the 24 hours after the truce was declared on June 23, 2014, the Ukrainian government said there had been approximately 45 violations by pro-Russian militants. For example, on June 24, 2014, at least one Ukrainian soldier was killed and several others were wounded due to the pro-Russian separatists' violation of the truce. On that same day, pro-Russian separatists shot down a Ukrainian military helicopter, killing all nine persons on board the aircraft. Around the area of Sloviansk, separatist militias were using grenade launchers and mortars to attack a military post. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko issued a hardline response, telling Ukrainian forces to return fire if they were attacked and threatening to abandon the truce completely.

By the start of July 2014, Ukrainian President Poroshenko ended the government ceasefire, which had been established in order to pursue peace talks. Explaining his decision, the Ukrainian leader said, "The unique chance to implement the peace plan was not realized. It happened because of the criminal actions of the militants. They publicly declared their unwillingness to support the peace plan as a whole and in particular the ceasefire."

In fact, the pro-Russian separatists refused to disarm and repeatedly violated the truce, as exemplified by the incident in which they shot down a helicopter thus killing nine individuals on board. Moreover, as noted by several Ukrainian security experts, the rebels were not simply unwilling to support the peace plan, but had used the ceasefire to regroup and reassert their campaign of violent resistance.

Accordingly, President Poroshenko wasted little time after ending the ceasefire and resumed a full-scale military operation against pro-Russia separatists in the eastern part of the country. In a national broadcast, the president emphatically asserted: "The decision not to continue the ceasefire is our answer to terrorists, militants and marauders." He then declared: "We will attack, we will free our land." Ukraine's parliamentary Speaker Oleksander Turchynov said in an address to the legislative body of Ukraine, "I can inform you that in the morning the active phase of the anti-terrorist operation was renewed. Our armed forces are carrying out strikes on terrorist bases and checkpoints."

Indeed, Ukrainian military forces were soon launching an aggressive operation against pro-Russian separatist bases in the eastern regions using aerial bombardment and artillery strikes. The Ukrainian military appeared to calculate the operation as a success, issuing the following statement: "The terrorists' plan to significantly escalate armed confrontation has been disrupted and the threat of losses to the civilian population and service personnel has been liquidated."



Predictably, Russia condemned Ukraine's move and President Vladimir Putin promised to protect the interests of ethnic Russians in Ukraine. Putin also tried to give the impression that his stance was backed by Western European powers as he said, "Unfortunately President Poroshenko took the decision to restart military operations and we -- I mean myself and my European colleagues -- could not convince him that the road to stable, strong and long-lasting peace does not lie through war."

In truth, it was difficult to determine in Western powers such as Germany and France shared this interpretation of their stances. For her part, German Chancellor Angela Merkel renewed threats of further sanctions against Russia, saying of that country's willingness to violate Ukraine's territorial integrity: "Regarding sanctions against Russia, we have so far reached level two and we cannot rule out having to go further."

That being said, Germany was also working to bring Russia, pro-Russian separatists, and Ukraine together, with an eye on a fresh ceasefire. At issue was a plan for multilateral negotiations involving all three parties, with the objective of forging a new ceasefire. To this end, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier held talks with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin, and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius. Following that meeting, which he described as "constructive," he indicated that progress had been made in moving -- at least -- in the direction of multilateral negotiations starting on July 5, 2014. Those negotiations would focus on establishing a new ceasefire that would be monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Also on the agenda would be the terms of the ceasefire, cessation of violence on all sides, the release of hostages, and the return of control over Ukrainian border points from Russia to Ukrainian government control. With concurrence being found on following this path, the German foreign minister said, "It is a clear commitment to a multilateral ceasefire" and added that all parties "realize what responsibility we bear."

A turning point for eastern Ukraine?

As July 2014 moved through its second week, Ukrainian troops recaptured the pro-Russian separatist stronghold of Sloviansk. Ukrainian President Poroshenko characterized the event as a "turning point" in the eastern Ukrainian conflict that for months saw momentum on the rebel side. President Poroshenko noted that the return of the Ukrainian flag in Sloviansk was not a total victory, but instead a symbolically significant development. He said, "This is not a complete victory yet, and it is not the time for fireworks displays. But the cleansing of Sloviansk from gangs who are armed to the teeth is of huge symbolic importance. This is the start of a turning point in the fight against the militants."

Indeed, offensive operations in the eastern part of the country were ongoing with the pro-Russian

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separatists still in control of the regional capitals of Donetsk and Luhansk. Still, the recapture of Sloviansk -- the military center of the self-declared People's Republic of Donetsk -- indicated that the energy was on the side of the pro-government forces.

For their part, some rebels claimed they were simply going forward with a "tactical retreat" from Sloviansk; however, in truth, as many of them moved towards Horlivka, they were being intercepted by government troops. Moreover, other rebels were admitting that morale was low among the pro-separatist factions, with many of them claiming they had been abandoned.

That low morale was not likely to be boosted by the news on July 6, 2014, that pro-government forces had recaptured the east Ukrainian towns of Artyomivsk and Druzhkivka. While being of far less strategic value than Sloviansk, the hold on Artyomivsk and Druzhkivka reinforced the view expressed by President Poroshenko that Ukraine had reached a turning point. To that end, the Ukrainian president was poised to continue -- and even intensify -- the offensive assault against pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Via Twitter, President Poroshenko declared, "My order is now in effect -- tighten the ring around the terrorists. Continue the operation to liberate Donetsk and Luhansk regions."

It should be noted that this military mission in eastern Ukraine meant that the proposed multilateral meetings (discussed above) were now less likely to involve separatist rebels. Those meetings were intended to discuss a renewed truce.

The prospects for a renewed ceasefire looked bleak on July 12, 2014, following a rocket attack by pro-Russian separatist rebels on Ukrainian soldiers close to the border with Russia. That attack involved a relentless volley of Grad missiles and left 20 Ukrainian troops dead and close to 100 others injured in the border village of Zelenopillya. Ukrainian President Poroshenko promised retribution, vociferously declaring that his forces would root out those responsible for the bloodshed. The Ukrainian leader asserted: "For every life of our soldiers, the militants will pay with tens and hundreds of their own. Not one terrorist will evade responsibility. Everybody will get what is coming to them."

It should be noted that around the same time of this deadly attack by pro-Russian separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine, a human rights organization publicized a damning report on abuses, including torture, by pro-Russian groups. Amnesty International's report titled "Abductions and Torture in Eastern Ukraine" accused pro-Russian groups of abducting hundreds of people, and targeting protesters and journalists particularly. Amnesty International noted in the report that its investigators had discovered "graphic and compelling evidence of savage beatings and other torture" by pro-Russian groups in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian government forces were not exempt from criticism, with the human rights group noting that abuses had been committed on that end as well, albeit at far less of a pervasive level.

In mid-July 2014, a Ukrainian military transport aircraft was shot down in the eastern part of the country. Crew members were reported to have survived the attack and a search and rescue mission to find them was ongoing. It should be noted that the transport military aircraft was shot down using a missile launcher and was quite likely fired from Russian territory. While Russia did not offer any feedback on that report, pro-Russian rebels were being quite forthright about their intent to target the aircraft.

Also in mid-July 2014, Ukrainian forces launched air strikes on the pro-Russian stronghold of Luhansk, with the Ukrainian air force announcing it had successfully carried out "five powerful air strikes" on targets in the eastern region. Ukrainian authorities also announced that the country's military forces now held control over several villages around Luhansk and that the airport was no longer being blocked by pro-Russian separatists.

United States intensifies sanctions against Russia by targeting major firms --

On July 16, 2014, the Obama administration in the United States intensified its sanctions against Russia, targeting large Russian firms as a punitive measure against Russia for failing to de-escalate the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

On the target list of Russian firms being hit by United States sanctions were significant defense and energy companies, as well as large banks. Indeed, the targets of the new sanctions list included Russia's largest oil producer, Rosneft, as well as the country's second largest gas producer, Novatek, and also Russia's third largest bank, Gazprombank. Other targets included Vnesheconombank, which functions as a payment agent for the government of Russia, and eight weapons companies, most notably the one that produces Kalashnikov assault rifles. Of significance was the fact that these particular enterprises were controlled by some of Putin's closest allies.

The new sanctions stopped short of cutting off entire key sectors of the Russian economy; however, they were the harshest measures to date against Russia. They were certainly more damaging than the financial and travel restrictions on a handful of individuals and businesses that went into effect months prior.

Across the Atlantic in Europe, leaders were meeting to discuss the measures they would take to intensify pressure on Russia. Together, the West was coordinating their efforts to punish Russia; however, European sanctions were not expected to go as far as those imposed by the United States

In Russia, the government of that country was reacting with furor to the United States' action, charging that such sanctions constituted "primitive revenge" and promising retaliation. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev vituperatively cast the sanctions as "evil" while Russian

President Putin warned that the move would bring relations with the United States to a "dead end." Putin also had sharp words for the European Union, which was yet to announce its measures. But with the knowledge that some action was in the offing, his government accused the European bloc of succumbing to the "blackmail of the U.S. administration."

In Ukraine, Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk noted that the action by the United States and Europe to punish Russia for its complicity in the Ukrainian crisis showed that Western countries were united in their support for Ukraine. In a cabinet meeting, he said, "All attempts by Russia to split the European Union, and to stop the European Union and United States from agreeing, were doomed to failure." He continued by demanding that Russia stop supplying weapons to Ukraine's rebels.

Geopolitical crisis as civilian airliner is shot down --

The landscape in eastern Ukraine took a disturbing turn on July 17, 2014, when a civilian passenger aircraft traveling from Netherlands to Malaysia went down in eastern Ukraine. All 298 people aboard the Boeing 777 airliner perished when Malaysian Airlines flight 17 crashed in the rebel-held territory of Donetsk close to the Russian border. Among the dead were nationals the Netherlands, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Canada, and United States among others. It was unclear if Americans were on board the flight. That event raised the stakes in the ongoing crisis in eastern Ukraine. Indeed, it augured a geopolitical landmine as Ukraine said that Malaysian Airlines flight 17 bound from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was shot down.

By far, the Netherlands suffered the greatest blow with the vast majority of the passengers aboard Malaysian Airlines flight 17 being from that country. Included in the dead was the Dutch senator Willem Witteveen as well as the world's leading HIV/AIDS researcher, Professor Joep Lange. In fact, as many as 100 HIV/AIDS activists and researchers were on the flight as they were scheduled to attend a conference in Australia. Their collective deaths were sure to strike a damaging blow to the global effort to fight the devastating HIV/AIDS disease.

For his part, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said, "I am deeply shocked by the dramatic reports on the crash of Malaysia Airlines MH17" while King Willem-Alexander expressed his heartfelt condolences about the tragedy.

In Malaysia, the loss of Flight 17 presented a painful blow to Malaysia Airlines, which earlier in the year suffered the mysterious disappearance of Flight 370, which was traveling from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak gave voice the sentiment felt by his citizens as he said, "This is a tragic day, in what has already been a tragic year, for Malaysia." But the Malaysian head of government also expressed his shock and outrage over the fate of Flight 17, saying via the social media outlet Twitter, "I am shocked by reports that an MH plane crashed. We

are launching an immediate investigation." Demanding justice, he was also on the record declaring, "If it transpires that the plane was indeed shot down, we insist that the perpetrators must swiftly be brought to justice."

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said in a statement that he would call for an immediate investigation into the fate of the of the flight. While there was some hesitation at first from the Ukrainian president to attribute the crash of the civilian airliner to a missile attack, he was soon unconditionally accusing "terrorists" in the eastern part of the country of shooting down Malaysian Airlines flight 17. Via the social media outlet, Twitter, Poroshenko declared: "MH-17 is not an incident or catastrophe, it is a terrorist attack."

The government of Ukraine also pointed to the fact that pro-Russian separatists had shot down a military transport plane only days earlier (discussed above). In fact, pro-Russian separatists have themselves been quite forthright about their efforts to target aircrafts entering "their" self-declared air space. To reiterate some of the coverage from above, a month earlier in mid-June 2014, pro-Russian separatists shot down a Ukrainian army transport plane as it was landing at the Luhansk airport in the eastern part of the country, killing as many as 50 troops. At that time, pro-Russians showed little regret, with one separatist saying to Reuters News, "This is how we work. The fascists can bring as many reinforcements as they want but we will do this every time. We will talk to them on our own terms."

In regards to the events of July 17, 2014, United States authorities were soon corroborating claims that the flight had gone down as a result of a missile attack. United States officials confirmed that based on its tracking of the missile's final trajectory from infra-red sensors on a spy satellite, a surface-to-air missile had indeed been used to impact the Malaysian airliner, which was flying at about 30,000 feet at the time. United States authorities stopped short of attributing blame to any group, while making it clear that the missile attack was deliberate. Indeed, United States Vice President Joe Biden expressly stated that the Malaysia Airlines jet was apparently "blown out of the sky."

Leaders of the rebel-held and self-declared Donetsk People's Republic denied being behind the missile attack on Malaysian Airline flight 17, with one representative saying to the international media, "We simply do not have such air defense systems. " He also noted that their shoulder-launched Man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) have the limited range of 4000 meters (around 13,000 feet). It was certainly true that MANPADs are typically used by insurgent and terrorist movements worldwide on low-flying aircrafts, and in this case, Flight 17 was known to be traveling at the altitude of 30,000 feet.

But Ukraine was accusing the pro-Russian rebels of using more sophisticated missile launchers, such as the Russian anti-aircraft Buk system (vis a vis MANPADs). The Buk system dates back to the 1970s; it is a radar-guided missile system, typically mounted on a truck, and codenamed SA-11

Gadfly. This system was absolutely capable of the range needed to hit a plane flying at an altitude of 30,000 feet. Ukraine was thus placing the blame at Russia for providing separatists with such sophisticated military equipment.

Worthy of note was the fact that the United States has for several months been sounding the alarm about Russia transporting heavy weaponry into eastern Ukraine. To recapitulate what was discussed above, pro-Russian separatists have had access to significant military equipment -- a disturbing revelation for a so-called "grassroots" separatist movement. All expectations were that Russia was the likely source of such military resources. In June 2014, the United States Department of State made the assertion that separatists in eastern Ukraine had acquired heavy weapons and military equipment from Russia, and specified that these resources included Russian tanks and multiple rocket launchers. At the time, NATO warned of consequences if these claims were verified.

Meanwhile, the accusations from Ukraine were bolstered by an unabashed claim of responsibility by a pro-Russian separatist leader in Donetsk. Igor Girkin (also known by the name of Strelkov) proudly claimed credit for shooting down an aircraft near the border of Russia around the same time the Malaysian Airlines flight went down. According to the Kiev Post, he proudly said, "The plane has just been taken down somewhere around Torez (Donetsk Oblast). It lays there behind the Progress mine. We did warn you -- do not fly in our sky." It could not be confirmed if he was actually referring to the Malaysian Airlines flight, mistaking it for a Ukrainian military jet, or another aircraft entirely.

While Strelkov was prepared to brag about taking down what he believed to be a Ukrainian aircraft, such hubris can sometimes have deadly consequences. It was to be seen if Girkin would continue to claim responsibility now that close to 300 civilians were dead as a result of a plane going down in the same area he was targeting. It was possible that he and his Donetsk People's Army mis-identified Malaysian Airlines flight 17 for a Ukrainian army plane; as such, he might recant the claim of responsibility once the geopolitical implications of accidentally shooting down a passenger vessel became clear.

This version of the events that transpired -- that is, an accidental missile assault on a passenger jet misidentified as a Ukrainian military aircraft -- was further augmented by leaked recordings of a pro-Russian rebel commander talking to a Russian intelligence officer in which the pro-Russian separatists admit that they accidentally shot down a passenger aircraft.

Along a related vein, the security services of Ukraine released three intercepted telephone conversations, which that country said proved that pro-Russian separatists were responsible for downing the Malaysian airliner. In one recording, a pro-Russian separatist commander, Igor Bezler, was heard telling Russian military intelligence officer, Vasili Geranin, "We have just shot down a plane. That was Miner's group. It fell down outside Yenakievo." In the second recording,



two separatists were heard confirming that the missile attack was carried out by a unit to the north of the crash site. In the third recording, supposedly between a local separatist leader and a militant, the following statement is heard in relation to the downed flight: "Well then it was bringing spies. Why the hell were they flying? There is a war going on."

It should be noted that both Russia and allied pro-Russian separatists denied any responsibility for the downing of Flight 17, irrespective of the material detailed in the leaked recordings mentioned just above. In fact, some pro-Russian separatist leaders were going so far as to suggest that Ukraine's armed forces may have shot down the plane, regardless of the fact that Ukraine was emphatic about the fact that it was not launching any missile attacks at the time.

The full facts of the tragedy were yet to be determined, but that process of fact-finding promised to be slow (and likely hindered) by rebel separatists unwilling to aid the West, and certainly unlikely to assist in a process that might ultimately implicate them as the culprits behind the downing of Malaysian Airlines aircraft.

There were attempts from the countries of the West to internationalize the fact-finding mission and evidence procurement effort, in order to preserve the crash site as best as possible. However, the pro-Russian separatists were showing little indication that they would be willing to relinquish control over the territory where the crash site was located. In fact, they displayed little interest in assuaging the humanitarian concerns of the global community by simply respecting the bodies of the dead.

The fact of the matter was that the crash site was in the center of a war zone and under the control of rebels unfriendly to the West. Questions thus erupted as to why a commercial airliner would be flying about a conflict zone. It should, however, be noted that the flight path followed by Malaysian Airlines flight 17 was an established one for aircrafts traveling from Europe to Asia, and at an accepted level of 30,000 feet altitude. Thus it was difficult to apportion blame to Malaysian Airlines when it was compliant with prevailing guidelines. That being said, some countries such as United States authorities had earlier ordered its airliners to avoid flying over the Crimea region and eastern Ukraine, given the hostilities ongoing in that region of the world. Several other airliners from around the world, however, continued to fly over the volatile region. Now, with the tragedy of Flight 17, Ukraine closed its air space over the eastern part of the country.

The United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting on the situation in Ukraine on July 18, 2014. In that emergency session, there was a call from the Security Council for a "full, thorough and independent international investigation" into the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight 17, as well as "appropriate accountability" for those responsible. However, with the exception of these broad terms, the emergency session was marked by dissonance and acrimony as envoys from Kiev and Moscow respectively blamed each other for the tragedy.

Russia blamed the crash of Malaysian Airlines flight 17 on Ukraine for carrying out its offensive operations in the eastern part of the country against pro-Russian separatists. At home, Russian President Vladimir Putin was emphasizing this claim as he accused Ukraine of creating the conditions for the uprising in eastern Ukraine that culminated with this tragedy.

But Ukraine dismissed this line of reasoning, characterizing the downing of a civilian airliner as an "act of terrorism" and releasing further intercepted phone recordings that it said proved Malaysian Airlines flight 17 was shot down by pro-Russian separatists. Yuriy Sergeyev, Ukraine's ambassador to the United Nations, went further by implicating Russia for the deaths of almost 300 people as he said that the attack have been impossible were it not for Russia's decision to provide sophisticated anti-aircraft missile systems to extremists. At home in Ukraine, the government underlined its accusations against Russia, announcing that it was in possession of "compelling evidence" that the missile launcher was not simply provided by Russia, but also operated by Russian citizens, who transferred the truck-mounted Buk system back over the border into Russia.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov dismissed any claims that his country was to blame, and instead accused Ukraine of dishonesty as he declared in an interview with Russian media, "I have not heard a truthful statement from Kiev for months."

During the emergency session of the Security Council on July 18, 2014, the United States added its voice to the accusations that pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine were behind the downing of the Malaysian Airlines jetliner. United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, said there was "credible evidence" that a Russian-built anti-aircraft system located in a separatist stronghold had fired the missile that destroyed the commercial Boeing 777 airliner and was thus responsible for the killing of all 298 people aboard.

United States President Barack Obama expanded on the claims of Ambassador Power, saying that a surface-to-air missile fired from territory controlled by pro-Russian separatists was responsible for the tragic fate of Flight 17 and cast the missile attack as "an outrage of unspeakable proportions." The United States president asserted that he would make sure that the real story of Malaysian Airlines flight 17 was told. He said, "This was a global tragedy... The eyes of the world are on eastern Ukraine, and we are going to make sure that the truth is out." In a clear prod to his European counterparts who have been unwilling to press too hard on Russian President Putin for economic reasons, President Obama added that the downing of the Malaysian jetliner by Russian-backed separatists should act as a "wake-up call for Europe and the world" to act more assertively. President Obama also demanded that Russia cease its flow of both weapons and fighters into eastern Ukraine. For Americans wary of further international engagement, President Obama foreclosed the notion of United States military intervention into the Ukrainian crisis; however, he made it clear that he was prepared to be more aggressive in its sanctions regime against Russia.

With outrage rising among the people of Europe, some leaders across the Atlantic were stirred to stake out firmer positions against Russia. Germany warned that Russia was now being presented with its last chance to cooperate, while the United Kingdom indicated that the European Union should rethink its hitherto cautious approach to Russia, given the emerging corpus of evidence pointing to Russian culpability. Following a meeting of the European Union's Foreign Council, a statement from the office of United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron was issued. Referring to the decision makers at that meeting, the statement read as follows: "They ... agreed that the EU must reconsider its approach to Russia and that foreign ministers should be ready to impose further sanctions on Russia."

The outrage in Europe rose to levels of furor on July 19, 2014. On that day, news broke that personnel from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) were prevented by pro-Russian separatists from doing their work to secure the crash site and collect the bodies of the victims. In fact, a member of the OSCE team charged that the Russian-backed separatists behaved in an unprofessional manner and exhibited a lack of respect for the bodies of the victims. In an interview with journalists, Michael Bociurkiw, said: "Unfortunately the task was made very difficult. Upon arrival at the site ... we encountered armed personnel who acted in a very impolite and unprofessional manner. Some of them even looked slightly intoxicated." He also said the bodies of the victims had been left exposed to the elements.

United States Secretary of State John Kerry vociferously condemned pro-Moscow separatists at the crash sites in eastern Ukraine for their poor treatment of the remains of victims. In an interview with NBC News, he angrily said, "Drunken separatists have been piling bodies into trucks and removing them from the site...What's happening is really grotesque and it is contrary to everything President Putin and Russia said they would do." Kerry's counterpart in the United Kingdom, Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, issued the following warning in an interview with Sky Television; "Russia risks becoming a pariah state if it does not behave properly." Dutch Prime Minister Rutte said he was "furious" about the disrespectful treatment of the corpses of the victims.

By July 20, 2014, there was some progress at the crash site with emergency workers being allowed to place dozens of bodies in bags and prepare them for removal. However, there was concomitant anxiety that the priority of pro-Russian separatists was to hide evidence related to the downing of Flight 17. To that end, Andriy Lysenko, a member of Ukraine's Security Council, accused the pro-Russians of a cover-up as he said in an interview with Ukrainian media, "The terrorists are doing everything to hide the evidence of the involvement of Russian missiles in the shooting down of that airliner." The announcement from the self-declared leader of Donetsk, Aleksander Borodai, that the Boeing 777's "black boxes" were now in his hands did little to assuage those concerns. According to international law, that flight recording equipment technically belonged to Malaysia and should have been immediately turned over to that country. On July 21, 2014, with international pressure on the rise, pro-Russian separatists finally turned over the "black boxes" to the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Meanwhile, at the United Nations Security Council, a draft resolution condemning the missile attack against Malaysian Airlines flight 17 was under consideration. The resolution would reportedly demand that emergency personnel be allowed access to the crash site, and call on all regional parties to cooperate with an international investigation. Because such a basic resolution was not imbued by controversy, all expectations were that it would be adopted. However, it was to be seen if further action at the Security Council would include determining responsibility for the tragedy, given the fact that Russia held veto power on that body.

As discussed here, one likely avenue of action involved even harsher sanctions by the West against Russia. The Obama administration had already announced punitive sanctions against major Russian firms with close ties to Putin only days before. Now, the United States could well intensify those measures unilaterally without having to deal with the United Nations Security Council, which in recent years has metamorphosed into an impasse-ridden body without any productive means to resolve major global conflicts.

With some 300 innocent civilians now paying the price in blood for the conflict in eastern Ukraine, and with the problematic behavior of pro-Russian separatists at the crash site, it was possible that the rest of the international community might close ranks and present a unified front in confronting Russian interference into Ukrainian affairs. Stated differently, the tragedy could well be a tipping point of sorts in the Ukrainian conflict.

Outrage from families of the victims was certainly intensifying, particularly from the Netherlands, which endured the heaviest death toll. In an address to the United Nations, Dutch Foreign Minister H.E. Frans Timmermans drew attention to the shocking treatment of the bodies of the crash victims in eastern Ukraine, saying: "To my dying day I will not understand that it took so much time for the rescue workers to be allowed to do their difficult jobs and that human remains should be used in a political game. I hope the world will not have to witness this again, any time in the future." Foreign Minister Timmermans promised that the day of accountability would come in the future, saying, "Once the investigation ascertains who was responsible for the downing of the flight MH17, accountability and justice must be pursued and delivered. We owe that to the victims; we owe it to justice; we owe it to humanity. Please, provide full cooperation, so that justice can be served. My country will not rest until all facts are known and justice is served."

The mission to find who was responsible for the deaths of the victims was being augmented by the United States. President Barack Obama visited the Dutch embassy in Washington D.C. to offer his condolences personally and promised to "stand shoulder to shoulder" with the Netherlands in its time of need. To this end, United States Secretary of State John Kerry was stepping up his country's claims that Russia was complicit in the downing of Flight 17 by providing the separatists with sophisticated anti-aircraft systems.

In the last week of July 2014, Ukrainian forces were making strides in the eastern part of the country, recapturing territory in Torez and Shakhtarsk and certainly challenging pro-Russian separatists who have held sway there for months. In fact, Ukrainian forces were bearing down on the very area where Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 went down as a result of a Russian-supplied Buk missile system. But because of fighting in the region, the area of the crash was yet to be secured and emergency personnel and investigators were yet to complete their work, which included the recovery of human remains. At the same time, the conflict was yielding a price in blood with both Ukrainian soldiers and pro-Russian fighters dying as battles intensified in eastern Ukraine.

Among pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, the self-proclaimed leader of Donetsk was tacitly admitting that they were enduring tactical losses in the period following the downing of Malaysian Airline Flight 17. Borodai retreated to Moscow for "consultations" and re-emerged in eastern Ukraine with reinforcements in the form of Vladimir Antyufeyev (also known as Vadim Shevtsov), who was immediately named "deputy prime minister." A native Russian, Antyufeyev was a major player in Russia's effort to support pro-Russian separatists in the breakaway territory of Trans-Dnestria in Moldova.

These moves indicated that Moscow was at the center of the eastern Ukrainian separatist movement -- not only symbolically, or even practically in terms of providing heavy military weaponry (which the United States said was arriving in greater quantity in eastern Ukraine from Russia), but also tactically and politically as it was quite literally directing the separatist movement. Indeed, Ukrainians with pro-Russian sensibilities were being shifted out of leadership roles in favor of Russians. As such, there could be no illusions about Russian centrality in the Ukrainian crisis. Indeed, there could be no illusions about the fact that the mission to "protect" Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine was just a proxy cause for a Russian war with Ukraine for daring to move out of Moscow's orbit. Ultimately, this engagement in Ukraine was aimed at reconstituting what Vladimir Putin's vision of "new Russia."

Accountability, responsibility, culpability, and new sanctions against Russia --

United States Secretary of State John Kerry was on the record on July 20, 2014, saying that separatists in eastern Ukraine used a surface-to-air missile from Russia to shoot down Malaysia Airlines flight 17.

In an interview with CNN, Kerry said that the United States had evidence of heavy weapons material being transferred from Russia into eastern Ukraine. The weapons and equipment at stake included a 150-vehicle convoy of armored personnel carriers, tanks, and rocket launchers, which were given to the separatists. Kerry also noted that the United States had access to intercepted conversations about the transfer of the Russian radar-guided SA-11 missile system to the pro-Russian separatists, saying, "It's pretty clear that this is a system that was transferred from Russia into the hands of separatists." In a separate interview with CBS News, Kerry said, "There's

enormous amount of evidence, even more evidence that I just documented, that points to the involvement of Russia in providing these systems...training the people on them."

Kerry also dismissed separatists' accusations that Ukraine was behind the downing of the Boeing 777, noting that the United States knew "with confidence" that the Ukrainian government had no Buk missile launcher in the area of the attack.

Accordingly, the United States' top diplomat echoed President Obama's challenge to Europe that it act more aggressively. John Kerry said, "It would help enormously if some countries in Europe that have been a little reluctant to move would now recognize this wakeup call and join the United States and President Obama in taking the lead, and also stepping up."

By July 22, 2014, United States officials had confirmed that the missile that brought down Malaysian Airline flight 17, leading to the deaths of 298 innocent civilians, was fired from an area in eastern Ukraine under pro-Russian separatist control. United States authorities stopped short of accusing Russia of being behind the firing of the fatal missile; however, the Obama administration said its rationale for the latest tranche of sanctions was motivated by the fact that Russia continued to arm the pro-Russian separatists. Moreover, the Obama administration was adamant in noting that even after the tragedy of Flight 17, there continued to be a steady flow of arms from Russia into eastern Ukraine -- including heavy weaponry such as missile systems.

With the people of the West demanding a stronger response from their leaders in regard to the downing of Malaysian Airline Flight 17, including accountability for those responsible, attention refocused on wider sanctions against Russia. As noted by United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron, "The latest information from the region suggests that even since MH17 was shot down, Russia continues to transfer weapons across the border and to provide practical support to the separatists." Cameron argued that harsher measures against Russia were necessary as he said, "Leaders agreed that the international community should therefore impose further costs on Russia and specifically that ambassadors from across the EU should agree a strong package of sectoral sanctions as swiftly as possible."

To that end, on July 29, 2014, the United States and Europe imposed wider sanctions on Russia's financial, defense, and energy sectors. The sweeping punitive measures by the United States included accentuated sanctions against Russian banks, including the Bank of Moscow and the Russian Agriculture Bank, as well as defense firms. The measures also included a ban on technology sales to the Russian oil industry, which would negatively impact the future development of the energy sector. Across the Atlantic, Europe moved from limited sanctions against individuals to restricting the trade of equipment for the energy and defense industries, and to limiting "dual use" technology that would employ civilian and defense purposes. Also included in the new sanctions regime was a ban on Russia's state-run banks from raising funds in European capital markets.



The new sanctions would be future tracked and thus not affect "in process" contracts such as France's sale of military carriers to Russia. Nevertheless, there would still inflict pain on certain European firms, such as British Petroleum, which had a significant stake in the Russian oil company, Rosneft. Also affected would be a slate of European banks holding Russian credit accounts. German Chancellor Merkel had long been reluctant to go down the road of harsh sanctions due to the potential harm to Germany manufacturing firms; but now she deemed the punitive measures against Russia to be "unavoidable." To be sure, the deleterious consequence of sanctions had been weighed in the European capitals since the start of the Ukrainian crisis; but they were ultimately deemed worth the price in the face of so many deaths on Flight 17, and in the interests of long-term regional security.

Also at stake was the matter of Western credibility. To that end, the complementary measures from the United States and Europe stood as the strongest international action against Russia. They certainly constituted a show of solidarity from the West in the face of escalating Russian engagement in the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

For its part, Russia lashed backed rhetorically, accusing the United States of a "slander campaign," and warning that there would be decreased cooperation on regional security while members of parliament were drafting counter-measures to be levied against "aggressor countries." As well, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was already on the record dismissing the measures. At a news conference, Lavrov said, "We will overcome any difficulties that may arise in certain areas of the economy, and maybe we will become more independent and more confident in our own strength."

In truth, however, the Russian economy was not in the best of health and the added pressure posed by this harsher tranche of sanctions would not aid Russia. In fact, unlike the targeted sanctions already in effect, these sectoral sanctions could potentially inflict notable damage on the already-weak Russian economy. As noted by United States President Obama in an address after the new sanctions against Russia were announced, "The sanctions that we've already imposed have made a weak Russian economy even weaker." President Obama also promised further action against Russia saying, "If Russia continues on this current path, the costs on Russia will continue to grow."

While the new sanctions regime would undoubtedly ensure that Russia felt a strong dose of economic punishment, there was also the question of whether there would be a penalty to be paid in the realm of international jurisprudence. While Russia appeared to have escaped unscathed from violating Ukrainian sovereignty and annexing Crimea, Russia's active continued engagement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, as well as Russia's culpability in the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, were still matters demanding a response. At the humanitarian level, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, noted that the downing of the

Malaysian airliner by pro-Russian separatists using a Russian missile system would likely be classified as a war crime.

For its part, Russia parried Western sanctions with some of its own. On Aug. 6, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered that restrictions be placed on agricultural and food imports from Western countries for one year. While the impact on Western trade would be felt, there would also be an impact at home in Russia, which relied on food imports. Presumably, Russia would look to friendlier countries for food imports, such as the leftist autocratic regime of Venezuela, or perhaps Asia to the east.

#### Military Note:

At the start of August 2014, Ukrainian government forces advanced on the eastern part of the country, forcing pro-Russian separatists into fierce battles on the outer perimeter of the separatist stronghold of Donetsk. Already, Ukrainian government forces had surrounded Luhansk. By the second week of August 2014, Ukrainian fighter jets were carrying out strikes on Donetsk, although the government of Ukraine made it clear that it was not bombing any populated areas. While Russia retained control over Crimea, it was evident that the momentum was now with Ukraine as it fought to retake the rest of its eastern territory from pro-Russian fighters. It should be noted that, according to sources from Kiev, almost all these fighters were being "led" not by local eastern Ukrainian separatists but, instead, Russian citizens.

The fighting, however, was making it difficult for responders to do the job of collecting the human remains of the victims of the tragic downing of Malaysian Airline Flight 17. To this end, United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond called on to Russian President Vladimir Putin to persuade the rebels to stop interfering with the international experts who were carrying out the difficult recovery effort at the site Flight 17's wreckage. He said, "It is an unspeakable abomination that, two weeks after this crash, there are still bodies on the crash site unrecovered and the Russians have not used their influence with the separatists." He continued, "I said last week that there is one man who can snap his fingers and make this happen and he hasn't done so. He must now do so." But in fact, that work was brought to a halt by Aug. 7, 2014, as the fighting in the region increased. As noted by Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, "It doesn't make sense to continue the repatriation in this manner."

On Aug. 10, 2014, the Ukrainian military was pounding targets in the major pro-Russian rebel stronghold of Donetsk. A spokesperson from the Ukrainian military, Oleksiy Dmytrashkivsky, said that several strikes on enemy pro-Russian positions were being carried out. He said, "A large number of enemy hardware and personnel was destroyed. Panic and chaos have been noted among the terrorists." The offensive by Ukrainian forces was so intense, creating some degree of a seige scenario, that up to 300,00 residents had fled the city. As well, several rebel fighters apparently deserted the rebel militias.

Alexander Zakharchenko, the new prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk people's republic (a local who was attempting to ensure the separatist operation remained in the hands of locals and not under Moscow's control), was calling for a humanitarian ceasefire to ensure basic supplies -- such as food, water, and medicine -- could enter the area of Donbass where fighting was going on. He said, "We are ready for a ceasefire to prevent the proliferation of a humanitarian disaster in Donbass." However, he was adamant in noting that a humanitarian ceasefire was not a surrender and the effort would continue to defend Donetsk for pro-Russians. Soon, the notion of a ceasefire was abandoned and Zakharchenko was claiming his forces would launch a counter-offensive against Ukrainian forces. But by Aug. 11, 2014, Ukrainian authorities said they were in the "final stages" of recapturing Donetsk.

Elsewhere in the other rebel stronghold of Luhansk, which was closer to the Russian border, many residents had left or were living under desperate conditions since the electrical power system was no longer functional, while food and health supplies were scarce. As well, Ukrainian military forces had gained control over the road between Luhansk and Donetsk, essentially restricting the flow of separatists' weapons in the region.

While Ukrainian military forces were clearly on the offensive, Russia was not about to quietly retreat with the consolation prize of Crimea alone. In an apparent response to the momentum from Ukrainian government forces, Russia reportedly placed tanks, artillery, air defense systems, aircrafts, and special forces along Ukraine's border. NATO warned that up to 20,000 combat-ready Russian troops were now amassing along Ukraine's border. In a statement, NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu, said, "We're not going to guess what's on Russia's mind, but we can see what Russia is doing on the ground -- and that is of great concern. Russia has amassed around 20,000 combat-ready troops on Ukraine's eastern border." NATO also added that Russia could well use the same argument of "protecting" the Russian ethno-linguistic population to move into eastern Ukraine in a ground assault. Indeed, Russia had a record of exploiting that rationale as show by its actions in Georgian enclaves in 2008 and as illustrated by the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine months earlier in 2014.

As of mid-August 2014, heavy fighting was reported to be going on close to Donetsk with Luhansk under the proverbial gun. Given the landscape in Donetsk and Luhansk, there was rising anxiety that Russia would use the situation and the notion of a humanitarian mission to intervene in eastern Ukraine.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen reminded the global community that Russian troops remained amassed on the Ukrainian border and said in an interview with Reuters interview that there was "a high probability" of a Russian military intervention. He said, "We see the Russians developing the narrative and the pretext for such an operation under the guise of a humanitarian operation, and we see a military build-up that could be used to conduct such illegal

military operations in Ukraine."

Likewise, United State President Barack Obama said that any form of Russian intervention into Ukrainian territory without the consent from the Ukrainian government in Kiev would constitute a violations of international law. The European Commission also delivered its own warning with President Jose Manuel Barroso during a phone call with Vladimir Putin. In a statement, the European Commission summarized the conversation as follows: "President Barroso warned against any unilateral military actions in Ukraine, under any pretext, including humanitarian."

There was little actual hope that Russia was heed these messages and, the Kremlin made it clear that it would deploy a convoy to eastern Russia purportedly carrying humanitarian aid.

By Aug. 13, 2014, the movement of that Russian convoy was slowed when Ukrainian officials made it clear that they would not allow the trucks to move into Ukrainian territory. Via his Russian Facebook page, Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov wrote, "Provocation by a cynical aggressor is not permissible on our territory." Reports from the ground said that the convoy had stopped in the area of Voronezh area, while other reports indicated that the convoy had diverted to the south. Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk characterized the Russian aid convoy as a measure of "boundless cynicism." He said, "First they deliver tanks, Grad rocket launchers, terrorists and bandits..., and then they deliver water and salt."

A day later on Aug. 14, 2014, Ukrainian forces were bearing down on Donetsk, quite literally encircling the city. As well, for the first time, shelling hit the city center. As well, Ukrainian forces took control of the settlement of Novosvitlivka, the remaining route used by the separatists to travel between Luhansk and Donetsk. It was a clear strategic gain for Ukraine.

Meanwhile, two leading separatist commanders aligned with Moscow resigned from their posts. Of note was the resignation of the well known Colonel Igor Strelkov (also known as known as Igor Girkin) who was regarded as the defense chief in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, but who was also believed to be a Russian intelligence officer. As well, Valery Bolotov, the head of the self-proclaimed rebel government in Luhansk, announced he was stepping down due to injuries. These two moves seemed to suggest the pro-Russian leadership in the two rebel separatist strongholds of Luhansk and Donetsk was in shambles, presumably because of the Ukrainian military offensive.

Ukrainian forces enjoyed a victory in the former separatist stronghold of Luhansk, which continued to be under siege as of Aug. 18, 2014. While street fighting was still apparently going on in the city, Ukrainian forces were able to raise their national flag over the Zhovtneviy police station in Luhansk. Control over Luhansk would be regarded as a crucial development since it is a major venue along the supply route from Russia into eastern Ukraine. Not all the news was postive for Ukraine as, once again, pro-Russian separatists were able to shoot down a Ukrainian

warplane in eastern Ukraine.

The action was also intensifying in Donetsk where the prime minister of the self-declared republic, Alexander Zakharchenko, expressed his confidence in holding the area. He pointed to the fact that his fighters would soon have access to 150 armored vehicles, including 30 tanks, and 1,200 Russian-trained fighters, who would aid in a major counter-offensive intended to stave off ascendant Ukrainian forces. His remarks should put paid to continuing claims by Russia that it was not supplying pro-Russian separatists with arms and armies. Yet despite Zakharchenko's declaration on video that "they are joining at the most crucial moment" a spokesperson for Russian President Putin, Dmitry Peskov, issued the following statement: "We have repeatedly said that we don't supply any equipment there."

Note that as of Aug. 19, 2014, Donetsk stood at the center of the battle between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists. A gun battle in the middle of the city actually forced residents to flee the scene, as the fight to reclaim eastern Ukraine was now situated in the most significant stronghold for pro-Russian separatists. Regardless, the fighting in Donetsk had deadly consequences with artillery fire striking apartment buildings, and killing and wounding residents as a result.

In Yasynuvata, to the north of Donetsk, Ukrainian forces took control there by recapturing a railway junction. However, fighting between the two sides continued elsewhere in the town. Fighting was also reported in Iovaisk and Torez, with both sides issuing competing claims that they had the advantage.

While fighting continued in eastern Ukraine, the foreign ministers of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany had been meeting to try to achieve a ceasefire. For Ukraine, France, and Germany, a main issue at the gathering was the problem of fighters and arms crossing over the border from Russia into Ukrainian territory. However, it was unclear how that objective would be achieved when, as indicated above, Russia has refused to fully acknowledge its active involvement in the Ukrainian crisis. Also of note has been the fact that as Ukrainian forces achieve military victories against pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, the incentive to forge any kind of deal with Russia has been lessened to some extent.

Still, it was to be seen if some diplomatic breakthrough could be reached at a summit in Belarus set for Aug. 26, 2014. While that event was aimed at discussing relations between the European Union and the eastern European customs union, it would nonetheless be attended by both Russian President Putin and Ukrainian President Poroshenko, with the Ukrainian crisis at the center of the agenda.

Ahead of that meeting in Belarus, Ukraine marked its independence celebration on Aug. 24, 2014, with a military parade in Kiev. As well, President Poroshenko offered a passionate national address

in which he said his country was fighting "a war against external aggression, for Ukraine, for its freedom, for its people, for independence." He warned of a future in which Ukraine would have to defend itself against that external aggression from Russia, saying. "It is clear that in the foreseeable future, unfortunately, a constant military threat will hang over Ukraine. And we need to learn not only to live with this, but also to be always prepared to defend the independence of our country."

Pro-Russian separatists retaliated by marching captured Ukrainian troops through their stronghold of Donetsk. Residents both heckled and threw bottles at the prisoners of war who were presented in the public square for ridicule. But Donetsk was soon returned to a site of conflict with fierce fighting reported on Aug. 24 and 25, 2014.

NATO accuses Russia of violating Ukraine's sovereignty amidst rising fears of Russian invasion:

In the last week of August 2014, Russia again announced it would be sending another "humanitarian" convoy into Ukraine. This gesture -- like the previous humanitarian convoy -- was likely to be interpreted by the Ukrainian government as an invasion of Ukrainian territory.

Meanwhile, fighting in eastern Ukraine was not limited to the two main fronts of Donetsk and Luhansk. The Ukrainian military said that it engaged armored vehicles that crossed into Ukraine from Russia and were moving in the direction of the port city of Mariupol on the Azov Sea. The Ukrainian military said the pro-Russian separatists might be attempting to open a new front in the conflict and accordingly intercepted the column of armored vehicles at Novoazovsk. Ultimately, however, pro-Russian separatists were able to seize control of Novoazovsk. Elsewhere -- in the village of Markyne -- dangerous clashes were reported to be taking place. Meanwhile, Russian forces reportedly destroyed almost every home in the town of Novosvitlivka close to the separatist stronghold of Luhansk.

As August 2014 was drawing to a close, there were fierce battles going on in Mariupol as separatists clearly were moving to open up a third major front. However, Ukrainian government troops were determined to hold control on Mariupol and deny the pro-Russians a foothold there. Andriy Lysenko, a military spokesperson, said that Ukrainian forces would rally to defend Mariupol. He said, "Fortifications are being built. Local people are coming out to help our troops, to stop the city being taken. We are ready to repel any offensive on Mariupol."

But even with the defensive effort at Mariupol, Ukraine was being subject to Russian aggression. On Aug. 29, 2014, NATO accused Russia of violating Ukraine's sovereignty and becoming embroiled in military operations in support of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. In truth, the Russian presence and involvement in the eastern Ukraine conflict had been well-known for some time. However, rather than a clandestine effort, now the Russian engagement was a far more direct operation. At issue were satellite images released by NATO showing columns of



Russian armed forces inside Ukrainian territory. NATO warned that more than 1,000 Russian troops were now operating inside Ukraine.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen made it clear that "despite hollow denials," Russia had illegally crossed Ukraine's border and violated Ukraine's sovereignty. Rasmussen said, "This is not an isolated action, but part of a dangerous pattern over many months to destabilize Ukraine as a sovereign nation." He continued, "This is a blatant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It defies all diplomatic efforts for a peaceful solution."

For his part, Ukrainian President Poroshenko warned that his country was "close to a point of no return" with "full scale-war" in the offing. Speaking from Belgium where he was attending a meeting with European Union leaders, Poroshenko explained that Ukraine was a victim of "military aggression and terror."

In response to Russian aggression, Ukraine declared its intent to apply for membership in NATO. Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk said he would introduce a bill in parliament that would call for the cancellation of Ukraine's non-aligned status, and thus set the path for Ukraine to join NATO. It was a move sure to anger and outrage Russia, which has long been concerned about Ukraine's alignment with the West. Ironically, though, it was precisely Russia's aggression and interference into Ukrainian affairs that was driving Ukraine westward -- out of Russia's orbit and towards Europe and the United States.

As August 2014 drew to a close, Russian President Vladimir Putin seemed determined to reverse that westward drift by force or will, if necessary. On Aug. 31, 2014, Putin called for negotiations on the "statehood" of southern and eastern Ukraine – underlining his stance that portions of Ukrainian territory should be removed from Kiev's jurisdiction. Around the same time, during a visit to a youth camp, he declared that Ukrainians and Russians were "practically one people," essentially dismissing the particular historic legacy and cultural heritage of the Ukrainian nation.

Before the arrival of Russian troops and columns in eastern Ukraine, the conventional wisdom had been that Russian President Vladimir Putin would use the organic gains for Ukrainian forces to gently back away from his "New Russia" ambitions, and instead rest his imperial laurels upon the annexation of Crimea. But the apparent invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops suggested that Vladimir Putin was not about to retreat quietly from his visions of "New Russia."

It should be noted that while Putin was enjoying high approval ratings for his nationalist agenda at home in Russia, in the wider world, Russia's reputation internationally had suffered a cataclysmic meltdown. According to data compiled by Pew Research, a majority of respondents in Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East viewed Russia unfavorably. In Poland, for example, only 12 percent of people had a favorable view of Russia. The increase in hostility towards Russia from 2013 to 2014 was conceivably connected to Russia's lack of respect for Ukraine's territorial

integrity, compounded by fears from European neighbors that they too might suffer at the hands of Russian aggression.

Would this global view have an impact on Russian policies? Governments in European capitals would no doubt take note of the unfavorable way in which their citizens now viewed Putin's Russia. Those governments could well be spurred to hold steady with the sanctions regime against Russia as a result. With Russia oil trading at \$100 a barrel and with the Russian budget being based on \$114 a barrel standard, and given the fact that Russia would now have to deal with increased military spending, the effects on the Russian economy at home would eventually be felt. It was to be seen if the effect would extend to Putin's domestic popularity.

Outside of Russia, however, Russian aggression in Ukraine was evoking negative reactions across Europe. Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė said Russia was "practically in a war against Europe." Recognizing the vulnerability of any eastern European country, she said: "We need to support Ukraine, and send military materials to help Ukraine defend itself. Today Ukraine is fighting a war on behalf of all Europe." Meanwhile, Poland denied permission for Russia's defense minister to fly over its air space following a trip to Slovakia.

The harshest condemnation of Russian aggression to date emanated from the president of Estonia. President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said: "Ukraine is under attack by the armed forces of the Russian Federation. This military aggression should finally dispel any doubts that Russia's words fail to match its actions." A statement from the office of the president issued the following declaration: "It is not possible to speak seriously of a diplomatic process or of ceasefire negotiations while one country has brought without permission its armed forces de facto into another, while refusing formally to admit its involvement in the conflict. The destabilization of Ukraine by Russia has continued for too long. Today, in addition to terrorists, clearly identifiable Russian military forces are operating in Eastern Ukraine. In other words, this is an undeclared war. Russia's actions are a clear violation of the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter. Western allies should agree on their part on the need to intervene in an even more determined way to protect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

For its part, the European Union appeared poised to move forward with harsher sanctions against Russia. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, "I have to say there is also an impact when you are allowed to move borders in Europe and attack other countries with your troops...Accepting Russia's behavior is not an option. And therefore it was necessary to prepare further sanctions."

Regardless of these excoriations and warnings, Russia for the time being remained undeterred by its global pariah status. Instead, Russian President Vladimir Putin was thrusting forward with his vision of "New Russia" irrespective of the actual sense of self-determination felt by the Ukrainian people, or the rebuke being issued by the international community.

NATO announces rapid reaction force and military exercises in eastern Europe:

On Sept. 4, 2014, at a NATO meeting in Wales, member states of the West agreed to form a new rapid reaction force intended to respond to crisis scenarios in NATO countries. Included in the rapid reaction force would be an agile and precise "spearhead" force consisting 4,000 to 5,000 troops, and capable of being deployed within 48 hours to any location across the Northern Atlantic alliance.

The head of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said Russia's invasion of Ukraine's sovereignty had been the catalyst forcing NATO to move forward with the formation of the rapid-reaction force.

NATO also moved to intensify joint exercises in eastern Europe.

These actions were aimed at delivering reassurances to eastern European countries fearful of suffering a similar fate as Ukraine at the hands of Russian aggression. Of particular note were the Baltic states; these countries were particularly worried that Russian President Putin would use the same tactics -- the defense of ethno-linguistic Russians in the region -- as he used to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea.

On Sept. 5, 2014, NATO followed up with its warning of intensifying joint exercises in eastern Europe by staging major military exercises in Latvia. The exercises were aimed at simulating a crisis deployment of NATO forces in a member state. It was an act intended to remind Russia that NATO was committed to defending all member states, especially those in the Baltics, from Russian aggression.

However, General Hans-Lothar Domrose, the commander of the NATO military command in the Netherlands, noted that the Latvian exercises were only part of the process as other NATO military exercises were set to take place in Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany as well. Domrose explained, "We want to assure our people that we are able to protect them." He continued, "Certainly on top of this we send a clear message to everyone who wants to threaten NATO, that it's not a thing you should do. NATO will always defend and protect its people."

Predictably, Russia reacted unfavorably to NATO's announcements and promised that there would be increased tensions as a result. A statement from the Russian foreign ministry declared: "The essence and tone of [NATO] statements on the Ukraine situation, and the plans announced to hold joint NATO exercises with Kiev on the territory of that country before the end of 2014, will inevitably lead to heightened tension."

For his part, Russian President Putin reacted to the actions by NATO by claiming that the Northern Atlantic alliance was using the crisis in Ukraine to "resuscitate itself."

Fragile truce established and quickly violated in eastern Ukraine:

Meanwhile, as NATO enacted the aforementioned measures, negotiations were going on between Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists in Belarus to try to forge a ceasefire. Ironically, the ceasefire was being negotiated at a time when clashes were taking place in Donetsk and Mariupol.

Around the same time as the ceasefire negotiations were ongoing, the European Union was preparing fresh sanctions. The new measures included restrictions on the ability of Russian state-owned oil companies to raise money in European financial markets. Russia's so-called "leading" oil company, Rosneft, as well as Gazprom Neft, the oil component of the Gazprom natural gas monopoly, and the Transneft pipeline operator would all be affected; on the other hand, the natural gas sector was left out of this tranche of measures. The new sanctions also expanded on existing visa bans and asset freezes on Russian officials and pro-Russian activists in Ukraine. The timing of the implementation of the sanctions was left vague -- presumably to give time for a ceasefire to take either root or dissolve.

Note that later in September 2014, the United States also expanded its sanctions against Russia. The United States' moves targeted oil and defense industries, while intensifying sanctions that have limited access of major Russian banks to United States debt and equity markets. (Of note was the fact that the financial sanctions targeted Russia's Sberbank.)

Meanwhile, on Sept. 5, 2014 after five months of fighting, thanks to the negotiations brokered by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the two sides were able to sign on to a truce in Belarus. The agreement, known as the Minsk Agreement, did not expressly deal with the positions of Ukrainian authorities and pro-Russian separatists -- namely, Kiev's right to holding onto its territorial integrity, or the separatists' breakaway aspirations. Still, the truce would bring an end to the fighting, and thus offer time for the two sides to work out a roadmap of sorts for longer term regional stability plan. Included in the agreement were provisions for an exchange of prisoners of war and the establishment of a humanitarian corridor for the transportation of aid and displaced persons.

For his part, Ukrainian President Poroshenko said he welcomed the ceasefire. Poroshenko said he and Russian President Putin had shared a phone call in which they agreed that "overall the ceasefire was being implemented" and that there was a need to make it more durable. Poroshenko noted, "It is very important that this ceasefire lasts long, and during this ceasefire we continue the political dialogue to bring peace and stability." Both President Poroshenko and United States President Barack Obama noted that the ceasefire was accomplished, at least partially, because of the sanctions imposed on Russia.

On Sept. 6, 2014, despite the prevailing ceasefire, pro-Russian separatists fired artillery at Ukrainian government forces close to the city of Mariupol. For several days leading up to the

ceasefire, pro-Russian separatists had been targeting the strategic port city. Now, irrespective of the ceasefire, Mariupol -- which was under Ukrainian control -- was emerging as the new flashpoint city and one that could very well derail the new ceasefire agreement. For the rebels, it seemed that taking control over Mariupol, which was located on the highway to Crimea, was a strategic goal for pro-Russian separatists. However, for Ukraine, there was a high priority on holding that city and not ceding any further territory to Russia and pro-Russian separatists. Given Ukraine's determination to hold Mariupol, President Poroshenko himself traveled to the strategic city, where he promised that Mariupol would be reinforced and defended, and that any separatist attempt to advance on the city would be met with a "crushing defeat."

As of Sept. 7, 2014, less than two days after the establishment of the truce, shelling continued in Mariupol and at least one death had been reported there. Meanwhile, sporadic clashes were also being reported in rebel-held Donetsk. The Red Cross said shelling in Luhansk prevented the movement of humanitarian aid vehicles.

As the next few days went on, there were further sporadic violations of the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine. The area of the Malaysian Airlines crash as a result of a pro-Russian missile continued to be a conflict zone. There was also an increasingly complex scenario unfolding in the region of eastern Ukraine with the arrival of Chechen fighters eager to exact "revenge" on Russia and Russian fighters.

That being said, in keeping with the ceasefire agreement, pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine released 1,200 prisoners. As well, Ukrainian President Poroshenko said that most of the Russian forces that had penetrated Ukrainian territory had been withdrawn. He said, "According to the latest information I have received from our intelligence, 70 percent of Russian troops have been moved back across the border." Now, it should be noted that Russia has never actually admitted that its forces violated Ukraine's sovereignty irrespective of the evidence to the contrary. That being said, as noted by President Poroshenko, "This further strengthens our hope that the peace initiatives have good prospects."

On the other side of the border, Russia also lauded the truce -- as fragile as it might be. According to the Kremlin, Russian President Vladimir Putin was satisfied that the ceasefire was still in place several days later after its establishment.

Ukrainian parliament grants more autonomy to the East; Minsk peace plan laid out --

With an eye on the future, Ukrainian President Poroshenko laid out a plan for the future of Ukraine that would preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity, while offering greater autonomy to the eastern part of the country under an uprising from pro-Russian separatists. President Poroshenko noted that his proposal was consistent with the provisions of the ceasefire agreement that was forged in Belarus. He said, "The Minsk protocol envisages the restoration and

preservation of Ukrainian sovereignty on all the territory of the Donbass (in eastern Ukraine), including that controlled by the fighters."

By mid-September 2014, the parliament of Ukraine passed legislation granting greater autonomy to the two flashpoint areas of eastern Ukraine -- Donetsk and Luhansk - for a three year period. As well, the legislation granted amnesty to pro-Russian separatist in those two regions. It should be noted that the amnesty provision would not apply to separatists believed to have committed grave crimes, such as the shooting down of the Malaysian Airline passenger plane carrying mostly Dutch citizens.

It was not clear that eastern Ukraine separatists would accept these gestures. Indeed, a pro-Russian leader from Donetsk, Andrei Purgin, as quoted as saying, "Ukraine is free to adopt any law it wants. But we are not planning any federalism with Ukraine." It was apparent that for many separatists, their notion of creating a new independent state known as "Novorossiya" remained the central goal.

As September 2014 entered its final week, the government of Ukraine and pro-Russian separatists met for peace talks in the Belarusian capital of Minsk. There, in the city where the initial ceasefire was announced at the start of the month, more details were furnished regarding the path forward to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

While the ceasefire has continued to endure intermittent violations, it remained in effect. This agreement at the end of September 2014, however, was intended to add more detail to the ceasefire deal, with an eye on ensuring it would be a sustainable plan for regional stability.

The agreement included provisions for the establishment of a buffer zone, the removal of heavy artillery from the front lines, a ban on overflights by military aircraft in the newly-established security zone, a ban on offensive operations, and the withdrawal of "foreign mercenaries" on both sides from the conflict zone. Also included in the plan was the implementation of an OSCE monitoring mission in eastern Ukraine. Left outside of the agreement, according to separatist leader, Alexander Zakharchenko, was the status of Luhansk and Donetsk. He said, "We have our opinion on it while Ukraine has its own."

In fact, as noted above, the parliament of Ukraine passed legislation granting self-determination and greater autonomy to Donetsk and Luhansk for a three-year period, thus garnering the condemnation of Ukrainian nationalists. But even those measures were regarded as insufficient by pro-Russian separatists who continued to demand a fully independent state (known as "Novorossiya" as noted above).

In another complication, Ukraine was soon refusing to pull back from the front lines in eastern Ukraine and, instead, calling for a new buffer zone deal. Ukraine said it would not withdraw its



forces until the ceasefire was fully implemented, with Andriy Lysenko, a spokesperson for Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, noting that two government soldiers had been killed, at least eight others had been injured, and pro-Russian separatists had fired at Ukrainian government forces in 22 different locations – and all within 24 hours of the signing the Minsk agreement. He emphasized that the pro-Russian separatists were hardly abiding by the terms of the deal, thus Ukraine's decision to hold its positions.

Ukraine's stance was backed by NATO with top military commander United States General Philip Breedlove charging that the ceasefire of Sept. 5, 2014, existed "in name only."

Ukrainian parliament ratifies deal with EU; President Poroshenko unveils reforms aimed at securing EU accession -

Meanwhile, Ukraine strengthened its relationship with the West when the parliament ratified an Association Agreement with the European Union. It was the Association Agreement that sparked the Ukrainian uprising in the first place, when now-ousted former President Yanukovich decided to shelve the pact in favor of a customs agreement with Russia. Now, after an uprising, an annexation of Crimea, a war, and a fatal plane crash, not to mention the loss of countless lives, the Association Agreement had returned to the fore.

This move was likely to upset Moscow, which has throughout been dismayed about Ukraine slipping out of its orbit. The ratification of the Association Agreement quite literally underlined the passage of Ukraine from Russia's realm to the European sphere. The price paid in blood for this movement from east to west was illustrated by President Poroshenko's words: "No nation has ever paid such a high price to become Europeans."

That thrust to become European was accelerated on Sept. 25, 2014, with Ukrainian President Poroshenko unveiling a package of social and economic reforms aimed at ultimately securing accession to the European Union. Speaking of the package, he said, "This program foresees about 60 reforms and special programs that will allow Ukraine to prepare for submitting in six years a bid for membership of the European Union."

Putin calls for withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian border; Poroshenko strengthens defense posture --

In the first part of October 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops to withdraw from their positions along the Ukrainian border and return to their permanent bases. While the news was welcomed, Western powers warned that they would not take the announcement as a genuine commitment until they saw actual evidence of the announced withdrawal from the border. Of course, the fact of the matter was that most Western powers also believed that Russian forces remained across the border in eastern Ukraine.

It should be noted that the call by Putin to withdraw Russian troops from the border occurred in the aftermath of military exercises that took place in the region of Rostov region. The move was being regarded as a cautiously optimistic sign that tensions between Russia and Ukraine were easing to some degree.

This lessening of tension came at an opportune time -- ahead of a meeting between Russian President Putin and Ukrainian President Poroshenko set to take place in mid-October 2014 in Italy on the sidelines of a scheduled summit of Asian and European leaders. With that summit underway, however, there was no sign that the two leaders had made any significant strides.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Poroshenko moved to strengthen the defense system of his country. At issue was his appointment of National Guard Chief Stepan Poltorak as the new defense minister and the ensuing ratification of that move by the parliament. Poltorak would replace Valery Heletey, who faced scathing criticism for his military leadership against Russian-backed separatists in August 2014. A series of defeats during that period around Donetsk compelled the newly-elected President Poroshenko to back away from a military mission to defeat the pro-Russian separatists in the east, and instead move towards the negotiating table.

While peace negotiations remained a priority for the Ukrainian leadership, President Poroshenko wanted to strengthen his military infrastructure. To that end, Poroshenko was looking towards the appointment of the well-respected Poltorak at the helm of the defense ministry as one who would be well-positioned to "create a powerful system of defense for Ukraine."

As October 2014 was coming to a close, that defense strategy remained a key consideration given NATO's warning that Russian troops remained in eastern Ukraine and had substantial forces amassed on the border, despite claims of a withdrawal (mentioned just above). NATO's new Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, the former leader of Norway, said of Russia and Russian forces: "They are still violating the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine by having Russian forces in Ukraine."

United States Air Force General Philip Breedlove, NATO's supreme allied commander, said in an interview with international media, "We've seen a pretty good withdrawal of the Russian forces from inside Ukraine but, make no mistake, there remain Russian forces inside eastern Ukraine." Breedlove continued, "But the force that remains and shows no indications of leaving is still a very, very capable force." Breedlove noted that the continued presence of a "large coercive force" on the Ukraine border was not conducive to the implementation of the Minsk ceasefire agreement, and a complete withdrawal of Russian forces from inside Ukraine and along the border with Ukraine would be needed to take Russian commitments to peace seriously.

The only bright spot in the realm of Russian-Ukrainian relations was forging of a short-term

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agreement at the start of November 2014, which was aimed at securing Russian gas for Ukrainian use through the duration of the winter.

#### Elections and effects on Russian-Ukrainian relations --

In the last week of October 2014, Ukrainians went to the polls to vote in parliamentary elections. Ukrainian President Poroshenko was looking for allies to be elected to the parliament in the elections so he would gain legislative support and a mandate for his aforementioned defense strategy against pro-Russians in the east. The president was also looking for an endorsement from the citizenry for his Westward push for the country, as he advocated Ukraine's closer ties with Europe, and ultimately, accession to the European Union. President Poroshenko received that mandate on election day (Oct. 26, 2014), following a strong showing at the polls by his own party, and other pro-European and allied nationalist parties. As such, President Poroshenko was well-positioned to move forward not only with his security agenda, but also with his pro-Europe moves.

But at the start of November 2014, the eastern portion of Ukraine (which had not participated in parliamentary elections mentioned here due to separatist inclinations) was moving forward with illegal elections of their own. The big winners of the vote in the pro-Russian east were Alexander Zakharchenko and Igor Plotnitsky who respectively claimed victory as the new leaders of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics" of "new Russia."

As expected, these results of these elections that took place on Nov. 2, 2014, were rejected by Ukraine and the larger international community, while (unsurprisingly) being backed by Russia.

In a move sure to heighten tensions between the two countries, Russia made clear that it would recognize the results of the elections of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry blasted Russia for this decision, declaring in a statement: "The Kremlin is consciously making the situation worse ... In such an extraordinarily fragile situation, this is an irresponsible step by Russia which can threaten the peace process."

Meanwhile, the Obama administration in the United States made clear to Kiev that it would not recognize any elections held in areas of eastern Ukraine under the control of pro-Russian separatists. Likewise, the governments of other Western countries, including Germany and France, made it clear that the vote in eastern Ukraine would be treated as illegitimate.

The vote among pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine prompted Ukrainian President Poroshenko to act in the political arena. He called on the newly-elected parliament of Ukraine to repeal the law that was passed granting greater autonomy for the separatists regions. That legislation moved forward despite the objections of nationalists for the purpose of advancing peace, and as an act of good faith in the Minsk ceasefire process. However, the elections in eastern Ukraine constituted a flagrant violation of the spirit of the peace process. There was now no

reason for the Ukrainian president to go against his nationalist allies in parliament to appease separatists in the east who clearly had no intention of being appeased.

On the ground in eastern Ukraine, the situation appeared to be devolving. At issue was the flare of renewed violence between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, with shelling intensifying around Donetsk, the main separatist stronghold. President Poroshenko addressed the shelling between government forces and pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions, saying that there was no need to panic. He explained, "If events begin to unravel in spite of the peace plan, Ukrainian armed forces today are ready and capable of repelling."

Meanwhile, the government of Ukraine in Kiev said that there was mounting evidence of continued Russian support for the separatists in the east, in clear violation of the Minsk ceasefire agreement. Of note was the fact that the pro-Russian separatists received fresh stores of ammunition and other military equipment. The Kiev government also accused Russia of sending mercenaries to the front lines in the east and further charged that there had been Russian incursions into its territory. Kiev authorities said that a column of tanks and troops crossed the border from Russia and crossed into eastern Ukraine in the first week of November 2014. This claim was backed by observations reported by both the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as well as Reuters News correspondents. Radio Free Europe also pointed out that there was no shortage of videotaped clips of the convoy available on the Internet.

For its part, Russia denied the accusations despite the evidence to the contrary. Nevertheless, Ukraine was deploying reinforcements to the region in response to apparent threats of Russian aggression. The truth of the matter was that the movement of troops from both sides on the Ukrainian-Russian border suggested that Ukraine and Russian-supported separatists were preparing for renewed conflict.

In many senses the fragile ceasefire agreement discussed above was on the brink of collapse. As noted by United States Air Force General Philip Breedlove, NATO's supreme allied commander, the conditions were clearly in place for a so-called "frozen conflict" between Greater Ukraine under the control of Kiev and the pro-Russian east under the protection of Moscow. Still, with heavy bombardment and shelling of rebel-held Donetsk in the second week of November 2014, and with reports of a build-up of pro-Russian reinforcements in eastern Ukraine, it was fair to say that the conflict retained many traits of a "hot" war.

Indeed, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk said on Nov. 14, 2014, that the top priority for his country would be to strengthen the army so it would be able to stop Russian aggression. Days later, he also dismissed Russian calls that Ukraine engage in direct talks with separatist leaders, making clear that his government would take no action aimed at legitimizing "terrorists."

## International Relations --

Given this landscape, it was perhaps not surprising that the West was telegraphing no end to the sanctions against Russia. In fact, the European Union was hinting that it might intensify its sanctions regime against Russia given the clear violations of the Minsk Agreement.

At the G20 summit in Australia in mid-November 2014, Western leaders placed pressure on Russian President Putin for continued backing of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. In one particularly marked exchange, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said: "I guess I'll shake your hand but I have only one thing to say to you: You need to get out of Ukraine." According to Reuters News, Putin's response contained the same kind of mendacious denial that has come to characterize Russia's official stance on Ukraine. Putin said: "Unfortunately, this is impossible to do because we are not there."

President Barack Obama noted that the United States was leading the charge of "opposing Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which is a threat to the world, as we saw in the appalling shoot-down of MH17." (MH17 was the Malaysian airliner shot down by pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine in July 2014.) The United States was joined by Australia and Japan in issuing a joint statement expressing solidarity in "opposing Russia's purported annexation of Crimea and its actions to destabilize eastern Ukraine."

Even outside the summit, the mood was distinctly anti-Putinesque, with protesters accusing the Russian leader of murder, while others wore headbands with the words "Putin, Killer" emblazoned on them. The summit thus highlighted Putin's isolation and estrangement from the rest of the world's leading nation states.

Ultimately, Putin left the summit early, returning to Russia before other G20 leaders had completed their sidebar meetings. He explained his early departure as follows: "It will take nine hours to fly to Vladivostok and another eight hours to get Moscow. I need four hours sleep before I get back to work on Monday. We have completed our business." However, the general consensus was that the Russian leader was likely departing the summit in order to avoid further unpleasant exchanges with world leaders.

Given his alienation from the world's leading Western nation states, Putin was looking for new allies. To that end, he was hoping to improve Russian ties with the paranoid and pariah nation state of North Korea. The leaders of the two countries were apparently interested in working together to improve regional security. With a United Nations resolution in the offing regarding North Korea's human rights violations and possible action at the International Criminal Court, no doubt Pyongyang was looking to cultivate a better relationship with a veto-wielding country (other than China) on the United Nations Security Council.

Meanwhile, Moscow was on the hunt for new friends.

## Status Update

In December 2014, fighting had intensified at the Donetsk airport in eastern Ukraine - a violation of the Minsk ceasefire agreement. The government of Ukraine accused Russia of providing special operatives to bolster support for the pro-Russian separatists there, as well as of smuggling heavy artillery ammunition into its territory.

With the fighting going on irrespective of the Minsk agreement, and with signs of continued Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine, the United States and the European Union telegraphed that they would be working to intensifying their sanctions against Russia, while simultaneously working to shore up European energy security. One measure in that direction would be the export of United States liquefied natural gas to Europe to diversify supplies on the other side of the Atlantic. To date, Europe has been concerned that tougher sanctions against Russia would create negative consequences, given that region's reliance on Russian energy supplies. United States President Barack Obama urged patience in regards to the sanctions against Russia, noting that it would take some time before Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign policy choices would ultimately create economic pain for Russia, which would have to be transposed into domestic political pressure before Putin could be persuaded to change course. With an eye on creating that economic pain, in the third week of December 2014, President Obama said that he had signed onto a new Russian sanctions bill that had been signed by the United States Congress.

As December 2014 drew to a close, there was a prisoner exchange between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists. This action was regarded to be a positive step in tamping down the tensions in eastern Ukraine, and may have been - at least partially - driven by economic pressures on Russia due to the combination of lower oil prices and economic sanctions imposed by the West.

Around the same period of late 2014, Ukrainian President Poroshenko said he intended to meet with his Russian, French, and German counterparts on Jan. 15, 2015, in the Kazakh capital of Astana for discussions on the restoration of peace in the eastern part of the country -- now a hotbed of pro-Russian separatist activity. Poroshenko described the priority for the meeting as follows: "The most important thing is to turn a fragile ceasefire into a stable peace and return previously occupied territories under the control of Ukrainian authorities." That imperative could prove difficult because Ukraine regarded its territorial integrity and sovereignty to be of paramount importance while Russia was unlikely to cede control of Crimea back to Ukraine.

Meanwhile, on the domestic political landscape in Ukraine, a new government was approved by parliament in the aftermath of the parliamentary elections. The new cabinet, led by Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk, included technocrats and made clear that no major shifts in policy were in the offing.



In the realm of foreign policy, on Dec. 23, 2014, Ukraine's westward drift was emphasized when President Poroshenko signed legislation revoking Ukraine's status as a neutral country. The bill, which nullified Ukraine's official "non-aligned" status, effectively set the path towards the pursuit of NATO membership at some point in the future. It was a move sure to raise the ire of Russia, which has opposed Ukraine's alliances with Western multilateral powers, such as the European Union and NATO.

Not surprisingly, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed disapproval for these latest developments, casting the decision to revoke Ukraine's neutrality as "counter-productive" and warning that it would only amplify regional tensions. But Ukraine was undeterred; Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin noted Ukraine was determined to intensify its alliances with Europe and the West. He said: "This will lead to integration in the European and the Euro-Atlantic space."

It should be noted that the entire crisis in the region was precipitated by Russia's desire to prevent Ukraine from aligning more closely with the European Union. Now, in the aftermath of Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea, not only was Ukraine looking to join the European Union, but it was also looking potentially towards NATO, which Russia has long regarded as a threat to its power in the region. In truth, NATO was not necessarily interested in having Ukraine join its body; however, Ukraine's ambitions along these lines were likely enough to enrage Russia and imperil prevailing efforts to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Of note was Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's Facebook post warning that Ukraine's rejection of neutrality augured "negative consequences." He posted, "In essence, an application for NATO membership will turn Ukraine into a potential military opponent for Russia."

In January 2015, there was no end in sight as to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. In fact, fighting was still going on at the international airport in Donetsk. As noted by a presidential adviser, Yuri Biryukov, via the social media outlet, Facebook: "They (the separatists) launched a full storm from this morning. We have wounded on our side. There is hot combat going on there and the tension and the situation there is the worst I have seen." Not surprisingly, attempts to revive peace talks had ended in failure and the prevailing Minsk ceasefire agreement could be regarded as effectively defunct. But in some good news for Ukraine, on Jan. 19, 2015, their forces were successfully able to regain control over the Donetsk airport and the surrounding territory in eastern Ukraine, which had been lost to the pro-Russian separatists over the course of weeks. Ukrainian military spokesperson, Andriy Lysenko, said, "We succeeded in almost completely cleansing the territory of the airport, which belongs to the territory of Ukrainian forces as marked by military separation lines."

With Russia increasing its support of the separatists in the east, the Ukrainian parliament in mid-January 2015 voted affirmatively to rotate its forces on the front lines and resume conscription into its military. Oleksander Turchynov, secretary of the national defense council, said in an address to

parliament that 8,500 Russian regular forces were now deployed in eastern Ukraine. He said, "Russian aggression is continuing. There has been a significant surge in the intensity of firing." He also made note of the fact that Ukrainian positions were fired on more than 100 times in mid-January 2015, and that several Ukrainian soldiers had been killed, while even more had been wounded. In addition, 12 civilians died at an army checkpoint due to shelling of a passenger bus. Thus the need for Ukraine to be ready to respond militarily. To this end, Turchynov said, "There is an urgent need to strengthen the combat and mobilization readiness of our forces and other military forces up to a level which guarantees an adequate reaction to threats to national security from continuing Russian aggression."

Meanwhile, with Russia continuing to play a central role in the eastern Ukrainian crisis (despite claims to the contrary), the West made clear that there would be no easing of sanctions, and the alienation of Russia would continue. To that end, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was to host the next meeting of G7 countries, made it clear that Russian President Vladimir Putin would not be invited to the summit of the world's economic super-powers. In an interview with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper, Merkel said, "The G7 and former G8 group has always viewed itself as a community of values. The annexation of Crimea, which is a blatant violation of the principles of international law, and the events in eastern Ukraine are serious violations of these common values." She explained that, as a result, there was "no chance" that the Russian president would be invited to attend the summit in Bavaria scheduled to take place in June 2015. Merkel also noted that given Russia's continued aggression, sanctions would remain in place as she said, "In spring we will discuss the question how to deal with the sanctions that we decided to impose after Russia's annexation of Crimea. Given the current situation, they will remain in place." Accordingly, Russia's pariah status remained unchanged.

In the third week of January 2015, pro-Russian separatists were able to send Ukrainian forces into retreat from the Donetsk airport where a lengthy battle had been ongoing for weeks. However, Ukrainian President Poroshenko insisted that despite that obvious setback due to an intensified effort from the pro-Russian rebels, his country's troops were holding the line. He said, "Across all front lines we are firmly holding our positions." Still, there were casualties with at least 10 Ukrainian soldiers being killed in the period of the third week of January 2015. There was also a trolleybus attack in Donetsk that left eight civilians dead, which both sides blamed on one another.

Around the same period, NATO released a report noting that in violation of the Minsk ceasefire agreement, fighting in separatist territories was actually more intense than it had been prior to the ceasefire being announced in September 2014. Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk said the increased violence and bloodshed should be blamed on pro-Russian separatists, who were being supported by Moscow despite Russian President Putin's claim to the contrary. For his part, Putin appeared determined to sow the seeds of mischief as he suggested that, in fact, NATO troops were fighting alongside Ukrainian forces. NATO dismissed this claim by the Russian president as ludicrous.

Pro-Russian separatist aggression was highlighted on Jan. 23, 2015, when Alexander Zakharchenko, the head of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic, dismissed the notion of further peace talks with the government of Ukraine in Kiev, saying his forces would instead launch a new offensive into the eastern regions not yet under separatists' control.

Making good on this threat, on Jan. 24, 2015, pro-Russian separatists launched an offensive against the strategic port city of Mariupol located on the Sea of Azov. The city administration of Mariupol said the pro-Russian separatists fired rockets using long-range GRAD missile systems, killing at least 30 people and injuring scores more. In an interview with Russia's RIA news agency proudly took responsibility for his rebels' attack on Mariupol saying it was intended to avenge the deaths of his people. He said, "Today an offensive was launched on Mariupol. This will be the best possible monument to all our dead." He added that his separatists fighters intended to target the town of Debaltseve, to the northeast of Donetsk, next in its war campaign.

At home in Kiev, President Poroshenko promised to protect Ukrainian's territorial sovereignty and convened an emergency meeting of his country's security council on Jan. 25, 2015. He issued a statement that read as follows: "We are for peace, but we accept the challenge of the enemy. We will protect our motherland."

As January 2015 came to a close, scores of people were killed as fighting raged on between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. The pro-Russians were now penetrating the town of Debaltseve, consolidating pre-Russian separatist control of the region.

Also in late January 2015, cracks began to form in the normally strong Russia-Belarus alliance. With Russia backing pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and annexing Crimea a year earlier, Belarus -- like many of Russia's neighbors -- was suddenly wary of Russia's imperial ambitions, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's apparent hopes to reconstitute the Soviet empire. Once one of Russia's closest allies in the region, Belarus was suddenly shifting its stance with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko declaring in vociferous language that his country would never be part of the "Russian world" -- a term adopted by the Russian Kremlin as Moscow seeks to draw its former republics back under its umbrella.

It should be noted that Belarus has played a key regional role in the Ukrainian crisis, hosting talks that led to the (now collapsed) Minsk ceasefire agreement of 2014. But as Russia has sought to extend a controlling hand over Belarus' assets, the Belarusian president was keen to draw the proverbial line in the sand. For Belarus, suspicion of Russia was sparked when Moscow tried to restrict exports in violation of the regulations enshrined within the Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Belarus warned that if the rules of the Eurasian Economic Union were not observed, it would withdraw from the alliance.

President Lukashenko made it clear that Belarus' independence would have to be respected as he declared, "Those who think that the Belarusian land is part as what they call the Russian world, almost part of Russia, forget about it!" He continued, "Belarus is a modern and independent state." Lukashenko went one step further, noting that he wished to normalize ties with the West. It was a move certain to infuriate Moscow, which seeks the opposite outcome. However, as Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine exists, it has stood as a reminder to surrounding countries of their own vulnerability, and concomitantly driven stalwart allies, such as Belarus, in a Westward direction.

By the start of February 2015, fighting in the Ukrainian east was fierce and the death toll was increasing around the transport hub of Debaltseve, while pro-Russian rebels had not only advanced on the nearby town of Vuhlehirsk. Indeed, on Feb. 4, 2015, pro-Russian rebels appeared to be in full control of the garrison town. The fall of Vuhlehirsk was a clear blow to the Ukrainian government in Kiev. Surrounding towns were also suffering the effects of heavy shelling with residents of Avdiivka saying that large swaths of that town had been completely destroyed.

It was a clear fact that fighting in eastern Ukraine had escalated at an alarming level in the first part of February 2015, prompting the United Nations to warn that the violence was reaching "catastrophic" levels with civilian casualties on a marked increase. Flashpoints included the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as well as the town of Debaltseve. United Nations human rights chief, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said there had been a "clear breach of international humanitarian law which governs the conduct of armed conflicts." To this end, he noted that public venues, such as bus stops, marketplaces, schools, and hospitals had become battlegrounds.

Meanwhile, talks in Belarus aimed at reviving a truce ended in failure. Ukraine's representative, former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, said the negotiations were "thwarted" by the actions of pro-Russian rebels. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which took part in the talks in Minsk, along with envoys from Ukraine and Russia, shared the view that pro-Russian rebels had sabotaged the peace negotiations. The OSCE said that pro-Russian separatists were simply not interested in serious discussions pertaining to a peace plan. Furthermore, as noted in an OSCE statement: "In fact, they [pro-Russian separatists] were not even prepared to discuss implementation of a ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons."

Given this landscape, as well as the increase in Russian-aided aggression on Ukrainian territory, the West was warning of consequences to come. Speaking from a state visit in India, United States President Barack Obama said his country was looking at a wealth of options, just short of military action, to isolate Russia. He said, "We are deeply concerned about the latest break in the ceasefire and the aggression that these separatists -- with Russian backing, Russian equipment, Russian financing, Russian training and Russian troops -- are conducting. I will look at all additional options that are available to us short of military confrontation and try to address this issue. And we will be in close consultation with our international partners, particularly European partners."

The European Union convened an emergency meeting of foreign ministers, headed by the European Union foreign affairs chief, Federica Mogherini. But the sharpest language came from the new leader of the European Council, Former Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who delivered harsh rebuke not only of Russian aggression, but of Europe's response to it. Tusk conjured up memories of World War II, as he condemned the "appeasement" of Moscow. Via the social media outlet, Twitter, he said: "Once again, appeasement encourages the aggressor to greater acts of violence. Time to step up our policy based on cold facts, not illusions." Ultimately, the European Union opted to extend the sanctions regime against Russia in response to continued Russian aggression and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Debate over arming Ukraine --

On Feb. 2, 2015, the New York Times in the United States reported that President Barack Obama was considering additional support for Ukrainian forces -- possibly in the form of defensive weapons and equipment -- for the purpose of protecting Ukraine from the pro-Russian offensive. United States officials said that no decision had been made on the matter. In fact, in an interview with CNN, Ben Rhodes, the deputy national security adviser to President Barack Obama, said: "We're not going to bring the Ukrainian military into parity with Russia's military, certainly not in the near future. We have to keep the perspective that the best tool that we have to apply pressure on Russia is that economic pressure through the sanctions."

On Feb. 5, 2015, Ukrainian President Poroshenko called on NATO states to provide additional weaponry to his country, saying, "The escalation of the conflict that's happening today, the increasing number of civilian casualties, especially after the terrorist attacks in Volnovakha and, Donetsk as well as the bombardment of Mariupol... should move the alliance to provide Ukraine with more support." In his interview with the publication, Die Welt, he said, "(That) includes, among other things, delivering modern weapons for protection and for resisting the aggressor." Poroshenko added that while his country aspired to peace, Ukraine nonetheless had to be defended.

While NATO was not expected to assent to this call easily, there was nevertheless a plan afoot for the establishment of new command and control NATO units in eastern Europe. According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the units would be made up of about 50 officers and would be established in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland. Ultimately, they would be geared to the rapid deployment of NATO forces in the region. It was a plan sure to cause consternation for Russia, which has eschewed NATO's footprint in its east European backyard.

Also on February 5, United States Secretary of State John Kerry was in Ukraine to show solidarity with that country and to announce \$16.4 million in new humanitarian aid to help

Ukrainians affected by the war raging in the east. During a news conference, Secretary of State Kerry was asked if he believed Russia was active militarily in Ukraine despite Russian claims to the contrary. He referred the question to Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who said: "It is crystal clear that (the) Russian military is on the ground...We are not fighting so-called rebels or guerrillas. We are fighting with the Russian regular army." The Ukrainian prime minister also mocked Russia and its leader for denying this reality as he sarcastically declared that the only country denying Russian military boots are on the ground was the Russian Federation. In a dramatic flourish, Yatsenyuk removed his glasses and offered to lend them to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Some Western think tanks were suggesting that a stronger Ukrainian military -- once capable of confronting Russian-backed separatists -- could help push the separatists into peace talks that they recently eschewed. Emboldened by their success on the battlefield, pro-Russian rebels have become more aggressive rather than less so; it was conceivable that some reversals on the battlefield might make a truce look more attractive. To this end, the Atlantic Council said that Ukraine would benefit from military aid, such as anti-armor missiles, drones, and armored Humvees. In a report, the Atlantic Council noted: "A stronger Ukrainian military, with enhanced defensive capabilities, will increase the prospects for negotiation of a peaceful settlement."

Of course, the obvious counter-argument was that military aid from the West, and specifically from the United States, might spur Russia to retaliate by amplifying its own military footprint in eastern Ukraine, thus escalating the war. As well, there was the political aspect, which was that the West likely preferred a united approach rather than one by which a country was acting out of sync with NATO. That type of disunity would certainly provide an opening for Russian President Putin to exploit.

It was clear that the issue of arming the Ukrainian military was soon becoming an issue of contention within the countries of the West. At issue was German Chancellor Angela Merkel's objections to the notion of sending arms to Ukraine to help that country's military battle Russian-backed separatists. To this end, she said, "I understand the debate but I believe that more weapons will not lead to the progress Ukraine needs. I really doubt that."

While the Obama White House remained reticent about actually moving forward on this front, key Republican politicians from the United States accused Germany of turning its back on Ukraine. Senator John McCain said, "The Ukrainians are being slaughtered and we're sending them blankets and meals. Blankets don't do well against Russian tanks." Senator Lyndsey Graham added, "At the end of the day, to our European friends, this is not working...Stand up to what is clearly a lie and a danger."

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, speaking on behalf of the Obama administration was far more restrained in his view, saying that the effort should be made to resolve the conflict in eastern

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Ukraine peacefully. However, Biden noted that Russian President Putin was not to be trusted, as he said, "Too many times President Putin has promised peace and delivered tanks, troops and weapons."

Meanwhile, making it clear that Ukrainian-Russian relations were at a new low, the Ukrainian government in Kiev introduced new laws requiring Russians to present a passport (vis a vis internal identity documents) to enter Ukrainian territory.

Ukrainian President Poroshenko reiterated his country's right to defend itself, saying, "We are an independent nation and we have a right to defend our people." He did receive European support from Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, who declared that Ukraine should be supported "with all means necessary to defend, not to attack, to defend its people and its territory."

But the peace path was not yet abandoned. The leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France were set to meet in Belarus' capital city of Minsk in the second week of February 2015 to discuss a resolution to the violence in eastern Ukraine. The proposal on the table was not actually new -- it seemed to build upon the now-defunct Minsk ceasefire agreement of September 2014, and focus on the establishment of a 40 mile demilitarized zone around the current front lines of the conflict. In an act of good faith in anticipation of the Minsk meeting, the European Union opted to impose further sanctions against pro-Russian separatist, Russians, and key organizations, but to delay the proposed assets freeze and visa bans until after the peace summit had taken place. The intent was to give the talks a chance to yield results and implement them on the basis of the results of the meeting. As noted by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, "The principle of these sanctions remains but the implementation will depend on results on the ground."

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Merkel was by-passing the contingent of United States politicians advocating the arming of the Ukrainian military and, instead, conferring with the president of the United States, Barack Obama, on the details of the new peace plan. A meeting between the two heads of government was held on Feb. 9, 2015, ahead of the Minsk meeting with the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, and France on Feb. 11, 2015. Speaking of the meeting between Obama and Merkel, the spokesperson for the United States National Security Council, Mark Stroh, paid tribute to the German chancellor on behalf of the United States president, saying, "The President values the Chancellor's judgement, and appreciates her strong efforts in marshalling European support and maintaining Transatlantic unity throughout the Ukraine crisis. She has been tireless in her pursuit of a diplomatic solution to the crisis, and the President anticipates a useful and informative discussion about this and other issues."

Even as discussions about a new ceasefire were ongoing, the reality was that pro-Russian separatists were interested only in war as they prepared for fresh assaults on Debaltseve and Mariupol. In fact, on Feb. 8, 2015, reports from eastern Ukraine indicated that pro-Russian separatists were making repeated attempts to attack government positions in Debaltseve, with

massive shelling reported in that town. The commander of a squadron that captured the town of Vuhlehirsk close to Debaltseve told international media that his forces had no interest in a truce.

On Feb. 11, 2015, the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany convened peace talks in the city of Minsk in Belarus. Of note was a televised handshake between Ukrainian President Poroshenko and Russian President Putin. However, the meeting was immediately overshadowed from the news in eastern Ukraine that pro-Russian separatists' assaults close to Debaltseve had left as many as 20 Ukrainian soldiers dead. A separate incident resulted in the deaths of several people when a shell hit a bus station in Donetsk.

New Minsk Ceasefire Agreement --

On Feb. 12, 2015, following close to 24 hours of marathon talks, French President François Hollande announced that an agreement for peace in eastern Ukraine had been forged to end the fighting and ultimately stabilize the region. The ceasefire was to go into effect at midnight on Feb. 14, 2015 (technically 00.01 on Feb. 15, 2015) and was to be observed by international monitors.

There were provisions for a forthcoming concord that would end the war, and settle difficult issues such as disarmament, the withdrawal of heavy weaponry, amnesty for all fighters, prisoner exchanges, and border control. There was also a roadmap for constitutional reforms that would facilitate the decentralization of separatist-dominated regions of the east. There was also the matter of self-determination in the flashpoint pro-Russian separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. As indicated here, under the terms of the concord, the territory in the east would be returned to Ukraine, but only after the holding of fresh elections in Donetsk and Luhansk under the aegis of Ukrainian law, and on the basis of the aforementioned constitutional reforms that would deal with decentralization.

President Hollande of France hailed the truce, saying, "It is a relief for Europe." German Chancellor Merkel was more restrained, saying that the ceasefire offered a "glimmer of hope." President Poroshenko made initially accused Russia of making "unacceptable" demands of his country but said that Ukraine has stood strong in the face of "ultimatums." Russian President Putin said in an interview with Russian media, "It wasn't the best night for me, but it's a good morning."

Across the Atlantic in the United States, the United States government noted the "significant step" constituted by the agreement, but pointed out that continued fighting in eastern Ukraine was "inconsistent with the spirit of the accord." In truth, it was to be seen if the new Minsk ceasefire agreement would end more positively than the last one. At issue was the ongoing fighting in Debaltseve, where pro-Russian fighters were on the offensive and Ukrainian forces were under pressure. Would the truce be observed there? The rebel leader of Luhansk, Igor Plotnitskiy, issued a more promising note, saying, "We hope that thanks to our efforts today, Ukraine will change and

stop firing at civilians, hospitals and socially important facilities." The rebel leader of Donetsk, Alexander Zakharchenko, said the blame would be placed on Ukraine if the ceasefire collapsed, and ominously warned that in that event, there would "be no meetings and no new agreements."

On Feb. 16, 2015, the new Minsk ceasefire agreement appeared to be a conceptual notion rather than a reality as fighting continued in some parts of eastern Ukraine. In truth, the truce did indeed seem to be in place in significant portions of eastern Ukraine; however, in the flashpoint town of Debaltseve where intensive fighting had gone on for weeks, there was no sign of peace. In fact, pro-Russian separatists who were advancing on the town and assaulting Ukrainian forces made clear that there would be no ceasefire in Debaltseve.

By the third week of February 2015, Debaltseve was under pro-Russian separatist control and Ukrainian forces were in retreat. As well, Ukrainian authorities said that pro-Russian were attacking government-held positions in eastern Ukraine -- including the area around the strategic port of Mariupol. Anatoly Stelmach, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian military, said, "The number of attacks show the terrorists do not want to completely silence their guns." Ukrainian authorities then went further, accusing Russia of dispatching more troops and tanks to the region, specifically in the direction of the town of Novoazovsk on the southern coast. As noted by another Ukrainian military spokesperson, Andriy Lysenko: "In recent days, despite the Minsk (ceasefire) agreement, military equipment and ammunition have been sighted crossing from Russia into Ukraine." Of note was the movement of 20 Russian tanks, 10 missile systems, and deployment of troops into the eastern Ukrainian conflict zone. These moves appeared to hint towards a new battlefield in the war, irrespective of the fact that a new ceasefire agreement was supposedly in place.

Meanwhile, a year after the original Maidan uprising in Kiev ousted former pro-Russian President Yanukovich from power, the one-year anniversary was marked by a somber remembrance in the capital of the lives and territory lost as Ukraine has sought to hold onto its sovereignty in the face of pro-Russian aggression and imperialistic expansion.

But on Ukraine's second largest city of Kharkiv, the situation took a dark turn as citizens marked the occasion. On Feb. 22, 2015, a bomb exploded at a rally for national unity near the city's Palace of Sport, killing two people and injuring 10 more. Four individuals with alleged ties to Russia were detained in connection with the attack. The reality was that Ukraine was still being plagued by conflict despite the latest Minsk ceasefire agreement. Ukrainian President Poroshenko characterized the attack as "a bold attempt to expand the territory of terrorism" and vowed that justice would be served.

As February 2015 came to a close, pro-Russian separatists attempted to win the public relations debate over who was responsible for the latest Minsk ceasefire not taking hold, as they invited journalists to witness the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the eastern Ukrainian front line.

Ukrainian authorities dismissed the move, saying that the gesture was intended to obfuscate the reality that the pro-Russian were simply preparing for a fresh offensive.

Nevertheless, the fact of the matter was that in eastern Ukraine at the end of February 2015 was marked by increasing calm. Of course, it was quite possible that pro-Russians were willing to ease up on the fighting now that the railway hub of Debaltseve was under their control. Regardless of the actual cause for the slowing activity in the battlefield, it was to be seen if this sense of calm would prove sustainable.

In the third week of March 2015, amidst the ongoing -- but fragile -- ceasefire agreement, fighting was reported in Donetsk. Of concern was the Spartak district of the city which has seen no cessation of hostilities since the time of the announcement of the new Minsk ceasefire deal. Still, the rest of the region was enjoying some calm, albeit of an uneasy variety.

Western leaders have said that more resources would be needed for monitors to oversee the truce, while warning of further sanctions, should Russian-backed separatists advance further into Ukrainian territory.

Indeed, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has warned that any significant violation of the new -- but fragile -- ceasefire in eastern Ukraine would spur Europe to move forward with further sanctions against Russia for its support of pro-Russian separatists. She said, "So far we've got a fragile ceasefire which needs to be stabilized. But if the Minsk agreement is seriously violated, European leaders and the (European) Commission stand ready to prepare and impose further sanctions."

Then, in the last week of March 2015, leaders of European Union countries said that they intended to link the lifting of economic sanctions on Russia with the full implementation of a Ukraine ceasefire agreement. According to the president of the European Council, Donald Tusk, "The duration of economic sanctions will be clearly linked to the full implementation of the Minsk agreement. We have to maintain our sanctions until the Minsk agreement is fully implemented." This stance made clear that while the European Union was not officially extending its sanctions regime, which was due to expire in mid-2015, without clear benchmarks being met as regards the implementation of a sustainable peace in eastern Ukraine, sanctions would, in fact, be continued.

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom announced it would deploy military forces to Ukraine to help train that country's military in the fight against Russian-backed rebels aiming to establish a "new Russia."

In the first part of April 2015, there was a flare of violence in eastern Ukraine. In the aftermath of the death of one Ukrainian soldier and the wounding of several others, Ukraine accused Russian-backed separatists of using weapons, such as heavy weapons and artillery, that were banned under the terms of the Minsk ceasefire agreement. As stated by a Ukrainian military spokesperson,

Oleksandr Motuzyanyk, "The rebels have not stopped firing at Ukrainian positions ... Over the past day, the enemy has used weapons banned under the Minsk agreements." On the other side of the equation, Russian-backed separatists blamed Ukrainian attacks on the injuring of two journalists close to the flashpoint city of Donetsk.

As the spike in violence ensued in eastern Ukraine, foreign ministers from Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany held talks and agreed to move forward with a plan to remove weaponry from the frontlines of the conflict. The list of items targeted for withdrawal included heavy caliber weapons, mortars, tanks, and armored vehicles.

Note:

To date, as many as 5,000 people have died in a year of war marked by violence and bloodshed.

Could Russian encroachment into Ukraine be part of an economic plot?

In a separate development in late February 2015, the Russian independent newspaper, Novaya Gazeta, published an apparent strategy document showing Russian plans to annex Crimea and integrate other portions of eastern Ukraine. The plan was supposedly presented to the leadership in the Russian Kremlin leaders in early February 2014 -- a period preceding the ousting of pro-Russian President Yanukovich from power in Ukraine and suggestive of an entrenched imperative to get Ukraine under the de facto control of Moscow. Novaya Gazeta characterized the document as an "analytical note" that outlined the economic failures of the Yanukovich regime and the costs to continued support from Moscow. The note also warned against the economic costs to Russia as regards the Ukrainian energy market and control over Ukraine's gas pipelines, which would ultimately redound negatively on Russia.

Key excerpts from the document included the following quote: "The V. Yanukovich regime finally went bankrupt. For the Russian Federation to continue to support it politically, diplomatically, financially and informationally no longer makes any sense" and suggestions that Russia risked "losing not just the Ukrainian energy market, but what is much more dangerous, even indirect control over Ukraine's gas transport system."

But the document went further, as it mused over the benefits of integrating eastern Ukraine into the Russian fold either in a de facto economic alliance or in a more explicit geopolitical manner. A key quote was as follows: "Russia... should attempt to enter into cross-border cooperation agreements and then establish direct inter-government relations with those Ukrainian territories, where there is stable pro-Russian electoral support." The document continues by noting that although the integration of eastern Ukrainian territories into Russia would be costly, the benefits would be "invaluable" from "a geopolitical point of view," since Russia would "gain access to new demographic resources" and "highly qualified personnel in industry and transport."

There was no official response from Western powers, although a NATO military official acknowledged that the contents of the document were consistent with the perception that Russia was "directly involved" in the destabilization of eastern Ukraine. In a report published by Voice of America, that NATO official was quoted as saying, "NATO does not have any comment on the forthcoming publication of an alleged Kremlin strategy document. But it comes to no surprise to NATO that Russia has been directly involved in destabilizing military activities in Ukraine and Crimea from the outset."

While the veracity of the contents of the "analytical note" was yet to be established, it certainly presented a calculating rationale as to why Russia would back pro-Russian separatists in a bid to control eastern Ukraine.

For its part, the Kremlin dismissed the document as nonsense; however, in March 2015, a new dimension of Russia's territorial ambitions in Ukraine emerged when Russian President Putin said in an interview on the Rossiya-1 state television channel that he ordered officials in his government to look at ways to take control over Crimea as early as February 2014. Putin said that he convened an emergency with the commanders of his special forces to discuss the overthrow of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, and to secure the ousted Ukrainian leader's safe passage to Russia. At the end of that meeting, according to Putin, he signaled his ambitions in Crimea. To this end, Putin said, "This was on the night of Feb. 22 through to Feb. 23. We finished around 7 in the morning. And, while saying goodbye, I told all the colleagues: We have to start the work on Crimea's return into Russia."

Of note was the fact that until this interview with Putin, Russian authorities had insisted that the decision to annex Crimea only occurred after the referendum in the Black Sea peninsula, which ensued on March 16, 2014 and resulted in ratification of the initiative to join Russia. Now, however, Putin was advancing quite a different account. Regardless of the rationale, the fact of the matter was that Crimea was now under Russian control.

Moreover, by the third week of March 2015, Russia made clear that it had no intention of returning Crimea to Ukraine. A spokesperson for the Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, refused to even acknowledge that Ukraine had any right to the territory, emphasizing that Crimea was now a Russian region. He said, "There is no occupation of Crimea. Crimea is a region of the Russian Federation and of course the subject of our regions is not up for discussion." In truth, however, the vast majority of the countries of the world did not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea as legitimate, given the flagrant and illegal violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Undeterred by world opinion, and interested only in advancing his national popularity, Russian President Putin intensified his hawkish and aggressive rhetoric, saying in an interview that he had been ready to put nuclear weapons on standby during the Crimea crisis. The Russian president's



willingness to play the nuclear threat card was being regarded as a dangerous development, especially since Russia was soon carrying out major military exercises across northern Russia involving more than 45,000 troops, in what was a clear show of military strength intended to intimidate its neighbors. As well, Russian President Putin was flexing his aggressive and hawkish muscles in the region as he ordered the Russian Northern Fleet to be on a state of full combat readiness in the Arctic.

For its part, Ukraine has reminded the world that the annexation of Crimea was illegal and that there would be no normalization of ties with Russia in the future without the return of Crimea to its fold and respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin was on the record saying, "There could be no slightest way of normalizing or getting back to business in the relations between Ukraine and Russia without returning to status quo and establishing full Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea." He continued, "The ultimate precondition for any effective, final settlement is to fully close down the Ukrainian-Russian border... Because everything that has been destabilizing the situation in (the Ukrainian cities of) Donetsk and Lugansk - mercenaries, money, weapons, heavy weaponry, and of course Russian rebel troops - came through the Russian-Ukrainian border."

### Latest Developments

At the start of June 2015, irrespective of the prevailing Minsk ceasefire agreement, the pro-Russian stronghold of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine was mired by fierce fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists. Battles were also said to be taking place in the nearby areas of Maryinka and Krasnohorivka. Journalists on the ground reported that it was the worst flare of violence in the region since the signing of the new ceasefire in the Belarusian capital of Minsk months prior, with a significant death toll likely to be calculated.

As before, the government of Ukraine, several Western powers, and NATO repeated their accusation that Russia was playing an active role in the conflict, even supplying both weaponry and troops to the separatists. For its part, Russia dismissed these claims and even registered discontent over the term "annexation" as regards its seizure of the Ukrainian region of Crimea, insisting that Crimea was simply "reunited" with Russia. These stances by Russia made clear that there was no consensus between the various parties about the basic events that transpired in eastern Ukraine over the course of the last year.

As regards the latest flare of violence in eastern Ukraine, the Russian Kremlin placed the blame on the Ukrainian military, claiming that those forces had acted provocatively. But the Ukrainian government had a different view and said that Russian-supported separatists were responsible for launching a fresh offensive to the west of Donetsk.

Regardless of the veracity of the respective claims being made by either side, the fact of the matter

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was that this eruption of violence could not be simply be regarded as simple skirmishes that might blight any peace accord. Instead, the use of heavy weapons made clear that these fresh battles augured a shift in the landscape.

Indeed, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko went so far as to call on his military to prepare for a possible "full-scale invasion" by Russia. He said, "There is a colossal threat of a renewal of large-scale military operations from the side of the Russian-terrorist groups. "The military must be ready as much for a renewal of an offensive by the enemy in the Donbass as they are for a full-scale invasion along the whole length of the border with Russia. We must be truly ready for this." The Ukrainian president also noted that rather than reducing its military footprint in the border zone, instead there were more Russian troops in the region than a year before. He said, "The concentration of Russian troops near the state border is one and a half times greater than a year ago."

Unsurprisingly, Russian authorities dismissed this claim with a Russian defense ministry spokesperson, Igor Konashenkov, insisting, "There are no regular Russian troops, let alone tactical combat groups in Ukraine." However, journalists in the field have made note of the buildup of Russian troops and heavy weaponry along the border with Ukraine in the late spring of 2015.

Nevertheless, the West was warning of fresh sanctions against Russia, if needed. United States Treasury Secretary Jack Lew offered support to Ukraine by saying that the United States and its allies from other G7 countries would be prepared to impose more sanctions, should Russia act in an aggressive manner in eastern Ukraine.

But financial repercussions were not the only possible consequences on the table. By mid-June 2015, the United States Pentagon indicated it would move heavy weaponry, such as battle tanks and other infantry fighting vehicles, and even United States troops, to Eastern European and Baltic countries. The move, should it come to pass, would be the first time the United States has placed heavy military equipment on the territories of young NATO states in the region since the end of the Cold War. As such, it was sure to anger Russia, which has been trying to increase its hegemonic presence in the region while driving the countries in the region from the NATO orbit. Instead, Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine was having the opposite effect.

For its part, Russia warned that it would react by ramping up its own forces in the region. In an interview with the Interfax news agency, Russian General Yuri Yakubov said, "If heavy U.S. military equipment, including tanks, artillery batteries and other equipment really does turn up in countries in eastern Europe and the Baltics, that will be the most aggressive step by the Pentagon and NATO since the Cold War. Russia will have no option but to build up its forces and resources on the Western strategic front."

Key Developments in the second part of 2015 --

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In mid-2015, Ukraine's parliament was moving forward with constitutional reforms aimed at establishing temporary self-rule in the eastern part of the country under pro-Russian rebel rule. The changes to the constitution were aimed at meeting Ukraine's obligations under the prevailing Minsk peace accord. The main provisions contained in the constitutional changes centered on plans for decentralization of power, granting the pro-Russian rebels autonomy in key areas, such as financial and local administration. Ukraine would retain control in areas of defense, foreign policy, national security, rule of law, and civil liberties.

While the legislative progress in Ukraine signaled to some that the government in Kiev was adhering to its Minsk peace accord commitments, Russia objected to the changes, arguing that they did not go far enough to fulfill the obligations of the Minsk. Russian President Vladimir Putin also argued that the constitutional changes were conceived without consulting the Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine. But there were objections at home in Ukraine where nationalists railed against the move to grant autonomy to pro-Russian rebels, arguing angrily that it constituted political surrender to Russia.

In late August 2015, as legislation on the constitutional reforms granting eastern Ukraine greater self-rule were being debated, violent clashes erupted outside the parliamentary building in Kiev. Nationalist protesters hurled grenades, firecrackers, and smoke bombs at the parliament as the so-called "decentralization" legislation was being advanced for a first reading in the legislative chamber. The ensuing melee resulted in the deaths of at least two Ukrainian national guardsmen charged with protecting the building, as well as injuries to another 100 people -- most of whom were security personnel.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk as well as Interior Minister Arsen Avakov placed the blame for the violence on the hardline nationalist party, Svoboda (Freedom), which they said was fomenting unrest.

For his part, Ukrainian President Poroshenko concentrated on the political aspect, warning that if the decentralization legislation was not passed by parliament, in keeping with the commitments required by the Minsk Agreement, Ukraine would be at risk of losing its Western support. To this end, President Poroshenko said, "There would have been a real possibility of us being left alone with the aggressor." Heeding this warning, the Ukrainian parliament passed the bill although some hardline nationalist member of parliament railed against the move, screaming "Shame" as the vote was going forward. But this was just a first reading vote with further parliamentary measures to go before the bill actually became the law of the land. It was to be seen if it would survive the heated political environs in Ukraine.

In September 2015, the schedule for local elections in the pro-Russian eastern part of Ukraine was the cause of consternation. Under the terms of the prevailing Minsk peace agreement, local

elections in the pro-Russian separatist regions of eastern Ukraine were to be held at the same time as elections across Ukraine. But due to continuing unrest in eastern Ukraine, the government in Kiev said that the vote would have to be postponed. Angered by the prospect of delayed elections, the pro-Russian separatists decided to schedule local polls for October and November 2015 anyway.

The government of Ukraine responded to this act of defiance by the separatists by declaring that it would not view those polls as legitimate and thus not recognize the results. As noted by Ukrainian President Poroshenko: "These aren't elections, they're not free, they will not meet the standards of the OSCE. This directly and severely contradicts the Minsk agreements." The imbroglio was thus threatening to erode and even upend the Minsk peace agreement.

Given these deteriorating conditions, Russia entered to fray in October 2015 and urged the pro-Russian separatists to postpone the local elections. With the polls now set for February 2016 instead, both sides were given some breathing room and necessary time to craft a scheduling solution that would be mutually acceptable. The West applauded Moscow for playing a constructive role and effectively saving the Minsk peace agreement from collapse. More skeptical observers suggested that Moscow's shift to being a more cooperative player in the Ukrainian crisis was likely driven by its impending financial woes that might require external assistance as well as its new pre-occupation with the Syrian quagmire.

Meanwhile, tensions between Ukraine and the pro-Russian elements continued to be an issue in the region, with Ukraine clearly alarmed about the potential collapse of the peace deal. Of note was Ukraine's request that NATO provide military weaponry to help that country defend itself from Russian-backed rebels. As noted by Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk, "Defense capabilities are essential to us in the face of a nuclear country, which has spent tens of billions of dollars on modernizing its army." Not keen to be drawn into the conflict and threatening the already-fragile Minsk peace accord, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg signed an agreement to help modernize the Ukrainian armed forces, but stopped short of agreeing to directly provide Ukraine with military weapons. In an interview with Reuters News, Stoltenberg said, "NATO does not provide or supply weapons." He added, "The main focus now is the implementation of the Minsk agreement."

In another sign that the Minsk ceasefire -- fragile as it was -- remained in tact was the fact that both pro-Russian rebels and Ukrainian forces withdrew their light weapons. Given this development, it was perhaps not entirely surprising that NATO was not interested in sparking a fire that was now simmering instead of blazing. Overall, the developments in eastern Ukraine in October 2015 were being cautiously regarded as hopeful signs for a more enduring peace.

Update on Malaysian Air shoot-down disaster:

In mid-2015, a year after Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over an eastern Ukrainian war zone, killing close to 300 people, there was a call for justice as evidence began to mount against Russian-backed rebels. Of particular note was a proposal for a United Nations tribunal to prosecute suspects of Malaysian Air shoot-down disaster over eastern Ukraine, as well as a legal case seeking compensation for the families of victims. As July 2015 came to a close, Russia vetoed that proposal when it came before the United Nations Security Council, raising questions that its action was politically motivated. Those suspicions were raised more acutely when, in August 2015, Dutch investigators said fragments of a Russian missile system were found at the crash site, essentially implicating Russia more directly in the shoot-down disaster, which had been generally attributed to pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Now, with physical evidence of a Russian missile system being found at the scene of the crash, the Russian veto of the proposal for a United Nations tribunal to prosecute suspects stood out as an example of Russia acting in its own self-interest.

Going back to mid-2014, the landscape in eastern Ukraine was beset by crisis as Russian-backed separatists were at war with the Ukrainian forces in what was becoming a bloody and violent conflict. The already-dire geopolitical landscape took a disturbing turn on July 17, 2014, when a civilian passenger aircraft traveling from Amsterdam in the Netherlands to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia went down in eastern Ukraine. All 298 people aboard the on board the Boeing 777 airliner -- 283 passengers, including 80 children, and 15 crew members -- perished when Malaysian Airlines flight 17 crashed in the rebel-held territory of Donetsk close to the Russian border.

That event augured a geopolitical landmine when it was revealed that the Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down and blame was soon placed on pro-Russian separatists battling Ukrainian forces. Of particular significance was the mounting evidence pointing to the fact that the aircraft was struck by a Russian-supplied missile, which was likely fired by pro-Russian rebels operating in the area.

Indeed, a preliminary report released in September 2014 made note of the fact that the damage to the Flight 17's fuselage and cockpit indicated that it had been impacted by high-energy objects from outside the aircraft. This finding was consistent with the theory that Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 was hit by a missile of some kind. This theory was further bolstered when the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in the United States reported that there was a "solid case" that a SA-11 missile -- also known as the Buk surface-to-surface missile -- was fired from eastern Ukraine and likely struck the airliner, causing it to crash and killing all those on board. Other evidence involved voice recordings of pro-Russian rebel commanders admitting they had shot down the airliner.

The tragedy soon transposed into something of a scandal when the Russian-backed rebels prevented emergency responders from gathering the remains of passengers, and in fact treated both the human remains and the belongings of victims with grave disrespect. As such, in the

aftermath of the tragic downing of the Malaysian Airlines flight, and because the majority of the victims with Dutch nationals, Europe's stance against Russia hardened. Accordingly, the West -- including the United States and the European Union -- intensified its sanctions regime against Russia. For its part, Russia has throughout denied any responsible for the tragedy.

A year later in mid-July 2015, the Dutch Safety Board, which was leading a multinational investigation into the tragedy, was in the process of compiling a report on the shoot-down disaster. While the final report was not due to be released until October 2015, preliminary findings indicated the following: 1. There was "no evidence of technical or human error" ; 2. The flight data recorder showed that "all engine parameters were normal for cruise flight" until the recording "stopped abruptly" at the time of the crash; 3. Evidence pointed to the fact that the Russian Buk surface-to-surface missile was fired from a village in eastern Ukraine under pro-Russian control and struck Malaysian Air Flight 17, precipitating the crash. The report also chided Malaysian Airlines for continuing to fly over a dangerous war zone despite other countries' dispatches and warnings, known as "notices to airmen" or NOTAMs.

As these preliminary findings began to circulate in the public sphere, Malaysia -- one of the countries involved in the multinational inquest -- demanded that the United Nations authorize a tribunal to further probe the crash. This call was echoed by Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands -- the country that bore the brunt of the tragic death toll in the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 -- as he argued that an international tribunal would be needed to ensure justice was served. For his part, Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed this call for the establishment of such a prosecutorial United Nations tribunal, casting the move as "premature." But his stance was not finding resonance across the world.

Meanwhile, relatives of the Flight 17 victims were wasting no time seeking legal recourse and financial reparations as they filed a \$900 million lawsuit against a Russian-supported rebel leader believed to be responsible for the shoot-down disaster over the eastern Ukrainian warzone. The legal writ filed in the United States alleged that a Russian national, Igor Strelkov ( also known as Igor Girkin) was functioning as a rebel leader in eastern Ukraine, and was acting with the "actual or apparent" authority of Russian government when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine. Court documents made available to Agence France Presse included the following assertion: "Flight 17 flew over the airspace of the area in which the aforesaid rebel army was waging its war activities and the rebel army under the command responsibility of defendant Girkin shot down the subject Boeing 777-200 aircraft."

Floyd Wisner, the attorney who advanced the lawsuit on behalf of the victims' families said the legal action had "nothing to do with the money." Instead, he made clear that it was intended to pressure both the United Nations and Russia to bring those responsible to justice. Wisner said, "The relatives want answers, and we believe Girkin has answers. This lawsuit could shed light on the families' concerns, particularly over slow-moving diplomatic measures."



Note that as July 2015 came to a close, Russia -- a permanent and thus veto-wielding member of the United Nations Security Council -- vetoed a draft resolution calling for a United Nations tribunal to be established to prosecute suspects of Malaysian Air shoot-down disaster over eastern Ukraine. The proposal was rewarded with 11 of the 15 members of the United Nations Security Council voting in its favor, and with Angola, Venezuela, and China abstaining from the vote. But even that overwhelming tally was not enough to save the draft from surviving Russia's veto.

Given Russia's apparent complicity in the disaster, the general consensus was that the veto was a measure of self-interest by Moscow. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin made this point himself as he said, "There can be no reason to oppose this [ unless you are a perpetrator yourself." For his part, Russia's Amabassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, dismissed the claim that his country's was attempting to stymie the process of accountability. He noted that criminal prosecutions would have been carried out in a "closed fashion" and blamed the media for "aggressive propaganda."

Despite this defense, Russia's veto was decried internationally and vociferously. United States Amabassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, condemned Russia's veto of the draft proposal seeking, as she declared, "Russia has callously disregarded the public outcry in the grieving nations." Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop cast the Russian veto as "an affront to the memory of the 298 victims of MH17 and their families and friends." Foreign Minister Bishop also intimated that the Russian veto was not the end of the matter. Instead, she said that her country would be joined by Malaysia, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Ukraine in seeking an alternative pathway to prosecution mechanism.

By August 2015, suspicions about the Russian veto at the United Nations Security Council and Russia's eagerness to evade accountability were heightened more acutely when Dutch investigators said fragments of the Russian Buk surface-to-air missile system were found at the crash site. Fred Westerbeke, a spokesperson for the Dutch Prosecutor's Office, made clear that the fragments were very clearly not parts of the downed aircraft, and that examinations had shown that they were likely from a missile system. He said, "We are going to need more investigation to really find out what exactly this is and if it is part of a possible system that took down MH17. If we can establish that, then we can say that it is a breakthrough."

In a statement, the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) -- led by the Netherlands, but also including representatives of Ukraine, Belgium, Malaysia and Australia -- announced that seven missile fragments had been "secured during a previous recovery mission in eastern Ukraine." The JIT added that further investigation was thus in the offing, noting, "The parts are of particular interest to the criminal investigation as they can possibly provide more information about who was involved in the crash of MH17. For that reason the JIT further investigates the origin of these parts." It was expected that the JIT would prevail upon the expertise of weapons experts and

forensic specialists to refine its examination. The investigators stopped short of outright accusing Russia of being behind the shoot-down disaster, noting in careful terms that they had not yet proved a "causal connection" between Russia and the crash of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 that killed close to 298 people on board.

The discovery of physical evidence of the Russian missile system essentially implicated Russia more closely in the shoot-down disaster, which had been generally attributed to pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. But in truth, the main question going forward would be whether or not the fatal missile was fired by Russian-backed separatists, or, if the Russian military had played a more direct role in the disaster.

A concluding note --

Ukraine's "Maidan" uprising of 2013 and 2014, resulting in the removal of the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich from office and the dismantling of his authority in 2014, were signs that Ukraine was actively resisting influence from Moscow. They were also clear signals that Ukraine was determined to set its own course -- and quite likely in the direction of Europe. The people of Ukraine were delivering Russia a clear message that they would be the agents of their own self-determination. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin was not in a mood to receive that message.

The invasion and de facto annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea by Russia, under the guise of "protecting" the Russian ethno-linguistic population, showed that Russia felt entitled to stake a claim on Ukraine. For the wider world, this action recalled alarming memories of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, under the aegis of the Brezhnev Policy, to subdue the independence-minded Prague Spring. It also evoked suggestions that Putin was attempting to recraft a Cold War Russian quasi-empire in the mold of the former Soviet Union.

While the "Maidan" or Independence Square in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev would be stamped in the history books as "Ground Zero" of Ukraine's 2014 unrest, the battleground had clearly move eastward with Crimea as a new flashpoint. But with fighting going on elsewhere in eastern Ukraine, and with "new Russia" enclaves been declared in Donetsk and Luhansk later in 2014, it was evident that Russia would not end its Ukrainian adventure at the borders of Crimea.

In much the same way as the Turks annexed northern Cyprus from that country in 1976, claiming it was protecting the rights of the Turkish ethnic population in Cyprus, which was home to an ethnically Greek population, Russia has done the same in eastern Ukraine. To date, Cyprus has remained divided by the so-called "Green Line," with an internationally recognized Cyprus encompassing most of the island, and a Turkish enclave to the north, which does not enjoy international recognition. A similar Ukraine/Crimea division could materialize as the likely outcome of this unfolding crisis. But with an alternative scenario unfolding that takes Russian ambitions

beyond Crimea, possibly in pursuit of the gas pipelines that traverse wider Ukrainian territory, a tidy solution was unlikely.

At stake were Russian ambitions to regain territory lost following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The reality was that Russia was attempting to destabilize Ukraine by supporting pro-Russian cabals in eastern Ukraine, and with an eye on establishing southern and eastern Ukraine as part of Vladimir Putin's "new Russia."

It was to be seen if the landscape in eastern Europe represented the foundation for a renewed Cold War between the East and West. Given the geopolitical and geostrategic stakes, the outcome was clearly being textured by bloodshed and tears. Russian President Putin was banking on the West's rationality and its reluctance to be drawn into another conflict -- especially one on European soil. From the point of view of United States President Barack Obama, the very notion of a Cold War being in the offing was to be dismissed. According to President Obama, Russia was no longer a superpower and was now operating from a position of weakness as it intimidated neighbors such as Ukraine. But the tragic downing of a commercial airliner in eastern Ukraine in July 2014 raised the geopolitical stakes, and has since spurred the West to apply economic sanctions to Russia.

Economic pressures may have played a hand in forcing Russia to the negotiating table and the forging of two separate ceasefire agreements in the Belarusian capital of Minsk. But, to date, neither Minsk ceasefire agreement has managed to stem the flow of blood, and the encroachment of pro-Russian forces into eastern Ukrainian territory.

In the long run, the outcome to this story was yet to be written.

### **Special Entry: Russia launches military exercises in disputed territories of Georgia**

In the backdrop of Russia's encroachment into eastern Ukraine, and its annexation of Crimea in 2014, surrounding countries have watched warily, wondering if its territories would be similarly affected. In March 2015, Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed that large-scale military exercises involving 2,000 Russian troops had commenced in the southern part of the country, along contested borders and even in disputed regions.

The areas affected included the federal districts of Southern and North Caucasus, as well as the recently annexed Ukrainian region of Crimea. Military drills were also taking place on Russian military bases in Armenia, and in the Georgian separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The moves were being regarded as a symbolic illustration of Russian hegemony and influence in the region, irrespective of global outrage over Russia's backing of separatists in eastern Ukraine and the ensuing war that has rocked the region since 2014.

In fact, while global attention has focused on Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian region of Crimea, Russia has been quietly working towards subsuming the semi-autonomous Georgian territory of South Ossetia into its fold. In fact, a treaty, known as the "Treaty of Alliance and Integration" was drafted in December 2014 with the intent of integrating the Russian speaking enclave, irrespective of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity or its legal claim on South Ossetia. At the end of January 2015, the leader of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, dispatched finalized documents to Moscow. In February 2015, Russia and South Ossetia signed the "Treaty on the State Border," which was being viewed as a first step towards the signing of the broader "Treaty of Alliance and Integration." Once that integration accord was signed, South Ossetia would be absorbed by Russia over a period of months.

A similar process has been underway as regards the other Georgian semi-autonomous breakaway region, Abkhazia, which was also home to a Russian-speaking population. The alliance and integration measures related to Abkhazia, however, were not regarded as comprehensive as the integration accord at stake for South Ossetia.

Note that on March 18, 2015, Russian President Putin signed the aforementioned Treaty of Alliance and Integration," which (illegally) integrated the breakaway territory with Russia. The government of Georgia in Tbilisi cast the development as a provocation with the aim of stealing Georgian territory. As noted by Georgian Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili, "It's a cynical and provocative step by Russia ... We consider it a move aimed at annexation." Meanwhile, leading Western countries said it was a dangerous threat to regional stability.

As with the annexation of Crimea, the integration of Georgian territories had no chance of gaining international recognition, and instead, Russia's territorial encroachment has been widely condemned. Indeed, the United States and the European Union condemned the new treaty with South Ossetia. Jen Psaki, the spokesperson for the United States Department of State said, "The United States' position on South Ossetia and Abkhazia remains clear: these regions are integral parts of Georgia, and we continue to support Georgia's independence, its sovereignty, and its territorial integrity." Federica Mogherini, the European Union's foreign policy head, said the treaty was "yet another step" intended to undermine "ongoing efforts to strengthen security and stability in the region."

Of course, as noted above, the loudest outrage as regards South Ossetia and Abkhazia has come from Georgia, which already fought a war with Russia in 2008 over these very issues of control. Nevertheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin was not expected to curtail his expansionist ambitions. In fact, the Russian leader was flexing his aggressive and hawkish muscles in the region as he ordered the Russian Northern Fleet to be on a state of full combat readiness in the Arctic. As well, Russia commenced major military exercises across northern Russia involving more than 45,000 troops, in what was a clear show of military strength intended to intimidate its neighbors.

**Special Entry: Death of opposition leader and Putin critic Nemtsov**

On Feb. 27, 2015, Boris Nemtsov, a Russian opposition leader and well-known critic of President Vladimir Putin, was shot to death in central Moscow in close proximity to the highly-fortified Russian Kremlin. Nemtsov served as the governor of Nizhny Novgorod Oblast and as a vice premier in the waning years of the presidency of Boris Yeltsin in the late 1990s. As Putin gained prominence in the post-Yeltsin period, Nemtsov evolved into a sharp anti-government critic.

For his part, Russian President Vladimir Putin condemned the killing of his political nemesis, and in a telegram to Nemtsov's mother, promised that the killer(s) would be brought to justice. However, Western powers were not about to easily accept Putin's gestures and instead called for an open investigation into the killing of Nemtsov.

Adding an ominous dimension to the mystery surrounding his death was Nemtsov's own anxieties about being the subject of a political assassination. In a recent interview, Nemtsov mused about his fears that Russian President Putin might have him eliminated over his objections to the Russian military's activities in eastern Ukraine. In fact, Nemtsov was murdered just hours after he gave an interview in which he urged Russians in Moscow to participate in an opposition rally to protest Putin's "mad, aggressive, and deadly policy of war against Ukraine."

Of note has been the fact that Russian authorities have suggested that Nemtsov's murder was aimed at destabilizing the country, with some pro-Putin Russian politicians saying that the killing of Nemtsov was a "provocation" against the state. Left outside the "official" discussion in Russia, however, has been the glaring reality that Nemtsov himself speculated about being killed for his views in opposition to the Russian government.

On March 1, 2015, tens of thousands of Russians took to the streets in Moscow to rally in protest of Nemtsov's death.

On March 8, 2015, two individuals were charged in connection with the murder of Nemtsov. Russian authorities said that Zaur Dadayev admitted his involvement in the shooting death of Nemtsov close to the Kremlin in Moscow a week earlier. Dadayev and the other alleged assailant, Anzor Gubashev, -- both of whom were of Chechen origin -- were said to have been the organizers of a plot to kill Nemtsov. Three other suspects were in police custody while a sixth individual reportedly committed suicide during an altercation with authorities in the Chechen capital Grozny.

Russian authorities were advancing the theory that the suspects were opposed to Nemtsov's defense of satirical cartoons, of the type published by the French entity Charlie Hebdo, which portrayed the Islamic prophet Mohammed in an unflattering light. Stated differently, Russian

authorities were suggesting that the assailants were motivated by their adherence to political Islam.

Some of Nemtsov's supporters, including the well-known opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, have rejected this narrative. They have suggested that the men in custody were actually hired to assassinate the opposition leader, with the Islamist extremist explanation refocusing attention away from Putin and the Kremlin.

### **Special Note on Russian Economy**

In April 2015, it was apparent that Western sanctions against Russia were having an effect as the Russian economy contracted by two percent in the first three months of the year. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev made it clear that Western sanctions, along with the low price of oil, were the causes of the first contraction in the Russian economy since 2009. He also intimated that more economic pain might be in the future, but insisted that Russians could cope with the hardship. He also reminded Russians that the sacrifice was necessary, given the imperative of regaining control over Crimea. Indeed, the Ukrainian territory of Crimea resided at the heart of the matter with the Russian support for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea being the very reason the West imposed sanctions on Russia in the first place.

Economic pressure on Russia had been building for several months. Indeed, in December 2014, Russia was faced with economic calamity due to the decreasing price of oil. As a result, the Bank of Russia raised its key interest rate to 17 percent from 10.5 percent. The interest rate hike was being interpreted as a desperate move by Russia to bolster its currency, the Ruble, and to ultimately help revitalize its ailing economy.

Western sanctions, led by the United States and the European Union, against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine and its seizure of Crimea, have taken a destructive toll on the Russian economy. Of note was a new round of Western sanctions in September 2014, which included restrictions on key Russian companies from financial markets, as well as limits on the imports of some technologies.

One tangible consequence was the collapsing Russian currency. Indeed, the value of the Ruble sank about 50 percent since the start of the year. That falling currency value promised to escalate inflation in Russia, trigger consumer panic and a possible run on the banks, thus causing further damage to the economy.

The assertive move by the Bank of Russia was intended to guard against these deleterious consequences. Most specifically, there were hopes that a rise in interest rates would coax investors



to keep their funds in Russian banks. But even with these moves, it was difficult to tell if they would be enough to rescue Russia. A higher interest rate would stymie growth, and almost guarantee that Russia would be heading into a recession -- as reflected in the Russian government's own decision to downgrade its forecast for the next year.

Meanwhile, the fact of the matter was that the Russian energy economy was reliant on the average price of a barrel of oil, which has dropped below \$56 from a high mid-year of \$107. With oil and gas occupying as much as two thirds of Russian exports, and with Russian public expenditure being largely supported by energy-related revenues, Moscow could expect a significant -- and unsustainable -- deficit on its trade and financial engagement with the global market place. With this path ahead for Russia, it was not surprising that investors were not enthused about keeping their funds in Russian banks, and the result was a precipitous slide in the value of the Ruble.

President Vladimir Putin's rivals took the opportunity to place blame on the Russian president for the economic woes facing the country. Former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov -- a one-time Putin stalwart who was now an opposition chief -- made the following charge in an interview with Reuters News: "Russia is going into decline. 2015 is a year in which Putin must make a principle decision." That decision, according to Kasyanov, would be in the political realm as he called for Putin to either resign or hold early elections. He said that Putin he should have "just a quiet departure through presidential elections." He continued, "I don't believe he will win presidential elections if they are free and fair."

In truth, however, Putin's popularity was actually bolstered by his decision to violate Ukraine's sovereignty and annex Crimea. Thus, despite Kasyanov's claims, early elections might serve simply to ratify Putin's mandate. Of course, the next scheduled elections were not due until 2018, and continued external pressure in the form of sanctions and low oil prices could significantly change the political climate in the future.

For his part, Russian President Putin has sidestepped any serious discussion of the economic ills facing Russia, instead blaming the West during an annual address at the end of 2014. He said, "Sometimes I think, maybe they'll (the West) let the bear eat berries and honey in the forest, maybe they will leave it in peace. They will not. Because they will always try to put him on a chain, and as soon as they succeed in doing so they tear out his fangs and his claws." Putin's rhetoric -- bereft of an actual economic plan of action -- indicated that he intended to rely in nationalist sentiment to ride out the negative economic climate. It was to be seen if this approach would actually be effective.

Meanwhile, United States President Barack Obama entered the equation, saying in an interview with National Public Radio in December 2014 that Putin made a "strategic mistake" when he annexed Crimea. Pushing back at his conservative critics in the United States who have intimated

that the Russian president had outplayed the West by flexing his military muscle in eastern Ukraine, Obama said that the burgeoning economic calamity in Russia had proved those critics wrong. The United States leader said, "You'll recall that three or four months ago, everybody in Washington was convinced that President Putin was a genius and he had outmaneuvered all of us and he had bullied and strategized his way into expanding Russian power." Obama continued, "Today, I'd sense that at least outside of Russia, maybe some people are thinking what Putin did wasn't so smart." President Obama noted that sanctions had left the Russian economy vulnerable to the volatility of the energy market. Comparing the Russian scenario to the relative stability of the United States economy, Obama said, "The big advantage we have with Russia is we've got a dynamic, vital economy, and they don't. They rely on oil. We rely on oil and iPads and movies and you name it."

By April 2015, it was reported that Western sanctions against Russia were having an effect as the Russian economy contracted by two percent in the first three months of the year. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev made the announcement during an address to members of the Russian parliament, and made clear that Western sanctions, along with the lower price of oil, constituted the reasons for the the first contraction in the Russian economy since 2009.

Those Western sanctions were imposed because of Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea. Prime Minister Medvedev addressed this reality head on, saying, the the weightiest pressure on the Russian economy had come from "the main political decision last year -- the return of Crimea to Russia." He intimated that this was a necessary process, noting that the return of Crimea to Russia was vital, and comparing it to the "reunification of Germany or the return to China of Hong Kong and Macao."

Of course, the cost of that "vital" reunification was likely to increased, with the Russian Central Bank warning that the economy could shrink even further through the year to four percent, if the price of oil stayed around \$50 a barrel. Still, the Russian head of government also insisted that Russia would weather the economic storm. Prime Minister Medvedev said, "If external pressure intensifies, and oil prices remain at an extremely low level for a long time, we will have to develop in a new economic reality. I am convinced that we will be able to live even in such a reality. The experience of the recent period has shown that we have learnt how to do this."

Note: The prospects of a Russian economic calamity will likely be somewhat mitigated by the reality that it still retains significant currency reserves that the International Monetary Fund has said would account for about one year's worth of imports.

### **Special Entry: Russia questions 1991 recognition of Baltic states' independence**

In mid-2015, Russia was questioning the recognition of the independence of the Baltic nation

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states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The office of Russia's chief prosecutor announced plans to examine the legitimacy of the former Soviet Union's recognition of the three Baltic countries in 1991, and to specifically consider whether the action was legal. The action was spurred by letters by two members of parliament, who alleged that the decision to recognize the independence of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia has been taken "by an unconstitutional body."

Not surprisingly, the governments of the Baltic countries reacted with outrage. Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė reacted by declaring: "Our independence was gained through the blood and sacrifice of the Lithuanian people. No one has the right to threaten it." Her country's Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius characterized the investigation as "a provocation to say the least" and also an "absurd provocation." In an interview with Reuters News, Estonian Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus offered a similar assessment. Pentus-Rosimannus said, "The entire issue is legally absurd. It serves as yet another example of the resurgent imperialistic mood that unfortunately exists in Russia."

That sense of concern over Russia's imperial aspirations was real, given that country's recent actions in eastern Ukraine, and in particular, the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Faced with international condemnation for its annexation of the Ukrainian territory, Russia's chief prosecutor justified the move by declaring that Crimea was illegally transferred from Russia to Ukraine in 1954. Now, there were fears that Russia was using the same type of justification in regard to the Baltic countries, which were under Soviet control from 1940 until the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Indeed, this suggestion by Russia that Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia may have been granted independent recognition illegally was raising the alarm that Russia was now looking to return the Baltic nation states to its fold, as part of Russian Vladimir Putin's recent penchant to reconstitute the Soviet Union.

While Russia has sought to quiet these concerns, with the Kremlin casting the investigation as simply a formality with no legal consequences, there remained prevailing anxieties about these moves, even if they proved to be perfunctory. The fact of the matter was that if Russia did, in fact, seek to re-absorb the three Baltic countries, there would be consequences in terms of global security. With Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia being NATO member states, an attack on their sovereignty would spur a defensive response by NATO.

### **Special Entry: Russia encroaches into semi-autonomous Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia**

-- Some portions of this entry replicated from entry above due to relevance --

In the backdrop of Russia's encroachment into eastern Ukraine, and its annexation of Crimea in 2014, surrounding countries have watched warily, wondering if its territories would be similarly

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affected. In March 2015, Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed that large-scale military exercises involving 2,000 Russian troops had commenced in the southern part of the country, along contested borders and even in disputed regions.

The areas affected included the federal districts of Southern and North Caucasus, as well as the recently annexed Ukrainian region of Crimea. Military drills were also taking place on Russian military bases in Armenia, and in the Georgian separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The moves were being regarded as a symbolic illustration of Russian hegemony and influence in the region, irrespective of global outrage over Russia's backing of separatists in eastern Ukraine and the ensuing war that has rocked the region since 2014.

In fact, while global attention has focused on Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian region of Crimea, Russia has been quietly working towards subsuming the semi-autonomous Georgian territory of South Ossetia into its fold. In fact, a treaty, known as the "Treaty of Alliance and Integration" was drafted in December 2014 with the intent of integrating the Russian speaking enclave, irrespective of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity or its legal claim on South Ossetia. At the end of January 2015, the leader of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, dispatched finalized documents to Moscow. In February 2015, Russia and South Ossetia signed the "Treaty on the State Border," which was being viewed as a first step towards the signing of the broader "Treaty of Alliance and Integration." Once that integration accord was signed, South Ossetia would be absorbed by Russia over a period of months.

A similar process has been underway as regards the other Georgian semi-autonomous breakaway region, Abkhazia, which was also home to a Russian-speaking population. The alliance and integration measures related to Abkhazia, however, were not regarded as comprehensive as the integration accord at stake for South Ossetia.

On March 18, 2015, Russian President Putin signed the aforementioned Treaty of Alliance and Integration," which (illegally) integrated the breakaway territory with Russia. The government of Georgia in Tbilisi cast the development as a provocation with the aim of stealing Georgian territory. As noted by Georgian Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili, "It's a cynical and provocative step by Russia ... We consider it a move aimed at annexation." Meanwhile, leading Western countries said it was a dangerous threat to regional stability.

As with the annexation of Crimea, the integration of Georgian territories had no chance of gaining international recognition, and instead, Russia's territorial encroachment has been widely condemned. Indeed, the United States and the European Union condemned the new treaty with South Ossetia. Jen Psaki, the spokesperson for the United States Department of State said, "The United States' position on South Ossetia and Abkhazia remains clear: these regions are integral parts of Georgia, and we continue to support Georgia's independence, its sovereignty, and its

territorial integrity." Federica Mogherini, the European Union's foreign policy head, said the treaty was "yet another step" intended to undermine "ongoing efforts to strengthen security and stability in the region."

Of course, as noted above, the loudest outrage as regards South Ossetia and Abkhazia has come from Georgia, which already fought a war with Russia in 2008 over these very issues of control. Nevertheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin was not expected to curtail his expansionist ambitions. In fact, the Russian leader was flexing his aggressive and hawkish muscles in the region as he ordered the Russian Northern Fleet to be on a state of full combat readiness in the Arctic. As well, Russia commenced major military exercises across northern Russia involving more than 45,000 troops, in what was a clear show of military strength intended to intimidate its neighbors.

By mid-July 2015, the European Union was warning that while world attention remained on Russia's land grab in Ukraine, Russia was doing the same in the Georgian semi-autonomous regions. Of note was the fact that Russia had installed its own border signs inside South Ossetia, as it continued its quiet absorption of the Georgian territory. As the European Union had warned, Russia was intent on redrawing the regional map, effectively expanding its territory in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, to the detriment of Georgian sovereignty. A statement by the European Union foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, aimed to remind Russia that it was acting in violation of international law and read as follows: "The EU reaffirms its full support for Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders."

Meanwhile, the political landscape in Georgia was tense due to Russia's moves in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On July 18, 2015, thousands of demonstrators were on the streets of the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to register their outrage over what Russia's so-called "occupation" of the two semi-autonomous regions. In an interview with Agence France Presse, Tamara Chergoleishvili, a leading protest organizer, explained the mass action as follows: "The Kremlin continues to use both hard and soft power in its efforts to subjugate Georgia. We gathered here to show that Russia's aggressive policy doesn't belong to the 21st century."

### **Special Note on Russian engagement in Syrian Crisis**

Since early 2011, anti-government protests have spread and escalated across the Arab world; Syria emerged as an addition to the list of countries experiencing unrest in March 2011. At first, protesters stopped short of demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, instead demanding greater political freedom and efforts to end corruption. For his part, President Assad announced he would advance a reform agenda, which would include lifting the emergency laws that had been in place for decades, and increased rights to the country's disenfranchised Kurdish population. These moves were aimed at quelling the rising climate of unrest gripping the country. But over time, as protests continued, and as the Assad regime carried out a hardline crackdown on

dissent, tensions escalated between the government and the protesters.

In mid-2011, the United Nations Security Council and the Arab League respectively issued condemnations of the violence in Syria. As well, the United Nations Human Rights Council called for an independent inquiry into the violent crackdown on dissent. Meanwhile, global leaders were calling for President Assad to step down from power, given the brutality of the Syrian regime's crackdown on protesters. In 2012, the bloody crackdown by the Assad regime on anti-government protesters was ongoing. In fact, the crackdown appeared to become more relentless in places such as Homs and Aleppo. Despite widespread condemnation from the West, a United Nations Security Resolution on the situation in Syria was subject to veto by Russia and China. A subsequent vote in the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly condemned Syria for its brutal crackdown. A prevailing truce, brokered by the joint United Nations/Arab League envoy, Kofi Annan, was established in the interests of preventing further bloodshed; however, it was revealed to be an exercise in theory rather than practice and eventually the United Nations monitoring mission ended in failure.

Syria has meanwhile been subject to sanctions by various countries and was sliding into pariah status in the international community. Assassinations, alleged massacres, geopolitical tensions with Turkey and Israel, and suspicions about the use of chemical weapons, have since mired the Syrian landscape. Indeed, with it was increasingly clear that with President Bashar al-Assad using brutal tactics to quell the uprising served only to create an even more tumultuous landscape, and eventually set the path for a full-blown civil war. That civil war pitted the Assad forces, backed by Lebanon-based Hezbollah, against a disparate cabal of anti-government entities, ranging from the rebel Free Syrian Army to several Islamist terrorist enclaves.

At the same time, Syria was facing a devastating humanitarian crisis. That crisis reached new heights in August 2013 with claims that Syrian forces launched a chemical attack on the outskirts of Damascus. Although this was the clear sign that United States President Barack Obama's "red line" had definitively been crossed, the international community remained reticent about becoming more involved in the Syrian crisis. Ultimately, an ensuing chemical weapons deal with Syria between the United States and Russia quieted the war drums. In the meantime, though, a highly anticipated peace summit in Geneva ended without yielding any productive results and the civil war in Syria raged on and on.

By mid-2014, while Syria had shown progress in its disposal of chemical toxins, in keeping with an international agreement intended to avoid intervention by the West, the country was dealing with an ascendant "Islamic State." Previously known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS as well as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or ISIL, this group self-declared a caliphate extending from Syria to Iraq. It was apparent that the power vacuum from the Syrian civil war provided a breeding ground for extremism that Islamic State could exploit and use to both challenge the Assad regime and function as a recruitment tool for Jihadists. Whereas the West and regional powers in



the Middle East had earlier called for an end to the Assad regime, suddenly the geopolitical stakes were quite different as extremist terrorists were now posing the most dangerous threat to regional stability. The barbaric beheadings of two American journalists by Islamic State in their stronghold in Syria changed the calculus and the Obama administration in the United States -- initially reticent about re-engaging in the Middle East -- was now looking at a targeted anti-terrorism strategy in the Syrian-Iraqi landscape of Islamic State. As such, a Western coalition, led by the United States, was soon carrying out air strikes on Islamic State targets in Syria and Iraq. Of note was the fact that the United States-led coalition expanded to include Japan and Jordan when citizens of their countries that were being held by Islamic State were also brutally killed.

As of 2015, Syria was beset by two sets of intersecting challenges -- the ongoing civil war between the Assad regime and rebel forces on one end, and the horrific dangers posed by the notorious terror group, Islamic State, which had seized wide swaths of territory in Syria and left an appalling death toll. It was generally understood that the civil war conditions in Syria, to some extent, facilitated the emergence of Islamic State in that country. Syrian President Assad's priority to hold onto power, and thus the center of power in Damascus, had allowed a power chasm to flourish in other parts of the country, which Islamic State has been able to exploit. The result has been a mass exodus of Syrians fleeing the country and seeking refuge in Europe. The so-called migrant influx in Europe has raised questions as to how to legally and humanely deal with a burgeoning humanitarian refugee crisis.

At the political level, Russia signaled it would be entering the Syrian crisis militarily in September 2015 although it was unclear if Moscow's goal was to bolster and preserve Bashar al-Assad's hold on power, or, to go after Islamic State. The geopolitical landscape was complicated in October 2015 with the news that the United States would be deploying special operations teams to Syria. The scene in November 2015 was grave as Russia and France intensified their efforts to go after Islamic State targets in Syria following devastating terror attacks by the Islamist terror network that killed hundreds of Russian and French citizens. Russia, France, and the United States were now respectively changing their respective calculations, cognizant that the Islamist terror group was no longer simply seeking to build its Caliphate but, instead, transposing its goals to more of an Islamic Jihadist orientation. The result was a global security crisis.

See "Foreign Relations" for more details.

### **Special Entry**

Russia acknowledges that bomb brought down jet carrying vacationers from Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh; promises retribution against Islamic State

Summary

The crash of a Russian airliner in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula resulted in the deaths of all 224 persons on board. The Russian Metrojet Flight KG9268 departed the Red Sea resort city of Sharm-el-Shekh and was bound for the Russian city of St. Petersburg but crashed before the tourists and flight crew could arrive at their destination. The notorious terror group, Islamic State, claimed responsibility for the downing of the flight but Egyptian officials dismissed the claim on the basis of their belief that the terror group did not have the capability to bring down a jet. The Russian government was, likewise, reticent to accept terrorism as explanation. Nevertheless, both the United States and the United Kingdom made clear that intelligence pointed to a bomb being planted on the aircraft and exploding shortly after taking off from Sharm-el-Sheikh. With an affiliate of Islamic State active in the Egyptian Sinai in recent years, and with intelligence pointing in the direction of terrorism, that group's claim of responsibility was being viewed by the countries of the West as credible. Russia joined that group's conclusions two weeks after the crash, pointing to explosive material found on crash debris, while Russian President Vladimir Putin promised that those responsible would face justice. The international dimension of the tragedy catapulted the global security threat posed by Islamic State to new heights.

### In Detail

On Oct. 31, 2015, a Russian airliner carrying 224 people crashed in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula about 20 minutes after taking off from the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh, killing all the persons on board. While most of those aboard were Russian citizens, there were also four Ukrainians and one Belarussian national among the victims. The Russian Metrojet Flight KG9268 departed the Red Sea city and was bound for the Russian city of St. Petersburg but crashed before the tourists and flight crew could arrive at their destination. It was the deadliest crash of the French-made Airbus A321 airliner in recent times.

According to the Egyptian authorities, the aircraft disappeared from radar approximately 20 minutes after its departure from Sharm el-Sheikh while flying over the central Sinai Peninsula at an altitude of 31,000 feet. The Egyptian military aircraft later located the wreckage of the aircraft in an area of the Sinai called Hasna, just south of the Mediterranean coastal town of el-Arish. Russian officials confirmed that the aircraft split into two in mid-air but refrained from immediately drawing conclusions about the cause of the disaster. With both of the aircraft's flight recorders, known as "black boxes," recovered, along with no shortage of forensic evidence, there would be a good foundation for investigators to determine what happened to Metrojet Flight KG9268.

To that end, Egypt would be leading the investigation, which would involve the participation of an international group of aviation experts. The Russians were expected to assist with the inquiry given the fact that its citizens made up the vast majority of the appalling death toll. Because the aircraft was a French-made Airbus A321, France would also be involved in the investigation into what went wrong. As well, an Irish delegation would be part of the investigation since the actual

aircraft was registered in Ireland.

Although Egyptian officials initially indicated that there was nothing irregular about the doomed flight and suggested either human error or a mechanical malfunction, Islamist terrorists in the Sinai aligned with the notorious terror group, Islamic State, claimed responsibility for downing the flight via a Telegram messaging application. Egyptian Prime Minister Sharif Ismail immediately dismissed the claim, asserting that the terror group did not have the capability to bring down an aircraft from the type of high altitude Metrojet Flight KG9268 reached at the time it disappeared from radar.

But in the days after the crash, authorities in the United States and United Kingdom respectively indicated that intelligence pointed to the likelihood that Metrojet Flight KG9268 was brought down by a bomb. Clearly, this assertion by two Western countries would vitiate the notion that an Islamic State affiliate in the Sinai used some sort of missile to target the aircraft. Instead, attention was settling on a more conventional methodology for the conduct of terrorism -- the use of a bomb, which was likely planted on the aircraft by an airport insider, and which was very likely programmed to explode when that aircraft reached a certain altitude.

United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond did not prevaricate in any way as he made the following declaration: "We have concluded that there is a significant possibility that the crash was caused by an explosive device on board the aircraft." Moreover, the government of the United Kingdom moved to suspend all flights to and from Sharm-el-Sheikh, while putting plans into place for providing transportation to bring British nationals home from Egypt, but only after new and stringent security protocols had been put into place. The office of United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron explained the government's decision with the following statement: "The evidence we received suggested there was a credible threat with regard to Sharm al-Sheikh airport which is why we have taken the actions we have." The prime minister's office stopped short of providing information about what types of security actions would be taken.

Across the Atlantic, unnamed officials in the United States revealed to various news agencies that a bomb "was a highly possible scenario" and that terrorism was the likely cause of the crash. Subsequently, United States President Barack Obama himself noted that there was a possibility that the Russian airliner was brought down by a bomb that was planted on board. To that end, President Obama said, "We're taking that very seriously." President Obama's head of homeland security, Jey Johnson, later noted that new and more stringent security measures would be implemented at certain airports across the world for aircraft flying into the United States.

Of note was the fact that no United States-registered airlines fly in and out of the Sharm al-Sheikh airport due to enduring concerns about poor security. As such, the United States Transportation Security Administration has not been at that airport in recent times to actually evaluate security there.

Perhaps eager to protect its vital tourism industry, Egypt again dismissed the idea that Islamic State terrorists within its own borders might be responsible for the tragedy. Indeed, the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi went so far as to disparage Islamic State's claim of responsibility as mere "propaganda." But on Nov. 4, 2015, another claim of responsibility had been advanced by Islamic State in the Sinai -- this time via an audio message posted on Twitter. In that message, the speaker said: "We, with God's grace, are the ones who brought it down, and we are not obliged to disclose the mechanism of its demise."

Meanwhile, Russia was likewise distancing itself from the Islamic State and terrorism angle. With Russia now actively participating in the civil war in Syria against both anti-Assad rebels and Islamic State, it was not keen to admit that it might be suffering so quickly from what is generally known as "blowback" from its Syrian engagement. Still, the truth of the matter was that if the cause of the crash was ultimately determined to be terrorism at the hands of Islamic State, Russia would have to confront the reality that its heavy military footprint in Syria quite possibly was yielding deleterious consequences. Of note was the fact that airplanes from various European countries depart to and from Sharm-el-Sheikh daily, yet of all the aircraft available, it was a Russian jetliner which may have been selected by Islamic State terrorists as a target.

Regardless of its hesitation in accepting the terrorism explanation for the crash of Metrojet Flight KG9268, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered all flights to and from Egypt to be halted. Putin made that decision after a meeting with Alexander Bortnikov, the head of Russia's security service, in which he recommended that Russia suspend passenger flights to Egypt until the precise cause of the crash was determined. Bortnikov explained the move saying, "Until we know the real reasons for what happened, I consider it expedient to stop Russian flights to Egypt. Above all, this concerns tourist routes." Arrangements were also made to repatriate Russians stranded at the Egyptian resort town.

Several other airlines were also taking precautions by grounding flights scheduled to traverse that route, rerouting aircraft flying over the Sinai, while several Western governments released travel warnings expressly stating that their citizens should not travel to the Egyptian Sinai.

Note that as the first week of November 2015 came to a close, authorities in the United States and United Kingdom made clear that their intelligence assets had intercepted communications, known in intelligence circles as "chatter," from suspected terrorists. This revelation only bolstered their view that Russian Metrojet Flight KG9268 was the target of terrorism. While this view would yet have to be proved via forensic evidence and a thorough assessment of information on the flight recorders, the working theory at this time was that a bomb had been hidden in luggage and stowed in the hold of the aircraft. The general belief was that the bomb was quite likely planted by an insider working at the Sharm-el-Sheikh airport. That insider was believed to have worked in some form or fashion with Islamic State in the Sinai.

In the second week of November 2015, Russia and Egypt continued to officially resist the terrorism explanation for the crash of the Russian Metrojet airliner in the Egyptian Sinai. For Russia, there was no willingness to publicly admit that it was suffering from blowback as a result of its military engagement in Syria. For Egypt, there was no desire to taint its tourism industry by admitting that the resort city of Sharm-el-Sheikh may have suffered from lax security; Egypt was also not eager to confront the reality that despite its hardline measures against Islamist militants, a likely act of international terrorism had quite possibly occurred on its soil. As such, Russia and Egypt continued to publicly insist that it was too soon to draw conclusions about what happened on Oct. 31, 2015.

In the same period (the second week of November 2015), Islamic State -- which had already claimed responsibility for bringing down the Russian jet -- was now promising further attacks on Russia. To this end, Islamic State was vowing via a videotaped threat to attack Russians "very soon" on Russian soil for that country's heavy involvement in the Syrian crisis.

On Nov. 17, 2015, after two weeks of avoiding the terrorism explanation for the downing of the Metrojet flight, Russian authorities finally acknowledged that "an act of terror" in the form of a bomb brought down the plane over the Egyptian Sinai. Russian authorities reportedly informed President Putin that "traces of foreign explosives" were identified on the debris from the aircraft. Publicly, the head of Russia's security service, Alexander Bortnikov, said, "We can unequivocally say it was a terrorist act."

It should be noted that the government of Egypt continued to insist that it would not arrive at premature conclusions and would let the the investigatory process be fully completed. Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail said, "The Egyptian authorities affirm they will take into consideration the investigations that the Russian side reached ... in the comprehensive investigation." Egyptian Interior Minister Magid Abdel Ghaffar went slightly further, noting that there would be consequences if the investigation indicated security lapses at the Sharm el-Sheikh airport. He said, "Regarding Sharm al-Sheikh airport, when we discover that there have been security lapses action will be taken, but up to now we have no information about lapses in the search and security procedures." Egypt's Civil Aviation Minister Hosam Kamel, however, would not even concede that anything nefarious had occurred, as he said, "Up until this moment, there is no evidence of crime."

Note that on Nov. 18, 2015, Islamic State released details regarding their claim of responsibility in the Russian Metrojet disaster. In the terror group's Dabiq magazine, Islamic State explained that its operatives used its liquids bomb manufacturing capability, hidden in a canned Schweppes soft drink, to bring down the doomed jetliner. That liquids bomb making capability has been known to global anti-terrorism experts since 2006 following an investigation by MI6 experts from the United Kingdom, which has led to regulations on carry-on liquids belonging to aircraft passengers. In

this message from Islamic State, the terror group said, "The divided Crusaders of the East and West thought themselves safe in their jets as they cowardly bombarded the Muslims of the Caliphate. And so revenge was exacted upon those who felt safe in the cockpits."

### Russia's Official Response

With Islamic State claiming responsibility for the fatal crash, Russian President Vladimir Putin promised to "find and punish" those responsible for the attack over the Sinai peninsula. He said, "We'll look for them everywhere, wherever they are hiding. We'll find them in any corner of the planet and punish them." The Russian leader warned that those who carried out the attack that led to the deaths of more than 200 Russians, or were in anyway complicit in helping them, would face justice as he declared, "We must do this without any statute of limitations and we must find out all their names. Anyone who tries to help the criminals should know that the consequences for trying to shelter them will lie completely on their shoulders."

President Putin also made it clear that his country's military engagement in Syria would not only continue, but that Russian air strikes "must be intensified so that the criminals understand that retribution is inevitable." To that end, Russian warplanes wasted no time before stepping up its air campaign in Syria. The Russian government was also signaling its interest in working with France, which was also struck with a spate of terrorist attacks at the hands of Islamic State in the French capital of Paris. Indeed, both countries were reported to be carrying out sustained air strikes on Islamic State targets in Syria. As well, despite strained relations with the United States, as a result of their shared interest in defeating Islamic State, Russian and United States forces were said to be more closely coordinating their respective strikes on Islamic State targets in Syria.

### **Special Entry**

Ties between Turkey and Russia erode after Russian-Turkish jet shoot down crisis

In the last week of November 2015, the geopolitical complexity of Syrian civil war grew more complicated when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet on the basis of accusations that the Russian aircraft violated Turkish air space. When the crew ejected from the doomed aircraft, one pilot was shot to death by extremists on the ground in Syria as he parachuted to the ground. There was another fatality as a Russian special operations officer dispatched to rescue the crew was also killed by extremists on the ground. Only the pilot of the doomed jet survived the ordeal.

According to Turkish authorities, the Russian aircraft was notified multiple times of its territorial violation before it was shot down. In an attempt to bolster its account of the tragic events, Turkey released an apparent audio recording of its warnings to the Russian jet before it was shot down. On the recording, the following warning was stated: "Change your heading." Turkey also



explained that its protocols in cases of territorial encroachment had been followed and its personnel attempted to rescue the Russian pilots. For his part, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan issues no apology for the downing of the Russian jet. Instead, Erdogan declared that his country was defending its own security and sovereignty.

Russia disputed Turkey's claim, insisting that the jet was operating in Syrian air space as part of the fight against Islamic State. Russian President Vladimir Putin referred to the tragic incident as a betrayal administered by "the accomplices of terrorists," and warned that Moscow's relations with Ankara would suffer as a result. He said, "Today's loss is linked to a stab in the back delivered to us by accomplices of terrorists. I cannot qualify what happened today as anything else." He added, "We will of course analyze everything that happened and today's tragic events will have serious consequences for Russo-Turkish relations."

Soon thereafter, the Russian government instituted sanctions against Turkey. Russia also remained defiant, making clear it would continue its effort in the Syrian crisis and against Islamic State. A spokesperson from the Russian Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, noted that Russian jets would continue to fly missions close to the Turkish border because that was simply where the Islamist extremists were located.

It should be noted that the Russian president also blasted Turkey for being lax in its border controls, essentially allowing Islamic State terrorists to move across the Turkish border to and from Syria with virtual impunity, benefiting from its transportation and sales of oil revenues. Putin said, "We established a long time ago that large quantities of oil and oil products from territory captured by Islamic State have been arriving on Turkish territory. And now we get stabbed in our back and our planes, which are fighting terrorism, are struck. This despite the fact that we signed an agreement with our American partners to warn each other about air-to-air incidents and Turkey ... announced it was allegedly fighting against terrorism as part of the U.S. coalition."

With Turkey being a NATO member, Russia's wrath could potentially affect all Western countries participating in the United States-led coalition fighting Islamic State in the region. Hopes for greater cooperation between the West and Russia against the terror group were thus dimmed. In a small positive sign, however, both Moscow and Ankara made clear that they were not interested in escalating tensions and facilitating the path of war. As well, despite being NATO allies, France and the United States called on Turkey to do a better job of monitoring its borders which Islamic State terrorists were using to traverse in and out of Syria. Of particular note was a stretch of the Syrian-Turkish border north of the Syrian city of Aleppo where Turkey had not closed and was being used by the terror group to transport militants and supplies.

Of course, the truth of the matter was that neither Turkey nor Russia has been involved in the Syrian civil war for the principal purpose of fighting Islamic State in the first place. Turkey was one of the initial voices calling for Bashar Assad to go and has directly supported Sunni rebel

groups fighting the Assad regime in Syria. At the same time, Turkey has exploited the excuse of fighting Islamic State to instead go after Kurdish extremists, which it deems to be a political threat. On the other side of the equation, Russia has been a long-time backed of the Assad regime, and has often treated Syria like a client state. Russia entered the Syrian quagmire on the basis of claims that it was fighting Islamic State but it, instead, hit rebel targets in Syrian territory that were opposed to the Assad regime. In many senses, Turkey and Russia were already in opposed political "camps" with regard to the Syrian crisis before the latest contretemps over Turkey shooting down a Russian jet.

In December 2015, in the aftermath of Turkey's decision to shoot-down a Russian jet, ties between the two countries eroded further. At issue was Turkey's claim that a marine aboard a Russian naval ship was aggressively displaying a missile launcher as the Caesar Kunikov vessel sailed through the Bosphorus in Istanbul. Turkey summoned the Russian envoy for consultations as a result. As well, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu cast the incident as a provocation, saying, "The showing off of a missile by a soldier on a Russian warship, or other things such as anti-aircraft weapons, is pure provocation." The Russian Foreign Ministry dismissed Turkey's concerns, with spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, citing the 1936 Montreux Convention, which regulates ship movements through the Bosphorus Straits, and declaring that "the protection of a ship is the legal right of any crew."

Meanwhile, a Russian news crew was arrested in Turkey's Hatay province on the border with Syria and subsequently deported. That action was not expected to help improve already-damaged bilateral ties between the two countries.

### **Special Entry**

Public inquiry concludes ex-spy Litvinenko likely poisoned with Russian President Putin's approval

In January 2016, a public inquiry into the death of a former Russian clandestine agent, Alexander Litvinenko, concluded with some disturbing findings. It should be noted that after unveiling an alleged plot to assassinate a Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky, Litvinenko sought asylum in the United Kingdom, and went onto to work for the British MI6 intelligence service. He died in a London hospital in 2006 where it was confirmed that he succumbed to polonium-210-induced acute radiation syndrome.

An inquest was launched in the United Kingdom where Litvinenko was killed, and was chaired by Sir Robert Owen. It came to a conclusion with the production of the 300-page Litvinenko report. Of significance in the so-called "Sir Robert report" was the assessment that Litvinenko was poisoned to death with radioactive polonium-210 at the hands of Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitry Kovtun, who were working under the aegis of Russia's Federal Security Service, and quite likely at

the behest of Russian President Putin. Indeed, the report also "antagonism" between Putin and Litvinenko, which may have been part of the motivation for the killing.

Kovtun denied the alleged role in the death of Litvinenko. For his part, Lugovoi, who had since gone on to serve in the Russian parliament and thus would enjoy immunity from prosecution, dismissed the conclusions of the report. In fact, he cast the findings as "invention" and "supposition," and accusing Sir Robert of having "gone mad." Both men, however, would see their assets frozen by the United Kingdom government, while British officials indicated that the matter would also be brought up with Russian President Putin.

### **Special Note**

#### Peace Progress and Obstacles in Syria

At the start of 2016, the United Nations announced that the Syrian peace talks had commenced in the Swiss city of Geneva, with delegates from the opposition and representatives from the Assad regime meeting with United Nations Envoy Staffan de Mistura. The two sides were not at the same table for these negotiations; instead, these "proximity talks" were ensuing in separate rooms. It should be noted that the peace talks occurred even as Syria's pro-Assad forces, backed by Russian air strikes, were carrying out a massive offensive operation close to Aleppo. Syrian rebels pointed to the fact that this operation was going on despite the understanding that such actions should cease in order to give the peace process a chance.

In mid-February 2016, United States Secretary of State John Kerry announced that an agreement had been forged to seek a cessation of hostilities in Syria, and which would set the path for humanitarian aid to be transported to war-torn cities. Despite this favorable development, the fact of the matter was that Russian air power continued to strike targets in Syria deemed to be enemies of the Assad regime. As well, Syrian President Assad was intensifying his forces' efforts to regain control over Aleppo, which he indicated would only be the start of a national campaign to retake control of the country. Secretary of State Kerry thus warned that the aforementioned agreement to end hostilities would only remain relevant if Syria and its Russian and Iranian allies made good on their commitments.

By the last week of February 2016, the United States and Russia appeared to have reached some concurrence and issued a joint statement announcing that the ceasefire would commence on Feb. 27, 2016 and would apply to all parties in the Syrian conflict, with terrorist groups such as the Islamic State and al-Nusra being the exceptions.

--February 2016

*Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, [www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com). Supplementary sources used specifically in this section include Reuters, Newsweek, Interfax, as noted in the text. See Bibliography for general list of sources used for research in all Country Reviews.*

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## Political Risk Index

### Political Risk Index

The **Political Risk Index** is a proprietary index measuring the level of risk posed to governments, corporations, and investors, based on a myriad of political and economic factors. The [Political Risk Index](#) is calculated using an established methodology by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on varied criteria\* including the following consideration: political stability, political representation, democratic accountability, freedom of expression, security and crime, risk of conflict, human development, jurisprudence and regulatory transparency, economic risk, foreign investment considerations, possibility of sovereign default, and corruption. Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the highest political risk, while a score of 10 marks the lowest political risk. Stated differently, countries with the lowest scores pose the greatest political risk. A score of 0 marks the most dire level of political risk and an ultimate nadir, while a score of 10 marks the lowest possible level of political risk, according to this proprietary index. Rarely will there be scores of 0 or 10 due to the reality that countries contain complex landscapes; as such, the index offers a range of possibilities ranging from lesser to greater risk.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2

Albania	4
Algeria	6
Andorra	9
Angola	4
Antigua	8
Argentina	4
Armenia	4-5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9.5
Azerbaijan	4
Bahamas	8.5
Bahrain	6
Bangladesh	3.5
Barbados	8.5-9
Belarus	3
Belgium	9
Belize	8
Benin	5

Bhutan	5
Bolivia	5
Bosnia-Herzegovina	4
Botswana	7
Brazil	7
Brunei	7
Bulgaria	6
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	3
Cambodia	4
Cameroon	5
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4
Chile	9
China	7



China: Hong Kong	8
China: Taiwan	8
Colombia	7
Comoros	5
Congo DRC	3
Congo RC	4
Costa Rica	8
Cote d'Ivoire	4.5
Croatia	7
Cuba	4-4.5
Cyprus	5
Czech Republic	8
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	4.5
Dominica	7
Dominican Republic	6
East Timor	5
Ecuador	6

Egypt	5
El Salvador	7
Equatorial Guinea	4
Eritrea	3
Estonia	8
Ethiopia	4
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Fr.YugoslavRep.Macedonia	5
France	9
Gabon	5
Gambia	4
Georgia	5
Germany	9.5
Ghana	6
Greece	4.5-5
Grenada	8
Guatemala	6

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Guinea	3.5
Guinea-Bissau	3.5
Guyana	4.5
Haiti	3.5
Holy See (Vatican)	9
Honduras	4.5-5
Hungary	7
Iceland	8.5-9
India	7.5-8
Indonesia	6
Iran	3.5-4
Iraq	2.5-3
Ireland	8-8.5
Israel	8
Italy	7.5
Jamaica	6.5-7
Japan	9
Jordan	6.5

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Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5
Kiribati	7
Korea, North	1
Korea, South	8
Kosovo	4
Kuwait	7
Kyrgyzstan	4.5
Laos	4.5
Latvia	7
Lebanon	5.5
Lesotho	6
Liberia	3.5
Libya	2
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	7.5
Luxembourg	9
Madagascar	4

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Malawi	4
Malaysia	8
Maldives	4.5
Mali	4
Malta	8
Marshall Islands	6
Mauritania	4.5-5
Mauritius	7
Mexico	6.5
Micronesia	7
Moldova	5
Monaco	9
Mongolia	5
Montenegro	6
Morocco	6.5
Mozambique	4.5-5
Namibia	6.5-7
Nauru	6

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Nepal	4
Netherlands	9.5
New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	5
Niger	4
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9.5
Oman	7
Pakistan	3.5
Palau	7
Panama	7.5
Papua New Guinea	5
Paraguay	6.5-7
Peru	7
Philippines	6
Poland	8
Portugal	7.5
Qatar	7.5

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Romania	5.5
Russia	5.5
Rwanda	5
Saint Kitts and Nevis	8
Saint Lucia	8
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	8
Samoa	7
San Marino	9
Sao Tome and Principe	5.5
Saudi Arabia	6
Senegal	6
Serbia	5
Seychelles	7
Sierra Leone	4.5
Singapore	9
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8
Slovenia	8
Solomon Islands	6

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Somalia	2
South Africa	7
Spain	7.5
Sri Lanka	5
Sudan	3.5
Suriname	5
Swaziland	5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2
Tajikistan	4.5
Tanzania	6
Thailand	6.5
Togo	4.5
Tonga	7
Trinidad and Tobago	8
Tunisia	6
Turkey	7

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Turkmenistan	4.5
Tuvalu	7
Uganda	6
Ukraine	3.5-4
United Arab Emirates	7
United Kingdom	9
United States	9.5
Uruguay	8
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	7
Venezuela	4
Vietnam	5
Yemen	3
Zambia	4.5
Zimbabwe	3

**\*Methodology**

The [Political Risk Index](#) is calculated by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on the combined scoring of varied criteria as follows --

1. political stability (record of peaceful transitions of power, ability of government to stay in office and carry out policies as a result of productive executive-legislative relationship, perhaps with popular support vis a vis risk of government collapse)
2. political representation (right of suffrage, free and fair elections, multi-party participation, and influence of foreign powers)
3. democratic accountability (record of respect for political rights, human rights, and civil liberties, backed by constitutional protections)
4. freedom of expression (media freedom and freedom of expression, right to dissent or express political opposition, backed by constitutional protections)
5. security and crime (the degree to which a country has security mechanisms that ensures safety of citizens and ensures law and order, without resorting to extra-judicial measures)
6. risk of conflict (the presence of conflict; record of coups or civil disturbances; threat of war; threats posed by internal or external tensions; threat or record of terrorism or insurgencies)
7. human development (quality of life; access to education; socio-economic conditions; systemic concern for the status of women and children)
8. jurisprudence and regulatory transparency (the impartiality of the legal system, the degree of transparency within the regulatory system of a country and the durability of that structure)
9. economic conditions (economic stability, investment climate, degree of nationalization of industries, property rights, labor force development)
10. corruption ( the degree of corruption in a country and/or efforts by the government to address graft and other irregularities)

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the current climate of upheaval internationally -- both politically and economically -- has affected the ratings for several countries across the world.

North Korea, [Afghanistan](#), [Somalia](#), and [Zimbabwe](#) -- retain their low rankings.

Several Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), [Libya](#), [Syria](#), [Iraq](#) and [Yemen](#) were downgraded in recent years due to political instability occurring in the "season of

unrest" sweeping the region since 2011 and continuing today. The worst downgrades affected [Syria](#) where civil war is at play, along with the rampage of terror being carried out by Islamist terrorists who have also seized control over part of Syrian territory. [Iraq](#) has been further downgraded due to the rampage of Islamist terrorists and their takeover of wide swaths of Iraqi territory. [Libya](#) has also been downgraded further due to its slippage into failed state status; at issue in [Libya](#) have been an ongoing power struggle between rival militias. [Yemen](#) continues to hold steady with a poor ranking due to continued unrest at the hands of Houthi rebels, secessionists, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, and Islamic State. Its landscape has been further complicated by the fact that it is now the site of a proxy war between [Iran](#) and [Saudi Arabia](#). Conversely, [Tunisia](#) and [Egypt](#) have seen slight upgrades as these countries stabilize.

In Africa, [Zimbabwe](#) continues to be one of the bleak spots of the world with the Mugabe regime effectively destroying the country's once vibrant economy, and miring [Zimbabwe](#) with an exceedingly high rate of inflation, debilitating unemployment, devolving public services, and critical food shortages; rampant crime and political oppression round out the landscape. [Somalia](#) also sports a poor ranking due to the continuing influence of the terror group, al-Shabab, which was not operating across the border in [Kenya](#). On the upside, [Nigeria](#), which was ineffectively dealing with the threat posed by the terror group, Boko Haram, was making some strides on the national security front with its new president at the helm. [Mali](#) was slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. But the [Central African Republic](#) was downgraded due to the takeover of the government by Muslim Seleka rebels and a continued state of lawlessness in that country. South [Sudan](#) -- the world's newest nation state -- has not been officially included in this assessment; however, it can be unofficially assessed to be in the vicinity of "3" due to its manifold political and economic challenges. [Burkina Faso](#), [Burundi](#) and [Guinea](#) have been downgraded due to political unrest, with [Guinea](#) also having to deal with the burgeoning Ebola crisis.

In Europe, [Ukraine](#) was downgraded due to the unrest facing that country following its Maidan revolution that triggered a pro-Russian uprising in the eastern part of the country. [Russia](#) was also implicated in the Ukrainian crisis due to its intervention on behalf of pro-Russian separatists, as well as its annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Strains on the infrastructure of southern and eastern European countries, such as [Serbia](#), [Croatia](#), and [Hungary](#), due to an influx of refugees was expected to pose social and economic challenges, and slight downgrades were made accordingly. So too, a corruption crisis for the Romanian prime minister has affected the ranking of that country. Meanwhile, the rankings for [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Ireland](#), and [Italy](#) were maintained due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. [Greece](#), another euro zone nation, was earlier downgraded due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, no further downgrade was added since the country was able to successfully forge a bailout rescue deal with creditor institutions. Cyprus' exposure to Greek banks yielded a downgrade in its case.

In Asia, [Nepal](#) was downgraded in response to continuous political instability and a constitutional

crisis that prevails well after landmark elections were held. Both [India](#) and China retain their rankings; [India](#) holds a slightly higher ranking than [China](#) due to its record of democratic representation and accountability. Increasing violence and political instability in [Pakistan](#) resulted in a downgrade for this country's already low rating. Meanwhile, [Singapore](#) retained its strong rankings due to its continued effective stewardship of the economy and political stability.

In the Americas, ongoing political and economic woes, as well as crime and corruption have affected the rankings for [Mexico](#) , [Guatemala](#), and [Brazil](#). [Argentina](#) was downgraded due to its default on debt following the failure of talks with bond holders. [Venezuela](#) was downgraded due to its mix of market unfriendly policies and political oppression. For the moment, the [United States](#) maintains a strong ranking along with [Canada](#), and most of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean; however, a renewed debt ceiling crisis could cause the [United States](#) to be downgraded in a future edition. Finally, a small but significant upgrade was attributed to [Cuba](#) due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the United States.

Source:

Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, CountryWatch Inc. [www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com)

Updated:

2015

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## Political Stability

### Political Stability

The **Political Stability Index** is a proprietary index measuring a country's level of stability, standard of good governance, record of constitutional order, respect for human rights, and overall strength of democracy. The [Political Stability](#) Index is calculated using an established methodology\* by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on a given country's record of peaceful transitions of power, ability of a government to stay in office and carry out its policies vis a vis risk credible risks of government collapse. Threats include coups, domestic violence and instability, terrorism, etc. This index measures the dynamic between the quality of a country's government and the threats that can compromise and undermine stability. Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the lowest level of political stability and an



ultimate nadir, while a score of 10 marks the highest level of political stability possible, according to this proprietary index. Rarely will there be scores of 0 or 10 due to the reality that countries contain complex landscapes; as such, the index offers a range of possibilities ranging from lesser to greater stability.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4.5-5
Algeria	5
Andorra	9.5
Angola	4.5-5
Antigua	8.5-9
Argentina	7
Armenia	5.5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9.5
Azerbaijan	5
Bahamas	9
Bahrain	6

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Bangladesh	4.5
Barbados	9
Belarus	4
Belgium	9
Belize	8
Benin	5
Bhutan	5
Bolivia	6
Bosnia-Herzegovina	5
Botswana	8.5
Brazil	7
Brunei	8
Bulgaria	7.5
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	4
Cambodia	4.5-5
Cameroon	6

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Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4.5
Chile	9
China	7
China: Hong Kong	8
China: Taiwan	8
Colombia	7.5
Comoros	5
Congo DRC	3
Congo RC	5
Costa Rica	9.5
Cote d'Ivoire	3.5
Croatia	7.5
Cuba	4.5
Cyprus	8
Czech Republic	8.5

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Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	5
Dominica	8.5
Dominican Republic	7
East Timor	5
Ecuador	7
Egypt	4.5-5
El Salvador	7.5-8
Equatorial Guinea	4.5
Eritrea	4
Estonia	9
Ethiopia	4.5
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Fr.YugoslavRep.Macedonia	6.5
France	9
Gabon	5
Gambia	4.5

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Georgia	5
Germany	9.5
Ghana	7
Greece	6
Grenada	8.5
Guatemala	7
Guinea	3.5-4
Guinea-Bissau	4
Guyana	6
Haiti	3.5-4
Holy See (Vatican)	9.5
Honduras	6
Hungary	7.5
Iceland	9
India	8
Indonesia	7
Iran	3.5
Iraq	2.5

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Ireland	9.5
Israel	8
Italy	8.5-9
Jamaica	8
Japan	9
Jordan	6
Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5
Kiribati	8
Korea, North	2
Korea, South	8.5
Kosovo	5.5
Kuwait	7
Kyrgyzstan	5
Laos	5
Latvia	8.5
Lebanon	5.5
Lesotho	5

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Liberia	3.5-4
Libya	2
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	9
Luxembourg	9.5
Madagascar	4
Malawi	5
Malaysia	8
Maldives	4.5-5
Mali	4.5-5
Malta	9
Marshall Islands	8
Mauritania	6
Mauritius	8
Mexico	6.5-7
Micronesia	8
Moldova	5.5
Monaco	9.5

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Mongolia	6.5-7
Montenegro	8
Morocco	7
Mozambique	5
Namibia	8.5
Nauru	8
Nepal	4.5
Netherlands	9.5
New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	6
Niger	4.5
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9.5
Oman	7
Pakistan	3
Palau	8
Panama	8.5
Papua New Guinea	6

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Paraguay	8
Peru	7.5
Philippines	6
Poland	9
Portugal	9
Qatar	7
Romania	7
Russia	6
Rwanda	5
Saint Kitts and Nevis	9
Saint Lucia	9
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	9
Samoa	8
San Marino	9.5
Sao Tome and Principe	7
Saudi Arabia	6
Senegal	7.5
Serbia	6.5

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Seychelles	8
Sierra Leone	4.5
Singapore	9.5
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8.5
Slovenia	9
Solomon Islands	6.5-7
Somalia	2
South Africa	7.5
Spain	9
Sri Lanka	5
Sudan	3
Suriname	5
Swaziland	5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2
Tajikistan	4.5
Tanzania	6

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Thailand	6
Togo	5
Tonga	7
Trinidad and Tobago	8
Tunisia	5
Turkey	7.5
Turkmenistan	5
Tuvalu	8.5
Uganda	6
Ukraine	3.5-4
United Arab Emirates	7
United Kingdom	9
United States	9
Uruguay	8.5
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	8.5
Venezuela	4.5-5
Vietnam	4.5

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Yemen	2.5
Zambia	5
Zimbabwe	3

### \*Methodology

The Political Stability Index is calculated by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on the combined scoring of varied criteria as follows --

1. record of peaceful transitions of power ( free and fair elections; adherence to political accords)
2. record of democratic representation, presence of instruments of democracy; systemic accountability
3. respect for human rights; respect for civil rights
4. strength of the system of jurisprudence, adherence to constitutional order, and good governance
5. ability of a government to stay in office and carry out its policies vis a vis risk credible risks of government collapse (i.e. government stability versus a country being deemed "ungovernable")
6. threat of coups, insurgencies, and insurrection
7. level of unchecked crime and corruption
8. risk of terrorism and other threats to national security
9. relationship with regional powers and international community; record of bilateral or multilateral cooperation
10. degree of economic strife (i.e. economic and financial challenges)

### Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the current climate of upheaval internationally -- both politically and economically --



has affected the ratings for several countries across the world. The usual suspects -- North Korea, [Afghanistan](#), and [Somalia](#) -- retain their low rankings. The reclusive and ultra-dictatorial North Korean regime, which has terrified the world with its nuclear threats, has exhibited internal instability. Of note was a cut-throat purge of hundreds of high ranking officials deemed to be a threat to Kim Jung-un. Despite their attempts to recover from years of lawlessness, war, and warlordism, both [Afghanistan](#) and [Somalia](#) continue to be beset by terrorism and turmoil. In [Afghanistan](#), while international forces have seen success in the effort against the terror group, al-Qaida, the other Islamist extremist group, the Taliban, continues to carry out a vicious insurgency using terrorism. In [Somalia](#), while the government attempts to do the nation's business, the terror group, al-Shabab continues to make its presence known not only in [Somalia](#), but across the border into [Kenya](#) with devastating results/ Also in this category is [Iraq](#), which continues to be rocked by horrific violence and terrorism at the hands of Islamic State, which has taken over wide swaths of Iraqi territory.

Syria, [Libya](#), and [Yemen](#) have been added to this unfortunate echelon of the world's most politically unstable countries. [Syria](#) has been mired by the twin hazards of 1. a civil war as rebels oppose the Assad regime; and 2. the rampage of terror being carried out by Islamic State, which also seized control over vast portions of Syrian territory. Meanwhile, the post-Qaddhafi landscape of [Libya](#) has devolved into chaos as rival militias battle for control -- the elected government of the country notwithstanding. Rounding out this grim triad is [Yemen](#), which was dealing with a Houthi rebellion, secessionists in the south, as well as the threat of terrorism from al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula as well as Islamic State, while also being the site of a proxy war between Shi'a [Iran](#) and Sunni [Saudi Arabia](#).

Meanwhile, several Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), and [Bahrain](#) were downgraded in recent years due to political instability occurring in the "season of unrest" sweeping the region since 2011 and continuing today. All three of these countries have stabilized in recent years and have been upgraded accordingly. In [Bahrain](#), the landscape had calmed. In [Egypt](#), the secular military-backed government has generated criticism for its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood; however, the country had ratified the presidency via democratic elections and were on track to hold parliamentary elections as the country moved along the path of democratization. Perhaps the most impressive story was coming out of [Tunisia](#) -- the country whose Jasmine Revolution sparked the entire Arab Spring -- and where after a few years of strife, a new progressive constitution was passed into law and a secular government had been elected to power. [Tunisia](#), [Egypt](#), and [Bahrain](#) have seen slight upgrades as these countries stabilize.

In Africa, the [Central African Republic](#) was downgraded the previous year due to the takeover of the government by Muslim Seleka rebels. Although the country has been trying to emerge from this crisis, the fact of the matter was that it was difficult to halt the precipitous decline into lawlessness in that country. [Zimbabwe](#) has maintained its consistently poor ranking due to the

dictatorial regime of Mugabe, who continues to hold a tight grip on power, intimidates the opposition, squashes dissent, and oppresses the white farmer population of the country. Moving in a slightly improved direction is [Nigeria](#), which has sported abysmal ratings due to the government's fecklessness in dealing with the threat posed by the Islamist terror group, Boko Haram. Under its newly-elected government, there appears to be more of a concerted effort to make national security a priority action item. [Mali](#) was also slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. Political instability has visited [Burkina Faso](#) and [Burundi](#) as the leaders of those countries attempted to side-step constitutional limits to hold onto power. In [Burundi](#), an attempted coup ensued but quelled, and the president won a (questionable) new term in office; unrest has since punctuated the landscape. In [Burkina Faso](#), the political climate has turned stormy as a result of a successful coup that ended the rule of the president, and then a putsch against the transitional government. These two African countries have been downgraded as a result.

It should be noted that the African country of South [Sudan](#) -- the world's newest nation state -- has not been officially included in this assessment; however, it can be unofficially assessed to be in the vicinity of "3" due to its manifold political and economic challenges. [Guinea](#) has endured poor rankings throughout, but was slightly downgraded further over fears of social unrest and the Ebola heath crisis.

In Europe, [Ukraine](#) was downgraded due to the unrest facing that country following its Maidan revolution that triggered a pro-Russian uprising in the eastern part of the country. [Russia](#) was also implicated in the Ukrainian crisis due to its intervention on behalf of pro-Russian separatists, as well as its annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. [Serbia](#) and [Albania](#) were slightly downgraded due to eruptions of unrest, while [Romania](#) was slightly downgraded on the basis of corruption charges against the prime minister. [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Ireland](#), and [Italy](#) were downgraded due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. [Greece](#), another euro zone nation, was downgraded the previous year due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, the country successfully forged a rescue deal with international creditors and stayed within the Euro zone. Greek voters rewarded the hitherto unknown upstart party at the polls for these efforts. As a result, [Greece](#) was actually upgraded slightly as it proved to the world that it could endure the political and economic storms. Meanwhile, [Germany](#), [France](#), [Switzerland](#), the [United Kingdom](#), the [Netherlands](#), and the Scandinavian countries continue to post impressive ranking consistent with these countries' strong records of democracy, freedom, and peaceful transfers of power.

In Asia, [Nepal](#) was downgraded in response to continuous political instability well after landmark elections that prevails today. [Cambodia](#) was very slightly downgraded due to post-election instability that has resulted in occasional flares of violence. Despite the "trifecta of tragedy" in [Japan](#) in 2011 -- the earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the resulting nuclear crisis -- and the appreciable destabilization of the economic and political terrain therein, this country has only slightly been downgraded. Japan's challenges have been assessed to be transient, the government

remains accountable, and there is little risk of default. Both [India](#) and China retain their rankings; [India](#) holds a slightly higher ranking than [China](#) due to its record of democratic representation and accountability. Increasing violence and political instability in [Pakistan](#) resulted in a downgrade for this country's already low rating.

In the Americas, [Haiti](#) retained its downgraded status due to ongoing political and economic woes. [Mexico](#) was downgraded due to its alarming rate of crime. [Guatemala](#) was downgraded due to charges of corruption, the arrest of the president, and uncertainty over the outcome of elections. [Brazil](#) was downgraded due to the corruption charges erupting on the political landscape, the stalling of the economy, and the increasingly loud calls for the impeachment of President Rousseff. [Argentina](#) was downgraded due to its default on debt following the failure of talks with bond holders. [Venezuela](#) was downgraded due to the fact that the country's post-Chavez government is every bit as autocratic and nationalistic, but even more inclined to oppress its political opponents. [Colombia](#) was upgraded slightly due to efforts aimed at securing a peace deal with the FARC insurgents. A small but significant upgrade was attributed to [Cuba](#) due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the United States. Meanwhile, the [United States](#), [Canada](#), [Costa Rica](#), [Panama](#), and most of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean retain their strong rankings due to their records of stability and peaceful transfers of power.

In the Pacific, [Fiji](#) was upgraded due to its return to constitutional order and democracy with the holding of the first elections in eight years.

In Oceania, [Maldives](#) has been slightly downgraded due to the government's continued and rather relentless persecution of the country's former pro-democracy leader - former President Nasheed.

Source:

Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, CountryWatch Inc. [www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com)

Updated:

2015

## Freedom Rankings

### Freedom Rankings

#### Freedom in the World

Editor's Note: This ranking by Freedom House quantifies political freedom and civil liberties into a single combined index on each sovereign country's level of freedom and liberty. The initials "PR" and "CL" stand for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, respectively. The number 1 represents the most free countries and the number 7 represents the least free. Several countries fall in the continuum in between. The freedom ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

Country	PR	CL	Freedom Status	Trend Arrow
Afghanistan	6 ?	6	Not Free	
Albania*	3	3	Partly Free	
Algeria	6	5	Not Free	
Andorra*	1	1	Free	
Angola	6	5	Not Free	
Antigua and Barbuda*	3 ?	2	Free	
Argentina*	2	2	Free	
Armenia	6	4	Partly Free	
Australia*	1	1	Free	
Austria*	1	1	Free	

Azerbaijan	6	5	Not Free	
Bahamas*	1	1	Free	
Bahrain	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Bangladesh*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Barbados*	1	1	Free	
Belarus	7	6	Not Free	
Belgium*	1	1	Free	
Belize*	1	2	Free	
Benin*	2	2	Free	
Bhutan	4	5	Partly Free	
Bolivia*	3	3	Partly Free	
Bosnia-Herzegovina*	4	3	Partly Free	
Botswana*	3 ?	2	Free	
Brazil*	2	2	Free	
Brunei	6	5	Not Free	
Bulgaria*	2	2	Free	
Burkina Faso	5	3	Partly Free	
Burma	7	7	Not Free	

Burundi*	4	5	Partly Free	↑
Cambodia	6	5	Not Free	↓
Cameroon	6	6	Not Free	
Canada*	1	1	Free	
Cape Verde*	1	1	Free	
Central African Republic	5	5	Partly Free	
Chad	7	6	Not Free	
Chile*	1	1	Free	
China	7	6	Not Free	
Colombia*	3	4	Partly Free	
Comoros*	3	4	Partly Free	
Congo (Brazzaville )	6	5	Not Free	↓
Congo (Kinshasa)	6	6	Not Free	↓
Costa Rica*	1	1	Free	
Cote d'Ivoire	6	5	Not Free	
Croatia*	1 ?	2	Free	
Cuba	7	6	Not Free	
Cyprus*	1	1	Free	



Czech Republic*	1	1	Free	
Denmark*	1	1	Free	
Djibouti	5	5	Partly Free	
Dominica*	1	1	Free	
Dominican Republic*	2	2	Free	↓
East Timor*	3	4	Partly Free	
Ecuador*	3	3	Partly Free	
Egypt	6	5	Not Free	
El Salvador*	2	3	Free	
Equatorial Guinea	7	7	Not Free	
Eritrea	7	7 ?	Not Free	
Estonia*	1	1	Free	
Ethiopia	5	5	Partly Free	↓
Fiji	6	4	Partly Free	
Finland*	1	1	Free	
France*	1	1	Free	
Gabon	6	5 ?	Not Free ?	
The Gambia	5	5 ?	Partly Free	

Georgia	4	4	Partly Free	
Germany*	1	1	Free	
Ghana*	1	2	Free	
Greece*	1	2	Free	
Grenada*	1	2	Free	
Guatemala*	4 ?	4	Partly Free	
Guinea	7	6 ?	Not Free	
Guinea-Bissau*	4	4	Partly Free	
Guyana*	2	3	Free	
Haiti*	4	5	Partly Free	
Honduras	4 ?	4 ?	Partly Free	
Hungary*	1	1	Free	
Iceland*	1	1	Free	
India*	2	3	Free	
Indonesia*	2	3	Free	
Iran	6	6	Not Free	↓
Iraq	5 ?	6	Not Free	
Ireland*	1	1	Free	

Israel*	1	2	Free	
Italy*	1	2	Free	
Jamaica*	2	3	Free	
Japan*	1	2	Free	
Jordan	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Kazakhstan	6	5	Not Free	↓
Kenya	4	4 ?	Partly Free	
Kiribati*	1	1	Free	
Kosovo	5 ?	4 ?	Partly Free ?	
Kuwait	4	4	Partly Free	
Kyrgyzstan	6 ?	5 ?	Not Free ?	
Laos	7	6	Not Free	
Latvia*	2	1	Free	
Lebanon	5	3 ?	Partly Free	
Lesotho*	3 ?	3	Partly Free ?	
Liberia*	3	4	Partly Free	
Libya	7	7	Not Free	
Liechtenstein*	1	1	Free	

Lithuania*	1	1	Free	
Luxembourg*	1	1	Free	
Macedonia*	3	3	Partly Free	↑
Madagascar	6 ?	4 ?	Partly Free	
Malawi*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Malaysia	4	4	Partly Free	
Maldives*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Mali*	2	3	Free	
Malta*	1	1	Free	↓
Marshall Islands*	1	1	Free	
Mauritania	6	5	Not Free	
Mauritius*	1	2	Free	
Mexico*	2	3	Free	
Micronesia*	1	1	Free	
Moldova*	3 ?	4	Partly Free	
Monaco*	2	1	Free	
Mongolia*	2	2	Free	↑
Montenegro*	3	2 ?	Free ?	

Morocco	5	4	Partly Free	↓
Mozambique	4 ?	3	Partly Free	
Namibia*	2	2	Free	
Nauru*	1	1	Free	
Nepal	4	4	Partly Free	
Netherlands*	1	1	Free	
New Zealand*	1	1	Free	
Nicaragua*	4	4 ?	Partly Free	
Niger	5 ?	4	Partly Free	
Nigeria	5	4	Partly Free	↓
North Korea	7	7	Not Free	↓
Norway*	1	1	Free	
Oman	6	5	Not Free	
Pakistan	4	5	Partly Free	
Palau*	1	1	Free	
Panama*	1	2	Free	
Papua New Guinea*	4	3	Partly Free	
Paraguay*	3	3	Partly Free	

Peru*	2	3	Free	
Philippines	4	3	Partly Free	↓
Poland*	1	1	Free	
Portugal*	1	1	Free	
Qatar	6	5	Not Free	
Romania*	2	2	Free	
Russia	6	5	Not Free	↓
Rwanda	6	5	Not Free	
Saint Kitts and Nevis*	1	1	Free	
Saint Lucia*	1	1	Free	
Saint Vincent and Grenadines*	2	1	Free	
Samoa*	2	2	Free	
San Marino*	1	1	Free	
Sao Tome and Principe*	2	2	Free	
Saudi Arabia	7	6	Not Free	
Senegal*	3	3	Partly Free	
Serbia*	2 ?	2	Free	
Seychelles*	3	3	Partly Free	



Sierra Leone*	3	3	Partly Free	
Singapore	5	4	Partly Free	
Slovakia*	1	1	Free	↓
Slovenia*	1	1	Free	
Solomon Islands	4	3	Partly Free	
Somalia	7	7	Not Free	
South Africa*	2	2	Free	
South Korea*	1	2	Free	
Spain*	1	1	Free	
Sri Lanka*	4	4	Partly Free	
Sudan	7	7	Not Free	
Suriname*	2	2	Free	
Swaziland	7	5	Not Free	
Sweden*	1	1	Free	
Switzerland*	1	1	Free	↓
Syria	7	6	Not Free	
Taiwan*	1 ?	2 ?	Free	
Tajikistan	6	5	Not Free	

Tanzania	4	3	Partly Free	
Thailand	5	4	Partly Free	
Togo	5	4 ?	Partly Free	
Tonga	5	3	Partly Free	
Trinidad and Tobago*	2	2	Free	
Tunisia	7	5	Not Free	
Turkey*	3	3	Partly Free	↓
Turkmenistan	7	7	Not Free	
Tuvalu*	1	1	Free	
Uganda	5	4	Partly Free	
Ukraine*	3	2	Free	
United Arab Emirates	6	5	Not Free	
United Kingdom*	1	1	Free	
United States*	1	1	Free	
Uruguay*	1	1	Free	
Uzbekistan	7	7	Not Free	
Vanuatu*	2	2	Free	
Venezuela	5 ?	4	Partly Free	

Vietnam	7	5	Not Free	↓
Yemen	6 ?	5	Not Free ?	
Zambia*	3	4 ?	Partly Free	
Zimbabwe	6 ?	6	Not Free	

### Methodology:

PR and CL stand for political rights and civil liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating. The ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

? ? up or down indicates a change in political rights, civil liberties, or status since the last survey.

↑ ↓ up or down indicates a trend of positive or negative changes that took place but that were not sufficient to result in a change in political rights or civil liberties ratings of 1-7.

\* indicates a country's status as an electoral democracy.

### Source:

This data is derived from the latest edition of Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2010 edition.

Available at URL: <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

### Updated:

Reviewed in 2015

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## Human Rights

### Human Rights in Russia

#### Overview

In recent years, the government passed a series of initiatives that further strengthen presidential control over Russia. As well, gubernatorial elections no longer function in a direct manner, changes to constituency voting in parliamentary elections have been out forth, and political parties are required to have at least 50,000 members in order to compete in parliamentary elections. The government has also moved to pass a law that would increase the governments' ability to legitimately intervene into the work of human rights organizations and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Meanwhile, there have been cases in which freedoms of expression, assembly, and movement have been arbitrarily revoked by the government. There is also the prevailing belief that media independence may be under some degree of threat. As well, the torture and other forms of abuse by the police forces against criminal suspects remain widespread.

In recent times, a series of strange assassinations of well-known public figures have wracked Russia. Because some of the victims have been vocal critics of the Kremlin, there has been speculation about whether the government was responsible. Other possible responsible parties that have been mentioned include rogue elements of the former Soviet intelligence services as well as contract killers. Regardless of who is actually responsible, the matter has evoked questions about the climate of political security in Russia, and whether justice will be served.

There have been allegations of governmental involvement in politically-motivated abductions, disappearances, and killings in Chechnya and areas in the Caucasus. On the other side of the equation, Chechen rebels also continue to commit gross human rights violations. Killings, kidnappings, and other violent activities are perpetrated on a daily basis across Chechnya, but in the neighboring regions of Ingushetia and Dagestan.

Widespread governmental and societal discrimination against ethnic minorities and persons from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Africa also takes place. Indeed, a spate of attacks by white supremacists has plagued Moscow in recent years.

### **Human Development Index (HDI) Rank:**

See Social Overview in Country Review for full list of countries' rankings.

### **Human Poverty Index Rank:**

Not Ranked

### **Gini Index:**

40

**Life Expectancy at Birth (years):**

67.5 years

**Unemployment Rate:**

7.6%

Note- This does not take into account the large number of underemployed people in the nation

**Population living on \$1 a day (%):**

N/A

**Population living on \$2 a day (%):**

N/A

**Population living beneath the Poverty Line (%):**

17.8%

**Internally Displaced People:**

339,000

Note- Some 96,000 foreign refugees are currently seeking asylum in Russia

**Total Crime Rate (%):**

26.3%

**Health Expenditure (% of GDP):**

Public: 3.5%

**% of GDP Spent on Education:**

3.8%

**Human Rights Conventions Party to:**

- International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Conventions on the Rights of the Child
- Convention relating to the Status of Refugees
- Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Signed but not yet ratified)

\*Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite index that measures the level of well-being in 177 nations in the world. It uses factors such as poverty, literacy, life-expectancy, education, gross domestic product, and purchasing power parity to assess the average achievements in each nation. It has been used in the United Nation's Human Development Report since 1993.

\*Human Poverty Index Ranking is based on certain indicators used to calculate the Human Poverty Index. Probability at birth of not surviving to age 40, adult literacy rate, population without sustainable access to an improved water source, and population below income poverty line are the indicators assessed in this measure.

\*The Gini Index measures inequality based on the distribution of family income or consumption. A value of 0 represents perfect equality (income being distributed equally), and a value of 100 perfect inequality (income all going to one individual).

\*The calculation of the total crime rate is the % of the total population which has been effected by property crime, robbery, sexual assault, assault, or bribery (corruption) related occurrences.

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## **Government Functions**

### **Constitution**

The 1993 Russian Constitution established a mixed presidential and parliamentary system, in which a popularly elected president is granted more executive authority, and a government headed by a prime minister (premier) is dependent upon support in the legislature. A separate judicial branch was established as well. The constitution also recognized Russia as a multi-ethnic, federal system in which some powers are devolved to territories, autonomous republics, cities, regions, and autonomous areas.

### **Executive Power**

Most executive power in Russia is vested in the president, who is also the head of state. The president is chosen in direct elections for a four-year term and is limited to two consecutive terms. As the head of state, the president is the primary representative of the Russian Federation in the international arena and is commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president of Russia also wields substantial power in the domestic political arena. The president appoints a prime minister, who is subject to approval by the Duma. The president can dismiss individual ministers on the advice of the prime minister and can dismiss the entire government. The president can dissolve the Duma and call early elections; can call referenda; and can initiate legislation in the Duma, as well as veto legislation adopted by the Duma. The president can also preside over meetings of the government. The president can issue decrees and executive orders that have the force of law and can declare martial law or emergencies with approval from the Federation Council.

The president of Russia shares executive power with a government headed by a prime minister. As noted previously, the prime minister is nominated by the president and approved by the Duma. Deputy prime ministers and other federal ministers are nominated by the prime minister and appointed by the president. The prime minister (also known as premier or chairman) and other government ministers are subject to the approval of the Duma. If the president's nomination for prime minister is rejected three times, the president can dissolve the Duma and call early elections. The government is responsible for developing legislation based on the president's policy priorities, implementing adopted legislation, and overseeing the state bureaucracy. The government can issue decrees, which may then be rejected by the president. The prime minister can call for confidence votes; the president, in turn, may choose to accept or reject the resignation of the prime minister.

### **Legislative Power**

Legislative power is vested in a bicameral Federal Assembly, which consists of a lower house, the State Duma, and an upper house, the Federation Council.

The State Duma has 450 members elected for four-year terms. All members are elected by



proportional representation from party lists winning at least seven percent of the vote. Dual mandates are prohibited; members of the Duma may not simultaneously hold other offices. The Duma is responsible for approving a president's nomination for prime minister and can pass votes of no confidence in the government (prime minister plus other cabinet ministers). The Duma shares with the other organs of state the power to initiate legislation; draft laws must be introduced in the Duma.

The upper house of the Federal Assembly, the Federation Council, has 166 members. These members are appointed by the top executive and legislative officials in each of the federal administrative units - oblasts, krays, republics, autonomous okrugs and oblasts, and the federal cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The Federation Council is responsible for approving presidential declarations of martial law, declarations of emergency, and decisions to use force outside Russia's boundaries. The Federation Council is also responsible for impeaching a president and approving early presidential elections as well as approving appointments to the high courts of Russia. Like the Duma and other organs of state, the Federation Council can initiate legislation.

## **Judicial Power**

Judicial power is vested in a number of high courts and lower courts. The Supreme Court exercises power in civil, criminal, and administrative cases. In addition, the 1993 Constitution empowers the Constitutional Court to arbitrate disputes between the executive and legislative branches, as well as between Moscow and the regional and/or local governments. The court is also authorized to rule on violations of constitutional rights, to examine appeals from various bodies, and to participate in impeachment proceedings against the president. The July 1994 Law on the Constitutional Court prohibits the court from examining cases on its own initiative and limits the scope of issues that can be heard. Members of these high courts are nominated by the president and approved by the Federation Council.

## **Editor's Note**

In December 2008, the Russian Federation Council, which is the upper house of the parliament, approved the extension of the presidential term from four years to six years. The legislative body also passed the amendment of the Constitution, which will increase the mandate of the deputies of the State Duma, lower house of the parliament, from four years to five years. The draft legislation was pending because for it enter into force, it required approval of two-thirds of regional legislatures. Given the ruling United Russia party's influence and popularity, it was believed that the constitutional amendments would successfully be formalized.

Note: These constitutional changes were put forth by President Dmitry Medvedev during his first state-of-the-nation address.

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## Government Structure

### **Names:**

*conventional long form:*

Russian Federation

*conventional short form:*

Russia

*local long form:*

Rossiyskaya Federatsiya

*local short form:*

Rossiya

*former:*

Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

### **Type:**

Federation

### **Executive Branch:**

#### Head of State:

President Vladimir Putin elected on March 4, 2012; resumed the post of president after serving as prime minister and therefore succeed outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev who was tapped to be the new prime minister.

See 2011/2012 Election Primer below for information regarding forthcoming elections

#### Note:

The president is elected by popular vote for a four-year term (eligible for a second term); election last held March 2008 (next to be held in March 2012); the term length was extended to six years in late 2008, to go into effect following the 2012 presidential election; there is no vice president; if the president dies in office, cannot exercise his powers because of ill health, is impeached, or resigns,

the premier serves as acting president until a new presidential election is held, which must be within three months; premier appointed by the president with the approval of the Duma.

Head of Government:

Following election of 2012, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin won the presidency; with the office of the prime minister vacant, all expectations were that incoming President Putin might call on outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev to serve as head of government. To that end, Medvedev's nomination was approved by the State Duma on May 8, 2012.

See 2011/2012 Elections Note below regarding the elections.

Cabinet:

Ministries of the Government; composed of the premier and his deputies, ministers, and other agency heads; all are appointed by the president and endorsed by the State Duma.

Note:

There is also a Presidential Administration (PA) that provides staff and policy support to the president, drafts presidential decrees, and coordinates policy among government agencies. The Security Council, originally established as a presidential advisory body in June 1991, is responsible for individual and state security. The Security Council reports directly to the president.

Elections:

See Elections Primer below

**Primer on 2012 Presidential Elections in Russia:**

March 4, 2012 --

Summary:

Russians voted in a presidential election on March 4, 2012. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who previously served as president, was looking to return to the helm as president of Russia. On election day, after the votes were cast, exit poll data and preliminary results indicated that Putin was on track to win the presidency in the first round with around 60 percent of the vote share.

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In Detail:

Note that a presidential election in Russia was expected to be held in 2012. In September 2011, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who previously served as president, said he intended to

contest that election with an eye on returning to that post. Current President Dmitry Medvedev indicated support for his mentor, Putin, and that he would consider taking on the role of prime minister himself. President Medvedev said that he was interested in "engaging in the practical work of the government." It was apparent that both Putin and Medvedev wanted to remain in the top posts of Russian government but did not want to contest elections against one another. In mid-October 2011, the ruling United Russia Party confirmed that it would formally nominate Putin as its presidential candidate for the presidential election scheduled to be held on March 4, 2012. On Nov. 27, 2011, as expected, the United Russia party officially nominated Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as its presidential candidate in the forthcoming election.

For his part, Putin made clear that since he intended to resume his post as president, he expected the current president -- Medvedev -- to hold the post of prime minister in the future. Putin said, "I would like to once again stress that if the voters trust us with forming the government, that they vote for the United Russia and me as the Russian president... Dmitry Anatolyevich (Medvedev) would undoubtedly head the government." Putin called for a national modernization plan to be implemented in Russia as part of an economic development strategy. To that end, he noted, "Russia should end its dependence on oil and gas and perform a transition to the innovative development model."

On Dec. 11, 2011, Russian billionaire and leading industrialist in the precious metals sector Mikhail Prokhorov announced he would contest the presidential election to be held in 2012. Speaking at a news conference, Prokhorov said, "I made probably the most serious decision in my life. I will run for president." Prokhorov seemed realistic about his prospects at the polls against Putin. Indeed, Prokhorov acknowledged that his bid for the presidency was unlikely to receive popular support in 2012, but that he could potentially see inroads over the course of "the next 10 or 15 years."

Another candidate was also known to be contesting the presidential election -- Sergei Mironov, leader of the center-left A Just Russia party. Other candidates included Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov and Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) chief Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. However, Yabloko leader Grigory Yavlinsky was barred from contesting the election as some of the signatures collected in the process of registration were deemed to be invalid.

Note that in January 2012, polling data showed diminishing support for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's presidential bid. The state-run polling agency, VTsIOM, said that Putin commanded about 48 percent in popular support -- far less than his landslide-levels of support in previous elections. Still, that 48 percent -- while diminished in comparison to previous levels of support for Putin -- was nonetheless an improvement over VTsIOM's previous polling data, which showed Putin with only 42 percent of voters' support. Another polling outfit, the independent Levada Center, indicated less optimistic election results for Putin. Indeed, Levada Center forecast Putin to carry only 42 percent of the vote -- not enough for victory in the first round of voting. Meanwhile, VTsIOM said that support for other candidates was holding fairly stable -- with 10 percent for

Zyuganov, nine percent for Zhirinovskiy, five percent for Mironov, three percent for Prokhorov, and two percent for Yavlinsky.

By February 2012, VTsIOM found momentum on the side of Putin, with 53.3 percent of respondents saying they support the prime minister who was seeking to return to the presidency. The VTsIOM survey showed Zyuganov was significantly behind with 10 percent of support, while Zhirinovskiy had 8.2 percent, and Prokhorov had 4.6 percent of support. Since Putin would need at least 50 percent of the vote share in the March election to avoid a second-round runoff, this polling result at the start of February 2012 was encouraging for his ambitions.

A week ahead of the Russian presidential election, polling data indicated that Putin was enjoying momentum and was on track to win Russia's presidential election in the first round. According to Levada Center's poll, Putin was expected to receive about 63 percent of the vote share -- well over the 50 percent majority. Following the trends of the weeks before, Zyuganov would come in significantly behind in second place with about 15 percent, while Zhirinovskiy continued to track with about eight percent.

Also in February 2012, tens of thousands of people participated in a number of political rallies in Moscow. The rallies appeared to be roughly divided into two categories: pro-Putin events and anti-Putin demonstrations. The anti-Putin contingent alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections held in December 2011 and urged voters to deny the former president a return to power. Pro-Putin elements accused the opposition of fomenting discord and seeking a revolution that would ultimately result in Russia being too closely linked with Western powers. On Feb. 17, 2012, a pro-Putin rally was organized by Federation of Trade Unions of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region and attracted tens of thousands of participants. The organizers called on Russians to vote for Putin in the interests of the political stability of Russia. As February 2012 was coming to a close, further such rallies were ongoing. It should be noted that Russian authorities made it clear that even after the presidential election was decided, it would not try to stop protests or such mass action, which could well ensue.

The political landscape of Russia at the time in late February 2012 was also dominated by news of a foiled plot, apparently by Chechen rebels, to assassinate Putin. That news was likely to remind Russians of Putin's leading role in the fight against Chechen Islamic militant separatists. While human rights activists have criticized Putin for orchestrating a harsh crackdown against the movement, many Russians have applauded him for his hard line actions in this regard, given Chechen militants' willingness to use terrorism to further their aims. Accordingly, Putin's national security record could well be beneficial to him at the polls.

As March 2012 began, and as the Russian presidential election loomed only days away, the Russian Central Electoral Commission (CEC) rejected complaints submitted by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and the League of Voters about the unbalanced provision

of broadcast time by a number of channels to presidential candidates. The CEC resolution determined that the complaints lacked objective foundation and concluded that there was "no evidence of equality violations of the candidates for the post of Russian president in the placing of informational materials on Channel One, Rossiya 1, Centre TV or REN TV, or of any discrimination concerning their access to airtime."

That case, along with the aforementioned political rallies, drew attention to the matter of a functioning opposition in Russia. Was there an effective opposition force in Russia presenting a serious challenge to the traditional power base in this country? Does Russia embrace the notion of vigorous and open debate, common in mature democracies? Or does Russia's autocratic legacy prevail at the socio-cultural level? Is Russia a venue for thriving political activism, or, it is a country that continues to adhere to a sense of order?

While not a direct response to these questions, the news agency, Interfax, released a survey on the matter of opposition forces and political mass action. The survey showed that the majority of Russians -- 55 percent -- believe that political opposition should exist in the country. The survey, which was conducted by Public Opinion Foundation, also found that most Russians believe that the country's authorities should be more responsive to the opposition. That being said, 12 percent of respondents expressed a penchant for autocracy, saying that there was no need for an opposition. About a quarter of respondents said that they did not believe a political opposition actually existed in Russia. Close to 80 percent of those who replied to the survey questions said that they were not interested in participating in protest action; only 13 percent responded positively to the idea of protest participation. That all being said, an overwhelming 84 percent of respondents said that they did not believe Russia was in need of any kind of revolution at this time.

Perhaps those last two data points would prove to be the most salient indicators of the outcome of the forthcoming Russian presidential election. Stated differently, with the vast majority of Russians not enthused about either the notion of radical change, or, participating in protest action, it was quite possible that they would vote in favor of the status quo. The status quo would, more than likely, line up with Putin as president.

Heading into the Russian presidential election, the main question would be whether or not Putin could win outright victory in the first round. Polling data right before election day gave Putin a clear majority; it was yet to be seen if this would hold on March 4, 2012. Note also that according to Russia's Central Elections Commission, almost 670 international monitors from various international, national, and regional agencies, were accredited to observe the Russian presidential election to be held on March 4, 2012.

On election day, turnout was reported to be high at 58 percent -- notably higher than the level of turnout in the 2008 election. After Russian voters had cast their ballots, exit poll data and preliminary results indicated that Putin had won election, having secured around 60 percent of the

vote share. Other candidates were trailing significantly behind, including Putin's toughest rival, Gennady Zyuganov. Given the fact that he had crossed the 50 percent majority threshold outright, Putin avoided having to contest a second round.

In an appearance with current President Dmitry Medvedev, Putin claimed victory declaring, "I promised you we would win, and we won," he said. "Glory to Russia!" He continued saying, "We have won in an open and honest battle. We proved that no-one can force anything on us." Outside the Kremlin, pro-Putin supporters gathered in the tens of thousands with flags and banners with messages such as "We believe in Putin," to celebrate the election victory for their standard bearer and his imminent return to the helm of the Russian presidency.

Not all Russians were celebrating the election outcome, though, as opposition groups reported widespread fraud and charged that there were incidences of multiple voting by individual persons. Indeed, activists were outraged about the level of voting violations, while election observers were pointing to a phenomenon called "carousel voting," whereby busloads of voters were driven around to different polling stations to cast ballots on a repeated basis. Still, Putin's campaign chief, Stanislav Govorukhin, disputed these claims, instead asserting that this 2012 election was "the cleanest in Russian history."

International monitors from the the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe had its own assessment of the Russian presidential contest. The OSCE said that although Putin's challengers were able to compete openly, the election conditions favored Putin's election. In response, the British government called for Russia to consider this finding seriously. British Foreign Secretary William Hague said in a statement. "A Russia with greater political freedoms, including the registration of political parties, freedom of assembly and freedom of the media is in the interests of Russians and of the wider world." Striking a similar chord, Human Rights Watch called on Putin to undertake key reforms once he begins his new term as president.

There were reports that Moscow was under tight security after the election, and all expectations were that anticipated opposition protests would ensue in the future. For his part, opposition leader, Zyuganov, characterized the elections as "unfair and unworthy," but encouraged Russians to take comfort from the knowledge that Putin "would not be able to rule like he used to." Zyuganov appeared to be referring to a hitherto reluctance of opposition-aligned Russians to take to the streets to register their discontent. As discussed above, though, mass action in Russia, while on the rise in recent times, remains a relatively infrequent occurrence in this country, with many Russians seemingly ambivalent about it at a constituent level.

Note:

In late April 2012, Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin indicated he would announce his choice of prime minister on May 7, 2012 -- the very day of his inauguration. Under Russia's constitution, the candidacy of prime minister is proposed by the president but has to be approved by the State



Duma. Given the continued majority of the ruling United Russia Party in parliament, Putin's choice was likely to be ratified. To that end, all eyes were on outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev as Putin's likely choice. Putin's decision in the last week of the month to hand over leadership of the United Russia Party on to Medvedev augmented expectations that the outgoing head of state would be the future head of government.

In early May 2012, ahead of Putin's return to power as head of state, the country was rocked by virulent protests, leading ultimately to the arrests of hundreds of people demonstrating against the incoming president. Among those arrested were anti-corruption activist, Alexey Navalny, leftist activist, Sergei Udaltsov, and former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov. Protesters hurled rocks, bottles, and flares at police, who responded using pepper spray and clubs to beat back the crowds. Several people were injured in the fracas while a journalist was killed when he fell from a fire escape as he tried to film the unrest.

On May 7, 2012, as scheduled, Putin was sworn into office as president of Russia at a heavily-fortified ceremony at the Kremlin States Palace. In his inauguration speech, Putin said that it was his "life's meaning" to serve the country and its people. He also augured democratic progress in Russia saying, "We are entering a new stage of national development. We want to live in a democratic country ... in a successful Russia." With the constitution of the country having been amended to provide for longer presidential terms, Putin would now serve as head of state for a six-year term.

A day later on May 8, 2012, Russia's State Duma (the country's lower house of parliament), overwhelmingly approved Medvedev's candidacy as prime minister in the new government. Medvedev was supported by two of the four Duma factions -- the United Russia Party and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia -- while members of parliament belonging to the Communists and A Just Russia lawmakers voted against him. In a speech to the State Duma, Medvedev said that his new government intended to focus on economic and social issues, and that he would engage all political parties in dialogue.

### **Legislative Branch:**

#### Bicameral *Federalnoye Sobraniye* (Federal Assembly):

Consists of the *Sovyet Federatsiyi* (Federation Council) and the *Gosudarstvennaya Duma* (State Duma)

#### *Sovyet Federatsiyi* (Federation Council):

166 seats; members appointed by the top executive and legislative officials in each of the 88 federal administrative units - oblasts, krays, republics, autonomous okrugs and oblasts, and the federal cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg; members serve four-year terms

#### *Gosudarstvennaya Duma* (State Duma):

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450 seats; all members elected by proportional representation from party lists winning at least seven percent of the vote; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms

Elections:

See Elections Primer below

**Primer on 2011 Parliamentary Elections in Russia:**

Dec. 4, 2011 --

A parliamentary election in Russia was scheduled to take place in December 2011. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev confirmed this timeline when he announced that the country's parliamentary elections would be held on Dec. 4, 2011. Although the Russian Federal Assembly, known as the Federalnoye Sobraniye, was a bicameral entity composed of the Sovyet Federatsiyi (Federation Council) and the Gosudarstvennaya Duma (State Duma), in fact, only the 450 seats in the State Duma were up for election. Typically, members of the State Duma are elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms. The last elections were held in December 2007; the United Russia Party of President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have dominated Russian politics, and won an overwhelming victory of 64 percent in those previous elections. Clearly, United Russia hoped to continue its reign on supremacy following the 2011 elections.

Ahead of the parliamentary contest, the head of Russia's only independent election monitoring group, Golos, was detained for several hours. Lilya Shibanova, who was held at Moscow's main airport after refusing to hand over her laptop to authorities to be checked, said that the move constituted political pressure and intimidation. While she was subsequently released, her group, Golos, was fined for allegedly violating election law. The violation involved the release of "election-related opinion polls and research" in the days ahead of the election -- a time period when such opinion survey research is not allowed to be published.

This scenario notwithstanding, the elections went forward as scheduled and Russians went to the polls to express their political voices. Indeed, President Medvedev noted that Russia's political parties enjoyed "free and equal competition" in elections. His pronouncement would prove to hold some merit as the outcome was not the one that the president might have ideally preferred. With the votes counted, it was clear that the composition of the Duma would be somewhat different in the new parliament. Specifically, it would no longer be as heavily dominated by the United Russia Party of Putin and Medvedev.

Indeed, United Russia appeared to have garnered just under a bare majority in the Duma (49.6 percent) in terms of the popular vote, but 238 seats of the 450-seat lower chamber. In this way, the ruling United Party of Russia would claim victory, albeit with reduced support. The new parliament would see representation by the Communist Party with 19.8 percent, and 92 seats as

well as the social-democratic Fair Russia with 12.8 percent and 64 seats, and the nationalist Liberal Democrats, with 11.42 percent and 56 seats. Prime Minister Putin parlayed the election results into populist political rhetoric, noting that the outcome reflected the "real situation" in the country. Meanwhile, President Medvedev said that the United Russia would have to close ranks with other political parties on certain issues in the new Duma, in order to get some things done. He said, "We will have to take into account the more complex configuration of the Duma and for some issues we will have to join coalition bloc agreements."

Following the outcome of the 2011 parliamentary elections that returned Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's United Russia party to power by a slim parliamentary majority, Russians took to the streets of Moscow in pro-government and anti-government rallies. Anti-government demonstrators were claiming that the elections were flawed and subject to both vote rigging and ballot box stuffing. Indeed, tens of thousands of Russians took to the streets in Moscow on Dec. 10, 2011, to protest the election results. Protests were also reported in St. Petersburg, the southern Siberian city of Barnaul, Krasnoyarsk, Vladivostok, Chita and Khabarovsk. The spirit of discontent was heightened when the Communist Party posted a notice on its website stating that it did not recognize the results of the elections as valid. But supporters of the United Russia Party were also in the streets to rally support for Putin. As well, Russian authorities deploying thousands of police and Interior Ministry troops for the purpose of "ensuring the security of the citizens."

As the mass action continued, according to Amnesty International, more than 420 people were arrested in the demonstrations across Moscow and St. Petersburg, including several journalists and activists. Amnesty International urged the release of the detainees, which were referred to by the human rights group as "prisoners of conscience." Russia's presidential Council for Human Rights also expressed concerns over the election results and the detainment of protesters. Even former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev entered the fray, calling for new elections, given the strong sense of irregularities that had taken hold in Russia.

For his part, on Dec. 11, 2011, Russian President Medvedev posted on his Facebook page that he had called for an investigation into the alleged elections fraud; he also expressed disagreement with the protesters' slogans. His post read as follows: "Under the Constitution, Russian citizens have the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly. People have a right to express their positions and that is what they did yesterday. It is good that everything was held within the law. I agree neither with the slogans, nor the statements made in the protests. Nevertheless, I have ordered probes into all reports from polling stations regarding the compliance with the electoral laws." The Russian president was met by hostile Russian Facebook posters who expressed vituperative scorn for his pledge.

With the Russian citizenry in a less than amiable mood as regards the governing leadership, President Medvedev on Dec. 23, 2011, announced a series of political reforms that would relax restrictions on political parties and presidential candidates. The proposals were ensconced in draft

bills that were sent to the State Duma for approval. According to the Kremlin, the proposal was intended to "liberalize the requirements" for the creation and activities of political parties." Certainly, the changes would make it easier for small political blocs to be registered with the party membership threshold reduced from 50,000 to 500.

The comprehensive reform proposal was not expected to deter protesters from again taking to the streets to register discontent over the entrenched political interests in Russia. Certainly, it was clear that the protest movement was alive and well in Russia on Dec. 24, 2011, when tens of thousands of people gathered in Moscow to once again protest the outcome of the parliamentary elections held weeks earlier.

**Note on next elections:**

The next parliamentary elections were expected to be held in 2016.

**Judicial Branch:**

Constitutional Court; judges appointed by the Federation Council on the recommendation of the president

Supreme Court (highest court for criminal, civil, and administrative cases); judges appointed by the Federation Council on the recommendation of the president

Superior Court of Arbitration (highest court that resolves economic disputes); judges appointed by the Federation Council on the recommendation of the president

**Constitution:**

Adopted Dec. 12, 1993

Note:

In December 2008, the Russian Federation Council, which is the upper house of the parliament, approved the extension of the presidential term from four years to six years. The legislative body also passed the amendment of the Constitution, which will increase the mandate of the deputies of the State Duma, lower house of the parliament, from four years to five years. The draft legislation was pending because for it enter into force, it required approval of two-thirds of regional legislatures. Given the ruling United Russia party's influence and popularity, it was believed that the constitutional amendments would successfully be formalized. These constitutional changes were put forth by President Dmitry Medvedev during his first state-of-the-nation address.

**Legal System:**

Based on civil law system; judicial review of legislative acts

**Political Parties and Leaders:**

seventy eight political parties are registered with Russia's Ministry of Justice but only four parties maintain representation in Russia's national legislature:

A Just Russia [Sergey MIRONOV]

Communist Party of the Russian Federation or CPRF [Gennadiy ZYUGANOV]

Liberal Democratic Party of Russia or LDPR [Vladimir ZHIRINOVSKIY]

United Russia [Dmitriy MEDVEDEV]

**Suffrage:**

18 years of age; universal

**Administrative Divisions:**

46 oblasts (oblastey, singular - oblast), 21 republics (respublik, singular - respublika), 4 autonomous okrugs (avtonomnykh okrugov, singular - avtonomnyy okrug), 9 krays (krayev, singular - kray), 2 federal cities (goroda, singular - gorod), and 1 autonomous oblast (avtonomnaya oblast')

*oblasts:*

Amur (Blagoveshchensk), Arkhangel'sk, Astrakhan', Belgorod, Bryansk, Chelyabinsk, Irkutsk, Ivanovo, Kaliningrad, Kaluga, Kemerovo, Kirov, Kostroma, Kurgan, Kursk, Leningrad, Lipetsk, Magadan, Moscow, Murmansk, Nizhniy Novgorod, Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Orenburg, Orel, Penza, Pskov, Rostov, Ryazan', Sakhalin (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk), Samara, Saratov, Smolensk, Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg), Tambov, Tomsk, Tula, Tver', Tyumen', Ul'yanovsk, Vladimir, Volgograd, Vologda, Voronezh, Yaroslavl'

*republics:*

Adygeya (Maykop), Altay (Gorno-Altaysk), Bashkortostan (Ufa), Buryatiya (Ulan-Ude), Chechnya (Groznyy), Chuvashiya (Cheboksary), Dagestan (Makhachkala), Ingushetiya (Magas), Kabardino-Balkariya (Nal'chik), Kalmykiya (Elista), Karachayevo-Cherkesiya (Cherkessk), Kareliya (Petrozavodsk), Khakasiya (Abakan), Komi (Syktyvkar), Mariy-El (Yoshkar-Ola), Mordoviya (Saransk), North Ossetia (Vladikavkaz), Sakha [Yakutiya] (Yakutsk), Tatarstan (Kazan'), Tyva (Kyzyl), Udmurtiya (Izhevsk)

*autonomous okrugs:*

Chukotka (Anadyr'), Khanty-Mansi (Khanty-Mansiysk), Nenets (Nar'yan-Mar), Yamalo-Nenets (Salekhard)

*krays:*

Altay (Barnaul), Kamchatka (Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy), Khabarovsk, Krasnodar, Krasnoyarsk, Perm', Primorskiy [Maritime] (Vladivostok), Stavropol', Zabaykal'sk (Chita)

*federal cities:*

Moscow (Moskva), Saint Petersburg (Sankt-Peterburg)

*autonomous oblast:*

Yevrey [Jewish] (Birobidzhan)

Note:

Administrative divisions have the same names as their administrative centers (exceptions have the administrative center name following in parentheses)

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## Principal Government Officials

### **Leadership and Cabinet of Russia**

Pres.

Vladimir Vladimirovich PUTIN

Premier

Dmitriy Anatolyevich MEDVEDEV

First Dep. Premier

Igor Ivanovich SHUVALOV

Dep. Premier

Arkadiy Vladimirovich DVORKOVICH

Dep. Premier

Olga Yuryevna GOLODETS

Dep. Premier

Aleksandr Gennadiyevich KHLOPONIN

Dep. Premier

Dmitriy Nikolayevich KOZAK  
Dep. Premier  
Sergey Eduardovich PRIKHODKO  
Dep. Premier  
Dmitriy Olegovich ROGOZIN  
Dep. Premier  
Yuriy Petrovich TRUTNEV  
Min. of Agriculture  
Aleksandr Nikolayevich TKACHEV  
Min. of Civil Defense, Emergencies, & Natural Disasters  
Vladimir Andreyevich PUCHKOV  
Min. of Communications & Mass Media  
Nikolay Anatolyevich NIKIFOROV  
Min. of Construction, Housing, & Public Utilities  
Mikhail Aleksandrovich MEN  
Min. of Culture  
Vladimir Rostislavovich MEDINSKIY  
Min. of Defense  
Sergey Kuzhugetovich SHOYGU  
Min. of Economic Development  
Aleksey Valentinovich ULYUKAYEV  
Min. of Education & Science  
Dmitriy Viktorovich LIVANOV  
Min. of Energy  
Aleksandr Valentinovich NOVAK  
Min. of Far East Development  
Aleksandr Sergeevich GALUSHKA  
Min. of Finance  
Anton Germanovich SILUANOV  
Min. of Foreign Affairs  
Sergey Viktorovich LAVROV  
Min. of Health  
Veronika Igoryevna SKVORTSOVA  
Min. of Industry & Trade  
Denis Valentinovich MANTUROV  
Min. of Internal Affairs  
Vladimir Aleksandrovich KOLOKOLTSEV  
Min. of Justice  
Aleksandr Vladimirovich KONOVALOV  
Min. of Labor & Social Protection  
Maksim Anatolyevich TOPILIN



Min. of Natural Resources & Ecology  
Sergey Yefimovich DONSKOY  
Min. of North Caucasus Affairs  
Lev Vladimirovich KUZNETSOV  
Min. of Sport  
Vitaliy Leontyevich MUTKO  
Min. of Transportation  
Maksim Yuryevich SOKOLOV  
Min. for Liaison With Open Govt.  
Mikhail Anatolyevich ABYZOV  
Dir., Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)  
Mikhail Yefimovich FRADKOV  
Dir., Federal Security Service (FSB)  
Aleksandr Vasilyevich BORTNIKOV  
Sec., Security Council  
Nikolay Platonovich PATRUSHEV  
Procurator Gen.  
Yuriy Yakovlevich CHAYKA  
Chmn., Central Bank of Russia  
Elvira Sakhizadovna NABIULLINA  
Ambassador to the US  
Sergey Ivanovich KISLYAK  
Permanent Representative to the UN, New York  
Vitaliy Ivanovich CHURKIN

-- as of 2016

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## **Leader Biography**

## **Leader Biography**

## **Leadership of Russia**

## **Executive Branch:**

### Head of State:

President Vladimir Putin elected on March 4, 2012; resumed the post of president after serving as prime minister and therefore succeed outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev who was tapped to be the new prime minister.

See 2011/2012 Election Primer below for information regarding forthcoming elections

### Note:

The president is elected by popular vote for a four-year term (eligible for a second term); election last held March 2008 (next to be held in March 2012); the term length was extended to six years in late 2008, to go into effect following the 2012 presidential election; there is no vice president; if the president dies in office, cannot exercise his powers because of ill health, is impeached, or resigns, the premier serves as acting president until a new presidential election is held, which must be within three months; premier appointed by the president with the approval of the Duma.

### Head of Government:

Following election of 2012, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin won the presidency; with the office of the prime minister vacant, all expectations were that incoming President Putin might call on outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev to serve as head of government. To that end, Medvedev's nomination was approved by the State Duma on May 8, 2012.

See 2011/2012 Elections Note below regarding the elections.

### Cabinet:

Ministries of the Government; composed of the premier and his deputies, ministers, and other agency heads; all are appointed by the president and endorsed by the State Duma.

### Note:

There is also a Presidential Administration (PA) that provides staff and policy support to the president, drafts presidential decrees, and coordinates policy among government agencies. The Security Council, originally established as a presidential advisory body in June 1991, is responsible for individual and state security. The Security Council reports directly to the president.

Elections:

See Elections Primer below

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Primer on 2012 Presidential Elections in Russia

March 4, 2012 --

Summary:

Russians voted in a presidential election on March 4, 2012. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who previously served as president, was looking to return to the helm as president of Russia. On election day, after the votes were cast, exit poll data and preliminary results indicated that Putin was on track to win the presidency in the first round with around 60 percent of the vote share.

In Detail:

Note that a presidential election in Russia was expected to be held in 2012. In September 2011, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who previously served as president, said he intended to contest that election with an eye on returning to that post. Current President Dmitry Medvedev indicated support for his mentor, Putin, and that he would consider taking on the role of prime minister himself. President Medvedev said that he was interested in "engaging in the practical work of the government." It was apparent that both Putin and Medvedev wanted to remain in the top posts of Russian government but did not want to contest elections against one another. In mid-October 2011, the ruling United Russia Party confirmed that it would formally nominate Putin as

its presidential candidate for the presidential election scheduled to be held on March 4, 2012. On Nov. 27, 2011, as expected, the United Russia party officially nominated Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as its presidential candidate in the forthcoming election.

For his part, Putin made clear that since he intended to resume his post as president, he expected the current president -- Medvedev -- to hold the post of prime minister in the future. Putin said, "I would like to once again stress that if the voters trust us with forming the government, that they vote for the United Russia and me as the Russian president... Dmitry Anatolyevich (Medvedev) would undoubtedly head the government." Putin called for a national modernization plan to be implemented in Russia as part of an economic development strategy. To that end, he noted, "Russia should end its dependence on oil and gas and perform a transition to the innovative development model."

On Dec. 11, 2011, Russian billionaire and leading industrialist in the precious metals sector Mikhail Prokhorov announced he would contest the presidential election to be held in 2012. Speaking at a news conference, Prokhorov said, "I made probably the most serious decision in my life. I will run for president." Prokhorov seemed realistic about his prospects at the polls against Putin. Indeed, Prokhorov acknowledged that his bid for the presidency was unlikely to receive popular support in 2012, but that he could potentially see inroads over the course of "the next 10 or 15 years."

Another candidate was also known to be contesting the presidential election -- Sergei Mironov, leader of the center-left A Just Russia party. Other candidates included Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov and Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) chief Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. However, Yabloko leader Grigory Yavlinsky was barred from contesting the election as some of the signatures collected in the process of registration were deemed to be invalid.

Note that in January 2012, polling data showed diminishing support for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's presidential bid. The state-run polling agency, VTsIOM, said that Putin commanded about 48 percent in popular support -- far less than his landslide-levels of support in previous elections. Still, that 48 percent -- while diminished in comparison to previous levels of support for Putin --

was nonetheless an improvement over VTsIOM's previous polling data, which showed Putin with only 42 percent of voters' support. Another polling outfit, the independent Levada Center, indicated less optimistic election results for Putin. Indeed, Levada Center forecast Putin to carry only 42 percent of the vote -- not enough for victory in the first round of voting. Meanwhile, VTsIOM said that support for other candidates was holding fairly stable -- with 10 percent for Zyuganov, nine percent for Zhirinovskiy, five percent for Mironov, three percent for Prokhorov, and two percent for Yavlinsky.

By February 2012, VTsIOM found momentum on the side of Putin, with 53.3 percent of respondents saying they support the prime minister who was seeking to return to the presidency. The VTsIOM survey showed Zyuganov was significantly behind with 10 percent of support, while Zhirinovskiy had 8.2 percent, and Prokhorov had 4.6 percent of support. Since Putin would need at least 50 percent of the vote share in the March election to avoid a second-round runoff, this polling result at the start of February 2012 was encouraging for his ambitions.

A week ahead of the Russian presidential election, polling data indicated that Putin was enjoying momentum and was on track to win Russia's presidential election in the first round. According to Levada Center's poll, Putin was expected to receive about 63 percent of the vote share -- well over the 50 percent majority. Following the trends of the weeks before, Zyuganov would come in significantly behind in second place with about 15 percent, while Zhirinovskiy continued to track with about eight percent.

Also in February 2012, tens of thousands of people participated in a number of political rallies in Moscow. The rallies appeared to be roughly divided into two categories: pro-Putin events and anti-Putin demonstrations. The anti-Putin contingent alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections held in December 2011 and urged voters to deny the former president a return to power. Pro-Putin elements accused the opposition of fomenting discord and seeking a revolution that would ultimately result in Russia being too closely linked with Western powers. On Feb. 17, 2012, a pro-Putin rally was organized by Federation of Trade Unions of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region and attracted tens of thousands of participants. The organizers called on Russians to vote

for Putin in the interests of the political stability of Russia. As February 2012 was coming to a close, further such rallies were ongoing. It should be noted that Russian authorities made it clear that even after the presidential election was decided, it would not try to stop protests or such mass action, which could well ensue.

The political landscape of Russia at the time in late February 2012 was also dominated by news of a foiled plot, apparently by Chechen rebels, to assassinate Putin. That news was likely to remind Russians of Putin's leading role in the fight against Chechen Islamic militant separatists. While human rights activists have criticized Putin for orchestrating a harsh crackdown against the movement, many Russians have applauded him for his hard line actions in this regard, given Chechen militants' willingness to use terrorism to further their aims. Accordingly, Putin's national security record could well be beneficial to him at the polls.

As March 2012 began, and as the Russian presidential election loomed only days away, the Russian Central Electoral Commission (CEC) rejected complaints submitted by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and the League of Voters about the unbalanced provision of broadcast time by a number of channels to presidential candidates. The CEC resolution determined that the complaints lacked objective foundation and concluded that there was "no evidence of equality violations of the candidates for the post of Russian president in the placing of informational materials on Channel One, Rossiya 1, Centre TV or REN TV, or of any discrimination concerning their access to airtime."

That case, along with the aforementioned political rallies, drew attention to the matter of a functioning opposition in Russia. Was there an effective opposition force in Russia presenting a serious challenge to the traditional power base in this country? Does Russia embrace the notion of vigorous and open debate, common in mature democracies? Or does Russia's autocratic legacy prevail at the socio-cultural level? Is Russia a venue for thriving political activism, or, it is a country that continues to adhere to a sense of order?

While not a direct response to these questions, the news agency, Interfax, released a survey on the

matter of opposition forces and political mass action. The survey showed that the majority of Russians -- 55 percent -- believe that political opposition should exist in the country. The survey, which was conducted by Public Opinion Foundation, also found that most Russians believe that the country's authorities should be more responsive to the opposition. That being said, 12 percent of respondents expressed a penchant for autocracy, saying that there was no need for an opposition. About a quarter of respondents said that they did not believe a political opposition actually existed in Russia. Close to 80 percent of those who replied to the survey questions said that they were not interested in participating in protest action; only 13 percent responded positively to the idea of protest participation. That all being said, an overwhelming 84 percent of respondents said that they did not believe Russia was in need of any kind of revolution at this time.

Perhaps those last two data points would prove to be the most salient indicators of the outcome of the forthcoming Russian presidential election. Stated differently, with the vast majority of Russians not enthused about either the notion of radical change, or, participating in protest action, it was quite possible that they would vote in favor of the status quo. The status quo would, more than likely, line up with Putin as president.

Heading into the Russian presidential election, the main question would be whether or not Putin could win outright victory in the first round. Polling data right before election day gave Putin a clear majority; it was yet to be seen if this would hold on March 4, 2012. Note also that according to Russia's Central Elections Commission, almost 670 international monitors from various international, national, and regional agencies, were accredited to observe the Russian presidential election to be held on March 4, 2012.

On election day, turnout was reported to be high at 58 percent -- notably higher than the level of turnout in the 2008 election. After Russian voters had cast their ballots, exit poll data and preliminary results indicated that Putin had won election, having secured around 60 percent of the vote share. Other candidates were trailing significantly behind, including Putin's toughest rival, Gennady Zyuganov. Given the fact that he had crossed the 50 percent majority threshold outright, Putin avoided having to contest a second round.



In an appearance with current President Dmitry Medvedev, Putin claimed victory declaring, "I promised you we would win, and we won," he said. "Glory to Russia!" He continued saying, "We have won in an open and honest battle. We proved that no-one can force anything on us." Outside the Kremlin, pro-Putin supporters gathered in the tens of thousands with flags and banners with messages such as "We believe in Putin," to celebrate the election victory for their standard bearer and his imminent return to the helm of the Russian presidency.

Not all Russians were celebrating the election outcome, though, as opposition groups reported widespread fraud and charged that there were incidences of multiple voting by individual persons. Indeed, activists were outraged about the level of voting violations, while election observers were pointing to a phenomenon called "carousel voting," whereby busloads of voters were driven around to different polling stations to cast ballots on a repeated basis. Still, Putin's campaign chief, Stanislav Govorukhin, disputed these claims, instead asserting that this 2012 election was "the cleanest in Russian history."

International monitors from the the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe had its own assessment of the Russian presidential contest. The OSCE said that although Putin's challengers were able to compete openly, the election conditions favored Putin's election. In response, the British government called for Russia to consider this finding seriously. British Foreign Secretary William Hague said in a statement. "A Russia with greater political freedoms, including the registration of political parties, freedom of assembly and freedom of the media is in the interests of Russians and of the wider world." Striking a similar chord, Human Rights Watch called on Putin to undertake key reforms once he begins his new term as president.

There were reports that Moscow was under tight security after the election, and all expectations were that anticipated opposition protests would ensue in the future. For his part, opposition leader, Zyuganov, characterized the elections as "unfair and unworthy," but encouraged Russians to take comfort from the knowledge that Putin "would not be able to rule like he used to." Zyuganov appeared to be referring to a hitherto reluctance of opposition-aligned Russians to take to the streets to register their discontent. As discussed above, though, mass action in Russia, while

on the rise in recent times, remains a relatively infrequent occurrence in this country, with many Russians seemingly ambivalent about it at a constituent level.

Note:

In late April 2012, Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin indicated he would announce his choice of prime minister on May 7, 2012 -- the very day of his inauguration. Under Russia's constitution, the candidacy of prime minister is proposed by the president but has to be approved by the State Duma. Given the continued majority of the ruling United Russia Party in parliament, Putin's choice was likely to be ratified. To that end, all eyes were on outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev as Putin's likely choice. Putin's decision in the last week of the month to hand over leadership of the United Russia Party on to Medvedev augmented expectations that the outgoing head of state would be the future head of government.

In early May 2012, ahead of Putin's return to power as head of state, the country was rocked by virulent protests, leading ultimately to the arrests of hundreds of people demonstrating against the incoming president. Among those arrested were anti-corruption activist, Alexey Navalny, leftist activist, Sergei Udaltsov, and former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov. Protesters hurled rocks, bottles, and flares at police, who responded using pepper spray and clubs to beat back the crowds. Several people were injured in the fracas while a journalist was killed when he fell from a fire escape as he tried to film the unrest.

On May 7, 2012, as scheduled, Putin was sworn into office as president of Russia at a heavily-fortified ceremony at the Kremlin States Palace. In his inauguration speech, Putin said that it was his "life's meaning" to serve the country and its people. He also augured democratic progress in Russia saying, "We are entering a new stage of national development. We want to live in a democratic country ... in a successful Russia." With the constitution of the country having been amended to provide for longer presidential terms, Putin would now serve as head of state for a six-year term.

A day later on May 8, 2012, Russia's State Duma (the country's lower house of parliament),

overwhelmingly approved Medvedev's candidacy as prime minister in the new government. Medvedev was supported by two of the four Duma factions -- the United Russia Party and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia -- while members of parliament belonging to the Communists and A Just Russia lawmakers voted against him. In a speech to the State Duma, Medvedev said that his new government intended to focus on economic and social issues, and that he would engage all political parties in dialogue.

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## Foreign Relations

### General Relations

Russia has taken important steps to become a full partner in the world's principal political groupings. On Dec. 27, 1991, Russia assumed the seat formerly held by the Soviet Union in the United Nations (UN) Security Council. Russia also is a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). It signed the NATO Partnership for Peace initiative on June 22, 1994. On May 27, 1997, NATO and Russia signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act, which provides the basis for an enduring and robust partnership between the Alliance and Russia--one that can make an important contribution to European security architecture in the 21st century. On June 24, 1994, Russia and the European Union (EU) signed a partnership and cooperation agreement.

Russia has played an important role in helping mediate international conflicts and has been particularly actively engaged in trying to promote a peace following the conflict in Kosovo. Russia is a co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process and supports UN and multilateral initiatives in the Persian Gulf, Cambodia, Angola, the former Yugoslavia, and Haiti. Russia is a founding member of the Contact Group and (since the Denver Summit in June 1997) a member of the G-8. In November 1998, Russia joined APEC. Russia has contributed troops to the NATO-led stabilization force in Bosnia and has affirmed its respect for international law and OSCE principles. It has accepted U.N. and/or OSCE involvement in instances of regional conflict in neighboring countries, including the dispatch of observers to Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

## **Regional Relations**

### *Relations With the CIS*

The collapse of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) or Soviet Union on Dec. 25, 1991, was precipitated by the declarations of independence by several Soviet republics and finally by the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, also known as CIS, on Dec. 21, 1991. The CIS was formed by the leaders of 12 of the 15 republics of the U.S.S.R. as a means of preserving political and economic ties between the republics, while allowing each to pursue independent statehood. In addition to Russia, the member states of the CIS are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The three Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) did not join the CIS for both geopolitical and historical reasons.

Although Russia is the most important member of the CIS, the organization is not a continuation of the former U.S.S.R. in a less centralized guise. Rather, the CIS is an organization that fosters a continuation of some of the political and economic relations between its members that occurred during the Soviet era. As of January 2000, the leaders of the CIS had held 23 summit meetings to discuss matters of mutual concern.

Russia's relations with the other CIS members, however, have not always been characterized by mutual cooperation and trust. Indeed, the early relations between Russia and many of the CIS member states were strained by the insistence of Russia that Russian troops remain on their territories to protect, sometimes large, Russian minorities. (The emigration of Russians to the republics encouraged during Stalin's rule had resulted in large Russian minorities throughout the Newly-Independent States, or NIS). The Russian military participated, at times covertly, in conflicts on the Afghanistan border of Tajikistan, in Georgia, Moldova, and in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russian troops remain engaged in some of these areas still.

One important source of tension between Russia and some CIS members concerned the status of former Soviet military assets claimed by Russia. The vital Black Sea Fleet and military installations on the Crimean peninsula severely strained relations between Russia and Ukraine for most of the 1990s. In May 1997, an agreement was finally reached that allowed Russia to lease parts of the naval base at Sevastopol and compensated the Ukraine for ships and other equipment, which previously belonged to the U.S.S.R. Other disputes between Russia and CIS members over military assets have also been settled during the 1990s.

In terms of economic relations, Russia has sought some economic integration with, and among, CIS member states. Although the goal of a free trade zone among CIS members has not been met, Russia has reached bilateral agreements with some CIS members that strengthen economic ties. In

1996, Russia signed customs agreements with Belarus and Kazakhstan. In 1997, the President Yeltsin of Russia and President Lukashenka of Belarus signed an agreement to form a confederation between the two states. The subsequent deterioration in relations between the two countries, however, suspended implementation of the agreement. By January 2000, a new agreement had been reached, signed and ratified - creating an, as yet, uncertain confederation between the two states. In 1998, Russia reached an accord with Kazakhstan on the division of Caspian seabed rights. Much of Russia's economic relations with CIS members concern matters relating to the trade in petroleum and natural gas. Both existing and proposed oil and gas pipelines in the Caucasus remain a major foreign policy concern of Russia.

Despite the Russian government's efforts, the CIS has not enhanced its reputation. On the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CIS, President Vladimir Putin welcomed the leaders of 11 former Soviet republics to the Kremlin on Nov. 30, 2001, and urged them to strengthen their ties within the Commonwealth of Independent States. Putin said the recent terrorist attacks in the United States demonstrated the need for forging strong international partnerships.

In 2009, Georgia moved to withdraw from the CIS. Consequently the body would now be composed of 11 countries in total, including Russia.

### *Relations with Ukraine*

Despite a November 1990 agreement to respect one another's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Ukraine's relations with Russia have been strained due to its concern over Russia's intentions. One important source of tension between Russia and Ukraine concerned the status of former Soviet military assets claimed by Russia. The vital Black Sea Fleet and military installations on the Crimean peninsula severely strained relations between Russia and Ukraine for most of the 1990s. In May 1997, an agreement was finally reached that allowed Russia to lease parts of the naval base at Sevastopol and provided compensation to Ukraine for ships and other equipment, which previously belonged to the U.S.S.R.

Relations with Russia improved somewhat with the late May 1998 signing of the bilateral Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. In September 1998, President Kuchma met with President Yeltsin and discussed the financial crisis and the possibility of a free-trade zone within the Commonwealth of Independent States. However, in December 1998 ratification of the Friendship Treaty was delayed in the Russian Duma due to Ukraine's growing relationship with NATO, the delayed relinquishment of Sevastopol, the home of the Black Sea Fleet, and alleged discrimination against Russian-speaking Ukrainians.

Ukraine's development of closer ties to the West, in particular to NATO, the European Union, and the United States, will somehow have to be reconciled with Ukraine's proximity to Russia and

reliance on that neighbor. In particular, in March 2000, Ukraine was significantly in debt to Russia for gas shipments. The exact amount owed is under dispute, with Ukraine allowing a \$1.4 billion dollar debt, and Russia asserting that the amount due was closer to \$3 billion dollars.

Geographic proximity and dependence on resources do not provide a complete picture of the ties between Russia and Ukraine. Historical and linguistic ties also bind the two countries together. For more than 350 years, southern and eastern Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire; this region then spent more than 70 years as part of the Soviet Union. For more than 50 years, western Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. Leftwing Ukrainian politicians have repeatedly raised the possibility of unification with Russia. In the 1999 presidential elections, second-place finisher, Petro Symonenko, was in favor of such a union. In the 1994 presidential elections, it was Leonid Kuchma who campaigned on a platform of greater integration with Russia.

Ukrainian-Russian relations were expected to take a turn for the better. On his first three-nation foreign mission since being elected president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin met in early April 2000 in Kyiv with President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine in order to raise relations with the neighboring country to a "qualitatively better level." The two heads of state also discussed deepening cooperation in arms production and building nuclear reactors, bilateral trade as well as resolving the question of Ukraine's gas payment debt. Both presidents hailed the talks, with Putin calling them a "good base for developing" relations, while Kuchma said he was "deeply satisfied." During his visit, Putin indicated Russia's willingness to help Ukraine complete two new nuclear reactors that are meant to compensate for the planned closure of the Chernobyl nuclear plant. Kuchma explained to his Russian counterpart that gas companies are to blame for the theft of gas from export pipelines headed through Ukraine to European markets.

As noted above, Ukraine claims it owes Russia some \$1.4 billion for gas, while Russia insists that the sum is closer to \$2.1 billion. A joint commission was expected to look into the matter. However, Putin praised Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko's offer of a "constructive" plan for debt repayment. In the course of the visit, Putin restated Russia's opposition to any further eastward expansion of NATO. Putin said Russia would reconsider its anti-NATO position if NATO would reconsider its adversarial position about Russia.

The appointment of a new Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine resulted in a new series of official statements concerning an improvement in relations with Russia. President Leonid Kuchma, among others, said in October 2000, after reappointing Anatoly Zlenko as minister for foreign affairs, that the Russian component of Ukraine's foreign policy could not be of secondary importance and needed to be enhanced.

Presidents Kuchma and Putin signed in February 2001, in the Ukrainian industrial city Dnipropetrovsk, an agreement to coordinate electricity distribution between the two countries. The agreement will allow Russia to sell electricity in Ukraine, where tariffs are higher than in Russia,

and vice versa. Commenting on expanding relations with a Ukrainian president who is under fire, Putin said, "Regardless of the complex political situation, we will work with the president elected legally by the Ukrainian people, Leonid Kuchma."

In May 2001, President Putin appointed veteran Russian statesman and former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin ambassador to Ukraine.

Russia and Ukraine continued to maintain stable relations. In September 2001, the Ukrainian military accidentally shot down a Russian commercial airliner carrying Israeli citizens to Russia for a religious retreat. Despite its initial denials, President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine ultimately admitted the country's mistake and accepted full responsibility for the catastrophe. He said Ukraine would pay reparations to the families of the victims as well as to Russia. Despite this potentially explosive issue, President Putin did not castigate his Ukrainian counterpart, who fired the Minister for Defense Gen. Aleksander Kuzmuk and other military officers.

In 2004 and through 2005, Russian-Ukrainian relations were expected to take a negative turn following the elections in Ukraine. Indeed, the pro-Western orientation of Ukrainian President Yushchenko led to speculation that he wished to move his country out of Russia's orbit of influence.

In 2006, a dispute over the price of gas sold by Russian gas entity Gazprom to Ukraine resulted in the halting of the sale of gas, and the heightening of tensions between the two countries.

In early 2009, Russia and Ukraine were again at odds over a gas deal. At issue was Russia's refusal to implement an agreement with Ukraine to resume the flow of gas to Europe. The central issues in the dispute involved Ukraine's gas debts to Russia and accusations that it (Ukraine) siphoned off gas intended for other European customers. Meanwhile, there was no agreement about how much Ukraine should pay Russia for gas, or, how much Russia should pay Ukraine for transporting gas to other European destinations. The dispute has left several countries in the region without gas, and with Russian energy company Gazprom unwilling to restart gas supplies, even as wintry conditions prevailed in the region. As such, the European Union intervened in an energetic shuttle diplomacy effort to resolve the matter. On January 12, 2009, it was announced that Russia would resume gas supplies to other European countries via Ukraine.

### *Relations with Belarus*

Late 2006 and early 2007 saw an imbroglio involving Russia and Belarus. In late 2006, an agreement was forged in which Belarus was largely compelled to accept Russian gas supplies at double the previous price. Belarus subsequently retaliated by imposing a new tax on Russian oil shipments that traversed the country, while Russia reacted by refusing to pay the new taxes.



The situation became increasingly heated in the second week of January 2007 when the Russian state-owned pipeline firm Transneft closed the Druzhba or "Friendship" pipe. Russia also accused Belarus of siphoning off oil supplies as an illicit means of payment for unpaid taxes and duties. Representatives of the two countries held talks and the situation was eventually resolved. The flow of Russian oil resumed, along with assurances being advanced that such stoppages would not occur again.

Belarus struck a cooperative tone with Russia, offering at the close of 2007 to allow Russia to host missiles on its soil if the United States moved forward with a controversial plan to build military bases in Poland and the Czech Republic.

### *Relations with Moldova*

There has been tension with Moldova over the presence of Russian troops in the breakaway Trans-Dnestr region. In March 2005, at the time of the Moldovan election, about 100 Russians were barred from entering the country. While the Russians claimed they were election monitors, Moldovan authorities said they were not registered as such and they were likely to disrupt the election. A month prior, several Russians were expelled from Moldova under suspicion of spying, while Russia threatened sanctions against Moldova. At the heart of the Moldovan-Russian imbroglio has been the matter of Russian troops stationed in Trans-Dnestr region where there is a large number of ethnic Russians living. Moldova has called the Russian presence there an illegal occupation.

The Trans-Dniestr issue returned to the political landscape in 2006 when an explosion on a bus in the city of Tiraspol left several people dead and around 20 people injured. The political landscape of Trans-Dniester had been imbued with discord since March 2006 when new customs regulations were instituted by Moldova and Ukraine requiring exporters in Trans-Dniester to register with the Moldovan authorities. Officials in Trans-Dniester administration said that the new rules constituted a blockade of sorts.

### *Relations with Estonia*

Russia has had to deal with its post-Soviet relationship with former republics. In the case of Estonia, tensions have dominated the relationship. First, nearly 30 percent of Estonia's total population is ethnic Russian. Estonia's citizenship laws - which require knowledge of Estonia - have angered Russia, as it views these laws as discriminatory against ethnic Russians in Estonia. Second, Estonia has been investigating and prosecuting former Soviet officials for alleged crimes against humanity during World War II and the Soviet occupation thereafter. Russia resents what it sees as a fervent pursuit of former Soviet officials in the face of a less than equally fervent pursuit of Estonians who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. Estonia's tendency to give convicted war criminals suspended sentences (as opposed to actual prison sentences) has

somewhat ameliorated the situation.

In 2000, relations between Estonia and Russia took center stage as the two countries expelled diplomats from within their own borders over a spying imbroglio.

In March 2005, there was something of a diplomatic flap when President Ruutel decided to decline an invitation to attend the celebrations in Moscow scheduled for May to mark the anniversary of the end of World War II. Nevertheless, in May 2005, the two countries signed a treaty delimiting their shared border. The treaty was ratified a month later by parliament, however, an amendment was introduced in the language of the legislation that referenced Soviet occupation. The Russian government in Moscow said it would not accept such language and withdrew from the agreement in June 2005.

In February 2007, the Estonian parliament passes legislation banning the display of monuments valorizing the period of Soviet rule. The law effectively set in motion a series of actions, that would ultimately result in political unrest.

### *Relations with Czech Republic*

A diplomatic imbroglio unfolded in Europe when on August 17, 2008, the Czech Republic expelled a Russian diplomat and called on a second one not to return to Prague from vacation. At issue were allegations by the Czech government that the Russians were carrying out clandestine intelligence activities. The allegations were made after Czech intelligence officials came upon information indicating that the two Russian diplomats likely worked for the Russian secret service, and indeed, that one of them was actually a military attache. The scenario was reported in the Czech media, however, the Czech government would not confirm the situation. Instead, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, Milan Repka, said: "The ministry does not comment on this type of information, whether it has happened or not." That said, the actual expulsion did not appear to be a matter of debate since Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov condemned the decision. Lavrov said in an interview with the Russian news agency RIA Novosti, "This is yet another provocation." It was unknown as to whether or not Russia would take the normal reciprocal action of expelling two Czech diplomats from Moscow.

### *Relations with Georgia*

There are an estimated 3,400 rebels scattered throughout Chechnya and the area around Georgia and the Pankisi Gorge has become a strategic area for the rebels. Tensions between the two countries increased in tandem with Russia's accusation that Georgia has allowed Chechen rebels to move freely and enact terrorist attacks in the area. Russia also claims that after carrying out attacks, the rebels usually flee across the border into Georgia, including the Pankisi Gorge, where they enjoy a safe haven. For its part, Georgia accuses Russia of violating its airspace as it attempts

to deal with the rebel threat. Although joint patrols have been established to deal with this transborder issue, at the time of writing, there was no clear resolution. It remains unclear how Putin intends to handle the situation in the long-term, but international observers have expressed increased concern.

In September 2006, Russia and Georgia became embroiled in a diplomatic imbroglio. At issue was the arrest of five Russian officers in Georgia on the basis of allegations of spying.

The Russian government in Moscow demanded their release, however, the Georgian government in Tbilisi was itself compelling the handover of a sixth Russian officer. That officer was apparently within Russian army headquarters, which was surrounded by police in the Georgian capital. The Georgian Interior Ministry claimed that it had evidence showing that the Russian officers had been "personally carrying out intelligence activities." It also linked Russia with separatist activities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In response, Russia ordered the withdrawal of diplomatic officials, including the Russian ambassador, from Georgia using emergency aircrafts. Russia additionally urged its citizens to refrain from travel to Georgia and stopped processing visa requests from Georgian nationals. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Georgia's actions were a manifestation of an anti-Russian policy and he warned that he would refer the matter to the United Nations. The situation was not helped by Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili's dismissal of Russia's reaction as being "hysteria."

By the start of October 2006, Russian President Vladimir Putin entered the fray, saying that Georgia's arrest of the Russian army officers for spying was tantamount to "an act of state terrorism with hostage-taking." His remarks came following a meeting with the security council of his government and a day after his government said that it would halt its scheduled withdrawal of troops from Georgia. The presence of Russian troops in Georgia had been a source of consternation for Georgians and their exit in 2008 had been highly-anticipated. Georgian Foreign Minister Gela Bezhushvili responded to that bit of news by saying that his government expected Russia to honor its prior commitment.

On October 2, 2006, Georgia said that it was releasing the Russian military officers. The situation was not automatically resolved, however, as Russia went forward with sanctions against Georgia, including the aforementioned travel restrictions, but also including deportations of Georgians and raids on Georgian-owned businesses. Georgia protested Russia's actions, with Foreign Minister Bezhushvili characterizing it as being beyond xenophobia. By October 9, 2006, Georgia said that it would turn back any aircraft with deported Georgians from Russia.

Tensions between the two countries were not helped by a dispute in late 2006 over the price of gas supplies provided to Georgia from Russia's Gazprom.

By March 2007, ties between the two countries -- Georgia and Russia -- deteriorated as a result of

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the poor medical conditions and deaths of several ethnic Georgians who were deported from Russia during the aforementioned diplomatic imbroglio, which started with the detainment of Russian officers on charges of spying in the fall of 2006. Georgians expressed outrage at the deaths of the deportees, and the Georgian government in the spring of 2007 launched charges of human rights violations against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Russia responded by saying that it believed that it had the right to deport illegal migrants, and as such, it was doubtful that the court would consider the case.

In August, 2007, Georgia accused Russia of violating its airspace for a second time within weeks. The Georgian Foreign Ministry said that a Russian fighter jet had flown a few miles into its territory, according to tracking data from the country's air defense system. The Russian government in Moscow denied the incursion saying that its planes were not flying close to the border with Georgia on the day in question. The incident followed a similar episode earlier in the month when Georgia accused Russia of violating its border and dropping a missile close to the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. Russia vociferously denied that accusation as well. Two days after the second claim by the Caucasus country that Russia had violated its border, the Georgian Interior Ministry announced that it had fired on what it claimed to be a Russian aircraft after it allegedly violated Georgian airspace. Russia again denied the claim and noted that there were no reports of missing Russian aircraft.

These incidences have been indicative of a further devolution of poor relations between the two countries. In the background, various issues have worked to sour Russian-Georgian relations. Of grave importance has been the Georgian region of Abkhazia, which has been held by Russian-backed separatists. Georgia views Russia's decision to back the separatists as a virtual annexation. As well, the two countries have been involved in imbroglios involving spying, the expulsion of ethnic Georgians from Russia as a result, as well as a dispute over the price of Russian gas to Georgia. Another source of tension comes from Russian accusations that Georgia is hiding Chechen militants in the Pankisi Gorge area, the home of Chechen kin people, the Kists. Since Saakashvili's ascent to power in 2004, relations between the two countries have devolved. Increased tensions have been blamed not only on the separatist campaigns which have been ongoing for some time, or the presence (until 2008) of two remaining Soviet-era military bases, but also on Saakashvili's Western orientation (away from Russia and toward the European Union and NATO).

NOTE: In August 2008, Russia and Georgia were embroiled in a violent conflict over South Ossetia. See "Special Report" below for details.

### *Relations with Poland*

On September 16, 2010, Chechen separatist leader Akhmed Zakayev was arrested in Poland. He was in that European country to attend a two-day Chechen summit when he was detained.

Zakayev was then subject to several hours of interrogation by Polish police, who were acting on the basis of an international arrest warrant issued by Russia, which sought his extradition on terrorism, murder and kidnapping charges. For his part, Zakayev has denied being involved in terrorism, and indeed, could be considered something of a moderate since he has called for negotiations with Russia -- a position not embraced by most extremist Chechen separatists. Since being granted asylum in the United Kingdom in the first part of the 2000s, Zakayev has been known to travel within Europe. But in this case, he was arrested by Polish authorities who had no choice but to act on the decision by Interpol to place Zakayev on its most wanted list, at Russia's request.

Attention was soon focused on the question of if Zakayev would actually be extradited to Russia to face charges. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that although the Chechen separatist leader had been arrested, there was no guarantee that Polish courts would rule in favor of extradition to Russia. Meanwhile, the head of the international affairs committee of the Russian Duma or lower house of parliament, Konstantin Kosachev, applauded Poland for taking its international obligations seriously.

A day later on September 17, 2010, a Polish court ruled that Zakayev could be released pending its decision on the matter of extradition. But even if the Polish court eventually ruled in favor of extradition, according to Polish Finance Minister Jan Rostowski, the government of Poland still had the power to intervene on behalf of Zakayev. Russia responded to events unfolding in Poland in a less than favorable manner this time. Konstantin Kosachev warned Poland that its failure to act in accordance with international law would yield deleterious consequences.

Despite successful offensive operations in the North Caucasus, violence by Islamist separatist militants has been ongoing for some time, effectively plaguing areas in the region, such as Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan.

## **Other Significant Relations**

### *Relations With the United States*

The United States remains committed to maintaining a constructive relationship with Russia in which we seek to expand areas of cooperation and effectively work through differences. The United States continues to support Russia's political and economic transformation and its integration into major international organizations. These steps, in conjunction with achievements in considerably reducing nuclear weapons, have greatly enhanced the security of the United States.

The intensity and frequency of contacts between President Yeltsin and President Clinton, most recently the Moscow Summit in August 1998, are indicative of the strong commitment to working

together on a broad range of issues. These include European security, reducing the threat to our countries posed by weapons of mass destruction, and economic cooperation, especially American investment in Russia.

Relations between Putin and the new Bush administration started off to a promising start despite grave differences on issues, such as missile defense. They were strengthened when Russia pledged to join the global war on terror following the terrorist attacks on the United States on 2001.

Relations were increasingly strained in the lead up to the war in Iraq in 2003 and then in the immediate aftermath.

Relations with the United States took center stage again in 2005 when United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Russia. During her visit, however, she took time to criticize President Vladimir Putin's political weight by suggesting that he had too much personal power. In this regard, Rice expressed concern over the lack of an independent media in Russia, and she also repudiated the accumulation of political power that Putin had gathered since taking office.

Perhaps most important to the Bush administration in the United States, however, was the matter of foreign investors' rights. In this regard, the Bush administration would apparently be watching closely the fraud and tax evasion trial of the founder of the Yukos oil company, Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Some, perhaps even including those within the Bush administration, have been of the mind that the case against Khodorkovsky was manufactured purely to punish him for his political ambitions. Naturally, those in the Kremlin have viewed the situation quite differently. In May 2005, Mikhail Khodorkovsky and an associate were found guilty of six charges, including tax evasion, and was sentenced to nine years in prison. The verdict was watched closely by Washington. Indeed, it was interpreted symbolically as Russia's approach to foreign investment.

A year later in May 2006, on the heels of sharp criticism by United States Vice President Dick Cheney of Russia's human rights record, the Kommersant business newspaper said that the matter augured the start of a new Cold War. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov offered no comment on the content of Cheney's position, however, he criticized the forum in Lithuania where Cheney spoke. He noted that such meetings were convened for the purpose of uniting a cadre of interest groups against someone. Meanwhile, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev said that Cheney's speech appeared to be "a provocation and interference in Russia's internal affairs in terms of its content, form and place."

The matter preceded a scheduled meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President George W. Bush at a key industrial summit to be convened in St. Petersburg. At that meeting in July 2006, during a joint press address by Putin and Bush, the American president called on Russia to democratize, and said that he hoped that the country would enjoy the kind of



freedom now being enjoyed by Iraq. Putin responded to this statement by asserting that the example of Iraq -- now embroiled in what some were calling a civil war -- was not one he thought Russia should emulate.

In April 2007, Russia responded negatively to plans by the Bush administration in the United States (U.S.) to develop a missile defense system in eastern Europe. Russian President Vladimir Putin decried the notion, indicating that he viewed such a missile system as being more than simply a defense plan. To this end, he said, "This is not just a defense system, this is part of the U.S. nuclear weapons system." President Putin went so far as to warn the U.S. that its plans in this regard would run the risk of mutual destruction, saying, "The threat of causing mutual damage and even destruction increases many times." Making clear its hard-line opposition to the notion of a U.S. missile defense system, President Putin also threatened to withdraw participation in a treaty limiting conventional weaponry in Europe.

NATO responded to Russia's threat to suspend its membership in the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) with its own concern. Indeed, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer made it clear that the treaty was a keystone of security and stability in Europe.

With the United States planning to construct missile defense facilities in Europe, Russia had already expressed its opposition to such a plan. But in early June 2007, ahead of the G-8 summit of key world leaders, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that his country could be forced to point weapons at Europe for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Russia also announced that it had tested an RS-24 ballistic missile a week prior.

Both moves appeared oriented toward the maintenance of "strategic balance" in the region. To this end, Putin pointed to the fact that the United States had already altered the strategic balance by withdrawing from the anti-ballistic missile treaty in 2002. In an interview published in the Italian newspaper, *Corriere Della Sera*, he made the Russian position clear by asserting, "If the American nuclear potential grows in European territory, we have to give ourselves new targets in Europe."

The climate of bilateral relations thawed somewhat at the summit when United States President Bush said, "They're [Russians] not a military threat." He also called for the United States to work with Russia in dealing cooperatively on the issue.

Then, Russian President Putin proposed an alternate solution to the missile defense issue when he suggested that both countries utilize the radar system at Gabala in Azerbaijan to develop a shield that would cover Europe. In this plan, incoming missiles from hostile countries could be detected. Putin noted that "This work should be multi-faceted with the engagement of the states concerned in Europe." He also added that if his country and this United States worked together in an open manner to develop missile defense capabilities, "then we will have no problems."



Bush responded to the proposal by saying that it was an interesting option and noted that he and Putin would engage on a "strategic dialogue" on the subject in a forthcoming visit of his Russian counterpart to the United States. Bush' senior advisor on national security, Stephen Hadley's characterization of the Russian proposal as "a positive development" augured a possible productive resolution to the matter.

But on October 12, 2007, missile talks between the United States (U.S.) and Russia ended in failure. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had described the bilateral talks with Russia saying, "We discussed a range of proposals we hope they will accept." Her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, said that the proposals required study and in the interim, the U.S. should not work on the missile defense system. But the U.S. rejected Russia's request to put an end to the plan, with Rice asserting that discussions with Poland and the Czech Republic on the deployment of system would go on as anticipated. Responding to the U.S. position, Putin said, "One day you and I may decide that missile defense systems can be deployed on the Moon, but before we get there the possibility of reaching an agreement may be lost because you will have implemented your own plans."

Meanwhile, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates argued that that the missile defense system was not directed at Russia but at rogue states including Iran and North Korea. However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the very idea of the missile defense shield system was based on the false assumption that Iran presented a nuclear threat. Lavrov also criticized the U.S. for hinting at the use of force against Iran, saying that such an approach contravenes against the notion of a negotiated solution to the Iranian problem. Russia also reiterated its position that its own early warning radar systems in Azerbaijan could easily be used by the U.S. But Gates responded that radar was incapable of guiding interceptor missiles.

U.S. intransigence on the matter thus paved the way for Russia to make good on its earlier threat to withdraw its participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which was aimed at limiting conventional weaponry in Europe. Russia also warned that it could withdraw its participation in the 20-year old Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which limits both U.S. and Russian short and medium range missiles, and resulted in the elimination of thousands of missiles in both countries.

The 2008 election of Barack Obama in the United States was cautiously viewed as an entry point toward improved bilateral relations. Indeed, in a speech delivered to the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States capital of Washington D.C., Russian President Dmitry Medvedev expressed hopes that his country would enjoy improved relations with the United States under an Obama administration. Russian President Medvedev said that United States President-Elect Barack Obama had the potential to rebuild "necessary mutual trust" that had waned during the Bush years. The Russian president also hinted at possible compromise with the United States over the controversial plan for a United States missile shield in Europe. He said, "We have a chance to

solve the problem through either agreeing on a global system or, as a minimum, to find a solution on the existing programs, which would suit the Russian Federation.”

As of 2009, the two countries appeared to be working cooperatively on a host of issues including the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea. On the issue of Georgia, where bilateral ties have been weaker, the tenor of the discussions appeared cordial. Notably, when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov traveled to Washington to meet with both Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, both sides expressed a desire for cooperation. “We have expressed on several occasions our concerns about Georgia,” Clinton said. “But it is, I think, old thinking to say that we have a disagreement in one area, therefore we shouldn’t work in something else that is of overwhelming importance.” Perhaps most importantly, both Lavrov and Clinton made clear that their countries had a shared interest in maintaining stability in Georgia.

### *Relations with the United Kingdom*

The mysterious poisoning death of a former Russian spy, Alexander Litvinenko, in a London hospital in late 2006 resurfaced in mid-2007. In July 2007, Russian Prosecutor-General Yuri Chayka ruled against the extradition of a former KGB agent Andrei Lugovoi, whom the British authorities said was responsible for Litvinenko's death. Chayka said that extradition of Lugovoi to the United Kingdom would contradict the Russian constitution. Meanwhile, Russia said that it would carry out its own investigation and would be willing to prosecute a Russian citizen accused of a crime in another country, using "evidence provided by the foreign state."

For its part, the United Kingdom had earlier noted that Russia had signed the European Union 1957 convention on extradition. Now with the official Russian decision on the extradition issued, the British authorities responded by expelling four diplomats from the Russian embassy in London. The British Foreign Secretary David Miliband additionally noted that his country was reviewing its cooperation with Russia on a number of issues.

Soon thereafter, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko noted that the expulsion of its diplomats from London could very well hinder bilateral cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts. As well, Russian announced that it would also expel four staffers from the British embassy in Moscow. The United Kingdom responded to this action by noting that Russia decision to retaliate in kind was "not justified."

Consequently, in 2007, British-Russian relations were at one of their lowest points in recent history.

### *Relations with Asia*

Russian President Vladimir Putin approved on June 30, 2000, a government document, which outlined the countries foreign-policy priorities. In it, Russia made Asia an important focus of its

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new foreign policy, which aims to challenge U.S. dominance in world affairs, reported Agence France Presse. Improved ties with China, India and major Far Eastern states featured strongly in the new foreign policy doctrine, which also championed the role of the United Nations and Russia's ties with the European Union. Russia also pledged to defend its national economic interests, the rights of Russians living abroad and to use its secret services "when the skills of diplomats prove insufficient," Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said.

Russia had selected Asia as a priority in its efforts to create a genuinely multipolar world "due to Russia's direct affinity with this dynamically developing region and the need for an economic upturn in Siberia and the Far East." Moscow would put more emphasis on its membership of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the Association of South East Asia Nations, or ASEAN, and the Shanghai Five (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan).

The policy overhaul was long overdue, observers have commented, noting that regional giants India and China were both important markets for Russian military hardware and shared Moscow's concerns over Muslim extremism.

On Japan, Ivanov said Russia favored good neighborly ties and "a stable development of relations," but the new document made only passing reference to the long-running Kuril Islands dispute. Soviet troops invaded the string of four islands, known as the Northern Territories in Japan, at the end of World War II. Failure to resolve the issue has prevented Tokyo and Moscow from signing a formal peace treaty.

Asia expert Dmitry Trenin, deputy director of the Carnegie Endowment in Moscow, said the policy initiative was long overdue but warned Moscow still had many thorny issues to grasp. "Russia should exercise enormous efforts simply to remain a country in Asia," he said. "Russia is in danger of losing its Asia dimension. You have depopulation, de-industrialization, total degeneration of vast territories which become adjuncts, at best, to other countries' economies."

In the past Russia had sought to boost ties with Asia when frustrated with links with Washington, teaming up with China and India to provide a counterpoint to the United States, he said.

### *Relations with China and Central Asia*

Russia, China and four Central Asian nations signed an agreement in Shanghai, China, on June 15, 2001, on promoting trade and combating Islamic militancy. The agreement is seen as a step toward building a new economic and security bloc in Central Asia, which Beijing and Moscow are also promoting as a way to counter U.S. and European influence in the region. The group also includes the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan was admitted on the first day of the two-day summit here.

Russia's relations with China took a cooperative turn in 2006 when Russian President Vladimir Putin was visited Chinese President Hu Jintao in Beijing for two days. The two leaders signed nearly 30 agreements, and crafted the terms of a political, economic and technological alliance that some may regard as a historic shift in the geopolitical alignment of the globe.

### **Security Cooperation**

NATO/Russia Founding Act. Russia signed the NATO Partnership for Peace initiative in June 1994. U.S. and Russian troops are serving together in the Implementation Force in Bosnia and its successor, the Stabilization Force. Building on these steps, NATO and Russia signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act on May 27, 1997, in Paris. The act defines the terms of a fundamentally new and sustained relationship in which NATO and Russia will consult and coordinate regularly, and where appropriate, act jointly. Cooperation between NATO and Russia exists in scientific and technical fields.

Although Russia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative (as noted in the previous paragraph), which provided for closer cooperation with NATO countries without granting full membership, Russia opposed the inclusion of former Warsaw Pact members in NATO. Russian opposition to NATO expansion was somewhat placated in 1997 when NATO agreed not to deploy nuclear weapons in the eastern countries and with the signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security. The agreement granted Russia greater say in NATO policy, but did not grant Russia the veto power given to full members.

NATO allies agreed on Dec. 6, 2001, to set up a new forum for closer cooperation with Russia, but Washington's doubts about granting Moscow a right of veto stopped what one diplomat branded "starry-eyed" ambitions. Diplomats said there was an abrupt cooling in Washington's position on improving ties with the 19-strong alliance's Cold War foe. Diplomats said Washington and others, including the three former Warsaw Pact nations that joined NATO in 1999, were anxious not to rush headlong into a relationship or council that would lock them into consulting Moscow on certain security issues.

In the end, the ministers agreed to aim for a NATO-Russia council which could identify opportunities for consultation, cooperation, joint decisions and joint action "at 20" by their next meeting in Iceland in May 2002. In addition to the struggle against terrorism, Russia and NATO suggested in a joint statement that they could work together in such areas as crisis management, nonproliferation, arms control, theater missile defense, search and rescue at sea, military-to-military cooperation and civil emergencies.

A 2000 Russian policy paper emphasized Russia's destiny as a great power and insisted that any United Nations reform must keep Moscow's United Nations Security Council veto intact.

### **Middle East Peace Process**

Moscow convened talks with newly-elected Hamas in March 2006. During those key talks, Khaled Meshaal, the leader of the Palestinian militant group, told Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov that he wanted to forge ties with Russia. Meanwhile, the Russian foreign minister said that Russia respected the democratic choice of the Palestinian people when they elected Hamas to power. On behalf of Russia, Lavrov nevertheless said that Hamas must transform itself from a militant entity to a political organization if it wanted to have a serious political future. Lavrov also expressed Russia's commitment to achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East, however, he called on Hamas to recognize the Jewish State of Israel. For his part, Meshaal referred to the talks with Moscow as constructive but insisted that peace would only be possible if Israel withdrew from territory occupied in 1967.

The decision by Russia to meet with Hamas constituted a gap in otherwise coordinated efforts by the Quartet -- the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia -- to achieve peace in the Middle East. Until the Russian meeting, the members of Quartet had refused to deal with Hamas, on the basis of the militant group's dubious legacy of carrying out numerous terrorist attacks in Israel. For its part, Israel expressed outrage about the meeting.

Despite the controversial nature of the meeting, Moscow has made the calculation to actively insert itself into the Middle East peace process. For Moscow, the talks represent a re-entry point into the global spectrum, albeit amidst a host of potential diplomatic risks.

The issue of Iran's nuclear ambitions has also been of key importance as regards Middle Eastern security as of 2006. The West has been opposed to Iran's uranium enrichment activity and the United States particularly has accused Iran of seeking to build nuclear weaponry, and not simply generating nuclear power. Iran's failure to fully cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has not helped to alleviate these suspicions. In a bid to diffuse the ever-more volatile situation, Russia offered a compromise plan to Iran whereby it would be responsible for uranium enrichment off Iranian territory and in keeping with international standards. But it was a plan that was not accepted by Iran.

Nevertheless, regardless of Iran's obstinacy, and despite the United States' insistence on economic sanctions against Iran for failing to abide by IAEA dictates, Russia has continued to advocate a diplomatic approach to the dispute and has remained a central player in the matter.

### **Nuclear Politics**

In early 2005, the nuclear issue took center stage as Iran and Russia signed an agreement by which

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Moscow would supply fuel for Iran's new nuclear reactor in Bushehr. Under the terms of the agreement, Iran must return spent nuclear fuel rods from the reactor, which had been designed and built by Russia. This condition was implemented in response to growing anxiety by the United States, Israel and others about Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Against the backdrop of this development was a meeting in Slovakia between Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President George W. Bush in which both leaders agreed that Iran should not develop nuclear weapons. Russia, however, refused to acquiesce to United States's pressure to completely halt cooperation with Iran on nuclear power.

Two years later, there was little progress on the issue, with the United States growing more impatient with Iran's refusal to end its nuclear ambitions, and with Russia disinclined to take as strong a stand with Iran as the United States would have liked.

In 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin was set to travel to Iran to attend a summit of the leaders of Caspian Sea countries despite of reports of a possible assassination plot against him there. Russian media reported that suicide bombers were planning to kill the Russian head of state during his visit to the Iranian capital of Tehran. Some Russian sources acknowledged that the threats likely contained some degree of reliability. However, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said that there was no basis in fact to the reports. Nevertheless, during a news conference in Germany, Putin dismissed rumors that he might cancel his visit amidst the threats saying, "Of course I'm going." That said, the Russian leader's arrival in Iran for was delayed by one day to October 16, 2007.

Putin also confirmed that the issue of Iran's controversial nuclear program would be on the agenda for discussion. To that end, he urged a peaceful resolution to the matter and called for patience on the part of the international community in resolving the dispute. He noted that threatening Iran would be futile since Iran and its people were not scared.

Putin would be the first Russian leader to visit Iran since Stalin visited that country during the Soviet era in 1943.

In December 2007, the latest National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in the United States concluded that Iran halted its weapons program in 2003. The NIE, which coalesces information from the United States' 16 intelligence agencies, asserted "high confidence" that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons program in 2003 "in response to international pressure." Accordingly, the NIE reflected similar findings by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Mohammed ElBaradei, the head of the nuclear watchdog agency, said, "The report gives me a sigh of relief because it is consistent with our assessment."

Nevertheless, the United States and other Western countries continued to characterize Iran's



nuclear development as threatening. With Iran currently subject to both United Nations (U.N.) Security Council sanctions, as well as unilateral United States sanctions, there was speculation about how, or if, the sanctions regime would be affected by the new information. In fact, the most immediate outcome of the NIE has been the collapse of the argument in favor of military action against Iran. While dissonance on the international stage was expected to continue to smolder over the fact that Iran has continued to abrogate U.N. Security Council edicts that it stop its enrichment of uranium, the temperature of the conflict was expected to decrease. As well, U.N. Security Council members, Russia and China, were now less likely to support the notion of strongly intensifying sanctions against Iran. Both countries were expected to argue that the NIE proved that the nuclear threat posed by Iran was now contained.

But the nuclear issue of Iran was not to see any resolution. In May 2008, the United Nations nuclear watchdog group, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said that Iran was withholding some information about its nuclear program. The IAEA said in a report that Iran was not providing enough information about its nuclear activities despite agreeing to clarify prevailing questions about the country's nuclear development program. At issue for the IAEA was the fact that Iran has been operating 3,500 centrifuges in Natanz.

June 2008 saw international negotiators put forth a new package, laden with attractive incentives, to Iran aimed at halting that country's nuclear enrichment activities. The deal was reached after extensive consultations between European Union policy chief, Javier Solana, and Iranian representatives. The talks were aimed at resolving many of the contentious issues that had, to date, left the nuclear issue in Iran unresolved. Javier Solana described the new incentive package for Iran as "full of opportunities." Solana said the five members of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Russia, France) as well as Germany were willing to both recognize Iran's right to have a civilian nuclear energy program, and to assist in its development for peaceful purposes. For its part, Iran warned it would not accept demands that it halt its nuclear enrichment activities but it would study the proposal.

Meanwhile, rumors began to speculate about a strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. On July 9, 2008, Iran test-fired nine missiles in an apparent warning to Israel and the United States that it was capable of retaliating against any potential military strike on Iran. The missiles included both short-range and long-range types, as well as the new version of the Shahab-3, which was purported to be have sufficient range as to reach Israel. The missile test came less than a month after Israel carried out a military exercise presumed to be a rehearsal for an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. The whole question of Israel's possible military strike option was predicated on two considerations. First, it may be prepared to take action if it is clear that Iran has enough enriched uranium with which to make a nuclear bomb (a stage that the National Intelligence Estimate in the United States had said was not yet been reached by Iran). Second, Israel may be prepared to take action if Iran acquires a new Russian anti-aircraft system, the S-300 (a process that could take



an extended period of time).

In early August 2008, only a day after the United States and the United Kingdom warned that Iran would face a heightened sanctions regime if it did not respond positively to prevailing proposals on how to deal with its controversial nuclear program, the government of Iran offered an ambiguous response to the European Union (EU). Late September 2008 saw the United Nations Security Council unanimously approve a new resolution on Iran. United Nations Security Council resolution 1835 reaffirmed previous demands that Iran halt its uranium enrichment activities but did not expressly impose new sanctions. There were no new sanctions in the resolution due to Russia's objections to such a move. The resolution came a week after the IAEA said that it was unable to provide assurances about Iran's controversial nuclear development program due to a lack of information.

On February 20, 2009, a new report by the United Nations' nuclear watchdog entity, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), asserted that Iran was understating how much uranium it had enriched, and that it had built up a stockpile of nuclear fuel. According to reports by Reuters, the discrepancy in the amount of uranium believed to have been enriched and the amount enriched in actuality was not due to subterfuge by Iran, but rather, a result of a technical mistake. Then on March 1, 2009, the United States senior military commander, Admiral Mike Mullen, said that Iran had enough nuclear material to manufacture a bomb.

While there continued to be rumblings about a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, so too were there calls for negotiations with the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany. Russia and China -- two countries who have urged restraint by the West in dealing with Iran, have urged the Iranian authorities to accept the invitation. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Iran had to "convince us all of the exclusively peaceful character of its nuclear program." Such talks were not immediately on the agenda since the controversy over Iran's contested elections of 2009 took center stage.

See below for later developments related to Russia's engagement on the Iranian nuclear issue.

Meanwhile, from around 2002 through the next several years, Russia worked with several other countries within a multilateral framework to deal with the threat of nuclear proliferation by North Korea. Those talks stalled soon thereafter.

In mid-2006, North Korea test-fired a number of short-range missiles and one Taepodong-2 long-range missile into the Sea of Japan. The situation sparked international condemnation and threats of punitive measures by some countries, including sanctions. Others, including Russia, called for a return to multilateral talks on North Korea.

For its part, North Korea said that further missile tests would be launched. North Korea also

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warned that it would react strongly to punitive pressures from the international community, and it threatened to carry out an "annihilating" nuclear strike if its atomic facilities were pre-emptively hit by the United States.

The missile tests, in conjunction with dire promises of further tests and a nuclear strike, have intensified the widely-held view that North Korea is a threat to global security. Moreover, these moves by North Korea effectively served to further isolate the country and confirm its pariah status within the international community. The impact on relations with Russia was yet to be determined.

The matter resulted in the passage of a resolution by the United Nations Security Council members, including Russia, mandating inspections on cargo going to and from North Korea to search for weapons, a ban on the sale or transfer of materials related to North Korea's unconventional weapons program, and a freeze on the transfer of funds connected with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Absent from Resolution 1718 was the Chapter Seven [of the United Nations charter] provision, which would enforce the sanctions via military force.

December 2006 marked the resumption of multilateral talks regarding North Korea's controversial nuclear program. North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States indicated their interest in returning to the negotiating table after a year-long hiatus. While the news of the recommencement of six-party talks was welcomed, there was also a pervasive sense of caution. Experts conveyed limited optimism about the prospects of forging a resolution amenable to all parties.

By February 2007, the multilateral discussions were ongoing. Progress was quickly made during the six-party talks in Beijing when North Korea agreed to move closer toward the position of disarmament. Of particular interest was an agreement reportedly requiring Pyongyang to shut down its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon over the course of the ensuing months, in lieu of aid, such as fuel oil provided by the United States and South Korea. The draft agreement, which had been drafted by China, also called for the return of international inspectors to North Korea. On February 13, 2007, it was announced that concurrence on the matter had been reached. Yet to be seen was whether or not the agreement would be ratified by all six parties, and also whether or not North Korea would fully comply with the provisions of the deal.

In June 2007, North Korea reportedly agreed to shut down its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and, then, disable its nuclear facilities. North Korea also noted that it was inviting International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors to return to North Korea to monitor the closure of its nuclear program and facilities. To that end, IAEA inspectors were expected to visit North Korea on June 26, 2007, for the first time since their dismissal from that country in 2002.

These announcements came months after the Chinese drafted an agreement in February 2007 (discussed above), in which the closure of the reactor at Yongbyon would be secured, in lieu of heavy fuel oil that would be secured by other countries participating in the multilateral nuclear disarmament talks. The total amount of fuel oil -- one million metric tons -- appeared to more substantial than the original quantity discussed earlier in the year under the Chinese-brokered plan. In addition, diplomatic recognition and humanitarian aid benefits were included in the deal. Also included in the arrangement was the untangling of a financial dispute.

A new round of six-party disarmament talks, which has included North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, was commenced in July 2007. Later in 2007, concurrence was reached with North Korea in which that country officially agreed to shut down its nuclear facilities and open the country up to atomic inspection.

A year later in June 2008 North Korea declared its nuclear assets. In October 2008, the United States removed North Korea from its list of terrorism sponsors as part of the denuclearization agreement.

At the end of that year, it was clear that North Korea's disarmament progress had stalled. Then at the start of 2009, the United States reacted by suspending energy aid to North Korea. Soon thereafter, relations devolved between the two Koreas when the South Korean leader said that aid to the North would be dependent on that country's willingness to completely end its nuclear weapons program. North Korea accused South Korea of hostile intent and announced it was ending all political and military agreements with its neighbor to the south.

April 2009 saw North Korea take provocative action by launching a communications satellite into space via rocket. That claim was widely viewed as obfuscation of a missile test. On May 25, 2009, less than three years after the earlier underground nuclear test, North Korea conducted a second such test, arguing the merits of its right to a military deterrent. Days later, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the armistice that ended the Korean War.

Meanwhile, multilateral negotiations including North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States have remained stalled.

In the second week of June 2009, Russian officials warned that North Korea was close to test-firing another ballistic missile. Around the same time, the United Nations Security Council imposed harsh new sanctions against North Korea in response to the nuclear test carried out in May 2009. For its part, North Korea reacted to these developments by threatening to weaponize its stocks of plutonium.

## **Special Report**

*France negotiates truce agreement for Georgia and Russia as fighting dies down in separatist enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia*

On August 8, 2008, the Georgian military launched an attack against separatist targets in South Ossetia. The military offensive ensued only hours after the Georgian authorities and South Ossetia's separatists agreed to a Russian-brokered ceasefire.

The situation began when Georgian military troops and Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists were ensconced in violent clashes over the course of several days. Georgian tanks then attacked the separatist stronghold of Tskhinvali, presumably in an effort to regain control of the region.

According to Russian media, several people were reported to have been killed in the shelling. As well, Georgian forces and South Ossetian separatists were reported to be exchanging heavy fire. To that end, explosions and rocket fire were heard in the area around Tskhinvali. The British newspaper, *The Independent*, reported that "the assault is coming from all directions."

For its part, Georgia said that it was taking this action to stabilize the territory [South Ossetia]. Georgian Minister for Integration, Temur Yakobashvili, said that his country was compelled to terminate South Ossetia's "criminal regime" and to "restore constitutional order" to the breakaway region. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili himself called for an end to bloodshed to end, but warned the South Ossetian separatists that Tbilisi's patience was not limitless.

On the other side of the equation, South Ossetian rebel leader Eduard Kokoity said that Georgia was carrying out "a perfidious and base" attack on Tskhinvali. He also confirmed the assault on Tskhinvali saying, "The storming of Tskhinvali has started." Eyewitnesses on the ground said that the city was being attacked, the hospital was destroyed and the university was on fire. The Red Cross reported that there were numerous casualties needing medical attention.

In response, Russia was said to be deploying troops to South Ossetia to assist peacekeepers operating there. Indeed, an aide to the Russian Land Forces commander confirmed that Russian tanks and troops had entered South Ossetia and were approaching Tskhinvali, which was reported to have been already devastated by the Georgian offensive there.

Russia's military presence in the region was not well-received by Georgia, given the fact that the Georgian government has long accused Russia of arming South Ossetian separatists. But Russia has its own counter-argument to levy against Georgia. It has accused Georgia of deliberately ramping up its own military presence in breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and assuming a hard-line posture against these enclaves. Russia's tensions with Georgia have been partially rooted in another concern. Specifically, Russia has been opposed to pro-Western Georgia's ambitions to join NATO. This geopolitical element has textured the larger context of the territorial struggle being played out in South Ossetia.

It should be noted that Russia has enjoyed strong ties with South Ossetia, largely due to the fact that the ethnically-related province of North Ossetia is located within its borders, and both the south and the north have long hoped to unite. Indeed, many South Ossetians hold Russian citizenship. As such, with vested interests on both sides of the border, Russia called for an end to the ongoing violence. Russia also urged the international community to work cooperatively "to avert massive bloodshed and new victims."

However, the prospects for peace were not likely to be easily advanced, given the emerging situation in the region a day later. On August 9, 2008, Georgian authorities said that Russian jets had bombed military targets inside its territory – specifically in the Georgian town on Gori to the south of South Ossetia. They also said that one attack ensued close to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which is known to supply Caspian oil to the West. Georgia described the air strikes as "a full-scale military invasion" and Georgian President Saakashvili claimed that Russia was at war with his country.

Russia had a very different perspective and placed the blame squarely on the Georgians. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov indicated the dire nature of the situation by asserting that already 1,500 people had died in the conflict and more than 30,000 South Ossetian had fled into Russia to escape the threat of death. The Russian government said that it had to act to protect the South Ossetians, many of whom hold Russian citizenship. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev said that Georgia also bore a responsibility for "protecting the [South Ossetian] population" and that his country's military action was intended "to force the Georgian side to peace."

By August 9, 2008, the Russian army had advanced to take complete control South Ossetia's capital of Tskhinvali. General Vladimir Boldyrev, the head of the Russian ground forces said, "Tactical groups have completely liberated Tskhinvali from the Georgian military." Boldyrev also said that Russian forces would keep up the pressure on Georgian military units. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev explained his country's objectives in South Ossetia saying, "Under these circumstances, Russia is guided by one task -- to immediately stop violence and defend civilians and restore peace as soon as possible." President Dmitry Medvedev also demanded the withdrawal of Georgian troops from the conflict zone, saying that it was the only way to settle the "tragic crisis."

That same day, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili called for an end to hostilities saying, "We propose an immediate ceasefire and the beginning of the withdrawal of troops from the contact line." On the home front, the Georgia's parliament approved a presidential decree that essentially imposed two weeks of martial law in the country.

A day later on August 10, 2008, Georgia said that it was withdrawing its troops from the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali in the face of Russia's counter-offensive. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said his country's troops were returning to the positions they held before the conflict erupted days earlier. There was, however, some confusion about whether Georgian troops

were pulling out of Tskhinvali or withdrawing entirely from South Ossetia. Georgian Reintegration Minister Temur Yakobashvili confirmed that the troops left Tskhinvali but were remaining in other areas of South Ossetia. Russian sources said that Georgian military units were still active in South Ossetia.

Presumably due to the continued activity by Georgian military units in South Ossetia, and what Moscow described as continued Georgian offensive action, Russian forces were continuing to carry out its own military action into Georgian territory. Reports from the region suggested that Russia carried out an air strike on a military airfield near the Tbilisi International Airport.

With the situation grim despite the earlier declaration of a withdrawal of troops from Tskhinvali, Georgia said that it had submitted a note to the Russian embassy in Tbilisi calling for immediate negotiations with Russia regarding "an end to all hostilities and a ceasefire." Russia confirmed that the note had been received. Russia at the time also denied Georgia's claims that Russian air strikes had targeted populated areas.

But movement toward a resolution seemed no closer by August 11, 2008. Georgian authorities said that Russian air strikes hit communications facilities to the west of Tbilisi and the port city of Poti in the Black Sea. As well, Russian forces were reported to have led a raid through the other breakaway enclave of Abkhazia into the western Georgian town of Senaki. On the other side of the equation, Russia said that the Georgian military was still targeting positions in Tskhinvali, despite claims of a withdrawal and overtures of a ceasefire. In this way, both sides accused one another of continuing the hostilities and exacerbating the conflict.

On the international front, the United Nations Security Council had earlier convened an emergency session to consider the rapidly deteriorating security crisis in the Caucasus. Little was actually accomplished at that session. Likewise, a spokesperson from NATO had already called on both sides -- Georgian and Russian -- to exercise restraint. However, with the violence ongoing, clearly restraint was not at hand.

Nevertheless, the United States said that it was sending a delegation to the region to try to negotiate a resolution. The United States Department of States said that the envoys would "engage with the parties in the conflict." As well, a European Union delegation was en route to the region and said that it was hoping to procure a ceasefire and withdrawal agreement from both Georgia and Russia. A separate Council of Europe delegation was also hoping to advance dialogue.

In the same time period, according to news reports, Russian President Medvedev reiterated the death toll -- in the thousands -- during a conversation with United States President George W. Bush. For his part, Bush, who was attending the Beijing Olympics, called for an end to the violence, warned of escalation beyond the zone of conflict, and endorsed the notion of international mediation.



Indeed, the international community's objective appeared to be focused on averting the prospects of a war in the restive Caucasus, which has long been regarded as something of a powder keg. Yet to be determined was the question of whether or not such efforts would actually yield positive results.

Days later, Russia noted that its military activity in the area was ending and Russian troops were seen retreating from the area. The hostilities flared again when Georgia sent in troops to try to regain control of South Ossetia. Nevertheless, witnesses said that the full brunt of the fighting in South Ossetia appeared to be ending. Elsewhere in the region, Russian troops were withdrawing from the other breakaway region of Abkhazia, however, separatist there were reported to be ensconced in some continuing clashes with the Georgian military in the Kodori Gorge.

Yet even with an official truce in the offing (as discussed below) and an end to the fighting, the situation was not peaceful. A war of words continued. On an official day of mourning in his country, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev charged that Georgia had launched "genocide of the South Ossetian people." At issue were the deaths of thousands of South Ossetians, many of whom hold Russian passports, as well as the deaths and injuries to scores of Russian soldiers, including one general. The Russian leader used the Russian word "otmorozki," which roughly translates to "thugs" in English, to characterize Georgian troops. Meanwhile, Georgian President Saakashvili addressed a crowd of thousands gathered in Tbilisi's main and accused Russia of the "ruthless, heartless destruction" of Georgians. The Georgian leader also warned that his country would no longer be a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) -- a group consisting of former Soviet republics.

On August 13, 2008, French President Nicolas Sarkozy was leading diplomatic negotiations to help Georgia and Russia resolve the crisis that had been sparked when Georgian military troops and Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists were ensconced in violent clashes over the course of several days. Georgian tanks then attacked the separatist stronghold of Tskhinvali, presumably in an effort to regain control of the region, and went onto gain military supremacy over large swaths of Georgian territory.

Sarkozy put forth a peace agreement that both sides signed days later. Central to the proposed plan for a truce was that all forces would pull back to pre-conflict positions. Other elements of the plan included an end to the use of force, an end to military action in perpetuity, as well as the free access of humanitarian aid. France, as the head of the European Union, has called on the European bloc to endorse the peace initiative ahead of its submission to the United Nations Security Council. The European Union was also expected consider deploying peacekeepers to the region to maintain peace and security, and also to protect the supply of humanitarian aid.

The remaining thorny issue, which was not included in the framework of the truce, was the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Neither Russian President Medvedev nor Georgian



President Saakashvili was likely to find common ground on that matter in the immediate future. Indeed, the Georgian leader asserted, "The territorial integrity and belonging of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Georgia can never be put under doubt."

On August 17, 2008, Russia officially pledged to withdraw its forces from Georgian territory in keeping with the agreement. At the time, however, its forces had control over large swaths of Georgian territory, including the main east-west highway through that country. There was speculation that Russian troops might withdraw only as far as South Ossetia since Russia said it would only fully withdraw when Georgian police were ready to take over responsibility for security. NATO responded to anxieties that Russia would not abide by the withdrawal requirements of the agreement by warning that relations would be compromised if Russian troops remained in Georgia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia was not occupying Georgia and would not annex South Ossetia. However, he also characterized NATO as biased and intent on saving the "criminal regime" of Tbilisi.

Meanwhile, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev told his French President Nicolas Sarkozy that the Russian withdrawal would be complete by August 22, 2008, although approximately 500 troops would be installed as peacekeepers on both sides of South Ossetia's border. Russian troops were soon identified exiting Gori -- the largest town in Georgia located close to the border of South Ossetia. Sarkozy, during talks with Medvedev, acknowledged this withdrawal but noted that Russian troops were yet to exit Poti and Senaki. Russia had earlier indicated that it would not soon leave the port city of Poti, and claimed that this would be in keeping with the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Medvedev's government said that Russian peacekeepers were allowed to take "additional security measures." However, the United States and the United Kingdom countered this claim noting that such buffer zones would violate the deal.

In other developments, the first United States ship with humanitarian aid was expected to dock in Georgia by the last week of August 2008. Two more ships were expected to arrive in Georgia as well.

In the last week of August 2008, Russia's Kremlin officially recognized the breakaway enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. South Ossetians and Abkhazians celebrated the news of this recognition of their self-proclaimed sovereignty. However, without wider international recognition of sovereign status, and with many countries of the West committed to the notion of Georgia's territorial integrity, the actual status of South ossetia and Abkhazia remained in the zone of "contested independent status."

By the start of September 2008, the European Union (EU) had decided to suspend talks on a new partnership pact with Russia, given the still-incomplete withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. EU-Russian negotiations on the partnership agreement had been scheduled for mid-September 2008 but were based on a shared understanding that Russian troops would withdraw to

pre-conflict positions. The lack of progress on that withdrawal front, followed by the EU's response, signaled that relations between the EU and Russia were moving into highly challenging territory.

Following a meeting in the Belgian capital city of Brussels, EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said that the bloc that he represented could not "continue as if nothing had happened." As well, the European bloc's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, said that the EU could deploy civilian monitors to Georgia to determine whether or not Russia was complying with the ceasefire agreement that had been brokered earlier. Meanwhile French President Sarkozy said, "The EU would welcome a real partnership with Russia, which is in the interests of all, but you have to be two to have a partnership."

On the other side of the equation, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that unchecked support by the EU and the United States for the government of Georgian President Saakashvili would be a "historic" mistake. He also introduced the notion of an embargo on arms supplies to Georgia until a new regime was established there. These declarations came in the background of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's assertion that his country's foreign policy principles would not be dictated by the hegemony of any single country, such as the United States.

In October 2008, months after the Russian-Georgian conflict over South Ossetia, Russia removed a checkpoint near the town of Gori. The removal of the checkpoint at Gori -- located in Georgian territory close to the separatist region of South Ossetia -- marked the first significant sign that Russia intended to comply with its withdrawal pledge, which was part of the ceasefire deal negotiated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Indeed, Russia has also pledged to withdraw troops from two buffer zones within Georgia -- now under European Union observation -- by October 10, 2008.

At the same time, Russia increased its troop presence in South Ossetia -- largely a result of an explosion that left eight Russian soldiers and three civilians dead in the early part of the month. Russia accused Georgia of orchestrating the attack; Georgia denied the accusation. Russia also maintained its troop presence in the other separatist region of Abkhazia. Russia has recognized both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent while Western countries have backed Georgian territorial integrity. The matter of sovereignty has remained unresolved.

The fifth anniversary of the Rose Revolution, which swept President Mikhail Saakashvili to power, was marked by chaos. As the president traveled in a motorcade with Polish President Lech Kaczynski close to the breakaway republic of South Ossetia, shots were fired.

Although no one was hurt in the incident, both the Georgian president and his Polish counterpart accused Russian troops of being behind the apparent attack in an area that has been the site of much cross-border violence. According to Reuters, one individual in Saakashvili's entourage said that South Ossetians fired warning shots when their motorcade came close to a checkpoint at the

quasi-border area. Meanwhile, President Saakashvili said that the situation was a "reminder" that Russia was in flagrant violation of the European Union-brokered ceasefire between Tblisi and Moscow. President Saakashvili also railed against the Russians saying, "Twenty-first Century occupiers, who have no legal, moral or other right to be there and oppress people, are stationed in the heart of Georgia."

On the other side of the equation, however, the Russian military as well as South Ossetian forces denied an involvement in the gunfire incident. In an interview with RIA Novosti, a South Ossetian spokeswoman, Irina Gagloyeva, asserted the following: "The South Ossetian side has nothing to do with it. There was no shelling from our side." A Russian spokesperson said to the Interfax news agency, "The claims that Russian servicemen were implicated in the shelling of the cortege do not correspond with reality."

August 2009 marked the one year anniversary of the war between Georgia and Russia over the breakaway republic of South Ossetia.

On August 13, 2009, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Abkhazia, where he promised to build a military base along the border with Georgia. Putin also said that such a move would help guarantee the stability of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian head of government said: "Russia is going to deploy its armed forces in Abkhazia and take the necessary efforts to build a modern border guard system in cooperation with the relevant Abkhazian authorities." He continued, "All these factors are serious guarantees of the security of Abkhazia and South Ossetia." Putin's pledge came on the first anniversary of the cease-fire, which ended Russia's war with Georgia over South Ossetia. As might be expected, Georgia decried the move, characterizing it as "yet another provocation," that could potentially "escalate tensions" in the region of the Caucasus.

Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia declared independence from Georgia during a war in the 1990s, which followed on the heels of the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are recognized by Russia as sovereign states, but have nonetheless remained internationally-recognized as Georgian territories. They have increasingly become flashpoints in the region.

In October 2009, a report commissioned by the Council of the European Union placed the blame for the start of the 2008 war over the semi-autonomous region of South Ossetia on Georgia. The report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia found that the war, which erupted on August 7, 2008, was spurred when Georgian forces attacked the breakaway republic of South Ossetia, in an attempt to re-establish sovereign control. Still, the report did not cast Georgia as being the only guilty party. It noted that the hostilities between the two sides led to provocative actions by both Georgia and Russia. The report also acknowledged that after Georgia shelled South Ossetia, Russia responded by not only repelling the assault but, in fact, pressing further into Georgian territory.

See "Special Report" below for more recent developments related to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

### **Russia and Venezuela Forge Ties**

On a visit to Russia in late September 2008, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez met with his Russian counterpart, President Dmitry Medvedev, and agreed to work on energy cooperation. The two countries were already ensconced in a process of building economic links but Chavez and Medvedev were pursuing a pact that would include cooperation in the realm of energy production.

This cooperation was expected to concentrate on oil and gas production, but Chavez acknowledged that Russia had offered to assist Venezuela with a civilian nuclear power program as well. The Venezuelan leader noted that his country was only following in the footsteps of other Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Argentina, which already was on its way to nuclear energy production. He also emphasized that Venezuela was only looking to nuclear energy for medical purposes and power generation. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin registered his willingness to enter into nuclear energy cooperation with Venezuela.

Russia and Venezuela were additionally moving into the realm of closer military ties. To that latter end, Russian ships were en route to the Caribbean Sea off the coast of South America to participate in joint military exercises with the Venezuelans. Chavez was quick to note that the joint military exercises were not an indication of any military action saying, "We are not going to invade anyone, or engage in acts of aggression toward anyone." However, he indicated that the action was being taken to show that Venezuela took its sovereignty seriously. He said, "But no one should mistake our intention -- we are prepared to do everything necessary to defend Venezuelan sovereignty."

Prospects of a Russian loan to Venezuela to help finance the purchase of Russian arms were being discussed on September 9, 2009. Chief Russian foreign policy aide, Sergei Prikhodko, said that the Kremlin was considering such a loan to Venezuela. The announcement came as Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez arrived in Moscow for meetings with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

In addition to the possibility of an arms deal, the meeting was intended to establish multiple areas for bilateral cooperation. To that end, President Medvedev's Press Secretary Natalya Timakova said, "There are plans for the conclusion of documents and agreements on oil and gas cooperation, on ecology in the oil and gas industry, and also an agreement between the Justice Ministries."

After his trip to Moscow, President Chavez confirmed in a weekly televised address that Russia had agreed to lend Venezuela over \$2 billion for the purchase of weapons, such as 100 tanks and a series of anti-aircraft rocket systems, and were intended to boost the country's defensive capacity.

President Chavez noted that the anti-aircraft rocket systems would make it difficult for Venezuela to be attacked. He said, "With these rockets, it is going to be very difficult for them to come and bomb us. If that happens, they should know that we will soon have these systems installed, [and] for an enemy that appears on the horizon, there it goes." The move appeared to be in retaliation to a deal struck between Colombia and the United States to allow American troops access to Colombian military bases.

Note: Both Russia and Venezuela have indicated a shared interest in opposing United States influence and hegemony on the global stage.

### **Special Entry**

*U.S. and Russia forge agreement to cut stockpiles of nuclear weapons as Obama and Medvedev set new tone for bilateral relations*

On July 6, 2009, United States President Barack Obama met with his Russian counterpart, President Dmitry Medvedev, for talks on their countries' respective nuclear arsenals. Following three hours of discussion, the two world leaders signed an outline agreement aimed at reducing their countries' stockpiles of nuclear weapons. The "joint understanding" was signed in a public ceremony in Moscow and would cut deployed nuclear warheads to under 1,700 on both sides within seven years of a forging new accord. That new accord would stand in replacement of the 1991 Start I treaty, which was set to expire at the close of 2009.

A statement from the White House explained that the new treaty would "include effective verification measures" and "enhance the security of both the US and Russia, as well as provide predictability and stability in strategic offensive forces."

While the terms of the new concord would still leave both countries with enough weaponry to destroy one another, the move was intended to stop the diplomatic "drift" away from cooperation on shared interests, which had occurred in recent times.

To that end, President Obama said the United States and Russia were both "committed to leaving behind the suspicion and the rivalry of the past." He also noted that the new agreement was part of an initiative "to reset U.S.-Russian relations so that we can co-operate more effectively in areas of common interest."

For his part, President Medvedev said that the talks had been "very frank and very sincere" and were "without any doubt, the meeting we had been waiting for in Russia and the United States." The Russian leader went on to state, "I would like particularly to stress that our country would like to reach a level of cooperation with the United States that would really be worthy of the 21st Century, and which would ensure international peace and security."

In addition to reduced levels of nuclear warheads and delivery systems, including intercontinental ballistic missiles, there were also provisions for submarine-launched missiles and bombers.

In a separate agreement, Russia said it would allow the United States military to transport troops and weaponry across its territory to Afghanistan, where the war against resurgent Taliban and al-Qaida was ongoing. This use of Russian territory to move troops and equipment into the conflict zone would foreclose the use of routes through Pakistan, which have been the target of attacks by militants on a frequent and increasing basis.

In another development, Russia and the United States agreed to establish a joint commission, which would facilitate greater cooperation on energy, fighting terrorism and dealing with narcotics trafficking.

In a particularly significant move, the two countries agreed to resume military cooperation, which was suspended in 2008 as a result of the conflict between Russia and Georgia.

Yet unresolved was the prevailing source of controversy on both sides -- the United States' plan to develop a missile defence shield system in Eastern Europe. This proposal has been strenuously resisted by Russia, which eschews greater American domination in its own backyard. In a move aimed at gradually moving the two countries toward consensus on the issue, both Obama and Medvedev said that they backed a joint study on the threat of ballistic missiles and the institution of a data exchange center.

President Obama, who characterized former President Vladimir Putin as having "one foot in the old ways of doing business and one foot in the new," met with the prime minister of Russia on July 7, 2009.

### **Special Report:**

*Russia and United States respond to Iran's nuclear proposal; impact on Israel noted*

In September 2009, Iran put forth its package of proposals to the five permanent United Nations Security Council members and Germany. According to the independent United States-based entity, ProPublica, the five-page proposal, Iran called for "comprehensive, all-encompassing and constructive" negotiations on a range of security issues, including global nuclear disarmament. However, the document detailing Iran's latest proposals on its nuclear ambitions conspicuously failed to mention Iran's own nuclear program.

The United States reacted by registering dissatisfaction with the proposal package. Philip Crowley,



the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, said that the proposed measures failed to address the status of Iran's nuclear program. He said, "Our concern is that the response itself did not really address what is the core issue of the international community and the core concern, which is Iran's nuclear ambitions."

Conversely, Russia reacted by suggesting that the Iranian proposals signaled positive progress. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, "Based on a brief review of the Iranian papers my impression is there is something there to use." Lavrov also indicated that there would be no oil sanctions against Iran. "Some of the sanctions under discussion, including oil and oil products, are not a mechanism to force Iran to co-operate, they are a step to a full-blown blockade and I do not think they would be supported at the UN Security Council."

The American and Russian responses showed divergent approaches to the Iranian nuclear issue, and suggested that consensus on the matter would not be easily achieved.

The controversy surrounding Iran's nuclear program took on greater significance after the IAEA meeting, as discussed above. If Russia was indicating that it would not support strong oil sanctions against Iran, then what options would be available to countries such as the United States, which has made clear that consequences were in the offing if Iran failed to resolve the international community's concerns about its nuclear ambitions?

Indeed, neither the United States nor Israel have ever actually foreclosed the possibility of targeted air strikes against Iran, which would be specifically aimed at preventing that country from obtaining a nuclear weapon. But Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin entered the fray, speaking against not only the imposition of new sanctions, but also targeted military action against Iran. Prime Minister Putin characterized any attack on Iran as "very dangerous" and warned that it would lead to "an explosion of terrorism." That said, he also called on Iran to show "restraint" in its nuclear program and to be mindful of Israel's security concerns. Prime Minister Putin said, "This is a dangerous region and Iran should show responsibility, especially by taking into account Israel's concerns."

Earlier, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was reported to have made a secret visit to Moscow to discuss the matter of Russian arms sales to Iran and Syria. At issue has been rising tensions between Israel and Russia over Moscow's arms sales to Iran and Syria. Of particular concern have been the transfers of weapons to the extremist Islamic organization, Hezbollah, in Lebanon -- a particular flashpoint even since the 2006 between Israel and Lebanon-based Hezbollah.

In November 2009, in a move that could be viewed as a tactical maneuver, Russia announced in November 2009 that a nuclear power plant that it developed in southern Iran would not be launched in 2009 as scheduled. In an interview with BBC News, Russian Energy Minister Sergei



Shmatko said, "We expect serious results by the end of the year, but the launch itself will not take place. "The engineers have to reach their findings." While Russia offered technical explanations on the record for the delay, there was growing consensus that the protracted process was actually linked with ongoing conflict over Iran's nuclear activities and ambitions.

Note that in 2010, Russia backed the United States-led move to impose harsh sanctions on Iran for its controversial nuclear development program and failure to comply with international regulations on the matter. Accordingly, the United Nations Security Council was able to move forward with sanctions against Iran.

### **Special Entry:**

*U.S. President Obama abandon's Bush era missile shield; Russia lauds move*

On September 17, 2009, United States President Barack Obama announced that his administration was abandoning the Bush-era missile defense shield program in Eastern Europe, which caused the grave consternation of Russia. In its place, President Obama unveiled a "phased, adaptive approach" for missile defense on the European continent. At a news conference in the White House, President Obama said, "This new approach will provide capabilities sooner, build on proven systems and offer greater defenses against the threat of missile attack than the 2007 European missile defense program."

President Obama explained that he made the decision based on an assessment of Iran's missile threat and the Pentagon's "phased and adaptive" approach, which would ensure the American homeland defense. While President Obama acknowledged the threat posed by Iran, and although he insisted that he was committed to "deploying strong missile defense systems which are adaptable to the threats of the 21st century," he also wanted to institute a plan that would be appropriate and effective in responding to the current intelligence assessment of Iran's missile programs. To that end, recent intelligence appeared to indicate that Iran's capacity to attach warheads to long-range missiles would not pose an immediate strategic threat to the United States and its allies. Indeed, Iran was more likely to pursue short-range and medium-range missile development.

President Obama noted, "The best way to responsibly advance our security and the security of our allies is to deploy a missile defense system that best responds to the threats that we face and that utilizes technology that is both proven and cost-effective." He explained that the new missile defense architecture would provide "stronger, smarter and swifter defenses. "

The plan would essentially nullify former President George W. Bush's plan to deploy 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar system in the Czech Republic as part of its European missile

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shield, charged with preventing European allies from missile threats by "rogue states," such as Iran. Bush's plan had been criticized by some as being impractical to implement. Perhaps more significantly, Russia strongly opposed the missile defense shield concept and argued that it posed a security threat to the region. The matter caused a devolution in positive relations between the United States and Russia at the time, with Russia warning of retaliatory moves.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Russia was now lauding the decision by the Obama administration to dispense with the Bush missile defense shield system. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev welcomed the shift as "positive" and made clear that there were now "good conditions" for United States-Russia talks on dealing with missile proliferation. It was apparent that the "reset button" on bilateral relations between the two countries had, indeed, been pressed.

Meanwhile, Russia quickly announced that it would now scrap its own controversial plans to deploy missiles close to Poland. That proposal had been advanced in response to the Bush missile shield plan. But now, as noted by Deputy Defense Minister Vladimir Popovkin during an radio interview in Moscow, "Naturally, we will cancel the measures that Russia planned to take in response to the deployment of U.S. missile defense systems." He continued, "Common sense has finally prevailed over ambitions."

For his part, President Obama said on an interview with CBS on September 20, 2009, that his decision was not dictated by Russian opposition. He said, "The Russians don't make determinations about what our defense posture is." He continued, "If the by-product of it is that the Russians feel a little less paranoid... then that's a bonus." President Obama also noted that one of the bonus effects could be that the Russians might be more willing to work with the United States in dealing with ballistic missiles from Iran or nuclear development in Iran.

### *Comprehensive talks between Russia and the United States consider missile defense, arms control and Iran*

United States officials were expected to be in Russia on Oct. 12, 2009, for missile defense negotiations with Russian counterparts. The Russian were led by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov while Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Ellen Tauscher, was to head the United States delegation. After the groundwork has been established, further talks were set to take place later in the week between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Speaking ahead of the negotiations, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said the United States and Russia must advance strategic arms reduction. In an interview with Russia's Channel Once, President Medvedev said, "While dealing with non-proliferation, we must simultaneously deal with the limitation and reduction of strategic offensive potentials -- both carriers and nuclear warheads." Medvedev continued, "Today we have the chance to advance this process. We will be dealing with

this. And I call on our American partners to do the same."

With the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty set to expire on Dec. 5, 2009, President Medvedev said he believed Russia and the United States could reach a new strategic arms reduction accord. He observed, "There is definitely a chance for the agreement, since the new U.S. administration has demonstrated interest in this issue." Medvedev also said he did not support the expansion of nuclear weapons states recognized by the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. Striking a tone harmonious with his American counterpart, President Barack Obama, president Medvedev said, "We are against the extension of the nuclear club. Otherwise the situation will get out of control. The world without nuclear weapons is an ideal which should be on our agenda."

President Medvedev also reiterated his appreciation for President Obama's decision to scrap the Bush-era missile defense shield plan, calling President Obama's new missile shield plans "sensible." He additionally noted that Russia was eager to extend missile defense cooperation with the United States and Europe.

On October 13, 2009, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton traveled to Moscow to meet with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. In addition to the issues related to missile defense and a new successor treaty aimed at strategic arms reduction, the two diplomats were reported to have discussed approaches to dealing with geopolitical challenges in Iran, the wider Middle East, and Afghanistan, as well as possible joint work on climate change.

In an interview with the Newsweek's Russian edition, which was published in the German daily, Die Welt, and translated by Reuters, Secretary Clinton said that her country and Russia found broad agreement on the issue of Iran's controversial nuclear program. While there was no specific promise from Moscow to impose harsh sanctions on Iran if diplomacy failed, Secretary Clinton said, "We have agreed to make diplomacy the priority with Iran. But if we are not successful, we will consider other steps." She described her talks with Russian leaders as "very constructive" and noted that the United States and Russia were in "full agreement" on the path before them. The United States' top diplomat also lauded Russia for not following through with plans to deliver high-grade S300 air defense missiles to Iran. Secretary Clinton additionally addressed the Obama administration's plan to scrap the Bush-era missile defense system in Eastern Europe saying, "On the question of the missile shield, we are very open to cooperation with the Russians. We have made this clear to them. We believe that a joint missile defense would make sense."

On Dec. 21, 2009, Russia and the United States were reported to have made good progress on negotiations on a new strategic arms agreement. In an off-side meeting at the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit, United States President Barack Obama met with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and expressed confidence that a new treaty would soon be signed. At issue was the

impending expiration of the existing Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and the need to forge a new agreement.

### *Russia and United States Sign New Arms Treaty*

On Feb. 24, 2010, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged her Russian counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, to move forward with efforts to finalize a new arms reduction treaty. During a briefing, State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said the United States' top diplomat "emphasized to the foreign minister that our negotiators are close to reaching an agreement and encouraged Russia to continue to move ahead, push hard so we can reach an agreement in the next couple of weeks." That timeline seemed to coincide with Russian expectations, since a Russian lawmaker, Konstantin Kosachyov, noted that discussions were underway on a new treaty to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which expired on Dec. 5, 2009.

In March 2010, Secretary of State Clinton was in Moscow for meetings with Foreign Minister Lavrov. From Moscow, Clinton and Lavrov noted that a new START would soon be finalized. At a joint press conference with Lavrov, Clinton said, "The results of the latest negotiation rounds lead us to believe we'll be reaching a final agreement soon." At issue is a plan that would reduce the United States' stockpile of 2,000 strategic nuclear weapons, and Russia's stockpile of close to 3,000, be reduced to between 1,500 and 1,675 warheads respectively. There was, however, some dissonance on verification measures aimed at quantifying weapons and launch systems.

Meanwhile, as progress was being made on a successor treaty to START, United States President Barack Obama called for a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons, as part of a changing national security strategy. To this end, he said: "The United States reaffirms our resolve to strengthen the non-proliferation regime to meet the challenges of the 21st century as we pursue our ultimate vision of a world without nuclear weapons." As President Obama marked the 40th anniversary of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, he intimated new post-Cold War policy, saying: "Our forthcoming Nuclear Posture Review will move beyond outdated Cold War thinking and reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, even as we maintain a safe, secure and effective nuclear deterrent." President Obama also said he would work to seek ratification on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1996, but which had yet to be enforced. These statements appeared to reify President Obama's vision of a nuclear-free world, which was laid out in a keynote speech in Prague in 2009. It also came ahead of a nuclear security summit, set to take place in Washington D.C. in April 2010.

On March 24, 2010, the United States and Russia announced they had arrived at a breakthrough agreement that would pave the way for the establishment of a new START. Both President Obama

and his Russian counterpart, President Dmitry Medvedev, were expected to sign the landmark accord, which provides for the reduction of long-range nuclear weapons on both sides, and sets the path for further disarmament in the future. The accord was illustrative of the new texture of bilateral relations, marked by an increased level of cooperation and trust between the United States and Russia in the last two years. "Measures to Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms" was expected to be signed on April 8, 2010, in the Czech capital of Prague, symbolically marking President Barack Obama's call for a world without nuclear weapons in that very city a year earlier. The timing would also ensure that both the United States and Russia would be able to enter the forthcoming Summit on Nuclear Security with a joint claim of accomplishment. They would also have the moral high ground in their efforts to pressure Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

Lauding the treaty as the most comprehensive weapons control accord in two decades, President Obama declared: "With this agreement, the United States and Russia - the two largest nuclear powers in the world - also send a clear signal that we intend to lead." He continued, "By upholding our own commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, we strengthen our global efforts to stop the spread of these weapons, and to ensure that other nations meet their own responsibilities." Via his spokesperson, President Medvedev said the treaty "reflects the balance of interests of both nations." As well, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the treaty marked a "new level of trust" between the two countries.

That being said, on April 8, 2010, President Obama and President Medvedev held private talks at Prague Castle ahead of the signing ceremony. Later, both leaders signed their names on the new document that would significantly reduce the arsenal of nuclear weapons held by their respective countries. The two leaders of the countries controlling 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons made it clear that membership in the global nuclear club came with extraordinary responsibility, and a vision of non-proliferation. President Obama said, "This day demonstrates the determination of the United States and Russia... to pursue responsible global leadership. Together, we are keeping our commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which must be the foundation of global non-proliferation." Meanwhile, President Medvedev said: "This is a win-win situation. No one stands to lose in this agreement. Both parties won ... the entire world community won." In effect, the fact that the two countries were able to find consensus on such a complex matter, and the two leaders were able to sign one of the most important treaties in decades, signaled the anticipated "re-setting" of United States-Russian relations sought by the Obama administration in the United States when it came to power.

The difficult process of forging and signing such a bilateral agreement would be followed by the equally challenging process of ratification in the United States Senate. With an eye on this process, President Obama met in the Oval Office with the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) and the ranking republican, Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana) to discuss this imperative. To the end, Senator Kerry said, "A well-designed

treaty will send an important message to the rest of the world that America is prepared to lead efforts with key stakeholders to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons." It should be noted that the new START would also have to be ratified by the Russian Duma. Nevertheless, ahead of a global security summit scheduled to take place in Washington, Russia and the United States would be able to claim the high ground on leadership and responsibility among nuclear-armed nation states.

In November 2010, President Obama was calling on the United States Senate to ratify the treaty. He characterized the need to do so as "a national security imperative" on November 18, 2010, demanding that the upper chamber of Congress act affirmatively before departing at the close of the year. Bringing as much pressure to bear, President Obama drew upon support from former secretaries of states and secretaries of defense from both political parties in the United States -- Republican and Democratic -- to emphasize the urgency in ratifying the treaty. President Obama noted that his country would not "afford to gamble" with the matter. He emphasized that the United States could not risk alienating Russia, whose support would be needed in pressuring Iran, given that country's suspected program of nuclear proliferation. But delay was on the mind of some Republican senators who rejected the president's call for a review process during the Senate's lame duck session of the outgoing Senate. Speaking to this issue, President Obama said: "Every month that goes by without a treaty means that we are not able to verify what's going on on the ground in Russia. And if we delay indefinitely, American leadership on nonproliferation and America's national security will be weakened."

Note that despite heavy Republican opposition in the United States, the treaty was ratified in the United States Senate and then went through the ratification process at home in Russia.

The new arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russia went into effect on Feb. 5, 2011, effectively replacing the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his United States counterpart, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, exchanged ratification documents pertaining to "Measures to Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms" or "New START" at a conference in Germany. Secretary of State Clinton said that the treaty was "another example of the kind of clear-eyed co-operation that is in everyone's interests." Foreign Minister Lavrov characterized the new treaty as "a product of the understanding that unilateral approaches to security are counterproductive." He continued, "The treaty that enters into force today will enhance international stability."

The "New START" would significantly reduce the arsenal of nuclear weapons held by the United States and Russia; it would limit the United States' stockpile of 2,000 strategic nuclear weapons, and Russia's stockpile of close to 3,000, to between 1,500 and 1,675 warheads respectively. "New START" was regarded as a milestone in the decades-long thrust to decrease the chances of nuclearized warfare. Indeed, it could arguably be characterized as one of the most important treaties forged in a generation



## **Special Entry**

Modern-day spy scandal unfolds; implications for U.S.-Russia relations?

Earlier, on June 28, 2010, ten individuals using aliases were arrested in the United States for allegedly spying for the Russian government. According to the Justice Department of the United States, the ten individuals were charged with conspiracy to act as unlawful agents of a foreign government. Eight of the ten suspects were reported to have had "long-term, deep-cover assignments" in the United States. As well, nine of the ten suspects were charged with conspiracy to launder money. Five of the suspects appeared in a New York federal court where they were ordered to remain in jail pending hearings set for the end of July 2010. Other suspects soon faced court in Virginia. The arrests came after an investigation that went on for several years and, if convicted, the suspects could face five years in prison.

Authorities said they were in pursuit of an eleventh suspect. That eleventh suspect was soon arrested in Cyprus and released on bail; he was subsequently reported to be missing after failing to present for a scheduled "check in" meeting with the Cypriot police. An arrest warrant was issued for that individual as a result but reports soon emerged that he may have fled that country. The Cypriot authorities were now under fire for mishandling the situation; members of the opposition party in that Mediterranean country railed against the fact that an alleged spy was allowed bail rather than being subject to a detention order.

Meanwhile, United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, on a trip to Eastern Europe, made clear that the U.S. was committed to positive ties with Russia, the emerging spy scandal notwithstanding. Secretary Clinton said, "We're committed to building a new and positive relation with Russia." She continued, "We're looking toward the future." For its part, Russia has also indicated that the scenario would not affect closer bilateral relations with the United States.

Indeed, only weeks ago, Russia backed the United States in advancing a plan for further international sanctions against Iran for its controversial nuclear program. The United States-drafted proposal was passed in the United Nations Security Council with Russian support, effectively imposing harsh sanctions against Iran.

By the first week of July 2010, plans were in the works for a Cold War era "spy swap" in which ten Russian agents would be deported in exchange for the return of United States agents being held in Russia. Those agents sought by the United States included a Russian nuclear scientist, a former Russian military intelligence agent and a former KGB agent who were jailed for spying on behalf of the United States. There was also a former military intelligence agent jailed for spying for the United Kingdom.



The exchange ensued in Austria with the ten Russian agents boarding a flight to Moscow, and the four agents released by the Kremlin boarding an American aircraft close to the main passenger terminals at the airport in Vienna. The entire exchange took a total of 90 minutes.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the two countries involved cast the spy swap in positive terms. Russia said that the ten persons in United States custody facing charges there had been freed "for humanitarian considerations." Russia also lauded the move as being illustrative of "the general improvement of Russia-United States relations." Meanwhile, the United States was dismissing claims that only four agents were released in exchange for the ten Russians. United States authorities made clear that the four in question were "high value" and garnered far more usable information in comparison to the ten Russians. Moreover, the White House in the United States was playing up the fact that knowledge of the spy ring and plans for the spy swap had been in the works for several months before the Russians were ever arrested.

### **Special Entry**

#### Nuclear Politics

March 2012 was marked by the Nuclear Security Summit in South Korea, and attendance of global leaders from Russia, China, and the United States. The summit agenda aimed at reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism.

Ahead of the Nuclear Security Summit, United States President Barack Obama reiterated his call for "a world without nuclear weapons" and advanced his foreign policy agenda that advocates non-proliferation and the reduction of nuclear weapons through increase diplomacy.

In a speech to students at South Korea's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, President Obama said the United States -- the only nation to have ever used nuclear weapons -- was fully committed to reducing its stockpile of nuclear arms. The United States leader said his country had a "moral obligation" to pursue strategic arms cuts. President Obama also drew thunderous applause from the audience of students when he said that, as a father, he did not wish to see his daughters growing up in a world with nuclear threats.

"I say this as president of the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons," Obama said. "I say it as a commander in chief who knows that our nuclear codes are never far from my side. Most of all, I say it as a father, who wants my two young daughters to grow up in a world where everything they know and love can't be instantly wiped out."

President Obama acknowledged his country's unique position in the world, but he noted that "serious sustained global effort" was needed to achieve his expressed hope for a nuclear weapons-

free world.

The issue of nuclear proliferation has been at the forefront of the international purview given the ongoing concerns about North Korea's nuclear arsenal as well as Iran's nuclear ambitions. To that latter end, President Obama was expected to meet with Russia's outgoing President Dmitry Medvedev on the matter of Iran's nuclear program -- an issue that has not always seen progress due to divisions among countries with veto power on the United Nations Security Council. With an eye on working cooperatively with such countries, President Obama pledged to work with Russia and China at reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism.

With regard to China, President Obama noted that he has called on Beijing to work directly with Washington and this offer "remains open." He further noted that the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul presented an opportunity for the United States and China to fortify bilateral relations. He said, "I think this is also an opportunity to build on the excellent cooperation and dialogue across all the dimensions of our relationship that we've been able to establish over the last three years" The United States leader observed that the summit "shows the progress that the international community has made in preventing nuclear proliferation and making sure that we've secured nuclear materials." He continued, "And I know that's in the interest of both the United States and China."

With regard to Russia, the United States president said he hoped to follow up on the New Start Treaty (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty).

The "New START" provided for the significant reduction of the arsenal of nuclear weapons held by the United States and Russia; it would limit the United States' stockpile of 2,000 strategic nuclear weapons, and Russia's stockpile of nearly 3,000 to between 1,500 and 1,675 warheads respectively. "New START" was regarded as a milestone in the decades-long thrust to decrease the chances of nuclearized warfare. Indeed, it could arguably be characterized as one of the most important treaties forged in a generation.

President Obama expressed hope there could be a deal forged with Russia for further strategic arms cuts with Russia as part of the nuclear disarmament agenda. "Going forward, we'll continue to seek discussions with Russia on a step we have never taken before -- reducing not only our strategic nuclear warheads, but also tactical weapons and warheads in reserve," President Obama said.

That being said, President Obama was overheard telling his Russian counterpart President Dmitry Medvedev that dealing with the European missile defense shield would have to wait until after the election. The White House explained that President Obama was expressing the political reality of the campaign season where rigorous diplomacy and negotiations would be difficult to accommodate.

President Obama addressed the issue of Iran's controversial nuclear development program, saying that time remained to resolve the deadlock through diplomacy. "But time is short," said President Obama. "Iran must act with the seriousness and sense of urgency that this moment demands," he continued.

For its part, Iran has insisted that it has the right to develop nuclear development for peaceful civilian purposes. On the other side of the equation, the West has asserted that Iran is seeking to build nuclear weapons via its clandestine nuclear arms development program. While Iran has been subject to sanctions as a result of its failure to fulfill its international obligations, international concurrence has not come easily due to objections from China and Russia. However, President Obama made it clear that he intended to work with these two countries as he stated: "Today, I'll meet with the leaders of Russia and China as we work to achieve a resolution in which Iran fulfills its obligations."

Addressing the matter of North Korea's nuclear ambitions, President Obama made it clear that the United States held "no hostile intent" to that country, but warned that there would be "no rewards for provocation."

Note: In addition to the controversial and difficult issues of nuclear development in Iran and North Korea, the summit would also address the threats posed by nuclear terrorists, as well as radiological materials that could be used to construct a "dirty bomb" (i.e. a bomb that would spread radiological contamination rather than causing a nuclear explosion). Also on the agenda was a plan for nuclear power stations to convert to low-enriched fuel. Due to the complexity of these issues, it was unlikely that new agreements and concurrence would be found anytime soon despite the participation of 50 countries at the Nuclear Security Summit. Notably absent from the list of participants at the summit were North Korea and Iran.

### **Special Entry**

Russian President Putin says missile deal more likely with Obama than Romney

In the first week of September 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin entered the fray of American presidential politics, characterizing United States President Barack Obama as "a very honest man" while disparaging Republican nominee Mitt Romney as being politically craven.

In an interview with state media, President Putin said that if President Obama was re-elected in the November 2012 elections in the United States, he believed it was possible for a compromise agreement to be forged over the difficult issue of a United States' proposal for missile defense system in Europe. Russia has been opposed to the establishment of such a missile system in its

geopolitical neighborhood; however, President Putin was signaling that a deal could be reached with an Obama administration in the United States that would satisfy the interests of both countries. He said, "Is it possible to find a solution to the problem, if current President Obama is re-elected for a second term? Theoretically, yes." The Russian president went on to state the following: His desire to work out a solution is quite sincere. I met him recently on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Los Cabos, Mexico, where we had a chance to talk. And though we talked mostly about Syria, I could still take stock of my counterpart. My feeling is that he is a very honest man, and that he sincerely wants to make many good changes." He continued, "But this isn't just about President Obama."

The Russian head of state pivoted to talk about President Obama's rival for the presidency saying that although he could work with any American administration, there were limits to be considered. He said, "We'll work with whichever president gets elected by the American people. But our effort will only be as efficient as our partners will want it to be." President Putin then launched into a sharp rebuke of Mitt Romney's claim that Russia was "without question" the United States' "Number one geopolitical foe."

Putin said: "As for Mr. Romney's position, we understand that this is to a certain extent motivated by the election race. But I also think that he was obviously wrong, because such behavior on the international arena is the same as using nationalism and segregation as tools of U.S. domestic policy. It has the same effect on the international arena when a politician, a person who aspires to lead a nation, especially a superpower like the U.S., proclaims someone to be an enemy." Returning to the contentious matter of the missile shield, President Putin posed the following rhetorical question: "But what happens if Mr. Romney, who believes us to be America's No. 1 foe, gets elected as president of the United States? In that case, the system will definitely be directed against Russia."

It should be noted that President Putin's rare praise for President Obama stands in contrast to his attitude towards other American officials, or, American foreign policy in general. Russia has blocked a number of United State-backed Security Council resolutions against Syria at the United Nations, has at times stymied efforts to pressure Iran on its nuclear development program, and has even accused the United States' Department of State of providing tacit verbal support of anti-government demonstrations after Russia's recent disputed parliamentary elections.

### **Special Report:**

Boston terror bombings intersects with challenge of Islamic separatism and extremism in Russia

On April 15, 2013, two bombs exploded along the path to the finish line of the Boston Marathon in the state of Massachusetts in the United States. The explosive devices were believed to have been

placed inside backpacks and detonated remotely. Three people died as a result of these apparent terrorist acts. Meanwhile, there were more than 130 people hospitalized due to the intensely grave nature of so many injuries. It should be noted that due to the placement of the explosive devices, many of the victims endured horrific injuries to their lower extremities, with limbs severed as a result. Indeed, the scene of the tragedy displayed a traumatizing scene of dismembered and bloodied body parts along with the injured victims and shocked bystanders.

Thanks to the sheer quantity of photographic evidence from witnesses at the marathon taking pictures of the day's events, as well as cameras installed on commercial buildings, authorities were able to get a sense of the perpetrators and their actions. On April 18, 2013, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) released photographs of two suspects and actively sought the public's assistance in apprehending those responsible.

Later on the night of April 18, 2013 -- presumably agitated by the realization that their pictures were being shared with the world -- the two suspects became engaged in a spate of violent activities with deadly consequences. The two killed a police officer on the campus of MIT University, carjacked a man in a Mercedes-Benz SUV, held him by gunpoint, identified themselves as the Boston marathon bombers, and used his ATM card to withdraw \$800 in cash from the car owner's bank account, before releasing him at a gas station in Cambridge. The suspects then exchanged gunfire with police, with many stray bullets landing in the homes of people who lived in the hitherto quiet residential neighborhood of Watertown. As well, one transit officer was seriously wounded in the mayhem. The situation became even more intense when, during their attempted getaway, the two suspects hurled explosive devices at the police. Residents of the neighborhood who witnessed the events said in interviews with the media that the devices looked like a combination of grenades and pressure cooker bombs. Bomb detecting robots were soon dispatched to the scene to determine the security of the area since the two men reportedly hurled an arsenal of weapons and explosive devices on the Watertown residential street. Meanwhile, the firefight between the suspects and police was ongoing. One suspect was shot in the exchange of gunfire with police and then was run over by a car as his accomplice made his escape. The first suspect ultimately died as a result of his injuries, while the second suspect was captured after Boston and its surrounded areas was placed under lockdown for several hours. The second suspect would later be charged in the United States with using a weapon of mass destruction.

In the early hours of April 19, 2013, details regarding the identities of the two suspects were beginning to surface. The suspect seen in the FBI photographs wearing the black cap, and who had died as a result of the firefight with police, was identified as 26-year old Tamarlan Tsarnaev. The surviving suspect, who was seen in the FBI photographs wearing the white cap, was identified as his brother, 19-year old Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev. The young men were of Chechnyan and Avar (Dagestani) ethnicity. The father of the two brothers had worked in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan, which is now independent; the Tsarnaev brothers spent some of their younger years there. Anzor Tsarnaev was fired from his government job in Bishkek (the capital of Kyrgyzstan)

when the war sparked again in Chechnya in 1999; the general view was that he lost his job due to his Chechen ethnicity. The Tsarnaev family then moved to the Russian semi-autonomous region of Dagestan, close to the breakaway Russian region of Chechnya, which has been the site of an extremist separatist Islamic insurgency for about two decades. The entire family emigrated to the United States about ten years ago and settled in the suburban Boston area of Somerville and Cambridge. Tamarlan Tsarnaev was a legal resident of the United States and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev had become a United States citizen in 2012.

Information about Tamarlan Tsarnaev suggested that he had a difficult time adjusting culturally to life in the United States, despite some success with a boxing career. His decision to stop boxing on religious grounds appeared to have angered and perplexed his father, who had been socialized in the Soviet system and culture to hold a far more permissive and moderate attitude towards Islam. Influenced by his mother's religious transformation to Islamic orthodoxy, Tamarlan Tsarnaev reportedly became increasingly hard line in his Islamic and extremist views, even alienating some members of his extended family. Ruslan Tsarni, an uncle to the Tsarnaev brothers, was on the record with the media saying that as far back as 2009, Tamerlan Tsarnaev was becoming more of an extremist Muslim, expressing what he described as "this radical crap." This trend appeared to have fueled a break in contact among family members.

It should be noted that the Russian government had Tamarlan Tsarnaev on its radar, having requested that the United States authorities investigate him as early as 2011, due to suspicions of involvement with Islamic extremists and unspecified underground groups. The FBI confirmed that they interviewed Tamerlan Tsarnaev in 2011, as requested, but found no cause for alarm at the time.

Tamarlan Tsarnaev certainly traveled out of the country for extended periods of time, most recently in 2012 to visit his father who was now living in the Dagestan region of Russia. However, the actual time Tamarlan Tsarnaev spent with his father in Dagestan was limited to one month, leaving the rest of the period a mystery and open for interpretation. It was possible (although not confirmed) that he attended a terrorist training camp -- perhaps in the Caucasus region or elsewhere. But even without such an expedition, Tamarlan Tsarnaev may very well have been radicalized in a less "official" manner. While politicians in the United States were eager to suggest that Tamarlan Tsarnaev was radicalized out of the country, it was apparent that his increasingly extreme Islamic views were part of a personal transformation taking place in the home he shared with his mother. Still, it was after an overseas trip more recently that Tamarlan Tsarnaev created YouTube postings called "Terrorists," which featured videos from a militant extremist in Dagestan known as Amir Abu Dudzhan. In one posting, Dudzhan is shown holding a Kalashnikov rifle and declaring: "Jihad is the duty of every able-bodied Muslim." It was apparent that Tamarlan Tsarnaev was ideologically inspired by Islamic extremism and radicalism, while being sympathetic to the Chechnyan and Dagestani separatist and Jihadist causes.

Of course, the motivation for Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev to join his brother in carrying out terrorist

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attacks remained more of a matter for debate. Significantly more well-adjusted to American life than his brother, the younger Tsarnaev was a seemingly successful student at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, with a number of American friends, an active social life, and hopes for a medical career. It was difficult to determine if Dzhokhar Tsarnaev shared his brother's Jihadist views, or, if he was simply motivated by his relationship with his brother. To that end, there were some suggestions that Tamerlan Tsarnaev may have "brainwashed" his younger brother into participating in his terrorist agenda. For his part, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's posts on the Russian social media site, Vkontakt, made it clear that he self-identified as Islamic in terms of religion and "world view," and Chechnyan in terms of ethnicity and culture. He also posted links to Islamic and pro-Chechnyan independence websites.

There seemed to be bewilderment among United States intelligence circles about the idea that the Chechnyan drive for independence and war with Russia should be transported to American terrain. But it was not clear that Chechnyan independence was the driver for the two Tsarnaev brothers to commit acts of terror.

In fact, it should be noted that Islamic militants operating under the aegis of the Caucasian Mujahedeenin denied any involvement in the Boston marathon terror attacks, emphasizing that their conflict was with Russia. However, as discussed below, the militant Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus has steadily expanded past Chechnya's borders to neighboring territories, such as Dagestan and Ingushetia, and the cause itself has moved past establishing an independent Chechnya to a broader Jihadist goal in the Caucasus. It was quite possible that personal transformation to radical Islam meshed with the Jihadist agenda for the older Tsarnaev brother, and he drew the younger one into the fold.

But it was also possible that these two young men -- neither of whom were victims of economic strife as is the case for many Chechens, Dagestanis, and Ingushetians at home -- were motivated for different reasons. It was possible that they were inspired by a broader ideological (read: global Islamic Jihadist) sensibility, reminiscent of the September 11, 2001 hijackers, or the Nigerian Christmas Day bomber. All the young men in these cases were well-educated, spent several years in Western countries, quite possibly suffered from cultural alienation to some degree as a result of the experience, thus driving them to take on radicalized Islamic extremist identities, and ultimately - to terrorist actions on the basis of religion.

On April 22, 2013, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was reported to have told investigating authorities that he and his brother acted alone, rather than in concert with an organized Jihadist or terror enclave, and that their actions were motivated by their Islamist beliefs, and inspired by the goal of global Jihadism. By the last week of April 2013, a clearer picture of the motivation for the bombings was emerging as reports surfaced about the radicalization of Tarmalan Tsarnaev as early as 2010 -- a track that seemed to run parallel with the increasingly religious orientation of his mother. Both mother and son, as noted above, were wiretapped by Russian intelligence and



appeared to have discussed the possibility of participating in Jihad. As such, it was apparent that Islamic extremism within the Tsarnaev family fueled the terrorist actions of the two brothers.

### **Special Entry**

NSA leaker finally escapes Russian airport purgatory and accepts asylum in new homeland of Russia

Mid-2013 was dominated by questions about the fate of Edward Snowden -- a former contract employee of the National Security Agency (NSA) -- who leaked classified information to the public and then fled the United States. The revelations about the United States' secret surveillance program highlighted the post-September 11, 2001, debate over privacy rights versus national security interests in the United States.

The matter emerged in the public purview via an article in the United Kingdom-based Guardian newspaper. The Guardian's piece focused on a phone records monitoring program by the National Security Agency (NSA), which gathers millions of phone records in the United States as part of a database for national security purposes. The phone records or so-called "meta-data" theoretically do not include the actual content of conversations. Instead, the meta-data concentrates on points of contact, frequency of contacts, location data, call duration, and other such patterns that could presumably assist in determining whether terror suspects are in communication with persons in the United States.

The United States soon took legal action against Snowden for absconding with sensitive intelligence documents and then disclosing that classified information. Snowden was charged with theft of government property, unauthorized communication of national defense information to someone without a security clearance, and willful communication of classified intelligence. The latter two charges were violations covered under the Espionage Act.

After fleeing the United States, Snowden headed to the Chinese territory of Hong Kong, and from there he was in Russia en route to his final destination -- political asylum in another country. With the United States making it difficult for the NSA leaker to reach his final destination for asylum, Snowden was quite literally trapped at the "in transit" area of Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport, which was not technically Russian territory.

United States authorities were demanding the NSA leaker's extradition to face justice for the crimes outlined above. But while Russian President Vladimir Putin did not seem particularly enthused with Snowden's presence at the Sheremetyevo Airport, he nonetheless quickly foreclosed the notion of honoring United States requests for Snowden to be returned to the United States, saying the fugitive leaker had not broken any Russian laws.

Meanwhile, the motives behind Snowden's leaking activities were receiving even greater scrutiny. Snowden expanded his leaking agenda beyond the realm of exposing the NSA's surveillance activities to sharing information about the clandestine infiltration of the Chinese computer network intelligence with the Chinese themselves. Accordingly, it seemed that Snowden crossed the line into the realm of foreign espionage.

Snowden offered a sense of his motivation for this line-crossing during a live online chat with the Guardian newspaper on June 24, 2013. Snowden declared: "All spying is wrong." Apparently, from the perspective and personal judgment of Snowden, no covert activities by the United States targeting foreign governments were acceptable. Left unconsidered for Snowden was the matter of whether or not his fellow Americans concurred with his stance, or, if Americans might appreciate the utility of long-standing clandestine intelligence services in the interests of keeping the citizenry safe. Still, Snowden believed he was on a mission to expose this "wrongdoing" to the world.

The matter of how to go about accomplishing that goal was revealed in an interview with Snowden that was published by the South China Morning Post on the morning he departed Hong Kong. In that South China Morning Post interview, the fugitive leaker admitted that he took the job as an NSA contract worker with Booz Allen Hamilton for the specific purpose of acquiring and releasing sensitive classified intelligence. Snowden was now on the record stating the following: "My position with Booz Allen Hamilton granted me access to lists of machines all over the world the NSA hacked. That is why I accepted that position about three months ago." This admission was unlikely to strengthen his credibility, since it suggested that Snowden did not simply happen upon data he believed should be shared with the citizenry. Instead, he actively sought employment as a contractor to the NSA for the expressed purpose of acquiring classified intelligence data, which he then illegally released not only to the public -- but also to foreign powers.

For his part, President Barack Obama weighed in on the Snowden affair on June 27, 2013, when he dismissed the notion of personally pressuring his Chinese and Russian counterparts regarding extradition. Speaking from a news conference in Senegal (Africa) where he was on an overseas trip, the president said that he was concerned about the documents Snowden might have in his possession. "That's part of the reason why we'd like to have Mr. Snowden in custody," Obama said. The president continued, said. "But what I think we're going to continue to do is make sure that we are following the various channels that are well established and the rules that are well established to get this thing done." President Obama dismissed the notion of using tactics beyond the traditional outlets available, saying that he was "not going to be scrambling jets to get a 29-year-old hacker."

Snowden appeared to draw closer to a future in Russia in July 2013, when the fugitive leaker applied for political asylum in Russia. Snowden indicated that he would pursue temporary refuge in that country until he could be guaranteed "safe passage" to an unspecified Latin American

country in the future.

Noteworthy was the fact that around the same time, Russian President Putin pugnaciously asserted that Moscow had "no intention" of handing over Snowden to the United States. The Russian leader opened the door for Snowden to successfully find asylum in his country, pending one condition. Putin said: "If he [Snowden] wants to stay here, there is one condition: He must stop his activities aimed at inflicting damage on our American partners, no matter how strange it may sound coming from my lips."

For his part, United States President Obama addressed the unfolding imbroglio with Russia over the Snowden affair as follows: "We don't have an extradition treaty with Russia. On the other hand, Mr. Snowden, we understand, has traveled there without a valid passport and legal papers. And we are hopeful the Russian government makes decisions based on the normal procedures regarding international travel and the normal interactions law enforcement have."

It should be noted that in a statement released via Wikileaks, Snowden had argued that the United States condemned him to a life of "the extra-legal penalty of exile" as a punishment for his crimes. He continued, "Although I am convicted of nothing, it has unilaterally revoked my passport, leaving me a stateless person." Left unstated by Snowden was the fact that on June 21, 2013, the United States government levied legal charges of theft of government property and two violations covered under the Espionage Act. Clearly, in so doing, there was nothing "extra-legal" being undertaken by the United States government. It should also be noted that the revocation of a passport is standard procedure for persons charged with crimes and deemed to be flight risks. According to federal law, an American citizen's passport can be revoked due to "an outstanding federal warrant of arrest for a felony" as provided under Title 22 of the U.S. Code. Thus, despite Snowden's claim that he was now left a stateless person due to the revocation of his passport, in truth, he remained a citizen of the United States, retaining all constitutional rights as a United States citizen, while at the same time being subject to prosecution on United States soil for his violations of the law. Moreover, United States Attorney General Eric Holder expressly noted that Snowden would not be facing draconian legal consequences, such as the death penalty, if he were extradited to face justice.

Snowden made the announcement to seek asylum in Russia while meeting with human rights activists and politicians at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport where he also condemned the West for preventing him from reaching his ultimate destination in Latin America. This was in apparent reference to the fact that the Bolivian president's aircraft was denied access to certain European countries' air space on suspicion that Snowden was aboard. Snowden said, "Some governments in Western European and North American states have demonstrated a willingness to act outside the law, and this behavior persists today... This unlawful threat makes it impossible for me to travel to Latin America and enjoy the asylum granted there in accordance with our shared rights." In fact, sovereign states are fully within their rights to control access to their air space, even if the

outcome produces diplomatic imbroglios.

Left unsaid by Snowden was whether or not he would be meeting the conditions of the Russian government that he refrain from further harming the interests of the United States if he wanted to take refuge in Russia. It was not known how Russia intended to respond to this request from Snowden, given an impending meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President Barack Obama at a summit in Russia in September 2013. Obviously, by granting Snowden even temporary asylum in Russia, there would be a deleterious effect on relations with the United States. Indeed, the decision to allow Snowden to meet with human rights activists and political figures at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport was already raising the ire of the United States.

As noted by the White House itself, the prospect of Russian asylum would violate Moscow's own stated position that Snowden should avoid further damage to American national security. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said: "Providing a propaganda platform for Mr. Snowden runs counter to the Russian government's previous declarations of Russia's neutrality and that they have no control over his presence in the airport. It's also incompatible with Russian assurances that they do not want Mr. Snowden to further damage U.S. interests."

On Aug. 1, 2013, Edward Snowden was finally able to leave Russian airport purgatory and enter asylum in new homeland of Russia. Snowden's Russian lawyer said that his client received the legal documents necessary to exit the Sheremetyevo Airport's in-transit zone and enter Russian territory. Anatoly Kucherena declined to comment on the details of Snowden's Russian living arrangement, saying, "His location is not being made public for security reasons, since he is the most pursued man on the planet." He did, however, disclose that Snowden would be staying in a private home of American expatriates. Kucherena also acknowledged that Snowden intended to "build a new life in Russia" and noted that the NSA fugitive leaker was looking forward to learning about Russian culture. Kucherena added that while Snowden's legal permit allowed him temporary asylum for one year, the fugitive leaker did not foreclose the possibility of pursuing Russian citizenship in the future.

The movement of Snowden into Russian territory, and with Snowden's activities indicating a clear pursuit of a life in his new Russian homeland, marked a shift in Snowden's status. Indeed, it reflected Russia's official decision to support the NSA leaker wanted by the United States government. The move would invariably and deleteriously affect United States relations with Russia.

Yury Ushakov, foreign policy adviser to President Putin, tried to make light of the situation, saying the Snowden affair was "rather insignificant" and should not negatively impact relations with the United States. However, the United States seemed to be taking Russia's decision to grant asylum to Snowden quite seriously. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said: "We're extremely disappointed that the Russian government would take this step despite our very clear and lawful

requests in public and in private to have Mr. Snowden expelled to the United States to face the charges against him."

With United States President Barack Obama due to travel to Russia to attend the G-20 summit, the fact of the matter was that the Snowden affair could potentially cause the United States leader to cancel his planned private meeting with Putin, his Russian counterpart. As noted by White House Press Secretary Jay Carney, "We're evaluating the utility of a summit in light of this and other issues." Democrat Senator Chuck Schumer was more forthright in his assessment of the situation. He said Russia's decision to grant Snowden asylum was a "stab in the back" and recommended that President Obama consider relocating the G-20 summit to a country other than Russia.

Not surprisingly, in the first week of August 2013, President Obama cancelled his meeting with President Putin, although the United States president did intend to travel to Russia to attend the G-20 summit in St. Petersburg. A statement from the White House read as follows: "We have reached the conclusion that there is not enough recent progress in our bilateral agenda with Russia to hold a U.S.-Russia Summit." The White House statement continued, "We believe it would be more constructive to postpone the summit until we have more results from our shared agenda."

The Russian Kremlin expressed disappointment over President Obama's decision. As before, Putin's foreign policy adviser, Ushakov, tried to downplay the situation and move toward more productive ground, saying, "Russian representatives are ready to continue working together with American partners on all key issues on the bilateral and multilateral agenda." But at home in the United States, it seemed that White House national security advisers had unanimously backed the decision to cancel the meeting with Putin.

### **Special Report on Syrian Crisis:**

Report of chemical weapons usage surfaces and exacerbates Syrian Crisis; has the "red line" been crossed and will international powers now involve themselves in the Syrian civil war?

Summary:

Since early 2011, anti-government protests have spread and escalated across the Arab world; Syria emerged as an addition to the list of countries experiencing unrest in March 2011. At first, protesters stopped short of demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, instead demanding greater political freedom and efforts to end corruption. For his part, President Assad announced he would advance a reform agenda, which would include lifting the emergency laws that had been in place for decades, and increased rights to the country's disenfranchised Kurdish population. These moves were aimed at quelling the rising climate of unrest gripping the country. But over time, as protests continued, and as the Assad regime carried out a hard line crackdown on

dissent, tensions escalated between the government and the protesters.

In mid-2011, the United Nations Security Council and the Arab League respectively issued condemnations of the violence in Syria. As well, the United Nations Human Rights Council called for an independent inquiry into the violent crackdown on dissent. Meanwhile, global leaders were calling for President Assad to step down from power, given the brutality of the Syrian regime's crackdown on protesters. As of 2012, the bloody crackdown by the Assad regime on anti-government protesters was ongoing. In fact, the crackdown appeared to become more relentless in places such as Homs and Aleppo. Despite widespread condemnation from the West, a United Nations Security Resolution on the situation in Syria was subject to veto by Russia and China. A subsequent vote in the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly condemned Syria for its brutal crackdown. A prevailing truce, brokered by the joint United Nations/Arab League envoy, Kofi Annan, was established in the interests of preventing further bloodshed; however, it was revealed to be an exercise in theory rather than practice and eventually the United Nations monitoring mission ended in failure.

Syria has, meanwhile, been subject to sanctions by various countries and was sliding into pariah status in the international community. Assassinations, alleged massacres, geopolitical tensions with Turkey and Israel, and most recently, suspicions about the use of chemical weapons, have since mired the Syrian landscape. Indeed, it was increasingly clear that Syria had slipped into a state of civil war and was facing a devastating humanitarian crisis. That crisis reached new heights in August 2013 with claims that Syrian forces launched a chemical attack on the outskirts of Damascus. Was this the clear sign that United States President Barack Obama's "red line" had definitively been crossed? And would the international community become more involved in the Syrian crisis? The answers to those questions were yet to be determined.

Chemical weapons issue resurfaces:

On Aug. 21, 2013, Syrian opposition activists and rebels said that chemical weapons had killed hundreds of people on the outskirts of Damascus. They said that government forces launched a major bombardment on rebel forces in the area of Ghouta using rockets with toxic agents. The Syrian government dismissed the accusations as "illogical and fabricated." The Syrian military further said that rebel forces were suffering major defeat and were using claims of chemical attacks to draw attention away from the fact that they were losing the war.

The claims and counter-claims set up rival theories that could not be verified simply by looking at the videotaped footage of victims that immediately surfaced online. Stated differently, while the international media was able to obtain visual evidence of victims who had died, that footage could not prove whether they died as a result of conventional military bombardment or due to exposure to toxic substances. However, there was an increasing chorus of disturbing assertions by medical staff that the victims, particularly children, appeared to have suffered suffocation and blurred



vision. As well, further videotaped footage was starting to surface about the purported attacks, this time showing victims enduring convulsions or distinctly encountering breathing problems. In an interview with BBC News, Professor Alexander Kekule of the Institute for Medical Microbiology at Halle University in Germany, admitted that the videotaped images of the victims certainly suggested they had been subject to a chemical agent of some kind. However, he made a point of noting that none of the victims showed signs that they had been exposed to chemicals such as sarin or organophosphorous nerve agents.

The international community seemed initially wary to accept the claims of chemical attacks, perhaps with the memory of the inconclusive chemical weapons claims so fresh in their minds from earlier in the year (2013). Only recently, United Nations investigators traveled to Syria to look into those earlier claims. In August 2013, the United Nations convened an emergency meeting to discuss the newest chemical attack claims and its immediate response was to seek clarification on the situation in Syria. As noted by Maria Cristina Perceval, Argentina's United Nations Ambassador, "There is a strong concern among council members about the allegations and a general sense that there must be clarity on what happened and the situation must be followed closely."

That being said, individual countries -- such as France and the United Kingdom-- were going further and demanding that United Nations inspectors who were already investigating the earlier allegations of chemical attacks in Syria now look into these fresh claims. The United States echoed their call via White House spokesperson Josh Earnest, who said: "The United States is deeply concerned by reports that hundreds of Syrian civilians have been killed in an attack by Syrian government forces, including by the use of chemical weapons, near Damascus earlier today. We are formally requesting that the United Nations urgently investigate this new allegation. The United Nations investigative team, which is currently in Syria, is prepared to do so, and that is consistent with its purpose and mandate." Both the European Union and the Arab League entered the fray, adding their own voices to the call for United Nations inspectors to go look into the matter.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Russia had a different view and noted that the timing of the fresh claims of chemical attacks came just as United Nations inspectors were in Syria to investigate the chemical claims from earlier in 2013. The Russian foreign ministry said, "This makes us think that we are once again dealing with a premeditated provocation." Indeed, there was a legitimate question as to why the Syrian government would choose to use chemical weapons at a time when United Nations inspectors were "in country" and especially given United States President Barack Obama's 2012 famous statement that his country would not be involving itself in the Syrian crisis unless the Assad regime used chemical weapons -- essentially crossing a vital "red line" -- that could augur international military action.

There was incremental movement in that direction on Aug. 22, 2013, when the United Kingdom,

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France, and Turkey all demanded that the international community take a strong stand against the Syrian regime, if the chemical weapons attack was verified. France went further with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius saying that if the claims of a chemical attack proved to be true, a "reaction of force" would result. The United Kingdom issued a similar threat via the British Foreign Office, noting, "We believe a political solution is the best way to end the bloodshed" but also warning that the government of Prime Minister David Cameron "has said many times we cannot rule out any option that might save innocent lives in Syria." Meanwhile, Turkey goaded the United Nations about its symbolic "foot dragging" as Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu declared: "All red lines have been crossed but still the United Nations Security Council has not even been able to take a decision."

On Aug. 23, 2013, United States President Barack Obama offered comments on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria saying that the claims constituted a "big event, of grave concern." In an interview with CNN, President Obama noted that the conflict in Syria would have a bearing on United States national interests "both in terms of us making sure that weapons of mass destruction are not proliferating, as well as needing to protect our allies, our bases in the region." Nevertheless, the United States leader struck a cautious note, reminding journalists that his country was still in the process of seeking confirmation on the matter of chemical weapons usage; however, he asserted that if the allegations proved to be true, the crisis would "require America's attention." Left unsaid was the nature of that attention. For his part, President Obama urged prudent action, tacitly reminding people of the consequences of the reckless military intervention of his predecessor, George W. Bush, into Iraq. The United States president said: "Sometimes what we've seen is that folks will call for immediate action, jumping into stuff, that does not turn out well, gets us mired in very difficult situations, can result in us being drawn into very expensive, difficult, costly interventions that actually breed more resentment in the region."

Around this time, Russia maintained its belief that the use of chemical agents might be a provocation by the opposition. Still, Russia was now urging Syria to cooperate with an "objective investigation" by United Nations chemical weapons experts. United Kingdom Foreign Secretary William Hague indirectly addressed this suggestion that the use of chemical agents was a provocation by rebel forces saying, "I know that some people in the world would like to say this is some kind of conspiracy brought about by the opposition in Syria. I think the chances of that are vanishingly small and so we do believe that this is a chemical attack by the Assad regime on a large scale."

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon demanded an immediate investigation to clear up the matter. He said: "I can think of no good reason why any party -- either government or opposition forces -- would decline this opportunity to get to the truth of the matter." Ban also emphasized the fact that any use of chemical weapons -- by any actor or party -- would be a violation of international law, which would inevitably result in "serious consequences for the perpetrator."

### Key Developments:

On Aug. 24, 2013, the international medical assistance organization, Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF, ("Doctors Without Borders" in English), confirmed that it had treated as many as 3,600 patients with "neurotoxic symptoms," and noted that 355 of those patients had died. This news from MSF augmented the claim that the use of chemical agents were used in Syria in the final week of August 2013 although the international medical assistance organization was careful to note that it could not "scientifically confirm" the use of chemical weapons. MSF Director of Operations Bart Janssens said: "MSF can neither scientifically confirm the cause of these symptoms nor establish who is responsible for the attack. However, the reported symptoms of the patients, in addition to the epidemiological pattern of the events, characterized by the massive influx of patients in a short period of time, the origin of the patients, and the contamination of medical and first aid workers, strongly indicate mass exposure to a neurotoxic agent." He continued, "This would constitute a violation of international humanitarian law, which absolutely prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons."

On Aug. 25, 2013, the Assad regime again dismissed charges that it had used chemical toxins or poisons on Syrian citizens but did agree to allow United Nations inspectors to travel to suspected sites of chemical attacks to investigate the prevailing accusations. The United Nations said that Syria had agreed to allow investigators to operate in an environment of safety, even promising a ceasefire during inspections. However, as the convoy of vehicles carrying chemical weapons inspectors was driving to the Damascus suburb to carry out the investigation on Aug. 26, 2013, they were fired upon by snipers. The first vehicle in the convoy was repeatedly hit by gunfire, forcing it to discontinue its path. The other vehicles in the convoy, however, were able to get to the suspected sites and collect samples from victims, despite coming under gunfire. The United Nations released a statement describing what happened and condemning the attack on its convoy as follows: "The first vehicle of the Chemical Weapons Investigation Team was deliberately shot at multiple times by unidentified snipers in the buffer zone area. It has to be stressed again that all sides need to extend their cooperation so that the team can safely carry out their important work."

Should the United Nations' investigation end with evidence of the use of chemical agents, toxins, or poisons, the general consensus was that such confirmation would bolster the case for an international intervention into Syria. There were few hopes that veto-wielding Russia and China would sanction the use of force in Syria at the United Nations Security Council. However, there was a pertinent precedent for international action on the basis of humanitarian reasons. Specifically, the NATO campaign against Serbia to protect the people of Kosovo was undertaken without a United Nations Security Council Resolution and against the wishes of Russia -- an ally of Serbia. It was, thus, possible that Western powers could again go the NATO route -- this time in Syria.

A meeting of leaders from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and other NATO allies was in the offing to discuss possible options. United States Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel appeared to be reflecting the Obama administration's cautious stance regarding action in Syria when he said: "The United States is looking at all options regarding the situation in Syria. We're working with our allies and the international community. We are analyzing the intelligence. And we will get the facts. And if there is any action taken, it will be in concert with the international community and within the framework of legal justification."

Of course, the official report on the suspected chemical weapons usage in Syria by the United Nations was expected to take weeks to prepare. As such, the United States was indicating that there was a "clear" and "compelling" case to be made of those charges against the Assad regime in Syria. On Aug. 30, 2013, United States Secretary of State John Kerry released an unclassified intelligence report on the matter. Secretary of State Kerry said: "Read for yourselves the evidence from thousands of sources. This is the indiscriminate, inconceivable horror of chemical weapons. This is what Assad did to his own people." The United States' top diplomat also delivered the shocking claim that more than 1,400 people were killed in the chemical attack -- at least 400 of whom were children.

France was also giving weight to the United States' claims regarding a massive chemical attack in Syria, with French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault releasing a report in parliament. That report went so far as to note that while the Syrian army had already -- and repeatedly -- used chemical weapons against the Syrian people, on Aug. 21, 2013, it launched an attack using "massive use of chemical agents." The French report further alleged that the chemical attack at that time "could not have been ordered and carried out by anyone but the Syrian government." The French report additionally noted that Syria's arsenal of chemical weapons was "massive and diverse" and included both the nerve agent, sarin, and the toxic known agent, VX.

France was, therefore, maintaining its stance that there should be an international response to Syria's use of chemical weapons. On the issue of France's role in that response, Prime Minister Ayrault said, "France is determined to penalize the use of chemical weapons by Assad's regime and to dissuade with a forceful and firm response." He also indicated that France was working with international partners to build a coalition that would carry out a possible course of action against Syria. The French government was being very emphatic about the obligation of world powers to respond to the use of chemical weapons in defiance of international conventions. As stated by French President Francois Hollande on Sept. 3, 2013: "When a chemical massacre takes place, when the world is informed of it, when the evidence is delivered, when the guilty parties are known, then there must be an answer." The French leader urged other European countries to show unity on the issue.

The claims about Syria's use of chemical weapons by the United States and France were augmented by the statement of NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who declared

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that he was personally convinced that a chemical attack had, indeed, taken place, and that the Assad regime was responsible for that attack. That being said, there was no suggestion that NATO would be involved in any intervention into the Syrian crisis in the manner in which the regional security bloc was engaged in Libya.

On Sept. 4, 2013, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said that any intervention into the Syrian crisis should have the blessing of the United Nations, and urged the Security Council to take action. He also declared, "This is a larger issue than the conflict in Syria. This is about our collective responsibility to humankind." Left unsaid by Secretary General Ban was the fact that veto-wielding Russia and China were not eager to accommodate a resolution that would authorize such intervention.

United States weights its options:

Meanwhile, even as the evidence was increasing to support the claim of a chemical weapons attack in Syria, the political will to build an international coalition to act against Syria was eroding. At issue was a parliamentary vote in the United Kingdom's House of Commons urging an international response to the Syria chemical weapons crisis. The vote came amidst British Prime Minister David Cameron's vociferous condemnation of Syria's apparent use of chemical weapons, and his suggestion that the United Kingdom would join the United States and France in delivering some kind of punitive action against Syria. But when the parliamentary vote went down to defeat in the House on Commons on Aug. 29, 2013, it was apparent that the United Kingdom would not be a player in any kind of military intervention.

Irrespective of the political developments across the Atlantic, in the United States, President Barack Obama on Aug. 30, 2013, made clear that he was still considering the full range of options in response to Syria's use of chemical weapons against its own citizens. Referring to the aforementioned report on the suspected chemical weapons usage in Syria released by Secretary of State Kerry, President Obama said, "As you've seen, today we've released our unclassified assessment detailing with high confidence that the Syrian regime carried out a chemical weapons attack that killed well over 1,000 people, including hundreds of children. This follows the horrific images that shocked us all."

With an eye on showing why the use of chemical weapons required a response, President Obama said, "This kind of attack is a challenge to the world. We cannot accept a world where women and children and innocent civilians are gassed on a terrible scale." He continued, "So, I have said before, and I meant what I said that, the world has an obligation to make sure that we maintain the norm against the use of chemical weapons." In this way, the United States president was making it clear that the international community had an obligation to respond to Syria's use of chemical weapons -- an act that was undertaken in defiance of international law and in contravention to international norms.

President Obama indicated that several options were under review, as he noted, "Now, I have not made a final decision about various actions that might be taken to help enforce that norm. But as I've already said, I have had my military and our team look at a wide range of options." That being said, President Obama noted that a long-term campaign involving a ground force in Syria (reminiscent of Iraq) were not among those possibilities. He expressly said, "We're not considering any open-ended commitment. We're not considering any boots on the ground approach. What we will do is consider options that meet the narrow concern around chemical weapons." Evidently, although President Obama believed there was a moral obligation to act against Syria for its use of chemical weapons, he was not eager to see the United States mired in another war in the world's most volatile region. Stated differently, it was through the prism of the Iraq debacle that the United States leader was viewing his options for dealing with Syria.

Syria's stance:

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has repeatedly denied that his forces launched any chemical attacks. The Syrian leader has warned of a wider Middle Eastern war if foreign countries decide to move forward with military action against Syria. That wider war could occur if Assad decided to react to a yet-to-occur military strike by international powers on Syria. Some of the possibilities available to Assad would include retaliatory attacks on pro-Western allies of the United States, such as Israel, Jordan, and Turkey. But the reality was that Syria's military already had its hands full fighting the civil war at home. Moreover, Syria likely could not risk sparking the ire of Israel, with its own well-armed military, or Jordan, which hosts United States fighter jets, missiles and troops, or Turkey -- a NATO member state. Indeed, an attack on any NATO country, such as Turkey, would prompt a response from the entire security alliance.

Note on Russia's position:

Russia has maintained the view that the notion of a chemical attack by the Syrian government was inconceivable. Russia has also indicated that it would block a resolution in the United Nations Security Council authorizing a use of force against Syria. However, in early September 2013, Russian President Putin indicated some softening of his stance as he noted that he could be persuaded to change his mind if provided with clear evidence of a chemical attack. Russia has also long advocated for a negotiated or diplomatic settlement to the Syrian crisis.

Status update:

On Sept. 8, 2013, the European Union called for no action to go forward with regard to Syria until the findings on the chemical agents were made available by the United Nations investigative team. As well, plans for a full vote in the United States Congress authorizing use of force against the Syria regime were cancelled.

At issue was an unexpected diplomatic breakthrough that emerged when United States Secretary of State John Kerry uttered a (seemingly) off-hand remark during a news conference in London on Sept. 9, 2013 with British Foreign Secretary William Hague. Secretary of State Kerry said that President Assad could prevent a military strike on Syria if he handed over "every single bit" of his chemical weapons to the international community. At the time, Secretary of State Kerry said that he did not expect Assad to respond to this call; but, in fact, the remark appeared to have sparked fresh possibilities for a diplomatic solution with Russia championing the idea of subjecting Syria's chemical weapons stockpile to international auditors, and then placing them under the aegis of international jurisdiction. Syria -- Russia's client state in the Middle East -- was almost immediately scrambling to say that it would be willing to move in this direction. That stance by Syria functioned also as an admission by the Syrian regime that it was, in fact, in possession of chemical weapons. Until that moment, the Assad regime would not even acknowledge that reality.

On Sept. 10, 2013, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem offered a public admission of the Assad regime's chemical weapons stockpile when he said: "We are ready to inform about the location of chemical weapons, halt the production of chemical weapons, and show these objects to representatives of Russia, other states and the United Nations." He continued, "Our adherence to the Russian initiative has a goal of halting the possession of all chemical weapons."

On the night of Sept. 10, 2013, United States President Obama delivered a national address on the Syrian issue. Originally, the speech had been regarded as an opportunity for the president to build congressional support -- then, at anemic levels -- for authorizing strikes against Syria, and assuring a war-weary and skeptical nation that such action was necessary. Now, however, the speech had a two-fold purpose -- to bolster that aforementioned case against Syria, but also to address the emerging diplomatic channel.

As regards the former objective, President Obama presented a succinct case for acting against Syria. President Obama emphasized his conviction that the Assad regime was responsible for the chemical toxins attack that ensued around Ghouta on Aug. 21, 2013, characterizing the scene of death as "sickening," reminding the global community that such an attack was a violation of international law, and warning Americans that it posed a threat to United States national security.

But the president also opened the door to a negotiated settlement on the issue of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal and usage. He said that the Russian plan to report Syria's chemical weapons arsenal and place them under the aegis of international jurisdiction constituted "encouraging signs" and announced that he would pursue a "diplomatic path." The president said that his top diplomat, Secretary of State Kerry, would travel to Geneva in Switzerland to meet his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, with an eye on pursuing a negotiated settlement on the issue of dealing with Syria's chemical weapons.



President Obama offered cautious support for this path forward, saying, "It's too early to tell whether [the plan] would succeed, and any agreement must verify that the Assad regime keeps its commitments. But this initiative has the potential to remove the threat of chemical weapons without the use of force, particularly because Russia is one of Assad's strongest allies." President Obama defended his decision to consider military strikes against Syria, arguing that the current diplomatic opening was only possible as a result of the credible threat of military force by the United States. Accordingly, the United States leader made it clear that his country's armed forces would maintain their posture, saying: "Meanwhile, I've ordered our military to maintain their current posture, to keep the pressure on Assad and to be in a position to respond if diplomacy fails."

While United States pundits parried opinions over the effectiveness and utility of President Obama's speech, a poll from CNN showed that while a majority of Americans remained skeptical about involving the country in the Syrian crisis, an overwhelming majority expressed support for President Obama's approach to Syria. In precise terms, there was a split decision on whether or not the president's case for strikes with 47 percent of Americans saying the president had done so and had 50 percent saying that he had not. However, 61 percent of Americans said they favored President Obama's "wait for diplomacy and hold steady with the threat of action" approach, as set forth in his national address.

On Sept. 11, 2013, Russia officially handed over its plan for placing Syria's stockpile under international control to the United States. Discussion over its contents was expected to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, between United States Secretary of State Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. Those negotiations would be of a bilateral nature. The Obama administration announced that in addition to Secretary of State Kerry's meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov, the United States' top diplomat would also meet with the United Nations-Arab League special envoy on Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi.

On that very day, difficult discussions also commenced in the United Nations Security Council -- with particular emphasis among the permanent veto-wielding members, United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China -- over the proposition and the associated United Nations resolution.

The diplomatic path was not without serious obstacles. Russia was demanding that the United States withdraw its threat of force, while France -- the United States' ally on the issue of action against Syria -- was crafting a United Nations Security Council resolution that would include a provision for precisely such action, should Syria fail to comply with the dictates of the plan. At issue was France's inclusion of a Chapter VII provision (of the United Nations charter), which would effectively authorize the use of force if Syria failed to adhere to its stated obligations. For its part, Russia advocated for a non-binding declaration supporting its initiative.



At stake in that initiative was a demand for Syria to provide a full audit of its chemical weapons -- including varieties of toxins and storage locations -- within 15 days, as well as procedures facilitating the transfer of control over those chemical substances, and ultimately, their destruction. Of course, the issue of destruction itself presented a disagreement between Russia and Syria with the latter not keen on that aspect of the plan. Still, with the client state of Syria reliant on Russia to save the regime from United States strikes, it was likely that the arsenal of chemical toxins would ultimately be set for elimination.

Complicating the diplomatic path was an opinion editorial piece penned by Russian President Vladimir Putin, which was published by the New York Times. At the more conventional level, the piece included a fulsome plea for diplomacy by Putin as follows: "The potential strike by the United States against Syria, despite strong opposition from many countries and major political and religious leaders, including the pope, will result in more innocent victims and escalation, potentially spreading the conflict far beyond Syria's borders."

Putin also urged international action via global instruments of jurisprudence, noting that any actions should go through the United Nations Security Council, which stood as "one of the few ways to keep international relations from sliding into chaos." Putin also offered the reasonable argument that the United Nations could go down the road of obsolescence as its precursor, the League of Nations, if "influential countries bypass the United Nations and take military action without Security Council authorization." Left unstated by the Russian leader, however, was the fact that his country's penchant for United Nations authorization for the use of force was not at play during the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Afghanistan, or even its limited engagement in the Georgian territory of South Ossetia most recently.

The most incendiary element in Putin's editorial was perhaps his chastisement of President Obama's declaration on United States' exceptionalism. Putin argued against that claim, stating: "And I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism, stating that the United States' policy is What makes America different...it's what makes us exceptional. It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation." This statement was a stunning example of irony coming from a world leader who declared to his fellow Russians in February 2013: "We are a victorious people! It is in our genes, in our genetic code!"

The Obama administration responded to this provocative opinion piece by Putin a day later on Sept. 12, 2013 with White House Press Secretary Jay Carney saying, "It's worth also pointing out there's a great irony in the placement of an op-ed like this, because it reflects the truly exceptional tradition of this country of freedom of expression." Carney then went on to note that freedom of expression and free speech were "on the decrease in Russia." Carney also used the occasion to place the burden of the success of a diplomatic path on Russia, noting that the Russian president had placed his "prestige and credibility on the line" in offering a proposal to Syria to turn over its

chemical weapons.

The Putin versus Obama contretemps aside, the diplomatic channels remained open. On Sept. 12, 2013, the United Nations announced that it had received documents from Syria, effectively acceding to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits the production and use of chemical weapons. Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afar, said, "Legally speaking Syria has become, starting today, a full member of the (chemical weapons) convention."

The move was the first significant indication that Syria was attempting to meet the demands of the international community. Syrian President Assad said in an interview with Russian media that now that those documents had been dispatched, the chemical weapons audit data would be submitted within 30 days of signing the Chemical Weapons Convention. But Assad appeared to be reticent about relinquishing his control over the situation, arguing that Syria's assent to the Russian plan was "not unilateral" and that his country would only accept it "if America stops military threats and if other countries supplying the rebels with chemical weapons also abide by the agreement." United States Secretary of State Kerry quickly disposed of the notion that Assad was calling the shots, warning the Syrian leader that "this is not a game." Kerry also indicated that he viewed Assad's promise to submit chemical weapons data with suspicion. Kerry instead asserted the following in regard to Syria's chemical weapons audit: "It has to be real. It has to be comprehensive. It has to be verifiable. It has to be credible. It has to be timely and implemented in a timely fashion. And finally there ought to be consequences if it doesn't take place."

On Sept. 13, 2013, a preview of the highly anticipated United Nations' report on Syria's suspected use of chemical weapons emerged in the public purview. The chief chemical weapons inspector, Ake Sellstrom, acknowledged that the report was complete but that its release would be decided by the secretary general of the United Nations. The United Nations report was not expected to expressly assign blame for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, although according to sources, it would augment existing findings about the horror that unfolded in Ghouta, and its scientific evidence based on blood, urine, and soil samples would provide compelling suggestions as to the party responsible for the chemical weapons attack.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon indicated the findings from the United Nations inspectors would "overwhelmingly" confirm that chemical weapons were used in Syria. Speaking from the United Nations Women's International Forum, the head of the United Nations did not elaborate on which entity -- the Syrian regime or the Syrian rebels -- were responsible for the use of chemical weapons in that country; however, Ban was heard saying that Syrian President Assad was guilty of "crimes against humanity." Ban also said, "Therefore, I'm sure that there will be surely the process of accountability when everything is over."

Meanwhile, negotiations were ongoing in Geneva (Switzerland) between the top diplomats from the United States and Russia respectively -- Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov

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-- with leaks indicating that the two men enjoyed good rapport. The negotiations were being characterized as "constructive" and went late into the wee hours of Sept. 14, 2013, suggesting that climate was ripe with the possibility of forging a deal.

### Chemical Weapons Deal

On Sept. 14, 2013, United States Secretary of State Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov announced that a breakthrough agreement had been reached and that diplomacy had won the day. Speaking at a joint news conference with his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Lavrov, Secretary of State John Kerry said of the concord: "If fully implemented, this framework can provide greater protection and security to the world."

The agreement, titled "Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons," calls for a full accounting of its chemical weapons stockpile within one week, the destruction of all production equipment by November 2013, and the elimination or transfer of the arsenal of chemical weapons by the middle of 2014. Achieving the objectives of the agreement promised to be difficult. A one week deadline for a full audit of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal was strenuously aggressive. As well, the destruction of production equipment and chemical toxins by 2014 was considered unprecedented since previous processes of this nature have typically taken several years to complete. Moreover, there would be complicated questions yet to address, such as how to ensure the safety of international inspectors in Syria.

It should also be noted that agreement on a United Nations Security Council resolution mandating Syrian disarmament on chemical weapons still promised to be potentially fractious. Russia was reluctant to the notion of adding a Chapter VII provision (authorizing the use of force if Syria reneged on its obligations) to the resolution, although Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov intimated that the provision could be added in the future in a worse case scenario. As such, the United States was not expected to press for that particular inclusion at this time.

The diplomatic breakthrough and the agreement itself were thus being lauded by all veto-wielding members of the United Nations Security Council (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China), as well as the broader United Nations and NATO. But with the same lack of diplomatic restraint shown by Russian President Putin in his opinion editorial in the New York Times, Syria's Assad regime hailed the breakthrough agreement as a "victory" for that country. Syrian Reconciliation Minister Ali Haidar declared in an interview with Russian media, "It's a victory for Syria achieved thanks to our Russian friends."

United States Secretary of State Kerry quelled Assad regime's bravado warning on Sept. 15, 2013 that the United States retained its right to carry out punitive strikes against Syria, if that country did not meet its publicly stated international obligations. Secretary of State Kerry said, "If diplomacy has any chance to work, it must be coupled with a credible military threat." "We cannot have

hollow words in the conduct of international affairs," Kerry added.

Already, President Obama in the United States had reminded the Syrian regime that while the agreement was "an important step" in the right direction, his country reserved the right to act against Syria for failing to meet its obligations. The United States leader said, "If diplomacy fails, the United States remains prepared to act." Indeed, the United States Pentagon noted that the United States military remained in a posture poised for military strikes against Syria.

Within the rebel ranks, the agreement was being regarded with scorn and bitterness. Indeed, the military leader of the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army, General Salim Idriss, dismissed the deal as irrelevant, saying, "All of this initiative does not interest us. Russia is a partner with the regime in killing the Syrian people." Idriss also cast the deal as a Russian plan intended to gift the Assad regime with more time, and as such, he vowed to keep up the fight.

United Nations chemical inspectors confirm sarin attack; implicate Assad regime --

By the third week of September 2013, the United Nations released its report in which it confirmed that chemical weapons were used in Syria. The report by scientific experts stated that the banned chemical nerve agent, sarin, was dispersed using rockets into the Damascus suburb of Ghouta. The United Nations inspectors said that they had been able to procure significant evidence upon which to base their conclusions. That conclusion, in the words of the inspectors, was as follows: "The environmental, chemical and medical samples we have collected provide clear and convincing evidence that surface-to-surface rockets containing the nerve agent sarin."

The report stopped short of assigning blame for the use of sarin, however the forensic details of the weapons appeared to implicate the Syrian government in the chemical weapons attack. Specifically, the report detailed the size and shape of the munitions, and the precise direction from which the munitions had been fired. These elements foreclosed the possibility that rebel forces were responsible for the chemical weapons attack, as alleged by the Assad regime, and as suggested by President Putin of Russia.

Indeed, the inspectors were able to carry out standard ordinance identification and crater analysis to conclude that two types of rockets had been used. Meanwhile, using angular measurements from the points where rockets had struck to their points of origin, the inspectors were able to note that the point of origin was a Syrian military complex. The identification of the rockets, along with size and sophistication of the launchers, and finally the angular plot analysis, together bolstered the unofficial assessment that the Syrian government and not the insurgents were responsible for the chemical attack on Ghouta.

The details of the report also suggested that the attack was more lethal than previously thought. First, based on the remnants of a warhead recovered by inspectors, it was clear that its capacity of

sarin was quite large at around 56 liters. Second, the low temperature at the time of the attack meant that the sarin would prevail on the ground levels, even penetrating the lower levels of buildings where, according to the report, "many people were seeking shelter."

After a briefing of the United Nations Security Council, which included a presentation of the report's findings by Dr. Ake Sellstrom -- a leading chemical weapons experts -- United Nations Secretary Ban Ki-Moon offered the following assessment: "The report makes for chilling reading. The findings are beyond doubt and beyond the pale. This is a war crime." Secretary General Ban also stayed away from assigning blame to any particular party; however, he said that he hoped the seriousness of the situation would spur a new diplomatic solution to the Syrian crisis.

Such a hope was unlikely to be realized. Already Russia was downplaying the report as unconvincing. Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, suggested that there remained several unanswered questions and said, "We need not jump to any conclusions." Russia later went further and claimed the United Nations finding were "one sided." Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said, "We are disappointed, to put it mildly, about the approach taken by the U.N. secretariat and the U.N. inspectors, who prepared the report selectively and incompletely." He continued, "Without receiving a full picture of what is happening here, it is impossible to call the nature of the conclusions reached by the U.N. experts ... anything but politicized, preconceived and one-sided."

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius responded to Russia's critique of the United Nations inspectors' report saying, "We are surprised by Russia's attitude because they are calling into question not the report, but the objectivity of the inspectors... I don't think anybody can call into question inspectors that have been appointed by the U.N."

The United Kingdom ambassador to the United Nations, Mark Lyall Grant, noted that the evidence pointed to a sophisticated chemical attack at the hands of the Assad regime. He said, "This was no cottage-industry use of chemical weapons." Pointing to the variety of munitions and the trajectories that had been plotted, Grant stated: "In our view, that there is no remaining doubt that it was the regime that used chemical weapons."

United States ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, acknowledged that in the aftermath of Iraq, there was justifiable skepticism. But referring to the scientific evidence presented the aforementioned expert, Sellstrom, she said that it was important to focus on the facts. Powers said, "We understand some countries did not accept on faith that the samples of blood and hair that the United States received from people affected by the Aug. 21 attack contained sarin. But now Dr. Sellstrom's samples show the same thing. And it's very important to note that the regime possesses sarin, and we have no evidence that the opposition posses sarin."

The United Nations itself entered the fray to defend the work of its chemical weapons experts who

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endured being shot at in Syria, in order to procure copious amounts of samples, and then carry out extensive analysis in record time. United Nations spokesperson, Martin Nesirky, declared: "The findings in that report are indisputable. They speak for themselves and this was a thoroughly objective report on that specific incident." Nesirky also emphasized the fact that there was an assiduously cross-checked chain of custody of all the environmental and biomedical samples used in the chemical weapons inquest.

It should be noted that an analysis of the United Nations' chemical inspectors' report by the Arms Control Association, made it clear that the findings were fair, factual, and convincing. The Arms Control Association drew attention to the annexes of the United Nations' chemical inspectors' report, stating, "The additional details and the perceived objectivity of the inspectors buttress the assignment of blame to Bashar al-Assad's Syrian government." As well, it should be noted that a separate investigation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria was carried out by Human Rights Watch, which also concluded that the Assad regime -- and not the rebels -- were behind the sarin attack. Indeed, Human Rights Watch concluded that sarin-filled shells had been fired from a military base in Syria supervised by Maher Assad -- the brother of the Syrian president.

In the aftermath of the release of the report by the United Nations, the United States reminded Syria -- and indeed, the world -- that it remained under threat of punitive action for its use of chemical weapons, and was now subject to the provisions of the Russian-American compromise discussed above. To that end, Secretary of State John Kerry emphasized that his country would not tolerate any delays in the process of auditing and destroying Syria's chemical weapons. Secretary of States Kerry said, "If Assad fails in time to abide by the terms of this framework, make no mistake, we are all agreed -- and that includes Russia -- that there will be consequences." To that end, efforts were underway to move forward with a Security Council resolution against Syria. United Kingdom Ambassador Grant warned that the Security Council resolution against Syria was intended to compel Syria to abide by its promise to abandon its chemical weapons program.

It should be noted that in an address to the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 24, 2013, United States President Barack Obama called for a robust United Nations Security Council resolution on Syria's chemical weapons. President Obama said that a strong resolution was needed "to verify that the regime is keeping its commitments" to remove or destroy its chemical weapons arsenal.

### **Special Entry**

Georgia warns Russia against backing independence claims of Georgia breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia --



On Feb. 4, 2014, just ahead of the opening of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi (Russia), Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili of Georgia warned Russia that it should refrain from taking any positions that might support the independence claims of the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Relations between Russia and Georgia have long been tense since the early 1990s when Georgia declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Relations devolved further over the years as Russia has supported the independence inclinations of the two Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But relations between Georgia and Russia hit a nadir in 2008 when the two countries fought a brief war over South Ossetia. Since then, they have had no diplomatic ties.

With Russia in the international spotlight as it hosts the 2014 Winter Olympics, Georgia was adamant about ensuring that Russian President Vladimir Putin would not use the spotlight to advance the independence causes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Of note was the fact that Russia's Olympic security zone was expanded into Abkhazia, which was less than 25 miles away from Sochi.

Prime Minister Garibashvili went to so far as to suggest that his country considered boycotting the Olympics in Russia. During a meeting with European Union and NATO officials in Belgium, he said, "It was a tough decision not to boycott the Games...But if there are any surprises we will of course react adequately."

Editor's Note:

Since the final years of the Soviet Union, Russian-backed separatists in South Ossetia have sought to break away from Georgia and join North Ossetia, which is currently an autonomous region in Russia. While South Ossetians assert their right to self-determination, Georgia considers such separatist aspirations as a threat to its territorial integrity.

The dispute descended into a civil war in 1991, though a Russian-mediated ceasefire in 1992 ended the armed conflict and established a general framework by which to resolve the dispute. Despite the presence of Russian, Georgian, and Ossetian peacekeepers, tensions remain high and, in 2004, the situation once again descended into armed conflict. In January 2005, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili announced a peace plan under which South Ossetia would receive a high degree of autonomy and economic incentives, though South Ossetian leaders continued to reject any attempt to put the disputed territory under Georgian rule.

The geopolitical dimensions of the conflict have growing increasingly important as Russia has sought to use its military support for South Ossetia as leverage against Georgia's pro-Western government. November 2006 marked the time of an overwhelmingly supported independence



referendum in South Ossetia, which was intended to augment the thrust for sovereignty. But Georgia rejected such independence aspirations and warned that it could provoke a war.

In April 2007, the Georgian parliament approved legislation creating a temporary administration in South Ossetia. The move evoked an outcry from South Ossetian separatists and contributed to devolving tensions with Russia. The situation was no less stable two months later when South Ossetian separatists accused Georgia of attacking the capital of Tskhinvali with mortar and sniper fire.

Peace talks between Georgia and South Ossetia in October 2007, which were hosted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), saw no progress.

In early 2008, following Kosovo's secession from Serbia, South Ossetia called for international recognition of its self-avowed sovereignty and independence from Georgia. However, such recognition was not forthcoming at the broad level although the Russian parliament called on the Kremlin to indeed recognize South Ossetia (and Abkhazia) as independent.

In April 2008, the Georgian power-sharing agreement, which accorded significant autonomy but not actual sovereignty, was rejected by South Ossetia, which insisted on complete independence.

In August 2008, Georgia was carrying out a full military offensive in South Ossetia, intended to "restore constitutional order" to the breakaway region. Russia was responding with military action of its own. The situation left the region on the brink of full-scale conflict and in a state of crisis. By mid-August of 2008, a truce had been negotiated under the stewardship of the French government; this truce aimed to bring an end to the crisis.

Meanwhile, ethnic Abkhazs in the strategically located province of Abkhazia on the Black Sea have sought to assert their independence from Georgia. In 1991, war erupted as Georgian troops battled Abkhaz forces, alleged to have the backing of Russia and various northern Caucasus militant groups. More than 250,000 ethnic Georgians fled Abkhazia because of the fighting, fueling accusations that Abkhaz forces carried out a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Throughout the 1990s, the United Nations (U.N.), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Group of Friends (consisting of American, British, German, French, and Russian envoys) have attempted to negotiate a resolution to the conflict, but the situation remains a stalemate. Abkhazia, which is economically isolated as a result of a Georgian embargo, operates as a de facto protectorate of Russia. The geopolitical dimensions of the conflict have grown increasingly important, as Russia has sought to use its military support for Abkhazia as leverage against Georgia's pro-Western government. For its part, Georgia has accused Russia of seeking to informally annex Abkhazia. Nevertheless, Georgia has offered Abkhazia a high degree of autonomy, but insists on preserving

its territorial integrity. Abkhazia, meanwhile, continues to demand independence.

The 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia affected Abkhazia as well. The French-brokered peace agreement that was intended to end that crisis included implications for both South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

It should be noted that a report commissioned by the Council of the European Union placed the blame for the start of the 2008 war over the semi-autonomous region of South Ossetia on Georgia. The report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia found that the war was spurred when Georgian forces attacked the breakaway republic of South Ossetia, in an attempt to re-establish sovereign control. Indeed, the report read: "The shelling of Tskhinvali [the capital of South Ossetia] by the Georgian armed forces during the night of 7 to 8 August 2008 marked the beginning of the large-scale armed conflict in Georgia." The report unambiguously concluded that the attack by Georgia was not justified by international law as follows: "There is the question of whether [this] use of force... was justifiable under international law. It was not."

Still, the report did not cast Georgia as being the only guilty party. It noted that the hostilities between the two sides led to provocative actions by both Georgia and Russia. The report also acknowledged that after Georgia shelled South Ossetia, Russia responded by not only repelling the assault but, in fact, pressing further into Georgian territory. While Russia withdrew its forces several days later when a ceasefire was hammered out, it nonetheless retained a military presence in both South Ossetia and the other breakaway republic of Abkhazia, which was also technically under Georgian rule. The report found that while Russia's initial actions -- responding to attacks on its own personnel in South Ossetia -- were justified, its continued advance into Georgian territory "went far beyond the reasonable limits of defense." The report also found that the destruction that ensued after the ceasefire went into effect was "not justifiable by any means."

The report further dismissed Georgian claims that Russia carried out a large-scale incursion into South Ossetia ahead of the outbreak of war, noting that this accusation could not be substantiated. The European Union-sponsored report would only allow that there was some evidence of a low-level military build-up by the Russians in the area ahead of the conflict.

Perhaps not surprisingly, both Russia and Georgia interpreted the findings through an ideological prism most suited to their respective agendas. Russia asserted that the report had rendered an "unequivocal answer" on the question of who started the war. On the other side of the equation, Georgia said that the report showed that Russia had been spoiling for a fight throughout.

It should be noted that the report also registered the human toll of the conflict. Approximately 850 people died in August 2008, more than 100,000 were forced to flee their homes to escape the crossfire of violence, and to date, about 35,000 people remain displaced. Humanitarian aid

agencies have warned that there is a refugee crisis continuing in the region.

### **Special Entry on Ukraine's Uprising and Russian annexation of Crimea**

Special Report:

Following landmark uprising in Ukraine, Russia annexes Crimea in new East-West confrontation; anxieties raised over Russian nationalist ambitions to recapture Soviet-era territory

Summary:

Turbulence and turmoil have characterized the landscape in Ukraine. Tensions initially flared in late 2013 in response to Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's decision not to move forward with a pending association agreement with the European Union. That decision brought more than 100,000 protesters to the streets to rally against what they saw as Ukraine's movement towards greater control by Russia. Indeed, the general consensus was that President Yanukovich had bent to pressure by President Vladimir Putin of Russia to step away from the European Union Association Agreement and instead embrace a customs union with Russia.

By the start of 2014, another flare of protests ensued in Ukraine in response to legislation passed by members of parliament loyal to President Yanukovich. The laws at stake were intended to curb the free expression of political opposition and curtail public protests. The passage of such legislation raised the ire of Ukrainians, particularly those aligned with the opposition, and alarmed the West with the United States and European Union worried about the Ukraine's slide into autocracy under Yanukovich. In a twist of irony, the very laws intended to suppress mass action actually spurred exactly that end as mass protests attracting tens of thousands of people once again rocked Ukraine. As January 2014 entered its final week, concessions by President Yanukovich to include members of the opposition in government yielded no positive results. Instead, the unrest spread to the eastern part of the country. With the situation deteriorating, the prime minister and the government resigned, and the Ukrainian parliament repealed the controversial anti-protest laws.

In mid-February 2014, the turmoil re-ignited as police tried to clear the main protest camp. Ukraine was again thrust into a renewed state of turbulence and turmoil. A truce was forged on Feb. 19, 2014, but only after more than two dozen people died. That truce collapsed a day later, effectively returning the capital city of Kiev to a battle zone and leading to an increasing death toll. Yet another agreement was forged in which the president conceded to many of the demands of the opposition. But the deal appeared to have come to late to appease an enraged populace. By Feb. 22, 2014, President Yanukovich had fled to the eastern part of the country while his party abandoned him and joined the opposition to officially impeach him, while his political nemesis - former Prime Minister Tymoshenko - was freed from captivity.

The move was a clear message to Moscow that Ukraine would not be controlled by Russia and that Ukraine instead was looking toward Europe as it charted its future path. Indeed, to the chagrin of Russia, the new interim president of Ukraine declared the country would pursue closer ties with the European Union. The winds of change had swept across Ukraine with the "Maidan" or Independence Square stamped in the history books as "Ground Zero" of Ukraine's 2014 battleground.

But the celebration in Ukraine did not last long. The battleground terrain shifted eastward at the start of March 2014 when the Russian parliament granted Russian President Putin authorization to use force in Ukraine, and Russian forces annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Clearly, Putin and Russia felt entitled to reclaim their foothold in Ukraine, thus recalling alarming memories for the rest of the world of the Soviet invasion of then-Czechoslovakia in 1968 to subdue the independence-minded Prague Spring. Adding to the crisis was the perplexing decision by Russian President Putin to refuse to acknowledge that Russian troops were even in Crimea.

In response to Russia's actions against Ukraine, and particularly in the direction of controlling Crimea, the G7 countries (G8 minus Russia) pulled out of preparations for the G8 summit set to take place in Russia and the United States instituted targeted sanctions against Russian officials.

Talks aimed at resolving the crisis yielded no results. Indeed, an East-West conflict was intensifying as Crimea scheduled a referendum for mid-March 2014 when residents would decide whether or not to join Russia. A meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and United States Secretary of State Kerry ended in failure. Because Russia viewed the overthrow of Yanukovich as illegal, and because the West viewed Crimea's decision to join Russia as in violation of international law, an impasse was at hand.

The United States and the European Union respectively warned that such a unilateral action would run counter to international law, and thus they would not recognize the likely ratification of Crimean unification with Russia. For its part, Ukraine insisted that it would not accept the fracturing of its territorial integrity.

Meanwhile, the West attempted to condemn Crimea's secession referendum, and issue its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, by moving forward with a resolution in the United Nations Security Council. As expected, Russia -- as a veto-wielding permanent member -- vetoed the draft. Every other Security Council member voted in favor of the measure, with the exception of China, which abstained from the vote. The inaction at the Security Council was reminiscent of the Cold war era in which both sides habitually vetoed the other's measures, essentially creating a state of diplomatic paralysis.

On March 16, 2014, ethnic Russians in Crimea voted overwhelmingly to secede from Ukraine and

unite with Russia. Crimea then officially requested that the "Republic of Crimea" be admitted as a new subject to the Russian Federation. On the Russian side of the equation, Russia recognized Crimea as a sovereign entity. Russian President Putin soon responded by officially annexing Crimea.

The United States and the European Union imposed personal sanctions on Russian and Crimean officials. This punitive action was intended as a rebuke against the actions in Crimea; however, there was no sign that Russia was even slightly daunted by its decision to seize control of a territory belonging to Ukraine under the established system of international jurisprudence. As stated above, Russia justified its moves by asserting that the interim post-Yanukovich government in Ukraine was illegitimate.

Russian ambitions to regain territory lost following the collapse of the Soviet Union soon entered into the equation. Of note was the fact that in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russian attention was glancing towards other parts of eastern Ukraine. Eruptions of unrest in this Russian-speaking part of Ukraine were blamed on Russia, and reminiscent of what had transpired in Crimea. Indeed, Ukraine was accusing Russia of carrying out its Crimea formula by orchestrating unrest further into Ukrainian territory.

It was to be seen if the landscape in eastern Europe in the spring of 2014 represented the foundation for a renewed Cold War between the East and West. It was also possible that President Barack Obama of the United States was correct in dismissing such a notion on the basis of the fact that Russia was no longer a super power and, instead, a regional power acting as a bully against its neighbors.

Note that a presidential election was held in Ukraine on May 25, 2014. Petro Poroshenko claimed victory in Ukraine's presidential contest but turmoil continued to rock Ukraine. Entering the fray at the start of June 2014, NATO moved to bolster its security presence in eastern Europe as a deterrent against Russian aggression.

In June and July 2014, Ukrainian forces made some progress in retaking the rebel-held parts of eastern Ukraine, while the United States intensified its sanctions against Russian companies as a punitive measure against Russia for failing to de-escalate the conflict.

The landscape in eastern Ukraine took a disturbing turn on July 17, 2014, when a civilian passenger aircraft traveling from Netherlands to Malaysia went down in eastern Ukraine. All 298 people aboard the Boeing 777 airliner perished when Malaysian Airlines flight 17 crashed in the rebel-held territory of Donesk close to the Russian border. That event augured a geopolitical land mine as Ukraine said the Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down and placed the blame on pro-Russian separatists battling Ukrainian forces. The tragedy of the Malaysian Airlines flight occurred one day after the Obama administration in the United States unveiled harsh punitive sanctions

against major Russian firms aligned with Russian President Putin.

In the aftermath of the tragic downing of the Malaysian Airlines flight, and because the majority of the victims with Dutch nationals, Europe's stance against Russia hardened. Accordingly, the West -- including the United States and the European Union -- intensified its sanctions regime against Russia.

Meanwhile, in August 2014, Ukrainian forces at first held the momentum in the fight to regain control over the pro-Russian eastern part of the country, particularly in separatist strongholds of Donetsk and Luhansk. However, Russian-backed separatists were vigorously defending what they viewed as their own territory later in the month. By the close of August 2014, NATO said that Russian forces had violated Ukraine's territory while the Ukrainian president warned that his country was on the brink of war with Russia.

At the start of September 2014, NATO announced a rapid reaction force as well as military exercises in eastern Europe. Pressure from NATO and the threat of fresh sanctions by the European Union appeared to have spurred pro-Russian separatists to go to the negotiating table with Ukrainian authorities. There, a fragile truce was soon established but sporadically violated as fighting continued in Donetsk and Luhansk, and as Ukrainian forces fought to hold the port city of Mariupol.

In September 2014, with the ceasefire still in effect, Ukraine concentrated on the process of trying to retain its territorial integrity while meeting the needs of the pro-Russian separatists. To that end, Ukraine unveiled a proposal that would convey "special status" for eastern part of country, conveying greater autonomy. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian parliament advanced its pro-Western orientation by ratifying the Association Agreement with European Union (the basis of the uprising that caused the ousting of Yanukovich in the first place), while Ukrainian President Poroshenko unveiled a package of reforms aimed at securing membership in the European Union.

By October 2014, Russian President Putin was calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian border. However, NATO was warning that there was no sign of Russian troops actually retreating from the border in any significant fashion; as well, Russian forces remained active within Ukraine in violation of that country's sovereignty. Ukrainian President Poroshenko viewed the strong election performance of allied pro-Western parties as a ratification of, and a mandate for, his security plans for eastern Ukraine. However, that eastern portion of the country was moving forward with illegal elections of their own, which were rejected by Ukraine and the larger international community, but which were (unsurprisingly) being backed by Russia.

By November 2014, fighting had erupted in the east, there were reports of a build up of pro-Russian reinforcements there, and it was fair to say that the fragile ceasefire that had been in place since September 2014 was on the brink of collapse.



December 2014 saw a prisoner exchange occur between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists. As well, Ukrainian President Poroshenko said that he intended to meet with his Russian, French, and German counterparts in early 2015 for discussions on the restoration of peace in the eastern part of the country. These actions were regarded as positive steps in the arena of regional relations. However, Ukraine's decision to revoke its neutral status -- a move that could potentially facilitate future NATO membership -- was likely to raise the ire of Russia, which has opposed Ukraine's westward drift from the onset. Ironically, it was Russia's own aggressive interventions in eastern Ukraine, particularly marked by the annexation of Crimea, that actually catalyzed Ukraine's haste to move out of Russia's orbit.

At the start of 2015, the Minsk ceasefire agreement was effectively dead as fighting resumed around Donetsk and as pro-Russian separatists carried out an assault on the strategic port city of Mariupol, prompting Ukrainian President Poroshenko to warn that his forces would not bend to pro-Russian rebels and that Ukraine would protect its sovereignty. Fighting had extended to other areas in Ukraine's east as pro-Russian separatists aggressively sought to consolidate control over what they have termed "New Russia."

As the month of February 2015 began, there were reports that the Obama administration in the United States was considering additional support for Ukrainian forces in protecting Ukraine from the pro-Russian offensive. As well, NATO was considering the establishment of special command units in eastern Europe to respond rapidly to threats in the region.

Note that on Feb. 12, 2015, a new Minsk ceasefire agreement and a roadmap for peace were forged. But later in February 2015, peace in eastern Ukraine remained elusive as pro-Russians took control over the town of Debaltseve and forced Ukrainian forces into retreat. Pro-Russian forces were reportedly attacking government-held positions in eastern Ukraine -- including the area around the strategic port of Mariupol -- while Ukraine accused Russia of dispatching more troops and tanks to the region, specifically in the direction of the town of Novoazovsk on the southern coast.

Meanwhile, a year after the original Maidan uprising in Kiev ousted former pro-Russian President Yanukovich from power, Ukraine's second largest city of Kharkiv was struck by a bomb attack as demonstrators marched in a national unity rally. Despite the existence of the second Minsk ceasefire agreement, Ukraine was still occasionally mired by war and bloodshed. Europe warned of further sanctions to come if violations to the truce occurred and, indeed, a fragile peace appeared to take hold in the region. Juxtaposed against this background came a surprising admission from Russian President Putin that he had long-standing ambitions to regain Russian control over Crimea.

By mid-2015, despite the existing new Minsk ceasefire agreement, key areas of eastern Ukraine

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were beset by heavy fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists. Tension were also rising over the findings of a multinational investigation into the aforementioned tragedy of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17. The inquest, led by the Dutch Safety Board, indicated that a Russian Buk surface-to-surface missile was fired from a village in eastern Ukraine under pro-Russian control and struck Malaysian Air Flight 17, precipitating the crash. As such, there were ising calls for an international tribunal to ensure justice was served. For his part, Russian President Vladimir Putin cast the move as "premature."

Around the same period of mid-2015, Ukraine's parliament was moving forward with constitutional reforms aimed at establishing temporary self-rule in the eastern part of the country under pro-Russian rebel rule. The changes to the constitution were aimed at meeting Ukraine's obligations under the prevailing Minsk peace accord. While the legislative progress in Ukraine signaled to some that the government in Kiev was adhering to its Minsk peace accord commitments, Russia objected to the changes, arguing that they did not go far enough to fulfill the obligations of the Minsk. There were also objections at home in Ukraine by nationalists to the deal that would grant autonomy to pro-Russian rebels. Those protests in Kiev turned deadly, effectively expanding the landscape of unrest in Ukraine.

In September 2015, the schedule for local elections in the pro-Russian eastern part of Ukraine threatened to upend the Minsk peace accord. In the same period, Ukraine was calling on NATO to provide it with military weapons; however, NATO made clear that its priority was to ensure the implementation of the Minsk peace agreement .

See "Political Conditions" for details related to the ongoing unrest in eastern Ukraine, which has been blamed on Russia.

### **Special Entry**

Russian missile fragments found at Malaysian Airline crash site in eastern Ukraine; is Russian veto of United Nations Security Council proposal for United Nations tribunal to prosecute suspects of shoot-down disaster motivated by self-interest?

Summary:

In mid-July 2015, a year after Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over an eastern Ukrainian war zone, killing close to 300 people, there was a call for justice as evidence began to mount against Russian-backed rebels. Of particular note was a proposal for a United Nations tribunal to prosecute suspects of Malaysian Air shoot-down disaster over eastern Ukraine, as well as a legal case seeking compensation for te families of victims. As July 2015 came to a close, Russia vetoed that proposal when it came before the United Nations Security Council, raising

questions that its action was politically-motivated. Those suspicions were raised more acutely when, in August 2015, Dutch investigators said fragments of a Russian missile system were found at the crash site, essentially implicating Russia more directly in the shoot-down disaster, which had been generally attributed to pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Now, with physical evidence of a Russian missile system being found at the scene of the crash, the Russian veto of the proposal for a United Nations tribunal to prosecute suspects stood out as an example of Russia acting in its own self-interest.

In Detail:

In mid-July 2015, a year after Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over an eastern Ukrainian war zone, killing close to 300 people, there was a call for justice as evidence began to mount against Russian-backed rebels. Of particular note was a proposal for a United Nations tribunal to prosecute suspects of Malaysian Air shoot-down disaster over eastern Ukraine, as well as a legal case seeking compensation for the families of victims. As July 2015 came to a close, Russia vetoed that proposal when it came before the United Nations Security Council, raising questions that its action was politically motivated. Those suspicions were raised more acutely when, in August 2015, Dutch investigators said fragments of a Russian missile system were found at the crash site, essentially implicating Russia more directly in the shoot-down disaster, which had been generally attributed to pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Now, with physical evidence of a Russian missile system being found at the scene of the crash, the Russian veto of the proposal for a United Nations tribunal to prosecute suspects stood out as an example of Russia acting in its own self-interest.

Going back to mid-2014, the landscape in eastern Ukraine was beset by crisis as Russian-backed separatists were at war with the Ukrainian forces in what was becoming a bloody and violent conflict. The already-dire geopolitical landscape took a disturbing turn on July 17, 2014, when a civilian passenger aircraft traveling from Amsterdam in the Netherlands to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia went down in eastern Ukraine. All 298 people aboard the on board the Boeing 777 airliner -- 283 passengers, including 80 children, and 15 crew members -- perished when Malaysian Airlines flight 17 crashed in the rebel-held territory of Donesk close to the Russian border.

That event augured a geopolitical landmine when it was revealed that the Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down and blame was soon placed on pro-Russian separatists battling Ukrainian forces. Of particular significance was the mounting evidence pointing to the fact that the aircraft was struck by a Russian-supplied missile, which was likely fired by pro-Russian rebels operating in the area.

Indeed, a preliminary report released in September 2014 made note of the fact that the damage to the Flight 17's fuselage and cockpit indicated that it had been impacted by high-energy objects from outside the aircraft. This finding was consistent with the theory that Malaysian Airlines Flight

17 was hit by a missile of some kind. This theory was further bolstered when the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in the United States reported that there was a "solid case" that a SA-11 missile -- also known as the Buk surface-to-surface missile -- was fired from eastern Ukraine and likely struck the airliner, causing it to crash and killing all those on board. Other evidence involved voice recordings of pro-Russian rebel commanders admitting they had shot down the airliner.

The tragedy soon transposed into something of a scandal when the Russian-backed rebels prevented emergency responders from gathering the remains of passengers, and in fact treated both the human remains and the belongings of victims with grave disrespect. As such, in the aftermath of the tragic downing of the Malaysian Airlines flight, and because the majority of the victims with Dutch nationals, Europe's stance against Russia hardened. Accordingly, the West -- including the United States and the European Union -- intensified its sanctions regime against Russia. For its part, Russia has throughout denied any responsible for the tragedy.

A year later in mid-July 2015, the Dutch Safety Board, which was leading a multinational investigation into the tragedy, was in the process of compiling a report on the shoot-down disaster. While the final report was not due to be released until October 2015, preliminary findings indicated the following: 1. There was "no evidence of technical or human error" ; 2. The flight data recorder showed that "all engine parameters were normal for cruise flight" until the recording "stopped abruptly" at the time of the crash; 3. Evidence pointed to the fact that the Russian Buk surface-to-surface missile was fired from a village in eastern Ukraine under pro-Russian control and struck Malaysian Air Flight 17, precipitating the crash. The report also chided Malaysian Airlines for continuing to fly over a dangerous war zone despite other countries' dispatches and warnings, known as "notices to airmen" or NOTAMs.

As these preliminary findings began to circulate in the public sphere, Malaysia -- one of the countries involved in the multinational inquest -- demanded that the United Nations authorize a tribunal to further probe the crash. This call was echoed by Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands -- the country that bore the brunt of the tragic death toll in the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 -- as he argued that an international tribunal would be needed to ensure justice was served. For his part, Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed this call for the establishment of such a prosecutorial United Nations tribunal, casting the move as "premature." But his stance was not finding resonance across the world.

Meanwhile, relatives of the Flight 17 victims were wasting no time seeking legal recourse and financial reparations as they filed a \$900 million lawsuit against a Russian-supported rebel leader believed to be responsible for the shoot-down disaster over the eastern Ukrainian warzone. The legal writ filed in the United States alleged that a Russian national, Igor Strelkov ( also known as Igor Girkin) was functioning as a rebel leader in eastern Ukraine, and was acting with the "actual or apparent" authority of Russian government when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over

eastern Ukraine. Court documents made available to Agence France Presse included the following assertion: "Flight 17 flew over the airspace of the area in which the aforesaid rebel army was waging its war activities and the rebel army under the command responsibility of defendant Girkin shot down the subject Boeing 777-200 aircraft."

Floyd Wisner, the attorney who advanced the lawsuit on behalf of the victims' families said the legal action had "nothing to do with the money." Instead, he made clear that it was intended to pressure both the United Nations and Russia to bring those responsible to justice. Wisner said, "The relatives want answers, and we believe Girkin has answers. This lawsuit could shed light on the families' concerns, particularly over slow-moving diplomatic measures."

Note that as July 2015 came to a close, Russia -- a permanent and thus veto-wielding member of the United Nations Security Council -- vetoed a draft resolution calling for a United Nations tribunal to be established to prosecute suspects of Malaysian Air shoot-down disaster over eastern Ukraine. The proposal was rewarded with 11 of the 15 members of the United Nations Security Council voting in its favor, and with Angola, Venezuela, and China abstaining from the vote. But even that overwhelming tally was not enough to save the draft from surviving Russia's veto.

Given Russia's apparent complicity in the disaster, the general consensus was that the veto was a measure of self-interest by Moscow. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin made this point himself as he said, "There can be no reason to oppose this [ unless you are a perpetrator yourself." For his part, Russia's Amabassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, dismissed the claim that his country's was attempting to stymie the process of accountability. He noted that criminal prosecutions would have been carried out in a "closed fashion" and blamed the media for "aggressive propaganda."

Despite this defense, Russia's veto was decried internationally and vociferously. United States Amabassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, condemned Russia's veto of the draft proposal seeking, as she declared, "Russia has callously disregarded the public outcry in the grieving nations." Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop cast the Russian veto as "an affront to the memory of the 298 victims of MH17 and their families and friends." Foreign Minister Bishop also intimated that the Russian veto was not the end of the matter. Instead, she said that her country would be joined by Malaysia, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Ukraine in seeking an alternative pathway to prosecution mechanism.

By August 2015, suspicions about the Russian veto at the United Nations Security Council and Russia's eagerness to evade accountability were heightened more acutely when Dutch investigators said fragments of the Russian Buk surface-to-air missile system were found at the crash site. Fred Westerbeke, a spokesperson for the Dutch Prosecutor's Office, made clear that the fragments were very clearly not parts of the downed aircraft, and that examinations had shown that they were likely from a missile system. He said, "We are going to need more investigation to really find

out what exactly this is and if it is part of a possible system that took down MH17. If we can establish that, then we can say that it is a breakthrough."

In a statement, the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) -- led by the Netherlands, but also including representatives of Ukraine, Belgium, Malaysia and Australia -- announced that seven missile fragments had been "secured during a previous recovery mission in eastern Ukraine." The JIT added that further investigation was thus in the offing, noting, "The parts are of particular interest to the criminal investigation as they can possibly provide more information about who was involved in the crash of MH17. For that reason the JIT further investigates the origin of these parts." It was expected that the JIT would prevail upon the expertise of weapons experts and forensic specialists to refine its examination. The investigators stopped short of outright accusing Russia of being behind the shoot-down disaster, noting in careful terms that they had not yet proved a "causal connection" between Russia and the crash of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 that killed close to 298 people on board.

The discovery of physical evidence of the Russian missile system essentially implicated Russia more closely in the shoot-down disaster, which had been generally attributed to pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. But in truth, the main question going forward would be whether or not the fatal missile was fired by Russian-backed separatists, or, if the Russian military had played a more direct role in the disaster.

### **Special Entry**

Russia launches military exercises at bases in Armenia and in disputed territories of Georgia --

In the background of Russia's encroachment into eastern Ukraine, and its annexation of Crimea in 2014, surrounding countries have watched warily, wondering if its territories would be similarly affected. In March 2015, Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed that large-scale military exercises involving 2,000 Russian troops had commenced in the southern part of the country, along contested borders and even in disputed regions.

The areas affected included the federal districts of Southern and North Caucasus, as well as the recently annexed Ukrainian region of Crimea. Military drills were also taking place on Russian military bases in Armenia, and in the Georgian separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The moves were being regarded as a symbolic illustration of Russian hegemony and influence in the region, irrespective of global outrage over Russia's backing of separatists in eastern Ukraine and the ensuing war that has rocked the region since 2014.

In fact, while global attention has focused on Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian region of

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Crimea, Russia has been quietly working towards subsuming the semi-autonomous Georgian territory of South Ossetia into its fold. In fact, a treaty, known as the “Treaty of Alliance and Integration” was drafted in December 2014 with the intent of integrating the Russian speaking enclave, irrespective of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity or its legal claim on South Ossetia. At the end of January 2015, the leader of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, dispatched finalized documents to Moscow. In February 2015, Russia and South Ossetia signed the "Treaty on the State Border," which was being viewed as a first step towards the signing of the broader “Treaty of Alliance and Integration.” Once that integration accord was signed, South Ossetia would be absorbed by Russia over a period of months.

A similar process has been underway as regards the other Georgian semi-autonomous breakaway region, Abkhazia, which was also home to a Russian-speaking population. The alliance and integration measures related to Abkhazia, however, were not regarded as comprehensive as the integration accord at stake for South Ossetia.

As with the annexation of Crimea, the integration of Georgian territories had no chance of gaining international recognition, and instead, Russia's territorial encroachment has been widely condemned. Of course, the loudest outrage as regards South Ossetia and Abkhazia has come from Georgia, which already fought a war with Russia in 2008 over these very issues of control. Nevertheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin was not expected to curtail his expansionist ambitions.

### **Special Entry:**

Russia encroaches into semi-autonomous Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia

-- Note that some aspects of this entry are replicated from the entry above due to relevance --

In the backdrop of Russia's encroachment into eastern Ukraine, and its annexation of Crimea in 2014, surrounding countries have watched warily, wondering if its territories would be similarly affected. In March 2015, Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed that large-scale military exercises involving 2,000 Russian troops had commenced in the southern part of the country, along contested borders and even in disputed regions.

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On March 18, 2015, Russian President Putin signed the aforementioned Treaty of Alliance and Integration," which (illegally) integrated the breakaway territory with Russia. The government of Georgia in Tbilisi cast the development as a provocation with the aim of stealing Georgian territory. As noted by Georgian Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili, "It's a cynical and provocative step by Russia ... We consider it a move aimed at annexation." Meanwhile, leading Western countries said it was a dangerous threat to regional stability.

As with the annexation of Crimea, the integration of Georgian territories had no chance of gaining international recognition, and instead, Russia's territorial encroachment has been widely condemned. Indeed, the United States and the European Union condemned the new treaty with South Ossetia. Jen Psaki, the spokesperson for the United States Department of State said, "The United States' position on South Ossetia and Abkhazia remains clear: these regions are integral parts of Georgia, and we continue to support Georgia's independence, its sovereignty, and its territorial integrity." Federica Mogherini, the European Union's foreign policy head, said the treaty was "yet another step" intended to undermine "ongoing efforts to strengthen security and stability in the region."

Of course, as noted above, the loudest outrage as regards South Ossetia and Abkhazia has come from Georgia, which already fought a war with Russia in 2008 over these very issues of control. Nevertheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin was not expected to curtail his expansionist ambitions. In fact, the Russian leader was flexing his aggressive and hawkish muscles in the region as he ordered the Russian Northern Fleet to be on a state of full combat readiness in the Arctic. As well, Russia commenced major military exercises across northern Russia involving more than



45,000 troops, in what was a clear show of military strength intended to intimidate its neighbors.

By mid-July 2015, the European Union was warning that while world attention remained on Russia's land grab in Ukraine, Russia was doing the same in the Georgian semi-autonomous regions. Of note was the fact that Russia had installed its own border signs inside South Ossetia, as it continued its quiet absorption of the Georgian territory. As the European Union had warned, Russia was intent on redrawing the regional map, effectively expanding its territory in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, to the detriment of Georgian sovereignty. A statement by the European Union foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, aimed to remind Russia that it was acting in violation of international law and read as follows: "The EU reaffirms its full support for Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders."

Meanwhile, the political landscape in Georgia was tense due to Russia's moves in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On July 18, 2015, thousands of demonstrators were on the streets of the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to register their outrage over what Russia's so-called "occupation" of the two semi-autonomous regions. In an interview with Agence France Presse, Tamara Chergoleishvili, a leading protest organizer, explained the mass action as follows: "The Kremlin continues to use both hard and soft power in its efforts to subjugate Georgia. We gathered here to show that Russia's aggressive policy doesn't belong to the 21st century."

### **Special Entry:**

Russia questions 1991 recognition of Baltic states' independence

In mid-2015, Russia was questioning the recognition of the independence of the Baltic nation states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The office of Russia's chief prosecutor announced plans to examine the legitimacy of the former Soviet Union's recognition of the three Baltic countries in 1991, and to specifically consider whether the action was legal. The action was spurred by letters by two members of parliament, who alleged that the decision to recognize the independence of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia has been taken "by an unconstitutional body."

Not surprisingly, the governments of the Baltic countries reacted with outrage. Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė reacted by declaring: "Our independence was gained through the blood and sacrifice of the Lithuanian people. No one has the right to threaten it." Her country's Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius characterized the investigation as "a provocation to say the least" and also an "absurd provocation." In an interview with Reuters News, Estonian Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus offered a similar assessment. Pentus-Rosimannus said, "The entire issue is legally absurd. It serves as yet another example of the resurgent imperialistic mood that unfortunately exists in Russia."

That sense of concern over Russia's imperial aspirations was real, given that country's recent actions in eastern Ukraine, and in particular, the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Faced with international condemnation for its annexation of the Ukrainian territory, Russia's chief prosecutor justified the move by declaring that Crimea was illegally transferred from Russia to Ukraine in 1954. Now, there were fears that Russia was using the same type of justification in regard to the Baltic countries, which were under Soviet control from 1940 until the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Indeed, this suggestion by Russia that Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia may have been granted independent recognition illegally was raising the alarm that Russia was now looking to return the Baltic nation states to its fold, as part of Russian Vladimir Putin's recent penchant to reconstitute the Soviet Union.

While Russia has sought to quiet these concerns, with the Kremlin casting the investigation as simply a formality with no legal consequences, there remained prevailing anxieties about these moves, even if they proved to be perfunctory. The fact of the matter was that if Russia did, in fact, seek to re-absorb the three Baltic countries, there would be consequences in terms of global security. With Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia being NATO member states, an attack on their sovereignty would spur a defensive response by NATO.

### **Special Note**

#### Russian engagement in Syrian Crisis

Since early 2011, anti-government protests have spread and escalated across the Arab world; Syria emerged as an addition to the list of countries experiencing unrest in March 2011. At first, protesters stopped short of demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, instead demanding greater political freedom and efforts to end corruption. For his part, President Assad announced he would advance a reform agenda, which would include lifting the emergency laws that had been in place for decades, and increased rights to the country's disenfranchised Kurdish population. These moves were aimed at quelling the rising climate of unrest gripping the country. But over time, as protests continued, and as the Assad regime carried out a hardline crackdown on dissent, tensions escalated between the government and the protesters.

In mid-2011, the United Nations Security Council and the Arab League respectively issued condemnations of the violence in Syria. As well, the United Nations Human Rights Council called for an independent inquiry into the violent crackdown on dissent. Meanwhile, global leaders were calling for President Assad to step down from power, given the brutality of the Syrian regime's crackdown on protesters. In 2012, the bloody crackdown by the Assad regime on anti-government protesters was ongoing. In fact, the crackdown appeared to become more relentless in places such as Homs and Aleppo. Despite widespread condemnation from the West, a United Nations Security Resolution on the situation in Syria was subject to veto by Russia and China. A subsequent vote in

the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly condemned Syria for its brutal crackdown. A prevailing truce, brokered by the joint United Nations/Arab League envoy, Kofi Annan, was established in the interests of preventing further bloodshed; however, it was revealed to be an exercise in theory rather than practice and eventually the United Nations monitoring mission ended in failure.

Syria has meanwhile been subject to sanctions by various countries and was sliding into pariah status in the international community. Assassinations, alleged massacres, geopolitical tensions with Turkey and Israel, and suspicions about the use of chemical weapons, have since mired the Syrian landscape. Indeed, with it was increasingly clear that with President Bashar al-Assad using brutal tactics to quell the uprising served only to create an even more tumultuous landscape, and eventually set the path for a full-blown civil war. That civil war pitted the Assad forces, backed by Lebanon-based Hezbollah, against a disparate cabal of anti-government entities, ranging from the rebel Free Syrian Army to several Islamist terrorist enclaves.

At the same time, Syria was facing a devastating humanitarian crisis. That crisis reached new heights in August 2013 with claims that Syrian forces launched a chemical attack on the outskirts of Damascus. Although this was the clear sign that United States President Barack Obama's "red line" had definitively been crossed, the international community remained reticent about becoming more involved in the Syrian crisis. Ultimately, an ensuing chemical weapons deal with Syria between the United States and Russia quieted the war drums. In the meantime, though, a highly anticipated peace summit in Geneva ended without yielding any productive results and the civil war in Syria raged on and on.

By mid-2014, while Syria had shown progress in its disposal of chemical toxins, in keeping with an international agreement intended to avoid intervention by the West, the country was dealing with an ascendant "Islamic State." Previously known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS as well as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or ISIL, this group self-declared a caliphate extending from Syria to Iraq. It was apparent that the power vacuum from the Syrian civil war provided a breeding ground for extremism that Islamic State could exploit and use to both challenge the Assad regime and function as a recruitment tool for Jihadists. Whereas the West and regional powers in the Middle East had earlier called for an end to the Assad regime, suddenly the geopolitical stakes were quite different as extremist terrorists were now posing the most dangerous threat to regional stability. The barbaric beheadings of two American journalists by Islamic State in their stronghold in Syria changed the calculus and the Obama administration in the United States -- initially reticent about re-engaging in the Middle East -- was now looking at a targeted anti-terrorism strategy in the Syrian-Iraqi landscape of Islamic State. As such, a Western coalition, led by the United States, was soon carrying out air strikes on Islamic State targets in Syria and Iraq. Of note was the fact that the United States-led coalition expanded to include Japan and Jordan when citizens of their countries that were being held by Islamic State were also brutally killed.

As of 2015, Syria was beset by two sets of intersecting challenges -- the ongoing civil war between the Assad regime and rebel forces on one end, and the horrific dangers posed by the notorious terror group, Islamic State, which had seized wide swaths of territory in Syria and left an appalling death toll. It was generally understood that the civil war conditions in Syria, to some extent, facilitated the emergence of Islamic State in that country. Syrian President Assad's priority to hold onto power, and thus the center of power in Damascus, had allowed a power chasm to flourish in other parts of the country, which Islamic State has been able to exploit. The result has been a mass exodus of Syrians fleeing the country and seeking refuge in Europe. The so-called migrant influx in Europe has raised questions as to how to legally and humanely deal with a burgeoning humanitarian refugee crisis.

At the political level, Russia signaled it would be entering the Syrian crisis militarily in September 2015 although it was unclear if Moscow's goal was to bolster and preserve Bashar al-Assad's hold on power, or, to go after Islamic State. The geopolitical landscape was complicated in October 2015 with the news that the United States would be deploying special operations teams to Syria. The scene in November 2015 was grave as Russia and France intensified their efforts to go after Islamic State targets in Syria following devastating terror attacks by the Islamist terror network that killed hundreds of Russian and French citizens. Russia, France, and the United States were now respectively changing their respective calculations, cognizant that the Islamist terror group was no longer simply seeking to build its Caliphate but, instead, transposing its goals to more of an Islamic Jihadist orientation. The result was a global security crisis.

#### Update on Syrian Civil War and threat posed by Islamic State--

In the autumn of 2015, the geopolitical dynamics of the region were complicated by the news that Russian military forces were operating in Syria to help shore up the Assad regime. Reports were emerging about no shortage of Russian fighter jets in Syria, as well as infantry forces, battle tanks and other military Russian military resources at an airfield near the Syrian city of Latakia. As well, Russia deployed military advisers to Syria and staged naval exercises off Syria.

Also of note was the fact that a global coalition, led by the United States, was already carrying out air strikes against Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria. With both Russia and the United States-led Western coalition likely to be carrying out air strikes on Islamic State targets in the same region, the two countries were discussing modes of cooperation and coordination that would prevent accidents in their respective air campaigns.

To this end, regardless of their frosty bilateral relations, Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President Barack Obama met on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meeting to discuss this matter. Russian President Putin characterized that meeting as follows: "Our talks were very constructive, business-like and surprisingly frank." A Russia aide to the president added to Putin's assessment of the meeting with Obama and their intent to work

cooperatively as he said: "We have clarity on their objectives. Their objectives are to go after ISIL and to support the government."

Both leaders expressed the importance of avoiding air collisions between their respective air strike fleets; however, their visions for Syria's future remained quite different. While Putin has argued that Syria's stability and anti-terrorism efforts can only be maintained by keeping the Assad regime in power. Obama, by contrast, has cast Assad as a tyrant who was responsible for no shortage of gross abuses against his own people, and whose record should not be sanitized in the effort to go after Islamic State. For President Obama, there was a need for "a new [Syrian] leader and an inclusive government that united the Syrian people in the fight against terrorist groups."

Nevertheless, with Islamic State continuing to pose one of the most pressing threats to global security, President Obama expressed a pragmatic stance suggesting that there might be a "managed transition" from Assad's rule. This policy appeared to be backed by other Western leaders, namely United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron. Of concern was the reality that the loss of Assad at the helm might produce a power chasm that Islamic State and other unsavory actors could exploit. To this end, President Obama said, "There is no room for accommodating an apocalyptic cult like ISIL and the United States makes no apology for using our military as part of a broad coalition to go after it." He added, "Realism dictates that compromise will be required to end the fighting and ultimately stamp out ISIL. But realism also requires a managed transition away from Assad and to a new leader and an inclusive government that recognizes there must be an end to this chaos." President Obama also noted that his country was willing to work with other partner nation states in the effort to vanquish Islamic State and ultimately stabilize Syria. To this end, he said, "The United States is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict. But we must recognize that there cannot be, after so much bloodshed, so much carnage, a return to the pre-war status quo."

United States Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, further elaborated their two countries' respective interests in Syria by noting that they had agreed on "some fundamental principles." In an interview with MSNBC News, Kerry explained, "There was agreement that Syria should be a unified country, united, that it needs to be secular, that ISIL needs to be taken on, and that there needs to be a managed transition." Kerry also added that with the Syrian crisis raging on, and with the human toll increasing alarmingly, there was a need for cooperation. He said, "Everybody understands that Syria is at stake, and the world is looking rapidly for some kind of resolution."

It should be noted that the Syrian National Coalition -- Syria's political opposition in exile -- has made it clear that it rejects any role for Assad in a transitional government. That unrelenting stance was sure to complicate any joint effort by Russia and the West to facilitate a "managed transitions of power" in Syria.

Meanwhile, there remained some questions about the actual goals and purpose of Russia's military intervention into Syria. Was it actually aimed at assisting the global effort against the world's most notorious and brutal terror group, Islamic State? Or was it actually more craven and aimed at ensuring that Russian President Vladimir Putin's ally, Bashar al-Assad, could hold onto power? To that latter end, in late September 2015, United States officials reported to the news outlet, CNN, that Russian fighter jets had turned off their transponders to evade detection as they flew into Syrian territory. United States officials also confirmed that Russian drones were flying in the area of the city of Latakia. Since this was not exactly Islamic State territory, the conclusion was that Russia was more focused on supporting Assad's regime than actually fighting terrorism. Separately, other Western countries were reaching the same conclusion. As noted by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, "You have to look at who is doing what. The international community is striking Daesh [IS]. France is striking Daesh. The Russians, for the time being, are not at all."

It should be noted that, the prospect of Russia intervening into Syria to shore up President Assad was not being well-received by Gulf Arab countries, who argued that such a move would only deepen the conflict. Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir characterized the Russian intervention as an "escalation" and emphasized his country's view that a stable Syria in the future would not involve Assad at the helm of power. For Russia, though, which was an ally of Assad-led Syria, and which had a naval base at Tartous in Syria, supporting the Assad regime would also preserve a level of Russian influence in the region.

Note that on Sept. 30, 2015 -- shortly after agreeing to work with the United States to go after Islamic State -- Russian fighter jets were carrying out strikes on the anti-Assad rebel strongholds of Homs and Hama. The United States was informed of the Russian strikes only one hour before they commenced. For its part, Russia claimed that it was also carrying out missions against Islamic State Islamic State military equipment, ammunition, communications, and fuel supply targets, however, United States officials noted this did not appear to be the case. The Russians' actual choices of air strike targets in Homs and Hama, along with United States assessments, made clear that the Russian intervention into Syria was clearly for the purpose of bolstering the Assad regime.

That being said, later air strikes reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights at the start of October 2015 indicated that Russia was also targeting command posts in the Islamic State de facto capital of Raqqa. That effort appeared to be forcing residents there to cancel prayers.

For its part, the United States reacted to this news by making clear that it would remain focused on the goal of vanquishing Islamic State. United States department of state spokesperson, John Kirby, said: "The U.S.-led coalition will continue to fly missions over Iraq and Syria as planned and in support of our international mission to degrade and destroy ISIL."

By the start of October 2015 -- shortly after the start of Russia's foray into Syria -- a geopolitical

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imbroglio was sparked when Russian fighter jets twice violated Turkish air space. Russia explained one such violation as a mistake due to weather conditions; however, Turkey was not receptive to that explanation, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan issuing the following warning: "If Russia loses a friend like Turkey, with whom it has been cooperating on many issues, it will lose a lot, and it should know that" He added that "an attack on Turkey means an attack on NATO." For its part, NATO -- of which Turkey was a member state -- also refused to accept that explanation, noting that the Russian incursions "did not look like an accident" and with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg noting that the Russian violations of Turkish air space "lasted for a long time." Stoltenberg further cast the Russian incursions as "unacceptable," and warned that the North Atlantic security bloc was viewing the situation "very seriously."

It should be noted that bilateral ties between Turkey and Syria have been a downward spiral largely due to Turkey's criticism of the Assad regime's brutal crackdown on anti-government factions. The ties between the two countries reached a new low in mid-2012 when Syrian air defenses shot down a Turkish fighter jet, but deteriorated further in October 2012 when Syrian mortar fire killed five Turkish civilians in a border town. The Turkish parliament at the time authorized military action against Syria in the aftermath of that incident. The geopolitical scene grew more complicated later in 2012 when Turkish jets forced a Syrian plane, which was suspected of "non-civilian cargo," to land in Turkey. Authorities in that country said that the move was aimed at preventing the passage of weapons through its airspace into Syria. The geopolitical complexity was exacerbated when Russia and Syria decried the move by Turkey. In late 2012, it was announced that the United States would send 400 troops and two Patriot air defense missile batteries to Turkey to help defend its NATO ally against possible threats from Syria. Tensions between Turkey and Syria emerged again in March 2014 when Turkey downed a Syria aircraft, which (according to Turkey) had violated its air space. In 2015, as discussed here, with the entry of Russian forces into the Syrian crisis, so too came violations of Turkish air space by Russian jets operating in Syria. In many senses, Turkey was becoming a key inflection point in the ongoing Syrian crisis.

Meanwhile, Russia reported that it carried out repeated air strikes on Islamic State targets in the first week of October 2015. But as before, the lion's share of Russia's activity in Syria appeared aimed at helping the Assad regime hold its territory and go after opposition rebel groups, with an eye on regaining territory. Of note were Russian continued strikes in anti-Assad rebel strongholds. Around the same period in October 2015, Syrian forces were reported to be preparing for a ground offensive, which would presumably be backed Russian air strikes and cruise missile strikes from their fleet in the Caspian Sea.

The success of the Russian effort was very much a subject of debate, despite claims of Russia being an emerging actor in the region. For all its air strikes in Syrian territory, reports from the ground indicated that Russian strikes were more successful at hitting moderate rebel and civilian targets than Islamic State targets.



In the background of these developments were continued overtures between Russia and the United States aimed at establishing rules of engagement and protocols of conduct related to their respective campaigns in Syria. However, the United States Defense Secretary Ash Carter ruled out further cooperation with Russia regarding the Syrian crisis as he declared the Russian strategy to be clearly aimed at bolstering the Assad regime. He said, "We believe Russia has the wrong strategy. They continue to hit targets that are not ISIL. This is a fundamental mistake."

Nevertheless, as October 2015 came to a close, United States and Russian military officials signed a memorandum of understanding covering "de-conflicting" procedures and protocols to be undertaken by their pilots in order to avoid accidental incidences over Syria as they respectively carry out air strikes in the same territory. A Pentagon spokesperson, Peter Cook, said that the two countries would "form a working group to discuss any implementation issues that follow" but that the actual agreement covered all coalition members, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The State Department was clear in noting that the agreement was geared towards keeping pilots safe and did not extend into the realm of strategic cooperation. As noted by State Department spokesperson, John Kirby, "It's not a treaty of cooperation or anything like that ... It doesn't connote cooperation or coordination or joint targeting."

In the same period of late October 2015, United States President Barack Obama indicated a policy shift regarding Syria, as it was reported that dozens of special operations troops would be deployed to northern Syria to advise opposition groups as they battle Islamic State. The deployment indicated a departure from President Obama's "no combat boots on the ground" in Syria stance, although the White House insisted that the mission would have a circumscribed and highly limited "train, advise, and assist" role.

In the first week of November 2015, despite the addition of the Russian campaign in Syria to support Assad, anti-government rebels were able to capture control over the town of Morek to the north of the flashpoint city of Hama. In the same period, rebels in Idlib province recaptured Tal Skik, which had gone under Hezbollah-backed Syrian control a month earlier. These gains for anti-Assad factions indicated that despite Russia's intervention into the Syrian civil war, rebel factions continued to make their presence known.

Meanwhile, ahead of scheduled multilateral talks on Syria, Russia released a blueprint for the country's future. That initiative called for the Assad regime and the opposition to find consensus in a constitutional reform process that would last 18 months and be followed by a presidential election. Significantly, the proposal would not prevent Bashar al-Assad from contesting the presidential contest. This latter element promised to be a deal-breaker of sorts for the opposition. As noted by Monzer Akbik of the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition, "The Syrian people have never accepted the dictatorship of Assad and they will not accept that it is reintroduced or reformulated in another way." Meanwhile, Western powers, several Sunni Arab countries in the

region, and Turkey were not expected to accept a plan that included a pathway for Assad to hold onto power in Syria. Indeed, those various players made clear that they would not sign onto a plan that did not include an exit strategy for Assad, whom they viewed as one of the main sources of Syria's crisis. That being said, there were other viable aspects of the proposal, such as a process for distinguishing rebel groups with terror ties and legitimate opposition entities -- the latter of which could become key players in a future peace and reconciliation plan. As well, there were provisions for a soft partitioning of power and security into Assad-led zones and non-Assad led zones across Syria.

In the same period, the effort against Islamic State was ongoing. Indeed, on Nov. 12, 2015, the United States Pentagon reported that it had targeted a notorious Islamic State terrorist known as "Jihadi John" in an apparent drone strike in Syria. The Kuwaiti-born British national had already been identified as Mohammed Emwazi; he gained notoriety as the ominous masked figure in Islamic State propaganda videos who carried out beheadings of international journalists and humanitarian workers.

In this period, the United States' air strike effort was aggressively geared towards hitting Islamic State's oil producing resources, which essentially funds the terror group.

In mid-November 2015, the situation was grave as Russia and France intensified their efforts to go after Islamic State targets in Syria following devastating terror attacks by the Islamist terror network that killed hundreds of Russian and French citizens. At issue was the fact that Islamic State was claiming responsibility for a bomb that exploded on a Russian jet flying from the Egyptian resort of Sharm-el-Sheikh, killing more than 200 Russians on board. Also at issue was the Islamic State claim of responsibility for a spate of appalling terror attacks in the French capital city of Paris, which killed approximately 130 people. Islamic State made clear that its brutal acts were being carried out because of the international community's engagement in Syria. Islamic State also promised that attacks were to come in the United States and other Western countries.

In response to what could only be understood as acts of war by Islamic State, Russian and French warplanes wasted no time before stepping up their respective air campaigns in Syria, targeting Islamic State targets in the terror group's stronghold of Raqqa in a sustained manner. France also deployed its air craft carrier, the Charles de Gaulle, to the Middle Eastern region for the purpose of supporting the effort against Islamic State. Of note was the fact that France was not limiting its air strike campaign from the Charles de Gaulle only to Islamic State targets in Syria, such as the terror group stronghold of Raqqa; indeed, France soon expanded its scope to hit Islamic State targets in Ramadi and Mosul in Iraq.

Overall, Russia, France, and the United States were now respectively changing their calculations, cognizant that the Islamist terror group was no longer simply seeking to build its Caliphate but, instead, transposing its goals to more of an Islamic Jihadist orientation. The result was an

international security crisis.

In addition to the killing of Russian and French nationals in the autumn of 2015, in the same period, Islamic State had also claimed responsibility for double bombings in a Shi'a district of the Lebanese city of Beirut, killing more than 40 people. It was a terrorist trifecta for Islamic State, presumably part of its effort to demonstrate its relevance and resilience even as it was being subject to strikes from various international actors.

Indeed, the terror enclave was under pressure from a United States-led international coalition, as well as a bombing campaign by Russia. Earlier in November 2015 Islamic State lost control of Sinjar in Iraq as a result of a fierce offensive by Kurdish peshmerga fighters backed by United States air power. In the same period, as discussed above, the United States Pentagon reported that it had targeted the "face" of Islamic State in a drone strike -- the notorious terrorist "Jihadi John" who was shown in barbaric videotaped footage with international hostages who were executed via decapitation. The Pentagon indicated that the drone strike was very likely successful, thus inflicting a symbolic blow against the terror group. Meanwhile, Islamic State was losing control in Aleppo in Syria.

While these losses were recent, the downward trajectory for Islamic State had been occurring for several months. As such, the terror enclave's evolving imperative might be to show that it still had power and influence. No longer able to expand its territorial advances, Islamic State was very likely transforming its efforts. Rather than concentrating on building and expanding its so-called Caliphate, Islamic State could be refocusing its ambitions in the direction of international Jihadism. Should this working theory gain support, it would suggest an acute threat to global security.

The geopolitical complexity of Syrian civil war grew more complicated in the last week of November 2015 when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet on the basis of accusations that the Russian aircraft violated Turkish air space. Russia disputed that claim, insisting that the jet was operating in Syrian air space as part of the fight against Islamic State. Russia also referred to the tragic incident as a betrayal and instituted sanctions against Turkey as a result.

### **Special Note:**

Russia acknowledges that bomb brought down jet carrying vacationers from Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh; promises retribution against Islamic State

### Summary

The crash of a Russian airliner in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula resulted in the deaths of all 224 persons

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on board. The Russian Metrojet Flight KG9268 departed the Red Sea resort city of Sharm-el-Shekh and was bound for the Russian city of St. Petersburg but crashed before the tourists and flight crew could arrive at their destination. The notorious terror group, Islamic State, claimed responsibility for the downing of the flight but Egyptian officials dismissed the claim on the basis of their belief that the terror group did not have the capability to bring down a jet. The Russian government was, likewise, reticent to accept terrorism as explanation. Nevertheless, both the United States and the United Kingdom made clear that intelligence pointed to a bomb being planted on the aircraft and exploding shortly after taking off from Sharm-el-Sheikh. With an affiliate of Islamic State active in the Egyptian Sinai in recent years, and with intelligence pointing in the direction of terrorism, that group's claim of responsibility was being viewed by the countries of the West as credible. Russia joined that group's conclusions two weeks after the crash, pointing to explosive material found on crash debris, while Russian President Vladimir Putin promised that those responsible would face justice. The international dimension of the tragedy catapulted the global security threat posed by Islamic State to new heights.

### In Detail

On Oct. 31, 2015, a Russian airliner carrying 224 people crashed in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula about 20 minutes after taking off from the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh, killing all the persons on board. While most of those aboard were Russian citizens, there were also four Ukrainians and one Belarussian national among the victims. The Russian Metrojet Flight KG9268 departed the Red Sea city and was bound for the Russian city of St. Petersburg but crashed before the tourists and flight crew could arrive at their destination. It was the deadliest crash of the French-made Airbus A321 airliner in recent times.

According to the Egyptian authorities, the aircraft disappeared from radar approximately 20 minutes after its departure from Sharm el-Sheikh while flying over the central Sinai Peninsula at an altitude of 31,000 feet. The Egyptian military aircraft later located the wreckage of the aircraft in an area of the Sinai called Hasna, just south of the Mediterranean coastal town of el-Arish. Russian officials confirmed that the aircraft split into two in mid-air but refrained from immediately drawing conclusions about the cause of the disaster. With both of the aircraft's flight recorders, known as "black boxes," recovered, along with no shortage of forensic evidence, there would be a good foundation for investigators to determine what happened to Metrojet Flight KG9268.

To that end, Egypt would be leading the investigation, which would involve the participation of an international group of aviation experts. The Russians were expected to assist with the inquiry given the fact that its citizens made up the vast majority of the appalling death toll. Because the aircraft was a French-made Airbus A321, France would also be involved in the investigation into what went wrong. As well, an Irish delegation would be part of the investigation since the actual aircraft was registered in Ireland.

Although Egyptian officials initially indicated that there was nothing irregular about the doomed flight and suggested either human error or a mechanical malfunction, Islamist terrorists in the Sinai aligned with the notorious terror group, Islamic State, claimed responsibility for downing the flight via a Telegram messaging application. Egyptian Prime Minister Sharif Ismail immediately dismissed the claim, asserting that the terror group did not have the capability to bring down an aircraft from the type of high altitude Metrojet Flight KG9268 reached at the time it disappeared from radar.

But in the days after the crash, authorities in the United States and United Kingdom respectively indicated that intelligence pointed to the likelihood that Metrojet Flight KG9268 was brought down by a bomb. Clearly, this assertion by two Western countries would vitiate the notion that an Islamic State affiliate in the Sinai used some sort of missile to target the aircraft. Instead, attention was settling on a more conventional methodology for the conduct of terrorism -- the use of a bomb, which was likely planted on the aircraft by an airport insider, and which was very likely programmed to explode when that aircraft reached a certain altitude.

United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond did not prevaricate in any way as he made the following declaration: "We have concluded that there is a significant possibility that the crash was caused by an explosive device on board the aircraft." Moreover, the government of the United Kingdom moved to suspend all flights to and from Sharm-el-Sheikh, while putting plans into place for providing transportation to bring British nationals home from Egypt, but only after new and stringent security protocols had been put into place. The office of United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron explained the government's decision with the following statement: "The evidence we received suggested there was a credible threat with regard to Sharm al-Sheikh airport which is why we have taken the actions we have." The prime minister's office stopped short of providing information about what types of security actions would be taken.

Across the Atlantic, unnamed officials in the United States revealed to various news agencies that a bomb "was a highly possible scenario" and that terrorism was the likely cause of the crash. Subsequently, United States President Barack Obama himself noted that there was a possibility that the Russian airliner was brought down by a bomb that was planted on board. To that end, President Obama said, "We're taking that very seriously." President Obama's head of homeland security, Jey Johnson, later noted that new and more stringent security measures would be implemented at certain airports across the world for aircraft flying into the United States.

Of note was the fact that no United States-registered airlines fly in and out of the Sharm al-Sheikh airport due to enduring concerns about poor security. As such, the United States Transportation Security Administration has not been at that airport in recent times to actually evaluate security there.

Perhaps eager to protect its vital tourism industry, Egypt again dismissed the idea that Islamic State

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terrorists within its own borders might be responsible for the tragedy. Indeed, the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi went so far as to disparage Islamic State's claim of responsibility as mere "propaganda." But on Nov. 4, 2015, another claim of responsibility had been advanced by Islamic State in the Sinai -- this time via an audio message posted on Twitter. In that message, the speaker said: "We, with God's grace, are the ones who brought it down, and we are not obliged to disclose the mechanism of its demise."

Meanwhile, Russia was likewise distancing itself from the Islamic State and terrorism angle. With Russia now actively participating in the civil war in Syria against both anti-Assad rebels and Islamic State, it was not keen to admit that it might be suffering so quickly from what is generally known as "blowback" from its Syrian engagement. Still, the truth of the matter was that if the cause of the crash was ultimately determined to be terrorism at the hands of Islamic State, Russia would have to confront the reality that its heavy military footprint in Syria quite possibly was yielding deleterious consequences. Of note was the fact that airplanes from various European countries depart to and from Sharm-el-Sheikh daily, yet of all the aircraft available, it was a Russian jetliner which may have been selected by Islamic State terrorists as a target.

Regardless of its hesitation in accepting the terrorism explanation for the crash of Metrojet Flight KG9268, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered all flights to and from Egypt to be halted.

Putin made that decision after a meeting with Alexander Bortnikov, the head of Russia's security service, in which he recommended that Russia suspend passenger flights to Egypt until the precise cause of the crash was determined. Bortnikov explained the move saying, "Until we know the real reasons for what happened, I consider it expedient to stop Russian flights to Egypt. Above all, this concerns tourist routes." Arrangements were also made to repatriate Russians stranded at the Egyptian resort town.

Several other airlines were also taking precautions by grounding flights scheduled to traverse that route, rerouting aircraft flying over the Sinai, while several Western governments released travel warnings expressly stating that their citizens should not travel to the Egyptian Sinai.

Note that as the first week of November 2015 came to a close, authorities in the United States and United Kingdom made clear that their intelligence assets had intercepted communications, known in intelligence circles as "chatter," from suspected terrorists. This revelation only bolstered their view that Russian Metrojet Flight KG9268 was the target of terrorism. While this view would yet have to be proved via forensic evidence and a thorough assessment of information on the flight recorders, the working theory at this time was that a bomb had been hidden in luggage and stowed in the hold of the aircraft. The general belief was that the bomb was quite likely planted by an insider working at the Sharm-el-Sheikh airport. That insider was believed to have worked in some form or fashion with Islamic State in the Sinai.

In the second week of November 2015, Russia and Egypt continued to officially resist the

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terrorism explanation for the crash of the Russian Metrojet airliner in the Egyptian Sinai. For Russia, there was no willingness to publicly admit that it was suffering from blowback as a result of its military engagement in Syria. For Egypt, there was no desire to taint its tourism industry by admitting that the resort city of Sharm-el-Sheikh may have suffered from lax security; Egypt was also not eager to confront the reality that despite its hardline measures against Islamist militants, a likely act of international terrorism had quite possibly occurred on its soil. As such, Russia and Egypt continued to publicly insist that it was too soon to draw conclusions about what happened on Oct. 31, 2015.

In the same period (the second week of November 2015), Islamic State -- which had already claimed responsibility for bringing down the Russian jet -- was now promising further attacks on Russia. To this end, Islamic State was vowing via a videotaped threat to attack Russians "very soon" on Russian soil for that country's heavy involvement in the Syrian crisis.

On Nov. 17, 2015, after two weeks of avoiding the terrorism explanation for the downing of the Metrojet flight, Russian authorities finally acknowledged that "an act of terror" in the form of a bomb brought down the plane over the Egyptian Sinai. Russian authorities reportedly informed President Putin that "traces of foreign explosives" were identified on the debris from the aircraft. Publicly, the head of Russia's security service, Alexander Bortnikov, said, "We can unequivocally say it was a terrorist act."

It should be noted that the government of Egypt continued to insist that it would not arrive at premature conclusions and would let the the investigatory process be fully completed. Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail said, "The Egyptian authorities affirm they will take into consideration the investigations that the Russian side reached ... in the comprehensive investigation." Egyptian Interior Minister Magid Abdel Ghaffar went slightly further, noting that there would be consequences if the investigation indicated security lapses at the Sharm el-Sheikh airport. He said, "Regarding Sharm al-Sheikh airport, when we discover that there have been security lapses action will be taken, but up to now we have no information about lapses in the search and security procedures." Egypt's Civil Aviation Minister Hosam Kamel, however, would not even concede that anything nefarious had occurred, as he said, "Up until this moment, there is no evidence of crime."

Note that on Nov. 18, 2015, Islamic State released details regarding their claim of responsibility in the Russian Metrojet disaster. In the terror group's Dabiq magazine, Islamic State explained that its operatives used its liquids bomb manufacturing capability, hidden in a canned Schweppes soft drink, to bring down the doomed jetliner. That liquids bomb making capability has been known to global anti-terrorism experts since 2006 following an investigation by MI6 experts from the United Kingdom, which has led to regulations on carry-on liquids belonging to aircraft passengers. In this message from Islamic State, the terror group said, "The divided Crusaders of the East and West thought themselves safe in their jets as they cowardly bombarded the Muslims of the



Caliphate. And so revenge was exacted upon those who felt safe in the cockpits."

### Russia's Official Response

With Islamic State claiming responsibility for the fatal crash, Russian President Vladimir Putin promised to "find and punish" those responsible for the attack over the Sinai peninsula. He said, "We'll look for them everywhere, wherever they are hiding. We'll find them in any corner of the planet and punish them." The Russian leader warned that those who carried out the attack that led to the deaths of more than 200 Russians, or were in anyway complicit in helping them, would face justice as he declared, "We must do this without any statute of limitations and we must find out all their names. Anyone who tries to help the criminals should know that the consequences for trying to shelter them will lie completely on their shoulders."

President Putin also made it clear that his country's military engagement in Syria would not only continue, but that Russian air strikes "must be intensified so that the criminals understand that retribution is inevitable." To that end, Russian warplanes wasted no time before stepping up its air campaign in Syria. The Russian government was also signaling its interest in working with France, which was also struck with a spate of terrorist attacks at the hands of Islamic State in the French capital of Paris. Indeed, both countries were reported to be carrying out sustained air strikes on Islamic State targets in Syria. As well, despite strained relations with the United States, as a result of their shared interest in defeating Islamic State, Russian and United States forces were said to be more closely coordinating their respective strikes on Islamic State targets in Syria.

### **Special Entry**

Ties between Turkey and Russia erode after Russian-Turkish jet shoot down crisis

In the last week of November 2015, the geopolitical complexity of Syrian civil war grew more complicated when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet on the basis of accusations that the Russian aircraft violated Turkish air space. When the crew ejected from the doomed aircraft, one pilot was shot to death by extremists on the ground in Syria as he parachuted to the ground. There was another fatality as a Russian special operations officer dispatched to rescue the crew was also killed by extremists on the ground. Only the pilot of the doomed jet survived the ordeal.

According to Turkish authorities, the Russian aircraft was notified multiple times of its territorial violation before it was shot down. In an attempt to bolster its account of the tragic events, Turkey released an apparent audio recording of its warnings to the Russian jet before it was shot down. On the recording, the following warning was stated: "Change your heading." Turkey also explained that its protocols in cases of territorial encroachment had been followed and its personnel attempted to rescue the Russian pilots. For his part, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan issues no

apology for the downing of the Russian jet. Instead, Erdogan declared that his country was defending its own security and sovereignty.

Russia disputed Turkey's claim, insisting that the jet was operating in Syrian air space as part of the fight against Islamic State. Russian President Vladimir Putin referred to the tragic incident as a betrayal administered by "the accomplices of terrorists," and warned that Moscow's relations with Ankara would suffer as a result. He said, "Today's loss is linked to a stab in the back delivered to us by accomplices of terrorists. I cannot qualify what happened today as anything else." He added, "We will of course analyze everything that happened and today's tragic events will have serious consequences for Russo-Turkish relations."

Soon thereafter, the Russian government instituted sanctions against Turkey. Russia also remained defiant, making clear it would continue its effort in the Syrian crisis and against Islamic State. A spokesperson from the Russian Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, noted that Russian jets would continue to fly missions close to the Turkish border because that was simply where the Islamist extremists were located.

It should be noted that the Russian president also blasted Turkey for being lax in its border controls, essentially allowing Islamic State terrorists to move across the Turkish border to and from Syria with virtual impunity, benefiting from its transportation and sales of oil revenues. Putin said, "We established a long time ago that large quantities of oil and oil products from territory captured by Islamic State have been arriving on Turkish territory. And now we get stabbed in our back and our planes, which are fighting terrorism, are struck. This despite the fact that we signed an agreement with our American partners to warn each other about air-to-air incidents and Turkey ... announced it was allegedly fighting against terrorism as part of the U.S. coalition."

With Turkey being a NATO member, Russia's wrath could potentially affect all Western countries participating in the United States-led coalition fighting Islamic State in the region. Hopes for greater cooperation between the West and Russia against the terror group were thus dimmed. In a small positive sign, however, both Moscow and Ankara made clear that they were not interested in escalating tensions and facilitating the path of war. As well, despite being NATO allies, France and the United States called on Turkey to do a better job of monitoring its borders which Islamic State terrorists were using to traverse in and out of Syria. Of particular note was a stretch of the Syrian-Turkish border north of the Syrian city of Aleppo where Turkey had not closed and was being used by the terror group to transport militants and supplies.

Of course, the truth of the matter was that neither Turkey nor Russia has been involved in the Syrian civil war for the principal purpose of fighting Islamic State in the first place. Turkey was one of the initial voices calling for Bashar Assad to go and has directly supported Sunni rebel groups fighting the Assad regime in Syria. At the same time, Turkey has exploited the excuse of fighting Islamic State to instead go after Kurdish extremists, which it deems to be a political

threat. On the other side of the equation, Russia has been a long-time backed of the Assad regime, and has often treated Syria like a client state. Russia entered the Syrian quagmire on the basis of claims that it was fighting Islamic State but it, instead, hit rebel targets in Syrian territory that were opposed to the Assad regime. In many senses, Turkey and Russia were already in opposed political "camps" with regard to the Syrian crisis before the latest contretemps over Turkey shooting down a Russian jet.

In December 2015, in the aftermath of Turkey's decision to shoot-down a Russian jet, ties between the two countries eroded further. At issue was Turkey's claim that a marine aboard a Russian naval ship was aggressively displaying a missile launcher as the Caesar Kunikov vessel sailed through the Bosphorus in Istanbul. Turkey summoned the Russian envoy for consultations as a result. As well, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu cast the incident as a provocation, saying, "The showing off of a missile by a soldier on a Russian warship, or other things such as anti-aircraft weapons, is pure provocation." The Russian Foreign Ministry dismissed Turkey's concerns, with spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, citing the 1936 Montreux Convention, which regulates ship movements through the Bosphorus Straits, and declaring that "the protection of a ship is the legal right of any crew."

Meanwhile, a Russian news crew was arrested in Turkey's Hatay province on the border with Syria and subsequently deported. That action was not expected to help improve already-damaged bilateral ties between the two countries.

### **Special Note**

#### Peace Progress and Obstacles in Syria

At the start of 2016, the United Nations announced that the Syrian peace talks had commenced in the Swiss city of Geneva, with delegates from the opposition and representatives from the Assad regime meeting with United Nations Envoy Staffan de Mistura. The two sides were not at the same table for these negotiations; instead, these "proximity talks" were ensuing in separate rooms. It should be noted that the peace talks occurred even as Syria's pro-Assad forces, backed by Russian air strikes, were carrying out a massive offensive operation close to Aleppo. Syrian rebels pointed to the fact that this operation was going on despite the understanding that such actions should cease in order to give the peace process a chance.

In mid-February 2016, United States Secretary of State John Kerry announced that an agreement had been forged to seek a cessation of hostilities in Syria, and which would set the path for humanitarian aid to be transported to war-torn cities. Despite this favorable development, the fact of the matter was that Russian air power continued to strike targets in Syria deemed to be enemies of the Assad regime. As well, Syrian President Assad was intensifying his forces' efforts to regain

control over Aleppo, which he indicated would only be the start of a national campaign to retake control of the country. Secretary of State Kerry thus warned that the aforementioned agreement to end hostilities would only remain relevant if Syria and its Russian and Iranian allies made good on their commitments.

By the last week of February 2016, the United States and Russia appeared to have reached some concurrence and issued a joint statement announcing that the ceasefire would commence on Feb. 27, 2016 and would apply to all parties in the Syrian conflict, with terrorist groups such as the Islamic State and al-Nusra being the exceptions.

*Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, [www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com); see Bibliography for research sources.*

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## National Security

### External Threats

It remains to be seen whether or not two tragedies will rekindle Russian anxiety over Georgia's Pankisi Gorge. In August 2004, Chechen suicide bombers allegedly downed two Russian planes. Then, in September a group of Chechen rebels and foreign Islamic militants took over a school in the southern Russian town of Beslan. The incident ended in the deaths of over 300 individuals, mostly schoolchildren, and elicited harsh words from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who vowed to step up his campaign against Chechen separatists. Just two weeks after the Beslan attack, United States (U.S.) State Department spokesman Richard Boucher declared the Pankisi Gorge "no longer a haven for terrorists." U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Richard Miles later affirmed that, while terrorist elements still operate in the region, their numbers have been significantly reduced. What Washington categorizes as a diminished threat may take on a more ominous appearance from Moscow, however.

Outside of its security concerns over Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, Russia is engaged in a number of territorial disputes, many of which resulted from the abrupt dissolution of the Soviet Union. The roots of one of its more significant disagreements predates that historic occasion by decades, however. The governments of Japan and Russia remain embroiled in a quarrel over the sovereignty of the islands of Etorofu, Kunashiri, and Shikotan, and the Habomai group, collectively known in

Japan as the "Northern Territories " and in Russia as the "Southern Kuril Islands." The Soviet Union occupied the islands in 1945. In the aftermath of its dissolution, the Soviet Union's principle successor state, Russia, continued to administer them. The disagreement has served as an obstacle to the signing of an accord that would officially end the state of war between Japan and the Soviet Union/Russia that has endured for over six decades.

See below for information about conflict between Russia and Ukraine, ultimately ending in the Russian annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea.

## **Crime**

The crime rate in Russia is generally high. Criminal organizations are prevalent there. They engage in a range of illicit enterprises, including extortion, kidnapping, narcotics trafficking, money laundering, and prostitution. Also, corruption is endemic in Russia.

## **Insurgencies**

The militant Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus has steadily expanded past Chechnya's borders to neighboring territories, such as Dagestan and Ingushetia, and the cause itself has moved past establishing an independent Chechnya to a broader Jihadist goal in the Caucasus. To be clear, an Islamic insurgency emanating from the North Caucasus has bedeviled the Russian Federation for close to two decades. Despite successful offensive operations by the Russian military in the North Caucasus, violence by Islamist separatist militants has been ongoing. At issue has been the Chechen mandate to create an independent Islamic state and the willingness of the Chechen militants to use terrorism and violence to achieve their ends.

While the mainstream media has focused on this separatist war carried out by extremist Islamic insurgents from Chechnya, the neighboring restive provinces in the North Caucasus have also been engulfed in the conflict. The epicenter of the Islamic separatist insurgency is, of course, Chechnya, which has been in state of war for some time; however, neighboring Dagestan and Ingushetia have been intensely affected and a discussion of Islamic insurgency in Russia can not ensue without including all three territories. Dagestan is the site of militant activity, and a frequent target of terrorism and violent criminality, with attacks occurring on a daily basis. Meanwhile, Ingushetia is a literal war zone. Other parts of the North Caucasus have also seen violence -- North Ossetia is the site of militant activity, while Kabardino-Balkaria is often caught in the crossfire of violence between government forces and Chechen rebels.

The area is beset by daunting poverty and Russian leaders, such as Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, have offered the view that poverty alleviation in the region should be part of the

solution aimed at stabilization of the area. Indeed, expert analysts have, likewise, noted that poor socio-economic conditions constitute the stimulus for many youth to join extremist Islamic militant groups in the North Caucasus. At the same time, it must be emphasized that revenge and resistance against the brutal tactics of the Russian military are part of the equation, ultimately serving to augment extremism and militancy, and create more fertile political soil for radical action.

The motivation of extremism and militancy aside, it should be noted that terrorism by Islamic extremists on Russian terrain is not a new phenomenon. Militant Islamic extremists from the North Caucasus have been behind a host of terrorist attacks over the years. In 2002, Chechen rebels carried out a siege on a theater in Moscow. The Chechen militant rebels who took over the theater demanded an end to the war in Chechnya, and threatened to kill the hostages if their demands were not met. The grave situation demanded a rapid and overwhelming response by Russian authorities and, indeed, most of the hostages were eventually freed when Russian forces stormed the theater. However, 116 hostages were killed in the rescue operation, due to the indiscriminate use of an unspecified sleep-inducing agent by the Russians to deal with the Chechen rebels. In 2004, Chechen terrorists carried out a brutal and bloody attack on a school in Beslan, in which hundreds of people were taken hostage. A two day siege ended with a bloodbath in which more than 300 people were killed under the most horrific conditions. At least half the victims in that case were children. In 2009, the express train from Moscow to St. Petersburg was hit by North Caucasus Islamic terrorists. In 2010, militant extremists stormed the parliament in Chechnya. That same year, the Moscow underground transit system was hit by two female suicide bombers from Dagestan. In 2011, a bomb attack at Moscow's Domodedovo airport left more than 35 people dead and at least 170 others wounded -- many of them critically. The suicide bomber in that attack was identified as a 20-year-old man from the North Caucasus although a Chechen warlord, Doku Umarov, had claimed responsibility for orchestrating the attack at the Moscow airport.

The Chechen leader, Doku Umarov, who has been seen as more of a philosophical separatist leader than a military figure, claimed responsibility for a number of terrorist attacks, including the double suicide bombing of the Moscow subway system in 2010 and an attack on the Moscow airport in 2011. In fact, Umarov has threatened further attacks, insinuating that the extremist Islamic insurgency would intensify with more "special operations" in the future if Russia refused to allow the Caucasus to become an independent Islamic state. In a videotaped message in 2011, he warned, "Among us there are hundreds of brothers who are prepared to sacrifice themselves." Umarov's warning served as both a clarifier of sorts. Specifically, it was becoming increasingly clear that the ambitions of Islamist extremists had expanded from the goal of Chechnya's independence to a broader Jihadist ambition of creating an Islamic state across the Caucasus, governed by Shar'ia law. This broader objective explained the widening of the Jihadist cause -- from a concentrated geopolitical center in Chechnya to a broader claim across the Northern Caucasus. By 2013, Umarov was urging militants to use "maximum force" in the effort to sabotage the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.



## **Terrorism**

Chechen and other North Caucasus separatists, along with foreign Islamic extremists who support their cause, continue to threaten Russia's security, as discussed just above. Muslim support for the Chechen cause is growing. This, and their alleged ties to Al-Qaida, constitute a growing concern for both the region and the international arena, as more attacks are sure to occur in the future.

Russia is party to eleven of the twelve international conventions and protocols pertaining to terrorism.

## **Other**

Russia is said to have one of the highest growth rates of HIV infections in the world. The cause seems to be the work of intravenous drug users sharing needles. The number of registered cases is doubling every year and the current total is approximately 300,000 people. Projections are that, when looking at the high-risk groups that don't get tested for the disease, estimates for the number of cases is actually around 3 million persons. This rate, if left unchecked will have serious economic and security concerns for Russians.

## **Special Entry**

Crisis in Ukraine; blame placed on Russian aggression; NATO bolsters security presence in eastern Europe

Summary:

The start of 2014 was marked by turbulence and turmoil in Ukraine. Tensions initially flared in late 2013 in response to Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's decision not to move forward with a pending association agreement with the European Union. That decision brought more than 100,000 protesters to the streets to rally against what they saw as Ukraine's movement towards greater control by Russia. Indeed, the general consensus was that President Yanukovich had bent to pressure by President Vladimir Putin of Russia to step away from the European Union Association Agreement and instead embrace a customs union with Russia.

By the start of 2014, another flare of protests ensued in Ukraine in response to legislation passed by members of parliament loyal to President Yanukovich. The laws at stake were intended to curb the free expression of political opposition and curtail public protests. The passage of such legislation raised the ire of Ukrainians, particularly those aligned with the opposition, and alarmed

the West with the United States and European Union worried about the Ukraine's slide into autocracy under Yanukovich. In a twist of irony, the very laws intended to suppress mass action actually spurred exactly that end as mass protests attracting tens of thousands of people once again rocked Ukraine. As January 2014 entered its final week, concessions by President Yanukovich to include members of the opposition in government yielded no positive results. Instead, the unrest spread to the eastern part of the country. With the situation deteriorating, the prime minister and the government resigned, and the Ukrainian parliament repealed the controversial anti-protest laws.

In mid-February 2014, the turmoil re-ignited as police tried to clear the main protest camp. Ukraine was again thrust into a renewed state of turbulence and turmoil. A truce was forged on Feb. 19, 2014, but only after more than two dozen people died. That truce collapsed a day later, effectively returning the capital city of Kiev to a battle zone and leading to an increasing death toll. Yet another agreement was forged in which the president conceded to many of the demands of the opposition. But the deal appeared to have come too late to appease an enraged populace. By Feb. 22, 2014, President Yanukovich had fled to the eastern part of the country while his party abandoned him and joined the opposition to officially impeach him, while his political nemesis, former Prime Minister Tymoshenko, was freed from captivity.

The move was a clear message to Moscow that Ukraine would not be controlled by Russia and that Ukraine instead was looking toward Europe as it charted its future path. Indeed, to the chagrin of Russia, the new interim president of Ukraine declared the country would pursue closer ties with the European Union. The winds of change had swept across Ukraine with the "Maidan" or Independence Square stamped in the history books as "Ground Zero" of Ukraine's 2014 battleground.

But the celebration in Ukraine did not last long. The battleground terrain shifted eastward at the start of March 2014 when the Russian parliament granted Russian President Putin authorization to use force in Ukraine, and Russian forces annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Clearly, Putin and Russia felt entitled to reclaim their foothold in Ukraine, thus recalling alarming memories for the rest of the world of the Soviet invasion of then-Czechoslovakia in 1968 to subdue the independence-minded Prague Spring. Adding to the crisis was the perplexing decision by Russian President Putin to refuse to acknowledge that Russian troops were even in Crimea.

In response to Russia's actions against Ukraine, and particularly in the direction of controlling Crimea, the G7 countries (G8 minus Russia) pulled out of preparations for the G8 summit set to take place in Russia and the United States instituted targeted sanctions against Russian officials.

Talks aimed at resolving the crisis yielded no results. Indeed, an East-West conflict was intensifying as Crimea scheduled a referendum for mid-March 2014 when residents would decide whether or not to join Russia. A meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and United States Secretary of State Kerry ended in failure. Because Russia viewed the overthrow of

Yanukovych as illegal, and because the West viewed Crimea's decision to join Russia was in violation of international law, an impasse was at hand.

The United States and the European Union respectively warned that such a unilateral action would run counter to international law, and thus they would not recognize the likely ratification of Crimean unification with Russia. For its part, Ukraine insisted that it would not accept the fracturing of its territorial integrity.

Meanwhile, the West attempted to condemn Crimea's secession referendum, and issue its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, by moving forward with a resolution in the United Nations Security Council. As expected, Russia -- as a veto-wielding permanent member -- vetoed the draft. Every other Security Council member voted in favor of the measure, with the exception of China, which abstained from the vote. The inaction at the Security Council was reminiscent of the Cold war era in which both sides habitually vetoed the other's measures, essentially creating a state of diplomatic paralysis.

On March 16, 2014, ethnic Russians in Crimea voted overwhelmingly to secede from Ukraine and unite with Russia. Crimea then officially requested that the "Republic of Crimea" be admitted as a new subject to the Russian Federation. On the Russian side of the equation, Russia recognized Crimea as a sovereign entity. Russian President Putin soon responded by officially annexing Crimea.

The United States and the European Union imposed personal sanctions on Russian and Crimean officials. This punitive action was intended as a rebuke against the actions in Crimea; however, there was no sign that Russia was even slightly daunted by its decision to seize control of a territory belonging to Ukraine under the established system of international jurisprudence. As stated above, Russia justified its moves by asserting that the interim post-Yanukovych government in Ukraine was illegitimate.

Russian ambitions to regain territory lost following the collapse of the Soviet Union soon entered into the equation. Of note was the fact that in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russian attention was glancing towards other parts of eastern Ukraine. Eruptions of unrest in this Russian-speaking part of Ukraine were blamed on Russia, and reminiscent of what had transpired in Crimea. Indeed, Ukraine was accusing Russia of carrying out its Crimea formula by orchestrating unrest further into Ukrainian territory.

It was to be seen if the landscape in eastern Europe in the spring of 2014 represented the foundation for a renewed Cold War between the East and West. It was also possible that President Barack Obama of the United States was correct in dismissing such a notion on the basis of the fact that Russia was no longer a super power and, instead, a regional power acting as a bully against its neighbors.

Note that a presidential election was held in Ukraine on May 25, 2014. Petro Poroshenko claimed victory in Ukraine's presidential contest but turmoil continued to rock Ukraine. Entering the fray at the start of June 2014, NATO moved to bolster its security presence in eastern Europe as a deterrent against Russian aggression.

In June and July 2014, Ukrainian forces made some progress in retaking the rebel-held parts of eastern Ukraine, while the United States intensified its sanctions against Russian companies as a punitive measure against Russia for failing to de-escalate the conflict.

The landscape in eastern Ukraine took a disturbing turn on July 17, 2014, when a civilian passenger aircraft traveling from Netherlands to Malaysia went down in eastern Ukraine. All 298 people aboard the Boeing 777 airliner perished when Malaysian Airlines flight 17 crashed in the rebel-held territory of Donetsk close to the Russian border. That event augured a geopolitical landmine as Ukraine said the Malaysian Airlines flight was shot down and placed the blame on pro-Russian separatists battling Ukrainian forces. The tragedy of the Malaysian Airlines flight occurred one day after the Obama administration in the United States unveiled harsh punitive sanctions against major Russian firms aligned with Russian President Putin.

In the aftermath of the tragic downing of the Malaysian Airlines flight, and because the majority of the victims with Dutch nationals, Europe's stance against Russia hardened. Accordingly, the West -- including the United States and the European Union -- intensified its sanctions regime against Russia.

Meanwhile, in August 2014, Ukrainian forces at first held the momentum in the fight to regain control over the pro-Russian eastern part of the country, particularly in separatist strongholds of Donetsk and Luhansk. However, Russian-backed separatists were vigorously defending what they viewed as their own territory later in the month. By the close of August 2014, NATO said that Russian forces had violated Ukraine's territory while the Ukrainian president warned that his country was on the brink of war with Russia.

At the start of September 2014, NATO announced a rapid reaction force as well as military exercises in eastern Europe. Pressure from NATO and the threat of fresh sanctions by the European Union appeared to have spurred pro-Russian separatists to go to the negotiating table with Ukrainian authorities. There, a fragile truce was soon established but sporadically violated as fighting continued in Donetsk and Luhansk, and as Ukrainian forces fought to hold the port city of Mariupol.

In September 2014, with the ceasefire still in effect, Ukraine concentrated on the process of trying to retain its territorial integrity while meeting the needs of the pro-Russian separatists. To that end, Ukraine unveiled a proposal that would convey "special status" for eastern part of country,

conveying greater autonomy. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian parliament advanced its pro-Western orientation by ratifying the Association Agreement with European Union (the basis of the uprising that caused the ousting of Yanukovich in the first place), while Ukrainian President Poroshenko unveiled a package of reforms aimed at securing membership in the European Union.

By October 2014, Russian President Putin was calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian border. However, NATO was warning that there was no sign of Russian troops actually retreating from the border in any significant fashion; as well, Russian forces remained active within Ukraine in violation of that country's sovereignty. Ukrainian President Poroshenko viewed the strong election performance of allied pro-Western parties as a ratification of, and a mandate for, his security plans for eastern Ukraine. However, that eastern portion of the country was moving forward with illegal elections of their own, which were rejected by Ukraine and the larger international community, but which were (unsurprisingly) being backed by Russia.

By November 2014, fighting had erupted in the east, there were reports of a build up of pro-Russian reinforcements there, and it was fair to say that the fragile ceasefire that had been in place since September 2014 was on the brink of collapse.

December 2014 saw a prisoner exchange occur between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists. As well, Ukrainian President Poroshenko said that he intended to meet with his Russian, French, and German counterparts in early 2015 in Kazakhstan for discussions on the restoration of peace in the eastern part of the country. These actions were regarded as positive steps in the arena of regional relations. However, Ukraine's decision to revoke its neutral status -- a move that could potentially facilitate future NATO membership -- was likely to raise the ire of Russia, which has opposed Ukraine's westward drift from the onset. Ironically, it was Russia's own aggressive interventions in eastern Ukraine, particularly marked by the annexation of Crimea, that actually catalyzed Ukraine's haste to move out of Russia's orbit.

At the start of 2015, the Minsk ceasefire agreement was effectively dead as fighting resumed around Donetsk and as pro-Russian separatists carried out an assault on the strategic port city of Mariupol, prompting Ukrainian President Poroshenko to warn that his forces would not bend to pro-Russian rebels and that Ukraine would protect its sovereignty. Fighting had extended to other areas in Ukraine's east as pro-Russian separatists aggressively sought to consolidate control over what they have termed "New Russia."

As the month of February 2015 began, there were reports that the Obama administration in the United States was considering additional support for Ukrainian forces in protecting Ukraine from the pro-Russian offensive. As well, NATO was considering the establishment of special command units in eastern Europe to respond rapidly to threats in the region.

Note that on Feb. 12, 2015, a new Minsk ceasefire agreement and a roadmap for peace were

forged. But later in February 2015, peace in eastern Ukraine remained elusive as pro-Russians took control over the town of Debaltseve and forced Ukrainian forces into retreat. Pro-Russian forces were reportedly attacking government-held positions in eastern Ukraine -- including the area around the strategic port of Mariupol -- while Ukraine accused Russia of dispatching more troops and tanks to the region, specifically in the direction of the town of Novoazovsk on the southern coast.

Meanwhile, a year after the original Maidan uprising in Kiev ousted former pro-Russian President Yanukovich from power, Ukraine's second largest city of Kharkiv was struck by a bomb attack as demonstrators marched in a national unity rally. Despite the existence of the second Minsk ceasefire agreement, Ukraine was still occasionally mired by war and bloodshed. Europe warned of further sanctions to come if violations to the truce occurred and, indeed, a fragile peace appeared to take hold in the region. Juxtaposed against this background came a surprising admission from Russian President Putin that he had long-standing ambitions to regain Russian control over Crimea.

See "Political Conditions" and "Foreign Policy" sections of this Country Review for further details related to the ongoing unrest in eastern Ukraine, which has been blamed on Russia.

### **Special Entry**

Bomb believed to be responsible for crash of Russian jet carrying vacationers from Egyptian resort; Islamic State likely to blame

The crash of a Russian airliner in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula resulted in the deaths of all 224 persons on board. The Russian Metrojet Flight KG9268 departed the Red Sea resort city of Sharm-el-Shekh and was bound for the Russian city of St. Petersburg but crashed before the tourists and flight crew could arrive at their destination. The notorious terror group, Islamic State, claimed responsibility for the downing of the flight but Egyptian officials dismissed the claim on the basis of their belief that the terror group did not have the capability to bring down a jet. The Russian government was, likewise, reticent to accept terrorism as explanation. Nevertheless, both the United States and the United Kingdom made clear that intelligence pointed to a bomb being planted on the aircraft and exploding shortly after taking off from Sharm-el-Sheikh. With an affiliate of Islamic State active in the Egyptian Sinai in recent years, and with intelligence pointing in the direction of terrorism, that group's claim of responsibility was being viewed by the countries of the West as credible. The international dimension of the tragedy catapulted the global security threat posed by Islamic State to new heights.



See "Political Conditions" and "Foreign Policy" sections of this Country Review for further details related to Russia's engagement in Syria and the possible consequences.

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## Defense Forces

### Military Data

#### **Military Branches:**

Ground Troops (Sukhoputnyye Voyskia, SV), Navy (Voyenno-Morskoy Flot, VMF), Air Forces (Voyenno-Vozdushniye Sily, VVS); Airborne Troops (Vozdushno-Desantnyye Voyska, VDV), Missile Troops of Strategic Purpose (Raketnyye Voyska Strategicheskogo Naznacheniya, RVSN) referred to commonly as Strategic Rocket Forces, and Aerospace Defense Troops (Voyska Vozdushno-Kosmicheskoy Oborony or Voyska VKO) are independent "combat arms," not subordinate to any of the three branches; Russian Ground Troops include the following combat arms: motorized-rifle troops, tank troops, missile and artillery troops, air defense of the Ground Troops

#### **Eligible age to enter service:**

18-27 years of age for compulsory or voluntary military service; males are registered for the draft at 17 years of age

#### **Mandatory Service Terms:**

1-year service obligation (conscripts can only be sent to combat zones after 6 months of training); reserve obligation for non-officers to age 50; enrollment in military schools from the age of 16, cadets classified as members of the armed forces

#### **Manpower in general population-fit for military service:**

N/A

#### **Manpower reaching eligible age annually:**

N/A

**Military Expenditures-Percent of GDP:**

3.49%

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## **Appendix: North Caucasus**

### **Political Developments in the North Caucasus**

NOTE:

While this report has a particular focus on Chechnya, it also includes coverage of Dagestan, Ingushetia, and the wider restive region of the North Caucasus

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In Detail --

Russia withdrew its forces from Chechnya in 1996 after a 20-month war that left the separatists in charge. Russian troops then returned in 1999, after rebel incursions ensued into a neighboring region of Russia and bombings -- allegedly by rebels -- killed more than 300 people in Russia. Large-scale combat operations are now rare in Chechnya, but hit-and-run attacks and land mines wound and kill Russian troops, civilians and rebels almost every day.

At the beginning of August 1999, Prime Minister Stepashin was confronted with a continuing crisis in the southern Caucasus republic of Dagestan, which borders Chechnya. Armed groups from Chechnya, led by two important Chechen rebel leaders, Khatab and Basayev, had crossed into Dagestan in an attempt to launch an Islamic insurrection against the pro-Moscow government in Dagestan. Intermittent attacks and kidnappings had occurred throughout 1998.

In October 1998, the Russian government had sent troops to close the border between Dagestan and Chechnya.

Stepashin ordered Russian forces to repel the Chechens and protect the Dagestani government, as attacks against the Russian troops on the Dagestani-Chechnya border and attacks against the pro-Moscow Dagestani government increased in frequency and severity.

By the end of August 1999, Putin had ordered increased air attacks against the separatists in Dagestan as well as against rebel positions in Chechnya. By month's end, bombs were exploded at a military barracks in Dagestan, killing 64, and at a shopping mall in Moscow, injuring dozens.

In early September, the president of Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov, mobilized Chechen forces in anticipation that the fighting in neighboring Dagestan would lead to new fighting between Chechen and Russian forces.

On September 9 and 13, two apartment blocks in Moscow were bombed, leaving more than 260 people dead. Three days later, a residential area in the southern Russian town of Volgodonsk was bombed, resulting in 17 dead. Although clear evidence was never presented, it was widely suspected by the Russian public that Chechen separatists were behind the bombings. Moscow police began checking identification and rounding up suspects, concentrating their efforts on people who looked like they were from the Caucasus region.

On September 23, Russian planes attacked the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, while 30,000 additional Russian troops were sent to seal the border between Chechnya and Dagestan.

Despite Putin's stated aim of not engaging in another large Chechen war, Russian forces invaded Chechnya on Oct. 2, 1999, and Putin announced that Moscow would no longer recognize Chechen President Maskhadov.

From the beginning of the Russian assault on Chechnya to early December, Russian forces attacked their opponents from a distance, using aircraft, artillery and tanks to bombard suspected rebel positions. As a result, the number of civilian casualties was reported to be quite high and tens of thousands of Chechens became refugees, many fleeing the war by entering the neighboring Russian republic of Ingushetia. Russian casualties, however, were much lower than in the previous Chechen war. The low number of Russian casualties, in tandem with Putin's tight control over the media reporting on Chechnya, were contributing factors in winning public approval for the war.

Opposition to the manner in which Russia was conducting its war in Chechnya grew among European countries, the United States and others. Disagreement with Russia's conduct was expressed at a summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, in Istanbul in November 1999. Russia's relations with the West were strained when Yeltsin left the summit early after giving a speech that compared Russia's "anti-terrorist" campaign in Chechnya to NATO "aggression" in Yugoslavia, a reference to the Kosovo conflict. Tensions between the West and Russia increased when Russia announced an ultimatum to the Chechens remaining in Grozny: those who left would be treated as refugees, while those who remained would be assumed

separatists. Diplomatic intervention by the West led to an initial softening of the Russian position, but eventually proved ineffective as Russian continued its attack on Grozny.

In early December 1999, the International Monetary Fund announced a suspension of a \$4.5 billion loan, citing the lack of progress in Russia's economic reforms. The Russian government, however, voiced its opinion that the loan delay was related to Western opposition to the war in Chechnya.

The Russians re-established control over most Chechen territory, but failed to flush the guerrillas out of the mountains in the south.

Chechen separatist guerrillas killed at least two policemen on June 21, 2001, in attacks coinciding with the first anniversary of the region's pro-Russian administration taking office. The killings were part of an upsurge of violence directed at targets associated with the Moscow-installed administration of former Muslim cleric Akhmad Kadyrov, culminating in a deadly triple car bomb attack. Kadyrov put a brave face on events at a news conference in Moscow marking his first year in office. He said officials were working hard to restore normal life to the region where Russian forces were dispatched in October 1999 to wipe out separatists.

Moscow has tried to restore order by recruiting a local police force and installing pro-Russian administrators in towns and villages, but guerrillas have countered the move by singling out and gunning down Chechen "collaborators." A wave of killings of pro-Moscow Chechen officials has only added to a general sense of insecurity which tens of thousands of refugees in neighboring Ingushetia say stops them from returning to the republic.

Russian forces sweeping through villages near Chechnya's capital in late June 2001 killed several rebels active in nearly two years of warfare, including one of the country's most wanted men. In Ingushetia, on Chechnya's western border, a hunger strike to press demands for talks on ending the war drew more and more participants, with 82 refugees from the region refusing food. About 1,000 others staged a demonstration in their support in the border town of Sleptsovsk.

Russian news agencies quoted Ilya Shabalkin, spokesman for the FSB security police force, as saying that guerrilla chief Arbi Barayev had been among about 10 rebels chiefs and other fighters killed in the drive near Grozny.

Russia said on June 27, 2001, its border forces had cleared a remote mountain gorge of Chechen rebels after a major battle. The fighting followed a weekend battle that ended in the death of a top rebel guerrilla chief, which prompted media speculation that Moscow was switching tactics after many months of stalemate in the separatist region.

There were no independent reports from the scene of the clashes, in the mountains near the border with Georgia, but Russian officials described the fighting as a success.

The Kremlin's Chechnya office said the fighters were mostly foreigners, Arabs or Afghans, fighting for the Chechen guerrillas, some armed with United States-made rifles rather than the Russian ones used by most Chechen rebels. The mountain battle follows the killing of Arbi Barayev, a Chechen rebel commander Moscow had long accused of masterminding a brutal campaign of kidnappings for ransom.

Russian forces announced earlier they had been battling Barayev's forces for days in a special search and destroy mission in his home village. Later they said they had identified Barayev's body among the dead. Killing Barayev was considered a major coup for the Russian troops, who had failed to kill or capture any of the top rebel leaders, despite occupying virtually all of once separatist-held Chechen territory since March 2000. President Vladimir Putin transferred control of the Chechnya operation from the army to the Fyedyeral'naya Sluzhba Byezopasnosti (FSB - Federal Security Service) security police in early 2001, and the FSB said it planned to hunt guerrilla chiefs down in their homes while withdrawing tens of thousands of troops.

The troop withdrawal was later deferred and until as recently as 2001, no top rebel leader had been hunted down. Izvestia newspaper said in late June 2001 the new tactic could be aimed at eliminating radical rebel leaders and opening talks with elected separatist President Aslan Maskhadov, who led the Chechen delegation at talks that ended an earlier 1994-1996 war.

The conflict in Chechnya seemed to be heading in a positive direction with the convening of a peace conference in Moscow on November 18, 2001. One Chechen rebel leader said he was optimistic about a peace deal with Russia after a lightning visit to Moscow, for the first publicly acknowledged talks with the Kremlin since war started two years prior.

The talks were the first fruits of a shift in President Vladimir Putin's policy announced in September 2001 in apparent response to the terror attacks on the United States, although the Kremlin played down suggestions of an about-face.

Akhmed Zakayev, deputy prime minister in Aslan Maskhadov's rebel government, flew in from Turkey and met Viktor Kazantsev, Putin's envoy to southern Russia, at a Moscow airport for two to three hours. Moscow carefully tried to play down any suggestion that the meetings represented a change in its "no-talks" policy. The Kremlin's main Chechnya spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, said that there had in fact been meetings between Russian officials and Maskhadov's representatives, including Zakayev, in the past. He gave no specific details.

Russian officials and rebels discussed evacuating civilians from the capital Grozny at the height of its bombardment.

President Putin proposed the talks in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States, which gave Moscow a fresh impetus to sort out a stalemated policy, and gave Putin an opportunity to settle his divisions with the West over Chechnya. Putin strongly backed Washington in its war

against terrorism, and Moscow maintained that its war in Chechnya is part of the same fight.

On Sept. 24, 2001, Putin called for talks aimed at finding a means of "disarming illegal formations and groups, and a way to include them in civilian life in Chechnya." Putin also demanded "those who call themselves political actors immediately sever contacts with international terrorists and their organizations," suggesting Russia might rehabilitate Maskhadov if he disavowed warlords with extremist ties.

Nonetheless, on the ground in Chechnya battles were still waged. Twelve Russian servicemen and police troops were killed and 22 wounded in new round of skirmishes in mid-December with rebels and land mine explosions in Chechnya. Rebels attacked Russian positions and checkpoints 18 times over the previous 24 hours, killing five soldiers and wounding 11. Four Russian soldiers were killed and three were wounded when their jeeps set off land mines in the capital Grozny and Vedeno, in southern Chechnya. Rebels assaulted an armored personnel carrier near the town of Zandak in eastern Chechnya, killing one soldier and wounding four.

Russian helicopters attacked the rebels when they retreated into nearby woods after the clash. There were no reports of rebel casualties.

In Argun, nine miles east of Grozny, rebels attacked a police patrol, killing two officers and wounding four, the official said. Four rebels were also killed, he said. Russian aircraft bombed suspected rebel bases in eastern Chechnya and artillery-shelled targets in the east and southeast.

President Putin announced that Russian forces had captured a top aide to Chechen rebel leader Khattab, who helped finance the rebels' activities. The Russian president said Abu Sayah was seized during a special operation early Friday, Nov. 30, 2001. Sayah, "supplied money, organized terrorist acts on the territory of the Russian Federation and maintained contact with his units on the territory of Georgia," Putin said. A top Russian Defense Ministry official also said that Russian forces had intensified the military campaign in Chechnya. "A number of relevant conditions including climatic, political and military ones have emerged," said Yuri Baluyevsky. "This is the most suitable time to inflict irreparable damage." Baluyevsky said that 300-500 mercenaries remained in Chechnya. It was believed that with winter coming, it became harder for rebels to hide out in mountains and forests, and they began trying to mix in with the civilian population or trying to take refuge in neighboring countries.

The Russian military gained a victory when the warlord Khattab was killed in March 2002 by a poisoned letter. A number of other important rebel leaders were killed in the spring months of 2002, and 37 rebel troops surrendered to the Russian military, the largest group to surrender in two years.

Human rights organizations have long condemned human rights violations in the Chechnyan region. On April 2, 2002, in a speech addressed to the 58th Session of the Commission of Human Rights



in Geneva, Medecins Sans Frontieres representative Loick Barriquand denounced the military actions against civilians stating, "The violence today against civilians is still extreme and is without any relation to confrontations between the armed forces. On the contrary, these acts have been systematic."

On that same day, Human Rights Watch released a report that documented 87 cases of non-combatant disappearances between September 2000 and January 2002. It was believed that the actual number of non-civilian disappearances was much higher. On April 10, the European Commission called for an immediate cease-fire in Chechnya. Several hundred thousand Chechnyans have been displaced since the uprising, although in recent months there has been an effort to repatriate some 1,500 refugees back to Chechnya.

Days before the 58th Session of the Commission of Human Rights, on March 29, 2002, the Russian military commander Lieutenant General Vladimir Moltenskoï signed a decree, known as Order 80, that would stop human rights abuses by the Russian military during special operations. Order 80 stated that victims of abuse by the military could register their complaints and the perpetrators would be investigated and brought to trial for criminal behavior. The decree further stated that local officials must accompany troops when carrying out "sweeps" and the names of those persons apprehended in the sweeps will be given to local authorities. Human rights observers reported that the new rules were still violated.

In mid-2002, 43 people and more than 150 injured were injured at a Victory Day parade by a remote-controlled bomb in the Caspian port town, Kaspiysk. While no one was apprehended for the act, authorities were certain that the explosion was a terrorist act.

In the fall of 2002, Chechen rebels sieged a theater in Moscow. Following the rescue of the hundreds of hostages, which left 118 people dead, Russian President Putin vowed to crush terrorism. The Chechen militant rebels who took over the theater demanded an end to the war in Chechnya, and threatened to kill the hostages if their demands were not met. The grave situation demanded a rapid and overwhelming response by Russian authorities and, indeed, most of the hostages were eventually freed when Russian forces stormed the theatre.

Meanwhile, however, questions surfaced and anger intensified over the way in which the theater siege was quelled. In particular, the indiscriminate use of an unspecified sleep-inducing agent was used by the Russians to deal with the Chechens. Reports suggested that the gas used in this regard was the cause of the deaths of 116 of the 118 hostages killed, and the gas itself was made up of an opiate of a similar typology as heroin or morphine.

In March 2003, residents of Chechnya voted overwhelmingly -- 96 percent -- in favor of a new constitution. The new constitution would augment the Chechen Republic within the Russian Federation and resolve the problem of Russian territorial integrity, which has been at issue for several years. Although some critics wondered if the vote was legitimate, officials state that the

turnout was 79 percent. The new constitution will allow Chechnya a great deal of autonomy while preserving the state of the Russian Federation.

In May 2003, local government buildings in the breakaway republic of Chechnya were hit by a suicide bomb blast that left close to 40 people dead and almost 200 people injured. Countless more remained missing in the rubble from the blast. Reports suggested that a truck loaded with explosives drove into the compound of the Federal Security Service (FSB) in the northern town of Znamenskoy. The region of northern Chechnya -- historically home to many Terek Cossacks -- was normally one of the more stable parts of Chechnya. At least one person was in the truck when it barraged through a security checkpoint and exploded. The blast left a massive crater, and destroyed several buildings in the immediate vicinity and in surrounding residential areas.

This attack, presumably by Chechen separatists, was one of the deadliest incidents since a suicide bombing in Grozny and the most significant attack since the referendum on the status of Chechnya, which ensued in March. Russian President Vladimir Putin reacted by saying that the attack by separatist rebels would not affect the peace efforts. In this regard, he observed, "The act... was directed at stopping the process of bringing about a political settlement to the situation in Chechnya.. We cannot allow anything like this to happen, nor will we."

Then, a suicide bombing in Mozdok took place in June 2003 on a bus carrying military personnel. Approximately 20 people were killed in the explosion. A month later, a suicide bombing ensued at a rock concert in Moscow, which left 15 people dead.

In August, a suicide bombing in Russia resulted in the deaths of more than 50 people -- making it one of the deadliest attacks in recent years. The attack took place at a military hospital in the town of Mozdok in North Ossetia, just six miles (ten kilometers) from Chechnya. Reports stated that a suicide bomber crashed through the entrance gates of the military hospital in a truck laden with explosives. Once the explosives were detonated, a four-story hospital building was destroyed and a ten foot (three meter) deep crater was left in the rubble. Between 75 and 150 people were believed to have been in the building at the time of the explosion.

There was no claim of responsibility for the attack, however, there had been suggestions that it might be linked to the activities of Chechen separatist rebels. The town of Mozdok, where the suicide bombing took place, had been the headquarters for Russian troops involved in operations in Chechnya for close to a decade. Russian soldiers who had been hurt in Chechnya were treated at the very hospital in Mozdok, where a building was destroyed by the explosion. As such, the hospital in Mozdok may have been specifically targeted. The news agency Interfax reported, however, that the Chechen separatist leadership denied responsibility for the attack.

Also in August 2003, three people died and at least 17 people were killed following a series of bomb blasts in the southern Russia city of Krasnodar. The blasts took place at bus stops in residential areas in Krasnodar, located in close proximity to the Caucasus region. Interfax reported

that the attacks appeared to have been carried out by rebels from Chechnya.

President Vladimir Putin scheduled a leadership election in Chechnya for October 2003, however, Chechen separatists promised to resist all efforts by Russian authorities to control the affairs of the breakaway republic.

The election, when held in the latter part of 2003, showed pro-Russian candidate, Akhmad Kadyrov, to be the winner. Kadyrov won a landslide victory, however, the result of the poll was dismissed by both separatists and human rights groups as questionable.

On May 9, 2004, President Akhmad Kadyrov was killed in an attack in the Chechnyan capital city of Grozny. Reports stated that between six and 30 people (including the President) had been killed when a bomb exploded at Grozny's Dynamo stadium. Chechnya was placed under a security alert while Russian news reported that five people had been detained under suspicion of involvement in the attack.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Kadyrov was a hero and promised retribution against the Chechen rebels believed to have been behind the attack. He also appointed Chechnya's Prime Minister Sergei Abramov as Acting President.

In June 2004, an attack by Chechen rebels in the southern region of Ingushetia left more than 57 people dead. Included in the death toll were the acting Interior Minister Abukar Kostoyev and his Deputy Minister who were killed when the rebels seized the Interior Ministry building. Several members of the federal security service, border guard and prosecution service were also killed. Three days of mourning were announced to show respect for those who died.

Russian forces were reported to have been in pursuit of the rebels who apparently abandoned their vehicles in the border town of Galashki as they fled into Chechnya. Putin promised that the rebels would be "destroyed." During a trip to the region, Putin also noted that security in the area would have to be intensified. Indeed, thousands of troops were deployed into the area to search for militant fighters along with helicopter gunships. This approach was imperative, given the high level of coordination used by Chechen rebels in launching their attacks. In fact, a week earlier, Chechen rebel leader, Aslan Maskhadov, ominously declared that attacks were imminent.

On Aug. 24, 2004, two Russian aircraft crashed almost simultaneously after both took off from the Domodedovo Airport in Moscow, killing a total of 89 passengers and crew. One jet was bound for the Black Sea resort of Sochi, where President Putin was on holiday, while the other was headed toward the city of Volgograd.

The subsequent investigation found traces of explosives in both planes. In addition, each plane had a Chechen woman aboard and neither have had relatives claim the body. This may have been very significant as several suicide bombings in recent years have been carried out by Chechen women

who have lost husbands or other male family members in the war in the southern republic over the past decade. A terrorist group calling itself the Islambuli Brigades claimed responsibility for the crashes. Their statement on the Internet blamed the Russians for slaughtering Muslims in Chechnya. The statement also claimed there were five mujahedin aboard each plane and said their group was connected to al-Qaida

Following the attacks, the Chechen presidential election was held; Russian officials had warned that separatist rebels could resort to terrorism to undermine the voting. Moscow promoted a Kremlin favorite, Interior Minister Alu Alkhanov. In a post-election interview, Alkhanov ruled out any chance of talks with Chechen separatist leaders. Chechen separatists have consistently denounced all Russian-sponsored elections as a farce as they continue to battle the Russian military.

Days after the downing of the two aircraft and the election of Alkhanov, terrorists took control of a school in Beslan (North Ossetia), leaving hundreds of school children, parents and teachers trapped inside. The terrorists were reported to be militant separatists demanding independence for Chechnya. Given the number of people inside, most of whom were women and children, Russian authorities were reticent to attempt a dramatic rescue. A temporary cease-fire was negotiated in order to retrieve bodies of people who died in the initial spate of violence. However, as officials were attempting to complete this task, an explosion was heard. The explosion was followed by extended exchange of fire. When some hostages tried to escape during the chaos, the terrorists shot at them.

The standoff resulted in the tragic deaths of more than 300 people with over 600 people injured. Russian special forces battled the last of the terrorists as the rescue operations continue. Hostages who managed to escape said that male and female extremists dressed in military attire wired the buildings with explosives when they took control of the school. Presumably, the explosions precipitated the bloody shootout between Chechnyan militants and Russian forces. Identification of several Arabs also suggested an international connection of sorts.

Following the tragic events in Beslan, Putin defiantly made clear to the world and the Russian citizenry that he would do what was necessary to protect people from terrorism. Putin then implemented a number of measures aimed at consolidating his power in the interest of national security. Opponents of Putin, as well as several members of the international community, decried Putin's measures noting that they represented a slip into a more authoritarian political stance. The contraction of democratic rights in Russia has continued to be a concern on the domestic landscape in recent years.

In March 2005, Russian authorities said they had killed Chechen rebel leader, Aslan Mashhadov. The announcement was seen as a boost for Russian President Vladimir Putin as it portrayed him as an effective leader in dealing with the threat of Chechen terrorists.

Several months later in July 2005, at least 10 Russian soldiers were killed when a bomb exploded

in the Dagestani capital city of Makhachkala.

On October 13, 2005, Chechnyan militants led mass raids on governmental security institutions and police buildings in the provincial capital of Nalchik in the Russian province of Kabardino-Balkaria. The selection of official targets in Nalchik suggested that those responsible had launched an assault aimed at security and law enforcement installations. The actual attacks appeared to be well-coordinated and left the city under a cloud of black smoke, with gun battles ongoing. Official reports stated that the assault left scores of people dead or injured, including 61 militants and 12 police. The chaos continued with some militants holding several people hostage at a police station.

President Vladimir Putin issued an order for the city to be sealed and for military forces to shoot any armed rebels. Deputy Interior Minister Alexander Chekalin assured the public that the city was under government control and that no one would be able to traverse the area around Nalchik without being inspected.

The area has been wrought by increasing violence in recent years, primarily as a result of Chechnyan rebel efforts. The area is also plagued by poverty, which only serves to exacerbate the climate of instability. Nalchik, where the latest attack occurred, is located 60 miles (100 kilometers) from Beslan, where Chechnyan rebels, led by Shamil Basayev, carried out a massacre at a school in 2004.

A Chechnyan extremist group called the Caucasus Front claimed responsibility for the attacks. The claim was made on a website linked with Chechnyan rebel activities called Kavkaz Center. On the site, it was claimed that a "jamaat" -- an Islamic word denoting extremist Islamic warriors -- had laid siege on Nalchik.

In November 2005, Chechnya hosted its first parliament elections since Russian troops took control of the region in 1999. Whereas the Russian government in Moscow has viewed the 2005 elections as a positive sign on the road toward peace, separatists in Chechnya have regarded it as a sham, aimed at avoiding the creation of a genuine resolution. Indeed, Chechen rebel envoy, Akhmed Zakayev, characterized the vote as "pseudo-elections." Human rights groups echoed that sentiment and warned that ongoing violence made a free and fair election impossible, despite the presence of outside observers from Russia, the Arab League and Organization of the Islamic Conference. During the time of the previous parliamentary elections in Chechnya, the rebels held power over a quasi-independent state. But since that time, the rebels were removed from office, and in other processes that were also regarded as flawed, a new constitution was put forth, making Chechnya part of the Russian Federation, and a pro-Moscow president, Alu Alkhanov, was elected. Now, in these elections, voters would have to choose from a list of candidates known to be loyal to the Kremlin, and generally aligned with the pro-Moscow party, United Russia.

In March 2006, the regional assembly of Chechnya voted unanimously in favor of the appointment

of Ramzan Kadyrov as the new prime minister. Kadyrov was chosen to officially replace Sergei Abramov, who was set to resign as a result of health problems derived from a car crash. Kadyrov had been functioning as the caretaker head of government since Abramov's accident. Ramzan Kadyrov, the son of assassinated former president Akhmad Kadyrov, was the leader of a powerful security militia, which was accused of human rights abuses. Specifically, Kadyrov's security forces were linked by Russian and international human rights groups to extra-judicial killings, torture and abductions. For his part, the new pro-Moscow head of government has denied the charges.

An attack by militants in Chechnya left at least six Russian soldiers dead and 20 wounded in early July 2006. According to reports, a military convoy was ambushed near the town of Avtury -- just to the south-east of the Chechen capital city of Grozny. A Chechen rebel website posted details of the attack and said that it had been carried out to avenge the killing of separatist leader, Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev, by Russian forces a few weeks prior.

In July 2006, Russian media reported that Chechen warlord and rebel commander, Shamil Basayev, was dead. Nikolai Patrushev, the head of Russia's security service, said that Basayev had been killed in a special operation in Ingushetia on the border with Chechnya. According to reports, Basayev was among a group of militants who had been killed while preparing to carry out a terrorist act in Ingushetia. Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that Basayev's killing was "deserved retribution" for his many attacks, which had left a bloody legacy of thousands dead over the course of more than a decade.

After Russian troops withdrew from Chechnya in the mid-1990s, Basayev was defeated by Aslan Maskhadov in his bid for the Chechen presidency in 1996. He later served as prime minister in the self-proclaimed Chechen republic of Ichkeria in 1997. From the 1990s onward, he was known for his leadership role within the Chechen resistance, as well as his orchestration of terrorist activities aimed at achieving independence. To that end, Basayev was said to have been responsible for a host of major attacks by Chechen separatist rebels against Russia.

Basayev had been wanted by Russian authorities for his involvement in the October 2005 attack in Nalchik, the September 2004 seizure of a school in Beslan, the suicide bombing of two airliners in August 2004, the suicide bombing outside a metro station in Moscow also in the summer of 2004, the taking of theatre-attendees as hostages in October 2002, the takeover of a hospital in Budyonnovsk in June 1995, and the 1991 hijacking of an aircraft traveling from southern Russia to Turkey.

But Basayev was more than an architect of terrorist activities in Chechnya. Indeed, he was the central figure in the modern Chechen separatist movement. In many senses, he was the symbol of the independence enterprise. His death had to be regarded as a blow to the thrust for Chechen sovereignty and a coup for Putin's government.



In October 2006, journalist Anna Politkovskaya was murdered in her apartment building in the Russian capital of Moscow. Reports stated that she had been shot repeatedly in the apartment elevator, and a pistol was found next to her body. Throughout the years, Politkovskaya had forged a reputation as a strong critic of the Kremlin's policies in Chechnya. Only days before being killed, she had been scheduled to publish an article dealing with kidnappings and torture in Chechnya. Her last published article had dealt with human rights abuses by a pro-Moscow militia in Chechnya. Her murder was thusly believed to have been politically-motivated. The Prosecutor-General of Russia has been charged with overseeing an investigation into her killing, was expected to consider if and how her journalistic focus may have been linked with her death.

On March 1, 2007, a new president of the breakaway republic of Chechnya was confirmed as president. Ramzan Kadyrov (discussed above as regards his appointment as prime minister) was nominated by Russian President Vladimir Putin and endorsed by the Chechen parliament. In an address to the Chechen parliament, he said that his focus would be on economic development.

Two years later in 2009, Russian authorities announced that Moscow was ending its “counter-terrorism operation” against separatist rebels in Chechnya. The move would end military operations in the semi-autonomous republic with a majority Muslim population after more than a decade. It would also set the foundation for “normalizing the situation,” according to Russia’s anti-terrorism committee. Russian authorities said that after years of violent unrest, Chechnya was not stabilized under the leadership of its pro-Kremlin leader, Ramzan Kadyrov.

For his part, Kadyrov responded to Moscow’s announcement saying, "We received the news about cancelling the counter-terrorism operation with great satisfaction." He continued, “ Now the Chechen Republic... is a peaceful, developing territory, and cancelling the counter-terrorism operation will only promote economic growth in the republic.”

Critics of Kadyrov have said that stability in Chechnya has come at a grave price -- via fear of violence. They alleged that he has used torture and death to intimidate his opponents. Human rights groups concurred that such allegations were not without merit. For his part, Kadyrov has dismissed such charges as untrue. Meanwhile, occasional unrest prevails in parts of Chechnya as well as the nearby regions of Dagestan and Ingushetia.

In July 2009, prominent human rights activist, Natalia Estemirova, was abducted in the Chechen capital of Grozny and later shot to death. Her body was discovered in a woodland in neighboring Ingushetia. Estemirova's apparent assassination was met by outrage in Russia and across the globe. She was the latest victim in a string of murders that appeared to target activists and journalists trying to bring attention to the human rights situation in Chechnya where a long-standing conflict between Muslim separatists in the semi-autonomous republic and Russian authorities intent on preserving territorial sovereignty. In recent times, that conflict has waned and, in fact, Russian authorities announced earlier in the year that Moscow was ending its “counter-terrorism operation”

against separatist rebels in Chechnya. The abduction and murder of Estemirova was therefore seen as a blight on the increasingly stable political situation in Chechnya.

In reaction, the human rights agency, Memorial, as well as Russia's longest standing non-governmental organization, the Helsinki Group, both placed the blame for Estemirova's death on Chechnya's Kremlin-backed President Ramzan Kadyrov. For his part, Kadyrov denied any involvement and vowed to investigate the killing. Meanwhile, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev also promised a full investigation as well as justice. But the Russian president went further in acknowledging that Estemirova was likely assassinated for political reasons. He said: "It is obvious to me that this murder is linked to her professional work and this work is necessary for any normal state." The Russian president then paid tribute to that work saying, "She did something very useful. She spoke the truth, she gave a very open and sometimes very tough evaluation of what's happening in the country. And that is the value of human rights campaigners, even if they make those in power feel uncomfortable." In so doing, President Medvedev broke new ground by rapidly, expressly and publicly condemning the assassination of a human rights activist with ties to Chechnya.

In the early morning rush hour of March 29, 2010, female suicide bombers carried out attacks at two Moscow subway stations, killing at least 40 people and injuring more than 80 others. The first blast struck the Lubyanka subway station, followed by a blast at the Park Kultury station. The blasts appeared timed to maximize damage and casualties. Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov said, "It was a terrorist act carried out by ... female suicide bombers." To that end, suspicion fell on the Chechen "Black Widows" who lost their husbands during the conflict with the Islamic separatist republic in Chechnya. According to CNN, a group associated with Chechen separatists indeed claimed responsibility for the attacks. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev promised that his country "will fight terrorism without hesitation and to the end," while Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said those behind the attacks would be punished. According to RIA Novosti, he said: "It is well known that today a terrible crime against civilians in its effects and disgusting in its character was carried out. I am sure that police will do their best to find and punish the criminals. The terrorists will be destroyed."

Days after that attack, a teenage widow of a senior Caucasus militant was identified as one of the Moscow subway bombers. Dzhennet Abdurakhmanova was believed to be from the Khasavyurtsky region of Dagestan and was married to Islamist militant, Umalat Magomedov, who was killed by Russian security forces at the end of 2009. The second Moscow subway bomber was believed to have been the widow of another Chechen Islamic militant. Also in the days after the subway attacks there were two more suicide bombings -- this time in Kizlyar, leaving 12 people dead, the vast majority of whom were police officers. As before, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev struck a hard tone as he spoke from Russia's restive North Caucasus region. He said, "We must deal sharp dagger blows to the terrorists; destroy them and their lairs." He continued, "The list of measures to fight terrorism must be widened. They must not only be effective but

tough, severe and preventative. We need to punish."

On July 2, 2010, a suicide bombing ensued in Grozny, the capital of Russia's restive Chechnya region. Three police officers and two civilians were injured as a result. The attack took place close to Grozny's theatre where a musical performance was set to take place. While the Russian military has not been involved in offensive against militant extremist separatists in recent times, with Russian authorities declaring success in the breakaway republic, clashes and incidences of violence have nonetheless flared occasionally. In addition to Chechnya, neighboring regions of Ingushetia and Dagestan have also seen similar clashes and incidences of violence over the years.

Note also that similar attacks have plagued other areas of the North Caucasus such as Ingushetia and Dagestan over the decades. Indeed, while the security situation in Chechnya has improved in recent years (on a relative basis), the situation has not been nearly as positive in Dagestan and Ingushetia where violent insurgent attacks have increased.

While Chechnya, which was beset by a militant Islamic insurgency, has seen increased stability in the last year, Ingushetia has absorbed a number of refugees from the Chechnya conflict. In fact, during the second Chechen war which began in 1999, Ingushetia was the destination for thousands of Chechen refugees. The United Nations refugee agency has reported that approximately 13,000 displaced people remain in Ingushetia today. Analysts have said that in addition to the refugee crisis, the emerging wave of violence in Ingushetia has been spurred by a mixture of Islamic radicalism, frustration with the high level of poverty, as well as outrage over corruption and the repressive actions by the local security forces.

In Moscow, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said that violent insurgencies in the North Caucasus have prevailed as Russia's most significant domestic challenge and a threat to national security. The Russian leader offered the view that poverty alleviation in the region should be part of the solution aimed at stabilization of the area, given the fact that socio-economic strife has been a driving motivator behind the decision of many youth to join extremist Islamic militant groups in the North Caucasus.

On September 16, 2010, Chechen separatist leader Akhmed Zakayev was arrested in Poland. He was in that European country to attend a two-day Chechen summit when he was detained. Zakayev was then subject to several hours of interrogation by Polish police, who were acting on the basis of an international arrest warrant issued by Russia, which sought his extradition on terrorism, murder and kidnapping charges. For his part, Zakayev has denied being involved in terrorism, and indeed, could be considered something of a moderate since he has called for negotiations with Russia -- a position not embraced by most extremist Chechen separatists. Since being granted asylum in the United Kingdom in the first part of the 2000s, Zakayev has been known to travel within Europe. But in this case, he was arrested by Polish authorities who had no choice but to act on the decision by Interpol to place Zakayev on its most wanted list, at Russia's

request.

Attention was soon focused on the question of if Zakayev would actually be extradited to Russia to face charges. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that although the Chechen separatist leader had been arrested, there was no guarantee that Polish courts would rule in favor of extradition to Russia. Meanwhile, the head of the international affairs committee of the Russian Duma or lower house of parliament, Konstantin Kosachev, applauded Poland for taking its international obligations seriously.

A day later on September 17, 2010, a Polish court ruled that Zakayev could be released pending its decision on the matter of extradition. But even if the Polish court eventually ruled in favor of extradition, according to Polish Finance Minister Jan Rostowski, the government of Poland still had the power to intervene on behalf of Zakayev. Russia responded to events unfolding in Poland in a less than favorable manner this time. Konstantin Kosachev warned Poland that its failure to act in accordance with international law would yield deleterious consequences.

In mid-October 2010, Islamic militants stormed the parliament in Chechnya, killing several people and injuring even more. Two guards and an official were among the dead. The militants shouted Islamic slogans, detonated a bomb and opened fire using guns as members of parliament arrived at the compound for work. Many people, included members of parliament already inside the building, were able to avoid the bloodshed by running to upper floors. This was the latest episode of violence erupting in Chechnya, despite Moscow's official declaration ending counter-terrorism operations in the breakaway republic more than a year prior. Since then, Moscow has relied on the pro-Moscow efforts of Chechnyan leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, to eradicate the remaining threat by Islamist separatist rebels. However, recent times have seen an increase in insurgent violence not only in Chechnya but also other regions of the North Caucasus such as Ingushetia. As well, only days after the attack on the Chechnyan parliament, explosives were discovered and defused close to a bus station in the republic of Kabardino-Balkariya, while the director of a children's rehabilitation centre in Dagestan was shot to death.

On Jan. 24, 2011, a bomb attack at Moscow's Domodedovo airport left more than 35 people dead and at least 170 others wounded -- many of them critically. Russian authorities said the explosion that took place in the international arrivals hall of the airport, was carried out by a suicide bomber and appeared to be an act of terrorism. The location of the suicide bomb attack was not a restricted area of the airport; instead, it was open to non-passengers. Eyewitnesses reported that the suicide bomber yelled, "I'll kill you all!" before presumably detonating the explosives strapped to his body.

The Federal Investigative Committee said the bombing was aimed "first and foremost" at foreign citizens. Indeed, among the dead were citizens from the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Russia. Perhaps not surprisingly, suspicion in this

case quickly fell on North Caucasus Islamist extremists, with a record of terror attacks, as the likely culprits.

President Dmitry Medvedev delayed his impending trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos, increased security across Moscow, convened an emergency meeting with officials, and said that a commission of inquiry would be activated "to conduct urgent on-the-spot investigations." The Russian president also warned that those behind the attack would be hunted down and punished to the full extent of the law. President Medvedev demanded that the organizations responsible for the attack be "eliminated." To that end, three suspects were being pursued in connection to the airport bombing. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was echoing the president's hard line, saying that "retribution is inevitable." He continued, "This was an abominable crime in both its senselessness and its cruelty."

At the close of January 2011, Russian investigators said they had identified the Domodedovo Airport suicide bomber as a 20-year-old man from the North Caucasus. As well, at least two people were arrested on allegations that they were involved in the bombing. As well, Russian authorities said that several other suspects in possession of pertinent information about the terror attack had been detained.

Blame was also expanding to the authorities who may not have properly responded to threats of a potential act of terrorism at the airport. The news organization, RIA Novosti, reported that Russian authorities were warned in advance that an "act of terror" was in the offing at one of Moscow's airports. President Medvedev attributed blame to airport officials for "clear security breaches," and said that a shake-up was likely if the evidence pointed toward criminal negligence by transport officials. To that end, the federal Security Service later announced that several officers had been fired.

President Medvedev also seemed to hint toward major changes in Russia's security system, including the establishment of Israeli-style airport security. He appeared to be referring to Israel's Ben Gurion airport, which is generally regarded as one of the safest in the world, and the wider airport security apparatus in Israel, which depends on "smart profiling," spot checks by armed guards, preliminary checkpoints, multiple rounds of surveying of luggage, intense vigilance, and other measures oriented toward maximizing security.

By the second week of February 2011, a Chechen warlord, Doku Umarov, had claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing at the Moscow airport. He also threatened further attacks, insinuating that the extremist Islamic insurgency would intensify with more "special operations" in the future if Russia refused to allow the Caucasus to become an independent Islamic state. In a videotaped message, he warned, "Among us there are hundreds of brothers who are prepared to sacrifice themselves." Umarov, who has been seen more of a philosophical separatist leader rather than a military figure, has claimed responsibility for a number of terrorist attacks, including the double suicide bombing of the Moscow subway system in 2010.

The threat emanating from the Caucasus has long been Russia's most pressing internal challenge. Speaking of the difficulty in keeping the Russian people safe from the threat of terrorism from extremist Islamic separatists, Dmitri Peskov, a government spokesperson said, "The government is taking all necessary measures. But the nature of terror is that none of us, none of the countries in this world, are free from this threat. None of us could ensure 100 percent security level." Vladimir Vasilyev, the head of parliament's security committee, issued a similar warning. In an interview with the media, he said, "All residents of our country need to realize that we will have to live under the threat of terror for a long time to come."

On Feb. 27, 2012, Ukrainian authorities in the port city of Odessa said that they foiled an assassination plot against Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

According to the Russian news agency, Ria Novosti, two suspects were shown on Russian television detained admitting their involvement in an assassination plot that targeted Putin. One suspect, Ilya Pyanin, claimed that he had been hired by Chechen militant leader, Doku Umarov, and tasked with killing Putin. A second suspect, Adam Osmayev, was identified as being on an international wanted list since 2007. It should be noted that a third suspect, Ruslan Madayev, died in an explosion in Odessa that appeared to have sparked the discovery of the assassination conspiracy. That conspiracy supposedly involved a plan to plant mines on Kutuzovsky Avenue in Moscow, which has been regularly traversed by Putin. Details of the plan were reportedly discovered on laptops seized at the Odessa apartment where the aforementioned explosion occurred.

It should be noted that if Umarov was, indeed, shown to be the central orchestrator of this plot, the motivation for the attempted assassination could lie with the Chechen separatist movement. That movement has long sought to impose an Islamist state throughout the North Caucasus and has been embroiled in a bloody and lengthy fight with Russian security forces in the region. As the principal architect of Russia's military campaign in Chechnya, it was conceivable that Putin might be at the top of the Chechen rebels' target list.

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#### Update:

On May 20, 2013, Russian authorities announced they had foiled an attempted terror attack on Moscow following a raid on a home in the town of Orekhovo-Zuyevo to the east of the Russian capital. The raid sparked a gunfight that ended in the death of two suspects and the arrest of a third individual. All three of the suspects were Russian citizens who were believed to have recently returned from an Islamic militant training camp along the Afghan-Pak border. According to Russian security sources, the three Muslim suspects had been under surveillance for



approximately one month leading up to the raid. They were allegedly planning to carry out an attack at a large public gathering in central Moscow. With Russia's Independence Day occurring on June 12 and attracting large crowds for independence celebrations, there was speculation that this particular occasion may have been a possible target date.

Five days later on May 25, 2013, a female suicide bomber carried out an attack close to an interior ministry compound in Makhachkala, the capital of the southern Caucasus semi-autonomous republic of Dagestan. The suicide bomber, a so-called "black widow," whose spouse was believed to have been killed in the extremist Islamic separatist campaign against Russia, was the only person to have died in the attack, while as many as 15 people, including five police officers, however, were injured. Identified as Madina Aliyeva, she was actually married twice and both times to members of militant entities in the North Caucasus.

Whereas Chechnya has long been viewed as the center of militant Islamic separatist violence in the North Caucasus against Russia, in recent years, it was Dagestan that had seen a steady stream of violence and bloodshed in recent times, related to the separatist agenda of Islamic extremists against Russian rule. As if to illustrate that reality, on May 26, 2013 -- only a day after the "black widow" attack -- four people died and several others were wounded in two car bomb explosions in Makhachkala. The government of Dagestan said that it believed the incidences were all related.

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### Special Report:

Boston terror bombings intersects with challenge of Islamic separatism and extremism in Russia

On April 15, 2013, two bombs exploded along the path to the finish line of the Boston Marathon in the state of Massachusetts in the United States. The explosive devices were believed to have been placed inside backpacks and detonated remotely. Three people died as a result of these apparent terrorist acts. Meanwhile, there were more than 130 people hospitalized due to the intensely grave nature of so many injuries. It should be noted that due to the placement of the explosive devices, many of the victims endured horrific injuries to their lower extremities, with limbs severed as a result. Indeed, the scene of the tragedy displayed a traumatizing scene of dismembered and bloodied body parts along with the injured victims and shocked bystanders.

Thanks to the sheer quantity of photographic evidence from witnesses at the marathon taking pictures of the day's events, as well as cameras installed on commercial buildings, authorities were able to get a sense of the perpetrators and their actions. On April 18, 2013, the Federal Bureau of

Investigation (FBI) released photographs of two suspects and actively sought the public's assistance in apprehending those responsible.

Later on the night of April 18, 2013 -- presumably agitated by the realization that their pictures were being shared with the world -- the two suspects became engaged in a spate of violent activities with deadly consequences. The two killed a police officer on the campus of MIT University, carjacked a man in a Mercedes-Benz SUV, held him by gunpoint, identified themselves as the Boston marathon bombers, and used his ATM card to withdraw \$800 in cash from the car owner's bank account, before releasing him at a gas station in Cambridge. The suspects then exchanged gunfire with police, with many stray bullets landing in the homes of people who lived in the hitherto quiet residential neighborhood of Watertown. As well, one transit officer was seriously wounded in the mayhem. The situation became even more intense when, during their attempted getaway, the two suspects hurled explosive devices at the police. Residents of the neighborhood who witnessed the events said in interviews with the media that the devices looked like a combination of grenades and pressure cooker bombs. Bomb detecting robots were soon dispatched to the scene to determine the security of the area since the two men reportedly hurled an arsenal of weapons and explosive devices on the Watertown residential street. Meanwhile, the firefight between the suspects and police was ongoing. One suspect was shot in the exchange of gunfire with police and then was run over by a car as his accomplice made his escape. The first suspect ultimately died as a result of his injuries, while the second suspect was captured after Boston and its surrounded areas was placed under lockdown for several hours. The second suspect would later be charged in the United States with using a weapon of mass destruction.

In the early hours of April 19, 2013, details regarding the identities of the two suspects were beginning to surface. The suspect seen in the FBI photographs wearing the black cap, and who had died as a result of the firefight with police, was identified as 26-year old Tamarlan Tsarnaev. The surviving suspect, who was seen in the FBI photographs wearing the white cap, was identified as his brother, 19-year old Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev. The young men were of Chechnyan and Avar (Dagestani) ethnicity. The father of the two brothers had worked in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan, which is now independent; the Tsarnaev brothers spent some of their younger years there. Anzor Tsarnaev was fired from his government job in Bishkek (the capital of Kyrgyzstan) when the war sparked again in Chechnya in 1999; the general view was that he lost his job due to his Chechen ethnicity. The Tsarnaev family then moved to the Russian semi-autonomous region of Dagestan, close to the breakaway Russian region of Chechnya, which has been the site of an extremist separatist Islamic insurgency for about two decades. The entire family emigrated to the United States about ten years ago and settled in the suburban Boston area of Somerville and Cambridge. Tamarlan Tsarnaev was a legal resident of the United States and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev had become a United States citizen in 2012.

Information about Tamarlan Tsarnaev suggested that he had a difficult time adjusting culturally to life in the United States, despite some success with a boxing career. His decision to stop boxing on

religious grounds appeared to have angered and perplexed his father, who had been socialized in the Soviet system and culture to hold a far more permissive and moderate attitude towards Islam. Influenced by his mother's religious transformation to Islamic orthodoxy, Tarmalan Tsarnaev reportedly became increasingly hard line in his Islamic and extremist views, even alienating some members of his extended family. Ruslan Tsarni, an uncle to the Tsarnaev brothers, was on the record with the media saying that as far back as 2009, Tamerlan Tsarnaev was becoming more of an extremist Muslim, expressing what he described as "this radical crap." This trend appeared to have fueled a break in contact among family members.

It should be noted that the Russian government had Tamarlan Tsarnaev on its radar, having requested that the United States authorities investigate him as early as 2011, due to suspicions of involvement with Islamic extremists and unspecified underground groups. The FBI confirmed that they interviewed Tamerlan Tsarnaev in 2011, as requested, but found no cause for alarm at the time.

Tamarlan Tsarnaev certainly traveled out of the country for extended periods of time, most recently in 2012 to visit his father who was now living in the Dagestan region of Russia. However, the actual time Tamarlan Tsarnaev spent with his father in Dagestan was limited to one month, leaving the rest of the period a mystery and open for interpretation. It was possible (although not confirmed) that he attended a terrorist training camp -- perhaps in the Caucasus region or elsewhere. But even without such an expedition, Tamarlan Tsarnaev may very well have been radicalized in a less "official" manner. While politicians in the United States were eager to suggest that Tamarlan Tsarnaev was radicalized out of the country, it was apparent that his increasingly extreme Islamic views were part of a personal transformation taking place in the home he shared with his mother. Still, it was after an overseas trip more recently that Tamarlan Tsarnaev created YouTube postings called "Terrorists," which featured videos from a militant extremist in Dagestan known as Amir Abu Dudzhan. In one posting, Dudzhan is shown holding a Kalashnikov rifle and declaring: "Jihad is the duty of every able-bodied Muslim." It was apparent that Tamarlan Tsarnaev was ideologically inspired by Islamic extremism and radicalism, while being sympathetic to the Chechnyan and Dagestani separatist and Jihadist causes.

Of course, the motivation for Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev to join his brother in carrying out terrorist attacks remained more of a matter for debate. Significantly more well-adjusted to American life than his brother, the younger Tsarnaev was a seemingly successful student at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, with a number of American friends, an active social life, and hopes for a medical career. It was difficult to determine if Dzhokhar Tsarnaev shared his brother's Jihadist views, or, if he was simply motivated by his relationship with his brother. To that end, there were some suggestions that Tamerlan Tsarnaev may have "brainwashed" his younger brother into participating in his terrorist agenda. For his part, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's posts on the Russian social media site, Vkontakt, made it clear that he self-identified as Islamic in terms of religion and "world view," and Chechnyan in terms of ethnicity and culture. He also posted links

to Islamic and pro-Chechnyan independence websites.

There seemed to be bewilderment among United States intelligence circles about the idea that the Chechnyan drive for independence and war with Russia should be transported to American terrain. But it was not clear that Chechnyan independence was the driver for the two Tsarnaev brothers to commit acts of terror.

In fact, it should be noted that Islamic militants operating under the aegis of the Caucasian Mujahedeenin denied any involvement in the Boston marathon terror attacks, emphasizing that their conflict was with Russia. However, as discussed below, the militant Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus has steadily expanded past Chechnya's borders to neighboring territories, such as Dagestan and Ingushetia, and the cause itself has moved past establishing an independent Chechnya to a broader Jihadist goal in the Caucasus. It was quite possible that personal transformation to radical Islam meshed with the Jihadist agenda for the older Tsarnaev brother, and he drew the younger one into the fold.

But it was also possible that these two young men -- neither of whom were victims of economic strife as is the case for many Chechens, Dagestanis, and Ingushetians at home -- were motivated for different reasons. It was possible that they were inspired by a broader ideological (read: global Islamic Jihadist) sensibility, reminiscent of the September 11, 2001 hijackers, or the Nigerian Christmas Day bomber. All the young men in these cases were well-educated, spent several years in Western countries, quite possibly suffered from cultural alienation to some degree as a result of the experience, thus driving them to take on radicalized Islamic extremist identities, and ultimately - to terrorist actions on the basis of religion.

On April 22, 2013, On April 22, 2013, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was reported to have told investigating authorities that he and his brother acted alone, rather than in concert with an organized Jihadist or terror enclave, and that their actions were motivated by their Islamist beliefs, and inspired by the goal of global Jihadism. By the last week of April 2013, a clearer picture of the motivation for the bombings was emerging as reports surfaced about the radicalization of Tarmalan Tsarnaev as early as 2010 -- a track that seemed to run parallel with the increasingly religious orientation of his mother. Both mother and son, as noted above, were wiretapped by Russian intelligence and appeared to have discussed the possibility of participating in Jihad. As such, it was apparent that Islamic extremism within the Tsarnaev family fueled the terrorist actions of the two brothers.

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Special Report:

## Suicide bomber attacks train station in Russia; trolley bus attack follows the next day

### Summary

An attack on a train station in Volgograd in southern Russia on Dec. 29, 2013, left at least 15 people dead and scores more injured. A day later on Dec. 30, 2013, another bomb attack ensued in the very same Russian city of Volgograd. This time, the explosion struck a trolley bus. The blast, which occurred just as people were going to work in the morning rush hour, left between 10 and 15 people dead and more than 20 others injured. All eyes were on Islamist extremists, who have been carrying out an insurgency in the North Caucasus region, as the likely culprits. With the attacks occurring only six weeks ahead of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, there were increased anxieties over the threat of terrorism in Russia. To that end, the Russian government called on the international community to close ranks in the fight against extremism and terrorism.

### In Detail

An attack on a train station in Volgograd in southern Russia on Dec. 29, 2013, left at least 15 people dead and scores more injured. Children were among the victims. The bomb reportedly contained more than 20 pounds of explosives and contained shrapnel; it was detonated close to the metal detectors at the entrance of the train station. The conventional wisdom was that the presence of security personnel at the location of the blast likely ensured the death toll was not higher. Not surprisingly, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that security at airports and train stations would be increased in response to the attack

At first, Russian authorities said that a female suicide bomber -- possibly from Dagestan -- was likely responsible for the attack, which they made clear was an act of terrorism. A government spokesperson said the suicide attacker was likely looking to another target but having seen security personnel on the scene, she opted to detonate the bomb in her possession at the train station entrance. Subsequently, contradictory reports were emerging suggesting that the suicide bomber may have been a backpack-wearing male.

The issue of who might be responsible became more mysterious a day later on Dec. 30, 2013, when another bomb attack ensued in the very same Russian city of Volgograd. This time, the explosion struck a trolley bus close to a busy market in Volgograd's Dzerzhinsky district. The blast, which occurred just as people were going to work in the morning rush hour, left between 10 and 15 people dead and more than 20 others injured. Children were among the victims. As was the case the day before, Russian authorities emphasized that the violence was the result of terrorism, and noted that because the same type of explosives were used in both the train station and trolley bus attacks, both incidences were clearly linked together.

It should be noted that only days before the Volgograd train station and trolley bus attacks, there

was a car bombing in the southern Russian city of Pyatigorsk. The attack, which was reported to have been carried out by Islamic extremists, left three people dead. Noteworthy was the fact that Pyatigorsk has been the focus of a federal administrative district aimed at stabilizing the North Caucasus region. As well, Volgograd was the site of a previous terrorist attack at a bus station in October 2013. In that incident, the female suicide bomber was believed to be a member of an Islamic separatist group known as Caucasus Emirate and detonated the explosives strapped to her vest on a bus in Volgograd; that attack killed eight people.

It should be noted that so-called "Black Widows" have increasingly been responsible for terrorist acts linked with the North Caucasus. The women -- mostly the widows or female relatives of militants killed in action -- have become more active in the ongoing Islamic extremist insurgency and the effort to create an Islamic Caliphate in the North Caucasus region. Indeed, "Black Widows" could trace their activism to bombing attacks in the late 1990s although they entered the public purview in 2002 following their involvement in the 2002 terrorist attack on the Dubrovka theater in Moscow. It was to be seen if they were involved, once again, in the Volgograd bloodshed.

Regardless of the precise identity of the main actors in the Volgograd attacks in December 2013, all eyes were on Islamist extremists as the likely culprits. With the attacks occurring only six weeks ahead of the 2014 Winter Olympics in the Russian city of Sochi, there were increased anxieties over the threat of terrorism in Russia. Earlier, in July 2013, Doku Umarov -- an Islamic extremist Chechen leader, called on other militants to deploy "maximum force" in the effort to target civilians, and even to interrupt the 2014 Olympics.

In truth, the connection between Volgograd and Sochi was a bit murky. Nevertheless, the fact of the matter was that the city of Volgograd was located 600 miles from Sochi and was regarded as a gateway to the Caucasus. Indeed, Volgograd -- once known as Stalingrad -- has been the main railway hub along the route connecting European Russia with central Asia.

For its part, the government of Russia called for international solidarity in the fight against terrorism, which was characterized as "an insidious enemy that can only be defeated together." The international community was quick to respond to this call with British Prime Minister David Cameron saying via Twitter, "I've written to President Putin to say the UK will help Russia in whatever way we can." On behalf of the Obama administration in the United States, the White House National Security Council issued the following statement: "The United States stands in solidarity with the Russian people against terrorism. The U.S. government has offered our full support to the Russian government in security preparations for the Sochi Olympic Games, and we would welcome the opportunity for closer cooperation for the safety of the athletes, spectators, and other participants."



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### Special Entry

Sochi winter Olympics begin; Russian government's attention focused on North Caucasus terrorism threat

#### Summary:

On Feb. 7, 2014, the Winter Olympics began in the Russian city of Sochi on the Black Sea. The 2014 Olympiad would be known as the most expensive in history -- largely as a result of the security threat posed by Islamist extremist separatists from the North Caucasus region. Fears of attacks by militant terrorist cast a shadow on the highly anticipated games, which Russian President Vladimir Putin hoped would highlight his country's emerging dominance on the world stage. Nevertheless, President Putin has insisted that visitors to Sochi for the Winter Olympics would be safe. He pointed to the experience Russia has had in carrying out secure international events, such as the G8 and G20 summits, as well as the extraordinary security measures (discussed below) being taken to ensure that the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi went off in a successful manner.

#### In Detail:

In the second week of January 2014, Russian authorities announced the arrest of five North Caucasus terror suspects. The arrests were made in the town of Nalchik, 185 miles to the east of the city of Sochi on the Black Sea, where the 2014 Winter Olympics were set to start two weeks later. According to the National Anti-Terrorist Committee in Russia, the five suspects were reported to be in possession of a massive arsenal of weapons, including "grenades, ammunition, and a homemade explosive device packed with shrapnel." The particular items in this cache indicated plans for some sort of bombing operation and rang alarm bells about the possibility of not only the threat of terrorism at the hands of Muslim extremists from the North Caucasus, but also their targeted sabotage of the impending Olympic Games.

Only a few weeks earlier in late 2013, terrorism emanating from Muslim extremists of the North Caucasus struck Russia in the form of an attack on a train station in Volgograd, which left at least 15 people dead and scores more injured. A day later on Dec. 30, 2013, another bomb attack -- this time on a trolley bus -- ensued in the very same Russian city of Volgograd. The blast, which occurred just as people were going to work in the morning rush hour, killed between 10 and 15 people dead and injured more than 20 others.

As Russian authorities carried out a security sweep ahead of the Sochi Olympics, they became engaged in a shootout in the in the Dagestan region of the North Caucasus. According to Russia's

National Anti-terrorism Committee (NAC), the episode resulted in the deaths of three Russian servicemen and several gunmen including one man accused of orchestrating a car bombing in the city of Pyatigorsk in late 2013. Around the same period in mid-January 2014, Russian security forces also announced the arrest of five members of a banned militant group in southern Russia. Officials said the militants were in possession of a homemade bomb packed with shrapnel that had to be defused.

On Jan. 17, 2014, there was a grenade attack outside a restaurant in Makhachkala -- the regional capital of Dagestan -- followed by the detonation of a car bomb timed to coincide with the arrival of police on the scene. Several people were injured in that episode. A day later on Jan. 18, 2014, a siege at a house in Makhachkala left several militants dead. Those militants, which included one trained female suicide bomber, were suspected of being behind the restaurant attack in Makhachkala.

All eyes at the time were on Islamist extremists, who have been carrying out an insurgency in the North Caucasus region, as the likely culprits. With the attacks occurring only weeks ahead of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, there was increased anxiety over the threat of terrorism in Russia. Those anxieties were fueled by the recollection that Doku Umarov -- an Islamic extremist Chechen leader -- had called on other militants to deploy "maximum force" in the effort to target civilians, and even to interrupt the 2014 Olympics.

With the threat of Islamic militants from the separatist North Caucasus region threatening to disrupt and even sabotage the Olympics, and with the record of attacks in Volgograd in late 2013, followed by the attack in Makhachkala in early 2014, as well as the discovery of the weapons cache in Nalchick in January 2014, Russia announced a draconian safety and security plan. That security plan -- reported to be the biggest of any Olympics to date, included the deployment of 30,000 police and interior ministry troops, backed by anti-aircraft missiles, war ships, and military aircraft, all of which were placed on combat-ready status. As well, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed as security decree that effectively established two security zones; one "controlled" zone would apply stringent security and document protocols to visitors and vehicles, while a second closed or "forbidden" zone was established from the border with Abkhazia all across major portions of the mountainous Sochi national park. Presumably, the intent was to ensure safety at a time when the world's eyes would be on Sochi in Russia.

By the third week of January 2014, Russian authorities turned their attention towards a suspected female suicide bomber with an alleged plan to attack the Sochi Olympics. Wanted posters depicting Ruzanna "Salima" Ibragimova from Dagestan in the North Caucasus region have been circulated in Russia with authorities fearing that the widow of an Islamist militant may have already slipped into Sochi. Two other potential female suicide bombers -- quite likely so-called "Black Widows" as well -- were said to be in the region. (Note that the Russian authorities later took back these claims, suggesting that the Olympic city was safe.)

The Volgograd attacks resurfaced in late January 2014 -- just weeks ahead of the Sochi Olympics -- with an ominous videotaped warning by two young Islamic militants believed to be the suicide bombers in those two episodes of terrorism that plagued Russia in December 2013. The footage, which was posted on a Jihadist website, showed the (now deceased) militants issuing the following warning: "We've prepared a present for you and all tourists who'll come over. If you will hold the Olympics, you'll get a present from us for the Muslim blood that's been spilled."

Intensifying the climate of anxiety was the news that North Caucasus Islamic militants dispatched email threats to the national teams of certain European countries and the United States at the Sochi Olympics. In response, United States President Barack Obama offered his "full assistance" in ensuring the Olympics at Sochi were "safe and secure." To that end, two United States warships and several transport aircraft would be on standby in the Black Sea for the opening of the Sochi Olympics; the United States would also supply Russia with technologically sophisticated equipment able to detect improvised explosives.

For his part, Russian President Putin insisted that visitors to Sochi for the Winter Olympics would be safe. He pointed to the experience Russia has had in carrying out secure international events, such as the G8 and G20 summits, as well as the extraordinary security measures (discussed above) being taken in preparation for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

By the first week of February 2014, Russian security forces announced the elimination of a militant they said may have orchestrated the suicide bombings at Volgograd discussed above. Russian security forces said that Dzamaltin Mirzayev had been killed during a gun battle with law enforcement officers outside a house in the North Caucasus province of Dagestan. Located on the Caspian Sea about to the southeast of Sochi, Dagestan has been known for its notorious record of daily violence associated with the ongoing separatist aspirations of militant Islamists. According to Russian authorities, Mirzayev was thought to have been responsible for dispatching two assailants to Volgograd to carry out back-to-back attacks in late December 2013.

While this development was a boon for Russian authorities, who were beset by negative Olympic publicity over the security concerns (as well as unfinished or "problem" infrastructure and controversial anti-gay legislation), there were further wrinkles on the security scene. On the eve of the opening of the Sochi Olympics, the United States Department of Homeland Security issued a warning to airlines flying to Russia, saying that terrorists might attempt to smuggle explosives on board aircrafts by hiding them in toothpaste tubes. Law enforcement experts suggested that the explosives transported in this manner could be assembled either "in flight" or upon arrival at the Olympics in Russia. Due to the looming threat, United States authorities went so far as to ban liquids on all flights from the United States to Russia.

Note that on Feb. 7, 2014, the Opening Ceremony of the Winter Olympics began at Fisht Olympic

Stadium in Sochi. The event was marked -- as is traditional -- by the parade of nations, the athletes' oath, addresses by dignitaries, and performances aimed at highlighting Russia's illustrious cultural contributions to world history. Notably, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared the games of the Winter 2104 Olympiad open. Various international heads of state were in attendance including Chinese President Xi Jinping of China, Prince Albert of Monaco, Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg, King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, President Serge Sarkisian of Armenia, President Sauli Niinisto of Finland, President Filip Vujanovic of Montenegro, President Tomislav Nikolic of Serbia, President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson of Iceland, and President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj of Mongolia, among others. Conspicuously absent were the leaders of the leading Western nations, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Canada.

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### Special Entry

Gun battle in Chechen capital of Grozny leads to death of three police

In December 2014, ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's annual state of the union address, violence broke out in Chechnya. At issue was an incident in which gunmen opened fire on security forces and then stormed a media office building in the Chechen capital Grozny. The ambush led to a violent gun battle, which ultimately resulted in the deaths of six gunmen and three police officers. Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-backed leader of Chechnya, remarked on the developments via social media, writing that "six terrorists were annihilated" following the fracas.

For their part, Muslim extremists claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that it was carried out as an act of retaliation against the oppression of Muslim women in the Islamic separatist republic. While Chechnya has been under the harsh hand of Kadyrov, Islamic insurgency and terrorism continues to plague the North Caucasus region. Indeed, only two months prior in October 2014, a suicide bomber killed five policemen and injured a dozen other individuals when he strategically detonated the explosives strapped to his body just as police officers walked up to him to request identification.

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Editor's Note:

The militant Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus has steadily expanded past Chechnya's borders to neighboring territories, such as Dagestan and Ingushetia, and the cause itself has moved past establishing an independent Chechnya to a broader Jihadist goal in the Caucasus. To be clear, an Islamic insurgency emanating from the North Caucasus has bedeviled the Russian Federation for close to two decades. Despite successful offensive operations by the Russian military in the North Caucasus, violence by Islamist separatist militants has been ongoing. At issue has been the Chechen mandate to create an independent Islamic state and the willingness of the Chechen militants to use terrorism and violence to achieve their ends.

While the mainstream media has focused on this separatist war carried out by extremist Islamic insurgents from Chechnya, the neighboring restive provinces in the North Caucasus have also been engulfed in the conflict. The epicenter of the Islamic separatist insurgency is, of course, Chechnya, which has been in state of war for some time; however, neighboring Dagestan and Ingushetia have been intensely affected and a discussion of Islamic insurgency in Russia can not ensue without including all three territories. Dagestan is the site of militant activity, and a frequent target of terrorism and violent criminality, with attacks occurring on a daily basis. Meanwhile, Ingushetia is a literal war zone. Other parts of the North Caucasus have also seen violence -- North Ossetia is the site of militant activity, while Kabardino-Balkaria is often caught in the crossfire of violence between government forces and Chechen rebels.

The area is beset by daunting poverty and Russian leaders, such as Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, have offered the view that poverty alleviation in the region should be part of the solution aimed at stabilization of the area. Indeed, expert analysts have, likewise, noted that poor socio-economic conditions constitute the stimulus for many youth to join extremist Islamic militant groups in the North Caucasus. At the same time, it must be emphasized that revenge and resistance against the brutal tactics of the Russian military are part of the equation, ultimately serving to augment extremism and militancy, and create more fertile political soil for radical action.

Of particular note has been the militancy of so-called "Black Widows" who have increasingly been responsible for terrorist acts linked with the North Caucasus. The women -- mostly the widows or female relatives of militants killed in action -- have become more active in the ongoing Islamic extremist insurgency and the effort to create an Islamic Caliphate in the North Caucasus region. Indeed, "Black Widows" could trace their activism to bombing attacks in the late 1990s although they entered the public purview in 2002 following their involvement in the terrorist attack on the theater in Moscow (mentioned below).

The motivation of extremism and militancy aside, it should be noted that terrorism by Islamic extremists on Russian terrain is not a new phenomenon. Militant Islamic extremists from the North Caucasus have been behind a host of terrorist attacks over the years. In 2002, Chechen rebels carried out a siege on a theater in Moscow. The Chechen militant rebels who took over the

Dubrovka theater demanded an end to the war in Chechnya, and threatened to kill the hostages if their demands were not met. The grave situation demanded a rapid and overwhelming response by Russian authorities and, indeed, most of the hostages were eventually freed when Russian forces stormed the theater. However, 116 hostages were killed in the rescue operation, due to the indiscriminate use of an unspecified sleep-inducing agent by the Russians to deal with the Chechen rebels. In 2004, Chechen terrorists carried out a brutal and bloody attack on a school in Beslan, in which hundreds of people were taken hostage. A two day siege ended with a bloodbath in which more than 300 people were killed under the most horrific conditions. At least half the victims in that case were children. In 2009, the express train from Moscow to St. Petersburg was hit by North Caucasus Islamic terrorists. In 2010, militant extremists stormed the parliament in Chechnya. That same year, the Moscow underground transit system was hit by two female suicide bombers from Dagestan. In 2011, a bomb attack at Moscow's Domodedovo airport left more than 35 people dead and at least 170 others wounded -- many of them critically. The suicide bomber in that attack was identified as a 20-year-old man from the North Caucasus although a Chechen warlord, Doku Umarov, had claimed responsibility for orchestrating the attack at the Moscow airport. As discussed here, December 2013 brought terrorism in the form of an attack on a train station in Volgograd, which left at least 15 people dead and scores more injured. A day later, another bomb attack -- this time on a trolley bus -- ensued in the very same Russian city of Volgograd and left 10 and 15 people dead. At the start of 2014, a grenade attack ensued outside a restaurant in Makhachkala followed by the detonation of a car bomb timed to coincide with the arrival of police on the scene. North Caucasus terrorists were said to be responsible for this latest episode of violence.

The Chechen leader, Doku Umarov, who has been seen as more of a philosophical separatist leader than a military figure, claimed responsibility for a number of these terrorist attacks, including the double suicide bombing of the Moscow subway system in 2010 and an attack on the Moscow airport in 2011. In fact, Umarov has threatened further attacks, insinuating that the extremist Islamic insurgency would intensify with more "special operations" in the future if Russia refused to allow the Caucasus to become an independent Islamic state. In a videotaped message in 2011, he warned, "Among us there are hundreds of brothers who are prepared to sacrifice themselves." Umarov's warning served as both a clarifier of sorts. Specifically, it was becoming increasingly clear that the ambitions of Islamist extremists had expanded from the goal of Chechnya's independence to a broader Jihadist ambition of creating an Islamic state across the Caucasus, governed by Shar'ia law. This broader objective explained the widening of the Jihadist cause -- from a concentrated geopolitical center in Chechnya to a broader claim across the Northern Caucasus. By 2013, Umarov had cancelled a moratorium on killing civilians and was urging militants to use "maximum force" in the effort to sabotage the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

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## Appendix: South Ossetia

### Special Report: South Ossetia

#### Summary

Since the final years of the Soviet Union, Russian-backed separatists in South Ossetia have sought to break away from Georgia and join North Ossetia, which is currently an autonomous region in Russia. While South Ossetians assert their right to self-determination, Georgia considers such separatist aspirations as a threat to its territorial integrity.

The dispute descended into a civil war in 1991, though a Russian-mediated ceasefire in 1992 ended the armed conflict and established a general framework by which to resolve the dispute. Despite the presence of Russian, Georgian, and Ossetian peacekeepers, tensions remain high and, in 2004, the situation once again descended into armed conflict. In January 2005, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili announced a peace plan under which South Ossetia would receive a high degree of autonomy and economic incentives, though South Ossetian leaders continued to reject any attempt to put the disputed territory under Georgian rule.

The geopolitical dimensions of the conflict have growing increasingly important as Russia has sought to use its military support for South Ossetia as leverage against Georgia's pro-Western government. November 2006 marked the time of an overwhelmingly supported independence referendum in South Ossetia, which was intended to augment the thrust for sovereignty. But Georgia rejected such independence aspirations and warned that it could provoke a war.

In April 2007, the Georgian parliament approved legislation creating a temporary administration in South Ossetia. The move evoked an outcry from South Ossetian separatists and contributed to devolving tensions with Russia. The situation was no less stable two months later when South

Ossetian separatists accused Georgia of attacking the capital of Tskhinvali with mortar and sniper fire.

Peace talks between Georgia and South Ossetia in October 2007, which were hosted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), saw no progress.

In early 2008, following Kosovo's secession from Serbia, South Ossetia called for international recognition of its self-avowed sovereignty and independence from Georgia. However, such recognition was not forthcoming at the broad level although the Russian parliament called on the Kremlin to indeed recognize South Ossetia (and Abkhazia) as independent.

In April 2008, the Georgian power-sharing agreement, which accorded significant autonomy but not actual sovereignty, was rejected by South Ossetia, which insisted on complete independence.

In August 2008, Georgia was carrying out a full military offensive in South Ossetia, intended to "restore constitutional order" to the breakaway region. Russia was responding with military action of its own. The situation left the region on the brink of full-scale conflict and in a state of crisis. By mid-August of 2008, a truce had been negotiated under the stewardship of the French government; this truce aimed to bring an end to the crisis.

It should be noted that a report commissioned by the Council of the European Union placed the blame for the start of the 2008 war over the semi-autonomous region of South Ossetia on Georgia. The report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia found that the war was spurred when Georgian forces attacked the breakaway republic of South Ossetia, in an attempt to re-establish sovereign control. Indeed, the report read: "The shelling of Tskhinvali [the capital of South Ossetia] by the Georgian armed forces during the night of 7 to 8 August 2008 marked the beginning of the large-scale armed conflict in Georgia." The report unambiguously concluded that the attack by Georgia was not justified by international law as follows: "There is the question of whether [this] use of force... was justifiable under international law. It was not."

Still, the report did not cast Georgia as being the only guilty party. It noted that the hostilities between the two sides led to provocative actions by both Georgia and Russia. The report also acknowledged that after Georgia shelled South Ossetia, Russia responded by not only repelling the assault but, in fact, pressing further into Georgian territory. While Russia withdrew its forces several days later when a ceasefire was hammered out, it nonetheless retained a military presence in both South Ossetia and the other breakaway republic of Abkhazia, which was also technically under Georgian rule. The report found that while Russia's initial actions -- responding to attacks on its own personnel in South Ossetia -- were justified, its continued advance into Georgian territory "went far beyond the reasonable limits of defense." The report also found that the destruction that ensued after the ceasefire went into effect was "not justifiable by any means."

The report further dismissed Georgian claims that Russia carried out a large-scale incursion into South Ossetia ahead of the outbreak of war, noting that this accusation could not be substantiated. The European Union-sponsored report would only allow that there was some evidence of a low-level military build-up by the Russians in the area ahead of the conflict.

Perhaps not surprisingly, both Russia and Georgia interpreted the findings through an ideological prism most suited to their respective agendas. Russia asserted that the report had rendered an "unequivocal answer" on the question of who started the war. On the other side of the equation, Georgia said that the report showed that Russia had been spoiling for a fight throughout.

It should be noted that the report also registered the human toll of the conflict. Approximately 850 people died in August 2008, more than 100,000 were forced to flee their homes to escape the cross-fire of violence, and to date, about 35,000 people remain displaced. Humanitarian aid agencies have warned that there is a refugee crisis continuing in the region.

See "Special Report" below for details.

### Background/Context

The Ossetian people are believed to have migrated from Persia five millennia ago. The Ossetian language belongs to the Indo-European group and, though it uses the Cyrillic alphabet, is related to Farsi. Ossetians maintain that their ancestors have been living on both sides of the Caucasus mountains for as long as the Georgians, while Georgians claim that the Ossetians did not arrive until the seventeenth century. The contrasting historical narratives about the duration of the Ossetians' presence in Georgia form the basis of the dispute. Georgians believe that the Ossetians are merely guests in the region, while the Ossetians argue that the area is their historical homeland.

When the first Georgian Republic was established in 1918, the government accused the Ossetians of cooperating with the Russian Bolsheviks. Ossetian separatists subsequently launched a series of rebellions. In response, the Georgian government deployed troops to the region to defeat the uprising, allegedly killing 5,000 Ossetians while 13,000 more died from starvation and epidemics. After invading Georgia in 1921, Soviet authorities established the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (SOAO) within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). During the Soviet period, hostilities were latent, though Georgians generally believed that Ossetians in the autonomous region

had special privileges that were not extended to them. Georgian authorities considered South Ossetia an artificial entity. South Ossetians, meanwhile, felt politically disadvantaged compared to Ossetians living in other parts of the Soviet Union.

In 1988, Ossetians intensified their efforts to change their status by creating Ademon Nykhaz (the South Ossetia Popular Front) in order to counter increasing nationalist sentiments in Georgia. In 1989, the SOAO regional council lobbied for either joining North Ossetia in Russia or being granted independence, which infuriated Georgians. Later that year, following increasingly violent clashes between Georgians and Ossetians in Tskhinvali, the Soviet Union sent forces to keep the peace. At one point, 15,000 Georgians marched on Tskhinvali only to be repelled by South Ossetia militants and the Soviet army. In 1990, prior to parliamentary elections, the Georgian government passed a law that banned regionally based political parties, which prevented groups like Ademon Nykhaz from participating. In response, South Ossetia declared its complete autonomy within the Soviet Union. Ossetians then boycotted the Georgian election and shortly afterwards held their own parliamentary election. The Georgian government, led by Zviad Tskhinvali, voided the election results, revoked South Ossetia's status as an autonomous oblast, and declared a state of emergency. In April 1991, the South Ossetia Supreme Council voted for secession and integration with Russia.

In January 1991, the Georgian government deployed several thousand troops to Tskhinvali, which triggered urban warfare that ultimately was responsible for 1,500 deaths and extensive destruction of South Ossetian homes and infrastructure. As neither Georgia nor South Ossetia possessed a well-disciplined military, most of the fighting took place between small groups and paramilitaries scattered throughout cities and villages. According to Human Rights Watch, both sides committed atrocities against civilians.

In June 1992, Russia brokered a ceasefire and negotiated the Sochi Agreement. The Sochi Agreement established a Joint Control Commission (JCC) – comprised of representatives from Russia, Georgia, and North and South Ossetia – to pursue a settlement of the conflict. The Sochi Agreement also created a trilateral Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF), which was comprised of troops from Russia, Georgia, and Ossetian areas. The JPKF had a mandate to monitor the ceasefire and maintain peace and security in the zone of conflict around the Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali and a security corridor along the Ossetian-Georgian border. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) agreed to monitor the ceasefire and facilitate negotiations.

In May 1996, the Memorandum on Measures to Ensure Security and Reinforce Mutual Confidence Between the Parties to the Georgia-Ossetian conflict called on all sides of the conflict to continue negotiating a final political settlement. Both sides renounced the use of force as a means of achieving their political aspirations.

In December 2000, Russia, Georgia, and North and South Ossetia signed an agreement to devise two programs to help resolve the situation. The first program concerned the economic rehabilitation of the zone of conflict and the second program dealt with the return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons affected by the conflict. Despite the 1992 ceasefire agreement, the displacement of Georgians and Ossetians has yet to be reversed. Though prior interethnic coexistence in many areas was prevalent prior to the conflict, the failure of displaced persons to return to their homes has ethnically polarized the disputed area.

The conflict has spurred the development of illegal business operations, such as smuggling drug trafficking, arms trading, and kidnapping. Neither Georgia nor South Ossetia could agree on a system of customs control to regulate trade. The Georgian government felt that smuggling was a serious impediment to resolving the conflict, as it provided South Ossetian authorities a source of income that they use for social projects designed to secure the support of their constituents. The Ergneti market developed on a strip of land between South Ossetia and Georgia proper, near the Transcaucasian highway. Food products, gasoline, cigarettes, alcohol, illegal drugs, and goods of Russian origin were sold in the market, which was the mainstay of the local economy. Georgian officials claimed that the market robbed Georgia of customs revenues and closed the market in 2004. Knowing that the closure would affect ordinary South Ossetian citizens as much as corrupt officials, Georgia launched a “humanitarian offensive” to aid ethnic Ossetians with the hope of undermining support for the de facto government. Georgia pursued a range of social, cultural, and economic projects. However, ordinary Ossetians did not respond favorably to the overtures and instead blamed Georgia for their troubles. Ossetians felt that Georgian military measures in the region were not meant to combat smuggling, but were rather part of a strategy to reassert Georgian control of South Ossetia. Russia also sharply criticized Georgia for its actions.

In May 2004, South Ossetia held parliamentary elections, though the Georgian government did not recognize their legitimacy. In June 2004, the Georgian government accused Russia of providing arms to the South Ossetians. Georgian forces seized Russian trucks carrying helicopter missiles. Russia condemned the move, arguing that the shipment was perfectly legal under the ceasefire

agreements. In retaliation, South Ossetian authorities seized 50 Georgian troops, but released them the next day. Georgian and South Ossetian forces began to exchange fire throughout the region. A resolution expressing support for the South Ossetian separatists passed in the Russian Dumas, further inflaming tensions. A Georgian-Ossetian ceasefire was signed on August 13, but was violated shortly afterwards. Georgia managed to seize strategic areas near South Ossetian villages, but handed control of those areas back to peacekeepers as a show of good faith. A second ceasefire was then signed. That fall, the four participants of the JCC agreed to demilitarize the zone of conflict.

November 2006 marked the time of an independence referendum in the Georgian semi-autonomous enclave of South Ossetia. Turnout was reported to be more than 90 percent and many analysts were expecting an overwhelming affirmative response to the question of independence. For their part, South Ossetians were hoping that the referendum result would help them augment their thrust for sovereignty. On the other hand, Georgia viewed the referendum as illegitimate and renewed its commitment to keeping South Ossetia within its fold. The situation strained Georgian-Russian ties.

### Recent Initiative

In January 2005, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili announced his intention to promote a dialogue with breakaway regions in order to restore Georgian territorial integrity. Saakashvili offered South Ossetia autonomy within the Georgian state, though this fell far short of the separatists' demands. Saakashvili emphasized the need to attract separatists through economic incentives. Saakashvili also proposed the creation of an international fund to facilitate repatriation and rebuilding in South Ossetia. The de facto leadership of South Ossetia rejected the plan, however, arguing that South Ossetians are Russian citizens. The United States and the OSCE reportedly backed the plan. In May 2006, tensions between Russia and Georgia once again rose when Georgia demanded that Russian peacekeepers be issued visas before serving in South Ossetia. The Russian Foreign Ministry accused Georgia of organizing a military buildup to reestablish control over South Ossetia by force. The referendum of 2006 was expected to spark tensions but the events of 2008 took relations between Georgia and Russia in an even more complex direction. See below for details.

### Foreign Policy Positions of Key Players



## Georgia

The Georgian government believes that South Ossetia is an integral part of Georgia and regards South Ossetian separatism as a threat to Georgian territorial integrity. The government even goes so far as referring to South Ossetia by its historical name, Samachablo, in order to deny the implication that the region has any sort of political bond with North Ossetia. When President Saakashvili became president in 2004, he reaffirmed his goal of reintegrating South Ossetia. Georgia believes that the integration of South Ossetia into Russia would be unrealistic because the region is not economically viable on its own. Furthermore, as there is only one road link between South Ossetia and Russia, Georgians claim that the Caucasus Mountains provide a “natural barrier” to reunification. The presence of ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia also complicates the issue. The Georgian military believes that it does not have the capacity to restore Georgian territorial integrity through military force, believing that it would risk guerilla warfare and the loss of Georgia’s international support and credibility.

## Russia

Russia has traditionally relied on the Ossetians as staunch allies. While Russia does not officially recognize South Ossetia’s independence from Georgia, it still maintains close contacts with its de facto political leadership. For Russia, South Ossetia has a prime geostrategic location given the volatility of the Northern Caucasus region. Russia also worries that the situation in South Ossetia could destabilize North Ossetia. Georgia accuses Russia of providing significant military and logistical support to South Ossetia. In June 2004, Russia’s Constitutional Court ruled that Russia could not unilaterally integrate South Ossetia without holding discussions with Georgia. As Georgia has sought to shift its allegiance to the West following the Rose Revolution, Russia increasingly views its military and economic presence in South Ossetia as important sources of leverage against Mikhail Saakashvili’s government.

## South Ossetia

South Ossetia, claiming a right to self-determination, wants to either achieve full independence or integration with the Russian Federation. South Ossetians assert that Ossetia was wrongfully divided

between the Russian SSR and the Georgian SSR during the Soviet period. Ossetians have traditionally maintained good relations with Russia throughout Russia's involvement in the area. Most South Ossetians have managed to obtain Russian citizenship and many have even attempted to migrate to Russia because of poor economic and political conditions. Many believe that their rights would be better protected within Russia. Since 1992, South Ossetia has developed greater economic ties with North Ossetia than with Georgia. As of 2006, South Ossetia has once again attempted to plead its case for integration to the Russian Constitutional Court.

## United States

The United States (U.S.) supports both the preservation of Georgian territorial integrity and a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The U.S. has played no direct role in the conflict, though U.S.-trained Georgian soldiers have served as peacekeepers in the area, much to Russia's dismay. The U.S. is also a staunch supporter of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and his peace plan to resolve the conflict. In March 2006, the U.S. State Department expressed concern when a Russian diplomat said that the Russian Federation would "protect the interests of its citizens" because the statement seemed to endorse the view that South Ossetians are legitimate Russian citizens.

## Special Report:

### Georgian military and Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists embroiled in conflict

On August 8, 2008, the Georgian military launched an attack against separatist targets in South Ossetia. The military offensive ensued only hours after the Georgian authorities and South Ossetia's separatists agreed to a Russian-brokered ceasefire.

The situation began when Georgian military troops and Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists were ensconced in violent clashes over the course of several days. Georgian tanks then attacked the separatist stronghold of Tskhinvali, presumably in an effort to regain control of the region.

According to Russian media, several people were reported to have been killed in the shelling. As well, Georgian forces and South Ossetian separatists were reported to be exchanging heavy fire. To that end, explosions and rocket fire were heard in the area around Tskhinvali. The British newspaper, *The Independent*, reported that "the assault is coming from all directions."

For its part, Georgia said that it was taking this action to stabilize the territory [South Ossetia]. Georgian Minister for Integration, Temur Yakobashvili, said that his country was compelled to terminate South Ossetia's "criminal regime" and to "restore constitutional order" to the breakaway region. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili himself called for an end to bloodshed to end, but warned the South Ossetian separatists that Tbilisi's patience was not limitless.

On the other side of the equation, South Ossetian rebel leader Eduard Kokoity said that Georgia was carrying out "a perfidious and base" attack on Tskhinvali. He also confirmed the assault on Tskhinvali saying, "The storming of Tskhinvali has started." Eyewitnesses on the ground said that the city was being attacked, the hospital was destroyed and the university was on fire. The Red Cross reported that there were numerous casualties needing medical attention.

In response, Russia was said to be deploying troops to South Ossetia to assist peacekeepers operating there. Indeed, an aide to the Russian Land Forces commander confirmed that Russian tanks and troops had entered South Ossetia and were approaching Tskhinvali, which was reported to have been already devastated by the Georgian offensive there.

Russia's military presence in the region was not well-received by Georgia, given the fact that the Georgian government has long accused Russia of arming South Ossetian separatists. But Russia has its own counter-argument to levy against Georgia. It has accused Georgia of deliberately ramping up its own military presence in breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and assuming a hard-line posture against these enclaves. Russia's tensions with Georgia have been partially rooted in another concern. Specifically, Russia has been opposed to pro-Western Georgia's ambitions to join NATO. This geopolitical element has textured the larger context of the territorial struggle being played out in South Ossetia.

It should be noted that Russia has enjoyed strong ties with South Ossetia, largely due to the fact

that the ethnically-related province of North Ossetia is located within its borders, and both the south and the north have long hoped to unite. Indeed, many South Ossetians hold Russian citizenship. As such, with vested interests on both sides of the border, Russia called for an end to the ongoing violence. Russia also urged the international community to work cooperatively "to avert massive bloodshed and new victims."

However, the prospects for peace were not likely to be easily advanced, given the emerging situation in the region a day later. On August 9, 2008, Georgian authorities said that Russian jets had bombed military targets inside its territory – specifically in the Georgian town on Gori to the south of South Ossetia. They also said that one attack ensued close to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which is known to supply Caspian oil to the West. Georgia described the air strikes as "a full-scale military invasion" and Georgian President Saakashvili claimed that Russia was at war with his country.

Russia had a very different perspective and placed the blame squarely on the Georgians. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov indicated the dire nature of the situation by asserting that already 1,500 people had died in the conflict and more than 30,000 South Ossetian had fled into Russia to escape the threat of death. The Russian government said that it had to act to protect the South Ossetians, many of whom hold Russian citizenship. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev said that Georgia also bore a responsibility for "protecting the [South Ossetian] population" and that his country's military action was intended "to force the Georgian side to peace."

By August 9, 2008, the Russian army had advanced to take complete control South Ossetia's capital of Tskhinvali. General Vladimir Boldyrev, the head of the Russian ground forces said, "Tactical groups have completely liberated Tskhinvali from the Georgian military." Boldyrev also said that Russian forces would keep up the pressure on Georgian military units. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev explained his country's objectives in South Ossetia saying, "Under these circumstances, Russia is guided by one task -- to immediately stop violence and defend civilians and restore peace as soon as possible." President Dmitry Medvedev also demanded the withdrawal of Georgian troops from the conflict zone, saying that it was the only way to settle the "tragic crisis."

That same day, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili called for an end to hostilities saying, "We propose an immediate ceasefire and the beginning of the withdrawal of troops from the contact

line." On the home front, the Georgia's parliament approved a presidential decree that essentially imposed two weeks of martial law in the country.

A day later on August 10, 2008, Georgia said that it was withdrawing its troops from the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali in the face of Russia's counter-offensive. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said his country's troops were returning to the positions they held before the conflict erupted days earlier. There was, however, some confusion about whether Georgian troops were pulling out of Tskhinvali or withdrawing entirely from South Ossetia. Georgian Reintegration Minister Temur Yakobashvili confirmed that the troops left Tskhinvali but were remaining in other areas of South Ossetia. Russian sources said that Georgian military units were still active in South Ossetia.

Presumably due to the continued activity by Georgian military units in South Ossetia, and what Moscow described as continued Georgian offensive action, Russian forces were continuing to carry out its own military action into Georgian territory. Reports from the region suggested that Russia carried out an air strike on a military airfield near the Tbilisi International Airport.

With the situation grim despite the earlier declaration of a withdrawal of troops from Tskhinvali, Georgia said that it had submitted a note to the Russian embassy in Tbilisi calling for immediate negotiations with Russia regarding "an end to all hostilities and a ceasefire." Russia confirmed that the note had been received. Russia at the time also denied Georgia's claims that Russian air strikes had targeted populated areas.

But movement toward a resolution seemed no closer by August 11, 2008. Georgian authorities said that Russian air strikes hit communications facilities to the west of Tbilisi and the port city of Poti in the Black Sea. As well, Russian forces were reported to have led a raid through the other breakaway enclave of Abkhazia into the western Georgian town of Senaki. On the other side of the equation, Russia said that the Georgian military was still targeting positions in Tskhinvali, despite claims of a withdrawal and overtures of a ceasefire. In this way, both sides accused one another of continuing the hostilities and exacerbating the conflict.

On the international front, the United Nations Security Council had earlier convened an emergency session to consider the rapidly deteriorating security crisis in the Caucasus. Little was actually

accomplished at that session. Likewise, a spokesperson from NATO had already called on both sides -- Georgian and Russian -- to exercise restraint. However, with the violence ongoing, clearly restraint was not at hand.

Nevertheless, the United States said that it was sending a delegation to the region to try to negotiate a resolution. The United States Department of States said that the envoys would "engage with the parties in the conflict." As well, a European Union delegation was en route to the region and said that it was hoping to procure a ceasefire and withdrawal agreement from both Georgia and Russia. A separate Council of Europe delegation was also hoping to advance dialogue.

In the same time period, according to news reports, Russian President Medvedev reiterated the death toll -- in the thousands -- during a conversation with United States President George W. Bush. For his part, Bush, who was attending the Beijing Olympics, called for an end to the violence, warned of escalation beyond the zone of conflict, and endorsed the notion of international mediation.

Indeed, the international community's objective appeared to be focused on averting the prospects of a war in the restive Caucasus, which has long been regarded as something of a powder keg. Yet to be determined was the question of whether or not such efforts would actually yield positive results.

Days later, Russia noted that its military activity in the area was ending and Russian troops were seen retreating from the area. The hostilities flared again when Georgia sent in troops to try to regain control of South Ossetia. Nevertheless, witnesses said that the full brunt of the fighting in South Ossetia appeared to be ending. Elsewhere in the region, Russian troops were withdrawing from the other breakaway region of Abkhazia, however, separatist there were reported to be ensconced in some continuing clashes with the Georgian military in the Kodori Gorge.

Yet even with an official truce in the offing (as discussed below) and an end to the fighting, the situation was not peaceful. A war of words continued. On an official day of mourning in his country, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev charged that Georgia had launched "genocide of the South Ossetian people." At issue were the deaths of thousands of South Ossetians, many of



whom hold Russian passports, as well as the deaths and injuries to scores of Russian soldiers, including one general. The Russian leader used the Russian word "otmorozki," which roughly translates to "thugs" in English, to characterize Georgian troops. Meanwhile, Georgian President Saakashvili addressed a crowd of thousands gathered in Tbilisi's main and accused Russia of the "ruthless, heartless destruction" of Georgians. The Georgian leader also warned that his country would no longer be a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) -- a group consisting of former Soviet republics.

On August 13, 2008, French President Nicolas Sarkozy was leading diplomatic negotiations to help Georgia and Russia resolve the crisis that had been sparked when Georgian military troops and Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists were ensconced in violent clashes over the course of several days. Georgian tanks then attacked the separatist stronghold of Tskhinvali, presumably in an effort to regain control of the region, and went onto gain military supremacy over large swaths of Georgian territory.

Sarkozy put forth a peace agreement that both sides signed days later. Central to the proposed plan for a truce was that all forces would pull back to pre-conflict positions. Other elements of the plan included an end to the use of force, an end to military action in perpetuity, as well as the free access of humanitarian aid. France, as the head of the European Union, has called on the European bloc to endorse the peace initiative ahead of its submission to the United Nations Security Council. The European Union was also expected consider deploying peacekeepers to the region to maintain peace and security, and also to protect the supply of humanitarian aid.

The remaining thorny issue, which was not included in the framework of the truce, was the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Neither Russian President Medvedev nor Georgian President Saakashvili was likely to find common ground on that matter in the immediate future. Indeed, the Georgian leader asserted, "The territorial integrity and belonging of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Georgia can never be put under doubt."

On August 17, 2008, Russia officially pledged to withdraw its forces from Georgian territory in keeping with the agreement. At the time, however, its forces had control over large swaths of Georgian territory, including the main east-west highway through that country. There was speculation that Russian troops might withdraw only as far as South Ossetia since Russia said it would only fully withdraw when Georgian police were ready to take over responsibility for

security. NATO responded to anxieties that Russia would not abide by the withdrawal requirements of the agreement by warning that relations would be compromised if Russian troops remained in Georgia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia was not occupying Georgia and would not annex South Ossetia. However, he also characterized NATO as biased and intent on saving the "criminal regime" of Tbilisi.

Meanwhile, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev told his French President Nicolas Sarkozy that the Russian withdrawal would be complete by August 22, 2008, although approximately 500 troops would be installed as peacekeepers on both sides of South Ossetia's border. Russian troops were soon identified exiting Gori -- the largest town in Georgia located close to the border of South Ossetia. Sarkozy, during talks with Medvedev, acknowledged this withdrawal but noted that Russian troops were yet to exit Poti and Senaki. Russia had earlier indicated that it would not soon leave the port city of Poti, and claimed that this would be in keeping with the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Medvedev's government said that Russian peacekeepers were allowed to take "additional security measures." However, the United States and the United Kingdom countered this claim noting that such buffer zones would violate the deal.

In other developments, the first United States ship with humanitarian aid was expected to dock in Georgia by the last week of August 2008. Two more ships were expected to arrive in Georgia as well.

In the last week of August 2008, Russia's Kremlin officially recognized the breakaway enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. South Ossetians and Abkhazians celebrated the news of this recognition of their self-proclaimed sovereignty. However, without wider international recognition of sovereign status, and with many countries of the West committed to the notion of Georgia's territorial integrity, the actual status of South ossetia and Abkhazia remained in the zone of "contested independent status."

By the start of September 2008, the European Union (EU) had decided to suspend talks on a new partnership pact with Russia, given the still-incomplete withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. EU-Russian negotiations on the partnership agreement had been scheduled for mid-September 2008 but were based on a shared understanding that Russian troops would withdraw to pre-conflict positions. The lack of progress on that withdrawal front, followed by the EU's response, signaled that relations between the EU and Russia were moving into highly challenging territory.

Following a meeting in the Belgian capital city of Brussels, EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said that the bloc that he represented could not "continue as if nothing had happened." As well, the European bloc's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, said that the EU could deploy civilian monitors to Georgia to determine whether or not Russia was complying with the ceasefire agreement that had been brokered earlier. Meanwhile French President Sarkozy said, "The EU would welcome a real partnership with Russia, which is in the interests of all, but you have to be two to have a partnership."

On the other side of the equation, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that unchecked support by the EU and the United States for the government of Georgian President Saakashvili would be a "historic" mistake. He also introduced the notion of an embargo on arms supplies to Georgia until a new regime was established there. These declarations came in the background of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's assertion that his country's foreign policy principles would not be dictated by the hegemony of any single country, such as the United States.

In October 2008, months after the Russian-Georgian conflict over South Ossetia, Russia removed a checkpoint near the town of Gori. The removal of the checkpoint at Gori -- located in Georgian territory close to the separatist region of South Ossetia -- marked the first significant sign that Russia intended to comply with its withdrawal pledge, which was part of the ceasefire deal negotiated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Indeed, Russia has also pledged to withdraw troops from two buffer zones within Georgia -- now under European Union observation -- by October 10, 2008.

At the same time, Russia increased its troop presence in South Ossetia -- largely a result of an explosion that left eight Russian soldiers and three civilians dead in the early part of the month. Russia accused Georgia of orchestrating the attack; Georgia denied the accusation. Russia also maintained its troop presence in the other separatist region of Abkhazia. Russia has recognized both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent while Western countries have backed Georgian territorial integrity. The matter of sovereignty has remained unresolved.

The fifth anniversary of the Rose Revolution, which swept President Mikhail Saakashvili to power, was marked by chaos. As the president traveled in a motorcade with Polish President Lech Kaczynski close to the breakaway republic of South Ossetia, shots were fired.

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Although no one was hurt in the incident, both the Georgian president and his Polish counterpart accused Russian troops of being behind the apparent attack in an area that has been the site of much cross-border violence. According to Reuters, one individual in Saakashvili's entourage said that South Ossetians fired warning shots when their motorcade came close to a checkpoint at the quasi-border area. Meanwhile, President Saakashvili said that the situation was a "reminder" that Russia was in flagrant violation of the European Union-brokered ceasefire between Tbilisi and Moscow. President Saakashvili also railed against the Russians saying, "Twenty-first Century occupiers, who have no legal, moral or other right to be there and oppress people, are stationed in the heart of Georgia."

On the other side of the equation, however, the Russian military as well as South Ossetian forces denied an involvement in the gunfire incident. In an interview with RIA Novosti, a South Ossetian spokeswoman, Irina Gagloyeva, asserted the following: "The South Ossetian side has nothing to do with it. There was no shelling from our side." A Russian spokesperson said to the Interfax news agency, "The claims that Russian servicemen were implicated in the shelling of the cortege do not correspond with reality."

August 2009 marked the one year anniversary of the war between Georgia and Russia over the breakaway republic of South Ossetia. Both countries commemorated the war in ceremonies. In the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, midnight bonfires were ignited, and a minute of silence was observed as church bells rang to honor those who died in the war. In South Ossetia itself, there was a rally as well as a candlelight ceremony in South Ossetia are also planned. Meanwhile, a war of words was brewing with Georgia and Russia respectively accusing each other of being the cause of the conflict. While Georgia said that its assault on South Ossetia was in reaction to a clandestine plan by Russia to invade the territory. On the other side of the equation, Russia denied making the first move and said reacted to Georgia's "pre-planned criminal act."

On August 13, 2009, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Abkhazia, where he promised to build a military base along the border with Georgia. Putin also said that such a move would help guarantee the stability of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian head of government said: "Russia is going to deploy its armed forces in Abkhazia and take the necessary efforts to build a modern border guard system in cooperation with the relevant Abkhazian authorities." He continued, "All these factors are serious guarantees of the security of Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

Putin's pledge came on the first anniversary of the cease-fire, which ended Russia's war with Georgia over South Ossetia. As might be expected, Georgia decried the move, characterizing it as "yet another provocation," that could potentially "escalate tensions" in the region of the Caucasus.

Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia declared independence from Georgia during a war in the 1990s, which followed on the heels of the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are recognized by Russia as sovereign states, but have nonetheless remained internationally-recognized as Georgian territories. They have increasingly become flashpoints in the region.

### Special Report

EU-sponsored report places blame on Georgia for starting the 2008 war

A report commissioned by the Council of the European Union placed the blame for the start of the 2008 war over the semi-autonomous region of South Ossetia on Georgia. The report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia found that the war, which erupted on August 7, 2008, was spurred when Georgian forces attacked the breakaway republic of South Ossetia, in an attempt to re-establish sovereign control. Indeed, the report read: "The shelling of Tskhinvali [the capital of South Ossetia] by the Georgian armed forces during the night of 7 to 8 August 2008 marked the beginning of the large-scale armed conflict in Georgia." The report unambiguously concluded that the attack by Georgia was not justified by international law as follows: "There is the question of whether [this] use of force... was justifiable under international law. It was not."

Still, the report did not cast Georgia as being the only guilty party. It noted that the hostilities between the two sides led to provocative actions by both Georgia and Russia. The report also acknowledged that after Georgia shelled South Ossetia, Russia responded by not only repelling the assault but, in fact, pressing further into Georgian territory. While Russia withdrew its forces several days later when a ceasefire was hammered out, it nonetheless retained a military presence in both South Ossetia and another breakaway republic of Abkhazia, which was also technically under Georgian rule. The report found that while Russia's initial actions -- responding to attacks on

its own personnel in South Ossetia -- were justified, its continued advance into Georgian territory "went far beyond the reasonable limits of defense." The report also found that the destruction that ensued after the ceasefire went into effect was "not justifiable by any means."

The report further dismissed Georgian claims that Russia carried out a large-scale incursion into South Ossetia ahead of the outbreak of war, noting that this accusation could not be substantiated. The European Union-sponsored report would only allow that there was some evidence of a low-level military build-up by the Russians in the area ahead of the conflict.

Perhaps not surprisingly, both Russia and Georgia interpreted the findings through an ideological prism most suited to their respective agendas. Russia asserted that the report had rendered an "unequivocal answer" on the question of who started the war. On the other side of the equation, Georgia said that the report showed that Russia had been spoiling for a fight throughout.

It should be noted that the report also registered the human toll of the conflict. Approximately 850 people died in August 2008, more than 100,000 were forced to flee their homes to escape the cross-fire of violence, and to date, about 35,000 people remain displaced. Humanitarian aid agencies have warned that there is a refugee crisis continuing in the region.

### Special Entry

Georgia warns Russia against backing independence claims of Georgia breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

On Feb. 4, 2014, just ahead of the opening of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi (Russia), Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili of Georgia warned Russia that it should refrain from taking any positions that might support the independence claims of the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Relations between Russia and Georgia have long been tense since the early 1990s when Georgia declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Relations devolved further over the years as Russia has supported the independence inclinations of the two Georgian breakaway regions of



Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But relations between Georgia and Russia hit a nadir in 2008 when the two countries fought a brief war over South Ossetia. Since then, they have had no diplomatic ties.

With Russia in the international spotlight as it hosts the 2014 Winter Olympics, Georgia was adamant about ensuring that Russian President Vladimir Putin would not use the spotlight to advance the independence causes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Of note was the fact that Russia's Olympic security zone was expanded into Abkhazia, which was less than 25 miles away from Sochi.

Prime Minister Garibashvili went to so far as to suggest that his country considered boycotting the Olympics in Russia. During a meeting with European Union and NATO officials in Belgium, he said, "It was a tough decision not to boycott the Games...But if there are any surprises we will of course react adequately."

### Special Entry

Russia launches military exercises in disputed territories of Georgia; quiet plan afoot to annex South Ossetia

In the backdrop of Russia's encroachment into eastern Ukraine, and its annexation of Crimea in 2014, surrounding countries have watched warily, wondering if its territories would be similarly affected. In March 2015, Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed that large-scale military exercises involving 2,000 Russian troops had commenced in the southern part of the country, along contested borders and even in disputed regions.

The areas affected included the federal districts of Southern and North Caucasus, as well as the recently annexed Ukrainian region of Crimea. Military drills were also taking place on Russian military bases in Armenia, and in the Georgian separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The moves were being regarded as a symbolic illustration of Russian hegemony and influence in the region, irrespective of global outrage over Russia's backing of separatists in eastern Ukraine and the ensuing war that has rocked the region since 2014.

In fact, while global attention has focused on Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian region of Crimea, Russia has been quietly working towards subsuming the semi-autonomous Georgian territory of South Ossetia into its fold. In fact, a treaty, known as the "Treaty of Alliance and Integration" was drafted in December 2014 with the intent of integrating the Russian speaking enclave, irrespective of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity or its legal claim on South

Ossetia. At the end of January 2015, the leader of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, dispatched finalized documents to Moscow. In February 2015, Russia and South Ossetia signed the "Treaty on the State Border," which was being viewed as a first step towards the signing of the broader "Treaty of Alliance and Integration." Once that integration accord was signed, South Ossetia would be absorbed by Russia over a period of months.

A similar process has been underway as regards the other Georgian semi-autonomous breakaway region, Abkhazia, which was also home to a Russian-speaking population. The alliance and integration measures related to Abkhazia, however, were not regarded as comprehensive as the integration accord at stake for South Ossetia.

Note that on March 18, 2015, Russian President Putin signed the aforementioned Treaty of Alliance and Integration," which (illegally) integrated the breakaway territory with Russia. The government of Georgia in Tbilisi cast the development as a provocation with the aim of stealing Georgian territory. As noted by Georgian Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili, "It's a cynical and provocative step by Russia ... We consider it a move aimed at annexation." Meanwhile, leading Western countries said it was a dangerous threat to regional stability.

As with the annexation of Crimea, the integration of Georgian territories had no chance of gaining international recognition, and instead, Russia's territorial encroachment has been widely condemned. Indeed, the United States and the European Union condemned the new treaty with South Ossetia. Jen Psaki, the spokesperson for the United States Department of State said, "The United States' position on South Ossetia and Abkhazia remains clear: these regions are integral parts of Georgia, and we continue to support Georgia's independence, its sovereignty, and its territorial integrity." Federica Mogherini, the European Union's foreign policy head, said the treaty was "yet another step" intended to undermine "ongoing efforts to strengthen security and stability in the region."

Of course, as noted above, the loudest outrage as regards South Ossetia and Abkhazia has come from Georgia, which already fought a war with Russia in 2008 over these very issues of control. Nevertheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin was not expected to curtail his expansionist ambitions. In fact, the Russian leader was flexing his aggressive and hawkish muscles in the region as he ordered the Russian Northern Fleet to be on a state of full combat readiness in the Arctic. As well, Russia commenced major military exercises across northern Russia involving more than 45,000 troops, in what was a clear show of military strength intended to intimidate its neighbors.

### Special Entry:

Russia encroaches into semi-autonomous Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia

-- Note that some aspects of this entry replicated from above due to relevance --

In the backdrop of Russia's encroachment into eastern Ukraine, and its annexation of Crimea in 2014, surrounding countries have watched warily, wondering if its territories would be similarly affected. In March 2015, Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed that large-scale military exercises involving 2,000 Russian troops had commenced in the southern part of the country, along contested borders and even in disputed regions.

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By mid-July 2015, the European Union was warning that while world attention remained on Russia's land grab in Ukraine, Russia was doing the same in the Georgian semi-autonomous regions. Of note was the fact that Russia had installed its own border signs inside South Ossetia, as it continued its quiet absorption of the Georgian territory. As the European Union had warned, Russia was intent on redrawing the regional map, effectively expanding its territory in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, to the detriment of Georgian sovereignty. A statement by the European Union foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, aimed to remind Russia that it was acting in violation of international law and read as follows: "The EU reaffirms its full support for Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders."

Meanwhile, the political landscape in Georgia was tense due to Russia's moves in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On July 18, 2015, thousands of demonstrators were on the streets of the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to register their outrage over what Russia's so-called "occupation" of the two semi-autonomous regions. In an interview with Agence France Presse, Tamara Chergoleishvili, a leading protest organizer, explained the mass action as follows: "The Kremlin continues to use both hard and soft power in its efforts to subjugate Georgia. We gathered here to show that Russia's aggressive policy doesn't belong to the 21st century."

*Written jointly by --*

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*Sources --*

*BBC, Congressional Research Service, Federal Information and News Dispatch, U.S. State Department, Chicago Tribune*

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## **Appendix: Abkhazia**

### **Special Report: Abkhazia**

#### Summary

Ethnic Abkhazs in the strategically located province of Abkhazia on the Black Sea have sought to assert their independence from Georgia. In 1991, war erupted as Georgian troops battled Abkhaz forces, alleged to have the backing of Russia and various northern Caucasus militant groups. More than 250,000 ethnic Georgians fled Abkhazia because of the fighting, fueling accusations that Abkhaz forces carried out a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Throughout the 1990s, the United Nations (U.N.), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Group of Friends (consisting of American, British, German, French, and Russian envoys) have attempted to negotiate a resolution to the conflict, but the situation remains a stalemate. Abkhazia, which is economically isolated as a result of a Georgian embargo, operates as a de facto protectorate of Russia.

The geopolitical dimensions of the conflict have grown increasingly important, as Russia has sought to use its military support for Abkhazia as leverage against Georgia's pro-Western government. For its part, Georgia has accused Russia of seeking to informally annex Abkhazia. Nevertheless,

Georgia has offered Abkhazia a high degree of autonomy, but insists on preserving its territorial integrity. Abkhazia, meanwhile, continues to demand independence.

Many outside observers stress the need to peacefully resolve the dispute because of fears that another armed conflict in Abkhazia could destabilize the region.

Editor's Note:

The 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia affected Abkhazia as well. The French-brokered peace agreement that was intended to end that crisis included implications for both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. See "Special Report" below for details about that situation.

### Background/Context

The ethnic Abkhaz people have close historical, cultural, and linguistic ties to the peoples of the Russian North Caucasus and are ethnically distinct from the Georgian people. The Russian empire incorporated Abkhazia as a protectorate in 1810 and formally annexed the area in 1864. Many ethnic Abkhazians fled as Russians and Georgians arrived.

A few years after the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviets gave Abkhazia the status of an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). In 1931, however, Joseph Stalin, who liked to vacation in the area, allowed the Georgian SSR to formally annex Abkhazia. Although the area was still called an autonomous region, there was very little autonomy during Stalin's rule. Georgian became the official language while the Abkhaz people suffered cultural and linguistic oppression. The situation became less severe when Khrushchev came to power.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, less than one-fifth of the Abkhaz population were ethnic Abkhazians. Most were ethnic Georgians. When Georgia became independent, ethnic Abkhazs wanted to declare their independence and establish closer ties with Russia. In 1992, the Georgian government sent 2,000 troops to Abkhazia to enforce the status quo. In 1993, however, Georgian troops were driven out by fierce fighting that killed 10,000. More than 250,000 Georgians became refugees and have been unable to return ever since. Georgia accused Russia of providing support to Abkhaz separatist forces. Militants from the north Caucasus also arrived to support Abkhazia. Chechen fighters, despite being openly hostile to Russia, also assisted the Abkhazs.

Russian, Georgian, and Abkhaz authorities signed a ceasefire agreement in Moscow in September 1992. The agreement stipulated that Georgian territorial integrity would be maintained. However, the agreement was never fully implemented and the ceasefire eventually collapsed in October 1992 as fighting resumed. Abkhaz forces captured most of the major cities and brought nearly 80 percent of the contested territory under Abkhaz control.



Georgia and Abkhazia signed a new ceasefire agreement in July 1993. At that point, the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council created the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) to verify compliance with the ceasefire. The ceasefire, however, again collapsed in September 1993 when Abkhaz forces launched more attacks, eventually gaining controlling of all of Abkhazia. The situation caused hundreds of thousands of ethnic Georgians to flee the area.

On April 4, 1994, Georgia and Abkhazia signed the Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz Conflict in Moscow, which committed both sides to observing yet another new ceasefire and cooperating to ensure the “safe, secure, and dignified” return of all civilians who had fled the zone of conflict. On May 14, 1994, both sides signed the Moscow Ceasefire Agreement, which created a demilitarized zone around the Inguri river. Russian peacekeeping troops, under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), were authorized to monitor the ceasefire. UNOMIG was also tasked with monitoring the ceasefire. Further negotiations took place in the context of the Geneva Peace Process, which was chaired by the U.N. The negotiations were observed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and by the “Group of Friends,” consisting of United States (U.S.), British, French, German, and Russian representatives.

Georgian and Abkhaz officials met in Geneva in 1997 for talks mediated by the U.N, where they agreed to establish a Coordination Council to resolve practical issues between them. The Coordination Council established three working groups to address security issues, refugees and internally displaced persons, and economic and social programs.

In May 1998, fighting broke out in the Gali district of Abkhazia when Georgian partisans attempted to take back control part of that district. By that point, tens of thousands of Georgian internally displaced persons had returned to their homes in the Gali district. Upwards of 40,000 Georgians were then expelled and 1,500 homes burned in an Abkhaz-sweep operation.

In 1999, Russia agreed to close its base at Gudauta in the conflict zone, pledging that it would only be used for peacekeeping purposes. However, Georgia expressed doubts that the base was being used solely for such operations, alleging that Russia still used it to provide military support to pro-independence Abkhaz forces. Georgia has complained about not being given access to inspect the Russian facilities.

In 2001, Georgia and Abkhazia signed an agreement not to use force against one another. In 2002, the U.N. and the Group of Friends presented a document that outlined a possible solution to the conflict based on the expectation of preserving Georgian territorial integrity. However, the Abkhaz side has never accepted the document as a basis for negotiation.

In 2001, the Russian conflict in Chechnya once again became intertwined with Georgia. Russia

accused the Georgian government of providing sanctuary to Chechen rebels on Georgian territory. That autumn, Georgian partisans and Chechen fighters reportedly fought their way through Abkhaz lines.

In 2003, the Group of Friends sponsored a series of talks with the purpose of establishing the principles for a final political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. In 2004, these talks were broke off amid rising Georgian-Abkhaz tensions. Abkhazia continued to suspend its participation in the talks until it held elections for a new de facto president. Following the election of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili in 2005, the new governments of both sides resumed talks in Geneva with the Group of Friends.

### Recent Initiative

In March 2006, the Georgian government announced it would reopen negotiations with Abkhaz officials. In May 2006, the Group of Friends and the U.N.-led Coordination Council sponsored talks between Georgia and Abkhaz officials in Tbilisi. The talks covered security issues in the Gali region of western Georgia, refugees and internally displaced persons, and economic plans for the zone of conflict. The de facto Abkhaz foreign minister stated that Abkhazia was satisfied with the talks and Georgian officials spoke of “cautious optimism.” In June 2006, the Georgian government presented a peace plan for ending the conflict to its parliament. The plan stresses the need for Georgian territorial integrity to be maintained, though it would seek to recognize the historical, cultural, and linguistic heritage of the Abkhaz people by granting the province “broad domestic sovereignty” over its internal affairs. The plan calls for the orderly return of refugees and internally displaced persons and the restoration of their lost property. The plan also pledges that the Georgian government will continue civil discussions with Abkhaz leaders and will continue to encourage the participation of multilateral institutions in facilitating the peace process. Abkhaz officials, however, have not embraced such a plan, instead demanding completely independence from Georgia.

In June 2006, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili held talks in St. Petersburg covering a wide range of issues in Georgian-Russian relations, including Abkhazia. Though both sides stated that the talks failed to resolve key differences, they both pledged to work to improve ties. In July 2006, Georgia requested that the U.N. Security Council replace Russian troops with U.N. peacekeepers, citing concerns that Russia does not have a neutral position on the conflict. Georgia alleged that Russia is continuing to provide military support to Abkhaz separatists. President Saakashvili accused Russia of using its peacekeeping presence as pretext to informally annex Abkhazia. Russia vehemently denied the allegations. The U.N. Security Council is unlikely to grant Georgia’s request considering that Russia, as a permanent member, has veto-power over all resolutions. The Abkhaz government said that the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers would destabilize the peace process and that Abkhazia would be forced to mine its

border with Georgia.

Editor's Note:

The 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia affected Abkhazia as well. The French-brokered peace agreement that was intended to end that crisis included implications for both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. See "Special Report" below for details about that situation.

### Foreign Policy Positions of Key Players

#### Georgia

Having been embroiled in a civil war with breakaway provinces such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia throughout the 1990s, Georgia insists on preserving its territorial integrity. Georgia believes that Russia played a crucial role in providing military and political support to Abkhaz separatists. Georgia has accused of Abkhaz forces of ethnic cleansing, an allegation which the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has endorsed. Furthermore, Georgia believes that Russia is seeking to solidify its position in Abkhazia in order to achieve a de facto annexation of the province. After coming to power in the "Rose Revolution", President Saakashvili has pledged reintegrate breakaway provinces.

#### Abkhazia

Abkhazia demands the restoration of its pre-1931 status and insists that there can be no settlement until Georgia recognizes its independence, which it declared in 1994. No country has formally recognized Abkhazia's sovereignty. A Georgian economic embargo has further isolated Abkhazia, although Russia has sought to soften the consequences of this by maintaining a border crossing and railway line. Abkhazia is currently a de facto Russian protectorate with many of its citizens holding Russian passports and using the Russian ruble as currency. Abkhaz officials want Russian oil companies to start drilling for oil along its coast in the Black Sea, though the Georgian government claims ownership of all natural resources in the area.

#### Russia

Russia has traditionally viewed the North Caucasus as its sphere of influence and has done much to support the Abkhaz cause. In recent years, Russia has also sought to use its military presence in Abkhazia as leverage against President Saakashvili's Western-oriented government, which is trying to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

#### United States

According to the U.S. Department of State, U.S. policy officially supports the preservation of Georgian territorial integrity through peaceful means. As a member of the Group of Friends, the U.S. supports negotiations toward a comprehensive settlement of the dispute, including the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Under the George W. Bush administration, the U.S. has sought to establish a strategic partnership with Georgia. Since coming to power in the Rose Revolution, President Saakashvili has supported American geopolitical objectives concerning energy and security issues.

#### United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia

The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia was established in August 1993 to monitor the ceasefire between Georgian and Abkhaz authorities. UNOMIG's mandate was further expanded in April 1994 to monitor the new ceasefire. In March 2006, the U.N. Security Council extended UNOMIG's mandate for six additional months.

Current countries that contribute military personnel to UNOMIG include Albania, Austria, Bangladesh, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, and Uruguay.

#### Special Report

France negotiates truce agreement for Georgia and Russia as fighting dies down in separatist enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia --

On August 8, 2008, the Georgian military launched an attack against separatist targets in South Ossetia. The military offensive ensued only hours after the Georgian authorities and South Ossetia's separatists agreed to a Russian-brokered ceasefire.

The situation began when Georgian military troops and Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists were ensconced in violent clashes over the course of several days. Georgian tanks then attacked the separatist stronghold of Tskhinvali, presumably in an effort to regain control of the region.

According to Russian media, several people were reported to have been killed in the shelling. As well, Georgian forces and South Ossetian separatists were reported to be exchanging heavy fire. To that end, explosions and rocket fire were heard in the area around Tskhinvali. The British newspaper, *The Independent*, reported that "the assault is coming from all directions."

For its part, Georgia said that it was taking this action to stabilize the territory [South Ossetia].

Georgian Minister for Integration, Temur Yakobashvili, said that his country was compelled to terminate South Ossetia's "criminal regime" and to "restore constitutional order" to the breakaway region. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili himself called for an end to bloodshed to end, but warned the South Ossetian separatists that Tbilisi's patience was not limitless.

On the other side of the equation, South Ossetian rebel leader Eduard Kokoity said that Georgia was carrying out "a perfidious and base" attack on Tskhinvali. He also confirmed the assault on Tskhinvali saying, "The storming of Tskhinvali has started." Eyewitnesses on the ground said that the city was being attacked, the hospital was destroyed and the university was on fire. The Red Cross reported that there were numerous casualties needing medical attention.

In response, Russia was said to be deploying troops to South Ossetia to assist peacekeepers operating there. Indeed, an aide to the Russian Land Forces commander confirmed that Russian tanks and troops had entered South Ossetia and were approaching Tskhinvali, which was reported to have been already devastated by the Georgian offensive there.

Russia's military presence in the region was not well-received by Georgia, given the fact that the Georgian government has long accused Russia of arming South Ossetian separatists. But Russia has its own counter-argument to levy against Georgia. It has accused Georgia of deliberately ramping up its own military presence in breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and assuming a hard-line posture against these enclaves. Russia's tensions with Georgia have been partially rooted in another concern. Specifically, Russia has been opposed to pro-Western Georgia's ambitions to join NATO. This geopolitical element has textured the larger context of the territorial struggle being played out in South Ossetia.

It should be noted that Russia has enjoyed strong ties with South Ossetia, largely due to the fact that the ethnically-related province of North Ossetia is located within its borders, and both the south and the north have long hoped to unite. Indeed, many South Ossetians hold Russian citizenship. As such, with vested interests on both sides of the border, Russia called for an end to the ongoing violence. Russia also urged the international community to work cooperatively "to avert massive bloodshed and new victims."

However, the prospects for peace were not likely to be easily advanced, given the emerging situation in the region a day later. On August 9, 2008, Georgian authorities said that Russian jets had bombed military targets inside its territory – specifically in the Georgian town on Gori to the south of South Ossetia. They also said that one attack ensued close to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which is known to supply Caspian oil to the West. Georgia described the air strikes as "a full-scale military invasion" and Georgian President Saakashvili claimed that Russia was at war with his country.

Russia had a very different perspective and placed the blame squarely on the Georgians. Russian

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov indicated the dire nature of the situation by asserting that already 1,500 people had died in the conflict and more than 30,000 South Ossetians had fled into Russia to escape the threat of death. The Russian government said that it had to act to protect the South Ossetians, many of whom hold Russian citizenship. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev said that Georgia also bore a responsibility for "protecting the [South Ossetian] population" and that his country's military action was intended "to force the Georgian side to peace."

By August 9, 2008, the Russian army had advanced to take complete control South Ossetia's capital of Tskhinvali. General Vladimir Boldyrev, the head of the Russian ground forces said, "Tactical groups have completely liberated Tskhinvali from the Georgian military." Boldyrev also said that Russian forces would keep up the pressure on Georgian military units. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev explained his country's objectives in South Ossetia saying, "Under these circumstances, Russia is guided by one task -- to immediately stop violence and defend civilians and restore peace as soon as possible." President Dmitry Medvedev also demanded the withdrawal of Georgian troops from the conflict zone, saying that it was the only way to settle the "tragic crisis."

That same day, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili called for an end to hostilities saying, "We propose an immediate ceasefire and the beginning of the withdrawal of troops from the contact line." On the home front, the Georgia's parliament approved a presidential decree that essentially imposed two weeks of martial law in the country.

A day later on August 10, 2008, Georgia said that it was withdrawing its troops from the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali in the face of Russia's counter-offensive. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said his country's troops were returning to the positions they held before the conflict erupted days earlier. There was, however, some confusion about whether Georgian troops were pulling out of Tskhinvali or withdrawing entirely from South Ossetia. Georgian Reintegration Minister Temur Yakobashvili confirmed that the troops left Tskhinvali but were remaining in other areas of South Ossetia. Russian sources said that Georgian military units were still active in South Ossetia.

Presumably due to the continued activity by Georgian military units in South Ossetia, and what Moscow described as continued Georgian offensive action, Russian forces were continuing to carry out its own military action into Georgian territory. Reports from the region suggested that Russia carried out an air strike on a military airfield near the Tbilisi International Airport.

With the situation grim despite the earlier declaration of a withdrawal of troops from Tskhinvali, Georgia said that it had submitted a note to the Russian embassy in Tbilisi calling for immediate negotiations with Russia regarding "an end to all hostilities and a ceasefire." Russia confirmed that the note had been received. Russia at the time also denied Georgia's claims that Russian air strikes had targeted populated areas.



But movement toward a resolution seemed no closer by August 11, 2008. Georgian authorities said that Russian air strikes hit communications facilities to the west of Tbilisi and the port city of Poti in the Black Sea. As well, Russian forces were reported to have led a raid through the other breakaway enclave of Abkhazia into the western Georgian town of Senaki. On the other side of the equation, Russia said that the Georgian military was still targeting positions in Tskhinvali, despite claims of a withdrawal and overtures of a ceasefire. In this way, both sides accused one another of continuing the hostilities and exacerbating the conflict.

On the international front, the United Nations Security Council had earlier convened an emergency session to consider the rapidly deteriorating security crisis in the Caucasus. Little was actually accomplished at that session. Likewise, a spokesperson from NATO had already called on both sides -- Georgian and Russian -- to exercise restraint. However, with the violence ongoing, clearly restraint was not at hand.

Nevertheless, the United States said that it was sending a delegation to the region to try to negotiate a resolution. The United States Department of States said that the envoys would "engage with the parties in the conflict." As well, a European Union delegation was en route to the region and said that it was hoping to procure a ceasefire and withdrawal agreement from both Georgia and Russia. A separate Council of Europe delegation was also hoping to advance dialogue.

In the same time period, according to news reports, Russian President Medvedev reiterated the death toll -- in the thousands -- during a conversation with United States President George W. Bush. For his part, Bush, who was attending the Beijing Olympics, called for an end to the violence, warned of escalation beyond the zone of conflict, and endorsed the notion of international mediation.

Indeed, the international community's objective appeared to be focused on averting the prospects of a war in the restive Caucasus, which has long been regarded as something of a powder keg. Yet to be determined was the question of whether or not such efforts would actually yield positive results.

Days later, Russia noted that its military activity in the area was ending and Russian troops were seen retreating from the area. The hostilities flared again when Georgia sent in troops to try to regain control of South Ossetia. Nevertheless, witnesses said that the full brunt of the fighting in South Ossetia appeared to be ending. Elsewhere in the region, Russian troops were withdrawing from the other breakaway region of Abkhazia, however, separatist there were reported to be ensconced in some continuing clashes with the Georgian military in the Kodori Gorge.

Yet even with an official truce in the offing (as discussed below) and an end to the fighting, the

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situation was not peaceful. A war of words continued. On an official day of mourning in his country, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev charged that Georgia had launched "genocide of the South Ossetian people." At issue were the deaths of thousands of South Ossetians, many of whom hold Russian passports, as well as the deaths and injuries to scores of Russian soldiers, including one general. The Russian leader used the Russian word "otmorozki," which roughly translates to "thugs" in English, to characterize Georgian troops. Meanwhile, Georgian President Saakashvili addressed a crowd of thousands gathered in Tbilisi's main and accused Russia of the "ruthless, heartless destruction" of Georgians. The Georgian leader also warned that his country would no longer be a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) -- a group consisting of former Soviet republics.

On August 13, 2008, French President Nicolas Sarkozy was leading diplomatic negotiations to help Georgia and Russia resolve the crisis that had been sparked when Georgian military troops and Russian-backed South Ossetian separatists were ensconced in violent clashes over the course of several days. Georgian tanks then attacked the separatist stronghold of Tskhinvali, presumably in an effort to regain control of the region, and went onto gain military supremacy over large swaths of Georgian territory.

Sarkozy put forth a peace agreement that both sides signed days later. Central to the proposed plan for a truce was that all forces would pull back to pre-conflict positions. Other elements of the plan included an end to the use of force, an end to military action in perpetuity, as well as the free access of humanitarian aid. France, as the head of the European Union, has called on the European bloc to endorse the peace initiative ahead of its submission to the United Nations Security Council. The European Union was also expected consider deploying peacekeepers to the region to maintain peace and security, and also to protect the supply of humanitarian aid.

The remaining thorny issue, which was not included in the framework of the truce, was the future status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Neither Russian President Medvedev nor Georgian President Saakashvili was likely to find common ground on that matter in the immediate future. Indeed, the Georgian leader asserted, "The territorial integrity and belonging of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Georgia can never be put under doubt."

On August 17, 2008, Russia officially pledged to withdraw its forces from Georgian territory in keeping with the agreement. At the time, however, its forces had control over large swaths of Georgian territory, including the main east-west highway through that country. There was speculation that Russian troops might withdraw only as far as South Ossetia since Russia said it would only fully withdraw when Georgian police were ready to take over responsibility for security. NATO responded to anxieties that Russia would not abide by the withdrawal requirements of the agreement by warning that relations would be compromised if Russian troops remained in Georgia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia was not occupying Georgia and would not annex South Ossetia. However, he also characterized NATO as biased and

intent on saving the "criminal regime" of Tbilisi.

Meanwhile, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev told his French President Nicolas Sarkozy that the Russian withdrawal would be complete by August 22, 2008, although approximately 500 troops would be installed as peacekeepers on both sides of South Ossetia's border. Russian troops were soon identified exiting Gori -- the largest town in Georgia located close to the border of South Ossetia. Sarkozy, during talks with Medvedev, acknowledged this withdrawal but noted that Russian troops were yet to exit Poti and Senaki. Russia had earlier indicated that it would not soon leave the port city of Poti, and claimed that this would be in keeping with the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Medvedev's government said that Russian peacekeepers were allowed to take "additional security measures." However, the United States and the United Kingdom countered this claim noting that such buffer zones would violate the deal.

In other developments, the first United States ship with humanitarian aid was expected to dock in Georgia by the last week of August 2008. Two more ships were expected to arrive in Georgia as well.

In the last week of August 2008, Russia's Kremlin officially recognized the breakaway enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. South Ossetians and Abkhazians celebrated the news of this recognition of their self-proclaimed sovereignty. However, without wider international recognition of sovereign status, and with many countries of the West committed to the notion of Georgia's territorial integrity, the actual status of South ossetia and Abkhazia remained in the zone of "contested independent status."

By the start of September 2008, the European Union (EU) had decided to suspend talks on a new partnership pact with Russia, given the still-incomplete withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. EU-Russian negotiations on the partnership agreement had been scheduled for mid-September 2008 but were based on a shared understanding that Russian troops would withdraw to pre-conflict positions. The lack of progress on that withdrawal front, followed by the EU's response, signaled that relations between the EU and Russia were moving into highly challenging territory.

Following a meeting in the Belgian capital city of Brussels, EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said that the bloc that he represented could not "continue as if nothing had happened." As well, the European bloc's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, said that the EU could deploy civilian monitors to Georgia to determine whether or not Russia was complying with the ceasefire agreement that had been brokered earlier. Meanwhile French President Sarkozy said, "The EU would welcome a real partnership with Russia, which is in the interests of all, but you have to be two to have a partnership."

On the other side of the equation, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that unchecked support

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by the EU and the United States for the government of Georgian President Saakashvili would be a "historic" mistake. He also introduced the notion of an embargo on arms supplies to Georgia until a new regime was established there. These declarations came in the background of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's assertion that his country's foreign policy principles would not be dictated by the hegemony of any single country, such as the United States.

In October 2008, months after the Russian-Georgian conflict over South Ossetia, Russia has removed a checkpoint near the town of Gori. The removal of the checkpoint at Gori -- located in Georgian territory close to the separatist region of South Ossetia -- marked the first significant sign that Russia intended to comply with its withdrawal pledge, which was part of the ceasefire deal negotiated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Indeed, Russia has also pledged to withdraw troops from two buffer zones within Georgia -- now under European Union observation -- by October 10, 2008.

At the same time, Russia has increased its troop presence in South Ossetia -- largely a result of an explosion that left eight Russian soldiers and three civilians dead in the early part of the month. Russia accused Georgia of orchestrating the attack; Georgia denied the accusation. Russia also maintained its troop presence in the other separatist region of Abkhazia. Russia has recognized both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent while Western countries have backed Georgian territorial integrity. The matter of sovereignty has remained unresolved.

In June 2009, the western Georgian town of Zugdidi was the site of three bombings that resulted in some structural damage and injuries to one person. One explosion hit a train and resulted in the wounding of a train engineer; a second explosion occurred half an hour later and damaged train tracks; the third explosion hit a truck just outside the town. While there was no claim of responsibility for the attacks, the location of Zugdidi close to the breakaway region of Abkhazia indicated a possible political motive.

August 2009 marked the one year anniversary of the war between Georgia and Russia over the breakaway republic of South Ossetia, which also had implications in Abkhazia, as discussed above.

On August 13, 2009, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Abkhazia, where he promised to build a military base along the border with Georgia. Putin also said that such a move would help guarantee the stability of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian head of government said: "Russia is going to deploy its armed forces in Abkhazia and take the necessary efforts to build a modern border guard system in cooperation with the relevant Abkhazian authorities." He continued, "All these factors are serious guarantees of the security of Abkhazia and South Ossetia." Putin's pledge came on the first anniversary of the cease-fire, which ended Russia's war with Georgia over South Ossetia. As might be expected, Georgia decried the move, characterizing it as "yet another provocation," that could potentially "escalate tensions" in the region of the Caucasus.

Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia declared independence from Georgia during a war in the 1990s, which followed on the heels of the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are recognized by Russia as sovereign states, but have nonetheless remained internationally-recognized as Georgian territories. They have increasingly become flashpoints in the region.

### Updates:

#### Abkhazia leader survives assassination attempt --

On Feb. 22, 2012, the president of Georgia's breakaway republic of Abkhazia survived an attempted assassination while he was en route to work in the Abkhazian capital of Sukhumi. President Aleksandr Ankvab was targeted when his motorcade struck a remote-controlled roadside bomb and then came under gunfire by five assailants. While President Ankvab survived the attack, two of his bodyguards were not so fortunate and died as a result. Officials from Abkhazia's National Security Council said that efforts were being made to find the perpetrators of the violent assault on the president. It should be noted that there were no claims of responsibility for the attack, and this assassination attempt was the latest in a long list of such efforts to take Ankvab's life.

#### Georgia warns Russia against backing independence claims of Georgia breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia --

On Feb. 4, 2014, just ahead of the opening of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi (Russia), Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili of Georgia warned Russia that it should refrain from taking any positions that might support the independence claims of the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Relations between Russia and Georgia have long been tense since the early 1990s when Georgia declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Relations devolved further over the years as Russia has supported the independence inclinations of the two Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But relations between Georgia and Russia hit a nadir in 2008 when the two countries fought a brief war over South Ossetia. Since then, they have had no diplomatic ties.

With Russia in the international spotlight as it hosts the 2014 Winter Olympics, Georgia was adamant about ensuring that Russian President Vladimir Putin would not use the spotlight to advance the independence causes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Of note was the fact that Russia's Olympic security zone was expanded into Abkhazia, which was less than 25 miles away

from Sochi.

Prime Minister Garibashvili went to so far as to suggest that his country considered boycotting the Olympics in Russia. During a meeting with European Union and NATO officials in Belgium, he said, "It was a tough decision not to boycott the Games...But if there are any surprises we will of course react adequately."

### Russia launches military exercises in disputed territories of Georgia

In the backdrop of Russia's encroachment into eastern Ukraine, and its annexation of Crimea in 2014, surrounding countries have watched warily, wondering if its territories would be similarly affected. In March 2015, Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed that large-scale military exercises involving 2,000 Russian troops had commenced in the southern part of the country, along contested borders and even in disputed regions.

The areas affected included the federal districts of Southern and North Caucasus, as well as the recently annexed Ukrainian region of Crimea. Military drills were also taking place on Russian military bases in Armenia, and in the Georgian separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The moves were being regarded as a symbolic illustration of Russian hegemony and influence in the region, irrespective of global outrage over Russia's backing of separatists in eastern Ukraine and the ensuing war that has rocked the region since 2014.

In fact, while global attention has focused on Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian region of Crimea, Russia has been quietly working towards subsuming the semi-autonomous Georgian territory of South Ossetia into its fold. In fact, a treaty, known as the "Treaty of Alliance and Integration" was drafted in December 2014 with the intent of integrating the Russian speaking enclave, irrespective of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity or its legal claim on South Ossetia. At the end of January 2015, the leader of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, dispatched finalized documents to Moscow. In February 2015, Russia and South Ossetia signed the "Treaty on the State Border," which was being viewed as a first step towards the signing of the broader "Treaty of Alliance and Integration." Once that integration accord was signed, South Ossetia would be absorbed by Russia over a period of months.

A similar process has been underway as regards the other Georgian semi-autonomous breakaway region, Abkhazia, which was also home to a Russian-speaking population. The alliance and integration measures related to Abkhazia, however, were not regarded as comprehensive as the integration accord at stake for South Ossetia.

Note that on March 18, 2015, Russian President Putin signed the aforementioned Treaty of



Alliance and Integration," which (illegally) integrated the breakaway territory with Russia. The government of Georgia in Tbilisi cast the development as a provocation with the aim of stealing Georgian territory. As noted by Georgian Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili, "It's a cynical and provocative step by Russia ... We consider it a move aimed at annexation." Meanwhile, leading Western countries said it was a dangerous threat to regional stability.

As with the annexation of Crimea, the integration of Georgian territories had no chance of gaining international recognition, and instead, Russia's territorial encroachment has been widely condemned. Indeed, the United States and the European Union condemned the new treaty with South Ossetia. Jen Psaki, the spokesperson for the United States Department of State said, "The United States' position on South Ossetia and Abkhazia remains clear: these regions are integral parts of Georgia, and we continue to support Georgia's independence, its sovereignty, and its territorial integrity." Federica Mogherini, the European Union's foreign policy head, said the treaty was "yet another step" intended to undermine "ongoing efforts to strengthen security and stability in the region."

Of course, as noted above, the loudest outrage as regards South Ossetia and Abkhazia has come from Georgia, which already fought a war with Russia in 2008 over these very issues of control. Nevertheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin was not expected to curtail his expansionist ambitions. In fact, the Russian leader was flexing his aggressive and hawkish muscles in the region as he ordered the Russian Northern Fleet to be on a state of full combat readiness in the Arctic. As well, Russia commenced major military exercises across northern Russia involving more than 45,000 troops, in what was a clear show of military strength intended to intimidate its neighbors.

#### Russia encroaches into semi-autonomous Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia

-- Note that some aspects of this entry replicated from above due to relevance --

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The moves were being regarded as a symbolic illustration of Russian hegemony and influence in the region, irrespective of global outrage over Russia's backing of separatists in eastern Ukraine and

the ensuing war that has rocked the region since 2014.

In fact, while global attention has focused on Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian region of Crimea, Russia has been quietly working towards subsuming the semi-autonomous Georgian territory of South Ossetia into its fold. In fact, a treaty, known as the "Treaty of Alliance and Integration" was drafted in December 2014 with the intent of integrating the Russian speaking enclave, irrespective of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity or its legal claim on South Ossetia. At the end of January 2015, the leader of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, dispatched finalized documents to Moscow. In February 2015, Russia and South Ossetia signed the "Treaty on the State Border," which was being viewed as a first step towards the signing of the broader "Treaty of Alliance and Integration." Once that integration accord was signed, South Ossetia would be absorbed by Russia over a period of months.

A similar process has been underway as regards the other Georgian semi-autonomous breakaway region, Abkhazia, which was also home to a Russian-speaking population. The alliance and integration measures related to Abkhazia, however, were not regarded as comprehensive as the integration accord at stake for South Ossetia.

On March 18, 2015, Russian President Putin signed the aforementioned Treaty of Alliance and Integration," which (illegally) integrated the breakaway territory with Russia. The government of Georgia in Tbilisi cast the development as a provocation with the aim of stealing Georgian territory. As noted by Georgian Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili, "It's a cynical and provocative step by Russia ... We consider it a move aimed at annexation." Meanwhile, leading Western countries said it was a dangerous threat to regional stability.

As with the annexation of Crimea, the integration of Georgian territories had no chance of gaining international recognition, and instead, Russia's territorial encroachment has been widely condemned. Indeed, the United States and the European Union condemned the new treaty with South Ossetia. Jen Psaki, the spokesperson for the United States Department of State said, "The United States' position on South Ossetia and Abkhazia remains clear: these regions are integral parts of Georgia, and we continue to support Georgia's independence, its sovereignty, and its territorial integrity." Federica Mogherini, the European Union's foreign policy head, said the treaty was "yet another step" intended to undermine "ongoing efforts to strengthen security and stability in the region."

Of course, as noted above, the loudest outrage as regards South Ossetia and Abkhazia has come from Georgia, which already fought a war with Russia in 2008 over these very issues of control. Nevertheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin was not expected to curtail his expansionist ambitions. In fact, the Russian leader was flexing his aggressive and hawkish muscles in the region as he ordered the Russian Northern Fleet to be on a state of full combat readiness in the Arctic. As well, Russia commenced major military exercises across northern Russia involving more than

45,000 troops, in what was a clear show of military strength intended to intimidate its neighbors.

By mid-July 2015, the European Union was warning that while world attention remained on Russia's land grab in Ukraine, Russia was doing the same in the Georgian semi-autonomous regions. Of note was the fact that Russia had installed its own border signs inside South Ossetia, as it continued its quiet absorption of the Georgian territory. As the European Union had warned, Russia was intent on redrawing the regional map, effectively expanding its territory in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, to the detriment of Georgian sovereignty. A statement by the European Union foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, aimed to remind Russia that it was acting in violation of international law and read as follows: "The EU reaffirms its full support for Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders."

Meanwhile, the political landscape in Georgia was tense due to Russia's moves in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On July 18, 2015, thousands of demonstrators were on the streets of the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to register their outrage over what Russia's so-called "occupation" of the two semi-autonomous regions. In an interview with Agence France Presse, Tamara Chergoleishvili, a leading protest organizer, explained the mass action as follows: "The Kremlin continues to use both hard and soft power in its efforts to subjugate Georgia. We gathered here to show that Russia's aggressive policy doesn't belong to the 21st century."

*Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman*

*Core research sources listed in Bibliography*

*Sources: BBC, International Crisis Group, Voice of America, United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia, Chicago Tribune, Agence France Presse*



# **Chapter 3**

## **Economic Overview**

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## Economic Overview

### *Overview*

Russia was the largest republic of the former Soviet Union. The country is endowed with vast natural resources, including oil, natural gas, coal, and timber. It holds the world's largest natural gas reserves, the second largest coal reserves, and the eighth largest oil reserves. Russia is also the world's largest exporter of natural gas, and the second largest oil exporter.

During the 1990s, the Russian economy experienced severe disruption as it moved from a centrally-planned model to a free market system. Difficulties in implementing fiscal reforms aimed at raising government revenues and a dependence on short-term borrowing to finance budget deficits led to a serious financial crisis in 1998. In addition, lower prices for Russia's major export earners (oil and minerals) and a loss of investor confidence exacerbated the financial problems. The result was a rapid and steep decline in the value of the ruble, the flight of foreign investment, a breakdown of commercial transactions via the banking system, and the threat of runaway inflation. But Russia weathered the crisis well, and its economic performance was strong in the following decade with robust GDP growth, strong external and fiscal positions, and increases in productivity and consumption. These achievements were attributed not only to high oil prices and large capital inflows but also to good macroeconomic management. In particular, saving the large oil revenue windfall provided a considerable measure of stability.

However, the Russian economy was hit hard by the global economic crisis from two shocks – a collapse in oil prices and a sudden reversal of capital flows. These shocks triggered an abrupt contraction in domestic demand, leading to sharply falling investment and productivity. The pre-crisis policy of the controlled exchange rate, combined with the lack of long-term domestic funding, contributed to excessive foreign currency borrowing, leaving Russian banks vulnerable to the reversal of capital flows. As a result, economic growth slowed in 2008, followed by a large contraction in 2009. The Russian government responded forcefully to the global crisis, taking full advantage of the considerable buffers provided by the past prudent policy of taxing and saving much of the oil windfall that had left significant scope for counter-cyclical fiscal relaxation. The stimulus helped stabilize the economy and growth was expected to see a moderate rebound in 2010. At the same time, the stimulus also significantly increased the non-oil fiscal deficit. A severe drought and fires in central Russia reduced agricultural output in 2010, leading to a ban on grain exports for part of the year, and slowed growth in other sectors such as manufacturing and retail trade. In early 2011, high oil prices boosted Russia's growth but inflation and increased government expenditures may limit the positive impact of these revenues. In April 2011, the country's central



bank reiterated its forecast of no more than 7 percent price growth in the whole of 2011. Indeed, high oil prices lifted Russian growth in 2011 and helped the country reduce its budget deficit. By mid-2012, the Russian economy was running close to its potential and unemployment had dropped to below 6 percent. High oil prices, strong wage growth, and robust consumption had supported demand. But risks remained. Standard and Poor's warned that rapid loan growth in Russia could result in an uptick in bad loans and capital shortages in the financial sector. "One of the key risks we see in Russia now is very high lending growth... It was 25-27 percent in 2011 and we are likely to see quite a high figure this year as well," said Elena Romanova, associate director with Standard & Poor's in Russia, in a Reuters article. Still, looking ahead, the country was expected to see continued moderate growth in 2012 and 2013 as well as a rebound in inflation.

In 2012, Russia joined the World Trade Organization in a move expected to reduce trade barriers in Russia for foreign goods and services and help open foreign markets to Russian goods and services. Meanwhile, Russia created a Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, as well as created a new Russia-led economic bloc called the Eurasian Economic Union. Russia's adoption of a new oil-price-based fiscal rule in 2012 and a more flexible exchange rate policy have made it easier to cope with external shocks, including volatile oil prices.

Also in 2012, the Russian economy saw historically low unemployment with high capacity utilization, though growth slowed somewhat compared to 2011. Economic growth slowed in the first quarter of 2013, by more than half compared to late 2012. In June 2013, Russia's central bank held its main interest rates steady although it was being pressured to cut them in the near future. President Putin was quoted as saying that the forecast economic growth for the year was "below the level needed for stable development, for the resolution of social and other problem," according to Reuters. Overall, a moderate expansion of the Russian economy was projected for 2013 while inflation was expected to ease slightly after surging to 7.4 percent in May.

Overall, growth for 2013 was modest. In late 2013, the Russian Economic Development Ministry reduced its growth forecast through 2030 to an average of only 2.5 percent per year, down from its previous forecast of 4 to 4.2 percent. Then, in 2014 - following Russia's military intervention in Ukraine - prospects for economic growth dropped even lower, with expectations that GDP growth could decline to as low as zero.

In April 2014, Russia's central bank unexpectedly raised interest rates for the second time in less than two months.

Also in 2014, the United States imposed sanctions on Russia and warned that it would impose more if Russia dramatically ramped up aggression against Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development slashed its forecast for Russian economic growth by almost four-fifths, citing the "major downside risks" posed by the crisis in Ukraine. The organization predicted Russia's GDP would grow by just 0.5 percent in 2014, down from its previous forecast of 2.3 percent. The International Monetary Fund had a week earlier cut its

growth forecast for Russia in 2014 to 0.2 percent from 1.3 percent.

“The moderate recovery that was under way at the end of 2013 has been halted by the turbulence related to the events in Ukraine,” the OECD said in its semi-annual global outlook. “Associated increased uncertainties and capital flight are now weighing on investor confidence.”

A senior finance ministry official in May 2014 predicted that Russia's economy would shrink again in the second quarter of 2014. A senior finance ministry official in May 2014 predicted that Russia's economy would shrink again in the second quarter of 2014. Indeed, the Russian ruble lost about half of its value in the second half of 2014 and remained volatile in 2015, contributing to increased capital outflows.

By April 2015, the Russian economy was in such bad shape that the government declared it was slashing spending on its space program by more than a third (to about US\$37.8 billion) over the next decade. This meant it would have to abandon plans to develop a super-heavy launch rocket and that its plans to develop its space station by 2023 would likely not come to fruition. Meanwhile, annual inflation was running at 16.9 percent in March 2015, marking a 13-year high for the country. Government and central bank officials claimed that was the peak and that prices should stabilize with inflation easing to 11 percent by the end of the year.

Also in April 2015, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said Russia continued to suffer significant economic problems because of international sanctions, but that the country was adapting. According to Reuters news, Medvedev told parliament: “Losses from the restrictions which were introduced are significant. According to the estimates of some foreign experts, Russia has suffered losses of 25 billion euros (US\$26.7 billion) in total, which is 1.5 percent of gross domestic product, and in 2015 it could increase several times.” He added that Russia's economy had contracted by around 2 percent in the first quarter of 2015, but that the economic situation was stabilizing.

### ***Economic Performance***

After robust growth from 2003 to 2007, real GDP slowed in 2008 followed by a large contraction in 2009 as a result of the global economic crisis. Growth rebounded in 2010 and stayed strong in 2011 and 2012.

According to CountryWatch estimated calculations for 2014:

Real GDP growth rate was: 3.3 percent

The fiscal deficit/surplus as percent of GDP (%) was: 2.5 percent

Inflation was measured at: 14.9 percent

*Updated in 2015*

*\*Please note that the figures in our Economic Performance section are estimates or forecasts based on IMF-based data that are formulated using CountryWatch models of analysis.*

*Supplementary Sources: Roubini Global Economics, International Monetary Fund and Reuters*

## **Special Entry**

### Summary of 2008 credit crisis

A financial farrago, rooted in the credit crisis, became a global phenomenon by the start of October 2008. In the United States, after failure of the passage of a controversial bailout plan in the lower chamber of Congress, an amended piece of legislation finally passed through both houses of Congress. There were hopes that its passage would calm jitters on Wall Street and restore confidence in the country's financial regime. With the situation requiring rapid and radical action, a new proposal for the government to bank stakes was gaining steam. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic in Europe, a spate of banking crises resulted in nationalization measures for the United Kingdom bank, Bradford and Bingley, joint efforts by the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg to shore up Fortis, joint efforts by France, Belgium, and Luxembourg to shore up Dexia, a rescue plan for Hypo Real Estate, and the quasi-bankruptcy of Iceland's economy. Indeed, Iceland's liabilities were in gross excess of the country's GDP. With further banks also in jeopardy of failing, and with no coordinated efforts to stem the tide by varying countries of the European Union, there were rising anxieties not only about the resolving the financial crisis, but also about the viability of the European bloc.

On Sept. 4, 2008, the leaders of key European states -- United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy -- met in the French capital city of Paris to discuss the financial farrago and to consider possible action. The talks, which were hosted by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, ended without consensus on what should be done to deal with the credit crisis, which was rapidly becoming a global phenomenon. The only thing that the four European countries agreed upon was that there would not be a grand rescue plan, akin to the type that was initiated in the United States. As well, they jointly called for greater regulation and a coordinated response. To that latter end, President Nicolas Sarkozy said, "Each government will operate with its own methods and means, but in a coordinated manner."

This call came after Ireland took independent action to deal with the burgeoning financial crisis. Notably, the Irish government decided days earlier to fully guarantee all deposits in the country's major banks for a period of two years. The Greek government soon followed suit with a similar action. These actions by Ireland and Greece raised the ire of other European countries, and evoked questions of whether Ireland and Greece had violated any European Union charters.

Nevertheless, as anxieties about the safety of bank deposits rose across Europe, Ireland and Greece saw an influx of new banking customers from across the continent, presumably seeking the security of knowing their money would be safe amidst a financial meltdown. And even with questions rising about the decisions of the Irish and Greek government, the government of Germany decided to go down a similar path by guaranteeing all private bank accounts. For his part, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said that his government would increase the limit on guaranteed bank deposits from £35,000 to £50,000.

In these various ways, it was clear that there was no concurrence among some of Europe's most important economies. In fact, despite the meeting in France, which called for coordination among the countries of the European bloc, there was no unified response to the global financial crisis. Instead, that meeting laid bare the divisions within the countries of the European Union, and called into question the very viability of the European bloc. Perhaps that question of viability would be answered at a forthcoming G8 summit, as recommended by those participating in the Paris talks.

A week later, another meeting of European leaders in Paris ended with concurrence that no large institution would be allowed to fail. The meeting, which was attended by leaders of euro zone countries, resulted in an agreement to guarantee loans between banks until the end of 2009, with an eye on easing the credit crunch. The proposal, which would apply in 15 countries, also included a plan for capital infusions by means of purchasing preference shares from banks. The United Kingdom, which is outside the euro zone, had already announced a similar strategy.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy argued that these unprecedented measures were of vital importance. The French leader said, "The crisis has over the past few days entered into a phase that makes it intolerable to opt for procrastination and a go-it-alone approach."

### Europe facing financial crisis as banking bail-out looms large

In early 2009, according to the European Commission, European banks may be in need of as much as several trillion in bailout funding. Impaired or toxic assets factor highly on the European Union bank balance sheets. Economist Nouriel Roubini warned that the economies of Ukraine, Belarus, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania appeared to be on the brink of disaster. Overall, Eastern European countries borrowed heavily from Western European banks. Thus, even if the currencies on the eastern part of the continent collapse, effects will be felt in the western part of Europe as well. For example, Swiss banks that gave billions of credit to Eastern Europe cannot look forward to repayment anytime soon. As well, Austrian banks have had extensive exposure to Eastern Europe, and can anticipate a highly increased cost of insuring its debt. German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrueck has warned that as many as 16 European Union countries would require assistance. Indeed, his statements suggested the need for a regional rescue effort.

### European Union backs financial regulation overhaul

With the global financial crisis intensifying, leaders of European Union countries backed sweeping financial regulations. Included in the package of market reforms were sanctions on tax havens, caps on bonus payments to management, greater hedge fund regulation, and increased influence by the International Monetary Fund. European leaders also backed a charter of sustainable economic activity, that would subject all global financial activities to both regulation and accountability by credit rating agencies.

These moves were made ahead of the Group of 20 summit scheduled for April 2, 2009, in London. It was not known whether other countries outside Europe, such as the United States, Japan, India and China, would support the new and aggressive regime of market regulation. That said, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in Berlin that Europe had a responsibility to chart this track. She said, "Europe will own up to its responsibility in the world."

Leaders forge \$1 trillion deal at G-20 summit in London

Leaders of the world's largest economies, known as the "G-20," met in London to explore possible responses to the global financial crisis. To that end, they forged a deal valued at more than US\$1 trillion.

Central to the agreement was an infusion of \$750 billion to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which was aimed at helping troubled economies. Up to \$100 billion of that amount was earmarked to assist the world's very poorest countries -- an amount far greater than had been expected. In many senses, the infusion of funding to the IMF marked a strengthening of that body unseen since the 1980s.

In addition, the G-20 leaders settled on a \$250 billion increase in global trade. The world's poorest countries would also benefit from the availability of \$250 billion of trade credit.

After some debate, the G-20 leaders decided to levy sanctions against clandestine tax havens and to institute strict financial regulations. Such regulations included tougher controls on banking professionals' salaries and bonuses, and increased oversight of hedge funds and credit rating agencies. A Financial Stability Board was to be established that would work in concert with the IMF to facilitate cross-border cooperation, and also to provide early warnings regarding the financial system.

Aside from these measures, the G-20 countries were already implementing their own economic stimulus measures at home, aimed at reversing the global recession. Together, these economic stimulus packages would inject approximately \$5 trillion by the end of 2010.

United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown played host at the meeting, which most concurred went off successfully, despite the presence of anti-globalization and anarchist protestors. Prime Minister Brown warned that there was "no quick fix" for the economic woes facing the

international community, but he drew attention to the consensus that had been forged in the interest of the common good. He said, "This is the day that the world came together to fight back against the global recession, not with words, but with a plan for global recovery and for reform and with a clear timetable for its delivery."

All eyes were on United States President Barack Obama, who characterized the G-20 summit as "a turning point" in the effort towards global economic recovery. He also hailed the advances agreed upon to reform the failed regulatory regime that contributed to the financial crisis that has gripped many of the economies across the globe. Thusly, President Obama declared the London summit to be historic saying, "It was historic because of the size and the scope of the challenges that we face and because of the timeliness and the magnitude of our response."

Ahead of the summit, there were reports of a growing rift between the respective duos of France and Germany and the United States and the United Kingdom. While France and Germany were emphasizing stricter financial regulations, the United States and the United Kingdom were advocating public spending to deal with the economic crisis. Indeed, French President Nicolas Sarkozy had threatened to bolt the meeting if his priority issues were not addressed. But such an end did not occur, although tensions were existent.

To that end, President Obama was hailed for his diplomatic skills after he brokered an agreement between France and China on tax havens. The American president played the role of peacemaker between French President Sarkozy and Chinese Premier Hu Jintao, paving the way for a meeting of the minds on the matter of tax havens.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy said the concurrence reached at the G-20 summit were "more than we could have hoped for." President Sarkozy also credited President Obama for the American president's leadership at the summit, effusively stating: "President Obama really found the consensus. He didn't focus exclusively on stimulus ... In fact it was he who managed to help me persuade [Chinese] President Hu Jintao to agree to the reference to the ... publication of a list of tax havens, and I wish to thank him for that."

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel also expressed positive feedback about the success of the summit noting that the new measures would give the international arena a "clearer financial market architecture." She noted the agreement reached was "a very, very good, almost historic compromise." Finally, Chancellor Merkel had warm words of praise for President Obama. "The American president also put his hand into this," said Merkel.

Note: The G-20 leaders agreed to meet again in September 2009 in New York to assess the progress of their agenda.

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### **Editor's Note**



## Russia faced with economic calamity; Bank of Russia raises interest rates

In April 2015, it was apparent that Western sanctions against Russia were having an effect as the Russian economy contracted by two percent in the first three months of the year. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev made it clear that Western sanctions, along with the low price of oil, were the causes of the first contraction in the Russian economy since 2009. He also intimated that more economic pain might be in the future, but insisted that Russians could cope with the hardship. He also reminded Russians that the sacrifice was necessary, given the imperative of regaining control over Crimea. Indeed, the Ukrainian territory of Crimea resided at the heart of the matter with the Russian support for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea being the very reason the West imposed sanctions on Russia in the first place.

Economic pressure on Russia had been building for several months. Indeed, in December 2014, Russia was faced with economic calamity due to the decreasing price of oil. As a result, the Bank of Russia raised its key interest rate to 17 percent from 10.5 percent. The interest rate hike was being interpreted as a desperate move by Russia to bolster its currency, the Ruble, and to ultimately help revitalize its ailing economy.

Western sanctions, led by the United States and the European Union, against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine and its seizure of Crimea, have taken a destructive toll on the Russian economy. Of note was a new round of Western sanctions in September 2014, which included restrictions on key Russian companies from financial markets, as well as limits on the imports of some technologies.

One tangible consequence was the collapsing Russian currency. Indeed, the value of the Ruble sank about 50 percent since the start of the year. That falling currency value promised to escalate inflation in Russia, trigger consumer panic and a possible run on the banks, thus causing further damage to the economy.

The assertive move by the Bank of Russia was intended to guard against these deleterious consequences. Most specifically, there were hopes that a rise in interest rates would coax investors to keep their funds in Russian banks. But even with these moves, it was difficult to tell if they would be enough to rescue Russia. A higher interest rate would stymie growth, and almost guarantee that Russia would be heading into a recession -- as reflected in the Russian government's own decision to downgrade its forecast for the next year.

Meanwhile, the fact of the matter was that the Russian energy economy was reliant on the average price of a barrel of oil, which has dropped below \$56 from a high mid-year of \$107. With oil and gas occupying as much as two thirds of Russian exports, and with Russian public

expenditure being largely supported by energy-related revenues, Moscow could expect a significant -- and unsustainable -- deficit on its trade and financial engagement with the global market place. With this path ahead for Russia, it was not surprising that investors were not enthused about keeping their funds in Russian banks, and the result was a precipitous slide in the value of the Ruble.

President Vladimir Putin's rivals took the opportunity to place blame on the Russian president for the economic woes facing the country. Former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov -- a one-time Putin stalwart who was now an opposition chief -- made the following charge in an interview with Reuters News: "Russia is going into decline. 2015 is a year in which Putin must make a principle decision." That decision, according to Kasyanov, would be in the political realm as he called for Putin to either resign or hold early elections. He said that Putin he should have "just a quiet departure through presidential elections." He continued, "I don't believe he will win presidential elections if they are free and fair."

In truth, however, Putin's popularity was actually bolstered by his decision to violate Ukraine's sovereignty and annex Crimea. Thus, despite Kasyanov's claims, early elections might serve simply to ratify Putin's mandate. Of course, the next scheduled elections were not due until 2018, and continued external pressure in the form of sanctions and low oil prices could significantly change the political climate in the future.

For his part, Russian President Putin has sidestepped any serious discussion of the economic ills facing Russia, instead blaming the West during an annual address at the end of 2014. He said, "Sometimes I think, maybe they'll (the West) let the bear eat berries and honey in the forest, maybe they will leave it in peace. They will not. Because they will always try to put him on a chain, and as soon as they succeed in doing so they tear out his fangs and his claws." Putin's rhetoric -- bereft of an actual economic plan of action -- indicated that he intended to rely in nationalist sentiment to ride out the negative economic climate. It was to be seen if this approach would actually be effective.

Meanwhile, United States President Barack Obama entered the equation, saying in an interview with National Public Radio in December 2014 that Putin made a "strategic mistake" when he annexed Crimea. Pushing back at his conservative critics in the United States who have intimated that the Russian president had outplayed the West by flexing his military muscle in eastern Ukraine, Obama said that the burgeoning economic calamity in Russia had proved those critics wrong. The United States leader said, "You'll recall that three or four months ago, everybody in Washington was convinced that President Putin was a genius and he had outmaneuvered all of us and he had bullied and strategized his way into expanding Russian power." Obama continued, "Today, I'd sense that at least outside of Russia, maybe some people are thinking what Putin did wasn't so smart." President Obama noted that sanctions had left the Russian economy vulnerable to the volatility of the energy market. Comparing the Russian scenario to the relative stability of

the United States economy, Obama said, "The big advantage we have with Russia is we've got a dynamic, vital economy, and they don't. They rely on oil. We rely on oil and iPads and movies and you name it."

By April 2015, it was reported that Western sanctions against Russia were having an effect as the Russian economy contracted by two percent in the first three months of the year. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev made the announcement during an address to members of the Russian parliament, and made clear that Western sanctions, along with the lower price of oil, constituted the reasons for the the first contraction in the Russian economy since 2009.

Those Western sanctions were imposed because of Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea. Prime Minister Medvedev addressed this reality head on, saying, the the weightiest pressure on the Russian economy had come from "the main political decision last year -- the return of Crimea to Russia." He intimated that this was a necessary process, noting that the return of Crimea to Russia was vital, and comparing it to the "reunification of Germany or the return to China of Hong Kong and Macao."

Of course, the cost of that "vital" reunification was likely to increased, with the Russian Central Bank warning that the economy could shrink even further through the year to four percent, if the price of oil stayed around \$50 a barrel. Still, the Russian head of government also insisted that Russia would weather the economic storm. Prime Minister Medvedev said, "If external pressure intensifies, and oil prices remain at an extremely low level for a long time, we will have to develop in a new economic reality. I am convinced that we will be able to live even in such a reality. The experience of the recent period has shown that we have learnt how to do this."

Note: The prospects of a Russian economic calamity will likely be somewhat mitigated by the reality that it still retains significant currency reserves that the International Monetary Fund has said would account for about one year's worth of imports.

## Nominal GDP and Components

Nominal GDP and Components					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015

	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Nominal GDP (LCU billions)	55,967.23	62,176.49	66,190.12	71,406.40	74,641.71
Nominal GDP Growth Rate (%)	20.857	11.094	6.455	7.881	4.531
Consumption (LCU billions)	27,105.43	30,498.89	34,143.12	36,833.85	37,221.47
Government Expenditure (LCU billions)	10,102.80	11,888.70	13,047.50	14,075.74	14,223.87
Gross Capital Formation (LCU billions)	13,982.50	15,223.90	15,077.00	16,265.18	13,984.12
Exports of Goods & Services (LCU billions)	16,940.90	18,413.10	18,936.60	20,428.95	21,765.05
Imports of Goods & Services (LCU billions)	12,164.40	13,848.10	15,014.10	16,197.32	12,552.81

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**Population and GDP Per Capita**

Population and GDP Per Capita					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Population, total (million)	143.000	143.300	143.700	146.300	146.300
Population growth (%)	0.0700	0.2098	0.2791	1.809	0.0000
Nominal GDP per Capita (LCU 1000s)	391,379.21	433,890.40	460,613.22	488,082.02	510,196.22

## Real GDP and Inflation

Real GDP and Inflation					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Real Gross Domestic Product (LCU billions 2005 base)	41,479.94	42,890.10	43,447.80	43,708.39	42,036.51
Real GDP Growth Rate (%)	4.301	3.400	1.300	0.5998	-3.8251
GDP Deflator (2005=100.0)	134.926	144.967	152.344	163.370	177.564
Inflation, GDP Deflator (%)	15.874	7.442	5.089	7.238	8.688



## Government Spending and Taxation

Government Spending and Taxation					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Government Fiscal Budget (billions)	19,994.64	23,174.72	25,290.91	27,611.67	29,548.32
Fiscal Budget Growth Rate (percentage)	13.499	15.905	9.131	9.176	7.014
National Tax Rate Net of Transfers (%)	37.264	37.691	36.928	37.484	33.910
Government Revenues Net of Transfers (LCU billions)	20,855.37	23,435.10	24,442.69	26,766.08	25,311.02
Government Surplus(-) Deficit(+) (LCU billions)	860.723	260.387	-848.2230	-845.5860	-4237.2970
Government Surplus(+) Deficit(-) (%GDP)	1.538	0.4188	-1.2815	-1.1842	-5.6768

## Money Supply, Interest Rates and Unemployment

Money Supply, Interest Rates and Unemployment					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Money and Quasi-Money (M2) (LCU billions)	28,754.60	32,226.40	37,271.90	43,032.10	44,981.81
Money Supply Growth Rate (%)	20.862	12.074	15.656	15.455	4.531
Lending Interest Rate (%)	8.458	9.100	9.467	11.142	13.138
Unemployment Rate (%)	6.500	5.500	5.500	5.200	5.958

## Foreign Trade and the Exchange Rate

Foreign Trade and the Exchange Rate					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Official Exchange Rate (LCU/\$US)	29.382	30.840	31.837	38.378	60.397
Trade Balance NIPA (\$US billions)	162.564	148.023	123.205	110.261	152.529
Trade Balance % of GDP	8.534	7.342	5.926	5.926	12.342
Total Foreign Exchange Reserves (\$US billions)	497.410	537.816	509.692	386.216	272.991

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**Data in US Dollars**

Data in US Dollars					
	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Nominal GDP (\$US billions)	1,904.79	2,016.11	2,079.02	1,860.60	1,235.86
Exports (\$US billions)	576.567	597.056	594.796	532.306	360.368
Imports (\$US billions)	414.004	449.033	471.591	422.045	207.839

## Energy Consumption and Production Standard Units

Energy Consumption and Production Standard Units					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum Consumption (TBDP)	3,422.31	3,445.10	3,493.00	3,195.86	3,149.34
Petroleum Production (TBDP)	10,402.86	10,517.42	10,723.29	10,604.51	10,886.75
Petroleum Net Exports (TBDP)	6,980.55	7,072.32	7,230.29	7,408.65	7,737.41
Natural Gas Consumption (bcf)	15,328.05	15,710.94	15,598.99	14,450.90	14,408.01
Natural Gas Production (bcf)	22,234.90	21,834.81	22,184.81	20,147.91	21,117.05
Natural Gas Net Exports (bcf)	6,906.85	6,123.87	6,585.82	5,697.02	6,709.04
Coal Consumption (1000s st)	245,531.04	274,199.95	252,162.54	233,074.40	231,950.39
Coal Production (1000s st)	348,092.87	367,554.03	367,937.90	389,400.82	385,911.24

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	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Coal Net Exports (1000s st)	102,561.83	93,354.08	115,775.36	156,326.42	153,960.85
Nuclear Production (bil kwh)	162.018	166.293	161.586	169.315	171.820
Hydroelectric Production (bil kwh)	164.186	164.423	177.912	169.016	170.658
Renewables Production (bil kwh)	3.326	3.515	3.417	3.521	3.588

## Energy Consumption and Production QUADS

Energy Consumption and Production QUADS					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum Consumption (Quads)	7.307	7.356	7.458	6.824	6.725
Petroleum Production (Quads)	22.210	22.610	22.971	23.161	18.580
Petroleum Net Exports (Quads)	14.903	15.254	15.512	16.337	11.855
Natural Gas Consumption (Quads)	15.635	16.025	15.911	14.740	14.696
Natural Gas Production (Quads)	22.657	22.199	22.582	20.846	18.436
Natural Gas Net Exports (Quads)	7.023	6.174	6.671	6.106	3.739
Coal Consumption (Quads)	4.911	5.484	5.043	4.661	4.639
Coal Production (Quads)	7.097	7.803	7.736	7.788	6.959
Coal Net Exports (Quads)	2.187	2.319	2.693	3.127	2.320
Nuclear Production (Quads)	1.620	1.663	1.616	1.693	1.718
Hydroelectric Production (Quads)	1.642	1.644	1.779	1.690	1.707
Renewables Production (Quads)	0.0333	0.0352	0.0342	0.0352	0.0359



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## World Energy Price Summary

World Energy Price Summary					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum-WTI (\$/bbl)	95.054	94.159	97.943	93.112	48.709
Natural Gas-Henry Hub (\$/mmbtu)	3.999	2.752	3.729	4.369	2.614
Coal Thermal-Australian (\$/mt)	121.448	96.364	84.562	70.130	57.511

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**CO2 Emissions**

CO2 Emissions					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petroleum Based (mm mt C)	163.257	164.344	166.629	152.454	150.235
Natural Gas Based (mm mt C)	248.684	254.896	253.080	234.453	233.757
Coal Based (mm mt C)	140.714	157.144	144.514	133.575	132.931
Total CO2 Emissions (mm mt C)	552.655	576.384	564.223	520.482	516.923

## Agriculture Consumption and Production

Agriculture Consumption and Production					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Corn Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	6,355.04	6,057.27	9,090.92	8,796.32	7,090
Corn Production (1000 metric tons)	6,949.53	8,187.95	11,587.54	11,505.49	10,723
Corn Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	594.497	2,130.68	2,496.61	2,709.17	3,633
Soybeans Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	2,642.00	2,380.23	2,697.83	3,685.75	2,908
Soybeans Production (1000 metric tons)	1,758.31	1,802.93	1,626.34	2,554.63	2,406
Soybeans Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	-883.6875	-577.3028	-1071.4956	-1131.1245	-501.8

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rice Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	994.367	878.354	859.484	939.437	736.1
Rice Production (1000 metric tons)	1,056.28	1,051.87	934.533	1,048.15	1,004
Rice Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	61.915	173.520	75.049	108.717	268.2
Coffee Total Consumption (metric tons)	98,546.00	109,603.00	125,835.00	140,844.50	116,94
Coffee Production (metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.000
Coffee Net Exports (metric tons)	-98546.0000	-109603.0000	-125835.0000	-140844.4954	-116943
Cocoa Beans Total Consumption (metric tons)	61,316.17	62,876.82	61,967.00	64,737.17	61,679
Cocoa Beans Production (metric tons)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.000
Cocoa Beans Net Exports	-61316.1660	-62876.8194	-61967.0000	-64737.1673	-61679.

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	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
(metric tons)					
Wheat Total Consumption (1000 metric tons)	41,174.18	22,004.29	39,207.78	46,110.28	34,413
Wheat Production (1000 metric tons)	56,115.06	37,919.31	52,009.21	59,908.27	51,998
Wheat Net Exports (1000 metric tons)	14,940.87	15,915.02	12,801.43	13,797.99	17,585

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## World Agriculture Pricing Summary

World Agriculture Pricing Summary					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Corn Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	291.684	298.417	259.389	192.881	169.750
Soybeans Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	540.667	591.417	538.417	491.771	390.417
Rice Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	458.558	525.071	473.989	425.148	386.033
Coffee Pricing Summary (\$/kilogram)	5.976	4.111	3.076	4.424	3.526
Cocoa Beans Pricing Summary (\$/kilogram)	2.980	2.392	2.439	3.062	3.135
Wheat Pricing Summary (\$/metric ton)	316.264	313.242	312.248	284.895	203.177

## Metals Consumption and Production

Metals Consumption and Production					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Copper Consumption (1000 mt)	704,234.75	592,041.26	651,639.58	580,884.07	447,003.
Copper Production (1000 mt)	879,173.75	838,023.06	867,201.73	927,265.92	813,559.
Copper Net Exports (1000 mt)	174,939.00	245,981.80	215,562.15	346,381.85	366,555.
Zinc Consumption (1000 mt)	213,206.91	235,904.39	248,657.58	213,703.35	168,913.
Zinc Production (1000 mt)	253,630.71	257,548.46	228,734.40	222,147.96	211,831.
Zinc Exports (1000 mt)	40,423.80	21,644.07	-19923.1757	8,444.61	42,917.7
Lead Consumption (1000 mt)	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Lead Production (1000 mt)	86,032.01	84,297.59	84,532.28	86,322.90	81,593.0



	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Lead Exports (1000 mt)	86,032.01	84,297.59	84,532.28	86,322.90	81,593.0
Tin Consumption (1000 mt)	2,317.66	2,284.17	1,995.32	1,919.18	1,579.6
Tin Production (1000 mt)	720.406	693.400	546.974	423.028	399.54
Tin Exports (1000 mt)	-1597.2495	-1590.7713	-1448.3434	-1496.1508	-1180.05
Nickel Consumption (1000 mt)	74,086.90	38,880.02	11,891.61	4,825.35	3,448.1
Nickel Production (1000 mt)	264,860.52	252,550.04	246,302.14	238,034.37	219,105.
Nickel Exports (1000 mt)	190,773.62	213,670.02	234,410.54	233,209.03	215,657.
Gold Consumption (kg)	240,352.55	167,933.96	145,722.40	219,233.50	169,375.
Gold Production (kg)	229,917.67	248,549.06	262,597.18	280,995.85	281,193.
Gold Exports (kg)	-10434.8838	80,615.10	116,874.78	61,762.35	111,818.

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	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Silver Consumption (mt)	1,000,399.67	1,113,875.00	1,119,395.00	1,458,719.36	1,062,750
Silver Production (mt)	1,711,337.76	1,852,273.65	1,902,697.74	1,962,601.80	1,845,596
Silver Exports (mt)	710,938.09	738,398.65	783,302.74	503,882.45	782,846.

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**World Metals Pricing Summary**

World Metals Pricing Summary					
	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Copper (\$/mt)	8,828.19	7,962.35	7,332.10	6,863.40	5,510.46
Zinc (\$/mt)	2,193.90	1,950.41	1,910.26	2,160.97	1,931.68
Tin (\$/mt)	26,053.68	21,125.99	22,282.80	21,898.87	16,066.63
Lead (\$/mt)	2,400.81	2,064.64	2,139.79	2,095.46	1,787.82
Nickel (\$/mt)	22,910.36	17,547.55	15,031.80	16,893.38	11,862.64
Gold (\$/oz)	1,569.21	1,669.52	1,411.46	1,265.58	1,160.66
Silver (\$/oz)	35.224	31.137	23.850	19.071	15.721

## Economic Performance Index

### Economic Performance Index

The Economic Performance rankings are calculated by CountryWatch's editorial team, and are based on criteria including sustained economic growth, monetary stability, current account deficits, budget surplus, unemployment and structural imbalances. Scores are assessed from 0 to 100 using this aforementioned criteria as well as CountryWatch's proprietary economic research data and models.

	Bank stability risk	Monetary/ Currency stability	Government Finances	Empl./ Unempl.	Econ.GNP growth or decline/ forecast
	0 - 100	0 - 100	0 - 100	0 - 100	%
<b>North Americas</b>					
Canada	92	69	35	38	3.14%
United States	94	76	4	29	3.01%
<b>Western Europe</b>					
Austria	90	27	30	63	1.33%
Belgium	88	27	19	23	1.15%
Cyprus	81	91	16	80	-0.69%
Denmark	97	70	45	78	1.20%
Finland	89	27	41	33	1.25%

France	87	27	18	27	1.52%
Germany	86	27	22	21	1.25%
Greece	79	27	5	24	-2.00%
Iceland	90	17	2	34	-3.04%
Italy	85	27	37	24	0.84%
Ireland	92	27	11	10	-1.55%
Luxembourg	99	27	28	66	2.08%
Malta	77	27	41	51	0.54%
Netherlands	91	27	26	74	1.30%
Norway	98	44	10	76	1.08%
Portugal	77	27	13	20	0.29%
Spain	83	27	9	3	-0.41%
Sweden	94	72	54	32	1.23%
Switzerland	97	86	55	77	1.53%
United Kingdom	85	12	9	37	1.34%
<b>Central and Eastern Europe</b>					
Albania	44	60	33	6	2.30%
Armenia	45	59	49	30	1.80%

Azerbaijan	56	4	84	99	2.68%
Belarus	59	21	83	98	2.41%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	34	68	69	N/A	0.50%
Bulgaria	58	75	88	49	0.20%
Croatia	69	68	94	9	0.18%
Czech Republic	80	89	29	70	1.67%
Estonia	72	90	66	92	0.80%
Georgia	36	60	53	56	2.00%
Hungary	70	66	26	54	-0.16%
Latvia	67	100	65	44	-3.97%
Lithuania	65	91	87	79	-1.65%
Macedonia (FYR)	53	69	56	2	2.03%
Moldova	23	36	81	67	2.50%
Poland	74	74	38	12	2.72%
Romania	62	56	70	62	0.75%
Russia	73	18	90	8	4.00%
Serbia	48	49	52	5	1.97%

Montenegro	39	27	73	1	-1.70%
Slovak Republic	80	62	30	14	4.06%
Slovenia	81	27	36	65	1.12%
Ukraine	41	11	57	N/A	3.68%
Africa					
Algeria	57	18	96	7	4.55%
Angola	49	1	97	N/A	7.05%
Benin	19	91	20	N/A	3.22%
Botswana	68	58	76	N/A	6.33%
Burkina Faso	16	91	13	N/A	4.41%
Burundi	2	91	6	N/A	3.85%
Cameroon	26	91	91	N/A	2.58%
Cape Verde	52	87	4	N/A	4.96%
Central African Republic	9	91	32	N/A	3.18%
Chad	22	91	89	N/A	4.42%
Congo	52	87	87	N/A	12.13%
Côte d'Ivoire	25	91	82	28	2.98%
Dem. Republic					



Congo	4	91	47	N/A	5.44%
Djibouti	31	76	50	N/A	4.47%
Egypt	37	20	24	69	5.01%
Equatorial Guinea	82	91	85	N/A	0.94%
Eritrea	1	3	1	18	1.81%
Ethiopia	6	45	8	N/A	6.96%
Gabon	64	91	96	N/A	5.36%
Gambia	8	48	86	N/A	4.82%
Ghana	9	11	69	N/A	4.50%
Guinea	10	7	91	N/A	3.03%
Guinea-Bissau	5	91	46	N/A	3.47%
Kenya	20	41	59	N/A	4.11%
Lesotho	13	40	12	N/A	2.98%
Liberia	12	73	74	N/A	5.92%
Libya	73	2	94	N/A	5.22%
Madagascar	4	22	24	N/A	-1.02%
Malawi	7	25	55	N/A	5.96%
Mali	20	91	82	N/A	5.12%

Mauritania	15	13	93	N/A	4.58%
Mauritius	65	52	56	55	4.10%
Morocco	37	72	48	26	3.23%
Mozambique	12	23	71	N/A	6.45%
Namibia	40	39	62	N/A	1.70%
Niger	10	91	21	N/A	4.41%
Nigeria	30	6	61	N/A	6.98%
Rwanda	21	40	68	N/A	5.39%
Sao Tome & Principe	1	61	100	N/A	3.40%
Senegal	24	91	63	N/A	3.44%
Seychelles	60	67	97	N/A	4.01%
Sierra Leone	5	10	39	N/A	4.77%
Somalia	2	38	59	N/A	3.19%
South Africa	61	37	70	N/A	2.59%
Sudan	16	5	73	N/A	5.52%
Swaziland	32	44	79	N/A	1.09%
Tanzania	15	45	32	N/A	6.17%
Togo	8	91	92	N/A	2.56%

Tunisia	50	61	44	39	4.00%
Uganda	11	17	54	N/A	5.59%
Zambia	29	20	49	N/A	5.84%
Zimbabwe	0	8	16	N/A	2.24%
<b>South and Central America</b>					
Argentina	66	3	80	36	3.50%
Belize	47	76	80	N/A	1.00%
Bolivia	32	51	61	81	3.99%
Brazil	71	47	78	11	5.50%
Chile	78	25	92	73	4.72%
Columbia	47	52	34	47	2.25%
Costa Rica	60	42	39	57	3.45%
Ecuador	43	76	75	64	2.51%
El Salvador	35	76	67	N/A	1.04%
Guatemala	46	59	58	N/A	2.52%
Honduras	27	47	58	N/A	2.00%
Mexico	69	42	52	61	4.07%
Nicaragua	23	49	42	N/A	1.75%

Panama	66	76	72	45	5.00%
Paraguay	35	46	66	16	5.27%
Peru	59	66	75	22	6.33%
Suriname	58	26	81	59	4.02%
Uruguay	70	26	27	N/A	5.71%
Venezuela	55	1	28	13	-2.63%
<b>Caribbean</b>					
Antigua & Barbuda	72	76	15	N/A	-2.01%
Bahamas	74	76	45	87	-0.50%
Barbados	67	76	33	15	-0.50%
Bermuda	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cuba	45	76	18	95	0.25%
Dominica	53	76	65	N/A	1.40%
Dominican Republic	54	39	43	4	3.50%
Grenada	63	76	48	N/A	0.80%
Guyana	28	56	17	N/A	4.36%
Haiti	11	27	89	N/A	-8.50%
Jamaica	42	9	85	19	-0.28%

St Lucia	55	76	67	N/A	1.14%
St Vincent & Grenadines	49	76	95	N/A	0.50%
Trinidad & Tobago	82	37	77	72	2.13%
<b>Middle East</b>					
Bahrain	84	76	62	91	3.48%
Iran	51	19	40	58	3.01%
Iraq	48	9	8	N/A	7.27%
Israel	87	62	12	48	3.20%
Jordan	41	51	3	N/A	4.10%
Kuwait	96	4	99	N/A	3.10%
Lebanon	63	54	2	N/A	6.00%
Oman	76	16	88	N/A	4.71%
Qatar	99	16	83	N/A	18.54%
Saudi Arabia	76	8	98	N/A	3.70%
Syria	61	24	40	N/A	5.00%
Turkey	75	23	27	60	5.20%
United Arab Emirates	96	24	98	94	1.29%

Yemen	28	2	78	N/A	7.78%
<b>Asia</b>					
Afghanistan	17	70	74	N/A	8.64%
Bangladesh	13	43	25	N/A	5.38%
Bhutan	24	55	5	N/A	6.85%
Brunei	78	19	99	75	0.48%
Cambodia	18	67	42	N/A	4.77%
China	54	90	19	68	11.03%
Hong Kong	89	76	14	82	5.02%
India	31	38	34	35	8.78%
Indonesia	42	46	37	31	6.00%
Japan	88	89	6	71	1.90%
Kazakhstan	62	13	76	42	2.40%
Korea North	18	65	23	N/A	1.50%
Korea South	83	63	22	85	4.44%
Kyrgyz Republic	24	15	84	88	4.61%
Laos	17	54	7	N/A	7.22%
Macao	91	76	14	82	3.00%

Malaysia	68	65	44	90	4.72%
Maldives	44	55	17	N/A	3.45%
Mongolia	33	5	77	93	7.22%
Myanmar	3	41	72	N/A	5.26%
Nepal	3	14	25	N/A	2.97%
Pakistan	19	15	31	41	3.00%
Papua New Guinea	75	50	11	N/A	7.96%
Philippines	30	48	53	43	3.63%
Singapore	93	75	63	40	5.68%
Sri Lanka	38	22	10	N/A	5.50%
Taiwan	84	88	35	89	6.50%
Tajikistan	6	6	60	97	4.00%
Thailand	56	64	90	96	5.46%
Turkmenistan	51	53	68	N/A	12.00%
Uzbekistan	40	10	60	100	8.00%
Vietnam	25	12	20	N/A	6.04%
<b>Pacific</b>					
Australia	96	63	31	46	2.96%



Fiji	46	53	3	N/A	2.06%
Marshall Islands	27	76	46	N/A	1.08%
Micronesia (Fed. States)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Caledonia	96	73	51	52	2.00%
New Zealand	98	73	51	52	2.00%
Samoa	34	88	64	N/A	-2.77%
Solomon Islands	14	71	1	N/A	3.36%
Tonga	26	57	38	N/A	0.60%
Vanuatu	33	58	47	N/A	3.80%

Source:

CountryWatch Inc. [www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com)

Updated:

This material was produced in 2010; it is subject to updating in 2012.

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# Chapter 4

## Investment Overview

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## Foreign Investment Climate

### Background

In the first year of his term, President MEDVEDEV outlined a number of economic priorities for Russia including improving infrastructure, innovation, investment, and institutions; reducing the state's role in the economy; reforming the tax system and banking sector; developing one of the biggest financial centers in the world, combating corruption, and improving the judiciary. The Russian government needs to diversify the economy further, as energy and other raw materials still dominate Russian export earnings and federal budget receipts. Russia's infrastructure requires large investments and must be replaced or modernized if the country is to achieve broad-based economic growth.

Corruption, lack of trust in institutions, and more recently, exchange rate uncertainty and the global economic crisis continue to dampen domestic and foreign investor sentiment. Russia has made some progress in building the rule of law, the bedrock of a modern market economy, but much work remains on judicial reform. Moscow continues to seek accession to the WTO and has made some progress, but its timeline for entry into the organization continues to slip, and the negotiating atmosphere has soured in the wake of the Georgia and global economic crises.

### Foreign Investment Assessment

In recent years, the Russian government has emphasized foreign direct investment, particularly through structural reforms. High tax levels and high costs of compliance with the Russian tax regime, inconsistent government regulation, the inability to obtain redress through the legal system in several cases, as well as crime and corruption, together function to discourage potential investors. That said, the 1991 Investment Code guaranteed foreign investors rights equal to those enjoyed by Russian investors while national treatment of investors was confirmed by the 1999 Law on Foreign Investment. However, the 1999 law included a clause that protects certain large investments from unfavorable changes in tax or other legislation for a selected periods. In addition, there are restrictions on foreign investment in specific sectors, such as aerospace. Potential investors should be encouraged by structural reform and privatization; however, economic restructuring could be hindered by political pressures and continuing deficiencies in the regulatory

system.

## **Agriculture and Industry**

Agriculture - products: grain, sugar beets, sunflower seed, vegetables, fruits; beef, milk

Industries: complete range of mining and extractive industries producing coal, oil, gas, chemicals, and metals; all forms of machine building from rolling mills to high-performance aircraft and space vehicles; shipbuilding; road and rail transportation equipment; communications equipment; agricultural machinery, tractors, and construction equipment; electric power generating and transmitting equipment; medical and scientific instruments; consumer durables, textiles, foodstuffs, handicrafts

## **Import Commodities and Import Partners**

Imports - commodities: machinery and equipment, consumer goods, medicines, meat, sugar, semi finished metal products Imports - partners: Germany 14%, Belarus 8.6%, Ukraine 7.7%, China 5.8%, US 5.2%, Kazakhstan 4.7%, Italy 4.2%, France 4.1%

## **Export Commodities and Export Partners**

Exports - commodities: petroleum and petroleum products, natural gas, wood and wood products, metals, chemicals, and a wide variety of civilian and military manufactures

Exports - partners: Germany 7.8%, Netherlands 6.5%, Italy 6.3%, China 6.2%, Belarus 5.7%, Ukraine 5.7%, US 4.6%, Switzerland 4.4%

## **Railways, Airports, Ports and Harbors**

Railways: total: 87,157 km

Airports: 2,609

Ports and harbors: Aleksandrovsk-Sakhalinskiy, Arkhangel'sk, Astrakhan', De-Kastri, Indigirskiy, Kaliningrad, Kandalaksha, Kazan', Khabarovsk, Kholm'sk, Krasnoyarsk, Lazarev, Mago, Mezen', Moscow, Murmansk, Nakhodka, Nevel'sk, Novorossiysk, Onega, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Rostov, Shakhtersk, Saint Petersburg, Sochi, Taganrog, Tuapse, Uglegorsk, Vanino, Vladivostok, Volgograd, Vostochnyy, Vyborg

## **Telephone System**

general assessment: the telephone system underwent significant changes in the 1990s; there are more than 1,000 companies licensed to offer communication services; access to digital lines has improved, particularly in urban centers; Internet and e-mail services are improving; Russia has made progress toward building the telecommunications infrastructure necessary for a market economy; however, a large demand for main line service remains unsatisfied

domestic: cross-country digital trunk lines run from Saint Petersburg to Khabarovsk, and from Moscow to Novorossiysk; the telephone systems in 60 regional capitals have modern digital infrastructures; cellular services, both analog and digital, are available in many areas; in rural areas, the telephone services are still outdated, inadequate, and low density

international: country code - 7; Russia is connected internationally by three undersea fiber-optic cables; digital switches in several cities provide more than 50,000 lines for international calls; satellite earth stations provide access to Intelsat, Intersputnik, Eutelsat, Inmarsat, and Orbita systems

### **Internet Users**

Internet hosts: 560,874 in recent years

Internet users: 6 million in recent years; on the increase

### **Labor Force**

Labor force: 71.68 million

Labor force - by occupation: agriculture 12.3%, industry 22.7%, services 65%

### **Legal System and Considerations**

The legal system is based on civil law system; there is judicial review of legislative acts. Russia has a corpus of contradictory, complex and ever-changing laws, decrees and regulations. Courts are also subject to political pressure and judges are sometimes unfamiliar with market considerations. Together, these factors have contributed to a rather unpredictable business environment. Foreign investors who are wary of this legal landscape may seek independent dispute resolution through arbitration, such as the Arbitration Court of the Russian Federation.

### **Corruption Perception Ranking**

See listing in this Country Review for Russia's ranking, as reported by Transparency International,

from least to most corrupt (scale of 1 - 163).

### Cultural Considerations

Western norms, such as punctuality, dominate Russian culture. Visitors should be aware of the strong sense of Russian identity shared by locals.

### Country Website (s)

N/A

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### Foreign Investment Index

#### Foreign Investment Index

**The Foreign Investment Index** is a proprietary index measuring attractiveness to international investment flows. The Foreign Investment Index is calculated using an established methodology by CountryWatch's Editor-in-Chief and is based on a given country's economic stability (sustained economic growth, monetary stability, current account deficits, budget surplus), economic risk (risk of non-servicing of payments for goods or services, loans and trade-related finance, risk of sovereign default), business and investment climate (property rights, labor force and laws, regulatory transparency, openness to foreign investment, market conditions, and stability of government). Scores are assigned from 0-10 using the aforementioned criteria. A score of 0 marks the lowest level of foreign investment viability, while a score of 10 marks the highest level of foreign investment viability, according to this proprietary index.

Country	Assessment
Afghanistan	2
Albania	4.5

Algeria	6
Andorra	9
Angola	4.5-5
Antigua	8.5
Argentina	5
Armenia	5
Australia	9.5
Austria	9-9.5
Azerbaijan	5
Bahamas	9
Bahrain	7.5
Bangladesh	4.5
Barbados	9
Belarus	4
Belgium	9
Belize	7.5
Benin	5.5
Bhutan	4.5



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Bolivia	4.5
Bosnia-Herzegovina	5
Botswana	7.5-8
Brazil	8
Brunei	7
Bulgaria	5.5
Burkina Faso	4
Burma (Myanmar)	4.5
Burundi	4
Cambodia	4.5
Cameroon	5
Canada	9.5
Cape Verde	6
Central African Republic	3
Chad	4
Chile	9
China	7.5
China: Hong Kong	8.5

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China: Taiwan	8.5
Colombia	7
Comoros	4
Congo DRC	4
Congo RC	5
Costa Rica	8
Cote d'Ivoire	4.5
Croatia	7
Cuba	4.5
Cyprus	7
Czech Republic	8.5
Denmark	9.5
Djibouti	4.5
Dominica	6
Dominican Republic	6.5
East Timor	4.5
Ecuador	5.5
Egypt	4.5-5

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El Salvador	6
Equatorial Guinea	4.5
Eritrea	3.5
Estonia	8
Ethiopia	4.5
Fiji	5
Finland	9
Former Yugoslav Rep. of Macedonia	5
France	9-9.5
Gabon	5.5
Gambia	5
Georgia	5
Germany	9-9.5
Ghana	5.5
Greece	5
Grenada	7.5
Guatemala	5.5
Guinea	3.5

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Guinea-Bissau	3.5
Guyana	4.5
Haiti	4
Holy See (Vatican)	n/a
Hong Kong (China)	8.5
Honduras	5.5
Hungary	8
Iceland	8-8.5
India	8
Indonesia	5.5
Iran	4
Iraq	3
Ireland	8
Israel	8.5
Italy	8
Jamaica	5.5
Japan	9.5
Jordan	6

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Kazakhstan	6
Kenya	5
Kiribati	5.5
Korea, North	1
Korea, South	9
Kosovo	4.5
Kuwait	8.5
Kyrgyzstan	4.5
Laos	4
Latvia	7
Lebanon	5
Lesotho	5.5
Liberia	3.5
Libya	3
Liechtenstein	9
Lithuania	7.5
Luxembourg	9-9.5
Madagascar	4.5

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Malawi	4.5
Malaysia	8.5
Maldives	6.5
Mali	5
Malta	9
Marshall Islands	5
Mauritania	4.5
Mauritius	7.5-8
Mexico	6.5-7
Micronesia	5
Moldova	4.5-5
Monaco	9
Mongolia	5
Montenegro	5.5
Morocco	7.5
Mozambique	5
Namibia	7.5
Nauru	4.5

Nepal	4
Netherlands	9-9.5
New Zealand	9.5
Nicaragua	5
Niger	4.5
Nigeria	4.5
Norway	9-9.5
Oman	8
Pakistan	4
Palau	4.5-5
Panama	7
Papua New Guinea	5
Paraguay	6
Peru	6
Philippines	6
Poland	8
Portugal	7.5-8
Qatar	9



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Romania	6-6.5
Russia	6
Rwanda	4
Saint Kitts and Nevis	8
Saint Lucia	8
Saint Vincent and Grenadines	7
Samoa	7
San Marino	8.5
Sao Tome and Principe	4.5-5
Saudi Arabia	7
Senegal	6
Serbia	6
Seychelles	5
Sierra Leone	4
Singapore	9.5
Slovak Republic (Slovakia)	8.5
Slovenia	8.5-9
Solomon Islands	5

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Somalia	2
South Africa	8
Spain	7.5-8
Sri Lanka	5.5
Sudan	4
Suriname	5
Swaziland	4.5
Sweden	9.5
Switzerland	9.5
Syria	2.5
Tajikistan	4
Taiwan (China)	8.5
Tanzania	5
Thailand	7.5-8
Togo	4.5-5
Tonga	5.5-6
Trinidad and Tobago	8-8.5
Tunisia	6

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Turkey	6.5-7
Turkmenistan	4
Tuvalu	7
Uganda	5
Ukraine	4.5-5
United Arab Emirates	8.5
United Kingdom	9
United States	9
Uruguay	6.5-7
Uzbekistan	4
Vanuatu	6
Venezuela	5
Vietnam	5.5
Yemen	3
Zambia	4.5-5
Zimbabwe	3.5

Editor's Note:

As of 2015, the global economic crisis (emerging in 2008) had affected many countries across the

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world, resulting in changes to their rankings. Among those countries affected were top tier economies, such as the [United Kingdom](#), [Iceland](#), [Switzerland](#) and [Austria](#). However, in all these cases, their rankings have moved back upward in the last couple of years as anxieties have eased. Other top tier countries, such as [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Ireland](#), and [Italy](#), suffered some effects due to debt woes and the concomitant effect on the euro zone. Greece, another euro zone nation, was also downgraded due to its sovereign debt crisis; however, Greece's position on the precipice of default incurred a sharper downgrade than the other four euro zone countries mentioned above. Cyprus' exposure to Greek bank yielded a downgrade in its case. Slovenia and [Latvia](#) have been slightly downgraded due to a mix of economic and political concerns but could easily be upgraded in a future assessment, should these concerns abate. Meanwhile, the crisis in eastern [Ukraine](#) fueled downgrades in that country and neighboring [Russia](#).

Despite the "trifecta of tragedy" in [Japan](#) in 2011 -- the earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the resulting nuclear crisis -- and the appreciable destabilization of the economic and political terrain therein, this country has only slightly been downgraded. Japan's challenges have been assessed to be transient, the government remains accountable, and there is little risk of default. Both [India](#) and China retain their rankings; [India](#) holds a slightly higher ranking than [China](#) due to its record of democratic representation and accountability.

There were shifts in opposite directions for [Mali](#) and [Nigeria](#) versus the [Central African Republic](#), [Burkina Faso](#), and [Burundi](#). [Mali](#) was slightly upgraded due to its efforts to return to constitutional order following the 2012 coup and to neutralize the threat of separatists and Islamists. Likewise, a new government in [Nigeria](#) generated a slight upgrade as the country attempts to confront corruption, crime, and terrorism. But the [Central African Republic](#) was downgraded due to the takeover of the government by Seleka rebels and the continued decline into lawlessness in that country. Likewise, the attempts by the leaders of [Burundi](#) and [Burkina Faso](#) to hold onto power by by-passing the constitution raised eyebrows and resulted in downgrades.

Political unrest in [Libya](#) and [Algeria](#) have contributed to a decision to marginally downgrade these countries as well. [Syria](#) incurred a sharper downgrade due to the devolution into de facto civil war and the dire security threat posed by Islamist terrorists. [Iraq](#) saw a similar downgrade as a result of the takeover of wide swaths of territory and the threat of genocide at the hands of Islamist terrorists. [Yemen](#), likewise, has been downgraded due to political instability at the hands of secessionists, terrorists, Houthi rebels, and the intervention of external parties. Conversely, [Egypt](#) and [Tunisia](#) saw slight upgrades as their political environments stabilize.

At the low end of the spectrum, devolving security conditions and/or economic crisis have resulted in countries like [Pakistan](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Somalia](#), and [Zimbabwe](#) maintaining their low ratings.

The [United States](#) continues to retain its previous slight downgrade due to the enduring threat of default surrounding the debt ceiling in that country, matched by a conflict-ridden political climate.

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In the case of [Mexico](#), there is limited concern about default, but increasing alarm over the security situation in that country and the government's ability to contain it. In [Argentina](#), a default to bond holders resulted in a downgrade to that country. Finally, a small but significant upgrade was attributed to [Cuba](#) due to its recent pro-business reforms and its normalization of ties with the United States.

Source:

CountryWatch Inc. [www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com)

Updated:

2015

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## Corruption Perceptions Index

### Corruption Perceptions Index

#### Transparency International: [Corruption Perceptions Index](#)

Editor's Note:

Transparency International's [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) is a composite index which ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials. This index indicates the views of national and international business people and analysts about the levels of corruption in each country. The highest (and best) level of transparency is indicated by the number, 10. The lower (and worse) levels of transparency are indicated by lower numbers.

Rank	Country/Territory	CPI 2009 Score	Surveys Used	Confidence Range
1	New Zealand	9.4	6	9.1 - 9.5
2	Denmark	9.3	6	9.1 - 9.5
3	Singapore	9.2	9	9.0 - 9.4

3	Sweden	9.2	6	9.0 - 9.3
5	Switzerland	9.0	6	8.9 - 9.1
6	Finland	8.9	6	8.4 - 9.4
6	Netherlands	8.9	6	8.7 - 9.0
8	Australia	8.7	8	8.3 - 9.0
8	Canada	8.7	6	8.5 - 9.0
8	Iceland	8.7	4	7.5 - 9.4
11	Norway	8.6	6	8.2 - 9.1
12	Hong Kong	8.2	8	7.9 - 8.5
12	Luxembourg	8.2	6	7.6 - 8.8
14	Germany	8.0	6	7.7 - 8.3
14	Ireland	8.0	6	7.8 - 8.4
16	Austria	7.9	6	7.4 - 8.3
17	Japan	7.7	8	7.4 - 8.0
17	United Kingdom	7.7	6	7.3 - 8.2
19	United States	7.5	8	6.9 - 8.0
20	Barbados	7.4	4	6.6 - 8.2
21	Belgium	7.1	6	6.9 - 7.3

22	Qatar	7.0	6	5.8 - 8.1
22	Saint Lucia	7.0	3	6.7 - 7.5
24	France	6.9	6	6.5 - 7.3
25	Chile	6.7	7	6.5 - 6.9
25	Uruguay	6.7	5	6.4 - 7.1
27	Cyprus	6.6	4	6.1 - 7.1
27	Estonia	6.6	8	6.1 - 6.9
27	Slovenia	6.6	8	6.3 - 6.9
30	United Arab Emirates	6.5	5	5.5 - 7.5
31	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	6.4	3	4.9 - 7.5
32	Israel	6.1	6	5.4 - 6.7
32	Spain	6.1	6	5.5 - 6.6
34	Dominica	5.9	3	4.9 - 6.7
35	Portugal	5.8	6	5.5 - 6.2
35	Puerto Rico	5.8	4	5.2 - 6.3
37	Botswana	5.6	6	5.1 - 6.3
37	Taiwan	5.6	9	5.4 - 5.9



39	Brunei Darussalam	5.5	4	4.7 - 6.4
39	Oman	5.5	5	4.4 - 6.5
39	Korea (South)	5.5	9	5.3 - 5.7
42	Mauritius	5.4	6	5.0 - 5.9
43	Costa Rica	5.3	5	4.7 - 5.9
43	Macau	5.3	3	3.3 - 6.9
45	Malta	5.2	4	4.0 - 6.2
46	Bahrain	5.1	5	4.2 - 5.8
46	Cape Verde	5.1	3	3.3 - 7.0
46	Hungary	5.1	8	4.6 - 5.7
49	Bhutan	5.0	4	4.3 - 5.6
49	Jordan	5.0	7	3.9 - 6.1
49	Poland	5.0	8	4.5 - 5.5
52	Czech Republic	4.9	8	4.3 - 5.6
52	Lithuania	4.9	8	4.4 - 5.4
54	Seychelles	4.8	3	3.0 - 6.7
55	South Africa	4.7	8	4.3 - 4.9
56	Latvia	4.5	6	4.1 - 4.9

56	Malaysia	4.5	9	4.0 - 5.1
56	Namibia	4.5	6	3.9 - 5.1
56	Samoa	4.5	3	3.3 - 5.3
56	Slovakia	4.5	8	4.1 - 4.9
61	Cuba	4.4	3	3.5 - 5.1
61	Turkey	4.4	7	3.9 - 4.9
63	Italy	4.3	6	3.8 - 4.9
63	Saudi Arabia	4.3	5	3.1 - 5.3
65	Tunisia	4.2	6	3.0 - 5.5
66	Croatia	4.1	8	3.7 - 4.5
66	Georgia	4.1	7	3.4 - 4.7
66	Kuwait	4.1	5	3.2 - 5.1
69	Ghana	3.9	7	3.2 - 4.6
69	Montenegro	3.9	5	3.5 - 4.4
71	Bulgaria	3.8	8	3.2 - 4.5
71	FYR Macedonia	3.8	6	3.4 - 4.2
71	Greece	3.8	6	3.2 - 4.3
71	Romania	3.8	8	3.2 - 4.3

75	Brazil	3.7	7	3.3 - 4.3
75	Colombia	3.7	7	3.1 - 4.3
75	Peru	3.7	7	3.4 - 4.1
75	Suriname	3.7	3	3.0 - 4.7
79	Burkina Faso	3.6	7	2.8 - 4.4
79	China	3.6	9	3.0 - 4.2
79	Swaziland	3.6	3	3.0 - 4.7
79	Trinidad and Tobago	3.6	4	3.0 - 4.3
83	Serbia	3.5	6	3.3 - 3.9
84	El Salvador	3.4	5	3.0 - 3.8
84	Guatemala	3.4	5	3.0 - 3.9
84	India	3.4	10	3.2 - 3.6
84	Panama	3.4	5	3.1 - 3.7
84	Thailand	3.4	9	3.0 - 3.8
89	Lesotho	3.3	6	2.8 - 3.8
89	Malawi	3.3	7	2.7 - 3.9
89	Mexico	3.3	7	3.2 - 3.5
89	Moldova	3.3	6	2.7 - 4.0

89	Morocco	3.3	6	2.8 - 3.9
89	Rwanda	3.3	4	2.9 - 3.7
95	Albania	3.2	6	3.0 - 3.3
95	Vanuatu	3.2	3	2.3 - 4.7
97	Liberia	3.1	3	1.9 - 3.8
97	Sri Lanka	3.1	7	2.8 - 3.4
99	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.0	7	2.6 - 3.4
99	Dominican Republic	3.0	5	2.9 - 3.2
99	Jamaica	3.0	5	2.8 - 3.3
99	Madagascar	3.0	7	2.8 - 3.2
99	Senegal	3.0	7	2.5 - 3.6
99	Tonga	3.0	3	2.6 - 3.3
99	Zambia	3.0	7	2.8 - 3.2
106	Argentina	2.9	7	2.6 - 3.1
106	Benin	2.9	6	2.3 - 3.4
106	Gabon	2.9	3	2.6 - 3.1
106	Gambia	2.9	5	1.6 - 4.0
106	Niger	2.9	5	2.7 - 3.0

111	Algeria	2.8	6	2.5 - 3.1
111	Djibouti	2.8	4	2.3 - 3.2
111	Egypt	2.8	6	2.6 - 3.1
111	Indonesia	2.8	9	2.4 - 3.2
111	Kiribati	2.8	3	2.3 - 3.3
111	Mali	2.8	6	2.4 - 3.2
111	Sao Tome and Principe	2.8	3	2.4 - 3.3
111	Solomon Islands	2.8	3	2.3 - 3.3
111	Togo	2.8	5	1.9 - 3.9
120	Armenia	2.7	7	2.6 - 2.8
120	Bolivia	2.7	6	2.4 - 3.1
120	Ethiopia	2.7	7	2.4 - 2.9
120	Kazakhstan	2.7	7	2.1 - 3.3
120	Mongolia	2.7	7	2.4 - 3.0
120	Vietnam	2.7	9	2.4 - 3.1
126	Eritrea	2.6	4	1.6 - 3.8
126	Guyana	2.6	4	2.5 - 2.7
126	Syria	2.6	5	2.2 - 2.9

126	Tanzania	2.6	7	2.4 - 2.9
130	Honduras	2.5	6	2.2 - 2.8
130	Lebanon	2.5	3	1.9 - 3.1
130	Libya	2.5	6	2.2 - 2.8
130	Maldives	2.5	4	1.8 - 3.2
130	Mauritania	2.5	7	2.0 - 3.3
130	Mozambique	2.5	7	2.3 - 2.8
130	Nicaragua	2.5	6	2.3 - 2.7
130	Nigeria	2.5	7	2.2 - 2.7
130	Uganda	2.5	7	2.1 - 2.8
139	Bangladesh	2.4	7	2.0 - 2.8
139	Belarus	2.4	4	2.0 - 2.8
139	Pakistan	2.4	7	2.1 - 2.7
139	Philippines	2.4	9	2.1 - 2.7
143	Azerbaijan	2.3	7	2.0 - 2.6
143	Comoros	2.3	3	1.6 - 3.3
143	Nepal	2.3	6	2.0 - 2.6
146	Cameroon	2.2	7	1.9 - 2.6

146	Ecuador	2.2	5	2.0 - 2.5
146	Kenya	2.2	7	1.9 - 2.5
146	Russia	2.2	8	1.9 - 2.4
146	Sierra Leone	2.2	5	1.9 - 2.4
146	Timor-Leste	2.2	5	1.8 - 2.6
146	Ukraine	2.2	8	2.0 - 2.6
146	Zimbabwe	2.2	7	1.7 - 2.8
154	Côte d'Ivoire	2.1	7	1.8 - 2.4
154	Papua New Guinea	2.1	5	1.7 - 2.5
154	Paraguay	2.1	5	1.7 - 2.5
154	Yemen	2.1	4	1.6 - 2.5
158	Cambodia	2.0	8	1.8 - 2.2
158	Central African Republic	2.0	4	1.9 - 2.2
158	Laos	2.0	4	1.6 - 2.6
158	Tajikistan	2.0	8	1.6 - 2.5
162	Angola	1.9	5	1.8 - 1.9
162	Congo Brazzaville	1.9	5	1.6 - 2.1
162	Democratic Republic of Congo	1.9	5	1.7 - 2.1



162	Guinea-Bissau	1.9	3	1.8 - 2.0
162	Kyrgyzstan	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.1
162	Venezuela	1.9	7	1.8 - 2.0
168	Burundi	1.8	6	1.6 - 2.0
168	Equatorial Guinea	1.8	3	1.6 - 1.9
168	Guinea	1.8	5	1.7 - 1.8
168	Haiti	1.8	3	1.4 - 2.3
168	Iran	1.8	3	1.7 - 1.9
168	Turkmenistan	1.8	4	1.7 - 1.9
174	Uzbekistan	1.7	6	1.5 - 1.8
175	Chad	1.6	6	1.5 - 1.7
176	Iraq	1.5	3	1.2 - 1.8
176	Sudan	1.5	5	1.4 - 1.7
178	Myanmar	1.4	3	0.9 - 1.8
179	Afghanistan	1.3	4	1.0 - 1.5
180	Somalia	1.1	3	0.9 - 1.4

Methodology:

As noted above, the highest (and best) level of transparency with the least perceived corruption is indicated by the number, 10. The lower (and worse) levels of transparency are indicated by lower numbers.

According to Transparency International, the [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) (CPI) table shows a country's ranking and score, the number of surveys used to determine the score, and the confidence range of the scoring.

The rank shows how one country compares to others included in the index. The CPI score indicates the perceived level of public-sector corruption in a country/territory.

The CPI is based on 13 independent surveys. However, not all surveys include all countries. The surveys used column indicates how many surveys were relied upon to determine the score for that country.

The confidence range indicates the reliability of the CPI scores and tells us that allowing for a margin of error, we can be 90% confident that the true score for this country lies within this range.

Note:

Kosovo, which separated from the Yugoslav successor state of [Serbia](#), is not listed above. No calculation is available for [Kosovo](#) at this time, however, a future corruption index by Transparency International may include the world's newest country in its tally. Taiwan has been listed above despite its contested status; while Taiwan claims sovereign status, [China](#) claims ultimate jurisdiction over Taiwan. Hong Kong, which is also under the rubric of Chinese sovereignty, is listed above. Note as well that Puerto Rico, which is a [United States](#) domain, is also included in the list above. These inclusions likely have to do with the size and fairly autonomous status of their economies.

Source:

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index; available at URL: <http://www.transparency.org>

Updated:

Uploaded in 2011 using most recent ranking available; reviewed in 2015.

## Competitiveness Ranking

### Competitiveness Ranking

#### Editor's Note:

The Global Competitiveness Report's competitiveness ranking is based on the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), which was developed for the World Economic Forum. The GCI is based on a number of competitiveness considerations, and provides a comprehensive picture of the competitiveness landscape in countries around the world. The competitiveness considerations are: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business sophistication, and innovation. The rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and the Executive Opinion Survey.

Country/Economy	GCI 2010 Rank	GCI 2010 Score	GCI 2009 Rank	Change 2009-2010
Switzerland	1	5.63	1	0
Sweden	2	5.56	4	2
Singapore	3	5.48	3	0
United States	4	5.43	2	-2
Germany	5	5.39	7	2
Japan	6	5.37	8	2
Finland	7	5.37	6	-1
Netherlands	8	5.33	10	2
Denmark	9	5.32	5	-4
Canada	10	5.30	9	-1

Hong Kong SAR	11	5.30	11	0
United Kingdom	12	5.25	13	1
Taiwan, China	13	5.21	12	-1
Norway	14	5.14	14	0
France	15	5.13	16	1
Australia	16	5.11	15	-1
Qatar	17	5.10	22	5
Austria	18	5.09	17	-1
Belgium	19	5.07	18	-1
Luxembourg	20	5.05	21	1
Saudi Arabia	21	4.95	28	7
Korea, Rep.	22	4.93	19	-3
New Zealand	23	4.92	20	-3
Israel	24	4.91	27	3
United Arab Emirates	25	4.89	23	-2
Malaysia	26	4.88	24	-2
China	27	4.84	29	2
Brunei Darussalam	28	4.75	32	4

Ireland	29	4.74	25	-4
Chile	30	4.69	30	0
Iceland	31	4.68	26	-5
Tunisia	32	4.65	40	8
Estonia	33	4.61	35	2
Oman	34	4.61	41	7
Kuwait	35	4.59	39	4
Czech Republic	36	4.57	31	-5
Bahrain	37	4.54	38	1
Thailand	38	4.51	36	-2
Poland	39	4.51	46	7
Cyprus	40	4.50	34	-6
Puerto Rico	41	4.49	42	1
Spain	42	4.49	33	-9
Barbados	43	4.45	44	1
Indonesia	44	4.43	54	10
Slovenia	45	4.42	37	-8
Portugal	46	4.38	43	-3

Lithuania	47	4.38	53	6
Italy	48	4.37	48	0
Montenegro	49	4.36	62	13
Malta	50	4.34	52	2
India	51	4.33	49	-2
Hungary	52	4.33	58	6
Panama	53	4.33	59	6
South Africa	54	4.32	45	-9
Mauritius	55	4.32	57	2
Costa Rica	56	4.31	55	-1
Azerbaijan	57	4.29	51	-6
Brazil	58	4.28	56	-2
Vietnam	59	4.27	75	16
Slovak Republic	60	4.25	47	-13
Turkey	61	4.25	61	0
Sri Lanka	62	4.25	79	17
Russian Federation	63	4.24	63	0
Uruguay	64	4.23	65	1

Jordan	65	4.21	50	-15
Mexico	66	4.19	60	-6
Romania	67	4.16	64	-3
Colombia	68	4.14	69	1
Iran	69	4.14	n/a	n/a
Latvia	70	4.14	68	-2
Bulgaria	71	4.13	76	5
Kazakhstan	72	4.12	67	-5
Peru	73	4.11	78	5
Namibia	74	4.09	74	0
Morocco	75	4.08	73	-2
Botswana	76	4.05	66	-10
Croatia	77	4.04	72	-5
Guatemala	78	4.04	80	2
Macedonia, FYR	79	4.02	84	5
Rwanda	80	4.00	n/a	n/a
Egypt	81	4.00	70	-11
El Salvador	82	3.99	77	-5



Greece	83	3.99	71	-12
Trinidad and Tobago	84	3.97	86	2
Philippines	85	3.96	87	2
Algeria	86	3.96	83	-3
Argentina	87	3.95	85	-2
Albania	88	3.94	96	8
Ukraine	89	3.90	82	-7
Gambia, The	90	3.90	81	-9
Honduras	91	3.89	89	-2
Lebanon	92	3.89	n/a	n/a
Georgia	93	3.86	90	-3
Moldova	94	3.86	n/a	n/a
Jamaica	95	3.85	91	-4
Serbia	96	3.84	93	-3
Syria	97	3.79	94	-3
Armenia	98	3.76	97	-1
Mongolia	99	3.75	117	18
Libya	100	3.74	88	-12

Dominican Republic	101	3.72	95	-6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	102	3.70	109	7
Benin	103	3.69	103	0
Senegal	104	3.67	92	-12
Ecuador	105	3.65	105	0
Kenya	106	3.65	98	-8
Bangladesh	107	3.64	106	-1
Bolivia	108	3.64	120	12
Cambodia	109	3.63	110	1
Guyana	110	3.62	104	-6
Cameroon	111	3.58	111	0
Nicaragua	112	3.57	115	3
Tanzania	113	3.56	100	-13
Ghana	114	3.56	114	0
Zambia	115	3.55	112	-3
Tajikistan	116	3.53	122	6
Cape Verde	117	3.51	n/a	n/a
Uganda	118	3.51	108	-10

Ethiopia	119	3.51	118	-1
Paraguay	120	3.49	124	4
Kyrgyz Republic	121	3.49	123	2
Venezuela	122	3.48	113	-9
Pakistan	123	3.48	101	-22
Madagascar	124	3.46	121	-3
Malawi	125	3.45	119	-6
Swaziland	126	3.40	n/a	n/a
Nigeria	127	3.38	99	-28
Lesotho	128	3.36	107	-21
Côte d'Ivoire	129	3.35	116	-13
Nepal	130	3.34	125	-5
Mozambique	131	3.32	129	-2
Mali	132	3.28	130	-2
Timor-Leste	133	3.23	126	-7
Burkina Faso	134	3.20	128	-6
Mauritania	135	3.14	127	-8
Zimbabwe	136	3.03	132	-4

Burundi	137	2.96	133	-4
Angola	138	2.93	n/a	n/a
Chad	139	2.73	131	-8

### Methodology:

The competitiveness rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and the Executive Opinion Survey, a comprehensive annual survey conducted by the World Economic Forum together with its network of Partner Institutes (leading research institutes and business organizations) in the countries covered by the Report.

Highlights according to WEF --

- The [United States](#) falls two places to fourth position, overtaken by [Sweden](#) and [Singapore](#) in the rankings of the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011
- The People's Republic of [China](#) continues to move up the rankings, with marked improvements in several other Asian countries
- [Germany](#) moves up two places to fifth place, leading the Eurozone countries
- [Switzerland](#) tops the rankings

### Source:

World Economic Forum; available at URL: <http://www.weforum.org>

### Updated:

2011 using most recent ranking available; reviewed in 2015.

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## **Taxation**

### Corporate profits tax

The main corporate tax rate is 24 percent. Certain categories of taxpayers may enjoy a reduced rate thanks to regional legislative bodies within Russia. Dividends are generally subject to a final withholding tax of 9 percent, however, those paid by or received from Russian companies to or from foreign companies are subject to a withholding tax of 15 percent. Exceptions apply in cases of applicable double tax treaties.

### Individual tax

The flat rate of personal income tax in Russia is 13 percent for residents and 30 percent for non-residents. Domestic and foreign dividends are subject to tax at 9 percent.

### Capital gains

Capital gains are generally taxed as ordinary income, although some long-term gains of individuals are exempt. Exemptions include gains on certain kinds of property. In cases of the sale of securities, capital gains are treated as a separate category of income, which cannot be reduced by expense deductions. As well, capital losses on securities cannot be offset by general income.

### Indirect tax

There is a value-added tax (VAT), which applies to most transactions at the standard rate of 18 percent. Lower rates of 10 percent VAT apply to some goods, such as foods, medicines and publications. Exemptions apply to services that include passenger transport, education and banking. A zero rate applies to exports.

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## **Stock Market**

The Russian Trading System (RTS) was established in 1997 and has become the largest stock exchange in Russia. By the end of the 1990s, the RTS had 230 listed companies.

For more information in the Russian Trading System Stock Exchange, see URL:

<http://www.rts.ru/engl/>

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## Partner Links

Partner Links

# **Chapter 5**

## **Social Overview**



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## People

### **Cultural Demography**

Russia's area is about 17 million sq. km. (6.5 million sq. mi.). It remains the largest country in the world by more than 2.5 million sq. mi. Its population density is about 23 persons per square mile (9 per sq. km.), making it one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. Its population is predominantly urban.

Most Russians derive from the Eastern Slavic family of peoples, whose original homeland was probably present-day Poland. As such, Russians are a Slavic people who have occupied the land between the Baltic and Black Seas for at least 1,500 years. Russia is also home to many other ethnic groups including Tatars, Ukrainians, Chuvash, Bashkir, Belarusians, Moldavians and others. Many of the minority ethnic groups reside in their own autonomous regions.

Russian is the official language of Russia, and an official language in the United Nations. As the language of writers such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Pushkin, and Solzhenitsyn, it has great importance in world literature. While Russian is the official language, other languages, such as Tatar and Ukrainian, reflect the country's diversity.

In terms of religious affiliation, although there are a number of Jews and Muslims in Russia, Christianity is by far the major religion. The Russian Orthodox Church is the largest of the Eastern Orthodox churches, and dates back to 988 C.E. Once discouraged under communist rule, religion is now experiencing a revival.

### **Cultural Tradition and Social Life**

Moscow is Russia's largest city and the capital of the country. Moscow continues to be the center of Russian Government and is increasingly important as an economic and business center. Its cultural tradition is rich, and there are many museums devoted to art, literature, music, dance, history, and science. It has hundreds of churches and dozens of notable cathedrals; it has become Russia's principal magnet for foreign investment and business presence.

St. Petersburg, established in 1703 by Peter the Great as the capital of the Russian Empire, was

called Petrograd during World War I, and Leningrad after 1924. In 1991, as the result of a city referendum, it was renamed St. Petersburg. Under the Tsars, the city was Russia's cultural, intellectual, commercial, financial and industrial center. After the capital was moved back to Moscow in 1918, the city's political significance declined, but it remained a cultural, scientific and military-industrial center. The Hermitage is one of the world's great fine arts museums. Finally, Vladivostok, located in the Russian Far East, is becoming an important center for trade with the Pacific Rim countries.

### **Health and Welfare**

Today, Russia has an estimated total population of around 142 million. Russians have a life expectancy of 67.5 years of age on average, with 62 years of age for males, and 73 years for females, according to recent estimates. The United Nations Development Programme determined that the infant mortality rate is 21 deaths per 1,000 live births. The CIA estimates a slightly lower infant mortality rate at around 20 deaths per 1,000 live births. About 3.9 percent of GDP is spent in the country on educational expenditures. About 5.4 percent of GDP is spent on health expenditures. Access to sanitation, water, and health care is considered to be generally good.

An estimated 99.5 percent of the total population, age 15 and older, can read and write (99.7 percent of males, 99.3 percent of females). Russia's educational system has produced nearly total literacy (over 99 percent literacy rate as noted above). About 3 million students attend Russia's 519 institutions of higher education and 48 universities. As a result of great emphasis on science and technology in education, Russian medical, mathematical, scientific, and space and aviation research is generally of a high order. The number of doctors in relation to the population is high by American standards, although medical care in Russia, even in major cities, is far below Western standards.

The Russian labor force is undergoing tremendous changes. Although well-educated and skilled, it is largely mismatched to the rapidly changing needs of the Russian economy. Millions of Russian workers are underemployed. Unemployment is highest among women and young people. Many Russian workers compensate by working other part-time jobs. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic dislocation it engendered, the standard of living fell dramatically, and one third of the population lives on just over \$1 a day.

### **Human Development**

One notable measure used to determine a country's quality of life is the Human Development Index (HDI), which has been compiled annually since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The HDI is a composite of several indicators, which measure a country's

achievements in three main arenas of human development: longevity, knowledge and education, as well as economic standard of living. In a recent ranking of 169 countries, Russia was ranked in 65th place, within the high human development category.

Note: Although the concept of human development is complicated and cannot be properly captured by values and indices, the HDI, which is calculated and updated annually, offers a wide-ranging assessment of human development in certain countries, not based solely upon traditional economic and financial indicators.

Written by Dr. Denise Youngblood Coleman, Editor in Chief, [www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com); see Bibliography for research sources.

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## Human Development Index

### Human Development Index

#### Human Development Index (Ranked Numerically)

The [Human Development Index](#) (HDI) is used to measure quality of life in countries across the world. The HDI has been compiled since 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a regular basis. The HDI is a composite of several indicators, which measure a country's achievements in three main arenas of human development: longevity, education, and economic standard of living. Although the concept of human development is complicated and cannot be properly captured by values and indices, the HDI offers a wide-ranging assessment of human development in certain countries, not based solely upon traditional economic and financial indicators. For more information about the methodology used to calculate the HDI, please see the "Source Materials" in the appendices of this review.

<b>Very High Human Development</b>	<b>High Human Development</b>	<b>Medium Human Development</b>	<b>Low Human Development</b>
1. Norway	43. Bahamas	86. Fiji	128. Kenya
2. Australia	44. Lithuania	87. Turkmenistan	129. Bangladesh
		88. Dominican	

3. New Zealand	45. Chile	Republic	130. Ghana
4. United States	46. Argentina	89. China	131. Cameroon
5. Ireland	47. Kuwait	90. El Salvador	132. Myanmar (Burma)
6. Liechtenstein	48. Latvia	91. Sri Lanka	133. Yemen
7. Netherlands	49. Montenegro	92. Thailand	134. Benin
8. Canada	50. Romania	93. Gabon	135. Madagascar
9. Sweden	51. Croatia	94. Suriname	136. Mauritania
10. Germany	52. Uruguay	95. Bolivia	137. Papua New Guinea
11. Japan	53. Libya	96. Paraguay	138. Nepal
12. South Korea	54. Panama	97. Philippines	139. Togo
13. Switzerland	55. Saudi Arabia	98. Botswana	140. Comoros
14. France	56. Mexico	99. Moldova	141. Lesotho
15. Israel	57. Malaysia	100. Mongolia	142. Nigeria
16. Finland	58. Bulgaria	101. Egypt	143. Uganda
17. Iceland	59. Trinidad and Tobago	102. Uzbekistan	144. Senegal
18. Belgium	60. Serbia	103. Micronesia	145. Haiti
19. Denmark	61. Belarus	104. Guyana	146. Angola

20. Spain	62. Costa Rica	105. Namibia	147. Djibouti
21. Hong King	63. Peru	106. Honduras	148. Tanzania
22. Greece	64. Albania	107. Maldives	149. Cote d'Ivoire
23. Italy	65. Russian Federation	108. Indonesia	150. Zambia
24. Luxembourg	66. Kazakhstan	109. Kyrgyzstan	151. Gambia
25. Austria	67. Azerbaijan	110. South Africa	152. Rwanda
26. United Kingdom	68. Bosnia and Herzegovina	111. Syria	153. Malawi
27. Singapore	69. Ukraine	112. Tajikistan	154. Sudan
28. Czech Republic	70. Iran	113. Vietnam	155. Afghanistan
29. Slovenia	71. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	114. Morocco	156. Guinea
30. Andorra	72. Mauritius	115. Nicaragua	157. Ethiopia
31. Slovakia	73. Brazil	116. Guatemala	158. Sierra Leone
32. United Arab Emirates	74. Georgia	117. Equatorial Guinea	159. Central African Republic
33. Malta	75. Venezuela	118. Cape Verde	160. Mali
34. Estonia	76. Armenia	119. India	161. Burkina Faso

35. Cyprus	77. Ecuador	120. East Timor	162. Liberia
36. Hungary	78. Belize	121. Swaziland	163. Chad
37. Brunei	79. Colombia	122. Laos	164. Guinea-Bissau
38. Qatar	80. Jamaica	123. Solomon Islands	165. Mozambique
39. Bahrain	81. Tunisia	124. Cambodia	166. Burundi
40. Portugal	82. Jordan	125. Pakistan	167. Niger
41. Poland	83. Turkey	126. Congo RC	168. Congo DRC
42. Barbados	84. Algeria	127. Sao Tome and Principe	169. Zimbabwe
	85. Tonga		

Methodology:

For more information about the methodology used to calculate the HDI, please see the "Source Materials" in the appendices of this Country Review.

Reference:

As published in United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report 2010.

Source:

United Nations Development Programme's [Human Development Index](http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/) available at URL: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

Updated:

Uploaded in 2011 using ranking available; reviewed in 2015

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**Life Satisfaction Index**

## Life Satisfaction Index

**Life Satisfaction Index**

Created by Adrian G. White, an Analytic Social Psychologist at the University of Leicester, the "Satisfaction with Life Index" measures subjective life satisfaction across various countries. The data was taken from a metastudy (see below for source) and associates the notion of subjective happiness or life satisfaction with qualitative parameters such as health, wealth, and access to basic education. This assessment serves as an alternative to other measures of happiness that tend to rely on traditional and quantitative measures of policy on quality of life, such as GNP and GDP. The methodology involved the responses of 80,000 people across the globe.

Rank	Country	Score
1	Denmark	273.4
2	Switzerland	273.33
3	Austria	260
4	Iceland	260
5	The Bahamas	256.67
6	Finland	256.67
7	Sweden	256.67



8	Iran	253.33
9	Brunei	253.33
10	Canada	253.33
11	Ireland	253.33
12	Luxembourg	253.33
13	Costa Rica	250
14	Malta	250
15	Netherlands	250
16	Antiguaand Barbuda	246.67
17	Malaysia	246.67
18	New Zealand	246.67
19	Norway	246.67
20	Seychelles	246.67
21	Saint Kitts and Nevis	246.67
22	United Arab Emirates	246.67
23	United States	246.67
24	Vanuatu	246.67
25	Venezuela	246.67

26	Australia	243.33
27	Barbados	243.33
28	Belgium	243.33
29	Dominica	243.33
30	Oman	243.33
31	Saudi Arabia	243.33
32	Suriname	243.33
33	Bahrain	240
34	Colombia	240
35	Germany	240
36	Guyana	240
37	Honduras	240
38	Kuwait	240
39	Panama	240
40	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	240
41	United Kingdom	236.67
42	Dominican Republic	233.33
43	Guatemala	233.33

44	Jamaica	233.33
45	Qatar	233.33
46	Spain	233.33
47	Saint Lucia	233.33
48	Belize	230
49	Cyprus	230
50	Italy	230
51	Mexico	230
52	Samoa	230
53	Singapore	230
54	Solomon Islands	230
55	Trinidad and Tobago	230
56	Argentina	226.67
57	Fiji	223.33
58	Israel	223.33
59	Mongolia	223.33
60	São Tomé and Príncipe	223.33
61	El Salvador	220

62	France	220
63	Hong Kong	220
64	Indonesia	220
65	Kyrgyzstan	220
66	Maldives	220
67	Slovenia	220
68	Taiwan	220
69	East Timor	220
70	Tonga	220
71	Chile	216.67
72	Grenada	216.67
73	Mauritius	216.67
74	Namibia	216.67
75	Paraguay	216.67
76	Thailand	216.67
77	Czech Republic	213.33
78	Philippines	213.33
79	Tunisia	213.33

80	Uzbekistan	213.33
81	Brazil	210
82	China	210
83	Cuba	210
84	Greece	210
85	Nicaragua	210
86	Papua New Guinea	210
87	Uruguay	210
88	Gabon	206.67
89	Ghana	206.67
90	Japan	206.67
91	Yemen	206.67
92	Portugal	203.33
93	Sri Lanka	203.33
94	Tajikistan	203.33
95	Vietnam	203.33
96	Bhutan	200
97	Comoros	196.67

98	Croatia	196.67
99	Poland	196.67
100	Cape Verde	193.33
101	Kazakhstan	193.33
102	South Korea	193.33
103	Madagascar	193.33
104	Bangladesh	190
105	Republic of the Congo	190
106	The Gambia	190
107	Hungary	190
108	Libya	190
109	South Africa	190
110	Cambodia	186.67
111	Ecuador	186.67
112	Kenya	186.67
113	Lebanon	186.67
114	Morocco	186.67
115	Peru	186.67

116	Senegal	186.67
117	Bolivia	183.33
118	Haiti	183.33
119	Nepal	183.33
120	Nigeria	183.33
121	Tanzania	183.33
122	Benin	180
123	Botswana	180
124	Guinea-Bissau	180
125	India	180
126	Laos	180
127	Mozambique	180
128	Palestinian Authority	180
129	Slovakia	180
130	Myanmar	176.67
131	Mali	176.67
132	Mauritania	176.67
133	Turkey	176.67



134	Algeria	173.33
135	Equatorial Guinea	173.33
136	Romania	173.33
137	Bosnia and Herzegovina	170
138	Cameroon	170
139	Estonia	170
140	Guinea	170
141	Jordan	170
142	Syria	170
143	Sierra Leone	166.67
144	Azerbaijan	163.33
145	Central African Republic	163.33
146	Republic of Macedonia	163.33
147	Togo	163.33
148	Zambia	163.33
149	Angola	160
150	Djibouti	160
151	Egypt	160

152	Burkina Faso	156.67
153	Ethiopia	156.67
154	Latvia	156.67
155	Lithuania	156.67
156	Uganda	156.67
157	Albania	153.33
158	Malawi	153.33
159	Chad	150
160	Côte d'Ivoire	150
161	Niger	150
162	Eritrea	146.67
163	Rwanda	146.67
164	Bulgaria	143.33
165	Lesotho	143.33
166	Pakistan	143.33
167	Russia	143.33
168	Swaziland	140
169	Georgia	136.67

170	Belarus	133.33
171	Turkmenistan	133.33
172	Armenia	123.33
173	Sudan	120
174	Ukraine	120
175	Moldova	116.67
176	Democratic Republic of the Congo	110
177	Zimbabwe	110
178	Burundi	100

Commentary:

European countries, such as [Denmark](#), [Iceland](#), [Finland](#), [Sweden](#), [Switzerland](#), [Austria](#) resided at the top of the ranking with highest levels of self-reported life satisfaction. Conversely, European countries such as [Latvia](#), [Lithuania](#), [Moldova](#), [Belarus](#) and [Ukraine](#) ranked low on the index. African countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, [Zimbabwe](#) and [Burundi](#) found themselves at the very bottom of the ranking, and indeed, very few African countries could be found in the top 100. [Japan](#) was at the mid-way point in the ranking, however, other Asian countries such as [Brunei](#) and [Malaysia](#) were in the top tier, while [Pakistan](#) was close to the bottom with a low level of self-identified life satisfaction. As a region, the Middle East presented a mixed bag with Saudi Arabians reporting healthy levels of life satisfaction and Egyptians near the bottom of the ranking. As a region, Caribbean countries were ranked highly, consistently demonstrating high levels of life satisfaction. The findings showed that health was the most crucial determining factor in life satisfaction, followed by prosperity and education.

Source:

White, A. (2007). A Global Projection of Subjective Well-being: A Challenge To Positive

Psychology? Psychtalk 56, 17-20. The data was extracted from a meta-analysis by Marks, Abdallah, Simms & Thompson (2006).

Uploaded:

Based on study noted above in "Source" ; reviewed in 2015

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## Happy Planet Index

### Happy Planet Index

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) is used to measure human well-being in conjunction with environmental impact. The HPI has been compiled since 2006 by the New Economics Foundation. The index is a composite of several indicators including subjective life satisfaction, life expectancy at birth, and ecological footprint per capita.

As noted by NEFA, the HPI "reveals the ecological efficiency with which human well-being is delivered." Indeed, the index combines environmental impact with human well-being to measure the environmental efficiency with which, country by country, people live long and happy lives. The countries ranked highest by the HPI are not necessarily the ones with the happiest people overall, but the ones that allow their citizens to live long and fulfilling lives, without negatively impacting this opportunity for either future generations or citizens of other countries. Accordingly, a country like the [United States](#) will rank low on this list due to its large per capital ecological footprint, which uses more than its fair share of resources, and will likely cause planetary damage.

It should be noted that the HPI was designed to be a counterpoint to other well-established indices of countries' development, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which measures overall national wealth and economic development, but often obfuscates the realities of countries with stark variances between the rich and the poor. Moreover, the objective of most of the world's people is not to be wealthy but to be happy. The HPI also differs from the [Human Development Index](#) (HDI), which measures quality of life but not ecology, since it [HPI] also includes sustainability as a key indicator.

Rank	Country	HPI
1	Costa Rica	76.1
2	Dominican Republic	71.8
3	Jamaica	70.1
4	Guatemala	68.4
5	Vietnam	66.5
6	Colombia	66.1
7	Cuba	65.7
8	El Salvador	61.5
9	Brazil	61.0
10	Honduras	61.0
11	Nicaragua	60.5
12	Egypt	60.3
13	Saudi Arabia	59.7
14	Philippines	59.0
15	Argentina	59.0
16	Indonesia	58.9
17	Bhutan	58.5

18	Panama	57.4
19	Laos	57.3
20	China	57.1
21	Morocco	56.8
22	Sri Lanka	56.5
23	Mexico	55.6
24	Pakistan	55.6
25	Ecuador	55.5
26	Jordan	54.6
27	Belize	54.5
28	Peru	54.4
29	Tunisia	54.3
30	Trinidad and Tobago	54.2
31	Bangladesh	54.1
32	Moldova	54.1
33	Malaysia	54.0
34	Tajikistan	53.5
35	India	53.0

36	Venezuela	52.5
37	Nepal	51.9
38	Syria	51.3
39	Burma	51.2
40	Algeria	51.2
41	Thailand	50.9
42	Haiti	50.8
43	Netherlands	50.6
44	Malta	50.4
45	Uzbekistan	50.1
46	Chile	49.7
47	Bolivia	49.3
48	Armenia	48.3
49	Singapore	48.2
50	Yemen	48.1
51	Germany	48.1
52	Switzerland	48.1
53	Sweden	48.0



54	Albania	47.9
55	Paraguay	47.8
56	Palestinian Authority	47.7
57	Austria	47.7
58	Serbia	47.6
59	Finland	47.2
60	Croatia	47.2
61	Kyrgyzstan	47.1
62	Cyprus	46.2
63	Guyana	45.6
64	Belgium	45.4
65	Bosnia and Herzegovina	45.0
66	Slovenia	44.5
67	Israel	44.5
68	South Korea	44.4
69	Italy	44.0
70	Romania	43.9
71	France	43.9

72	Georgia	43.6
73	Slovakia	43.5
74	United Kingdom	43.3
75	Japan	43.3
76	Spain	43.2
77	Poland	42.8
78	Ireland	42.6
79	Iraq	42.6
80	Cambodia	42.3
81	Iran	42.1
82	Bulgaria	42.0
83	Turkey	41.7
84	Hong Kong	41.6
85	Azerbaijan	41.2
86	Lithuania	40.9
87	Djibouti	40.4
88	Norway	40.4
89	Canada	39.4

90	Hungary	38.9
91	Kazakhstan	38.5
92	Czech Republic	38.3
93	Mauritania	38.2
94	Iceland	38.1
95	Ukraine	38.1
96	Senegal	38.0
97	Greece	37.6
98	Portugal	37.5
99	Uruguay	37.2
100	Ghana	37.1
101	Latvia	36.7
102	Australia	36.6
103	New Zealand	36.2
104	Belarus	35.7
105	Denmark	35.5
106	Mongolia	35.0
107	Malawi	34.5

108	Russia	34.5
109	Chad	34.3
110	Lebanon	33.6
111	Macedonia	32.7
112	Republic of the Congo	32.4
113	Madagascar	31.5
114	United States	30.7
115	Nigeria	30.3
116	Guinea	30.3
117	Uganda	30.2
118	South Africa	29.7
119	Rwanda	29.6
120	Democratic Republic of the Congo	29.0
121	Sudan	28.5
122	Luxembourg	28.5
123	United Arab Emirates	28.2
124	Ethiopia	28.1
125	Kenya	27.8

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126	Cameroon	27.2
127	Zambia	27.2
128	Kuwait	27.0
129	Niger	26.9
130	Angola	26.8
131	Estonia	26.4
132	Mali	25.8
133	Mozambique	24.6
134	Benin	24.6
135	Togo	23.3
136	Sierra Leone	23.1
137	Central African Republic	22.9
138	Burkina Faso	22.4
139	Burundi	21.8
140	Namibia	21.1
141	Botswana	20.9
142	Tanzania	17.8
143	Zimbabwe	16.6

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*Source: This material is derived from the Happy Planet Index issued by the New Economics Foundation (NEF).*

*Methodology: The methodology for the calculations can be found at URL: <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>*

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## **Status of Women**

### **Gender Related Development Index (GDI) Rank:**

Not Ranked

### **Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) Rank:**

60th out of 80

### **Female Population:**

75.5 million

### **Female Life Expectancy at birth:**

73 years

### **Total Fertility Rate:**

1.4

### **Maternal Mortality Ratio (2000):**

67

### **Total Number of Women Living with HIV/AIDS:**

110,000-370,000

**Ever Married Women, Ages 15-19 (%):**

11%

**Mean Age at Time of Marriage:**

22

**Contraceptive Use Among Married Women, Any Method (%):**

67%

**Female Adult Literacy Rate:**

99.2%

**Combined Female Gross enrollment ratio for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary schools:**

N/A

**Female-Headed Households (%):**

N/A

**Economically Active Females (%):**

59.1%

**Female Contributing Family Workers (%):**

42%

**Female Estimated Earned Income:**

\$7,302

**Seats in Parliament held by women (%):**

*Lower or Single House:* 9.8%



*Upper House or Senate: 3.4%*

**Year Women Received the Right to Vote:**

1918

**Year Women Received the Right to Stand for Election:**

1918

\*The Gender Development Index (GDI) is a composite index which measures the average achievement in a country. While very similar to the Human Development Index in its use of the same variables, the GDI adjusts the average achievement of each country in terms of life expectancy, enrollment in schools, income, and literacy in accordance to the disparities between males and females.

\*The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a composite index measuring gender inequality in three of the basic dimensions of empowerment; economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources.

\*Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is defined as the average number of babies born to women during their reproductive years. A TFR of 2.1 is considered the replacement rate; once a TFR of a population reaches 2.1 the population will remain stable assuming no immigration or emigration takes place. When the TFR is greater than 2.1 a population will increase and when it is less than 2.1 a population will eventually decrease, although due to the age structure of a population it will take years before a low TFR is translated into lower population.

\*Maternal Mortality Rate is the number of deaths to women per 100,000 live births that resulted from conditions related to pregnancy and or delivery related complications.

\*Economically Active Females are the share of the female population, ages 15 and above, whom supply, or are able to supply, labor for the production of goods and services.

\*Female Contributing Family Workers are those females who work without pay in an economic enterprise operated by a relative living in the same household.

\*Estimated Earned Income is measured according to Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in US dollars.

## Global Gender Gap Index

### Global Gender Gap Index

#### Editor's Note:

The Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum ranks most of the world's countries in terms of the division of resources and opportunities among males and females. Specifically, the ranking assesses the gender inequality gap in these four arenas:

1. Economic participation and opportunity (salaries and high skilled employment participation levels)
2. Educational attainment (access to basic and higher level education)
3. Political empowerment (representation in decision-making structures)
4. Health and survival (life expectancy and sex ratio)

	2010 rank	2010 score	2010 rank among 2009 countries	2009 rank	2009 score	2008 rank	2008 score	2007 rank
Country								
Iceland	1	0.8496	1	1	0.8276	4	0.7999	4
Norway	2	0.8404	2	3	0.8227	1	0.8239	2
Finland	3	0.8260	3	2	0.8252	2	0.8195	3
Sweden	4	0.8024	4	4	0.8139	3	0.8139	1
New Zealand	5	0.7808	5	5	0.7880	5	0.7859	5

Ireland	6	0.7773	6	8	0.7597	8	0.7518	9
Denmark	7	0.7719	7	7	0.7628	7	0.7538	8
Lesotho	8	0.7678	8	10	0.7495	16	0.7320	26
Philippines	9	0.7654	9	9	0.7579	6	0.7568	6
Switzerland	10	0.7562	10	13	0.7426	14	0.7360	40
Spain	11	0.7554	11	17	0.7345	17	0.7281	10
South Africa	12	0.7535	12	6	0.7709	22	0.7232	20
Germany	13	0.7530	13	12	0.7449	11	0.7394	7
Belgium	14	0.7509	14	33	0.7165	28	0.7163	19
United Kingdom	15	0.7460	15	15	0.7402	13	0.7366	11
Sri Lanka	16	0.7458	16	16	0.7402	12	0.7371	15
Netherlands	17	0.7444	17	11	0.7490	9	0.7399	12
Latvia	18	0.7429	18	14	0.7416	10	0.7397	13
United States	19	0.7411	19	31	0.7173	27	0.7179	31
Canada	20	0.7372	20	25	0.7196	31	0.7136	18
Trinidad and Tobago	21	0.7353	21	19	0.7298	19	0.7245	46
Mozambique	22	0.7329	22	26	0.7195	18	0.7266	43

Australia	23	0.7271	23	20	0.7282	21	0.7241	17
Cuba	24	0.7253	24	29	0.7176	25	0.7195	22
Namibia	25	0.7238	25	32	0.7167	30	0.7141	29
Luxembourg	26	0.7231	26	63	0.6889	66	0.6802	58
Mongolia	27	0.7194	27	22	0.7221	40	0.7049	62
Costa Rica	28	0.7194	28	27	0.7180	32	0.7111	28
Argentina	29	0.7187	29	24	0.7211	24	0.7209	33
Nicaragua	30	0.7176	30	49	0.7002	71	0.6747	90
Barbados	31	0.7176	31	21	0.7236	26	0.7188	n/a
Portugal	32	0.7171	32	46	0.7013	39	0.7051	37
Uganda	33	0.7169	33	40	0.7067	43	0.6981	50
Moldova	34	0.7160	34	36	0.7104	20	0.7244	21
Lithuania	35	0.7132	35	30	0.7175	23	0.7222	14
Bahamas	36	0.7128	36	28	0.7179	n/a	n/a	n/a
Austria	37	0.7091	37	42	0.7031	29	0.7153	27
Guyana	38	0.7090	38	35	0.7108	n/a	n/a	n/a
Panama	39	0.7072	39	43	0.7024	34	0.7095	38
Ecuador	40	0.7072	40	23	0.7220	35	0.7091	44

Kazakhstan	41	0.7055	41	47	0.7013	45	0.6976	32
Slovenia	42	0.7047	42	52	0.6982	51	0.6937	49
Poland	43	0.7037	43	50	0.6998	49	0.6951	60
Jamaica	44	0.7037	44	48	0.7013	44	0.6980	39
Russian Federation	45	0.7036	45	51	0.6987	42	0.6994	45
France	46	0.7025	46	18	0.7331	15	0.7341	51
Estonia	47	0.7018	47	37	0.7094	37	0.7076	30
Chile	48	0.7013	48	64	0.6884	65	0.6818	86
Macedonia, FYR	49	0.6996	49	53	0.6950	53	0.6914	35
Bulgaria	50	0.6983	50	38	0.7072	36	0.7077	25
Kyrgyz Republic	51	0.6973	51	41	0.7058	41	0.7045	70
Israel	52	0.6957	52	45	0.7019	56	0.6900	36
Croatia	53	0.6939	53	54	0.6944	46	0.6967	16
Honduras	54	0.6927	54	62	0.6893	47	0.6960	68
Colombia	55	0.6927	55	56	0.6939	50	0.6944	24
Singapore	56	0.6914	56	84	0.6664	84	0.6625	77
Thailand	57	0.6910	57	59	0.6907	52	0.6917	52

Greece	58	0.6908	58	85	0.6662	75	0.6727	72
Uruguay	59	0.6897	59	57	0.6936	54	0.6907	78
Peru	60	0.6895	60	44	0.7024	48	0.6959	75
China	61	0.6881	61	60	0.6907	57	0.6878	73
Botswana	62	0.6876	62	39	0.7071	63	0.6839	53
Ukraine	63	0.6869	63	61	0.6896	62	0.6856	57
Venezuela	64	0.6863	64	69	0.6839	59	0.6875	55
Czech Republic	65	0.6850	65	74	0.6789	69	0.6770	64
Tanzania	66	0.6829	66	73	0.6797	38	0.7068	34
Romania	67	0.6826	67	70	0.6805	70	0.6763	47
Malawi	68	0.6824	68	76	0.6738	81	0.6664	87
Paraguay	69	0.6804	69	66	0.6868	100	0.6379	69
Ghana	70	0.6782	70	80	0.6704	77	0.6679	63
Slovak Republic	71	0.6778	71	68	0.6845	64	0.6824	54
Vietnam	72	0.6776	72	71	0.6802	68	0.6778	42
Dominican Republic	73	0.6774	73	67	0.6859	72	0.6744	65
Italy	74	0.6765	74	72	0.6798	67	0.6788	84

Gambia, The	75	0.6762	75	75	0.6752	85	0.6622	95
Bolivia	76	0.6751	76	82	0.6693	80	0.6667	80
Brueni Darussalem	77	0.6748	77	94	0.6524	99	0.6392	n/a
Albania	78	0.6726	78	91	0.6601	87	0.6591	66
Hungary	79	0.6720	79	65	0.6879	60	0.6867	61
Madagascar	80	0.6713	80	77	0.6732	74	0.6736	89
Angola	81	0.6712	81	106	0.6353	114	0.6032	110
Bangladesh	82	0.6702	82	93	0.6526	90	0.6531	100
Malta	83	0.6695	83	88	0.6635	83	0.6634	76
Armenia	84	0.6669	84	90	0.6619	78	0.6677	71
Brazil	85	0.6655	85	81	0.6695	73	0.6737	74
Cyprus	86	0.6642	86	79	0.6706	76	0.6694	82
Indonesia	87	0.6615	87	92	0.6580	93	0.6473	81
Georgia	88	0.6598	88	83	0.6680	82	0.6654	67
Tajikistan	89	0.6598	89	86	0.6661	89	0.6541	79
El Salvador	90	0.6596	90	55	0.6939	58	0.6875	48
Mexico	91	0.6577	91	98	0.6503	97	0.6441	93



Zimbabwe	92	0.6574	92	95	0.6518	92	0.6485	88
Belize	93	0.6536	93	87	0.6636	86	0.6610	94
Japan	94	0.6524	94	101	0.6447	98	0.6434	91
Mauritius	95	0.6520	95	96	0.6513	95	0.6466	85
Kenya	96	0.6499	96	97	0.6512	88	0.6547	83
Cambodia	97	0.6482	97	104	0.6410	94	0.6469	98
Malaysia	98	0.6479	98	100	0.6467	96	0.6442	92
Maldives	99	0.6452	99	99	0.6482	91	0.6501	99
Azerbaijan	100	0.6446	100	89	0.6626	61	0.6856	59
Senegal	101	0.6414	101	102	0.6427	n/a	n/a	n/a
Suriname	102	0.6407	102	78	0.6726	79	0.6674	56
United Arab Emirates	103	0.6397	103	112	0.6198	105	0.6220	105
Korea, Rep.	104	0.6342	104	115	0.6146	108	0.6154	97
Kuwait	105	0.6318	105	105	0.6356	101	0.6358	96
Zambia	106	0.6293	106	107	0.6310	106	0.6205	101
Tunisia	107	0.6266	107	109	0.6233	103	0.6295	102
Fiji	108	0.6256	108	103	0.6414	n/a	n/a	n/a
Guatemala	109	0.6238	109	111	0.6209	112	0.6072	106

Bahrain	110	0.6217	110	116	0.6136	121	0.5927	115
Burkina Faso	111	0.6162	111	120	0.6081	115	0.6029	117
India	112	0.6155	112	114	0.6151	113	0.6060	114
Mauritania	113	0.6152	113	119	0.6103	110	0.6117	111
Cameroon	114	0.6110	114	118	0.6108	117	0.6017	116
Nepal	115	0.6084	115	110	0.6213	120	0.5942	125
Lebanon*	116	0.6084	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Qatar	117	0.6059	116	125	0.5907	119	0.5948	109
Nigeria	118	0.6055	117	108	0.6280	102	0.6339	107
Algeria	119	0.6052	118	117	0.6119	111	0.6111	108
Jordan	120	0.6048	119	113	0.6182	104	0.6275	104
Ethiopia	121	0.6019	120	122	0.5948	122	0.5867	113
Oman	122	0.5950	121	123	0.5938	118	<a href="#">0.5960</a>	119
Iran	123	0.5933	122	128	0.5839	116	0.6021	118
Syria	124	0.5926	123	121	0.6072	107	0.6181	103
Egypt	125	0.5899	124	126	0.5862	124	0.5832	120
Turkey	126	0.5876	125	129	0.5828	123	0.5853	121
Morocco	127	0.5767	126	124	0.5926	125	0.5757	122

Benin	128	0.5719	127	131	0.5643	126	0.5582	123
Saudi Arabia	129	0.5713	128	130	0.5651	128	0.5537	124
Côte d'Ivoire*	130	0.5691	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mali	131	0.5680	129	127	0.5860	109	0.6117	112
Pakistan	132	0.5465	130	132	0.5458	127	0.5549	126
Chad	133	0.5330	131	133	0.5417	129	0.5290	127
Yemen	134	0.4603	132	134	0.4609	130	0.4664	128
Belarus	n/a	n/a	n/a	34	0.7141	33	0.7099	23
Uzbekistan	n/a	n/a	n/a	58	0.6913	55	0.6906	41

\*new country 2010

#### Commentary:

According to the report's index, Nordic countries, such as [Iceland](#), [Norway](#), [Finland](#), and [Sweden](#) have continued to dominate at the top of the ranking for gender equality. Meanwhile, [France](#) has seen a notable decline in the ranking, largely as a result of decreased number of women holding ministerial portfolios in that country. In the Americas, the [United States](#) has risen in the ranking to top the region, predominantly as a result of a decreasing wage gap, as well as higher number of women holding key positions in the current Obama administration. [Canada](#) has continued to remain as one of the top ranking countries of the Americas, followed by the small Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, which has the distinction of being among the top three countries of the Americans in the realm of gender equality. [Lesotho](#) and South African ranked highly in the

index, leading not only among African countries but also in global context. Despite [Lesotho](#) still lagging in the area of life expectancy, its high ranking was attributed to high levels of female participation in the labor force and female literacy. The [Philippines](#) and [Sri Lanka](#) were the top ranking countries for gender equality for Asia, ranking highly also in global context. The [Philippines](#) has continued to show strong performance in all strong performance on all four dimensions (detailed above) of the index. Finally, in the Arab world, the [United Arab Emirates](#) held the highest-rank within that region of the world; however, its placement near the bottom of the global list highlights the fact that Arab countries are generally poor performers when it comes to the matter of gender equality in global scope.

Source:

This data is derived from the latest edition of The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum.

Available at URL:

<http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/Gende>

Updated:

Based on latest available data as set forth in chart; reviewed in 2014

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## Culture and Arts

### Culture and Art of Russia

#### **Music**

Russian music begins with the Byzantine tradition in the church liturgy. Russians utilized the tonal theories of St. John of Damascus (8th) who had refined the existing Byzantine Orthodox musical modes to a system of eight tones. However, Russian Orthodox monks modified Byzantine liturgy to reflect the harmonies that were present in the folk songs. One such innovation was the znamenny chant, a slowly moving plain chant. Originally the vocal music was monophonic and

sung in unison, though the Russian Orthodox Church eventually adopted the harmonious polyphonic singing style. To this day musical instruments never accompany true Orthodox liturgies.

Russian symphonic music began in the 19th century with the rise of Russian nationalism. The first composer to define a sense of nationalism in music was Mikhail Glinka (1804 - 1857). Glinka, after studying composition in Italy and Austria, understood that Continental European music styles could not truly reflect the distinctive character of the Russian experience. He looked to the folk music of his country to study the soul of the Russian sound and turned to the Russian heroes and themes as plot inspiration for his compositions. He was to write the very first Russian Opera, *A Life for the Czar*.

Mikhail Glinka was to inspire a wave of nationalistic feelings in fellow musicians. The most important of these were Peter Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) and a group of largely self-taught composers known as the Mighty Five, also called the Mighty Handful, who consisted of Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), Cesar Cui (1835-1918), Mily Balakirev (1837-1910), Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) and Alexander Borodin (1833-1887).

Since Glinka, a number of important composers have studied at Russian, and later Soviet, conservatories. Alexander Scriabin (1872- 1915), Sergie Rachmaninov (1873-1943), Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931), Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998), Sergey Berinsky (1946-1998) are among the many brilliant composers to have studied and worked in Russia.

During the 1950s, 60s and 70s when rock and roll and pop music were redefining the youth culture of Western Europe and the United States, the Soviet government absolutely forbid any rock to be played in Soviet countries. However, since the 80s, that has changed. Popular musical trends are fully ingrained in Russian life. Rock bands such as DDT, Aquarium, Kino, Alisa; jazz saxophonists Anatole Gerasimov, Igor Butman and Alexey Kozlov; jazz composer Nikolay Levinovsky; the acclaimed jazz trio, the Moscow Art Trio; and blues guitarist Yuri Naumov have contributed to defining the sound of modern Russian music.

Since the 19th century the Russians have excelled in the realm of ballet with exceptional musical composition, choreography, precision of dance technique and style as well as innovative technical productions with costumes, sets and lighting. The excellence that Russia has achieved has prompted many to believe ballet is a Russian art innovation, however the Italians and French in fact were the originators of this dance form.

Historically, the world's finest ballet companies have been Kirov Ballet of St. Petersburg, the Bolshoi Ballet of Moscow and the St. Petersburg Ballet Theater.

[http://androsdance.tripod.com/history/beginnings\\_of\\_russian\\_ballet.htm](http://androsdance.tripod.com/history/beginnings_of_russian_ballet.htm)  
<http://www.powerhat.com/tusovka/titlepage.html>

<http://www.jazz.ru/eng/default.htm>  
<http://www.rus-sky.org/deisus/eng/p.htm>  
<http://www.russia-in-us.com/Music/>  
<http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/rrollett/stevens.html>  
<http://www.balletcompanies.com/Countries/Russia.shtml>

## **Art**

Historically, sacred art was the primary genre that Russian artists would work in between the 10th century, when Vladimir I mandated Christianity as the official State religion, and the 18th century. Icon painting (the painting of holy images) was introduced to Russia, then called Kiev Rus, by the Byzantine Orthodox Church as early as the 9th century.

It was in the early stages of Christian conversion that Greek monks used these paintings as a tool to assist in the conversion of the Slavic peoples. As the great majority of Russian were illiterate, icons as well as church murals and frescoes were an important teaching aid of the Church. Icon paintings focused on the representation of sacred Christian images; Christ, the Virgin, the saints of the Christian Church as well as holy scenes from the Bible. Typically, icons were painted with tempura on lime or wooden panels and as the centuries wore on icons were painted in gold leaf and adorned with precious metals and stones. Four major icon schools developed: The Kiev School, Novgorodian School, Moscow School and Pskov School. The 15th century painter, Andrei Rublev, is considered the best representative of icon painters in the Russian Orthodox Church. His compositional style and the religious tone of his paintings was to set the standard for iconography for the following three hundred years in what is called the “golden age of Russian icons”.

Throughout the years, among lay Russians themselves, the spiritual importance of the icons grew; rich and poor alike collected icons to place throughout living quarters. Even in the present day, devote Orthodox Russians kneel or stand before icons during prayer and may even reverently kiss or touch the icon. Much more important than a portrait or landscape, icons served as a physical connection to the divine, a physical reminder of their spiritual salvation.

Between 10th and 15th centuries, architecture also followed in the Byzantine tradition: Monasteries were constructed en masse and great stone cathedrals were built with high walls in the shape of the Greek cross and the trademark dome shape roofs. While there was a heavy borrowing from Byzantine influence, one Russian Orthodox artistic innovation arose that has become a symbol of Russia itself, the colorful onion dome that tops religious structures such as St. Basil’s Cathedral in the Kremlin.

With Peter the Great (1672-1725) came a strong movement of artistic and intellectual secularization. The architecture and design of St. Petersburg was a direct result of Peter’s desire to modernize Russia and thus St. Petersburg became Russia’s “Window to the West”. Late Baroque

was incorporated into architectural designs and the opulent interior décor of grand palaces and state houses as seen in the Catherine Palace as well as the Winter Palace constructed under the rule of Peter's daughter, Elizabeth. Eager to join with the cultural advancements of Western Europe and the intellectual pursuits of the Enlightenment, Peter employed French and Italian artists to instruct Russians in contemporary artistic innovations or sent Russian artists, such as Andrei Matveev, abroad for their artistic education.

However it was not until the rule of Catherine the Great (1729-1796) that the Russian acclimation to Europeanization was fully realized. By the time of Catherine's ascension to the throne a number of art school such as the prestigious Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg, had been established and Neoclassicism became the official court style. And it was due to Catherine, that Peter I's dream of a great St. Petersburg became reality, Catherine transformed St. Petersburg into one of the greatest cities in the world to view stately Neoclassic architecture.

In a reaction to the ridged styles of European Neoclassicism and the stagnate teachings of Imperial Academy of Arts, a motivated group of talented young artists, lead by the painter Ivan Kramskoi (1837-1887), embarked upon the first truly Russian art movement since the creation of the onion dome. This group of young men, known as the Wanderers, left the Academy in 1863 and traveled throughout Russia painting religious themes, peasants, other artists and scenes from Russian history that focused on the human condition rather than the glory of the Motherland and her elite. This was also the precursor of a trend in art that the Soviets would adopt as their major means of expression, socialist realism. The greatest artist of this group was Ilya Efimovich Repin (1844-1930), whose painting of a political prisoner's unexpected return to his family, *They Did Not Expect Him*, has been hailed as a crowning achievement of this time. Aleksei Savrasov (1830-97), Ivan Shishkin (1832-98), Vasili Perov (1833-82), Arkhip Kuindzhi (1842-1910), Vasily Vereshchagin (1842-1904), and Vasili Surikov (1848-1916), Mikhail Nesterov (1862-1942) and Viktor Vasnetsov (1848-1926) were members of the Wanderers.

By the turn of the 20th century, realism was in decline and the world of the imagination, image, experimentation and emotion nourished the creative spirit for the next generation of artists. With the social upheavals that lead to the political revolution in 1917 came an artistic revolution in the form of the avant-garde. The avant-garde expanded the boundaries of Russian art and strengthened Russia's creative integrity, propelling Russian artists to the forefront of world art.

Under the umbrella of the avant-garde, one art trend morphed into another as a critical reaction for or against one movement lead to the innovation of a new movement. Neo-Primitivism, Cubo-Futurism, Rayonism, Constructivism and Suprematism were the results of this artistic revolution. The leading artists during this time experimented with many of these forms with intense creativity:

- Neo-Primitivism, often described as a crude style of painting characterized by bold colors, expressive lines, distorted forms and one-dimensional compositions, was derived from the



traditional Russian folk arts and to a large degree, Russian icon paintings. Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962), Mikhail Larionov (1881-1964), Olga Rozanova (1886-1918), Marc Chagall (1887-1985) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) worked within the realm of Neo-Primitivism.

- Cubo-Futurism synthesized Cubism and Futurism as well as aspects of Neo-Primitivism. In Russia, Cubo-Futurism was a dramatic break from realistic paintings. Attention was paid to fractured and fragmented space and forms, geometric shapes and vibrant movement expressed with lines and color. Important Cubo-Futurists include Goncharova, Rozanova, Larionov, Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935), Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953) and Liubov Popova (1889-1924).
- Rayonism, championed by Goncharova and Larionov, is closely associated with Cubo-Futurism, with the primary innovation being the use of rays of light to determine the fragmentation of space and form. With Rayonism, art began to move closer to the abstract.
- Vladimir Tatlin (1885 - 1953) was founder of Constructivism, an abstract trend that abandoned the canvas and the easel to pursue the construction of socially useful utilitarian designs. This was a trend that embraced the modernization and industrialization of society. The artist became the constructor working with plastic, wood, metal and glass; with items, such as furniture and tableware that could be mass produced for the consumption of the people. Antoine Pevsner (1886 - 1962), Naomi Gabo (1890 - 1977), El Lissitzky (1890-1941), Alexander Rodchenko (1891 - 1956) and Popova.
- The first true Russian abstract art movement, Suprematism, developed by Malevich and launched in 1915, is characterized by its composition in space and geometric forms with a minimum range of colors. Malevich theorized that this concept of art was supreme to art in the past due to Suprematism's purity in feeling and essence. It was ultra-simplification with a focus on the non-objectivity of art. This was to have a profound influence on art for several decades. The artists to work with Suprematism include Popova, Rozanova and El Lissitzky.

Wassily Kandinsky is considered the founder of abstract art. For Kandinsky, art was musical expression to be composed on a canvas with brush and color, and the artist should make the color sing to its viewer. In the beginning of his artistic career, he worked with representational art that showed an influence by Russian folk arts and Neo-Primitivism. In 1911, Kandinsky released the first theoretical writing on abstract art entitled, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, which expounds upon his belief of the music of color and theorizes about commonality of the inner spiritual and intellectual conditions that drive all of the arts. Thus, the remainder of Kandinsky's career was guided by the idea that the expression of the spirit in art can be best expressed in non-representational terms and non-identifiable objects.

The Belarussian born, Marc Chagall, is another important artist of the Russian avant-garde movement. Chagall grew up in a devoutly religious Jewish family within a Jewish community in

Vitebsk (then in Czarist Russia) from which he consistently drew upon as a source of inspiration that would span his entire career. Chagall's paintings blurred the boundaries of Neo-Primitivism, Cubism and Surrealism, combining them into his own uniquely colorful vision. His work stands on its own merit as being the one of most uniquely creative and visually imaginative arts created in the 20th century. Often in Chagall's work there are the elements dream, fantasy and nostalgia that has appealed to generations of art lovers of all ages, nationalities and creeds.

By the 1930s, the once thriving creative community of Russian artists was strained by governmental interference and intellectual censorship of the Soviet government. Just as one thousand years earlier, when icons were used to teach the Russian on the teachings of Christianity, so were the paintings of socialist realism used to teach the Russian about the glories of Communist Russia and the collective manpower of the Soviet Union. Art was to be the property of the people and state and as such should be created in away that could be easily understood. Therefore natural representation of subject matter with optimistic socialist overtones was deemed most suitable. Experimentation and abstraction was frowned upon and ideological dissent was forbidden. For example, the art of Chagall was non-political art, it neither promoted the ideology of communism nor did it fit within confines of socialist realism (the only official sanctioned visual art form) and his artistic presence was not welcomed in the newly formed Soviet Union. Even the artwork of Constructivism, whose intent was to create socially useful and functional art for the people, was too abstract for Bolshevik tastes. Creative expression could be interpreted as political dissent. Many prominent artists and intellectuals fled from Russia to the West or the Americas to escape the oppression of Stalinist censorship. Sadly, during the dark years of the Great Terror in the 1930s, censorship often took on a physical form with the dissenting artist facing forced labor at "rehabilitation camps" or execution as an enemy of the state.

Socialist realism artists include the sculptress Vera Mukina (1889-1953) and the painter Isaak Brodsky (1884-1939). Among the leading underground artists of later years include Ilya Kabakov (1933) and Leonid Lamm (1928).

Soviet leaders recognized the important role that cinema could play in propagating political and social ideology. In 1919, Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) remarked, "The cinema is for us the most important instrument of all the arts." Cinema would help to shape the attitudes and minds of the Russian society of the new world. A film's plot often focused on history, the proletariat as hero working for the betterment of Russia's future, and the corruption of capitalists. While the film could not be creative in subject matter, there was great creativity and innovation in the process of filmmaking. Under the watchful eye of Stalin, film directors proceeded in making cinematic masterpieces of epic proportions. The most prolific of all early Soviet directors was Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein (1898-1948) the director of such classics, *The Battleship Potemkin* (1926) and *October* (1927), innovated the montage-style of filmmaking. Other important Soviet filmmakers include the Ukrainian born, Aleksandr Dovzhenko (1894-1956) who directed *Zvenigord* (1928), *Arsenal* (1929), and *Earth* (1930); Vsevolod Ilarionovich Pudovkin, (1893-

1953) director of *Mother* (1925), *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927), and *Storm over Asia* (1930); and the Polish born documentary filmmaker, Dziga Vertov (1896-1954).

In the 60s, socialist realism was challenged by one of the greatest film directors of the 20th century, Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986). Tarkovsky was concerned with the spirit of man rather than the socialization of mankind. His films have often been characterized as poetic and sensual, a far cry from the Soviet dogma driven movie machine. Tarkovsky's films include, *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), and *Stalker* (1979), and *The Sacrifice* (1986). Andrei Ruble, based on the life of the 15th century icon painter, was banned by Soviet authorities until 1971.

Some important contemporary directors include Nikita Mikhalkov, who won a best Foreign Film Oscar for *Burnt by the Sun*; Sergei Bodrov, who directed, *Prisoner of the Mountains*; and Alexander Sokurov, director of, *Mother and Son*.

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## Literature

Russia has a notable body of ancient heroic legends and poems that had been preserved over the centuries in the oral tradition. These epic poems, or byliny, are quite unique to the Slavic culture, each recitation of the poem is sung in a monotone voice and the singer slightly modifies the byliny with each performance. The heroes of the byliny lived a placed during the time of Valdimir the Great who ruled from 980 until 1015. These heroes, who include; the dragon slayer, Dobrynya

Nikitich; the trickster, Alyosha Popovich; and Old Rus' greatest defender, the noble Cossack, Ilya Muromets, are knights who possess super human strength, enormous courage and keen intelligence through which they rid the land of invaders, evildoers, pagans and monsters.

The most famous epic of Russian literature is *The Tale of the Campaign of Igor*, a poem based on the true events of an ill-fated raid led by Prince Igor Sviatoslavich and his Kievan Rus warriors on the Turkic Polovtsy in 1185. There is an interesting mystery that surrounds this medieval epic and it is centered on the question of the actual date of composition. Some believe it was written shortly after the event that the poem speaks of, others believe the poem was composed in the 15th century, still others believe the poem was written in the 18th century. The original itself was not discovered until the 18th century and that same copy was burned in a fire in 1812, so there is no way of knowing for certain the time in which it was written. Fortunately, by the time of the fire, only a single copy had been made of the poem, through which the words of the anonymous poet have survived. Irregardless of the date of composition, *The Tale of the Campaign of Igor*, is a beautifully written tale that is beloved by both Russians and other nationalities of Slavic descent.

After the Mongol yoke, histories and religious tracts were the primary literary subjects. During the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, the Russian Orthodox Church, in an attempt to sever all ties with their non-Christian past, condemned the old Kievan Rus songs and legends that harkened back to pagan times. Those who publicly recited these poems were persecuted. Even with *The Tale of Igor*, whose hero was a Christian Prince, there are elements of nature deities and the supernatural that were considered heresy by Orthodox Church. Thus, the possibility of it being hidden from the world for so many centuries is plausible. Many of the old tales and legends did not survive the centuries when the Orthodox Church was the dominant force in Russian daily life. What poems and songs that have survived, did so in isolated villages away from the strong arm of the Church and were rediscovered in the 19th century during a strong nationalist movement by Russian artists and scholars who began exploring their country's folk life.

The refinement of the Russian language and the secularization of Russian literature began in the 18th century with Peter the Great's vision of a modernized Russia. Peter simplified the alphabet from the old Slavic alphabet and updated the written form of Russia, which for centuries was the archaic Old Church Slavonic, to reflect the linguistic changes of the modern Russian grammatical and speech patterns.

It was during this time that the fledgling stages of Russian poetry were put into place. With the modification of the written language, Vasilii Trediakovsky (1703–1769), a poet and translator, made a great contribution to the development of Russian verse. He understood that the Russian language was best suited for syllabic-accentual versification, or syllabotonic verse, and based his poetic innovations on the forms of European models. Trediakovsky has been largely unappreciated by generations of Russian literary critics due to his less than adequate poetic talent. He constructed poems using the laws of syllabotonic verse while trying to prove his theories, yet his verses are considered juvenile at best. However, subsequent generations of poets have followed the rules of

his poetic innovation.

The person credited with the development of modern Russian literature is Mikhail Lomonosov (1711–1765). Lomonosov was a man of great insight, he adopted Trediakovsky's rules of tonic verse and expanded upon them. He wrote popular plays, odes, created the first Russian grammar book, and wrote the first comprehensive book on Russian history. Concerning the Russian literary language, Lomonosov distinguished three literary styles:

- The High Style was Old Church Slavonic, to be used for works requiring elevated language such as high poetry and religious literature.
- The Middle Style was a combination of both Old Church Slavonic and the Present Russian vernacular to be used for lyric poetry, prose, and scientific treaties and discourses.
- The Low Style was the Russian vernacular to be used in personal correspondence and in low comedy.

Prolific in many fields of study, including chemistry and astronomy, Lomonosov founded the first Russian university, the Lomonosov Moscow State University.

Catherine the Great was well read ruler and as such was a tremendous supporter of literature. She was quite impressed with the French Humanists, with whom she would correspond. It was due to her fascination with French literature that many writers were exposed to the French Humanist theories of Rousseau, Diderot, and Voltaire. She wrote comic plays, children's books, memoirs and establish several literary journals, including the satirical journal, *All Sorts and Sundries*. During Catherine's rule, Gavrila Derzhavin (1743-1816) was the most innovative writer of his day.

The literary evolution of the previous 18th century gave rise to the creative fruition of the 19th century which has long been considered to be one of the most triumphant ages of all world literature, the Golden Age of Russian Literature. During the 19th century, Russian writers gained the creative integrity to break with European standards of literature and innovate a literary voice appropriate for their own unique historical, religious, social, philosophical and moral perspective.

The Golden Age begins with the father of Russian literature, Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837). He was the first of the major poets to write in his native tongue, thus elevating the status of Russian into a literary language. Furthermore, Pushkin found inspiration within the boundaries of his own country, Russian history and the rich Russian folk life. There was perfection in the expression and form of verse and for that reason, translations of Pushkin's poetry into other languages often fails to truly relate the spirit of his work. Pushkin is also credited with writing the first of the great Russian novels that were written in the 19th century, *Eugene Onegin*. His plays include, *Mozart and Salieri* and *The Stone Guest*. He wrote close to 800 lyrical poems and a dozen narrative poems including,

“Prisoner of the Caucasus” and “The Gypsies.”

Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841) was a true Romantic poet and novelist. His themes have often been compared to those of Lord Byron whose protagonists in his prose and poetry often have the feel of the Byronic Hero, man of feeling, lover of nature, critical of society’s hypocrisy, he chooses a self-imposed exile, a hero who does not bow to man or God, a nihilist. In an *ars poetica*, “No I’m Not Byron...”, Lermontov addresses the Byronic likeness that was ascribed to him in his youth:

No, I'm not Byron, it's my role  
To be an undiscovered wonder,  
Like him, a persecuted wand'rer,  
But furnished with a Russian soul.

Despite Lermontov’s short life, he wrote a great body of poetry, prose and some plays. The best of these include the poem that was a response to the death of Pushkin, “Death of a Poet”, the narrative poem, “The Demon”, and a collection of tales, *Hero of Our Time*.

The Ukrainian born Nikolay Gogol (1809-1852) displayed a keen satirical wit in his depiction of the absurdities of life. Unlike his Romantic predecessors, whose primary characters were often of the upper classes or else they were of the breed of the “noble savage”, Gogol’s characters were often underprivileged, misguided, socially abused or abusive persons coming to terms with life’s little and sometimes great ironies. His masterpieces include the short story, “The Overcoat”, the play, *The Inspector General*, and his unfinished three-volume mock epic, *Dead Souls*. Gogol was to be the forerunner to the era of Russian realism that was employed by Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy.

The three greatest of Russia’s novelists were contemporaries of each other. Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) were great critics of each other’s works. Each of these writers explored the moral conflict and psychology of their characters, the humanity of the Russian serf and his master, dealt with rumblings of social unrest that was beginning to occur in the 19th century, examined the cruel and base behavior of men and women as much as they explored the inner nobility and great love of humankind, addressed the political and spiritual power of the Orthodox Church, in much of their realistic fiction there carries an undercurrent pressing for social reform. Within one of these writer’s novels, the careful 21st century reader can gain an insight to the physical and social landscape of Russia while on a deeper level gaining an insight to human themes that color the fabric of the human experience.

Turgenev is the least read of the three authors. A champion for the abolishment of serfdom, his book, *A Sportsman’s Sketches*, a series of stories about the lives of serfs, is said to have influenced Alexander I’s abolishment of serfdom. His great novels include, *Fathers and Sons*, *Virgin Soil*, and *A Nest of Gentlemen*. Although a writer in the realist vein, his work is touched with a sublime poetic quality, in his latter years in life he worked with the genre of prose poetry. Due to his moderate



political stance and pro-Westernization sentiments, Turgenev found more success in the West during his life than in Russia.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky was to greatly influence the development of modern literature. He is considered a precursor to existentialist literature as well as the psychological novel. The psychological introspection and mental malaise of the characters as seen in *Poor Folk*, *Notes from the Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Brothers Zaramazov* are written in such a way that the reader is intimately drawn into the social dysfunctions and moral conflicts that expedite or paralyze the choices of the characters. It is also through the choices of the characters, important for character development and provides the momentum of the plot, that the element of existentialism occurs. His novels are also tempered with questions of morality, atheism, spirituality, and God's place in society and the hearts of the individual, as seen in *The Possessed*, *The Idiot*, and *The Brothers Zaramazov*, his last and arguably finest novel.

Leo Tolstoy was a writer of epic novels, philosophical treaties and religious tracts. He held a world view that history was determined by the collective desires of the masses that propel history forward rather than a powerful individual person as seen in his masterpiece about five Russia families during the Napoleonic War, *War and Peace*. As a realist, Tolstoy placed emphasis on depicting the everyday actions that add meaning to life. Towards his later life he was an outspoken advocate for brotherly love and non-violent actions, a critic of both the government and Russian Orthodox Church as seen in, *Christian Teaching*, *A Confession* and *What I Believe*. Other major works include *Anna Karenina*, *Resurrection* and his autobiographical novels, *The Cossacks*, *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth*.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), a master of the short story and popular playwright, ended the Golden Age of Russian Literature. He wrote stories with a great humor, sensitivity and compassion for Russians from all walks of life which can be read in a collection of his writings such as, *Motley Stories* and *Stories*. *The Seagull*, *The Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard* are plays that satirize the lives of the middle class. His plays are still quite popular, even more so than his short shorts.

The 20th century saw a number of literary movements motivated by social and political factors. The first of these movements is known as the Silver Age in Russian Literature, the last decades of creative freedom that was allowed until the 1990s. As with the avant-garde in art, the avant-garde in literature allowed experimentation in literature, redefining literary forms and techniques in pursuit of creative emotional expression, and poetry became the perfect vehicle for this creativity.

The initial poetic movement was the Symbolist movement. The Symbolist movement began as a reaction against the Literary Realism of the previous century. These poets were very much drawn to the metaphysical writings of the Russian religious philosopher and poet, Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900), cherished the imagination and mysticism, and believed that art can and should transcend reality. Their poetry often features sensuous imagery and abstract images that leave impressions upon the reader rather than dictate meaning. Important Symbolist writer include,



Alaksandr Blok (1880-1921), Andrey Bely (1880 - 1934), Valery Bryusov (1873-1924), Konstantine Balmont (1867-1942), Viacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949), and Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945).

The Acmeists followed the Symbolists but choose to write about the human condition in concrete terms rather than with vague metaphysical ideas and personal abstractions on life. There are the elements of precise emotional and physical descriptions in well-constructed forms with their poetry and other writings. Many of the greatest 20th century Russian poets were from this poetic society, Nikolay Guilyov (1886-1921), Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966), Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) and Marie Tsvetaeva (1892-1941).

The Futurist wanted to break completely with all past notions of poetic standards and develop new means of expression that complement the new world of political revolution and the age of the machine. Vladimir Mayakovksy (1893-1930) and Velemir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) were leading futurist poets.

The journalist, novelist, playwright and revolutionary, Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), was the founder of Socialist Realism. Gorky's youth was spent living and working among the underprivileged classes of people. Due to this close relationship with the "derelicts" of society, Gorky's writings revealed a deep compassion for the soul of the proletariat and society's underdogs, illuminating the struggles and triumphs of their lives. He also voiced a strong contempt for the bourgeoisie. Gorky's life was often caught between a rock and a hard place; he held a vocally pro-socialist stance yet opposed the fascist methods of Lenin and Stalin. He is highly regarded for his novels, *Mother* and *The Artamov Business*, the play *The Lower Depths* (1902), and the book *Notes on the Bourgeois Mentality*.

In 1932, the Writers' Union of the Soviet government, headed by Gorky, officially mandated Socialist Realism as the sole means of artistic expression for the Soviet Union. Socialist Realism in literature required, as in art, that literature of any type must be written to glorify the proletariat revolution, the new state of communism and Party leaders. All literature was to be propaganda for the State. Any publication, book of poetry, fiction, or history that failed to support the ideals of Socialist Realism was banned and removed from libraries. Religious writings were banned altogether. Writers had to conform to government standards or risk being their works to remain unpublished. If writings were critical of the government or Marxist doctrines the risk was greater. During the Great Terror many writers were imprisoned, rehabilitated, or executed between the decades of the 1930s and 1950s in an effort to purge the country of ideological dissent. Mandelstam's and Guilyov's lives were taken during these political purges, as were the lives of writers Boris Andreyevich Vogau (1894-1937) and Daniil Kharms (1904-1942).

Important post revolutionary writers include; Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), poet and author of *Doctor Zhivago*, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958 but Soviet authorities

forced him to relinquish his prize; the Ukrainian born, Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940) a playwright, novelist and short story writer, wrote the dark and satirical Soviet tale, *The Master and Margarita*; and novelist, Andrei Sinyavsky (1925–1997), who wrote, *The Trial Begins*, *The Makepeace Experiment*, and *Goodnight*.

Other writers were deported or left of their own accord. These writers in exile include Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin (1870- 1953) who was awarded the 1933 Nobel Prize for Literature; Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977); Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (b. 1918), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970, who did return to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union; and Joseph Brodsky (1940-1996) who was the 1987 Nobel Prize recipient for Literature.

Since the 1980s, there has been an opening up of creative freedom for writers. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990s poets and writers could once again gain creative control of their craft. Today, poets, Yevgeny Yevtushenko (b. 1933), Bella Akhmadulina (b. 1937); novelists, Andrei Makine (b. 1957) and Peter Aleshkovsky (1957); and short story writer, Tatyana Tolstaya (b. 1951) are important voices of the new Russian literary world.

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## **Cuisine**

The Russian cuisine is distinguished by its heartiness and variety of flavor produced by combining readily available ingredients such as beetroot, potato, mushroom, cabbage, grains, sour cream, dill, parley and horseradish. Common Russian specialties consist of caviar; kasha, a wholesome dish made with buckwheat porridge; borsch, a beetroot soup; shchi, a cabbage soup; bliny, pancakes topped with sour cream, caviar or fruit; Beef Stroganov, strips of beef covered in a cream sauce; Chicken Kiev, a large chicken stuffed with mushrooms; vinegret, a cold salad consisting of pickled

cabbage, potatoes, onion, beet and carrots; Stolichny salad, potato salad; pirozhki, meat filled pastries; golubtsy, beef-filled cabbage roll in a sour cream sauce; ice cream and smetana, a pie filled with a berry and sour cream mixture. Pickled vegetables such as cabbage and cucumbers and rye bread accompany most meals. Vodka, known in Russia as the little water, is the drink of choice.

Historically, Russia has been one of the largest exporters and consumers of caviar in the world. The Caspian Sea is home to the beluga sturgeon an ancient fish whose black eggs (often referred to as "black pearls") are the most sought after and expensive caviar in the world. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, which enacted strict controls over the production of caviar, the regulations on fishing for sturgeon has become ineffective or obsolete and over-fishing, pollution, and poaching the waters of the Caspian Sea has left the sturgeon on the edge of extinction. However, in June 2001, the countries that surround the Caspian have agreed to halt the fishing of sturgeon until 2002 to assess the damage that has been done to sturgeon levels. Should large scale poaching continue, the world's most expensive eggs may become extinct in as little as ten years.

<http://www.russianfoods.com/cuisine/room/default.asp> [http://www.russiajournal.com/news/rj\\_news.snd=954](http://www.russiajournal.com/news/rj_news.snd=954)

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## Etiquette

### Cultural Dos and Taboos

1. Shake hands, firmly but briefly, with everyone (including children) when introduced. It is also customary to shake hands once again upon your departure. Men should wait to see if women extend their hands in inter-gender meetings. In formal settings, local men may kiss the hands of women in greeting, but the replication of this practice by foreigners may not be well received. Note that it is impolite to reach over someone else's handshake. Also, avoid keeping your left hand in your pocket while shaking hands with your right.
2. Note that Russians often greet a stranger by shaking hands and stating their last name, rather than uttering the polite phrase (i.e. "how do you do?"). It is advisable that you greet and respond in the same way. Meanwhile, relatives and good friends will engage in a noisy embrace and kiss each

other on the cheeks.

3. The decision to address each other by first names may be decided by mutual consent, although the best practice is to err on the side of formality and use titles and surnames when first meeting someone.

4. Both the American "O.K." sign and any shaken-fist gesture will be interpreted as vulgar. Note also that whistling is not taken as a sign of approval and may even be associated with negative superstitions, such as the loss of money. The "thumb up" gesture, however, indicates approval among Russians.

5. Avoid sitting with the legs splayed apart or with one ankle resting upon the knee, and refrain from placing your feet on any furniture other than a footstool.

6. Laughing or speaking loudly is considered to be rude.

7. Politics and other complicated issues, such as religion and culture, are acceptable topics of discussion in most European countries. The Russians tend to be well informed about politics and to have their own opinions. While conversation on such issues is not discouraged, visitors should not expect Eastern Europeans to be entirely approving of Western concepts, ideas and political viewpoints. Peace, international relations, the changes in Russia, and difficult economic situations are all common topics of conversation. Other suggested topics of conversation include sports, music, travel, and local culture.

8. Western business practices are quickly becoming the norm across Europe, including such things as business lunches. One should not, however, enter into business discussions without some light introductory conversation, politesse and other such niceties. In this regard, it is acceptable to ask about your counterpart's family. If the lunch or dinner meeting is your idea, you should insist on payment being your responsibility.

9. Toasts are frequently offered at meals and as a result, it is good to know a few toasts. The most common is *Nah-zda-ROE-vee-ah*.

10. In a restaurant or nightclub, Russians may invite you to dance or to come over to their table. Gracious acceptance is advised.

11. It is a great honor to be invited to a Russian home. It is a good idea to bring flowers, liquor, or a food item that is scarce as a gift to the host and hostess. Note that red roses are reserved for romantic situations in many cultures, while lilies are often associated with funerals. Liquor, or a food item currently in scarce supply, are also good gifts.

12. During meals, the host may invite you to eat additional portions. It is traditional in many European cultures to turn down the first invitation.

13. When eating, always use utensils. Note that very few items are eaten with the hands. Also, adhere to the European standard of the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right hand. Avoid the Americanized "cross over" where one uses the knife only to cut meat, while using the fork in the right hand otherwise. Place your utensils together on one side of the plate when you have finished eating. The best practice is to place your knife and fork together in the 4 o'clock position on your plate. Meanwhile, if you wish to pause between courses, cross your utensils on the plate.

14. Generally, Russians dress in a casual but conservative manner, except at dinners or other more formal engagements. Conservative suits (dark in color with ties and white shirts) are usually worn by businessmen, while women's business attire consists of dark skirts and dresses. Discretion is advised in the realm of business, while trendy fashions may be more acceptable in other less formal domains of life.

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## Travel Information

### Please Note

**This is a generalized travel guide and it is intended to coalesce several resources, which a traveler might find useful, regardless of a particular destination. As such, it does not include travel warnings for specific "hot spot" destinations.**

**For travel alerts and warnings, please see the United States Department of State's listings available at URL:**

**<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html>**

**Please note that travel to the following countries, based on these warnings, is ill-advised, or should be undertaken with the utmost precaution:**

**Afghanistan, Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Honduras, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories of West Bank and Gaza, Philippines areas of Sulu Archipelago, Mindanao, and southern Sulu Sea, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen.**

## **International Travel Guide**

### **Checklist for Travelers**

- 1.** Take out travel insurance to cover hospital treatment or medical evacuation. Overseas medical costs are expensive to most international travelers, where one's domestic, nationalized or even private health insurance plans will not provide coverage outside one's home country. Learn about "reciprocal insurance plans" that some international health care companies might offer.
- 2.** Make sure that one's travel insurance is appropriate. If one intends to indulge in adventurous activities, such as parasailing, one should be sure that one is fully insured in such cases. Many traditional insurance policies do not provide coverage in cases of extreme circumstances.
- 3.** Take time to learn about one's destination country and culture. Read and learn about the place one is traveling. Also check political, economic and socio-cultural developments at the destination by reading country-specific travel reports and fact sheets noted below.
- 4.** Get the necessary visas for the country (or countries) one intends to visit - but be aware that a visa does not guarantee entry. A number of useful sites regarding visa and other entry requirements are noted below.
- 5.** Keep in regular contact with friends and relatives back at home by phone or email, and be sure to leave a travel itinerary.
- 6.** Protect one's personal information by making copies of one's passport details, insurance policy, travelers checks and credit card numbers. Taking copies of such documents with you, while leaving another collection copies with someone at home is also good practice for travelers. Taking copies of one's passport photograph is also recommended.
- 7.** Stay healthy by taking all possible precautions against illness. Also, be sure to take extra supplies of prescription drugs along for the trip, while also taking time to pack general pharmaceutical supplies, such as aspirin and other such painkillers, bandages, stomach ailment medication, anti-inflammatory medication and anti-bacterial medication.
- 8.** Do not carry illicit drugs. Understand that the punishment for possession or use of illegal drugs in some countries may be capital punishment. Make sure your prescription drugs are legal in the countries you plan to visit.
- 9.** Know the laws of one's destination country and culture; be sure to understand the repercussions of breaking those laws and regulations. Often the transparency and freedoms of the juridical system at home is not consistent with that of one's destination country. Become aware of these complexities and subtleties before you travel.
- 10.** For longer stays in a country, or where the security situation is volatile, one should register one's self and traveling companions at the local embassy or consulate of one's country of citizenship.
- 11.** Women should take care to be prepared both culturally and practically for traveling in a different country and culture. One should be sure to take sufficient supplies of personal feminine

products and prescription drugs. One should also learn about local cultural standards for women, including norms of dressing. Be aware that it is simply inappropriate and unsafe for women to travel alone in some countries, and take the necessary precautions to avoid risk-filled situations.

**12.** If one is traveling with small children, one should pack extra supplies, make arrangements with the travel carrier for proper seating that would adequately accommodate children, infants or toddlers. Note also that whether one is male or female, traveling with children means that one's hands are thus not free to carry luggage and bags. Be especially aware that this makes one vulnerable to pickpockets, thieves and other sorts of crime.

**13.** Make proper arrangements for accommodations, well in advance of one's arrival at a destination. Some countries have limited accommodation, while others may have culturally distinctive facilities. Learning about these practicalities before one travels will greatly aid the enjoyment of one's trip.

**14.** Travel with different forms of currency and money (cash, traveler's checks and credit cards) in anticipation that venues may not accept one or another form of money. Also, ensuring that one's financial resources are not contained in one location, or by one person (if one is traveling with others) can be a useful measure, in the event that one loses a wallet or purse.

**15.** Find out about transportation in the destination country. In some places, it might be advisable to hire a local driver or taxi guide for safety reasons, while in other countries, enjoying one's travel experience may well be enhanced by renting a vehicle and seeing the local sights and culture independently. Costs may also be prohibitive for either of these choices, so again, prior planning is suggested.

### **Note to Travelers**

Russia is a vast and diverse nation that continues to evolve politically and economically. Travel and living conditions in Russia contrast sharply with those in Western Europe and North America. Major urban centers show tremendous differences in economic development compared to rural areas. Past economic difficulties have included bank closures. Travelers sometimes cannot access money easily via credit card advances or wire transfers. While good tourist facilities exist in Moscow, St. Petersburg and some other large cities, they are not developed in most of Russia, and some of the goods and services taken for granted in other countries are not yet available. Petty crime affects foreigners in large urban centers. Travel to the Caucasus region of Russia is dangerous. Travel to Chechnya and adjoining areas is ill-advised; foreign nationals in these areas would do well to depart immediately. Travelers may need to cross great distances, especially in Siberia and the Far East, to obtain services from Russian government organizations, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow or one of the three U.S. consulates general in Russia: St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Vladivostok.

Medical care is usually far below Western standards, with severe shortages of basic medical supplies. Access to the few quality facilities that exist in major cities usually requires cash payment



at Western rates upon admission. The U.S. Embassy and consulates maintain lists of such facilities and English-speaking doctors. Many resident Americans travel to the west for medical needs. Such travel can be very expensive if undertaken under emergency conditions. Travelers should check their insurance coverage and purchase supplemental coverage for medical evacuation. Elderly travelers and those with existing health problems may be at particular risk.

In some areas of Russia, roads are practically non-existent. Persons planning to drive in Russia should adhere to all local driving regulations. These are strictly enforced, and violators are subject to severe legal penalties. A valid driver's license is necessary to drive a vehicle in Russia. International driver's licenses issued by the American Automobile Association are not accepted in Russia. Tourists can use an American driver's license, but they need to carry an official (notarized) Russian translation of the American license. Foreigners who are in Russia on a business visa or with a permanent residence status in Russia are required by law to have a Russian driver's license. In order to do that, one has to take an appropriate exam. An American driver's license cannot be exchanged for a Russian license. Travelers without a valid license are often subject to prolonged stops by highway police.

Your automobile should be fully insured under a policy valid in Russia. U.S. automobile liability insurance is not valid nor are most collision and comprehensive coverage policies issued by U.S. companies. A good rule of thumb is to buy coverage equivalent to that which you carry in the United States.

Drivers should be aware that Russia practices zero tolerance of any alcohol consumption prior to driving. Avoid excessive speed and, if at all possible, do not drive at night. Loose livestock can appear on the roads at any time. Construction sites or stranded vehicles are often unmarked by flares or other warning signals. Sometimes cars have only one headlight. Many cars lack brake lights. Bicycles seldom have lights or reflectors. Be prepared for sudden stops at any time.

Learn about your route from an auto club, guide book or a government tourist office. Some routes have heavy truck and bus traffic; others have poor or nonexistent shoulders. Also, some of the newer roads have very few restaurants, motels, gas stations or auto repair shops. For your safety, have your vehicle serviced and in optimum condition before you travel. It is wise to bring an extra fan belt, fuses and other spare parts.

Law enforcement checkpoints aimed at detecting narcotics, alien smuggling and firearms traffic are located at various places throughout the country. Many checkpoints are operated by uniformed officials; however, others will not be marked and are manned by police or military officers not in uniform. Traffic police sometimes stop motorists to extract cash "fines."

Please see the "Security and Safety" section below for important information about these matters.

Source: *The United States Department of State Consular Information Sheets.*

## **Tips for Travelers**

- Check with your embassy, consulate, or appropriate government institution related to travel before traveling.
- Bring enough funds for your stay and onward/return journey. Bring cash in US dollars. Bank transfers are possible but take time.
- Declare all foreign currency if it exceeds US dollars 1,500 in cash and valuable items such as cameras, computers, jewelry etc, on arrival at customs.
- Keep your valuables - cash, travelers checks and credit cards, passport, visa and travel documents - in a safe place. If valuables are stolen, inform the militia (police) and obtain a report.
- Ensure that your visa is valid. Lost/expired visas can be replaced, but it is a lengthy and complex procedure and heavy fines can be levied. Your sponsor is responsible for regularizing your status. You will not be allowed to leave Russia without a visa. Keep a separate record of your passport details, preferably a certified photocopy of the first five pages of a blue passport or the 'Details' page of a new passport. Photocopies of your birth certificate and visa would also help. Enter next of kin details into the back of your passport.
- Be aware of pickpockets, bag-snatchers and gypsy children. Theft is commonplace on public transport, at railway stations and airports.
- Take care at all stations and on trains, particularly long distance and international services, e.g. St Petersburg/Moscow. Make sure that your cabin door is quite secure from the inside by tying closed with wire or strong cord.
- Ask your travel agent for the leaflet British Consular Services Abroad.
- Don't leave home without travel insurance. Ensure that you are fully covered not only for medical treatment/local hospitalization and medical evacuation but also unexpected expenses such as costs incurred from overbooked flights. It is not unknown for travelers to spend some days waiting for onward flights.
- Don't get involved with drugs. Penalties are severe.
- Don't drink and drive. It is against the law. Don't leave drinks unattended in bars/restaurants as

they may be drugged. Take care when drinking with casual acquaintances.

Note: This information is directly quoted from the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Sources: *United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office*

### **Business Culture: Information for Business Travelers**

All Americans traveling to or transiting through Russia by any means of transportation must have a passport and visa. Travelers who arrive without a passport or entry visa are subject to fines, days of processing requirements imposed by Russian officials, and/or deportation by route of entry at the traveler's expense. The Embassy continues to recommend that all travelers obtain visas before traveling to Russia, regardless of the length of their stay or the purpose of their travel, including those simply changing planes at Sheremetovo Airport. Visas, other than for transit purposes, are issued based on support from a Russian individual or organization - the sponsor. It is very important to know your sponsor and how he or she can be contacted. Russian law requires the sponsor to apply for replacement, extension or changes to your visa. The Embassy and Consulates cannot act as a sponsor. Tourists should contact their tour company or hotel in advance for information on visa sponsorship.

All foreigners must have an exit visa to depart. For short stays, the exit visa is issued along with the entry visa. For longer stays, the sponsor must obtain the exit visa after the traveler's arrival. The vast majority of Russian visas are issued exit permission along with the entry visa. All travelers who spend more than three days in Russia must register their visa through their hotel or sponsor and may encounter problems when leaving the country if they fail to do so. Visitors who either loose or overstay their visas, even for one day, are unable to leave until the visa is extended or replaced. In order to avoid needing a visa extension, the Embassy advises all Americans to obtain visas for a longer validity than they anticipate needing and to depart before the visa expires. Errors in dates or other information on the visa can and do occur, and it is helpful to verify this information before departing the United States. It is recommended that travelers have all entry, exit, and itinerary points listed on their visa, in order to avoid any difficulties in registering or any delays in travel. Although it is no longer legally required for all itinerary points to be listed, not all local authorities seem aware of the change. Random document checks by police on foreigners are infrequent but do occur, so foreign citizens should carry their passport and visa (or photocopies). Failure to present proper documentation can lead to detention and/or fines.

Though many better-educated Russians in major cities speak English, you should be prepared to operate in Russian. Many first-time visitors are struck by how difficult it can be to find anyone who speaks English. Visiting businesses should hire a reputable interpreter when conducting

important negotiations. Not having product literature in Russian will put your company at a big disadvantage relative to other North American, European and Asian competitors, not to mention local firms.

While winters can be extremely cold in Russia with occasional temperatures in the minus-20 Fahrenheit range in northern and Siberian cities, Moscow's and St. Petersburg's climate can be less severe than some northern cities. Winter clothes may be needed as early as October or as late as April. Water-resistant footwear with thick soles is advised, because the pavement is often rough and large puddles form after rain. In winter one must be prepared for either slush or icy sidewalks. Summers, while brief, can be surprisingly hot, and air conditioning is still rare outside big-city hotels.

Sources: *United States Department of State Commercial Guides*

For more general information on etiquette in Russia, see our Cultural Etiquette page.

### **Online Resources Regarding Entry Requirements and Visas**

Foreign Entry Requirements for Americans from the United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1765.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html)

Visa Services for Non-Americans from the United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/visa\\_1750.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html)

Visa Bulletins from the United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin\\_1360.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin_1360.html)

Visa Waivers from the United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without\\_1990.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html) - new

Passport and Visa Information from the Government of the United Kingdom

<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

Visa Information from the Government of Australia

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/visas/index.html>

Passport Information from the Government of Australia

<https://www.passports.gov.au/Web/index.aspx>

Passport Information from the Government of Canada

[http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation\\_information/passport\\_passeport-eng.asp](http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/passport_passeport-eng.asp)

Visa Information from the Government of Canada

[http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation\\_information/visas-eng.asp](http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/visas-eng.asp)

Online Visa Processing by Immigration Experts by VisaPro

<http://www.visapro.com>

Sources: United States Department of State, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Canada Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Useful Online Resources for Travelers

Country-Specific Travel Information from United States

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1765.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html)

Travel Advice by Country from Government of United Kingdom

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/>

General Travel Advice from Government of Australia

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/General>

Travel Bulletins from the Government of Australia

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/TravelBulletins/>

Travel Tips from Government of Australia

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/tips/index.html>

Travel Checklist by Government of Canada

[http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation\\_information/checklist\\_sommaire-eng.asp](http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/checklist_sommaire-eng.asp)

Travel Checklist from Government of United Kingdom

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/staying-safe/checklist>

Your trip abroad from United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures\\_1225.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1225.html)

A safe trip abroad from United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_1747.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html)

Tips for expatriates abroad from United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/residing/residing\\_1235.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/residing/residing_1235.html)

Tips for students from United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/studying/studying\\_1238.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/studying/studying_1238.html) <http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/broc>

Medical information for travelers from United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\\_1185.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html)

US Customs Travel information

<http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/travel/>

Sources: United States Department of State; United States Customs Department, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Government of Australia; Government of Canada: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Other Practical Online Resources for Travelers

Foreign Language Phrases for Travelers

<http://www.travlang.com/languages/>

<http://www.omniglot.com/language/phrases/index.htm>

World Weather Forecasts

<http://www.intellicast.com/>

<http://www.wunderground.com/>

<http://www.worldweather.org/>

Worldwide Time Zones, Map, World Clock

<http://www.timeanddate.com/>

<http://www.worldtimezone.com/>

International Airport Codes

<http://www.world-airport-codes.com/>

International Dialing Codes

<http://www.kropla.com/dialcode.htm>

<http://www.countrycallingcodes.com/>

International Phone Guide

<http://www.kropla.com/phones.htm>

International Mobile Phone Guide

<http://www.kropla.com/mobilephones.htm>

International Internet Café Search Engine

<http://cybercaptive.com/>

Global Internet Roaming

<http://www.kropla.com/roaming.htm>

World Electric Power Guide

<http://www.kropla.com/electric.htm>

<http://www.kropla.com/electric2.htm>

World Television Standards and Codes

<http://www.kropla.com/tv.htm>

International Currency Exchange Rates

<http://www.xe.com/ucc/>

Banking and Financial Institutions Across the World

<http://www.123world.com/banks/index.html>

International Credit Card or Automated Teller Machine (ATM) Locator

<http://visa.via.infonow.net/locator/global/>

<http://www.mastercard.com/us/personal/en/cardholderservices/atmlocations/index.html>

International Chambers of Commerce

<http://www.123world.com/chambers/index.html>

World Tourism Websites

<http://123world.com/tourism/>

Diplomatic and Consular Information

United States Diplomatic Posts Around the World

<http://www.usembassy.gov/>



United Kingdom Diplomatic Posts Around the World

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/embassies-and-posts/find-an-embassy-overseas/>

Australia's Diplomatic Posts Around the World

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/missions/>

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/embassies.html>

Canada's Embassies and High Commissions

<http://www.international.gc.ca/ciw-cdm/embassies-ambassades.aspx>

Resources for Finding Embassies and other Diplomatic Posts Across the World

<http://www.escapeartist.com/embassy1/embassy1.htm>

Safety and Security

Travel Warnings by Country from Government of Australia

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/>

Travel Warnings and Alerts from United States Department of State

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/tw/tw\\_1764.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html)

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/pa/pa\\_1766.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html)

Travel Reports and Warnings by Government of Canada

[http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries\\_pays/menu-eng.asp](http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/menu-eng.asp)

[http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries\\_pays/updates\\_mise-a-jour-eng.asp](http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/updates_mise-a-jour-eng.asp)

Travel Warnings from Government of United Kingdom

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/>

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/?action=noTravelAll#noTravelAll>

Sources: United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the United States Department of State, the Government of Canada: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Government of Australia: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Other Safety and Security Online Resources for Travelers

United States Department of State Information on Terrorism

<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/>

Government of the United Kingdom Resource on the Risk of Terrorism

[http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?  
pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1044011304926](http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1044011304926)

Government of Canada Terrorism Guide

<http://www.international.gc.ca/crime/terrorism-terrorisme.aspx?lang=eng>

Information on Terrorism by Government of Australia

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/icat/index.html>

FAA Resource on Aviation Safety

<http://www.faasafety.gov/>

In-Flight Safety Information for Air Travel (by British Airways crew trainer, Anna Warman)

<http://www.warman.demon.co.uk/anna/inflight.html>

Hot Spots: Travel Safety and Risk Information

<http://www.airsecurity.com/hotspots/HotSpots.asp>

Information on Human Rights

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/>

Sources: The United States Department of State, the United States Customs Department, the Government of Canada, the Government of United Kingdom, the Government of Australia, the Federal Aviation Authority, Anna Warman's In-flight Website, Hot Spots Travel and Risk Information

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## **Diseases/Health Data**

**Please Note: Most of the entry below constitutes a generalized health advisory, which a**

traveler might find useful, regardless of a particular destination.

As a supplement, however, the reader will also find below a list of countries flagged with current health notices and alerts issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Please note that travel to the following countries, based on these 3 levels of warnings, is ill-advised, or should be undertaken with the utmost precaution:

**Level 3 (highest level of concern; avoid non-essential travel) --**

**Guinea - Ebola**  
**Liberia - Ebola**  
**Nepal - Earthquake zone**  
**Sierra Leone - Ebola**

**Level 2 (intermediate level of concern; use utmost caution during travel) --**

**Cameroon - Polio**  
**Somalia - Polio**  
**Vanuatu - Tropical Cyclone zone**  
**Throughout Middle East and Arabia Peninsula - MERS ((Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)**

**Level 1 (standard level of concern; use practical caution during travel) -**

**Australia - Ross River disease**  
**Bosnia-Herzegovina - Measles**  
**Brazil - Dengue Fever**  
**Brazil - Malaria**  
**Brazil - Zika**  
**China - H7N9 Avian flu**  
**Cuba - Cholera**  
**Egypt - H5N1 Bird flu**  
**Ethiopia - Measles**  
**Germany - Measles**  
**Japan - Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD)**  
**Kyrgyzstan - Measles**  
**Malaysia -Dengue Fever**  
**Mexico - Chikungunya**  
**Mexico - Hepatitis A**  
**Nigeria - Meningitis**  
**Philippines - Measles**

**Scotland - Mumps**

**Singapore - Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD)**

**South Korea - MERS ((Middle East Respiratory Syndrome)**

**Throughout Caribbean - Chikungunya**

**Throughout Central America - Chikungunya**

**Throughout South America - Chikungunya**

**Throughout Pacific Islands - Chikungunya**

**For specific information related to these health notices and alerts please see the CDC's listing available at URL:**

**<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>**

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### **Health Information for Travelers to Russia**

Food and waterborne diseases are the number one cause of illness in travelers. Travelers' diarrhea can be caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites, which are found throughout Eastern Europe and can contaminate food or water. Infections may cause diarrhea and vomiting (*E. coli*, *Salmonella*, cholera, and parasites), fever (typhoid fever and toxoplasmosis), or liver damage (hepatitis). Make sure your food and drinking water are safe. (See below.)

Malaria is a preventable infection that can be fatal if left untreated. Prevent infection by taking prescription antimalarial drugs and protecting yourself against mosquito bites (see below). Risk for malaria exists only in small southern border areas of Azerbaijan and Tajikistan. Travelers to these areas should take chloroquine to prevent malaria. For more detailed information about malaria in this region, see Malaria Risk and Prevention in Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/regionalmalaria/easteurp.htm>).

A certificate of yellow fever vaccination may be required for entry into certain of these countries if you are coming from a tropical South American or sub-Saharan African country. (There is no risk for yellow fever in Eastern European and NIS countries.) For detailed information, see Comprehensive Yellow Fever Vaccination Requirements (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/yelfever.htm>).

An outbreak of diphtheria is occurring in all the states of the former Soviet Union. Travelers to these areas should be sure that their diphtheria immunization is up to date.

Tickborne encephalitis, a viral infection of the central nervous system occurs chiefly in Central and Western Europe. Travelers are at risk who visit or work in forested areas during the summer

months and who consume unpasteurized dairy products. Vaccine for this disease is not available in the United States at this time. To prevent tickborne encephalitis, as well as Lyme disease, travelers should take precautions to prevent tick bites (see below).

Because motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury among travelers, walk and drive defensively. Avoid nighttime travel if possible and always use seat belts.

### **CDC Recommends the Following Vaccines (as Appropriate for Age):**

See your doctor at least 4-6 weeks before your trip to allow time for shots to take effect.

- Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG).
- Hepatitis B, if you might be exposed to blood (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, stay longer than 6 months, or be exposed through medical treatment.
- Rabies, if you might be exposed to wild or domestic animals through your work or recreation.
- Typhoid, particularly if you are visiting developing countries in this region.
- As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria, measles, and a one-time dose of polio vaccine for adults. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for 11- to 12-year-olds who did not receive the series as infants.

### **To Stay Healthy, Do:**

- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Drink only bottled or boiled water, or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes. If this is not possible, make water safer by BOTH filtering through an "absolute 1-micron or less" filter AND adding iodine tablets to the filtered water. "Absolute 1-micron filters" are found in camping/outdoor supply stores.
- Eat only thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables you have peeled yourself. Remember: boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.
- If you are going to visit risk areas for malaria, take your malaria prevention medication before, during, and after travel, as directed. (See your doctor for a prescription.)
- Protect yourself from insects by remaining in well-screened areas, using repellents (applied sparingly at 4-hour intervals), and wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants tucked into boots or socks as a deterrent to ticks.
- To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep feet clean and dry, and do not go barefoot.
- Always use latex condoms to reduce the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

### **To Avoid Getting Sick:**

- Don't eat food purchased from street vendors.
- Don't drink beverages with ice.
- Don't eat dairy products unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Don't share needles with anyone.
- Don't handle animals (especially monkeys, dogs, and cats), to avoid bites and serious diseases

(including rabies and plague).

**What You Need To Bring with You:**

- Long-sleeved shirt and long pants to wear while outside whenever possible, to prevent illnesses carried by insects.
- Insect repellent containing DEET (diethylmethylnoluanide), in 30%-35% strength for adults and 6%-10% for children. The insecticide permethrin applied to clothing is an effective deterrent to ticks.
- Over-the-counter antidiarrheal medicine to take if you have diarrhea.
- Iodine tablets and water filters to purify water if bottled water is not available. See above for more information about water filters.
- Sunblock, sunglasses, hat.
- Prescription medications: make sure you have enough to last during your trip, as well as a copy of the prescription(s).

**After You Return Home:**

If you have visited an area where there is risk for malaria, continue taking your malaria medication weekly for 4 weeks after you leave the area.

If you become ill after your trip-even as long as a year after you return-tell your doctor where you have traveled.

**For More Information:**

Ask your doctor or check the CDC web sites for more information about how to protect yourself against diseases that occur in Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States (NIS).

**For information about diseases-**

Carried by Insects

Lyme disease, Malaria

Carried in Food or Water

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy ("mad cow disease"), Cholera, *Escherichia coli*, diarrhea, Hepatitis A, Typhoid Fever

Person-to-Person Contact

Hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS

For more information about these and other diseases, also check the Diseases

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(<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases.htm>) section and the Health Topics A - Z (<http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm>).

*Note:*

*Russia is located in the Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States (NIS) health region.*

*Sources:*

*The Center for Disease Control Destinations Website:*

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm>



# **Chapter 6**

## **Environmental Overview**

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## Environmental Issues

### General Overview:

Russia 's vast terrain has a variety of climates, landscapes, and natural resources. In particular, Russia has an abundance of energy resources, such as oil and natural gas, as well as timber and iron ore.

Present-day environmental issues are largely a result of Soviet industrialization policies and the scant attention paid to ecological and environmental concerns. Air pollution, in particular, is acute. In addition, the level of soil degradation may have long-term effects on Russia 's agricultural self-sufficiency.

### Current Issues:

- deforestation
- soil erosion
- soil contamination from improper application of agricultural chemicals
- air pollution from heavy industry
- emissions from coal-fired electric plants, as well as vehicles and other forms of transportation in major cities
- industrial and agricultural pollution of inland waterways and sea coasts
- intense radioactive contamination in scattered areas
- high levels of oncology and other health compromises in areas affected by nuclear fall-out
- inadequate sewage and waste treatment systems in some areas

### Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Mtc):

523.7

### Country Rank (GHG output):

4th

### **Natural Hazards:**

- permafrost
- volcanic activity
- earthquakes

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## **Environmental Policy**

### **Regulation and Jurisdiction:**

The regulation and protection of the environment in Russia is under the jurisdiction of the following:

- Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- Ministry of Civil Defense, Emergencies, and Natural Disasters
- Ministry of Natural Resources
- State Committee for Environmental Protection
- State Committee for Fisheries
- State Committee for Land Policy
- Federal Forestry Service
- Federal Hydro-meteorological and Environmental Monitoring Service
- Federal Inspectorate for Mining and Industrial Safety
- Federal Inspectorate for Nuclear and Radiation Safety

### **Major Non-Governmental Organizations:**

- Ecology and Peace Association and the Pacific Oceanological Institute
- The All-Union Research Institute of Nature Conservation
- Institute for Lake Research at the Academy of Sciences

### **International Environmental Accords:**

*Party to:*

- Air Pollution
- Air Pollution-Nitrogen Oxides

- Air Pollution-Sulfur 85
- Antarctic-Environmental Protocol
- Antarctic-Marine Living Resources
- Antarctic Seals
- Antarctic Treaty
- Biodiversity
- Climate Change
- Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol
- Endangered Species
- Environmental Modification
- Hazardous Wastes
- Law of the Sea
- Marine Dumping
- Nuclear Test Ban
- Ozone Layer Protection
- Ship Pollution
- Tropical Timber 83
- Wetlands
- Whaling

*Signed but not ratified:*

- Air Pollution-Sulfur 94

*Kyoto Protocol Status (year ratified):*

2004

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## **Greenhouse Gas Ranking**

## Greenhouse Gas Ranking

**GHG Emissions Rankings**

<b>Country Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>
1	United States
2	China
4	Russia
5	Japan
6	India
7	Germany
8	United Kingdom
9	Canada
10	Korea, South
11	Italy
12	Mexico
13	France
14	South Africa

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15	Iran
16	Indonesia
17	Australia
18	Spain
19	Brazil
20	Saudi Arabia
21	Ukraine
22	Poland
23	Taiwan
24	Turkey
25	Thailand
26	Netherlands
27	Kazakhstan
28	Malaysia
29	Egypt
30	Venezuela
31	Argentina
32	Uzbekistan

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33	Czech Republic
34	Belgium
35	Pakistan
36	Romania
37	Greece
38	United Arab Emirates
39	Algeria
40	Nigeria
41	Austria
42	Iraq
43	Finland
44	Philippines
45	Vietnam
46	Korea, North
47	Israel
48	Portugal
49	Colombia
50	Belarus

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51	Kuwait
52	Hungary
53	Chile
54	Denmark
55	Serbia & Montenegro
56	Sweden
57	Syria
58	Libya
59	Bulgaria
60	Singapore
61	Switzerland
62	Ireland
63	Turkmenistan
64	Slovakia
65	Bangladesh
66	Morocco
67	New Zealand
68	Oman

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69	Qatar
70	Azerbaijan
71	Norway
72	Peru
73	Cuba
74	Ecuador
75	Trinidad & Tobago
76	Croatia
77	Tunisia
78	Dominican Republic
79	Lebanon
80	Estonia
81	Yemen
82	Jordan
83	Slovenia
84	Bahrain
85	Angola
86	Bosnia & Herzegovina

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87	Lithuania
88	Sri Lanka
89	Zimbabwe
90	Bolivia
91	Jamaica
92	Guatemala
93	Luxembourg
94	Myanmar
95	Sudan
96	Kenya
97	Macedonia
98	Mongolia
99	Ghana
100	Cyprus
101	Moldova
102	Latvia
103	El Salvador
104	Brunei

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105	Honduras
106	Cameroon
107	Panama
108	Costa Rica
109	Cote d'Ivoire
110	Kyrgyzstan
111	Tajikistan
112	Ethiopia
113	Senegal
114	Uruguay
115	Gabon
116	Albania
117	Nicaragua
118	Botswana
119	Paraguay
120	Tanzania
121	Georgia
122	Armenia

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123	Congo, RC
124	Mauritius
125	Nepal
126	Mauritius
127	Nepal
128	Mauritania
129	Malta
130	Papua New Guinea
131	Zambia
132	Suriname
133	Iceland
134	Togo
135	Benin
136	Uganda
137	Bahamas
138	Haiti
139	Congo, DRC
140	Guyana

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141	Mozambique
142	Guinea
143	Equatorial Guinea
144	Laos
145	Barbados
146	Niger
147	Fiji
148	Burkina Faso
149	Malawi
150	Swaziland
151	Belize
152	Afghanistan
153	Sierra Leone
154	Eritrea
155	Rwanda
156	Mali
157	Seychelles
158	Cambodia

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159	Liberia
160	Bhutan
161	Maldives
162	Antigua & Barbuda
163	Djibouti
164	Saint Lucia
165	Gambia
166	Guinea-Bissau
167	Central African Republic
168	Palau
169	Burundi
170	Grenada
171	Lesotho
172	Saint Vincent & the Grenadines
173	Solomon Islands
174	Samoa
175	Cape Verde
176	Nauru

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177	Dominica
178	Saint Kitts & Nevis
179	Chad
180	Tonga
181	Sao Tome & Principe
182	Comoros
183	Vanuatu
185	Kiribati
Not Ranked	Andorra
Not Ranked	East Timor
Not Ranked	Holy See
Not Ranked	Hong Kong
Not Ranked	Liechtenstein
Not Ranked	Marshall Islands
Not Ranked	Micronesia
Not Ranked	Monaco
Not Ranked	San Marino
Not Ranked	Somalia

Not Ranked

Tuvalu

\* European Union is ranked 3rd

Cook Islands are ranked 184th

Niue is ranked 186th

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## Global Environmental Snapshot

### Introduction

The countries of the world face many environmental challenges in common. Nevertheless, the nature and intensity of problem vary from region to region, as do various countries' respective capacities, in terms of affluence and infrastructure, to remediate threats to environmental quality.

Consciousness of perils affecting the global environment came to the fore in the last third or so of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has continued to intensify well into the new millennium. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, considerable environmental progress has been made at the level of institutional developments, international cooperation accords, and public participation. Approximately two-dozen international environmental protection accords with global implications have been promulgated since the late 1970s under auspices of the United Nations and other international organizations, together with many additional regional agreements. Attempts to address and rectify environmental problems take the form of legal frameworks, economic instruments, environmentally sound technologies and cleaner production processes as well as conservation efforts. Environmental impact assessments have increasingly been applied across the globe.

Environmental degradation affects the quality, or aesthetics, of human life, but it also displays potential to undermine conditions necessary for the sustainability of human life. Attitudes toward the importance of environmental protection measures reflect ambivalence derived from this bifurcation. On one hand, steps such as cleaning up pollution, dedicating parkland, and suchlike, are seen as embellishments undertaken by wealthy societies already assured they can successfully perform those functions deemed, ostensibly, more essential-for instance, public health and education, employment and economic development. On the other hand, in poorer countries, activities causing environmental damage-for instance the land degradation effects of unregulated logging, slash-and-burn agriculture, overgrazing, and mining-can seem justified insofar as such activities provide incomes and livelihoods.

Rapid rates of resource depletion are associated with poverty and high population growth, themselves correlated, whereas consumption per capita is much higher in the most developed countries, despite these nations' recent progress in energy efficiency and conservation. It is impossible to sequester the global environmental challenge from related economic, social and political challenges.

First-tier industrialized countries have recently achieved measurable decreases in environmental pollution and the rate of resource depletion, a success not matched in middle income and developing countries. It is believed that the discrepancy is due to the fact that industrialized countries have more developed infrastructures to accommodate changes in environmental policy, to apply environmental technologies, and to invest in public education. The advanced industrialized countries incur relatively lower costs in alleviating environmental problems, in comparison to developing countries, since in the former even extensive environmental programs represent a rather minuscule percentage of total expenditures. Conversely, budget constraints, lagged provision of basic services to the population, and other factors such as debt service and militarization may preclude institution of minimal environmental protection measures in the poorest countries.

A synopsis for the current situation facing each region of the world follows:

### **Regional Synopsis: Africa**

The African continent, the world's second-largest landmass, encompasses many of the world's least developed countries. By global standards, urbanization is comparatively low but rising at a rapid rate. More heavily industrialized areas at the northern and southern ends of the continent experience the major share of industrial pollution. In other regions the most serious environmental problems typically stem from inefficient subsistence farming methods and other forms of land degradation, which have affected an increasingly extensive area under pressure of a widely impoverished, fast-growing population. Africa's distribution of natural resources is very uneven. It is the continent at greatest risk of desertification, especially in the Sahel region at the edge of the Sahara but also in other dry-range areas. Yet at the same time, Africa also harbors some of the earth's richest and most diverse biological zones.

#### **Key Points:**

Up to half a billion hectares of African land are moderately to severely degraded, an occurrence reflecting short-fallow shifting cultivation and overgrazing as well as a climatic pattern of recurrent droughts.

Soil degradation is severe along the expanse directly south of the Sahara, from the west to the east coasts. Parts of southern Africa, central-eastern Africa, and the neighboring island of Madagascar

suffer from serious soil degradation as well.

Africa contains about 17 percent of the world's forest cover, concentrated in the tropical belt of the continent. Many of the forests, however, are severely depleted, with an estimated 70 percent showing some degree of degradation.

Population growth has resulted in continuing loss of arable land, as inefficient subsistence farming techniques affect increasingly extensive areas. Efforts to implement settled, sustainable agriculture have met with some recent success, but much further progress in this direction is needed. Especially in previously uninhabited forestlands, concern over deforestation is intensifying.

By contrast, the African savanna remains the richest grassland in the world, supporting a substantial concentration of animal and plant life. Wildlife parks are sub-Saharan Africa's greatest tourist attraction, and with proper management-giving local people a stake in conservation and controlling the pace of development-could greatly enhance African economies.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of northern, southern and eastern Africa are currently threatened, while the biological diversity in Mauritania and Madagascar is even further compromised with over 20 percent of the mammal species in these two countries currently under threat.

With marine catch trends increasing from 500,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 3,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Water resource vulnerability is a major concern in northeastern Africa, and a moderate concern across the rest of the continent. An exception is central Africa, which has plentiful water supplies.

Many Africans lack adequate access to resources, not just (if at all) because the resources are unevenly distributed geographically, but also through institutional failures such as faulty land tenure systems or political upheaval. The quality of Africa's natural resources, despite their spotty distribution, is in fact extraordinarily rich. The infrastructure needed to protect and benefit from this natural legacy, however, is largely lacking.

### **Regional Synopsis: Asia and the Pacific**

Asia-earth's largest landmass-and the many large and nearly innumerable small islands lying off its Pacific shore display extraordinarily contrasting landscapes, levels of development, and degrees of environmental stress. In the classification used here, the world's smallest continent, Australia, is also included in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to 9 of the world's 14 largest urban areas, and as energy use for utilities, industry and transport increases in developing economies, urban centers are subject to worsening air quality. Intense population density in places such as Bangladesh or Hong Kong is the quintessential image many people have of Asia, yet vast desert areas such as the Gobi and the world's highest mountain range, the Himalayas, span the continent as well. Forested areas in Southeast Asia and the islands of Indonesia and the Philippines were historically prized for their tropical hardwood, but in many places this resource is now severely depleted. Low-lying small island states are extremely vulnerable to the effects of global warming, both rising sea levels and an anticipated increase in cyclones.

### Key Points:

Asian timber reserves are forecast to be depleted in the next 40 years. Loss of natural forest is irreversible in some areas, but plantation programs to restore tree cover may ameliorate a portion of the resulting land degradation.

Increased usage of fossil fuels in China and other parts of southern Asia is projected to result in a marked increase in emissions, especially in regard to carbon dioxide. The increased usage of energy has led to a marked upsurge in air pollution across the region.

Acidification is an emerging problem regionally, with sulfur dioxide emissions expected to triple by 2010 if the current growth rate is sustained. China, Thailand, India, and Korea seem to be suffering from particularly high rates of acid deposition. By contrast, Asia's most highly developed economy, Japan, has effected substantial improvements in its environmental indicators.

Water pollution in the Pacific is an urgent concern since up to 70 percent of the water discharged into the region's waters receives no treatment. Additionally, the disposal of solid wastes, in like manner, poses a major threat in a region with many areas of high population density.

The Asia-Pacific region is the largest expanse of the world's land that is adversely affected by soil degradation.

The region around Australia reportedly suffers the largest degree of ozone depletion.

The microstates of the Pacific suffer land loss due to global warming, and the consequent rise in the levels of ocean waters. A high-emissions scenario and anthropogenic climate impact at the upper end of the currently predicted range would probably force complete evacuation of the lowest-elevation islands sometime in this century.

The species-rich reefs surrounding Southeast Asia are highly vulnerable to the deleterious effects of

coastal development, land-based pollution, over-fishing and exploitative fishing methods, as well as marine pollution from oil spills and other activities.

With marine catch trends increasing from 5,000,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 20,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of China and south-east Asia are currently threatened, while the biological diversity in India, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia and parts of Malaysia is even further compromised with over 20 percent of the mammal species in these countries currently under threat.

Water resource vulnerability is a serious concern in areas surrounding the Indian subcontinent.

### **Regional Synopsis: Central Asia**

The Central Asian republics, formerly in the Soviet Union, experience a range of environmental problems as the result of poorly executed agricultural, industrial, and nuclear programs during the Soviet era. Relatively low population densities are the norm, especially since upon the breakup of the U.S.S.R. many ethnic Russians migrated back to European Russia. In this largely semi-arid region, drought, water shortages, and soil salinization pose major challenges.

#### **Key Points:**

The use of agricultural pesticides, such as DDT and other chemicals, has contributed to the contamination of soil and groundwater throughout the region.

Land and soil degradation, and in particular, increased salinization, is mostly attributable to faulty irrigation practices.

Significant desertification is also a problem in the region.

Air pollution is prevalent, mostly due to use of low octane automobile fuel.

Industrial pollution of the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea, as a result of industrial effluents as well as mining and metal production, presents a challenge to the countries bordering these bodies of water.

One of the most severe environmental problems in the region is attributable to the several billion tons of hazardous materials stored in landfills across Central Asia.

Uzbekistan's particular problem involves the contraction of the Aral Sea, which has decreased in size by a third, as a consequence of river diversions and poor irrigation practices. The effect has been the near-total biological destruction of that body of water.

Kazakhstan, as a consequence of being the heartland of the former Soviet Union's nuclear program, has incurred a high of cancerous malignancies, biogenetic abnormalities and radioactive contamination.

While part of the Soviet Union, the republics in the region experienced very high levels of greenhouse gas emissions, as a consequence of rapid industrialization using cheap but dirty energy sources, especially coal.

By contrast, however, there have recently been substantial reductions in the level of greenhouse gas emissions, especially those attributable to coal burning, with further decreases anticipated over the next decade. These changes are partially due to the use of cleaner energy technologies, such as natural gas, augmented by governmental commitment to improving environmental standards.

### **Regional Synopsis: Europe**

Western Europe underwent dramatic transformation of its landscape, virtually eliminating large-scale natural areas, during an era of rapid industrialization, which intensified upon its recovery from World War II. In Eastern Europe and European Russia, intensive land development has been less prevalent, so that some native forests and other natural areas remain. Air and water pollution from use of dirty fuels and industrial effluents, however, are more serious environmental problems in Eastern than in Western Europe, though recent trends show improvement in many indicators. Acid rain has inflicted heavy environmental damage across much of Europe, particularly on forests. Europe and North America are the only regions in which water usage for industry exceeds that for agriculture, although in Mediterranean nations agriculture is the largest water consumer.

#### **Key Points:**

Europe contributes 36 percent of the world's chlorofluorocarbon emissions, 30 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, and 25 percent of sulfur dioxide emissions.

Sulfur and nitrogen oxide emissions are the cause of 30 to 50 percent of Central and Eastern Europe's deforestation.

Acid rain has been an environmental concern for decades and continues to be a challenge in parts of Western Europe.

Overexploitation of up to 60 percent of Europe's groundwater presents a problem in industrial and urban areas.

With marine catch trends increasing from 5,000,000 metric tons in the 1950s to over 20,000,000 metric tons by 2000, there was increasing concern about the reduction in fisheries and marine life, should this trend continue unabated.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of western Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia are currently threatened, while the biological diversity on the Iberian Peninsula is even further compromised with over 40 percent of the mammal species in this region currently under threat. As a result, there has been a 10 percent increase in protected areas of Europe.

A major environmental issue for Europe involves the depletion of various already endangered or threatened species, and most significantly, the decline of fish stocks. Some estimates suggest that up to 50 percent of the continent's fish species may be considered endangered species. Coastal fisheries have been over-harvested, resulting in catch limits or moratoriums on many commercially important fish species.

Fortunately, in the last few years, these policies have started to yield measurable results with decreasing trends in marine fish catch.

Recently, most European countries have adopted cleaner production technologies, and alternative methods of waste disposal, including recycling.

The countries of Eastern Europe have made air quality a major environmental priority. This is exemplified by the Russian Federation's addition to the 1995 "Berlin Mandate" (transnational legislation based on resolutions of the Rio Earth Summit) compelling nations to promote "carbon sinks" to absorb greenhouse gases.

On a relative basis, when compared with the degree of industrial emissions emitted by many Eastern European countries until the late 1980s, there has been some marked increase in air quality in the region, as obsolete plants are closed and a transition to cleaner fuels and more efficient energy use takes place.

### **Regional Synopsis: The Middle and Near East**

Quite possibly, the Middle East will exemplify the adage that, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a century fixated on oil, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be devoted to critical decisions about water. Many (though far from all) nations in the Middle East rank among those countries with the largest oil and gas



reserves, but water resources are relatively scarce throughout this predominantly dry region. Effects of global warming may cause moderately high elevation areas that now typically receive winter "snowpack" to experience mainly rain instead, which would further constrain dry-season water availability. The antiquities and religious shrines of the region render it a great magnet for tourism, which entails considerable economic growth potential but also intensifies stresses on the environment.

### Key Points:

Water resource vulnerability is a serious concern across the entire region. The increased usage of, and further demand for water, has exacerbated long-standing water scarcity in the region. For instance, river diversions and industrial salt works have caused the Dead Sea to shrink by one-third from its original surface area, with further declines expected.

The oil industry in the region contributes to water pollution in the Persian Gulf, as a result of oil spills, which have averaged 1.2 million barrels of oil spilt per year (some sources suggest that this figure is understated). The consequences are severe because even after oil spills have been cleaned up, environmental damage to the food webs and ecosystems of marine life will persist for a prolonged period.

The region's coastal zone is considered one of the most fragile and endangered ecosystems of the world. Land reclamation, shoreline construction, discharge of industrial effluents, and tourism (such as diving in the Red Sea) contribute to widespread coastal damage.

Significant numbers of mammal species in parts of the Middle East are currently threatened.

Since the 1980s, 11 percent of the region's natural forest has been depleted.

### **Regional Synopsis: Latin America and the Caribbean**

The Latin American and Caribbean region is characterized by exceedingly diverse landforms that have generally seen high rates of population growth and economic development in recent decades. The percentage of inhabitants residing in urban areas is quite high at 73.4 percent; the region includes the megacities of Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The region also includes the world's second-highest mountain range, the Andes; significant expanses of desert and grassland; the coral reefs of the Caribbean Sea; and the world's largest contiguous tropical forest in the Amazon basin. Threats to the latter from subsistence and commercial farming, mineral exploitation and timbering are well publicized. Nevertheless, of eight countries worldwide that still retain at least 70 percent of their original forest cover, six are in Latin America. The region accounts for nearly half (48.3 percent) of the world's greenhouse gas emissions derived from land clearing, but as yet a

comparatively minuscule share (4.3 percent) of such gases from industrial sources.

### Key Points:

Although Latin America is one of the most biologically diverse regions of the world, this biodiversity is highly threatened, as exemplified by the projected extinction of up to 100,000 species in the next few decades. Much of this loss will be concentrated in the Amazon area, although the western coastline of South America will also suffer significant depletion of biological diversity. The inventory of rainforest species with potentially useful commercial or medical applications is incomplete, but presumed to include significant numbers of such species that may become extinct before they are discovered and identified.

Up to 50 percent of the region's grazing land has lost its soil fertility as a result of soil erosion, salinization, alkalinization and overgrazing.

The Caribbean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean have all been contaminated by agricultural wastes, which are discharged into streams that flow into these major waters. Water pollution derived from phosphorous, nitrates and pesticides adversely affects fish stocks, contributes to oxygen depletion and fosters overgrowth of aquatic vegetation. Marine life will continue to be severely compromised as a result of these conditions.

Due to industrial development in the region, many beaches of eastern Latin America and the Caribbean suffer from tar deposits.

Most cities in the region lack adequate sewage treatment facilities, and rapid migration of the rural poor into the cities is widening the gap between current infrastructure capacity and the much greater level needed to provide satisfactory basic services.

The rainforest region of the Amazon Basin suffers from dangerously high levels of deforestation, which may be a significant contributory factor to global warming or "the greenhouse effect." In the late 1990s and into the new millennium, the rate of deforestation was around 20 million acres of rainforest being destroyed annually.

Deforestation on the steep rainforest slopes of Caribbean islands contributes to soil erosion and landslides, both of which then result in heavy sedimentation of nearby river systems. When these sedimented rivers drain into the sea and coral reefs, they poison the coral tissues, which are vital to the maintenance of the reef ecosystem. The result is marine degradation and nutrient depletion. Jamaica's coral reefs have never quite recovered from the effects of marine degradation.

The Southern Cone of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) suffers the effects of greatly increased ultraviolet-B radiation, as a consequence of more intense ozone

depletion in the southern hemisphere.

Water resource vulnerability is an increasingly major concern in the northwestern portion of South America.

### **Regional Synopsis: North America**

North American nations, in particular the United States and Canada, rank among the world's most highly developed industrial economies—a fact which has generated significant pollution problems, but also financial resources and skills that have enabled many problems to be corrected. Although efforts to promote energy efficiency, recycling, and suchlike have helped ease strains on the environment in a part of the world where per capita consumption levels are high, sprawling land development patterns and recent preferences many households have demonstrated for larger vehicles have offset these advances.

Meanwhile, a large portion of North America's original forest cover has been lost, though in many cases replaced by productive second-growth woodland. In recent years, attitudes toward best use of the region's remaining natural or scenic areas seem to be shifting toward recreation and preservation and away from resource extraction. With increasing attention on the energy scarcity in the United States, however, there is speculation that this shift may be short-lived. Indeed, the energy shortage on the west coast of the United States and associated calls for energy exploration, indicate a possible retrenchment toward resource extraction. At the same time, however, it has also served to highlight the need for energy conservation as well as alternative energy sources.

Despite generally successful anti-pollution efforts, various parts of the region continue to suffer significant air, water and land degradation from industrial, vehicular, and agricultural emissions and runoff. Mexico, as a middle-income country, displays environmental problems characteristic of a developing economy, including forest depletion, pollution from inefficient industrial processes and dirty fuels, and lack of sufficient waste-treatment infrastructure.

#### **Key Points:**

Because of significantly greater motor vehicle usage in the United States (U.S.) than in the rest of the world, the U.S. contribution of urban air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, especially carbon dioxide, is disproportionately high in relation to its population.

Acid rain is an enduring issue of contention in the northeastern part of the United States, on the border with Canada.

Mexico's urban areas suffer extreme air pollution from carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur

dioxide, and other toxic air pollutants. Emissions controls on vehicles are in their infancy, compared to analogous regulations in the U.S.

The cities of Mexico, including those on the U.S. border, also discharge large quantities of untreated or poorly treated sewage, though officials are currently planning infrastructure upgrades.

Deforestation is noteworthy in various regions of the U.S., especially along the northwest coastline. Old growth forests have been largely removed, but in the northeastern and upper midwestern sections of the United States, evidence suggests that the current extent of tree cover probably surpasses the figure for the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Extreme weather conditions in the last few years have resulted in a high level of soil erosion along the north coast of California; in addition, the coastline itself has shifted substantially due to soil erosion and concomitant landslides.

Agricultural pollution-including nitrate contamination of well water, nutrient runoff to waterways, and pesticide exposure-is significant in various areas. Noteworthy among affected places are California's Central Valley, extensive stretches of the Midwest, and land in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Inland waterways, especially around the Great Lakes, have substantially improved their water quality, due to concentrated efforts at reducing water pollution by governmental, commercial and community representatives. Strict curbs on industrial effluents and near-universal implementation of sewage treatment are the chief factors responsible for this improvement.

A major environmental issue for Canada and the United States involves the depletion of various already endangered or threatened species, and most significantly, the decline of fish stocks. Coastal fisheries have been over-harvested, resulting in catch limits or moratoriums on many commercially important fish species. In the last few years, these policies have started to yield measurable results with decreasing trends in marine fish catch.

Due to the decay of neighboring ecosystems in Central America and the Caribbean, the sea surrounding Florida has become increasingly sedimented, contributing to marine degradation, nutrient depletion of the ecosystem, depletion of fish stocks, and diseases to coral species in particular.

## **Polar Regions**

### **Key Points:**

The significant rise in sea level, amounting 10 to 25 centimeters in the last 100 years, is due to the melting of the Arctic ice sheets, and is attributed to global warming.

The Antarctic suffers from a significant ozone hole, first detected in 1976. By 1985, a British scientific team reported a 40 percent decrease in usual regeneration rates of the ozone. Because a sustained increase in the amount of ultraviolet-B radiation would have adverse consequences upon all planetary life, recent environmental measures have been put into effect, aimed at reversing ozone depletion. These measures are projected to garner significant results by 2050.

Due to air and ocean currents, the Arctic is a sink for toxic releases originally discharged thousands of miles away. Arctic wildlife and Canada's Inuit population have higher bodily levels of contaminants such as PCB and dioxin than those found in people and animals in much of the rest of the world.

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## Global Environmental Concepts

### 1. Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases

#### **The Greenhouse Effect:**

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French physicist, Jean Fourier, contended that the earth's atmosphere functions in much the same way as the glass of a greenhouse, thus describing what is now understood as the "greenhouse effect." Put simply, the "greenhouse effect" confines some of the sun's energy to the earth, preserving some of the planet's warmth, rather than allowing it to flow back into space. In so doing, all kinds of life forms can flourish on earth. Thus, the "greenhouse effect" is necessary to sustain and preserve life forms and ecosystems on earth.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Swedish chemist, Svante Arrhenius, noticed that human activities, such as the burning of coal and other fossil fuels for heat, and the removal of forested lands for urban development, led to higher concentrations of greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide and methane, in the atmosphere. This increase in the levels of greenhouse gases was believed to advance the "greenhouse effect" exponentially, and might be related to the trend in global warming.

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, after industrial development took place on a large scale and the total human population burgeoned simultaneously with industrialization, the resulting

increase in greenhouse gas emissions could, many scientists believe, be significant enough to have some bearing on climate. Indeed, many studies in recent years support the idea that there is a linkage between human activities and global warming, although there is less consensus on the extent to which this linkage may be relevant to environmental concerns.

That said, some scientists have argued that temperature fluctuations have existed throughout the evolution of the planet. Indeed, Dr. S. Fred Singer, the president of the Science and Environment Policy Project has noted that 3,000-year-old geological records of ocean sediment reveal changes in the surface temperature of the ocean. Hence, it is possible that climate variability is merely a normal fact of the planet's evolution. Yet even skeptics as to anthropogenic factors concur that any substantial changes in global temperatures would likely have an effect upon the earth's ecosystems, as well as the life forms that inhabit them.

### **The Relationship Between Global Warming and Greenhouse Gases:**

A large number of climatologists believe that the increase in atmospheric concentrations of "greenhouse gas emissions," mostly a consequence of human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels, are contributing to global warming. The cause notwithstanding, the planet has reportedly warmed 0.3°C to 0.6°C over the last century. Indeed, each year during the 1990s was one of the very warmest in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the mean surface temperature for 1999 being the fifth warmest on record since 1880.

In early 2000, a panel of atmospheric scientists for the National Research Council concluded in a report that global warming was, indeed, a reality. While the panel, headed by Chairman John Wallace, a professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington, stated that it remained unclear whether human activities have contributed to the earth's increasing temperatures, it was apparent that global warming exists.

In 2001, following a request for further study by the incoming Bush administration in the [United States](#), the National Academy of Sciences again confirmed that global warming had been in existence for the last 20 years. The study also projected an increase in temperature between 2.5 degrees and 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100. Furthermore, the study found the leading cause of global warming to be emissions of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels, and it noted that greenhouse gas accumulations in the earth's atmosphere was a result of human activities.

Within the scientific community, the controversy regarding has centered on the difference between surface air and upper air temperatures. Information collected since 1979 suggests that while the earth's surface temperature has increased by about a degree in the past century, the atmospheric temperature five miles above the earth's surface has indicated very little increase. Nevertheless, the panel stated that this discrepancy in temperature between surface and upper air does not invalidate the conclusion that global warming is taking place. Further, the panel noted that natural events,

such as volcanic eruptions, can decrease the temperature in the upper atmosphere.

The major consequences of global warming potentially include the melting of the polar ice caps, which, in turn, contribute to the rise in sea levels. Many islands across the globe have already experienced a measurable loss of land as a result. Because global warming may increase the rate of evaporation, increased precipitation, in the form of stronger and more frequent storm systems, is another potential outcome. Other consequences of global warming may include the introduction and proliferation of new infectious diseases, loss of arable land (referred to as "desertification"), destructive changes to existing ecosystems, loss of biodiversity and the isolation of species, and concomitant adverse changes in the quality of human life.

### **International Policy Development in Regard to Global Warming:**

Regardless of what the precise nature of the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and global warming may be, it seems that there is some degree of a connection between the phenomena. Any substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and global warming trends will likely involve systematic changes in industrial operations, the use of advanced energy sources and technologies, as well as global cooperation in implementing and regulating these transformations.

In this regard, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stipulated the following objectives:

1. To stabilize "greenhouse gas" concentrations within the atmosphere, in such a manner that would preclude hazardous anthropogenic intervention into the existing biosphere and ecosystems of the world. This stabilization process would facilitate the natural adaptation of ecosystems to changes in climate.
2. To ensure and enable sustainable development and food production on a global scale.

\*\*\* See section on "International Environmental Agreements and Associations" for information related to international policies related to limiting greenhouse gases and controlling climate change emanating from historic summits at Kyoto, Copenhagen, Doha, and Paris. \*\*\*

## **2. Air Pollution**

Long before global warming reared its head as a significant issue, those concerned about the environment and public health noted the deleterious effects of human-initiated combustion upon the atmosphere. Killer smogs from coal burning triggered acute health emergencies in London and

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other places. At a lower level of intensity motor vehicle, power plant, and industrial emissions impaired long-range visibility and probably had some chronic adverse consequences on the respiratory systems of persons breathing such air.

In time, scientists began associating the sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides released from coal burning with significant acid deposition in the atmosphere, eventually falling as "acid rain." This phenomenon has severely degraded forestlands, especially in Europe and a few parts of the [United States](#). It has also impaired some aquatic ecosystems and eaten away the surface of some human artifacts, such as marble monuments. Scrubber technology and conversion to cleaner fuels have enabled the level of industrial production to remain at least constant while significantly reducing acid deposition. Technologies aimed at cleaning the air and curtailing acid rain, soot, and smog may, nonetheless, boomerang as the perils of global warming become increasingly serious. In brief, these particulates act as sort of a sun shade -- comparable to the effect of volcanic eruptions on the upper atmosphere whereby periods of active volcanism correlate with temporarily cooler weather conditions. Thus, while the carbon dioxide releases that are an inevitable byproduct of combustion continue, by scrubbing the atmosphere of pollutants, an industrial society opens itself to greater insolation (penetration of the sun's rays and consequent heating), and consequently, it is likely to experience a correspondingly greater rise in ambient temperatures.

The health benefits of removing the sources of acid rain and smog are indisputable, and no one would recommend a return to previous conditions. Nevertheless, the problematic climatic effects of continually increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases pose a major global environmental challenge, not as yet addressed adequately.

### **3. Ozone Depletion**

The stratospheric ozone layer functions to prevent ultraviolet radiation from reaching the earth. Normally, stratospheric ozone is systematically disintegrated and regenerated through natural photochemical processes. The stratospheric ozone layer, however, has been depleted unnaturally as a result of anthropogenic (man-made) chemicals, most especially chlorine and bromide compounds such as chloroflorocarbons (CFCs), halons, and various industrial chemicals in the form of solvents, refrigerants, foaming agents, aerosol propellants, fire retardants, and fumigants. Ozone depletion is of concern because it permits a greater degree of ultraviolet-B radiation to reach the earth, which then increases the incidences of cancerous malignancies, cataracts, and human immune deficiencies. In addition, even in small doses, ozone depletion affects the ecosystem by disturbing food chains, agriculture, fisheries and other forms of biological diversity.

Transnational policies enacted to respond to the dangers of ozone depletion include the 1985 Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The Montreal Protocol was subsequently amended in



London in 1990, Copenhagen in 1992 and Vienna in 1995. By 1996, 155 countries had ratified the Montreal Protocol, which sets out a time schedule for the reduction (and eventual elimination) of ozone depleting substances (OPS), and bans exports and imports of ODS from and to non-participant countries.

In general, the Protocol stipulates that developed countries must eliminate halon consumption by 1994 and CFC consumption by 1996, while developing countries must eliminate these substances by 2010. Consumption of methyl bromide, which is used as a fumigant, was to be frozen at the 1995 in developed countries, and fully eliminated in 2010, while developing countries are to freeze consumption by 2002, based on average 1995-1998 consumption levels. Methyl chloroform is to be phased out by 2005. Under the Montreal Protocol, most ODS will be completely eliminated from use by 2010.

#### **4. Land Degradation**

In recent decades, land degradation in more arid regions of the world has become a serious concern. The problem, manifest as both "desertification" and "devegetation," is caused primarily by climate variability and human activities, such as "deforestation," excessive cultivation, overgrazing, and other forms of land resource exploitation. It is also exacerbated by inadequate irrigation practices. Although the effects of droughts on drylands have been temporary in the past, today, the productivity and sustainability of these lands have been severely compromised for the long term. Indeed, in every region of the world, land degradation has become an acute issue.

#### **Desertification and Devegetation:**

"Desertification" is a process of land degradation causing the soil to deteriorate, thus losing its nutrients and fertility, and eventually resulting in the loss of vegetation, known as "devegetation." As aforementioned, "desertification" and "devegetation" are caused by human activities, yet human beings are also the greatest casualties. Because these forms of land degradation affect the ability of the soil to produce crops, they concomitantly contribute to poverty. As population increases and demographic concentrations shift, the extent of land subject to stresses by those seeking to wrest subsistence from it has inexorably risen.

In response, the United Nations has formed the Convention to Combat Desertification-aimed at implementing programs to address the underlying causes of desertification, as well as measures to prevent and minimize its effects. Of particular significance is the formulation of policies on transboundary resources, such as areas around lakes and rivers. At a broader level, the Convention has established a Conference of Parties (COP), which includes all ratifying governments, for directing and advancing international action.

To ensure more efficacious use of funding, the Convention intends to reconfigure international aid to utilize a consultative and coordinated approach in the disbursement and expenditure of donor funds. In this way, local communities that are affected by desertification will be active participants in the solution-generation process. In-depth community education projects are envisioned as part of this new international aid program, and private donor financing is encouraged. Meanwhile, as new technologies are developed to deal with the problem of desertification, they need to be distributed for application across the world. Hence, the Convention calls for international cooperation in scientific research in this regard.

Desertification is a problem of sustainable development. It is directly connected to human challenges such as poverty, social and economic well-being and environmental protection as well. Broader environmental issues, such as climate change, biological diversity, and freshwater supplies, are indirectly related, so any effort to resolve this environmental challenge must entail coordinated research efforts and joint action.

### **Deforestation:**

Deforestation is not a recent phenomenon. For centuries, human beings have cut down trees to clear space for land cultivation, or in order to use the wood for fuel. Over the last 200 years, and most especially after World War II, deforestation increased because the logging industry became a globally profitable endeavor, and so the clearing of forested areas was accelerated for the purposes of industrial development. In the long term, this intensified level of deforestation is considered problematic because the forest is unable to regenerate itself quickly. The deforestation that has occurred in tropical rainforests is seen as an especially serious concern, due to the perceived adverse effects of this process upon the entire global ecosystem.

The most immediate consequence of deforestation is soil degradation. Soil, which is necessary for the growth of vegetation, can be a fragile and vital property. Organically, an extensive evolution process must take place before soil can produce vegetation, yet at the same time, the effects of natural elements, such as wind and rain, can easily and quickly degrade this resource. This phenomenon is known as soil erosion. In addition, natural elements like wind and rain reduce the amount of fertile soil on the ground, making soil scarcity a genuine problem. When fertile topsoil that already exists is removed from the landscape in the process of deforestation, soil scarcity is further exacerbated. Equally significant is the fact that once land has been cleared so that the topsoil can be cultivated for crop production, not only are the nutrient reserves in the soil depleted, thus producing crops of inferior quality, but the soil structure itself becomes stressed and deteriorates further.

Another direct result of deforestation is flooding. When forests are cleared, removing the cover of

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vegetation, and rainfall occurs, the flow of water increases across the surface of land. When extensive water runoff takes place, the frequency and intensity of flooding increases. Other adverse effects of deforestation include the loss of wildlife and biodiversity within the ecosystem that supports such life forms.

At a broader level, tropical rainforests play a vital role in maintaining the global environmental system. Specifically, destruction of tropical rainforests affects the carbon dioxide cycle. When forests are destroyed by burning (or rotting), carbon dioxide is released into the air, thus contributing to an intensified "greenhouse effect." The increase in greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide is a major contributor to global warming, according to many environmental scientists. Indeed, trees themselves absorb carbon dioxide in the process of photosynthesis, so their loss also reduces the absorption of greenhouse gases.

Tropical rainforest destruction also adversely affects the nitrogen cycle. Nitrogen is a key nutrient for both plants and animals. Plants derive nitrogen from soil, while animals obtain it via nitrogen-enriched vegetation. This element is essential for the formation of amino acids, and thereby for proteins and biochemicals that all living things need for metabolism and growth. In the nitrogen cycle, vegetation acquires these essential proteins and biochemicals, and then cyclically returns them to the atmosphere and global ecosystem. Accordingly, when tropical rainforest ecosystems are compromised, not only is vegetation removed; the atmosphere is also affected and climates are altered. At a more immediate level, the biodiversity within tropical rainforests, including wildlife and insect species and a wealth of plant varieties, is depleted. Loss of rare plants is of particular concern because certain species as yet unknown and unused could likely yield many practical benefits, for instance as medicines.

As a result of the many challenges associated with deforestation, many environmental groups and agencies have argued for government policies on the sustainable development of forests by governments across the globe. While many countries have instituted national policies and programs aimed at reducing deforestation, and substantial research has been advanced in regard to sustainable and regenerative forestry development, there has been very little progress on an international level. Generally speaking, most tropical rainforests are located in developing and less developed countries, where economic growth is often dependent upon the exploitation of tropical rainforests. Timber resources as well as wildlife hunting tend to be particularly lucrative arenas.

In places such as the Amazon, where deforestation takes place for the construction of energy plants aimed at industrialization and economic development, there is an exacerbated effect on the environment. After forests are cleared in order to construct such projects, massive flooding usually ensues. The remaining trees then rot and decay in the wake of the flooding. As the trees deteriorate, their biochemical makeup becomes more acidic, producing poisonous substances such as hydrogen sulphide and methane gases. Acidified water subsequently corrodes the mechanical equipment and operations of the plants, which are already clogged by rotting wood after the

floodwaters rise.

Deforestation generally arises from an economically plausible short-term motivation, but nonetheless poses a serious global concern because the effects go beyond national boundaries. The United Nations has established the World Commission on Forest and Sustainable Development. This body's task is to determine the optimal means of dealing with the issue of deforestation, without unduly affecting normal economic development, while emphasizing the global significance of protecting tropical forest ecosystems.

## **5. Water Resources**

For all terrestrial fauna, including humans, water is the most immediate necessity to sustain life. As the population has increased and altered an ever-greater portion of the landscape from its natural condition, demand on water resources has intensified, especially with the development of industrialization and large-scale irrigation. The supply of freshwater is inherently limited, and moreover distributed unevenly across the earth's landmasses. Moreover, not just demand for freshwater but activities certain to degrade it are becoming more pervasive. By contrast, the oceans form a sort of "last wilderness," still little explored and in large part not seriously affected by human activity. However, coastal environments - the biologically richest part of the marine ecosystem-are experiencing major depletion due to human encroachment and over-exploitation.

### **Freshwater:**

In various regions, for instance the Colorado River in the western [United States](#), current withdrawals of river water for irrigation, domestic, and industrial use consume the entire streamflow so that almost no water flows into the sea at the river's mouth. Yet development is ongoing in many such places, implying continually rising demand for water. In some areas reliant on groundwater, aquifers are being depleted at a markedly faster rate than they are being replenished. An example is the San Joaquin Valley in California, where decades of high water withdrawals for agriculture have caused land subsidence of ten meters or more in some spots. Naturally, the uncertainty of future water supplies is particularly acute in arid and semi-arid regions. Speculation that the phenomenon of global warming will alter geographic and seasonal rainfall patterns adds further uncertainty.

Water conservation measures have great potential to alleviate supply shortages. Some city water systems are so old and beset with leaking pipes that they lose as much water as they meter. Broad-scale irrigation could be replaced by drip-type irrigation, actually enhancing the sustainability of agriculture. In many areas where heavy irrigation has been used for decades, the result is deposition of salts and other chemicals in the soil such that the land becomes unproductive for

farming and must be abandoned.

Farming is a major source of water pollution. Whereas restrictions on industrial effluents and other "point sources" are relatively easy to implement, comparable measures to reform hydraulic practices at farms and other "nonpoint sources" pose a significantly knottier challenge. Farm-caused water pollution takes the following main forms:

- Nitrate pollution found in wells in intensive farming areas as a consequence of heavy fertilizer use is a threat to human health. The most serious danger is to infants, who by ingesting high-nitrate water can contract methemoglobinemia, sometimes called "blue baby syndrome," a potentially fatal condition.
- Fertilizer runoff into rivers and lakes imparts unwanted nutrients that cause algae growth and eventual loss of oxygen in the body of water, degrading its ability to support fish and other desirable aquatic life.
- Toxic agricultural chemicals - insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides - are detectable in some aquifers and waterways.

In general, it is much easier to get a pollutant into water than to retrieve it out. Gasoline additives, dry cleaning chemicals, other industrial toxins, and in a few areas radionuclides have all been found in water sources intended for human use. The complexity and long time scale of subterranean hydrological movements essentially assures that pollutants already deposited in aquifers will continue to turn up for decades to come. Sophisticated water treatment processes are available, albeit expensive, to reclaim degraded water and render it fit for human consumption. Yet source protection is unquestionably a more desirable alternative.

In much of the developing world, and even some low-income rural enclaves of the developed world, the population lacks ready access to safe water. Surface water and shallow groundwater supplies are susceptible to contamination from untreated wastewater and failing septic tanks, as well as chemical hazards. The occurrence of waterborne disease is almost certainly greatly underreported.

### **Marine Resources:**

Coastal areas have always been desirable places for human habitation, and population pressure on them continues to increase. Many types of water degradation that affect lakes and rivers also affect coastal zones: industrial effluents, untreated or partially treated sewage, nutrient load from agriculture figure prominently in both cases. Prospects for more extreme storms as a result of global warming, as well as the pervasiveness of poorly planned development in many coastal areas,

forebode that catastrophic hurricanes and landslides may increase in frequency in the future. Ongoing rise in sea levels will force remedial measures and in some cases abandonment of currently valuable coastal property.

Fisheries over much of the globe have been overharvested, and immediate conservation measures are required to preserve stocks of many species. Many governments subsidized factory-scale fishing fleets in the 1970s and 1980s, and the resultant catch increase evidently surpassed a sustainable level. It is uncertain how much of the current decline in fish stocks stems from overharvesting and how much from environmental pollution. The deep ocean remains relatively unaffected by human activity, but continental shelves near coastlines are frequently seriously polluted, and these close-to-shore areas are the major biological nurseries for food fish and the smaller organisms they feed on.

## **6. Environmental Toxins**

Toxic chemical pollution exploded on the public consciousness with disclosure of spectacularly polluted industrial areas such as Love Canal near Buffalo, New York. There is no question that pollutants such as organophosphates or radionuclides can be highly deleterious to health, but evidence to date suggests that seriously affected areas are a localized rather than universal problem.

While some explore the possibilities for a lifestyle that fully eschews use of modern industrial chemicals, the most prevalent remediative approach is to focus on more judicious use. The most efficient chemical plants are now able to contain nearly all toxic byproducts of their production processes within the premises, minimizing the release of such substances into the environment. Techniques such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) dictate limited rather than broadcast use of pesticides: application only when needed using the safest available chemical, supplemented as much as possible with nontoxic controls.

While heightened public awareness and growing technical sophistication suggest a hopeful outlook on limiting the damage from manmade environmental toxins, one must grant that previous incidents of their misuse and mishandling have already caused environmental damage that will have to be dealt with for many years to come. In the case of the most hazardous radioactive substances, the time scale for successful remediation actually extends beyond that of the recorded history of civilization. Moreover, in this era of high population density and rapid economic growth, quotidian activities such as the transport of chemicals will occasionally, seemingly inevitably result in accidents with adverse environmental consequences.

## **7. "Islandization" and Biodiversity**



With increased awareness regarding the adverse effects of unregulated hunting and habitat depletion upon wildlife species and other aspects of biodiversity, large-scale efforts across the globe have been initiated to reduce and even reverse this trend.

In every region of the world, many species of wildlife and areas of biodiversity have been saved from extinction. Nationally, many countries have adopted policies aimed at preservation and conservation of species, and one of the most tangible measures has been the proliferation of protected habitats. Such habitats exist in the form of wildlife reserves, marine life reserves, and other such areas where biodiversity can be protected from external encroachment and exploitation.

Despite these advances in wildlife and biodiversity protection, further and perhaps more intractable challenges linger. Designated reserves, while intended to prevent further species decline, exist as closed territories, fragmented from other such enclaves and disconnected from the larger ecosystem. This environmental scenario is referred to as "islandization." Habitat reserves often serve as oversized zoos or game farms, with landscapes and wildlife that have effectively been "tamed" to suit. Meanwhile, the larger surrounding ecosystem continues to be seriously degraded and transformed, while within the islandized habitat, species that are the focus of conservation efforts may not have sufficient range and may not be able to maintain healthy genetic variability.

As a consequence, many conservationists and preservationists have demanded that substantially larger portions of land be withheld as habitat reserves, and a network of biological corridors to connect continental reserves be established. While such efforts to combat islandization have considerable support in the [United States](#), how precisely such a program would be instituted, especially across national boundaries, remains a matter of debate. International conservationists and preservationists say without a network of reserves a massive loss of biodiversity will result.

The concept of islandization illustrates why conservation and preservation of wildlife and biodiversity must consider and adopt new, broader strategies. In the past, conservation and preservation efforts have been aimed at specific species, such as the spotted owl and grizzly bear in North America, the Bengal tiger in Southeast Asia, the panda in [China](#), elephants in Africa. Instead, the new approach is to simultaneously protect many and varied species that inhabit the same ecosystem. This method, referred to as "bio-regional conservation," may more efficaciously generate longer-term and more far-reaching results precisely because it is aimed at preserving entire ecosystems, and all the living things within.

### **More About Biodiversity Issues:**

This section is directly taken from the United Nations Environmental Program: "[Biodiversity Assessment](#)"

The Global Biodiversity Assessment, completed by 1500 scientists under the auspices of United Nations Environmental Program in 1995, updated what is known (or unknown) about global biological diversity at the ecosystem, species and genetic levels. The assessment was uncertain of the total number of species on Earth within an order of magnitude. Of its working figure of 13 million species, only 13 percent are scientifically described. Ecological community diversity is also poorly known, as is its relationship to biological diversity, and genetic diversity has been studied for only a small number of species. The effects of human activities on biodiversity have increased so greatly that the rate of species extinctions is rising to hundreds or thousands of times the background level. These losses are driven by increasing demands on species and their habitats, and by the failure of current market systems to value biodiversity adequately. The Assessment calls for urgent action to reverse these trends.

There has been a new recognition of the importance of protecting marine and aquatic biodiversity. The first quantitative estimates of species losses due to growing coral reef destruction predict that almost 200,000 species, or one in five presently contributing to coral reef biodiversity, could die out in the next 40 years if human pressures on reefs continue to increase.

Since Rio, many countries have improved their understanding of the status and importance of their biodiversity, particularly through biodiversity country studies such as those prepared under the auspices of UNEP/GEF. The [United Kingdom](#) identified 1250 species needing monitoring, of which 400 require action plans to ensure their survival. Protective measures for biodiversity, such as legislation to protect species, can prove effective. In the USA, almost 40 percent of the plants and animals protected under the Endangered Species Act are now stable or improving as a direct result of recovery efforts. Some African countries have joined efforts to protect threatened species through the 1994 Lusaka Agreement, and more highly migratory species are being protected by specialized cooperative agreements among range states under the Bonn Agreement.

There is an emerging realization that a major part of conservation of biological diversity must take place outside of protected areas and involve local communities. The extensive agricultural areas occupied by small farmers contain much biodiversity that is important for sustainable food production. Indigenous agricultural practices have been and continue to be important elements in the maintenance of biodiversity, but these are being displaced and lost. There is a new focus on the interrelationship between agrodiversity conservation and sustainable use and development practices in smallholder agriculture, with emphasis on use of farmers' knowledge and skills as a source of information for sustainable farming.

Perhaps even more important than the loss of biodiversity is the transformation of global biogeochemical cycles, the reduction in the total world biomass, and the decrease in the biological productivity of the planet. While quantitative measurements are not available, the eventual economic and social consequences may be so significant that the issue requires further attention.



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United Nations Global Environmental Outlook. URL: <http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/>

Note on Edition Dates:

The edition dates for textual resources are noted above because they were used to formulate the original content. We also have used online resources (cited above) to update coverage as needed.

Information Resources

For more information about environmental concepts, CountryWatch recommends the following resources:

The United Nations Environmental Program Network (with country profiles)

[<http://www.unep.net/>](http://www.unep.net)

The United Nations Environment Program on Climate Change

[<http://climatechange.unep.net/>](http://climatechange.unep.net)

The United Nations Environmental Program on Waters and Oceans

[<http://www.unep.ch/earthw/Pdepwat.htm>](http://www.unep.ch/earthw/Pdepwat.htm)

The United Nations Environmental Program on Forestry: "Forests in Flux"

<<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/flux/homepage.htm>>

FAO "State of the World's Forests"

<<http://www.fao.org/forestry/FO/SOFO/SOFO99/sofo99-e.stm>>

World Resources Institute.

<<http://www.wri.org/>>

Harvard University Center for Health and the Global Environment

<<http://www.med.harvard.edu/chge/the-review.html>>

The University of Wisconsin Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment

<http://sage.aos.wisc.edu/>

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## **International Environmental Agreements and Associations**

### **International Policy Development in Regard to Global Warming:**

#### **Introduction**

Regardless of what the precise nature of the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and global warming may be, it seems that there is some degree of a connection between the phenomena. Any substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and global warming trends will likely involve systematic changes in industrial operations, the use of advanced energy sources and technologies, as well as global cooperation in implementing and regulating these transformations.

In this regard, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stipulated the following objectives:

1. To stabilize "greenhouse gas" concentrations within the atmosphere, in such a manner that would preclude hazardous anthropogenic intervention into the existing biosphere and ecosystems of

the world. This stabilization process would facilitate the natural adaptation of ecosystems to changes in climate.

2. To ensure and enable sustainable development and food production on a global scale.

Following are two discussions regarding international policies on the environment, followed by listings of international accords.

### ***Special Entry: The Kyoto Protocol***

The UNFCCC was adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and entered into force in 1994. Over 175 parties were official participants.

Meanwhile, however, many of the larger, more industrialized nations failed to reach the emissions' reduction targets, and many UNFCCC members agreed that the voluntary approach to reducing emissions had not been successful. As such, UNFCCC members reached a consensus that legally binding limits were necessitated, and agreed to discuss such a legal paradigm at a meeting in Kyoto, [Japan](#) in 1997. At that meeting, the UNFCCC forged the Kyoto Protocol. This concord is the first legally binding international agreement that places limits on emissions from industrialized countries. The major greenhouse gas emissions addressed in the Kyoto Protocol include carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexafluoride, and methane.

The provisions of the Kyoto Protocol stipulate that economically advanced nations must reduce their combined emissions of greenhouse gases, by approximately five percent from their 1990 levels, before the 2008-2010 deadline. Countries with the highest carbon dioxide emissions, such as the [United States](#) (U.S.), many of the European Union (EU) countries, and [Japan](#), are to reduce emissions by a scale of 6 to 8 percent. All economically advanced nations must show "demonstrable progress" by 2005. In contrast, no binding limits or timetable have been set on developing countries. Presumably, this distinction is due to the fact that most developing countries - - with the obvious exceptions of [India](#) and [China](#) -- simply do not emit as many greenhouse gases as do more industrially advanced countries. Meanwhile, these countries are entrenched in the process of economic development.

Regardless of the aforementioned reasoning, there has been strong opposition against the asymmetrical treatment assigned to emissions limits among developed and developing countries. Although this distinction might be regarded as unfair in principle, associations such as the Alliance of Small Island States have been vocal in expressing how global warming -- a result of greenhouse gas emissions - has contributed to the rise in sea level, and thus deleteriously affected their very existence as island nation states. For this reason, some parties have suggested that economically advanced nations, upon returning to their 1990 levels, should be required to further reduce their

greenhouse gas emissions by a deadline of 2005. In response, interested parties have observed that even if such reductions were undertaken by economically advanced nations, they would not be enough to completely control global warming. Indeed, a reduction in the rate of fossil fuel usage by developing nations would also be necessary to have substantial ameliorative effect on global warming. Indeed, a reduction in the rate of fossil fuel usage by developing nations would also be necessary to have substantial ameliorative effect on global warming.

As such, the Protocol established a "Clean Development Mechanism" which permits developed countries to invest in projects aimed at reducing emissions within developing countries in return for credit for the reductions. Ostensibly, the objective of this mechanism is to curtail emissions in developing countries without unduly penalizing them for their economic development. Under this model, the countries with more potential emissions credits could sell them to other signatories of the Kyoto Protocol, whose emissions are forecast to significantly rise in the next few years. Should this trading of emissions credits take place, it is estimated that the Kyoto Protocol's emissions targets could still be met.

In 1999, the International Energy Outlook projected that Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Newly Independent States, as well as parts of Asia, are all expected to show a marked decrease in their level of energy-related carbon emissions in 2010. Nations with the highest emissions, specifically, the U.S., the EU and [Japan](#), are anticipated to reduce their emissions by up to 8 percent by 2012. By 2000, however, the emissions targets were not on schedule for achievement. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Energy estimates forecast that by 2010, there will be a 34 percent increase in carbon emissions from the 1990 levels, in the absence of major shifts in policy, economic growth, energy prices, and consumer trends. Despite this assessment in the U.S., international support for the Kyoto Protocol remained strong, especially among European countries and island states, who view the pact as one step in the direction away from reliance on fossil fuels and other sources of greenhouse gases.

In 2001, U.S. President, George W. Bush, rejected his country's participation in the Kyoto Protocol, saying that the costs imposed on the global economic system, and especially, on the US, overshadowed the benefits of the Protocol. He also cited the unfair burden on developed nations to reduce emissions, as another primary reasons for withdrawal from the international pact, as well as insufficient evidence regarding the science of global warming. Faced with impassioned international disapproval for his position, the U.S. president stated that his administration remained interested in dealing with the matter of global warming, but would endorse alternative measures to combat the problem, such as voluntary initiatives limiting emissions. Critics of Bush's position, however, have noted that it was the failure of voluntary initiatives to reduce emissions following the Rio Summit that led to the establishment of the Kyoto Protocol in the first place.

In the wake of the Bush administration's decision, many participant countries resigned themselves to the reality that the goals of the Kyoto Protocol might not be achieved without U.S. involvement.

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Nevertheless, in Bonn, [Germany](#), in July 2001, the remaining participant countries struck a political compromise on some of the key issues and sticking points, and planned to move forward with the Protocol, irrespective of the absence of the U.S. The key compromise points included the provision for countries to offset their targets with carbon sinks (these are areas of forest and farmland which can absorb carbon through the process of photosynthesis). Another compromise point within the broader Bonn Agreement was the reduction of emissions cuts of six gases from over 5 percent to a more achievable 2 percent. A third key change was the provision of funding for less wealthy countries to adopt more progressive technologies.

In late October and early November 2001, the UNFCCC's 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties met in Marrakesh, [Morocco](#), to finalize the measures needed to make the Kyoto Protocol operational. Although the UNFCCC projected that ratification of the Protocol would make it legally binding within a year, many critics noted that the process had fallen short of implementing significant changes in policy that would be necessary to actually stop or even slow climate change. They also maintained that the absence of U.S. participation effectively rendered the Protocol into being a political exercise without any substance, either in terms of transnational policy or in terms of environmental concerns.

The adoption of the compromises ensconced within the Bonn Agreement had been intended to make the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol more palatable to the U.S. In this regard, it failed to achieve its objective as the Bush administration continued to eschew participation in the international accord. Still, however, the Bonn Agreement did manage to render a number of other positive outcomes. Specifically, in 2002, key countries, such as [Russia](#), [Japan](#) and [Canada](#) agreed to ratify the protocol, bringing the number of signatories to 178. The decision by key countries to ratify the protocol was regarded as "the kiss of life" by observers.

By 2005, on the eve of a climate change conference in London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair was hoping to deal with the problems of climate change beyond the provisions set forth in the Kyoto Protocol. Acknowledging that the Kyoto Protocol could not work in its current form, Blair wanted to open the discussion for a new climate change plan.

Blair said that although most of the world had signed on to Kyoto, the protocol could not meet any of its practical goals of cutting greenhouse gas emissions without the participation of the United States, the world's largest polluter. He also noted that any new agreement would have to include India and China -- significant producers of greenhouse gas emissions, but exempt from Kyoto because they have been classified as developing countries. Still, he said that progress on dealing with climate change had been stymied by "a reluctance to face up to reality and the practical action needed to tackle problem."

Blair also touted the "huge opportunities" in technology and pointed toward the possibilities offered by wind, solar and nuclear power, along with fuel cell technology, eco-friendly biofuels, and

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carbon capture and storage which could generate low carbon power. Blair also asserted that his government was committed to achieving its domestic goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 percent by 2010.

In the United States, President George W. Bush has said that global warming remained a debatable issue and despite conclusions reached by his own Environmental Protection Agency, he has not agreed with the conclusion that global warming and climate change are linked with human activities. Bush has also refused to ratify Kyoto on the basis of its economic costs.

Australia, an ally of the United States, has taken a similarly dim view of the Kyoto Protocol. Ahead of the November 2005 climate change meeting in Canada in which new goals for the protocol were to be discussed, Australia's Environment Minister, Ian Campbell, said that negotiating new greenhouse gas emission levels for the Kyoto Protocol would be a waste of time. Campbell said, "There is a consensus that the caps, targets and timetables approach is flawed. If we spend the next five years arguing about that, we'll be fiddling and negotiating while Rome burns." Campbell, like the Bush administration, has also advocated a system of voluntary action in which industry takes up new technologies rather than as a result of compelling the reduction of emissions. But the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has called on its government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, to establish a system of emissions trading, and to set binding limits on emissions. Interestingly, although it did not sign on to Kyoto, Australia was expected to meet its emissions target by 2012 (an 8 percent increase in 1990 levels in keeping with the country's reliance on coal). But this success has nothing to do with new technologies and is due to state-based regulations on land clearing.

Note: The Kyoto Protocol calls for developed nations to cut greenhouse emissions by 5.2 percent of 1990 levels by 2012.

### ***Special Entry: Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen (2009) --***

In December 2009, the United Nations Climate Change Summit opened in the Danish capital of Copenhagen. The summit was scheduled to last from Dec. 7-18, 2009. Delegates from more than 190 countries were in attendance, and approximately 100 world leaders, including British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and [United States](#) President Barack Obama, were expected to participate. At issue was the matter of new reductions targets on greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

Despite earlier fears that little concurrence would come from the conference, effectively pushing significant actions forward to a 2010 conference in [Mexico](#) City, negotiators were now reporting that the talks were productive and several key countries, such as [South Africa](#), had pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The two main issues that could still lead to cleavages were questions of agreement between the industrialized countries and the developing countries of the



world, as well as the overall effectiveness of proposals in seriously addressing the perils of climate change.

On Dec. 9, 2009, four countries -- the [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#), [Mexico](#) and [Norway](#) -- presented a document outlining ideas for raising and managing billions of dollars, which would be intended to help vulnerable countries dealing with the perils of climate change. Described as a "green fund," the concept could potentially help small island states at risk because of the rise in sea level. [Bangladesh](#) identified itself as a potential recipient of an assistance fund, noting that as a country plagued by devastating floods, it was particularly hard-hit by climate change. The "green fund" would fall under the rubric of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, for which developed countries have been committed to quantifying their emission reduction targets, and also to providing financial and technical support to developing countries.

The [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#), [Mexico](#) and [Norway](#) also called for the creation of a new legal treaty that would replace the Kyoto Protocol. This new treaty, which could go into force in 2012, would focus largely on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. But [Australia](#) went even further in saying that the successor treaty to the Kyoto Protocol, should be one with provisions covering all countries. Such a move would be a departure from the structure of the Kyoto Protocol, which contained emissions targets for industrialized countries due to the prevailing view that developed countries had a particular historic responsibility to be accountable for climate change. More recently, it has become apparent that substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions demanded by scientists would only come to pass with the participation also of significant developing nation states, such as [China](#) and [India](#). Indeed, one of the most pressing critiques of the Kyoto Protocol was that it was a "paper tiger" that failed to address the impact of the actions of emerging economies like [China](#) and [India](#), with its focus on the developed economies.

Now, in 2009, [China](#) -- as the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitter -- was responding this dubious distinction by vocalizing its criticism of the current scenario and foregrounding its new commitments. Ahead of the Copenhagen summit, [China](#) had announced it would reduce the intensity of its carbon emissions per unit of its GDP in 2020 by 40 to 45 percent against 2005 levels. With that new commitment at hand, [China](#) was now accusing the [United States](#) and the European Union of shirking their own responsibilities by setting weak targets for greenhouse gas emissions cuts. Senior Chinese negotiator, Su Wei, characterized the goals of the world's second largest greenhouse gas emitter -- the [United States](#) -- as "not notable," and the European Union's target as "not enough." Su Wei also took issue with [Japan](#) for setting implausible preconditions.

On Dec. 11, 2009, [China](#) demanded that developed and wealthy countries in Copenhagen should help deliver a real agreement on climate change by delivering on their promises to reduce carbon emissions and provide financial support for developing countries to adapt to global warming. In so doing, China's Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei said his country was hoping that a "balanced outcome" would emerge from the discussions at the summit. Echoing the position of the Australian government, He Yafei spoke of a draft agreement as follows: "The final document we're going to

adopt needs to be taking into account the needs and aspirations of all countries, particularly the most vulnerable ones."

China's Vice Foreign Minister emphasized the fact that climate change was "a matter of survival" for developing countries, and accordingly, such countries need wealthier and more developed countries to accentuate not only their pledges of emissions reduction targets, but also their financial commitments under the aforementioned United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. To that end, scientists and leaders of small island states in the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, have highlighted the existential threat posed by global warming and the concomitant rise in sea level.

China aside, attention was also on [India](#) -- another major player in the developing world and a country with an industrializing economy that was impacting the environment. At issue was the Indian government's decision to set a carbon intensity target, which would slow emissions growth by up to 25 percent by the 2020 deadline. This strong position was resisted by some elements in [India](#), who argued that their country should not be taking such a strong position when developed wealthy countries were yet to show accountability for their previous commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The matter grew so heated that the members of the opposition stormed out of the parliament in protest as Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh defended the policy. But the political pressure at home in [India](#) was leaving the Indian delegation in Copenhagen in a state of chaos as well. In fact, India's top environmental negotiator refused to travel to Copenhagen in protest of the government's newly-announced stance.

China and [India](#) were joined by [Brazil](#) and [South Africa](#) in the crafting of a draft document calling for a new global climate treaty to be completed by June 2010. Of concern has been the realization that there was insufficient time to find concurrence on a full legal treaty, which would leave countries only with a politically-binding text by the time the summit at Copenhagen closed. But Guyana's leader, President Bharrat Jagdeo, warned that the summit in [Denmark](#) would be classified as a failure unless a binding document was agreed upon instead of just political consensus. He urged his cohorts to act with purpose saying, "Never before have science, economics, geo-strategic self-interest and politics intersected in such a way on an issue that impacts everyone on the planet."

Likewise, [Tuvalu](#) demanded that legally binding agreements emerge from Copenhagen. Its proposal was supported by many of the vulnerable countries, from small island states and sub-Saharan Africa, all of whom warned of the catastrophic impact of climate change on their citizens. [Tuvalu](#) also called for more aggressive action, such as an amendment to the 1992 agreement, which would focus on sharp greenhouse gas emissions and the accepted rise in temperatures, due to the impact the rise in seas. The delegation from [Kiribati](#) joined the call by drawing attention to the fact that one village had to be abandoned due to waist-high water, and more such effects were likely to follow. Kiribati's Foreign Secretary, Tessie Lambourne, warned

that the people of [Kiribati](#) could well be faced with no homeland in the future saying, "Nobody in this room would want to leave their homeland." But despite such impassioned pleas and irrespective of warnings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that the rise in sea level from melting polar ice caps would deleteriously affect low-lying atolls such as such as [Tuvalu](#) and [Kiribati](#) in the Pacific, and the [Maldives](#) in the Indian Ocean, the oil-giant [Saudi Arabia](#) was able to block this move.

Meanwhile, within the developed countries, yet another power struggle was brewing. The European Union warned it would only agree to raise its target of 20 percent greenhouse gas emissions reductions to 30 percent if the [United States](#) demonstrated that it would do more to reduce its own emissions. It was unknown if such pressure would yield results. [United States](#) President Barack Obama offered a "provisional" 2020 target of 17 percent reductions, noting that he could not offer greater concessions at Copenhagen due to resistance within the [United States](#) Congress, which was already trying to pass a highly controversial "cap and trade" emissions legislation. However, should that emissions trading bill fail in the Senate, the [United States](#) Environment Protection Agency's declaration that greenhouse gases pose a danger to human health and the environment was expected to facilitate further regulations and limits on power plants and factories at the national level. These moves could potentially strengthen the Obama administration's offering at Copenhagen. As well, President Obama also signaled that he would be willing to consider the inclusion of international forestry credits.

Such moves indicated willingness by the Obama administration to play a more constructive role on the international environmental scene than its predecessor, the Bush administration. Indeed, ahead of his arrival at the Copenhagen summit, President Barack Obama's top environmental advisors promised to work on a substantial climate change agreement. To that end, [United States](#) Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said at a press conference, "We are seeking robust engagement with all of our partners around the world." But would this pro-engagement assertion yield actual results?

By Dec. 12, 2009, details related to a draft document prepared by Michael Zammit Cutajar, the head of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action, were released at the Copenhagen climate conference. Included in the document were calls for countries to make major reductions in carbon emissions over the course of the next decade. According to the Washington Post, industrialized countries were called on to make cuts of between 25 percent and 40 percent below 1990 levels -- reductions that were far more draconian than the [United States](#) was likely to accept. As discussed above, President Obama had offered a provisional reduction target of 17 percent. The wide gap between the released draft and the United States' actual stated position suggested there was much more negotiating in the offing if a binding agreement could be forged, despite the Obama administration's claims that it was seeking greater engagement on this issue.

In other developments, the aforementioned call for financial support of developing countries to deal with the perils of climate change was partly answered by the European Union on Dec. 11, 2009.

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The European bloc pledged an amount of 2.4 billion euros (US\$3.5 billion) annually from 2010 to 2012. Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren of [Sweden](#) -- the country that holds the rotating presidency of the European Union at the time of the summit -- put his weight behind the notion of a "legally binding deal." Meanwhile, Yvo de Boer, a top United Nations climate change official, focused less on the essence of the agreement and more on tangible action and effects saying, "Copenhagen will only be a success if it delivers significant and immediate action that begins the day the conference ends."

The division between developed and developing countries in Copenhagen reached new heights on Dec. 14, 2009, when some of the poor and less developed countries launched a boycott at the summit. The move, which was spurred by African countries but backed by [China](#) and [India](#), appeared to be geared toward redirecting attention and primary responsibility to the wealthier and more industrialized countries. The impasse was resolved after the wealthier and more industrialized countries offered assurances that they did not intend on shirking from their commitments to reducing greenhouse gases. As a result, the participating countries ceased the boycott.

Outside the actual summit, thousands of protestors had gathered to demand crucial global warming, leading to clashes between police and demonstrators elsewhere in the Danish capital city. There were reports of scattered violence across Copenhagen and more than 1,000 people were arrested.

Nevertheless, by the second week of the climate change summit, hopes of forging a strong deal were eroding as developed and developing nations remained deadlocked on sharing cuts in greenhouse gases, and particularly on the matters of financing and temperature goals. In a bid to shore up support for a new climate change, [United States](#) President Barack Obama joined other world leaders in Copenhagen. On Dec. 14, 2009, there was a standoff brewing between the [United States](#) and [China](#). At issue was China's refusal to accept international monitoring of its expressed targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The [United States](#) argued that China's opposition to verification could be a deal-breaker.

By the close of the summit, the difficult process eventually resulted in some consensus being cultivated. A draft text called for \$100 billion a year by 2020 to assist poor nations cope with climate change, while aiming to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels. The deal also included specific targets for developed countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and called for reductions by developing countries as a share of their economies. Also included in the agreement was a mechanism to verify compliance. The details of the agreement were supported by President Barack Obama, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

This draft would stand as an interim agreement, with a legally-binding international pact unlikely to

materialize until 2010. In this way, the summit in Copenhagen failed to achieve its central objective, which was to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions.

### Editor's Note

In the background of these developments was the growing global consciousness related to global warming and climate change. Indeed, as the Copenhagen summit was ongoing, it was clear there was enormous concurrence on the significance of the stakes with an editorial on the matter of climate change being published in 56 newspapers in 45 countries. That editorial warned that without global action, climate change would "ravage our planet." Meanwhile, a global survey taken by Globescan showed that concern over global warming had exponentially increased from 1998 -- when only 20 percent of respondents believed it to be a serious problem -- to 64 percent in 2009. Such survey data, however, was generated ahead of the accusations by climate change skeptics that some climate scientists may have overstated the case for global warming, based on emails derived in an illicit manner from a British University.

### ***Special Entry: Climate change talks in Doha in [Qatar](#) extend life of Kyoto Protocol (2012)***

December 2012 saw climate talks ensue in the Qatari city of Doha as representatives from countries across the world gathered to discuss the fate of the Kyoto Protocol, which seeks to minimize greenhouse gas emissions. The summit yielded results with decisions made (1) to extend the Kyoto Protocol until 2020, and (2) for wealthier countries to compensate poorer countries for the losses and damage incurred as a result of climate change.

In regards to the second matter, Malia Talakai of [Nauru](#), a leading negotiator for the Alliance of Small Island States, explained the necessity of the compensation package as follows: "We are trying to say that if you pollute you must help us."

This measure was being dubbed the "Loss and Damage" mechanism, and was being linked with [United States](#) President Barack Obama's request for \$60 billion from Congress to deal with the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy months before. The sight of a hurricane bearing down on the northern Atlantic seaboard, along with the reality of the scope of reconstruction, appeared to have illustrated the economic costs of climate change -- not so much as a distant environmental issue -- but as a danger to the quotidian lives of people. Still, there was blame to be placed on the [United States](#) and European countries -- some of world's largest emitters -- for failing to do more to reduce emissions.

To that latter end, there was in fact little progress made on the central issue of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Had those emissions been reduced, there would have been less of a need to financially deal with the devastation caused by climate change. One interpretation was that the



global community was accepting the fact that industrialization was contributing to global warming, which had deleterious effects on the polar ice caps and concomitantly on the rise of sea level, with devastating effects for small island nations. Thus, wealthier countries were willing to pay around \$10 billion a year through 2020, effectively in "damages," to the poor countries that could be viewed as the "collateral damage" of industrial progress. But damages today could potentially be destruction tomorrow, leaving in place the existential challenges and burdens to be born by some of the world's smallest and least wealthy island countries.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the representative for the small island nation states at the Doha summit responded with ire, characterizing the lack of progress on reducing emissions as follows: "We see the package before us as deeply deficient in mitigation (carbon cuts) and finance. It's likely to lock us on the trajectory to a 3,4,5C rise in global temperatures, even though we agreed to keep the global average temperature rise of 1.5C to ensure survival of all islands. There is no new finance (for adapting to climate change and getting clean energy) -- only promises that something might materialize in the future. Those who are obstructive need to talk not about how their people will live, but whether our people will live."

Indeed, in most small island countries not just in the Pacific, but also the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, ecological concerns and the climate crisis have been dominant themes with dire life and death consequences looming in the background for their people. Small island nations in these region are already at risk from the rise of sea-level, tropical cyclones, floods. But their very livelihoods of fishing and subsistence farming were also at risk as a result of ecological and environmental changes. Increasingly high storm surges can wipe out entire villages and contaminate water supplies. Accordingly, the very existence of island nations, such as [Kiribati](#) and [Tuvalu](#), are at severe risk of being obliterated from the map. Yet even with the existential threat of being wiped off the map in the offing, the international community has been either slow or restrictive in its efforts to deal with global warming, climate change, economic and ecological damage, as well as the emerging global challenge of environmental refugees.

A 2012 report from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Pacific Regional Environment Program underlined the concerns of small island nations and their people as it concluded that the livelihoods of approximately 10 million people in Pacific island communities were increasingly vulnerable to climate change. In fact, low-lying islands in that region would likely confront losses of up to 18 percent of gross domestic product due to climate change, according to the report. The report covers 21 countries and territories, including [Fiji](#), [Kiribati](#), [Samoa](#) and [Tonga](#), and recommended environmental legislation intended to deal with the climate crisis facing the small island countries particularly. As noted by David Sheppard, the director general of the Pacific Regional Environment Program that co-sponsored this study: "The findings... emphasize the need more than ever to raise the bar through collective actions that address the region's environmental needs at all levels."

Regardless of the failures of the summit in [Qatar](#) (discussed above), the meeting did facilitate a process starting in 2015, which would bind both wealthy and poor countries together in the mission of forging a new binding treaty that would replace the Kyoto Protocol and tackle the central causes of climate change.

For more information on the threats faced in small island nations by climate change and the measures being undertaken to lobby for international action, please see the Alliance for Small Island States available online at the URL: <http://aosis.org/>

### *Special Report*

#### ***COP 21 summit in Paris ends with historic agreement to tackle climate change; rare international consensus formed on environmental crisis facing the planet (2015) --***

In mid-December 2015, the highly-anticipated United Nations climate conference of parties (COP) in Paris, [France](#), ended with a historic agreement. In fact, it would very likely be understood as the most significant international agreement signed by all the recognized countries of the world since the Cold War. Accordingly, the Paris Agreement was being distinguished as the first multilateral pact that would compel all countries across the world to cut its carbon emissions -- one of the major causes of increasing greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to global warming, and its deleterious effects ranging from the dangerous rise in sea level to catastrophic climate change.

The accord, which was dubbed to be the "Paris Agreement," was the work of rigorous diplomacy and fervent environmental advocacy, and it aimed to address the climate change crisis facing the planet. As many as 195 countries were represented in the negotiations that led to the landmark climate deal. Indeed, it was only after weeks of passionate debate that international concurrence was reached in addressing the environmental challenges confronting the world, with particular attention to moving beyond fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The success of the COP 21 summit in Paris and the emergence of the landmark Paris Agreement was, to some extent, attributed to the efforts of France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who presided over the negotiations. The French foreign minister's experience and credentials as a seasoned diplomat and respected statesman paid dividends. He skillfully guided the delegates from almost 200 countries and interest groups along the negotiations process, with ostensibly productive results and a reasonably robust deal to show for it.

On Dec. 12, 2015, French Foreign Minister Fabius officially adopted the agreement, declaring: "I now invite the COP to adopt the decision entitled Paris Agreement outlined in the document. Looking out to the room I see that the reaction is positive, I see no objections. The Paris



agreement is adopted." Once Foreign Minister Fabius' gavel was struck, symbolically inaugurating the Paris Agreement into force, the COP delegate rushed to their feet with loud and bouyant cheers as well as thunderous applause.

In general, the Paris Agreement was being hailed as a victory for enviromental activists and a triumph for international diplomats, while at the same time being understood as simply an initial -- and imperfect -- move in the direction of a sustainable future. China's chief negotiator, Xie Zhenhua, issued this message, saying that while the accord was not ideal, it should "not prevent us from marching historical steps forward."

United States President Barack Obama lauded the deal as both "ambitious" and "historic," and the work of strenuous multilateral negotiations as he declared, "Together, we've shown what's possible when the world stands as one." The [United States](#) leader acknowledged that the accord was not "perfect," but he reminded the critics that it was "the best chance to save the one planet we have. "

Former [United States](#) Vice President Al Gore, one of the world's most well known environmental advocates, issued a lengthy statement on the accomplishments ensconced in the Paris Agreement. He highlighted the fact that the Paris Agreement was a first step towards a future with a reduced carbon footprint on Planet Earth as he said, "The components of this agreement -- including a strong review mechanism to enhance existing commitments and a long-term goal to eliminate global-warming pollution this century -- are essential to unlocking the necessary investments in our future. No agreement is perfect, and this one must be strengthened over time, but groups across every sector of society will now begin to reduce dangerous carbon pollution through the framework of this agreement."

The central provisions of the Paris Agreement included the following items:

- Greenhouse gas emissions should peak as quickly as possible, with a move towards balancing energy sources, and ultimately the decrease of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century
- Global temperature increase would be limited to 1.5 degrees Centigrade above pre-industrial levels and would be held "well below" the two degrees Centigrade threshold
- Progress on these goals would be reviewed every five years beginning in 2020 with new greenhouse gas reduction targets issued every five years
- \$100 billion would be expended each year in climate finance for developing countries to move forward with green technologies, with further climate financing to be advanced in the years beyond

It should be noted that there both legally binding and voluntary elements contained within the Paris Agreement. Specifically, the submission of an emissions reduction target and the regular review of that goal would be legally mandatory for all countries. Stated differently, there would be a system in place by which experts would be able to track the carbon-cutting progress of each country. At the same time, the specific targets to be set by countries would be determined at the

discretion of the countries, and would not be binding. While there was some criticism over this non-binding element, the fact of the matter was that the imposition of emissions targets was believed to be a major factor in the failure of climate change talks in Copenhagen, [Denmark](#), in 2009.

In 2015, the talks faced challenges as several countries, such as [China](#) and [India](#), objected to conditions that would stymie economic and development. In order to avoid that kind of landmine, a system Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) was developed and formed the basis of the accord. As such, the Paris Agreement would, in fact, facilitate economic growth and development, as well as technological progress, but with the goal of long-term ecological sustainability based on low carbon sources. In fact, the agreement heralded as "the beginning of the end of the fossil fuel era." As noted by Nick Mabey, the head of the climate diplomacy organization E3G, said, "Paris means governments will go further and faster to tackle climate change than ever before. The transition to a low carbon economy is now unstoppable, ensuring the end of the fossil fuel age."

A particular sticking point in the agreement was the \$100 billion earmarked for climate financing for developing countries to transition from traditional fossil fuels to green energy technologies and a low carbon future. In 2014, a report by the International Energy Agency indicated that the cost of that transition would actually be around \$44 trillion by the mid-century -- an amount that would render the \$100 billion being promised to be a drop in the proverbial bucket. However, the general expectation was that the Republican-controlled Senate in the [United States](#), which would have to ratify the deal in that country, was not interested in contributing significant funds for the cause of climate change.

A key strength of the Paris Agreement was the ubiquitous application of measures to all countries. Of note was the frequently utilized concept of "flexibility" with regard to the Paris Agreement. Specifically, the varying capacities of the various countries in meeting their obligations would be anticipated and accorded flexibility. This aspect presented something of a departure from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which drew a sharp distinction between developed and developing countries, and mandated a different set of obligations for those categories of countries. Thus, under Kyoto, [China](#) and [India](#) were not held to the same standards as the [United States](#) and European countries. In the Paris Agreement, there would be commitments from all countries across the globe.

Another notable strength of the Paris Agreement was the fact that the countries of the world were finally able to reach consensus on the vital necessity to limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Centigrade. Ahead of the global consensus on the deal, and as controversy continued to surface over the targeted global temperature limits, the leaders of island countries were sounding the alarm about the melting of the Polar ice caps and the associated rise in seal level. Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga of [Tuvalu](#) issued this dismal reminder: "Tuvalu's future ... is already

bleak and any further temperature increase will spell the total demise of [Tuvalu](#). No leader in this room carries such a level of worry and responsibility. Just imagine you are in my shoes, what would you do?" It was thus something of a victory for environmental advocates that the countries of the world could find consensus on the lower number -- 1.5 degrees rather than 2 degrees.

A significant weak point with regard to the Paris deal was a "loss and damage" provision, which anticipates that even with all the new undertakings intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move to a low carbon future, there would nonetheless be unavoidable climate change consequences. Those consequences ranged from the loss of arable land for farmers as well as soil erosion and contamination of potable water by sea water, to the decimation of territory in coastal zones and on small islands, due to the rise in sea level, with entire small island countries being rendered entirely uninhabitable. The reality was that peoples' homes across the world would be destroyed along with their way of life.

With that latter catastrophic effect being a clear and present danger for small island countries, the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) demanded that the developed world acknowledge its responsibility for this irreversible damage.. Despite the fact that greenhouse gas emissions and the ensuing plague of global warming was, indeed, the consequence of development in the West (the [United States](#) and Europe) and the large power house countries, such as [Russia](#), [China](#) and [India](#), there was no appetite by those countries to sign on to unlimited liability. Under the Paris Agreement, there was a call for research on insurance mechanisms that would address loss and damage issues, with recommendations to come in the future.

The call for research was being regarded as an evasion of sorts and constituted the weakest aspect of the Paris Agreement. Not surprisingly, a coalition of small island nations demanded a "Marshall Plan" for the Pacific. Borrowing the term "Marshall Plan" from the post-World War II reconstruction effort, the coalition of Pacific island nation, which included [Kiribati](#), [Tuvalu](#), [Fiji](#), and the [Marshall Islands](#), called for an initiative that would include investment in renewable energy and shoreline protection, cultural preservation, economic assistance for economies in transition, and a plan for migration and resettlement for these countries as they confront the catastrophic effects of the melting of the Polar ice caps and the concomitant rise in sea level. The precise contours of the initiative remained unknown, unspecified, and a mere exercise in theory at the time of writing. Yet such an initiative would, at some point, have to be addressed, given the realities of climate change and the slow motion calamity unfolding each day for low-lying island nations across the world.

As noted by Vice President Greg Stone of Conservation International, who also functions as an adviser to the government of [Kiribati](#), "Imagine living in a place where you know it's going to go away someday, but you don't know what day that wave's going to come over and wash your home away." He added, "It's a disaster we know is going to happen." Meanwhile, the intervening years promised to be filled with hardship for small island nations, such as [Kiribati](#).

Stone explained, “For every inch of sea-level rise, these islands lose 10 feet of their freshwater table to saltwater intrusion,” Stone explained. “So it’s not just about the day the water finally goes over the island; it’s also about the day that there’s just not enough water left and everyone has to move off the island.” Presaging the future for island nations that could face submersion, Stone said, “If you look ahead 50 years, a country like [Kiribati](#) could become the first aqueous nation. possibility of migration. That is, they own this big patch of ocean, and they administer it from elsewhere.”

Foreign Minister Minister Tony Debrum of the [Marshall Islands](#) emerged as the champion advocating on behalf of small island nation states and a loose coalition of concerned countries from the Pacific to the Caribbean, but with support from the [United States](#). He addressed the comprehensive concerns of small island nations regarding the weaknesses of the deal, while simultaneously making clear that the Paris Agreement signified hope for the countries most at risk. In a formal statement, Debrum declared: “We have made history today. Emissions targets are still way off track, but this agreement has the tools to ramp up ambition, and brings a spirit of hope that we can rise to this challenge. I can go back home to my people and say we now have a pathway to survival.” Debrum highlighted the imperatives of Pacific island nations, saying, “Our High Ambition Coalition was the lightning rod we needed to lift our sights and expectations for a strong agreement here in Paris. We were joined by countries representing more than half the world. We said loud and clear that a bare-bones, minimalist agreement would not fly. We instead demanded an agreement to mark a turning point in history, and the beginning of our journey to the post-carbon era.”

Debrum of the [Marshall Islands](#) espoused the quintessential synopsis of the accord and its effects for those most likely to be affected by climate change as he noted, “Climate change won’t stop overnight, and my country is not out of the firing line just yet, but today we all feel a little safer.”

Editor's Entry on [Environmental Policy](#):

The low-lying Pacific island nations of the world, including [Kiribati](#), [Tuvalu](#), the [Marshall Islands](#), [Fiji](#), among others, are vulnerable to the threats posed by global warming and climate change, derived from carbon emissions, and resulting in the rise in sea level. Other island nations in the Caribbean, as well as poor countries with coastal zones, were also at particular risk of suffering the deleterious effects of climate change.

Political policy in these countries are often connected to ecological issues, which have over time morphed into an existential crisis of sorts. Indeed, ecological concerns and the climate crisis have also been dominant themes with life and death consequences for the people of island nations in the Pacific. Indeed, the very livelihoods of fishing and subsistence farming remain at risk as a result of ecological and environmental changes. Yet even so, these countries are threatened by increasingly high storm surges, which could wipe out entire villages and contaminate water supplies. Moreover,

because these are low lying island nations, the sustained rise in sea level can potentially lead to the terrain of these countries being uninhabitable at best, and submerged at worst. Stated in plain terms, these countries are at severe risk of being obliterated from the map and their plight illuminates the emerging global challenge of environmental refugees. In these manifold senses, climate change is the existential crisis of the contemporary era.

Since the time of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, there have been efforts aimed at extending the life of that agreement, with an eye on minimizing greenhouse gas emissions, and thus minimizing the effects of climate change. Those endeavors have largely ended in failure, as exemplified by the unsuccessful Copenhagen talks in 2009 and the fruitless Doha talks in 2012 respectively. The success of the COP 21 talks in [France](#), with the adoption of the landmark Paris Agreement in 2015, was regarded as the first glimmer of hope. Not only did the Paris Agreement signify the triumph of international diplomacy and global consensus, but it also marked the start of the end of the fossil fuel era, with the path forward toward a low carbon future reliant on greener technologies. Most crucially, the Paris Agreement stood as the first significant response in recent times to the central challenge of climate change and its quotidian effects on the lives of real human beings across the world.

## **1. Major International Environmental Accords:**

### **General Environmental Concerns**

Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, Espoo, 1991.

### **Accords Regarding Atmosphere**

Annex 16, vol. II (Environmental Protection: Aircraft Engine Emissions) to the 1044 Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, Montreal, 1981

Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP), Geneva, 1979

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), New York, 1992

Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, Vienna, 1985 including the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Depleted the Ozone Layer, Montreal, 1987

### **Accords Regarding Hazardous Substances**

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Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movements and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa, Bamako, 1991

Convention on Civil Liability for Damage Caused during Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road, Rail and Inland Navigation Vessels (CRTD), Geneva, 1989

Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (Basel Convention), Basel, 1989

Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, Helsinki, 1992

Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region (Waigani Convention), Waigani, 1995

European Agreement Concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR), Geneva 1957

FAO International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides, Rome, 1985

## **2. Major International Marine Accords:**

### **Global Conventions**

Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention 1972), London, 1972

International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by Protocol of 1978 relation thereto (MARPOL 73/78), London, 1973 and 1978

International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage 1969 (1969 CLC), Brussels, 1969, 1976, and 1984

International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage 1971 (1971 Fund Convention), Brussels, 1971

Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea (HNS), London 1996

International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response, and Co-operation (OPRC), London, 1990

International Convention Relation to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution Casualties (Intervention Convention), Brussels, 1969

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Montego Bay, 1982

### **Regional Conventions**

Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft (Oslo Convention), Oslo, 1972

Convention for the Prevention of Marine Pollution from Land-based Sources (Paris Convention), Paris, 1974

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention), Paris, 1992

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (1974 Helsinki Convention), Helsinki 1974

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Conventions within the UNEP Regional Seas Programme

Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution, Bucharest, 1992

Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, Cartagena de Indias, 1983

Convention for the Protection, Management, and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region, Nairobi, 1985

Kuwait Regional Convention for Co-operation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution, [Kuwait](#), 1978

Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Region of the Mediterranean Sea (Barcelona Convention), Barcelona, 1976



Regional Convention for the Conservation of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Environment, Jeddah, 1982

Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region, Noumea, 1986

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and Coastal Area of the South-East Pacific, Lima, 1981

Convention for Co-operation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region, Abidjan, 1981

### **3. Major Conventions Regarding Living Resources:**

#### **Marine Living Resources**

Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), Canberra, 1980

International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Rio de Janeiro, 1966

International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), Washington, 1946

#### **Nature Conservation and Terrestrial Living Resources**

Antarctic Treaty, Washington, D.C., 1959

Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention), Paris, 1972

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Nairobi, 1992

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Bonn, 1979

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Washington, D.C., 1973

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Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), Paris 1994

FAO International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources, Rome, 1983

International Tropical Timber Agreement, 1994 (ITTA, 1994), Geneva, 1994

### **Freshwater Resources**

Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Helsinki, 1992

### **4. Major Conventions Regarding Nuclear Safety:**

Convention on Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency (Assistance Convention), Vienna, 1986

Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident (Notification Convention), Vienna, 1986

Convention on Nuclear Safety, Vienna, 1994

Vienna Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage, Vienna, 1963

### **5. Major Intergovernmental Organizations**

Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)

European Union (EU): Environment

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds (IOPC Funds)

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Environment Policy Committee (EPOC)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

World Bank

World Food Programme (WFP)

World Health Organization (WHO)

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

World Trade Organization (WTO)

## **6. Major Non-Governmental Organizations**

Atmosphere Action Network East Asia (AANEAs)

Climate Action Network (CAN)

Consumers International (CI)

Earth Council

Earthwatch Institute

Environmental Liaison Centre International (ELCI)

European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI)

Greenpeace International

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)

International Solar Energy Society (ISES)

IUCN-The World Conservation Union

Pesticide Action Network (PAN)

Sierra Club

Society for International Development (SID)

Third World Network (TWN)

Water Environment Federation (WEF)

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

World Federalist Movement (WFM)

World Resources Institute (WRI)

World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF)

### **7. Other Networking Instruments**

Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED)

Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE)

Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)

United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS)

# Appendices

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- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Nauru
- Cuba
- Palau
- Holy See
- San Marino
- Korea, North
- [Serbia](#) & Montenegro
- Liberia
- Somalia
- Liechtenstein
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- Tuvalu

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#### Note on Edition Dates:

The earlier edition dates are noted above because they were used to formulate the original country reviews and serve as the baseline for some of the information covered. Later editions have been used in some cases, and are cited as such, while other more recent online resources (cited above) contain recent and ever-updated data sets used for research.

#### Methodology Notes for the HDI:

Since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme, in concert with organizations across the globe, has produced the [Human Development Index](#) (or HDI). According to the UNDP, the index measures average achievement in basic human development in one simple composite index, and produces from this index a ranking of countries. The HDI is a composite of three basic components of human development: longevity, knowledge and standard of living. Longevity is measured by life expectancy. Knowledge is measured by combination of adult literacy and mean



years of schooling. Standard of living is measured by purchasing power, based on real GDP per capita (in constant US\$) adjusted for differences in international living costs (or, purchasing power parity, PPP). While the index uses these social indicators to measure national performance with regard to human welfare and development, not all countries provide the same level of information for each component needed to compute the index; therefore, as in any composite indicator, the final index is predicated on projections, predictions and weighting schemes. The index is a static measure, and thus, an incomplete measure of human welfare. In fact, the UNDP says itself the concept of human development focuses on the ends rather than the means of development and progress, examining in this manner, the average condition of all people in a given country.

Specifically, the index is calculated by determining the maximum and minimum for each of the three components (as listed above) and then measuring where each country stands in relation to these scales-expressed as a value between 0 and 1. For example, the minimum adult literary rate is zero percent, the maximum is 100 percent, and the reading skills component of knowledge in the HDI for a country where the literacy rate is 75 percent would be 0.75. The scores of all indicators are then averaged into the overall index.

For a more extensive examination of human development, as well as the ranking tables for each participating country, please visit: <http://www.undp.org>

#### Note on [History](#) sections

In some CountryWatch Country Reviews, open source content from the State Department Background Notes and Country Guides have been used.

### **Environmental Overview**

Environmental Profiles: A Global Guide to Projects and People. 1993. Linda Sobel Katz, Sarah Orrick, and Robert Honig. New York: Garland Publishing.

The Environment Encyclopedia and Directory, 2nd Edition. 1998. London: Europa.

Environmental Protection Agency Global Warming Site. URL: <http://www.epa.gov/globalwarming>

Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations: Forestry. URL: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/sofo/en/>

Global Warming Information Page. URL: <http://globalwarming.org>

Introduction to Global [Environmental Issues](#), 2nd Edition. 1997. Kevin Pickering and Lewis Owen.

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London: Routledge.

Trends: Compendium of Data on Global Change. URL: [http://cdiac.esd.ornl.gov/trends/emis/em\\_cont.htm](http://cdiac.esd.ornl.gov/trends/emis/em_cont.htm)

United Nations Environmental Program. URL: [http://www.unep.org/GEO/GEO\\_Products/Assessment\\_Reports/](http://www.unep.org/GEO/GEO_Products/Assessment_Reports/)

United Nations Global Environmental Outlook. URL: <http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/>

United States Department of Energy, Country Analysis Briefs. URL: <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/contents.html>

World Climate Data Online. URL: <http://www.worldclimate.com>

World Directory of Country Environmental Studies. 1996. The World Resource Institute.

World Factbook. US Central Intelligence Agency. Washington, D.C.: Printing and Photography Group.

1998-1999 World Resources Guide to the Global Environment by the World Resources Institute. May, 1998.

1998/1999 Yearbook of International Cooperation on Environment and Development. 1998. London: Earthscan Publications.

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#### **Other Sources:**

General information has also been used in the compilation of this review, with the courtesy of governmental agencies from this country.

#### **News Services:**

CANA Daily Bulletin. Caribbean Media Agency Ltd., St. Michael, [Barbados](#).

Central and Eastern Africa Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Network for Central and Eastern Africa.

Daily News, Panafrican News Agency. Dakar, [Senegal](#).

PACNEWS, Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association. Suva, [Fiji](#).

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Washington D.C. USA.

Reuters News. Thomson Reuters. New York, New York. USA.

Southern Africa Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Network for Southern Africa.

Voice of America, English Service. Washington D.C.

West Africa Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa. 1998-1999

Note: Some or all these news services have been used to research various sections of this Country Review.

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**Basic form, using an Internet protocol:**

Author/editor. *Title of Print Version of Work*. Edition statement (if given). Publication information (Place of publication: publisher, date), if given. *Title of Electronic Work*. Medium. Available Protocol (if applicable):Site/Path/File. Access date.

**Examples:**

Youngblood-Coleman, Denise. *Country Review: France*. 2003. Houston, Texas: CountryWatch Publications, 2003. *Country Review:France*. Online. Available URL : [http://www.countrywatch.com/cw\\_country.asp?vCOUNTRY=61](http://www.countrywatch.com/cw_country.asp?vCOUNTRY=61) October, 12, 2003.

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**Examples:**

Youngblood-Coleman, Denise. "People." *CountryWatch.com: France*. 2003. Houston, Texas: CountryWatch Publications, 2003. *CountryWatch.com: France*. Online. Available URL : [http://www.countrywatch.com/cw\\_topic.asp?vCOUNTRY=61&SECTION=SOCIAL&TOPIC=CLPEO&TYPE=TEXT](http://www.countrywatch.com/cw_topic.asp?vCOUNTRY=61&SECTION=SOCIAL&TOPIC=CLPEO&TYPE=TEXT). October 12, 2003.

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***For further source citation information, please email:*** editor@countrywatch.com or education@countrywatch.com.

# CountryWatch

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ISBN: 1- 60523- 757-4

Russia Country Review

2016

ISSN: 1- 60523- 893-5

Printed in the United States of America