

Russian Federation

Country Report

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Executive Summary:

The Russian Federation is the world's largest country by square foot, spanning nine time zones. Russia's economy has experienced major transformations since the collapse of the Soviet Union, moving from centralization and isolation to global integration.

Russia has the largest global reserves of mineral and energy resources and is the world's second largest oil and natural gas producer. After the ruble's collapse in 1998, the economy grew on average by 7% yearly. Since 2008, however, the Russian economy has stagnated with an average annual growth of 1.2%. Russia is the primary trading partner for most of the Soviet successor states and for some EU countries, whose dependency on Russian gas for energy nears 100%.

Russia struggled with a difficult transition from communism to democracy after the breakup of the Soviet Union. President Vladimir Putin, Russia's dominant politician since his election in 2000, effectively controls political institutions and other public organizations, restricts the independence of some religious groups and the media, and often marginalizes political opposition. Corruption is widespread throughout all levels of government. President Putin has signed laws to limit political opposition and restrict legitimate activities and criticism, such as independent news agencies, websites, and bloggers.

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis seriously exacerbated relations between the West and Russia. Russia supported the Crimean referendum on "independence" in March 2014, and has been responsible for the conflict in Eastern Ukraine through its military intervention in the region. In response, the United States and EU have sanctioned Russia's financial and energy sectors and introduced targeted individual sanctions, including visa bans and the freezing of assets and accounts.

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine in what the Kremlin called a special military operation to denazify the region. Russia has targeted large cities with airstrikes hitting civilian and military buildings. As the war escalated, Russian attacks on civilians became more overt and abhorrent.

Russia has been sanctioned by the United States and EU countries, specifically targeting Russian oligarchs, imports from Russia, and energy. In a UN vote condemning Russia, 135 states voted yes, 5 voted against, and 35 abstained. The United States and other nations have called for Russia to be removed from the UN Human Right Council.

Russia's invasion has spurred international condemnation, and acts of domestic dissent have been met with arrests. The Israeli embassy in Moscow has received a substantial increase in requests to make Aliyah.

Russia features the fourth-largest Jewish community in the world. Since 1991, Russian Jewry has reestablished its diverse religious, social, and cultural life after decades of Soviet-era repressions and restrictions. Numerous Jewish

Statistics

Population: 143,918,000
(March 2019 est.)

Size: 17,098,242 sq. km

Capital: Moscow

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

Jewish population:
500,000 - 1,000,000(est.)

Head of State: President Vladimir Putin

Head of Government:
Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin

Foreign Minister:
Sergey Lavrov

Ambassador to United States:
Anatoly Antonov

U.S. Ambassador to Russia:

John J. Sullivan

Freedom House Rating:
Not Free

institutions now exist in Russia, including community centers, synagogues, schools, aliyah and emigration bureaus, youth groups, charity organizations, and mass media. However, challenges for Russia's Jewish community still exist, such as relatively low levels of religious observance, street-level anti-Semitism, and the growing needs of the elderly.

History: The Russian Empire

The modern Russian state was established between the 15th and 16th centuries, as a result of the Duchy of Moscow's territorial expansion under Tsars Ivan III and Ivan IV. An earlier predecessor state, known as Kievan Rus, was founded in the 9th century but was destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century with its Ukrainian and Belarusian territories coming under Polish-Lithuanian rule. In the late 17th century, Tsar Peter the Great expanded the Russian state and crowned himself the first Russian Emperor. Historians consider Peter the Great's reign a formative period in Russian history: it established social, institutional, and intellectual trends that dominated Russia for the next two centuries. Peter the Great instituted a Western system of administration, reformed the army, and introduced Western social and cultural customs.

Russia remained an authoritarian and powerful but relatively undeveloped state through the mid-19th century. Rooted in an agrarian economy, Russia did not abolish serfdom until 1861 and did not industrialize until the late 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, the pressures of a rapidly changing economy, compounded by incompetent autocratic rule, led to growing public dissatisfaction and opposition to the autocracy. Public discontent culminated in the violent but short-lived 1905 Revolution, which forced Tsar Nicholas II to grant Russia's first constitution. Russia's ill-fated involvement in World War I resulted in a popular rebellion against Tsar Nicholas II in February 1917. The subsequent short-lived Provisional Government fell to a Bolshevik coup led by Vladimir Lenin in October 1917.

Soviet Union and the Cold War

After the October Revolution, a civil war broke out between the Bolsheviks and the White Russians (a loose coalition of monarchists, democrats, and socialists). In 1922, the Bolsheviks established the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin became the leader of the Soviet Union. During the 1930s and 1940s, Stalin's policies of rapid industrialization, ruthless agricultural collectivization, forced relocation, and mass purges resulted in millions of deaths.

In late August 1939, the USSR signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany, which divided Eastern Europe in a secret deal. One week later, German forces invaded Poland from the west. Shortly afterward, the Soviet Red Army assaulted Poland from the east and forcibly annexed the Baltic States. In June 1941, Germany violated the earlier non-aggression pact and attacked the Soviet Union, catalyzing Russia's involvement on the side of the Allies.

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

Stalin's successors kept an oppressive but less brutal rule. Nikita Khrushchev, who led the country from 1953 to 1964, formally rehabilitated many individuals and groups repressed by Stalin. His successor, Leonid Brezhnev, concentrated primarily on domestic stability. Violations of basic human rights remained rampant even after the Soviet Union accepted the Helsinki Accords. By the late 1970s, critical problems inherent in the Communist political and economic system accelerated. As the economy stagnated, Soviet military and global power diminished. Social and political unrest mounted in Eastern Europe through the 1980s.

Mikhail Gorbachev was the last Soviet leader, following the two aged leaders Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko. Gorbachev initiated a new era with reforms aimed at modernizing the USSR, including economic restructuring (“*perestroika*”), and a loosening of restrictions on political, social, and cultural activity (“*glasnost*”). Gorbachev also moved decisively to reduce tensions with the West. His 1986 Reykjavik Summit with U.S. President Ronald Reagan heralded a move towards greater cooperation, with a twofold focus on disarmament and human rights.

Gorbachev’s reforms aimed at economic modernization but held internal contradictions, resulting in economic chaos. As the Soviet economic and political situation began to deteriorate, strong nationalist and separatist movements arose in the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Russia. In August 1991, a coup attempt by members of Gorbachev’s government precipitated the end of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev resigned as President of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, and the USSR was dissolved into fifteen post-Soviet states.

Russian Federation

Boris Yeltsin became president of the newly independent Russian Federation, which quickly entered a prolonged period of turmoil.

In October 1993, political conflict between the Russian Parliament and the Yeltsin government erupted into open warfare as the Russian Army crushed an armed uprising of supporters of the Parliament.

Yeltsin appointed Vladimir Putin, a former KGB agent and FSB chief, to Prime Minister in August 1999. Yeltsin resigned on December 31, 1999. Putin then assumed the dual role of prime minister and acting president until being elected president in March 2000. His domestic popularity soared in the period leading up to the election, in part due to his anti-terrorist offensive in Chechnya in retaliation for apartment bombings in Moscow blamed on Chechen terrorists.

Currency: 84 Rubles = \$1 (April 2022)

GDP: \$1.483 trillion (2020 est.)

GDP per capita: \$10,126.72 (2020)

GDP Growth: -3.0% (2020 est.)

Putin’s rise to power coincided with a major increase in global energy prices. He melded Russia’s economic and energy policies with foreign relations. Putin also employed Russian nationalism to unite domestic constituencies. He put forward a Russia-first approach in foreign policy and has sought to preserve Russia’s special “sphere of influence” over the republics of the former Soviet Union.

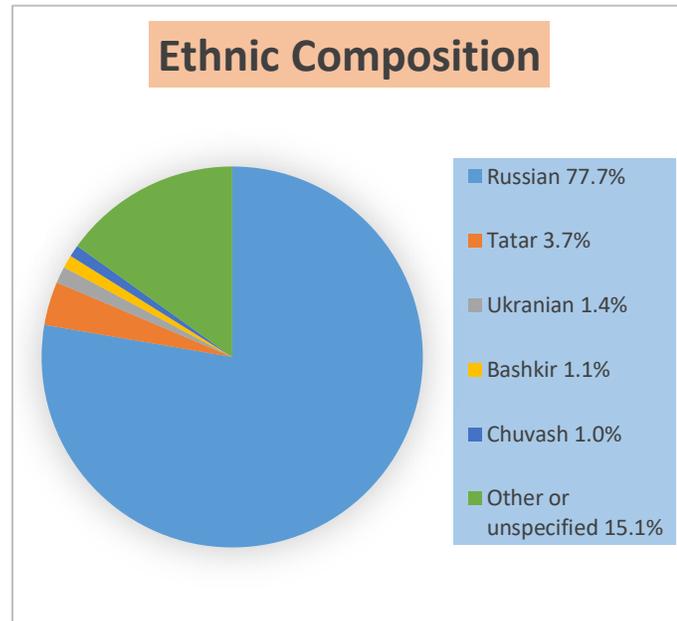
Constitutionally barred from a third consecutive term as president, Putin stepped down after his term ended. In March 2008, Putin’s Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev won the Presidential Election. Medvedev appointed Putin prime minister, which allowed Putin to continue to influence Russian politics. Putin was reelected for eight years in March 2018.

In January 2020, the entire Russian government abruptly resigned to make way for Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposed changes to the constitution. Putin appointed Mikhail Mishustin, the former head of the Russian tax service, as the prime minister. Medvedev took a new job as deputy head of the Security Council. Putin proposed amending the Constitution to expand the powers of Parliament, the prime minister, and a body called the State Council.

Domestic Situation:

Geography:

The Russian Federation is nearly twice the size of the United States. Russia extends across the whole of northern Asia and the eastern part of Europe. The territory of Russia occupies three-quarters of the former Soviet Union, and Russia inherited most of the USSR's industrial base, natural resources, military assets, international obligations, and population, with all their diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic characteristics.



Government:

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

The Federal Assembly is the country's legislative body. It consists of the Federation Council and the State Duma (a 450-member popularly-elected lower house).

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

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

Economy:

Russia has the world's largest reserves of mineral and energy resources and is the world's second-largest oil and natural gas producer. Hydrocarbons and electricity continue to occupy a dominant position in Russian exports.

Although rich in natural resources, industrial capabilities, and with an educated labor pool, Russia initially struggled in transitioning from communism to capitalism after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Russia's piecemeal and turbulent economic progress in the 1990s culminated in the 1998 default crisis. Capital flight took billions of dollars out of Russia to foreign tax havens.

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

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

The 2008-2009 global financial crisis severely impacted Russia's financial markets. The banking sector fell into turmoil. The stock market was among the worst affected in the world, losing 75% of its value.

Russia acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012. The 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which restricted trade with the former Soviet Union over emigration practices, had served as a major bilateral issue in U.S.-Russian relations. In December 2012, Russia graduated from the Jackson-Vanik provisions.

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

According to the data of Levada Center in 2019, 43% of the population thinks that their standard of living got increased, 13% feel that they live better, and others keep the status quo.

Domestic Issues:

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

The ineffectiveness of Russia's social safety net is also problematic. Despite significant expenditures on pensions and subsidies for the poor, the elderly, and the disabled, these programs are underfinanced. In response to the government's proposal to reform the pension system by increasing the retirement age, mass demonstrations erupted throughout Russia. Although the Duma still passed the legislation, the protests forced the government to reduce the age increase.

Nevertheless, state-funded education system supplies quality education to all citizens, producing a 98% adult literacy rate. The spread of AIDS is still a serious problem in Russia, with an estimated HIV infection rate from 1-2 million, many cases undiagnosed.

Freedom of Religion:

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

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

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

In 2010, President Dmitri Medvedev introduced a law for the restitution of religious property nationalized by the state during the Soviet period. The Duma passed this bill on June 11, 2013. Under this legislation, the Jewish community regained the synagogues in Kaluga and Novozybkov.

In late 2016, President Vladimir Putin signed into law a ban against calling sacred texts of the world religions as extremist. This Law on Combating Extremist Activity states that “[t]he Bible, the Koran, the Tanakh, and the Kangyur, their contents, and quotations from them cannot be recognized as extremist materials.”

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

In July 2017 a district court in Sochi classified as extremist the book “Forcibly Baptized” by Rabbi Marcus Lehmann. Since 2017, an organization represents "Jahova Witnesses" banned in Russia.

In 2018, the Russian government deported several rabbis on grounds that they were a threat to national security: Rabbis Ari Edelkopf (Sochi), Osher Krichevsky (Omsk), and Josef Marozof (Ulyanovsk). Rabbi Marozof was ordered to leave because the FSB security service said he had been involved in unspecified “extremist behavior.”

Freedom of Press and Civil Society:

Some experts describe the current Russian system of government as “managed democracy,” where a government-controlled media and stage-managed elections guarantee pro-Putin, pro-Kremlin outcomes. As of 2019, Russia is still ranked “Not Free” in Freedom House’s annual assessment.

The government controls the three main television outlets (Channel One, NTV, and Rossiya), which calibrate coverage and omit politically undesirable stories. Either the government or state-controlled companies own about 66% of 2,500 television channels and over 60% of 45,000 registered local newspapers and periodicals.

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

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

Public protests followed the parliamentary elections of December 2011, which were widely dismissed as fraudulent. In the aftermath, Russia saw some of the biggest protests in Moscow and St. Petersburg since the 1990s. In May 2012, the day before Putin’s third inauguration as President, protests involving close to 50,000 people took place in Moscow. The protests were marred by violence between the protesters and the police. Police arrested about 400 protesters, including activist leaders Alexei Navalny and Boris Nemtsov.

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

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

In May 2015, President Putin signed the so-called ‘Russian Undesirable Organizations’ law, a follow-up to the 2012 Russian foreign agent law. Today, the list of "undesirable organizations" includes about 20 organizations. 'Open Russia,' 'National Endowment for Democracy,' 'Open Society Foundation,' 'U.S. Russia Foundation' are among them.

In April 2018, the Telegram messaging app in Russia was blocked by The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor).

In July 2019, many approved and unapproved rallies in Moscow began, caused by the situation with the 2019 Moscow City Duma elections. The protests were accompanied by massive administrative arrests of unregistered independent candidates and two criminal cases: obstructing the work of election commissions case and the riots case (also known as the Moscow case).

Corruption:

Government corruption and organized crime are widespread and pose a significant challenge to Russia’s state, society, and economy. In 2018, a corruption index compiled by Transparency International ranked Russia 111th out of 176 countries.

In 2010 a well-known opposition activist Alexey Navalny established the Anti-Corruption Foundation. Its main goal is to investigate and to expose corruption cases among high-ranking Russian government officials.

The highly publicized case of Sergei Magnitsky, a 37-year-old lawyer who died in pretrial detention in November 2009, put an international spotlight on Russian corruption. Magnitsky’s testimony implicated police, the judiciary, tax officials, bankers, and the Russian mafia in large-scale tax evasion and fraud. Magnitsky was arrested and imprisoned in Moscow in November 2008; he was denied family visits and life-saving medical treatment.

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

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

Foreign Policy:

Since 1992, Russian foreign policy has substantially shifted from early compliance and cooperation with the West to a more Moscow-centered *realpolitik*. As the primary successor to the USSR, Russia inherited Soviet-era status and commitments in the international arena. Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a member of the G20, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and leads the Commonwealth of Independent States. In 2014, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus formed the Eurasian Economic Union.

Relations with the United States:

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

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

Beginning in 2005, U.S.-Russia relations appeared to worsen as American observers decried Russia's increasing authoritarianism at home and assertiveness abroad.

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

In 2009, the United States and Russia worked closely to address the threat presented by Iran's nuclear program, and along with other members of the UN Security Council, reached an agreement on comprehensive international sanctions against Iran. However, Russia has been highly critical and opposed to new sanctions imposed by the United States and its European allies since 2009.

The 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which restricted trade with the Soviet Union over emigration practices, had been a major bilateral issue in U.S.-Russian relations since the fall of communism. President Bush announced his intention in November 2001 to work for Russia's "graduation" from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. However, trade

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

In December 2012, Congress did graduate Russia from the Jackson-Vanik provisions. However, in response to the Sergei Magnitsky Act provisions tied to graduation, the Russian Government adopted the Dima Yakovlev Law in 2012, which bans American citizens from adopting children from Russia, issued a list of U.S. officials prohibited from entering Russia, and posthumously convicted Magnitsky for financial crimes.

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

The 2013-2014 Ukrainian crisis has led to even further deterioration of the U.S.-Russia relations. The U.S. has condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support of separatists in Eastern Ukraine, introducing sanctions against Russia that include visa bans and account freezes of those close to the Putin administration and responsible for the takeover of Crimea. The U.S. has sanctioned the Russian economy's financial and energy sectors and imposed individual sanctions on people responsible for military and financial support of the annexation of Crimea and warfare in Eastern Ukraine.

In 2016, the U.S. intelligence community claimed that the Russian government interfered in the 2016 U.S. elections. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified that Russia's alleged interference in presidential campaign included hacking, disinformation and the dissemination of fake news. In December 2016, the U.S. imposed sanctions on the Russian Federation in response to the state-sponsored cyberattacks. A testimony of that was provided by the Mueller Report in 2019.

Since his inauguration, President Trump looked to improve U.S.-Russia relations. In July 2018, President Trump met President Putin for a summit in Helsinki, Finland.

In October 2020, the United States and Russia issued a joint statement calling for the end of the Nagorno – Karabakh conflict.

After the 2020 US presidential election, there were speculations that Russia interfered against the election. After an investigation, the United States confirmed that Russia did not sabotage the 2020 elections.

In June 2021, President Biden and Putin met in Geneva to reengage in diplomatic normalcy. Ambassadors Antonov and Sullivan returned to their positions.

In December 2021, Secretary of State Blinken met with Foreign Minister Lavrov at an OSCE summit. President Biden spoke with President Putin over the phone twice, in which the conversation focused on Russia's military proliferation along Ukraine's border. In an *ex post facto* analysis, it is clear that the conversations were not effective in stifling a deadly conflict.

Relations with Middle East & Israel:

Israel

The Soviet Union recognized the State of Israel in May 1948. A decade later, however, the USSR made a dramatic shift in loyalty to Egypt and Syria, supplying them with arms and aid. The 1967 Six-Day War precipitated a Soviet-Israeli

break in relations that lasted through the mid-1980s. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, in pursuit of trade agreements with the United States, the Soviet Union began allowing Jews to immigrate to Israel, with the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment law playing a key role. The wave of mass emigration grew throughout the decade, reaching its peak in 1979. The number of *refuseniks*, or those who were refused the right to leave, also grew. By 1980, Jewish emigration had dried up due to increasing U.S.-Soviet tensions.

The Soviet Union restored diplomatic relations with Israel in October 1991. In recent years, the states have held a growing number of high-level bilateral meetings. In March 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Moscow. In July 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Netanya for the opening of a memorial to Red Army soldiers. In November 2012, President of Israel Shimon Peres visited Moscow on the invitation of President Putin. In November 2013, Prime Minister Netanyahu visited Moscow to discuss closer bilateral ties. In 2014, Russia began increasing fruit and meat imports from Israel, after banning food imports from the EU, United States, and other countries. In October 2015, Israel and Russia held meetings on Syria crisis to coordinate and avoid accidental clashes in Syrian airspace. In 2015 and 2016, Prime Minister Netanyahu visited Moscow three times and held discussions with President Putin on Syria, the Middle East and bilateral economic relations.

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

In September 2018, a Syrian missile shot hit a Russian military aircraft in Syria. Fifteen people killed. Russia blamed Israel for the tragedy and said that Israel used the Russian airplane as a cover.

In April 2019, the remains of the Israeli soldier Zachary Baumel, who was killed in Lebanon have been given back to Israel by the Russian Government.

In April 2019, Russian authorities arrested Israeli-American Naama Issachar for alleged drug smuggling. On October 11, 2019, a Russian court sentenced her to seven and a half years in prison on drug possession and smuggling charges. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu subsequently personally requested from Russian President Vladimir Putin a pardon for Issachar, which Putin said he would consider. On 29 January 2020 President Putin signed her pardon. Her attorney previously noted that no convicted foreigner was ever pardoned by a Russian President before.

Middle East

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

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

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

resumed the talks on S-300 deliveries

Russia's position on the Iranian nuclear program continues to be ambiguous. While Russia might not want to see a nuclear armed Iran, it sees the issue as a "bargaining card" in its dialogue with Washington on other contentious issues such as missile defense. Economic cooperation also plays an important role.

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

Russia lost one jet during its Syria intervention, which was shot down by Turkish Air Force for violating the border in November, 2015. The downing of the plane led to a rift in Russia-Turkey relations. Russia responded by imposing trade sanctions and suspending Russian package tours to Turkey. However, in June 2016, President of Turkey Tayyip Erdogan sent a letter to his Russian counterpart expressing regret over the incident and announcing legal proceedings against an individual allegedly responsible for the killing of the Russian pilot. Another recent development is Russia's rapprochement with Egypt. In September 2014, Egypt reached a preliminary deal to buy arms worth \$3.5 billion from Russia.

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

In January 2020, amid U.S. - Iran tensions, the Kremlin promised to support Syria during a meeting of the countries' leaders. In addition to reasserting its position in Syria, the Russian Government has made new overtures to the Gulf States, Libya and Egypt.

Jewish Community

History:

Russia's Tsarist and Soviet predecessors had a long history of official and popular anti-Semitism, including residency, workplace, and education restrictions, periodic pogroms, and denial of emigration rights.

Jewish presence in Russia was first recorded in the 15th century. In this period, Jews were generally free from persecution

In the late nineteenth century, Russian Jews were victimized by recurrent waves of pogroms, especially after the assassination of Alexander II. Thousands of Jewish homes were destroyed, and many Jews were killed. In May 1882, Alexander III passed the "Temporary Regulations" or "May Laws", which banned Jews from some villages and towns even within the Pale, placed quotas on Jewish attendance at secondary and higher education institutions, and expelled most Jews from Moscow and Kyiv. Between 1880 and 1920, two million Jews fled Russia. Some remaining Jews became prominent in Russian revolutionary circles.

In August 1919, the Communist government seized Jewish properties, including synagogues, and many Jewish

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

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

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

While existential threats against Russian Jews subsided under Khrushchev, the Soviet State launched a new campaign to stamp out Jewish religion and culture. Jews were systematically excluded from professions and institutes of higher learning, and many remaining synagogues were closed.

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

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

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

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

The onset of economic restructuring (*perestroika*), and loosening restrictions on political and social activity (*glasnost*) eventually brought dramatic changes in Soviet policies toward the Jewish minority. Emigration increased

substantially. Nearly 600,000 Jews emigrated from 1989 to 1992, with most going to Israel. The many Russian immigrants of the later 1990s, together with this group, now make up approximately 15% of Israel's population.

Russian Jewish Renaissance:

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

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

The religious community of Marina Roscha, which has existed for more than 80 years, is a centerpiece of the Chabad Lubavitch movement in the former Soviet region. The seven story Marina Roscha building was renovated and expanded in 2000, and is a vibrant center of Jewish life, organizing various religious, social, and academic programs. It includes the sanctuary, a gym, amphitheater, social halls, classrooms, offices, and an internet café. President Vladimir Putin attended the opening of the Moscow JCC in 2000.

The major institutional players in today's Russian Jewish community are the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia (CJROAR, and in Russian KEROOR), the Moscow Jewish Religious Community (MJRC, or MERO in Russian), the Russian Jewish Congress (RJC, or REK in Russian), and the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FJCR or FEOR in Russian, also affiliated with the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS, or FJC). KEROOR and MERO represent Russia's non-Hasidic Orthodox and Reform congregations, REK is an umbrella group representing both observant and non-observant Jews, and FEOR is affiliated with the Hassidic Chabad-Lubavitch movement.

FJCR and the Ohr Avner Foundation run a network of over 25 Jewish schools. In March 2018, FJCR opened a new Jewish University in Moscow, which incorporated two existing universities: "XXI Century Integration for men and "Machon Chamesh" for women.

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

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

American and Israeli aid organizations are active in Russia. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC/ "Joint") has offices in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod, and Kazan, to foster Jewish communal life and help meet social welfare needs. The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI/ "Sochnut") works with local cosponsors in sixty-two local offices across Russia, holding classes for potential émigrés and coordinating Aliyah.

The World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), active since 1991, collaborates with progressive congregations in Russia. The World Union maintains its Russian headquarters in Moscow, where it has established an Institute for Modern Jewish Studies ("Machon") that trains Jewish leaders for other communities.

ORT, a worldwide technical-training organization founded in St. Petersburg in 1880, has established Jewish schools and technological upgrades for other Jewish resource centers in cities across Russia, including in Kazan, Yekaterinburg, Samara, Moscow, and St. Petersburg.

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

The Jewish non-governmental organization Project Keshet operates centers in Russia, offering leadership seminars, women's empowerment programs, and support systems for those combating domestic violence and trafficking in women.

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

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

Limmud, which means "study" in Hebrew, is a dynamic, multi-day event that gathers Jews together for learning. For many years, Limmud FSU holds regular annual conferences in Moscow, which attract hundreds of Russian-speaking Jews from within Russia and other participants coming from Ukraine, the United States, and Israel.

The Russian Research and Educational Holocaust Center was founded in 1992 in Moscow and has since then been working on awareness raising of the Holocaust in the Russian society. It is the only non-governmental organization in the Russian Federation, devoted to the study of the life of Soviet Jews during the Great Patriotic War. The president of the center is Alla Gerber. The center is supported by the Claims Conference.

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

Russia is also establishing new synagogues. In 2016, synagogues opened in Khabarovsk, Kaluga, and Ivanovo. In October 2018, construction was completed in Arkhangelsk on Russia's northernmost synagogue and Jewish cultural center. In November 2018, the Jewish community in Kaliningrad finished the Königsberg New Synagogue, built on the site of the city's

original main synagogue, which the Nazis destroyed in 1938 during Kristallnacht. Today there are about 270 synagogues and community centers all over Russia.

In 2012, the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center opened in Moscow near the Marina Roscha synagogue. The museum campus includes a permanent exhibition on the history of Jewish life in Russia, the Tolerance Center, Center of Avant-Garde, Children's, Research, and Educational Centers, and an area for temporary exhibitions. The idea for creating the museum belongs to FEOR President Alexander Boroda, FEOR public affairs head Boruch Gorin, and Berel Lazar, Chief Rabbi of Russia. In 2013, Vladimir Putin ordered that the Schneerson Collection be moved to the Jewish Museum from the Russian State Library, in response to a longstanding dispute between U.S. representatives of Chabad and the Russian government. In 2016, UNESCO recognized the museum for its promotion of tolerance. In 2018, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister of Israel Netanyahu attended the Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at the museum. In June 2019 the Memorial for concentration camps and ghetto resistance fighters unveiled at the Jewish Museum's courtyard.

Anti-Semitism:

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

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

In 2006 a knife attack took place at the Bolshya Bronnaya synagogue in Moscow. Over 10 people were injured, including Rabbi Mihoel Mishulovin. Since 2007, incidents of anti-Semitism have declined, despite a high level of general xenophobia.

In July 2013, Chabad Rabbi Ovadia Isakov was shot and seriously injured in the province of Dagestan, where 2,000 Jews live among a predominantly Muslim population. Officials considered it a hate crime and cited "religious motivations" behind the attack. Russian security forces shot and killed the alleged shooter along with four other suspected extremists during a raid. Also in 2013, an anti-Semitic novel by Joseph Goebbels was sold in St. Petersburg, before being banned for extreme content. In July 2015, Sergei Ustinov, director and founder of a Moscow Jewish Museum, was shot and seriously injured outside of the museum. Police investigated several possible motives for the crime, including anti-Semitism.

There are concerns about the Kremlin's handling of anti-Semitic rhetoric by state-supported media against political opposition figures in Russia. Such incidents include an anti-Semitic article by *Komsomolskaya Pravda* journalist Ulyana Skoibeda in 2013, and comments in 2014 by Rossiya 24 TV journalist Evelina Zakamskaya, who said that Jews brought about the first Holocaust and are bringing about a second one now. The channel apologized to the Jewish community.

In 2016 there were three attacks and twenty-eight acts of vandalism against Jews. In 2017, this decreased to one attack and seventeen acts of vandalism. During 2018, only one attack and eleven acts of vandalism against Jews throughout Russia were reported.

On Rosh Hashanah Eve in 2016, an unknown person came to the Choral Synagogue in Moscow with a gasoline canister. A security guard of the synagogue was injured subduing the potential arsonist.

In February 2017, Russian Deputy Chairman of State Duma Pyotr Tolstoy made anti-Semitic comments about two Jewish St. Petersburg city council members who protested transferring control of a historic cathedral to the Russian Orthodox Church. He later apologized.

In late 2017 of the release of the film *Matilda* by Alexey Uchitel (who is Jewish) led to a wave of anti-Semitism due to its content. People considered the movie offensive towards Russian Tsar Nicolas II for its portrayal of his relationship with a Russian ballerina.

In response to the film, the Investigative Committee of Russia launched an investigation of the motivation of the Romanovs' murder. One of the reasons they considered was the anti-Semitic claim that they died as part of a Jew "ritual sacrifice."

In Spring 2018, following a fire at the shopping mall in Kemerovo in which a number of children died, anti-Semitic posts were seen on social media. A local blogger connected the tragedy with the upcoming Passover holiday, and cited the 1913 Menachem Mendel Beilis trial, a notorious blood libel.

In April 2019, Russia's largest yeshiva attacked with arson and swastikas ahead of Passover.

In 2016 and 2018, the Russian Jewish Congress held a conference on combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and racism 'Protecting Future'.

The ADL in 2019 found that antisemitic attitudes in Russia were up to 31% in 2019 from 23% in 2015, according to a poll that was conducted based on respondents' approval of rejection of statements about Jews, including: "Jews have too much power in the business world" and "Jews are responsible for most of the world's wars." However, in 2019 the Pew Research Center also found that in Russia, at least three-quarters of the population has a favorable view of Jews in their country – increases of 15 and 16 percentage points since 2009, respectively.

Russia-Ukraine War:

In January 2022, Russia sends troops into allied Belarus and NATO responds with bolstering its eastern flank.

On February 17, 2022, Russian separatist launched artillery shells in the Donbas region. Four days later, Russia recognized the breakaway region.

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine in what the Kremlin called a special military operation to denazify the region. Russia has targeted large cities with airstrikes hitting civilian and military buildings. As the war escalated, Russian attacks on civilians became more overt and abhorrent.

Two days later, EU removed Russian access to SWIFT and Russian commercial planes from EU airspace.

On February 27, 2022, Russia shifted focus from the Donbas to major cities such as Kiev, Kharkiv, and Odesa. Eastern cities and regions such as Mariupol and Dnipro were still targeted.

In the first couple days of March, military logistics impeded Russian advances, most notably stalling a 65 mile convoy.

As the war escalated, Russian attacks on civilians became more overt and abhorrent. On March 9, Russian strike hit a maternity ward. Later that week, AP filmed a tank firing shells onto civilian buildings.

On March 16, Russia bombed a theater sheltering around 150 civilians.

On March 29, Russian and Ukrainian representatives met in Istanbul. With Russia continuing its attacks while meeting with Ukrainian officials, peace talks are not effective in introducing a ceasefire.

In early April, Ukrainian resistance and Russian shortcomings led to Ukrainian victories and Russian retreat. As Russian troops left occupied cities, the carnage inflicted upon civilians was exposed, especially in Bucha.

As of April 5, 2022, 4.3 million Ukrainians have left the country and there are approximately 6.5 million internally displaced persons.