

# Russia's Transformation: Challenges for U.S. Policy



THE  
**CHOICES**  
**PROGRAM**  
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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## Introduction: A New Russia

For four decades, the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) were locked in a struggle called the Cold War. The two superpowers built arsenals of nuclear weapons capable of destroying civilization and extended their influence across the globe. The U.S.-Soviet rivalry drove the United States to create a vast network of alliances and a formidable military. Two generations of U.S. policymakers believed containing the spread of Soviet Communism was their principal mission.

The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the end of an era for U.S. foreign policy. With the Soviet threat gone, U.S. foreign policy lost its primary focus and U.S. citizens turned away from issues overseas.

The former Soviet Union still casts an enormous shadow. Russia—by far the largest of the fifteen former Soviet republics—is a giant country. Russia covers one-seventh of the earth's land and has huge reserves of oil, gas, minerals, and other natural resources. Russia assumed control of most of the Soviet Union's powerful military and its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia experienced nearly a decade of economic turmoil and political upheaval. Many Russians felt humiliated by their country's decline from a mighty superpower to a struggling country with a crippled economy and ineffective government.

Today, Russia has emerged from this period of turmoil and is reclaiming an active role in international relations.

**“Russia has proven, time and again, its ability to develop and renew itself, discover new territories, build cities, conquer space and make major discoveries.... We have gone through major challenging transformations, and were able to overcome new and extremely complex economic and social challenges, preserved the unity of our country, built a democratic society and set it on the path to freedom and independence. Today, Russia ranks among the world's leading nations with a powerful foreign economic and defence potential. But we have not yet reached the required level in the context of accomplishing our highly important task and guaranteeing people's quality of life and prosperity. But we must do this, and we will do this.”**

—Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, March 1, 2018

Washington and Moscow are not the sworn enemies they were during the Cold War, but with tensions bubbling, the relationship between Russia and the United States is extremely important. Russia possesses a nuclear arsenal comparable to that of the United States and a powerful army. In March 2014, the Russian military annexed the Crimean Peninsula from the neighboring country of Ukraine, a move that alarmed the United States and its European allies. The U.S. intelligence community believes that Russia used social media propaganda to influence the 2016 U.S. election.

In the coming days, you will consider many aspects of the relationship between these two powerful countries. Then you will engage in a debate on U.S. policy toward Russia. You will grapple with the same questions that face U.S. policymakers:

- Should the United States view Russia as a potential partner, a tough rival, or a growing threat?
- How do Russian policies affect the United States?
- What policies should the United States make to manage its relationship with Russia?

Russia at a Glance	
Area:	17,075,200 square kilometers
Land suitable for farming:	7.3%
Population:	142 million
Life expectancy at birth:	65 years, male 77 years, female
Per capita gross domestic product:	\$27,900
Internet users:	108 million

Data from the CIA World Factbook.

# Russia's Transformation: Challenges for U.S. Policy

## Teacher Resource Book



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# Teaching Resources and Lessons

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## Geography of Russia

### Objectives:

**Students will:** Practice general map-reading and map-making skills.

Identify the former Soviet republics on a map.

Explore the connection between international political issues and geography.

### Required Reading:

Students should have read Part II and completed “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 21-22) or “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-23).

### Handouts:

“Data Cards” (TRB-26)—copies for each group  
 “Russia” (TRB-27)

**Note:** Teachers may want to distribute the data cards one at a time. Colored pencils and rulers will be helpful for each group as students fill in their maps and make a map key.

### In the Classroom:

**1. Focus Question**—Write the question “How does geography affect international politics?” on the board and discuss with the class.

**2. Forming Small Groups**—Divide the class into groups of three or four. Distribute Data Card 1 to each group. (Give each group the next card after they complete the task on the previous card.)

Remind students that the purpose of a map key is to provide an explanation of symbols found on a map.

**3. Collecting and Synthesizing Data**—Each group should follow the instructions on the data cards and fill in the map “Russia” (TRB-27) using information from the data cards.

Some students may need help with the math on Data Card 2.

**4. Sharing Conclusions**—After about twenty minutes, call on students to share their findings. How does the size of Russia compare to that of the United States or European countries? What do students think the advantages and disadvantages of governing such a vast territory might be?

Ask students to consider how the breakup of the Soviet Union into fifteen countries might have affected the Russian people. How would a similar event affect another country? For example, what effects might the break-up of the United States have on its people?

### Extra Challenge:

Ask students to speculate about the reasons for Russia’s response to NATO expansion.

What reasons can students think of to support the position that NATO should expand to include former Soviet republics? What reasons are there that suggest NATO should not expand to former Soviet republics?

Teachers may want to address this challenge after students have finished Part III of the reading.

### Homework:

Students should read Part III and complete “Study Guide—Part III” (TRB 28-29) or the “Advanced Study Guide—Part III” (TRB-30).



## Data Cards

### Data Card 1: Former Soviet States

*Background:* The Soviet Union existed for seventy years and contained fifteen republics. (Russia was the largest and most influential Soviet Republic.) Today, each of these republics is an independent country. The countries are often grouped by their geographic region.

**Baltic States:** Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia

**Central Asia:** Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

**Caucasus:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia

**Eastern European States:** Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova

#### Directions:

Use different colored pencils to shade each geographic region of the former Soviet Union on the map. Make a key on your map that indicates these geographic regions. Leave room on the key to include additional information.

### Data Card 2: Estimating Distance

*Background:* Every map should include a scale that indicates the number of miles or kilometers represented by a smaller unit of measure on the map. You can use the scale to estimate distances.

#### Directions:

- Use the map key to estimate distances represented on the map. Measure the bar in the map key in inches and record your answer here. \_\_\_\_\_ inch(es)
- Measure the distance between the Russian cities of Krasnodar and Magadan in inches and record your answer here. \_\_\_\_\_ inches
- Estimate the distance in miles between Krasnodar and Magadan by multiplying 667 miles by your answer from b. Record your answer in the space provided on the map.

### Data Card 3: NATO Expansion

*Background:* The United States and its Western European allies created NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in 1949 to block Soviet aggression in Europe. After the fall of the Soviet Union, NATO began to add members. The new members included states that had been Soviet allies and even former Soviet republics.

Former Soviet republics that are now NATO members: Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia

Former Soviet republics that have expressed an interest in joining NATO: Ukraine, Georgia

#### Directions:

Use a pattern of vertical lines to shade the former Soviet republics that are now members of NATO. Use a pattern of horizontal lines to shade the former Soviet republics that have expressed an interest in joining NATO. Add these shadings to your map key.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Russia



Estimated Distance between  
Krasnodar and Magadan

Map Key

667 Miles