The Russian Federation: The Transition to Democracy and Capitalism

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Source: Palmer 2004
Population: 143,420,309 (July 2005 est.)
Life expectancy at birth: 67.1 years (total population) 60.55 years (men) 74.04 years (women) (2005 est.)
Literacy: 99 percent of people age 15 and over can read and write (2003 estimate)
Capital: Moscow
Per capita income: $9,800 (2004 est.)

Source: Palmer 2004
“I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.”

– Winston Churchill, Radio broadcast, October 1, 1939.

Source: Palmer 2004
Russia in Historical & Cultural Perspective

Source: Palmer 2004
Tsarist Russia

- Russia’s origins date to the 9th century AD when Rus tribes established a rudimentary state along the Volga River in what is now Ukraine and western Russia. Russians were converted to Orthodox Christianity in 987. Mongol tribes overran the area in the mid-13th century. In the 15th century, the Russian state arose – with power centered around Moscow. Over the next 400 years the Russia Empire expanded in all directions to become the largest country on earth. Religion and state were synonymous and the tsars used religion to legitimize their authoritarian rule. The Empire absorbed its weaker neighbors gradually and by force. The result: a complex, ethnically and religiously fragmented Russia by the end of the 19th century – a volatile mix unified only by the power of the central government.

Source: Palmer 2004
Tsarist Russia

- The three hallmarks of the Russian Empire were: 1) authoritarianism, 2) centralization and 3) bureaucracy. They also became hallmarks of the Soviet Union. Tsars held absolute power; all decisions were made in the capital city that Peter the Great moved from Moscow to St. Petersburg in 1712 and implemented by the massive bureaucracy. The first popularly elected parliament did not exist until 1906 although, in reality, Nicholas II, the last tsar continued to reign absolutely. Russia remained a peasant society until its collapse in 1917. An aristocracy of bureaucrats and landed gentry supported the authoritarian tsars.

Source: Palmer 2004
Kremlin Cathedral of the 12 Apostles

Photo by Patricia H. Kushlis

Source: Palmer 2004
The Bronze Horseman – Statue of Peter the Great
Inscription – “To Peter the First from Catherine the Second, 1782
Source: Palmer 2004
Photo by Patricia H. Kushlis
Georgi Zelma
Eastern Siberia, 1920's
gelatin silver photograph
Museum of Fine Arts, MNM, Department of Cultural Affairs,
Gift of Paul and Teresa Harbaugh, 200
Photo: Blair Clark

Source: Palmer 2004
Tsarist Russia

• The serfs (indentured peasants) were only freed in 1861, but few enjoyed true autonomy thereafter. The last European state to industrialize, the tsarist government imposed industrialization on the agrarian country in response to growing military threats from the West and, in 1905, an industrializing Japan. Yet most Russians were still illiterate peasants at the end of the 19th century. Russia’s forced industrialization transformed the country into the world’s 5th largest industrial power in a decade. Yet, this industrialization – which brought flocks of peasants to industrial centers in search of a better life which they did not find – led to Tsarist Russia’s downfall. Labor unions, introduced after the 1905 reforms, bred Marxist followers and other radical groups. Brutal government repression helped politicize the proletariat of some 4 million. Meanwhile, moderates sought a British-style constitutional monarch, anarchists opposed any form of state, and Marxists plotted to implement a “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Source: Palmer 2004
# Russian Vocabulary and Communist Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tsar</td>
<td>Title for the leader of the Russian Empire</td>
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<tr>
<td>serf</td>
<td>Indentured peasant</td>
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<tr>
<td>proletariat</td>
<td>The working class (Marxist term)</td>
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<tr>
<td>soviet</td>
<td>Local council in Russia</td>
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<tr>
<td>bolsheviks</td>
<td>Majority faction of the Russian communist party that took</td>
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<td></td>
<td>control of the country in 1917. Became the Communist Party of the Soviet</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Union under Lenin</td>
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<tr>
<td>duma</td>
<td>Russian parliament in pre and post Soviet times</td>
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<tr>
<td>gulag</td>
<td>Forced labor camps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politburo</td>
<td>Communist Party’s executive committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glasnost</td>
<td>Greater openness, transparency – Gorbachev reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perestroika</td>
<td>Structural reform of the Communist system – Gorbachev reform</td>
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Source: Palmer 2004
Tsarist Russia

• Russia’s participation in World War I was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Spring 1917 saw massive food riots in St. Petersburg and elsewhere. Soldiers mutinied and popular local councils called soviets seized local governments. Tsar Nicholas II abdicated on March 3. The Tsar and his family were murdered by the Bolsheviks several months thereafter. For six months, power was shared between the moderate Duma (parliament) and the soviets. Vladimir Lenin, a Russian revolutionary and leader of the Bolsheviks, the more radical faction of the Russian communist movement, seized control of the Russian Government on October 24, 1917 during “the ten days that shook the world.”

Source: Palmer 2004
Winter Palace, Leningrad (St. Petersburg)

Photo by Patricia H. Kushlis

Source: Palmer 2004
May Day Banner of Marx, Engels and Lenin, Red Square, Moscow 1979

Source: Palmer 2004
Photo by William J. Kushlis
Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics

- Lenin took the helm of the fledgling Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or Soviet Union and retained that position until his death in 1924. Although his long term goal was to create a powerful industrial state to spearhead Marx’s world proletarian revolution, his immediate task was to consolidate the revolution in Russia. His work was enhanced by an influx of nearly 200,000 workers into the Communist Party between March 17 and October 24 which gave him control of the major cities. He withdrew Russia from the war by signing a disadvantageous peace treaty with Germany. The countryside remained in the hands of his opponents. A two year civil war raged. During this period, the Communists created a formidable political/military organization that allowed them to dominate for years to come. Although Lenin’s role as the “intellectual, spiritual and organizational genius” of the Bolsheviks is undisputed, it was “three who made the revolution.” The other two were 1) Leon Trotsky who forged the Red Army — some five million who assured the Bolsheviks victory and 2) Joseph Stalin, the skilled and ruthless party organizer who used his administrative position of party secretary general to solidify complete control of party and state.

Source: Palmer 2004
Politics of Totalitarianism

• Once in control, the Bolsheviks – now the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) – ruthlessly pursued their dream of industrialization and military power. Overwhelming force and terror became their modus operandi. Stalinism introduced the new concept of totalitarianism, a form of rule that in Russia was based on four elements: 1) Communist party political supremacy; 2) socialism in the economic sphere; 3) creation of the “New Soviet Man” in the socio-economic realm and 4) thought control. The use of terror was the primary enforcement mechanism and assassinations, executions and forced labor camps called gulags were the tools of choice. Social groups – outside those controlled by the party – were banned because they might form the nucleus of opposition to the regime. Religion was discouraged, churches and mosques were closed but not all eliminated. All factories, industries, mines were nationalized with production micromanaged by government economic planners in Moscow. Even small businesses were banned. The intelligentsia, the party, mass media, the unions and youth organizations were mobilized to create the New Soviet Man who was “disciplined, worked steadily and was puritanical in conduct and motivation.” All information was controlled by the state.

Source: Palmer 2004
Zagorsk, 1979: A Russian Orthodox monastery near Moscow that survived.

Source: Palmer 2004
Photo by William J. Kushlis
The Terror

• Under totalitarianism, someone could be arrested because he “might do something” or a family member may have been declared an enemy of the people. The goal: atomization of society. The Great Purges of 1937 and 1938 resulted in the arrest of more than five million people – one million who were probably shot. Huge rallies and the swelling ranks of the Communist Party suggested that the CPSU had far greater popular support than it really did. A terror that forced compliance resulted in increased passivity and the emergence of informal “mutual support groups” to help mitigate against the harshness of life. In some instances, the groups took the form of patron-client relationships where an official would look after a client’s interests in turn for political support. Other groups were far less structured. A communist aristocratic bureaucratic bureaucracy took the place of a tsarist bureaucratic aristocracy.

Source: Palmer 2004
World War II

• On June 22, 1941, Hitler broke the secret Soviet-Nazi (Molotov-Ribbentrop) nonaggression pact and attacked the Soviet Union. Heroic resistance on the part of the Red Army, the Russian people and harsh Soviet winters stalled the German advance, but the price was high. Altogether, Russia lost about 27 million people by the end of the war in 1945, massive destruction of farmland, livestock, industry had housing, but the Soviet Union emerged from the war as one of two world superpowers. The other, the United States, countered Soviet ambitions in Europe with the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a military alliance of most western countries. The U.S. nuclear shield also protected NATO forces. The Soviet Union countered with the Warsaw Pact. The Cold War had begun.

Source: Palmer 2004
Soviet World War II Memorial in Volgograd: *In commemoration of the Soviet defense of Stalingrad (now Volgograd), a Soviet city that held out for five months against the Nazis. The statue is 305 feet high.* Photo by William J. Kushlis

Source: Palmer 2004
Soviet missiles on display, Moscow, November 7 Day Parade, 1979
Source: Palmer 2004
Photo by William J. Kushlis
World War II

• Political power in the Soviet Union was concentrated in the CPSU’s Secretary General who “consulted” with the party’s Politburo, the party’s executive committee of the Soviet Union’s most powerful political and military leaders. The larger Central Committee represented the political elite’s second tier. Similar structures operated at provincial and local levels. Communication flowed one way: top to bottom. Dissent was banned. The CPSU completely dominated the Soviet Union’s social, professional organizations and labor unions and the party kept its eye on individuals via a massive network of party “inspectors.”

Source: Palmer 2004
Evolution of the Soviet Union

- Although the basic structure did not change, the substance of Soviet politics did after Stalin’s death in 1953 as follows: 1) Stalin’s successors sharply curtailed the use of “terror” as a mass weapon; 2) they tried to establish a “collective leadership” to preclude the emergence of a new Stalin; and 3) they worked to increase the legitimacy of the regime by improving the quality of Soviet life through the creation of a welfare state. Three leaders guided the system’s evolution: 1) Nikita Khrushchev; 2) Leonid Brezhnev; and 3) Mikhail Gorbachev.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Khrushchev Era (1957-64)

- The first leader to emerge after a four-year power struggle was Nikita Khrushchev. This era saw the launch of Sputnik and the denunciation of Stalin but Khrushchev was unable to revive the ailing economy. His attempts to reform the CPSU resulted in his own demise. He became a “non-person” who lived out his life in obscurity but his memoirs – smuggled out of the Soviet Union and published in the West – tell his side of the story.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Brezhnev Era (1964-1982)

• Brezhnev offered stability, job security for party and state bureaucrats and pushed aside the Khrushchev reforms. The stability, however, was an illusion because the economy continued to deteriorate and the population became increasingly alienated.

Source: Palmer 2004
Brezhnev Era – Soviets walking in countryside near Moscow, 1980

Source: Palmer 2004
Photo by William J. Kushlis

• By 1985 and only after a struggle for leadership, reformers gained control of the Central Committee and the Politburo and the younger and more vigorous Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary. The Gorbachev reforms called for *glasnost* – greater openness and democracy within the system to reenergize the people – and *perestroika*, or structural reform. Perestroika’s goal was to “break the grip of the bureaucracies on the economy.” Managers were expected to turn a profit and increase product quality. Multi-candidate government elections used secret ballots after free and open discussion. Small scale capitalism was encouraged. Meanwhile, Gorbachev declared the Cold War over and loosened Soviet grip on its Warsaw Pact allies, or client states in Eastern Europe. By 1989, the Berlin Wall had fallen and Germany was soon united. Gorbachev’s reforms were too little and came too late. Hardliners undermined the reforms from within. Leaders of national minorities pressed for autonomy and ultimately independence. The movement began in the three tiny Baltic Republcis that had been swallowed up by the Soviets during World War II, but revolt spread like wildfire throughout the European parts of the Soviet Union and the Caucasus.

Source: Palmer 2004
Baltic Nationalism: An Estonian woman waves the Estonian national flag on Tallinn Town Hall Square, September 1990.

Source: Palmer 2004
Photo by Patricia H. Kushlis
The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

- The Soviet Union officially dissolved December 8, 1991 when Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia proclaimed their independence as sovereign states and created the treaty-based CIS. The CIS is a voluntary organization designed to preserve the benefits of economic and military integration under the Soviets. In reality, the organization’s effectiveness has been torn apart by various inter-state squabbles.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Soviet Union: Postmortem and Legacy

- Four of the reasons for the Soviet Union’s collapse resemble those that led to the demise of the Russian Empire. They are: 1) failure to solve the “nationalities” problem; 2) the alienation and passivity of the masses; 3) the rigid and parasitic nature of the bureaucracies; and 4) “the Western problem” which translated into fear of survival because of Western technological superiority and the economic burden of the arms race. These parallels can only be taken so far because the basic reason for the Soviet Union’s collapse was the ineffectiveness of the socialist system as practiced in the USSR. The massive centralized bureaucracy could not fulfill the complex needs of this tremendously large and complex country. Delays, shortages, unrealistic production goals and quantity over quality were the norm. The USSR’s demise was also due to an immobilized and sclerotic leadership particularly under Brezhnev. Seventy years of unchallenged rule had replaced revolutionaries with self-serving bureaucrats. Finally, it was unclear that Gorbachev had a clear plan for implementing his reform policies or that he understood the country’s severe economic problems.

Source: Palmer 2004
“There was a common perception ‘that the USSR is an Empire in which Russia is the metropolis and the national republics the colonies.’”

“They pretend to pay us and we pretend to work.”

- Soviet joke in late 1970s.

Source: Palmer 2004
“Seventy years on the road to nowhere.”

- Soviet protest slogan used by demonstrators during the late 1980s and up until August 1991.

Source: Palmer 2004
Russia Reborn

• Boris Yeltsin, Gorbachev’s one-time supporter and tireless reformer, guided the rebirth of the Russian state. In 1987, Gorbachev removed Yeltsin from the Politburo, but in 1991 Yeltsin became the Russian Republic’s (province) first democratically elected President. He used this position to press for ever faster reforms and to support ever-greater independence for the 15 Republics. His personal popularity soon eclipsed Gorbachev’s.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Transition to Democracy and Capitalism

• In late 1991, Yeltsin proclaimed the independent Russian Federation to be democratic and capitalistic, an uncharted transformation that proved extraordinarily difficult and painful. Neither leaders nor people had lived under any other system but communism. Russian firms needed to become profitable. Job security and the cradle to grave welfare system confined to history’s dust bin.

Source: Palmer 2004
Russian “White House,” December 1991: As President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin challenged Gorbachev, then later the Soviet coup makers, for power and succeeded. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin moved into Gorbachev’s offices in the Kremlin and the White House became the location for the Duma which Yeltsin ordered the Army to shell in a crisis for leadership between Yeltsin and the opposition Duma. Photo by William J. Kushlis.
Institution Building in Democratic Russia

• Yeltsin used his popularity and emergency powers to introduce sweeping economic reforms on the advice of American advisors. These reforms called “shock therapy” were “designed to dismantle the socialist system in the shortest amount of time.” Their rapid pace resulted in strong opposition: many feared loss of the Soviet social safety net and the economy went into a tail-spin. The crisis came in October 1993 between the Yeltsin government and opposition in the Duma (parliament). It ended when Yeltsin ordered the army to shell the building – and the army reluctantly obeyed.

Source: Palmer 2004
Elections in the New Russia

• The Russian Federation’s first post-1991 elections were held December 12, 1993 in which the voters were asked to elect a new parliament and approve a new Constitution. Electoral conditions were confusing, but the parliamentary system that developed thereafter was similar to that of Germany’s with half of the 450 Duma (lower house) elected by single-member-district and the other by party list. Yeltsin’s Constitution was approved, but his party “Russia’s Choice” remained a minority in the Duma dominated by antireform parties. The Liberal Democratic Party, the neo-fascist party of Vladimir Zhirinovsky, came in second. Yeltsin won the 1996 presidential election, but his uncertain health and ability to rule remained problematic. The remainder of his term was characterized by erratic immobilism. The economy neared collapse, banks folded and workers and soldiers were left unpaid. New Year’s Eve 1999, Yeltsin named Vladimir Putin, his recently appointed prime minister, as his replacement. Among Putin’s early acts were to grant Yeltsin immunity from prosecution and to sack his cronies – including his daughter – who had largely been running things.

Source: Palmer 2004
Chechnya: A Nasty Little War

- Although this small break-away Muslim majority region in the north Caucasus, had first declared its independence in 1991, it wasn’t until after the 1993 elections that the Yeltsin turned his attention to the “Chechen problem.” After the Chechen leaders refused to end their demands for succession, Yeltsin sent in the Russian army summer in 1994. The army performed abysmally. In 1996, a tentative peace was reached, but violence flared again in during the summer 1999 with armed incursions into neighboring Dagestan launched from Chechen soil and apartment house bombings in Moscow that Russia’s security forces blamed on Chechen terrorists. Putin’s decision to meet the Chechens with brute force helped his Presidential bid, but destroyed Chechnya. The resistance fighters retreated to the mountains and have been fighting a guerrilla war that continues today.

Source: Palmer 2004
Who is Vladimir Putin?

- President of the Russian Federation from 2000 to 2008 and Prime Minister since 2008, Vladimir Putin is now in his late 50s (he was born in 1952). He had been a career KGB intelligence officer from Leningrad during Soviet days. Under Yeltsin, he headed the Federal Security Service (FSB), the KGB’s successor. Spring 2004, Putin was reelected President with 71 percent of the vote. Putin is more supportive of economic reforms, but democracy is another story. Under Putin, the regional governments have lost power, the media – particularly electronic – crippled, and parliament weakened. Between 70 and 80 percent of Putin’s senior advisors are his former KGB colleagues, and he claims that his actions against the Chechens are required. Many see Putin as “a Russian nationalist dedicated to the restoration of Russia’s” earlier glory. Optimists hope that Putin’s “guided democracy” will disappear once Russia’s capitalist transformation is complete. But Putin’s commitment to the standards of democratic government - as defined by Freedom House - decline further the longer he remains in office. As the Russian president can serve only two continuous terms, then Putin could not run in the last elections. In 2008 his protégé Dmitry Medvedev was elected president without considerable alternative candidates. At the moment, it has not been decided whether Medvedev or Putin will run for president in the next elections.

Source: Palmer 2004
Political Institutions

Source: Palmer 2004
• The executive is by far the most important Russian Political Institution.
• The 1993 Yeltsin Constitution was modeled after the French with a very strong chief executive, a weak bicameral parliament and a Constitutional Council (Court). The 450 member Duma, parliament’s lower house, is elected directly by the people. The 178 member Federal Council (upper house) has two members from each of Russia’s 89 regions. The President and the Prime Minister share executive power. The president, however, appoints the prime minister with the Duma’s consent. The Constitution provides civil rights, press freedom and the right to form groups and parties. It also guarantees all citizens the “right to housing, health care and an old-age pension.” Because the Constitution was ratified under extraordinary circumstances and Russian democratic traditions are skin-deep, popular support “remains a matter of conjecture.” The Constitution contains few checks on the powerful presidency – one of the few being the two terms limit, but even that can be overridden by a 2/3rds majority vote of the Duma.

Source: Palmer 2004
Executive Power – President and Prime Minister

- The formal and informal powers of the Russian President veer in the direction of autocracy. Formally, the president: 1) is commander in chief of the armed forces; 2) can rule by decree if either the state of Constitution are endangered; 3) nominates the prime minister and cabinet members; 4) introduces legislation and vetoes acts of parliament, issues decrees unless overturned by the Constitutional Council or overruled by parliament, and dissolves the Duma and initiates new elections; 5) can bypass parliament and take his case to the people; and 6) nominates and removes heads of governmental departments and nominates judges. Informally, interest groups must curry presidential favor because he dominates the legislative and administrative processes. The president is the nation’s top dispenser of patronage and the focus of media attention –over which he has great control. His staff is large, and he has his own militia and an airline. Whether the few checks on presidential power will suffice in extraordinary circumstances remains to be seen. Some observers suggest that the “thin line that separates democracy from dictatorship has already been crossed.”

Source: Palmer 2004
The Prime Minister and Duma Chairman

• The prime minister and Duma chairman is appointed by the president, but must be confirmed by the Duma. If the Duma rejects the nominee three times, the President can dissolve the Duma and call new elections. Most of the 25 cabinet ministers are also selected by the president. The most important: Defense, Interior (Police) and Foreign Affairs report directly to the President as do special intergovernmental committees on espionage, border guards, information and media.

Source: Palmer 2004
Legislative Power: The Federal Assembly

• Both houses of parliament – the State Duma and the Federation Council must approve legislation before it becomes law. A 2/3rds majority in each chamber is required to overcome a presidential veto.

• 1) The Duma can force the government to resign through a vote of no confidence. It also confirms presidential nominations for the head of the central bank and other senior positions. One-half of the Duma members are elected in single-member districts while the other are on party lists. The Duma’s main strength is its role in the budgetary process a process that has worked more smoothly under Putin than Yeltsin.

• 2) The Federation Council can confirm a state of emergency, approve use of Russian troops on foreign soil and presidential nominations of judges and the public prosecutor. The Federation Council must also approve internal boundary changes. In general, parliament plays a reactive role in the legislative process. Short of impeachment, it has little it can check the president’s power – and impeachment is a long complicated process.

Source: Palmer 2004
Law: The Constitutional Council

• Law: The Constitutional Council (Supreme Court) is composed of 19 judges appointed for life by the president. The council can review laws and decrees, must agree to the initiation of impeachment proceedings against the president, arbitrate disputes between the president and parliament and may hear cases brought by republics in the federation as well as by individuals. Judicial review, however, is foreign to the Russian system and in 2004 parliament increased Putin’s authority over the legal system. Cases that will come before the court involve Russia’s new commercial code, boundary disputes, criminal justice system reform, and the institution of jury trials.

Source: Palmer 2004
Federalism

• Of Russia’s 89 republics – two of which are being merged – 21 are ethnically based and give autonomy to the dominant minority. The rest are administrative divisions although many other ethnic minorities living within the 89 republics are demanding greater autonomy and special status as ethnic republics. Ethnic divisiveness remains a problem for Russia and a reason for the government’s decision to deal with Chechnya by force. In response to growing regional independence, Putin created seven presidential districts and now appoints Russia’s governors – a centralizing change justified in the name of fighting terror.

Source: Palmer 2004
Map of Location of Ethnic Minorities in the Russian Federation

Source: Palmer 2004
Perry-Castenada Map Collection – CIA map
The Military

- After end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, the once proud, conscript-based Military, found itself in disarray, lacking a mission, under-funded, beset with draft-dodgers and as late as 1996 “on the brink of mutiny.” The Chechen wars have not helped. In 1993, Russia’s new military doctrine declared that the country was free from the threat of foreign invasion and that its new role would be to protect the country from regional conflicts that threaten the former Soviet Union. But the transformation of the Russian military into an all volunteer force that can deal with these new threats will take years: the development of rapid reaction forces that rely on smart weapons and a decrease in troop strength are far from reality. Only after the 2004 elections did Putin feel strong enough to restrict the power of the General Staff, an action he took to hasten modernization.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Bureaucracy

- Russia’s huge state corrupt anti-reform bureaucracy continues to manage day-to-day affairs. Privatization is slow: and the creation of a class of capitalist managers able to transform the country’s state enterprises into functioning private sector firms takes time to develop. To increase efficiency and reduce corruption, Putin has raised bureaucratic salaries and cut twenty percent of the positions.

Source: Palmer 2004
Actors

Source: Palmer 2004
The Elite

- All members of the Russian Federation’s elites were former CPSU members. Some, like Yeltsin, supported democracy and capitalism. Others remained true to communist ideals or became ultranationalists. Putin believes that rebuilding a strong Russia must be accomplished through capitalism and a strong central government. The Presidency is above effective challenge by other governmental institutions. The president’s closest advisors form the next rung on the hierarchy. Under Putin, the security service is particularly well represented in his inner circle. The secondary elite includes Federal Assembly leaders, senior bureaucrats, senior military, large public-sector factory managers and powerful regional and ethnic leaders. Although they have little say about policy formulation, they can and do derail programs they oppose.

Source: Palmer 2004
Political Parties

- Russian political parties – aside from the Communist Party – are young, personality based, lack organization and are without well defined ideologies – as one might expect in a system where all but the CPSU were illegal prior to 1991. As a result, the fledgling party system needs to overcome the following five characteristics if it is to help create a strong democratic Russia: 1) fluidity; 2) domination by personalities rather than ideologies; 3) weak grass roots organizations; 4) high polarization; 5) lack of will to challenge a powerful president. Meanwhile, the Communist Party is aging, fragmented and wracked with internal problems although it does well in rural areas. The biggest party is United Russia where Putin became Chairman without being a member of the Party. The party is not independent as it manipulated from the Kremlin.

Source: Palmer 2004
Pressure Groups

• Under the Communists, all pressure Groups were controlled by the party. With democracy, such groups have blossomed. The most visible include business associations, weak and ineffective labor unions, ethnic and religious organizations. Not all are committed to liberal democracy or retaining Russia as a single country. Under Putin, NGOs and civil rights groups have complained of sustained threats and harassment.

Source: Palmer 2004
Citizens

- Putin’s election in 2000 was viewed as a “vote for stability and national dignity” and his militaristic approach to Chechnya represented both. His victory in 2004 was explained as mass apathy combined with the government’s heavy hand on the electoral process – crowding out any real alternative candidates. Public opinion polls are taken frequently although many people are still afraid to speak openly. Those that do respond register economic, crime and security issues as their major concerns. Terrorism, much a result of the continuing war in Chechnya, is important and polls are showing that Russians are losing trust in their governmental institutions. Strikes, protests and demonstrations are common. But mass apathy, however, can also speak volumes as it did when it undermined the power of the tsars and the Soviet Union. Putin’s “social contract” has been based on promise of economic prosperity and rising standard of living in exchange for economic passivity. However, the recent economic crisis has weakened Russian economy and the contract does not seem to hold anymore. There have been mass protests in different parts of Russia in 2009 and 2010.

Source: Palmer 2004
Moscow street scene
Source: Palmer 2004
Photo by Steve Yates
The Context of Russian Politics: Culture, Economics, and International Interdependence

Source: Palmer 2004
Culture

• The task of transforming Soviet political culture into one that values democracy and capitalism is huge and cultural change is slow. Some values are rooted in the tsarist period. The ones most likely to impede Russia’s transition are: 1) intense concern for order and stability; 2) predisposition for authoritarian leadership; 3) apathy and sense of “psychological disengagement” from politics; 4) intense nationalism and suspicion of the West; 5) dependence on a cradle-to-grave social welfare system; 6) a socialist work ethic that saps productivity combines with the peasant ethic that “better all suffer than one to succeed.” Finally, Russia suffers from a crisis of authority. Laws are passed in Moscow but ignored in the regions. Gangs and local “bosses” fill the power vacuum. Local police have begun small-time warlords.

• Crime, drug abuse, alcoholism are pervasive. Further, the future of the Russian economy remains murky because its economic success, like that of the Soviet Union’s, rests on petroleum and other raw materials exports. High world prices are a windfall; low ones, spell disaster.

Source: Palmer 2004
International Interdependence

• The downsized Russian Federation stripped of the Soviet Union’s vast empire still wants to be a major world player – and in many ways - still is. But its problems are many: 1) the military – aside from its nuclear weapons – is no longer a credible threat to the West; 2) Putin’s aim to build a powerful, prosperous Russia requires massive funds and technology transfers; 3) The continuing conflict in Chechnya has attracted Islamic extremists and their supporters. The battlefield has extended into Moscow population centers with no end in sight. Putin made the best of a bad situation by acquiescing to NATO and EU expansion in exchange for economic assistance, and he signed major arms control reduction agreements. He embraced the Bush Administration’s “war on terror” putting the civil war in Chechnya into the global war. Putin, however, opposed the US invasion of Iraq and supports and sells arms to Iran. Otherwise, Russia is preoccupied with the problems in Central Asia. Neighboring China remains on the Russian “watch” list.

Source: Palmer 2004
Russia and the Arctic

• In 2007 Russian President Vladimir Putin was making an astonishing bid to grab a vast chunk of the Arctic - so he can tap its vast potential oil, gas and mineral wealth.

• His scientists claim an underwater ridge near the North Pole is really part of Russia’s continental shelf.

• One newspaper printed a map of the "new addition", a triangle five times the size of Britain with twice as much oil as Saudi Arabia.

• The dramatic move provoked an international outcry.
  – The U.S. and Canada expressed shock and environment campaigners said it would be a disaster.

• Under current international law, the countries ringing the Arctic - - Russia, Canada, the U.S., Norway, and Denmark (which owns Greenland) - are limited to a 200-mile economic zone around their coasts.

Source: Palmer 2004
Arctic Sea Incident

- Eight 'pirates' of Russian, Latvian and Estonian nationality were arrested by Russian Navy on August 17 2009 for the hijacking of the cargo ship Arctic Sea in Swedish waters.

- The missing cargo freighter was found by a Russian warship off the coast of the Cape Verde islands west Africa. At that time the ship was not "under the armed control" of hijackers or pirates.

- The freighter's disappearance on the high-seas for 19 days, in spite of 21st century satellite and navigation tracking technology, has been compared to the plot of spy thrillers by John Le Carre.

- European and Russian maritime experts had speculated that that the ship's hijacking was not connected with an official manifest of timber and could be linked to an illegal cargo, such as arms, drugs or even nuclear materials, carried without the knowledge of crew or the ship's owners.

- The vessel left the Finnish port of Pietarsaari, on July 23, with a routine cargo of 6,700 cubic metres, worth GBP1.2 million, of sawn timber for scheduled unloading on Aug 4 at Bejaia's docks, in Algeria.

Source: Palmer 2004
Present Challenges and Future Prospects

• Russia’s grave challenges should also be of U.S. concern because an “authoritarian Russia inflamed by ultra-nationalism would be a great threat to U.S. security.

Source: Palmer 2004
Democracy, Human Rights, and Stability

• How far democratic values have penetrated either the elite or the masses is questionable. Further, the democratic political parties are too weak to play a major or constructive role. A free media has lost ground – particularly radio and television. The right to assemble is under attack, information to be published abroad needs prior Russian government clearance and the Internet is controlled. Police torture is common. Civil rights and organizations have been in Putin’s line of fire although overall stability has increased. Crime, terror and the war in Chechnya continue. Russia will preserve, but democracy in Russia is less sure.

Source: Palmer 2004
Economic Growth, Quality of Life, and Environment

- The transition to capitalism has created a very small and wealthy entrepreneurial class while many people are jobless and poverty stricken. Health care has deteriorated and the population has decreased by 3.3 million since 1991. The Russian mafia helps the distribution of Afghanistan’s opium crop world wide and links between the mafia and Al Qaeda have been suspected. Both are linked to Afghanistan’s poppy crop. Russian per capita income now exceeds $3,000 a year. The enormity of Russia’s environmental disaster became known only after the Soviet Union’s collapse. Severe air and water pollution are consequences as are illnesses caused by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster April 26, 1986. The Russian Federation publicizes environmental problems, but cannot afford the price-tag to clean them up – political and economic survival take precedence.

Source: Palmer 2004
Key Challenges

- Corruption.
  - Similar to Somalia!
- The future of the Russian economy remains murky because its economic success, like that of the Soviet Union’s, rests on petroleum and other raw materials exports.
  - High world prices are a windfall; low ones, spell disaster.
- The transition to capitalism has created a very small and wealthy entrepreneurial class while many people are jobless and poverty stricken.
  - New elite under Putin – siloviki – has taken power from oligarchs that emerged in the 1990s.
- Health care has deteriorated and the population has decreased by 3.3 million since 1991.
  - Crime, drug abuse, alcoholism are pervasive.

Source: Palmer 2004
Future Prospects

- Russian transition to democracy is by no means sure and will depend not only on Putin and Medvedev’s ability to resolve Russia’s enormous problems but also the approach of and assistance from the U.S. and its allies.

Source: Palmer 2004