

Timeline

1917 - The Russian revolution begins as Vladimir Lenin leads the Bolsheviks in overthrowing the government.

1918 - Russia ends participation in WWI. Finland and Poland cede. The empire collapses, leading to civil war between the Red Army (Bolsheviks) and White Army (anti-communists).

1918-1921 - Red terror campaign occurs in which remote camps with notoriously poor conditions are used to imprison those deemed enemies of the state.

1922 - Civil war ends. Bolsheviks establish the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.); a single-party state governed by the Communist Party with Moscow as its capital.

1922-91 - Cold War between the US and the USSR occurs.

1936-1938 - Mass arrests and executions are coupled with an increasing Gulag population as Stalin consolidates power.

1985 - Mikhail Gorbachev takes power and initiates a policy of openness (glasnost) and restructuring (perestroika).

1991 - Boris Yeltsin becomes president. Russia, Ukraine and Belarus form the Commonwealth of Independent States, thus dissolving the USSR. Chechnya declares independence.

1992 - Russia takes over USSR's UN Security Council seat.

1993 - Yeltsin lifts price controls. Parliament revolts, leading to elections and a new constitution or State Duma, which gives the president greater powers and Russians the right to free enterprise, private ownership and individual rights.

1994 - Russia invades Chechnya.

1996 - Yeltsin gains second term and signs a peace treaty with Chechnya and an agreement of cooperation with NATO.

1998 - Russian ruble collapses.

1999 - Chechen militants invade Dagestan. Vladimir Putin becomes the fifth prime minister in two years after Yeltsin fires his predecessors. Putin's popularity rises after he sends troops into Chechnya to combat terrorism.

2000 - Putin wins presidency after Yeltsin suddenly resigns.

2002 - Russia's last independent TV station is shut down. Chechen rebels take 800 hostage in a Moscow theater. 120 hostages die when Russian forces storm the building. Rebels kill over 50 in a suicide attack on the headquarters of the Moscow supported Chechen government.

2003 - International monitors and human rights groups question the legitimacy, timing, and outcome of a Chechen referendum vote, that left the Chechen republic a part of the Russian Federation. Separatist suicide bombers attack government buildings, military installations, public events, buses and trains; hundreds are killed, thousands are injured. Putin's party wins elections, giving him almost total control over Duma. Billionaire oil boss and supporter of the liberal opposition, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, is arrested over alleged tax violations and fraud, and sentenced to 8 years in prison.

2004 - Putin wins second term and announces regional governors will be appointed rather than elected. Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov dies in a bomb blast. 330 are killed in North Ossetia's school siege.

2005 - Russian forces raid neighborhoods and search for Chechen fighters. Hundreds are killed, including separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov. Warlord Shamil Basayev emerges as the new commander of rebel forces.

2006 - Putin authorizes authorities to monitor and close "threatening" NGO's. Russian forces kill Basayev. Racial tensions rise after a market blast kills mostly Central Asians and two Russians are killed in a bar brawl.

2007 - Pro-democracy and anti-Putin protests lead to arrests. Putin's United

Russia party wins parliamentary victories, but many criticize it as neither free nor democratic.

2008 - Dmitry Medvedev is elected president and Putin becomes Prime Minister. Russia invades Georgia after Georgia attacks separatists in South Ossetia. Parliament extends presidential terms from four to six years.

2009 - Medvedev ends "counterterrorism operation" in Chechnya. Opposition denounces local elections after United Russia party overwhelmingly wins every poll. North Caucasus Muslim extremists are blamed for a series of bomb blasts on Moscow's train and metro systems.

2010 - Yuri Luzhkov, long time Mayor of Moscow, is fired by President Medvedev.

2011 - Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov claims responsibility for a suicide bombing at Moscow's airport that kills at least 35 people and injures 110 others. Putin gains confirmation as the 2012 ruling party's candidate for the presidential election. Thousands protest elections after the ruling party maintains a majority in parliament.

2012 - In an attempt to control presidential election fraud, the opposition forms the League of Voters. Galos, an independent election monitoring group, is expelled. Major protests lead to the arrest of hundreds after Putin wins the election with over 63% of the vote. Pavel Drozdov is arrested for public intoxication and dies in custody of acute pancreatitis. However, several months later surveillance video of his cell shows police beating him, tying his hands and feet together behind his back in what is known as the "swallow" position and leaving him alone in his cell.

Russian police are accused of committing acts of torture, including sexual abuse, beatings, electric shock treatment and forced confessions of crimes.

2013 - Edward Snowden is granted asylum in Russia after leaking sensitive US intelligence information. Russian neo-Nazi group begins new campaign of terror against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth by using social networking sites to entice and then torture victims.

2014 - Russian government harasses and intimidates journalists and organizations ahead of the Olympic games held in Sochi. Allegations made that hundreds of workers involved in construction for the Olympics were not paid. Some families forced to move due to Olympic construction also not compensated. Fighting breaks out in Eastern Ukraine in April 2014 sparked by pro-Russia separatists. Allegations surface that Russia is behind the separatist movement and is supplying weapons, troops and technical assistance. Russian Parliament amends "Foreign Agent" law allowing the government to register organizations as foreign agents without their consent.

2015 - Crimea region of Ukraine votes to join Russia and is officially integrated in March, as Russian troops surround the area.



Torture Methods

RUSSIAN POLICE regularly use torture to extract confessions, including the threat of rape, sodomy with bottles and other objects, electric shock and beatings. Detainees are regularly threatened with death. In many instances they are stripped of their clothes and forced to kneel down in front of deep holes in the ground and made to believe they will be shot. In other instances they are forced into holes and left naked with no water or food for days. Ears have been pierced with sharp nails, bones broken, genitals squeezed, fingers and ears mutilated, hands and feet smashed, and temporary blindness has occurred due to the use of chemical agents. Permanent deafness has been documented as detainees have been beaten in the head until their ear drums have broken. Victims' family members have been routinely extorted and forced to pay in order to get their family member released. Sadistic elements are sometimes introduced as police officers film the torture sessions and subsequently offer to sell the video to the victims who buy them out of fear of public humiliation. Some of the torture methods are so prevalent that media outlets refer to them using nicknames and dedicate entire columns to the issue.

THE ENVELOPE (konvert) combines elements of physical stress and sensory deprivation. The victims are blindfolded and handcuffed with their hands behind their backs. Their legs are then folded backwards and tied up to their hands. While in this position victims are beaten profusely, burned with cigarettes, gang raped and sodomized with broomsticks, champagne bottles, metallic objects, rubber batons or the butt of machineguns.

CALL MR PUTIN (Zvonok Putinu) is a torture method where victims are tied to a chair and given electric shock via electrodes inserted in their ears. The high voltage electrical current is produced using dynamos from old military field telephones. The intensity of the electrical output is controlled using hand-held megohmmeters. In a variation of this method, electrodes are placed on any part of the victims' body and water is splashed in the same area. Survivors exposed to this practice have reported long lasting effects such as pervasive headaches, heart conditions, loss of motor-function, impotence, hearing problems, and crumbling teeth.

BABY ELEPHANT (Slonik) is a suffocating torture technique used to reduce or stop breathing. This torture method is considered by many survivors as the worst practiced in Russia. Victims are tied to a chair, handcuffed with their hands behind their backs and a gas or respirator mask attached to a breathing tube is securely fastened to their face. In some instances the breathing tube is simply closed causing the victim to feel symptoms of asphyxiation. In other instances gases or liquids like ammonia, acetone, vinegar, or tear gas are inserted through the breathing tube causing the victim to suffocate and lose consciousness.

THE SWALLOW (Lastochka) is a form of suspension torture. The hands of the victims are handcuffed behind their backs, their legs are tied to their hands with ropes causing a backward arching of the body. The handcuffs are then hooked to chains attached to the ceiling that suspends the victim above the ground with all their weight bearing down on their hands and shoulders. The victim is then used as a punching bag or subjected to electrical shock.

Current Situation

Languages: Russian (official), Tatar, Ukrainian, Chuvash, Bashir, Mordvin, Chechen

Population: 142,423,773 (July 2015 est.)

Religion: Christian Orthodox, Islam, Protestant, Jewish

Ethnic groups: Russian 77.7%, Tatar 3.7%, Ukrainian 1.4%, Bashkir 1.1%, Chuvash 1%, Chechen 1%, other 10.2%, unspecified 3.9% (over 190 ethnic groups exist)

RAMPANT CORRUPTION is an acute problem in modern Russia, affecting all levels of the public and private sectors. The public procurement sector alone reportedly cost the Russian government USD 32 billion in 2012 which is 20% of total government annual expenditures. In 2014, Russia was listed as one of the most corrupt countries in the world by Transparency International. Corruption crimes involve fraud, embezzlement, illegal use of property, abuse of office, abuse of authority and bribery. The government has attempted to curtail corruption by enacting laws and setting up integrity systems; however, anti-corruption measures are generally very weak or not properly enforced. Corruption at the law enforcement level is usually accompanied by total immunity, thus easily transitioning into extortion, physical abuse, torture and murder.

CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS flourished following Putin's return to the presidency in May 2012 when a series of laws were enacted, restricting rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. One of the new laws which took effect in November 2012 requires organizations that accept foreign funding and engage in "political activity" to register as "foreign agents", a term that is widely understood to mean spy or traitor. This law was amended by Parliament to allow the government to register groups as foreign agents without their consent. No Russian group is known to have registered. Many argue that the aim of the law is to discredit any organization critical of the Kremlin.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE has reached alarming levels. According to the World Health Organization, 20% of men in Russia die due to alcohol-related causes; the global number is 6.2%. There are about 20 million alcoholics in a country of 143 million. A 2009 study by Oxford University and the Russian Cancer Research Centre in Moscow concluded that more than half of premature deaths (59% men, and 33% women) of people between the ages of 15 and 54 were caused directly or indirectly by alcohol. Drug abuse in Russia is an epidemic. According to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, Russia accounts for more than 20% of the heroine consumed globally, making it the largest consumer in the world. About 2.5 million Russian are addicted to drugs and 90% of them use heroin. About 30,000 Russians die every year as a consequence of heroin use; thousands more die as result of the use of synthetic marijuana and cheap and lethal "crocodile" made from codeine pills.

ETHNIC & RELIGIOUS CONFLICT in Russia is deteriorating rapidly. There have been a number of incidents in recent years that have painted a picture of a nation segregated along ethnic and religious lines. Most of those incidents have echoed the tensions between Russian/neo-Soviet nationalists and immigrants, both legal and illegal, principally Muslims from the north Caucasus and Central Asia. Hostilities between Slavic-Russians and other groups are deeply rooted in historical differences and the large cultural diversity of the nations that once comprised the USSR.