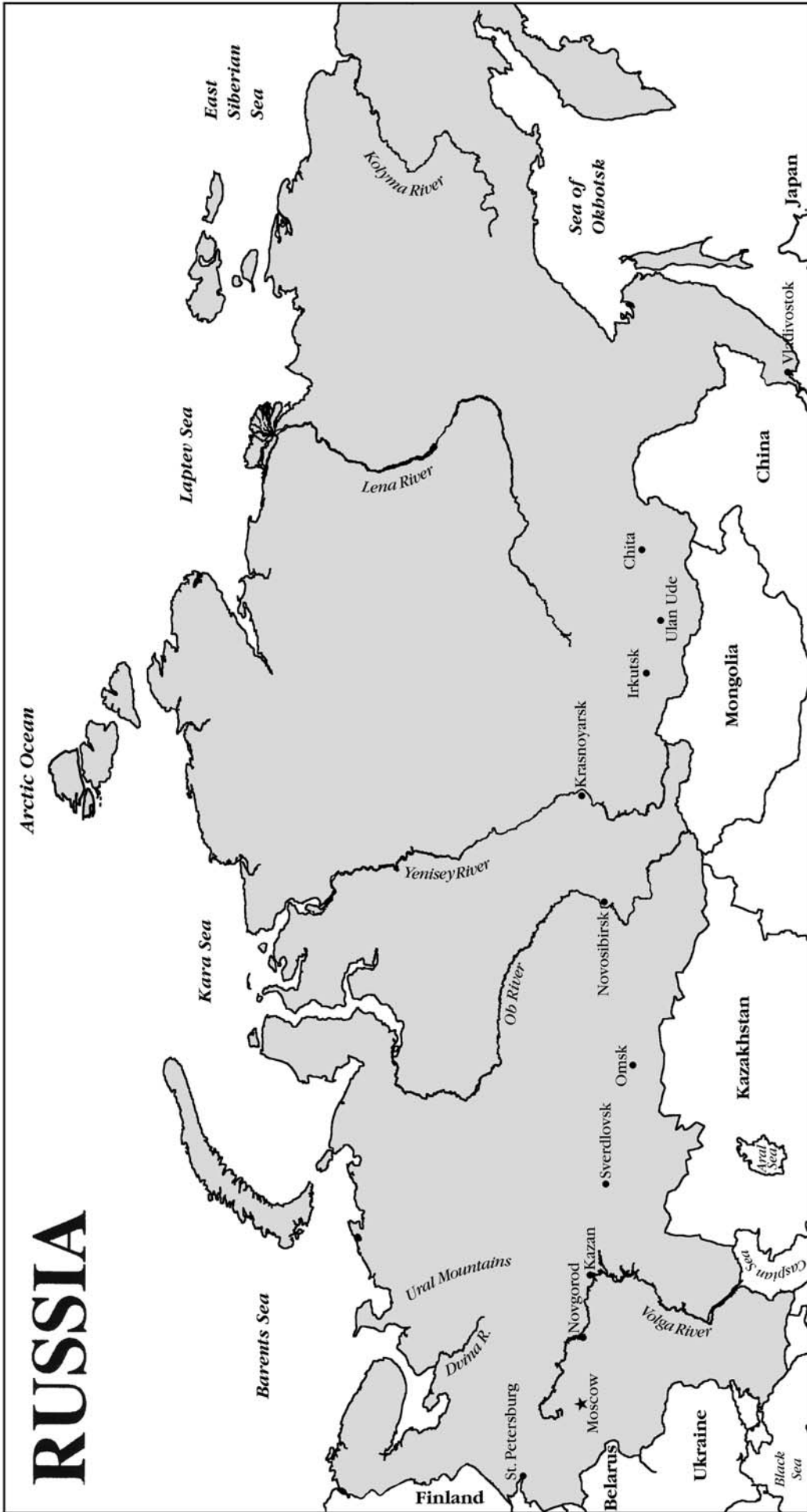


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# RUSSIA





# Russia

Between 1917 and 1991, the Russian Republic was the major component of the Soviet Union, a superpower which occupied one-sixth of the world's land mass and rivaled the United States for domination of the world. Now Russia has returned to its pre-revolutionary status as an independent country rather than the center of the Soviet empire. However, it still has the largest land mass of any nation in the world and is about twice the size of the United States. It still has great influence within the Commonwealth of Independent States (which replaced the Soviet Union), as well as in the United Nations and other world bodies. Russia has contributed much great art, literature, and music to world civilization. Its culture, language, and people are unique and interesting. Despite recent political changes, Russia remains one of the major countries in the world today.

**Area**—6.5 million square miles (16.8 million square kilometers), extending from the plains of Europe to the Pacific Ocean.

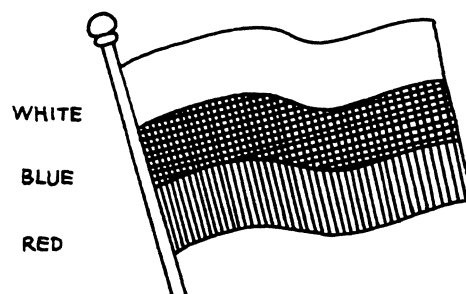
**Population**—147 million (83% Russian, 4% Tatar, 3% Ukrainian)

**Language**—Russian, although other ethnic groups have their own languages as well.

**Religion**—The Russian Orthodox Church used to be dominant, but now there are also many Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and Muslims.

**Currency**—The ruble and the kopeck. One ruble = 100 kopecks. The value of the currency varies frequently.

**Flag**—The new flag of Russia is the tricolor (white, blue, and red) based on the old tsarist flag, but without the tsarist emblem.





## Land and People

Russia occupies major parts of both Europe and Asia. It is about 4000 miles (6440 kilometers) wide and includes 11 time zones. Flying from Moscow east to Vladivostok takes longer than flying from Moscow to New York.

There are a number of autonomous (or self-governing) regions within Russia. These correspond somewhat to the states in the United States. Each region is divided into smaller units called **krais** or **oblasts**, and **rayons**. These political divisions are similar to our countries or townships, and wards.

The vast eastern land called Siberia is a region of Russia. Siberia evokes images of a cold and empty wasteland where criminals were sent to live, but this is only partly true. Like the rest of the country, Siberia is a combination of geographical regions, and is not all cold and deserted. Much of Russia's great mineral wealth of coal, oil, gas, uranium, and gold is found there. Wheat is grown in western Siberia, and many furbearing animals inhabit its northernmost lands.

The major types of geography found in Russia are the tundra, the forests, and the steppes. The **tundra** is the northernmost land around the Arctic Circle. This boggy land is frozen solid for most of the year and only thaws on the surface during the short but sometimes hot summer. The frozen ground is called **permafrost**. Reindeer and many furbearing animals like sable and fox make their home in the tundra. The land is rich underneath with natural gas and minerals. The people of the frozen north include nomadic tribes called Yakuts, Chukchis, and Nentsy, They are similar in appearance and lifestyle to American Eskimos, and they have always made their living by herding reindeer, which can be used for almost all of their daily necessities. The Soviet government tried to collectivize these tribes but had limited success. In recent years, the people of northern Siberia have become concerned about the destruction of their environment by hunters and by natural gas and mining operations.

South of the tundra lie great forests of pine, spruce, birch, and other trees. Early Slavic peoples began their settlements in the western part of these forest lands, along the great rivers called the Dnieper, Oka, Dvina, and Volga. They cleared the forests for farms and built their houses and churches from the wood. They became skilled woodcarvers, and modern Russian craftspeople still follow some of their ways. The ancient cities of Kiev and Novgorod began in the great forests south of the tundra. Another name for some of the forest region is **taiga**.