

IV. Russian History 1.0

A. Russia and the World We Live In

1. Russia is the largest country in the world in terms of area, stretching from Europe all the way across Asia to the Pacific Ocean.
2. Russia is not one of the world's most important countries economically. Its economy is smaller than the economy of South Korea or (to make another useful comparison) the economy of just the state of Texas.
3. What makes Russia one of the most important countries in the world is that Russia is one of the world's "superpowers," which means that it has a powerful military, and especially, a large arsenal of nuclear weapons.
4. For most of the last century, Russia was the champion of an idea that some believed would result in the rise of a perfect society, which they defined as one in which everyone is equal and equally prosperous. This idea is known as "communism."
5. Not only did communism not produce the results it promised, everywhere it was tried, including Russia, China, Cuba, North Korea, southeast Asia, and various parts of Africa, it created untold misery, and it was used to justify the slaughter of civilians who did not live up to the standards of their supposedly brilliant communist leaders.
6. Because the leaders of Russia could see that communism had failed, and that their great rival the United States of America was becoming incomparably prosperous and powerful, they decided to abandon communism in **1991**. It was in that year that the previous version of Russia, known as the "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" (USSR)—or "Soviet Union" for short—dissolved into different countries, including the Russia of today, and others, such as Ukraine.
7. From **1991** onward, Russia was adrift, culturally speaking. The answers that Russians had relied on to make sense of the world had been abandoned, and Russia's leaders did not want to give up and simply copy America, their former rival. So Russia became a "post-communist" country. This means that it is a country that *used to be communist*, but also that it is a country that doesn't quite know what to do now that it is no longer communist.
8. If Russia had continued to coast through the next few decades without a clear identity and purpose, it is likely that it would have declined from being a cardinal culture to being merely a major culture, and perhaps to even less. For one thing, many Russians have left to live elsewhere, causing the population to shrink, and as the population continues to drop, Russia is becoming emptier and poorer.
9. For Russia's leaders, in particular the infamous "president" of Russia, Vladimir Putin, this decline (and anticipated *fall*) of Russia is a tragedy that must be resisted.
10. That is the main reason why Russia notoriously invaded its neighboring country Ukraine earlier this year.
11. Ukraine, which used to be a part of the Soviet Union, has been independent since **1991**, and has been lured into seeking membership in the European Union and in America's military alliance NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization).

12. When Putin saw that this was happening, he interpreted it as yet another sign that Russia was becoming less important, and he decided that the only way to stop Russia's complete collapse was to invade Ukraine and force it to stay in the "Russosphere" (the group of countries that Russia still controls, even though they are technically independent).
13. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is already a major war that will become an "anchor fact" of future history. It has resulted in food supplies from Ukraine and Russia being cut off to poor countries in Asia and Africa, which will create famines, and energy (oil & gas) being cut off to Europe, which will lead to misery and *de*-industrialization. The full scope of the consequences will take years to measure.

B. The Rise of Mother Russia

1. The story of how Russia became the country it is today begins far to the east of the Europe in the time just after Charlemagne.
2. Around the year **862 AD**, land occupied by a tribal people known as Slavs was invaded and conquered by Vikings (people from the northern region of Europe known as Scandinavia). The Viking leader Rurik established a new kingdom which he called "Kievan Rus." ("Rus" is a viking word of unknown meaning, "Kievan" refers to its capital city, Kiev, which is the capital of Ukraine today, although it is now spelled "Kyiv" and pronounced "keev," which is the way Ukrainians pronounce it.)
3. The result of the Viking conquest of the Slavs was a union of two peoples that succeeded over the long term, producing a very large country. (If Charlemagne's union had succeeded we could image a similarly large and united "nation" of Europe to the west of Russia. Rurik succeeded in a way that Charlemagne did not.)
4. In between Russia and Europe for hundreds of years was an unsettled tribal region. Russia's cultural contact with Europe was minimal, and it evolved into a distinct culture on its own.

