

Nasty Stuff

About

Russia

Compiled and Edited by

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About the Editor

Michael Erbschloe has worked for over 30 years performing analysis of the economics of information technology, public policy relating to technology, and utilizing technology in reengineering organization processes. He has authored several books on social and management issues of information technology that were published by McGraw Hill and other major publishers. He has also taught at several universities and developed technology-related curriculum. His career has focused on several interrelated areas:

- Technology strategy, analysis, and forecasting
- Teaching and curriculum development
- Writing books and articles
- Publishing and editing
- Public policy analysis and program evaluation

Books by Michael Erbschloe

Threat Level Red: Cybersecurity Research Programs of the
U.S. Government (CRC Press)

Social Media Warfare: Equal Weapons for All (Auerbach Publications)

Walling Out the Insiders: Controlling Access to Improve Organizational
Security (Auerbach Publications)

Physical Security for IT (Elsevier Science)

Trojans, Worms, and Spyware (Butterworth-Heinemann)

Implementing Homeland Security in Enterprise IT (Digital Press)

Guide to Disaster Recovery (Course Technology)

Socially Responsible IT Management (Digital Press)

Information Warfare: How to Survive Cyber Attacks (McGraw Hill)

The Executive's Guide to Privacy Management (McGraw Hill)

Net Privacy: A Guide to Developing & Implementing an e-business
Privacy Plan (McGraw Hill)

Introduction

The Soviet economy and society stagnated in the decades following Stalin's rule, until General Secretary Mikhail GORBACHEV (1985-91) introduced glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) in an attempt to modernize communism, but his initiatives inadvertently released forces that by December 1991 splintered the USSR into Russia and 14 other independent republics.

Following economic and political turmoil during President Boris YELTSIN's term (1991-99), Russia shifted toward a centralized authoritarian state under the leadership of President Vladimir PUTIN (2000-2008, 2012-present) in which the regime seeks to legitimize its rule through managed elections, populist appeals, a foreign policy focused on enhancing the country's geopolitical influence, and commodity-based economic growth. Russia faces a largely subdued rebel movement in Chechnya and some other surrounding regions, although violence still occurs throughout the North Caucasus.

Founded in the 12th century, the Principality of Muscovy was able to emerge from over 200 years of Mongol domination (13th-15th centuries) and to gradually conquer and absorb surrounding principalities. In the early 17th century, a new ROMANOV Dynasty continued this policy of expansion across Siberia to the Pacific. Under PETER I (ruled 1682-1725), hegemony was extended to the Baltic Sea and the country was renamed the Russian Empire. During the 19th century, more territorial acquisitions were made in Europe and Asia. Defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 contributed to the Revolution of 1905, which resulted in the formation of a parliament and other reforms.

Repeated devastating defeats of the Russian army in World War I led to widespread rioting in the major cities of the Russian Empire and to the overthrow in 1917 of the imperial household. The communists under Vladimir LENIN seized power soon after and formed the USSR. The brutal rule of Josif STALIN (1928-53) strengthened communist rule and Russian dominance of the Soviet Union at a cost of tens of millions of lives. After defeating Germany in World War II as part of an alliance with the US (1939-1945), the USSR expanded its territory and influence in Eastern Europe and emerged as a global power. The USSR was the principal adversary of the US during the Cold War (1947-1991).

Military expenditures (country comparison to the world: 16):

5.4% of GDP (2016)

4.86% of GDP (2015)

4.1% of GDP (2014)

3.96% of GDP (2013)

3.75% of GDP (2012)

Military branches: Ground Troops (Sukhoputnyye Voyskia, SV), Navy (Voyenno-Morskoy Flot, VMF), Aerospace Forces (Vozdushno-Kosmicheskiye Sily, VKS); Airborne Troops (Vozdushno-Desantnyye Voyska, VDV) and Missile Troops of Strategic Purpose (Raketnyye Voyska Strategicheskogo Naznacheniya, RVSN) referred to commonly as Strategic Rocket Forces, are independent "combat arms," not subordinate to any of the three branches (2017)

Military service age and obligation: 18-27 years of age for compulsory or voluntary military service; males are registered for the draft at 17 years of age; 1-year service obligation (conscripts can only be sent to combat zones after 6 months of training); reserve obligation for non-officers to age 50; enrollment in military schools from the age of 16, cadets classified as members of the armed forces note: the chief of the General Staff Mobilization Directorate announced in March 2015 that for health reasons, only 76% of draftees called up during the spring 2015 draft campaign were fit for military service (2015).

Source: The World Factbook — Central Intelligence Agency

U.S.-Russia Relations

Russia recognized the United States on October 28, 1803, and diplomatic relations between the United States and Russia were formally established in 1809. Diplomatic relations were interrupted following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. On December 6, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson instructed all American diplomatic representatives in Russia to refrain from any direct communication with representatives of the Bolshevik Government. Although diplomatic relations were never formally severed, the United States refused to recognize or have any formal relations with the Bolshevik/Soviet governments until 1933. Normal diplomatic relations were resumed on November 16, 1933, when President Franklin Roosevelt informed Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov that the United States recognized the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and wished to re-establish normal diplomatic relations. On December 25, 1991, the United States recognized the Russian Federation as the successor to the Soviet Union, when President George H.W. Bush announced the decision in an address to the nation. President Bush also announced that the Embassy in Moscow would remain in place as the American Embassy to the Russian Federation. The United States and the Russian Federation established diplomatic relations on December 31, 1991.

The United States has long sought a full and constructive relationship with Russia. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States adopted a bipartisan strategy to facilitate cooperation on global issues and promote foreign investment and trade. The United States supported Russia's integration into European and global institutions and a deepened bilateral partnership in security cooperation to reinforce the foundations of stability and predictability. In response to the Russian violation in 2014 of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, however, the United States downgraded the bilateral political and military relationship and suspended the Bilateral Presidential Commission, a body jointly founded in 2009 by the United States and Russia to promote cooperation between the two countries. In addition to aggressive acts in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia has also sought to use information operations which appear to be designed to weaken core institutions in the West such as NATO and the EU, and to cast doubt on the integrity of our democratic systems. Russia's method is not to advance ideas to compete with ours, but to undermine and question all narratives, creating confusion and diverting attention from Moscow's own actions. The United States has sought to deter further Russian intervention through the projection of strength and unity with U.S. allies, and by building resilience and reducing vulnerability among allies facing Russian pressure and coercion. The United States maintains cooperation with Russia to address pressing global challenges in areas where U.S. core national security interests align, including nonproliferation, nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) security, preventing atrocities and humanitarian crises, and combatting violent extremism and terrorism. The long-term goal of the

United States is to see Russia become a constructive stakeholder in the global community. The United States seeks to nurture historically strong ties with the Russian people and civil society.

Bilateral Economic Relations

In response to Russia's ongoing violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Russia's occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea, the United States has suspended most bilateral engagement with the Russian government on economic issues. The United States continues to investigate allegations of mistreatment of or discrimination against U.S. investors in Russia and to urge Russia to improve its investment climate, adherence to the rule of law, and transparency. In Russia, the U.S. Commercial Service continues to assist U.S. firms interested in developing market opportunities that do not violate sanctions.

In 2014, the United States and our European and G-7 partners imposed sanctions on Russia for its intervention in eastern Ukraine and occupation of Crimea. Sectoral sanctions have reduced Russia's ability to access financing in the financial, energy, and defense sectors, as well as limited its access to certain technologies in those sectors.

A combination of low oil prices, structural limitations, and sanctions pushed Russia into a deep recession in 2015, with the economy contracting by four percent. The economy was expected to contract by nearly one percent in 2016 as well. In response, Russia has imposed a number of counter sanctions on U.S. and European goods, most notably in the agricultural sector.

Russia's Membership in International Organizations

Russia is one of five permanent members of the UN Security Council. It lost a re-election bid to the UN Human Rights Council in a competitive race in 2016. Russia's participation in the G8 (now G-7) was suspended in March 2014 in response to its attempted annexation of Crimea. For the same reason, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) stripped Russia of its voting rights in that body in April 2014. Since then, Russia has opted not to send Duma delegations to PACE sessions even though it was welcomed to continue to participate in debate. Russia remains a member state in the Council of Europe. Russia is a participating State in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It is also a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and East Asia Summit (EAS), and an observer state to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The country participates in the Quartet on the Middle East and the Six-party Talks with North Korea.

Russia also takes part in a number of regional organizations including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Community, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Source: U.S. Department of State

Russia - Market Overview

Discusses key economic indicators and trade statistics, which countries are dominant in the market, the U.S. market share, the political situation if relevant, the top reasons why U.S. companies should consider exporting to this country, and other issues that affect trade, e.g., terrorism, currency devaluations, trade agreements. Last Published: 8/11/2017

Russia presents both significant challenges and opportunities for experienced American exporters. Russia's 2014-2016 economic downturn, driven by low oil prices and the lack of structural economic reform, squeezed both Russian corporations and the average consumer. While targeted American and European economic sanctions remain in place, there is no overall trade embargo on Russia. On the back of a tight fiscal and monetary policy, coupled with higher oil prices, Russia should return to limited economic growth of 1-2% in 2017. Over 1,000 American firms of all sizes continued to do business in Russia, given its 142 million consumers, \$27k+ GDP per capita (as measured in purchasing power parity), a growing middle class and highly educated and trained workforce.

There are two broad considerations when considering business prospects in Russia: geopolitics and market dynamics. Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine and Syria and interference in the 2016 U.S. elections have raised tensions with the United States and its allies. Targeted U.S. and European economic sanctions instituted in 2014 remain firmly in place and are not expected to be lifted for the foreseeable future. Restrictions on offshore, Arctic and shale oil and gas, the financial sector and the defense industry continue. For the past three years, U.S. agricultural exporters have been hit with Russian countersanctions. In addition, a number of Russian entities and individuals are also subject to sanctions, requiring American firms to do careful due diligence on potential business. Increasing state dominance of the economy, high costs of borrowing and a lack of broad economic reform constrain growth. Both large, publicly-traded U.S. multinationals and small and medium size enterprises continue to carefully monitor the overall business climate in Russia, balancing opportunity and risk.

As for market-based considerations, both Western and Russian firms approach 2017-8 with cautious optimism. Stable oil prices, a less volatile ruble and a return to growth in some sectors will likely lift the Russian economy in 2017. Indeed, Western and Russian firms report year-on-year growth in large industrial equipment in the mining, energy, and heavy construction sector. The retail and residential construction sectors remain weak. Early in 2017, Standard & Poors and Moody's upgraded their ratings to BB+, a step below investment grade. A Treaty on the Avoidance of Dual Taxation and Russia's WTO accession in 2012 have helped create new opportunities for American trade and investment through more certain and predictable access to the market across tariff, trade rules, and dispute resolution platforms. Despite the need for deeper economic reform, most analysts doubt any major policy changes prior to the March 2018 Russian presidential elections. For more on U.S.-Russia trade, read Ambassador John Tefft's article on "Why U.S.-Russia Trade Still Matters".

U.S.-Russia trade reached over \$20 billion in 2016, well off its peak of \$38 billion in 2013. American investment in Russia was about \$9 billion in 2015 (latest data available). These figures are low and conservative, as they do not include third country trade and investment flows of U.S. origin and reinvested earnings from subsidiaries of American parent corporations. Numbers aside, American firms view the Russian market as a long-term, strategic play, given its population, natural resources, growing consumer class and access to a low-cost labor force.

Source: Prepared by our U.S. Embassies abroad.

2017 U.S. trade in goods with Russia

NOTE: All figures are in millions of U.S. dollars on a nominal basis, not seasonally adjusted unless otherwise specified. Details may not equal totals due to rounding. Table reflects only those months for which there was trade.

Month	Exports	Imports	Balance
January 2017	314.4	1,221.5	-907.1
February 2017	427.7	1,022.0	-594.3
March 2017	538.6	1,697.9	-1,159.2
April 2017	667.0	1,347.1	-680.1

May 2017	480.6	1,414.7	-934.1
June 2017	785.9	1,502.6	-716.8
July 2017	454.8	1,499.8	-1,045.0
August 2017	689.9	1,512.0	-822.1
September 2017	744.5	1,441.6	-697.1
October 2017	591.0	1,481.9	-891.0
November 2017	683.1	1,456.5	-773.3
TOTAL 2017	6,377.5	15,597.7	-9,220.1

Source: Census.gov › Business & Industry › Foreign Trade › U.S. International Trade Data

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the Russia Government as being in compliance with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) safety standards for oversight of Russia air carriers operations.

The majority of domestic airlines offer on-line ticket sales, which makes it convenient for travelers to order tickets in advance. Some flights can be canceled, if more than 30% of the seats remain unsold. However, this does not happen very often. Travelers should have their passport with them at all times. Air travel within western Russia generally stays on schedule; the quality of service continues to improve. Flights within the Russian Far East are sometimes delayed or cancelled in winter months due to snow or fog. International Russian carriers, such as Aeroflot and S7 Airlines, usually use Western equipment and meet higher customer service standards than other domestic carriers.

Moscow has three major airports (Sheremetyevo, Domodedovo and Vnukovo); the fourth airport Bykovo deals primarily with cargo and emergency flights. The VIP terminals of Sheremetyevo (Terminal A), Domodedovo (Domodedovo Business Aviation Center) and Vnukovo (Vnukovo-3) offer customized service to VIP clients on a regular basis. International flights generally enter Moscow through Sheremetyevo and Domodedovo. Most international flights arrive in Sheremetyevo-2 (renamed SVO-F in December 2009) while Sheremetyevo-1 (renamed SVO-B in March 2010) handles most domestic traffic. With the opening of Terminal C (SVO-C) in

March 2007 and the opening of Terminal D (SVO-D) in November 2009, some international and domestic travel has been diverted to these facilities. Terminal E (SVO-E) provides convenient access between SVO-D and SVO-F, offering high speed movement systems (elevators, escalators and moving walkways) and other amenities for travelers.

Travelers may continue to other Russian cities from Sheremetyevo, Vnukovo or Domodedovo airports. However, travel time between airports or to the city center can take as much as three hours, and ample time must be allowed for passport control, customs clearance and baggage retrieval. The introduction of Aeroexpress trains that provide a high-speed direct connection from each of the airports to the city center (35-45 minutes travel time) has greatly alleviated this problem in recent years. St. Petersburg's airport has two terminals: Pulkovo-1 (domestic flights) and Pulkovo-2 (international flights).

Train travel in Russia is generally reliable and convenient as stations are located in the city center. From St. Petersburg to Moscow, travelers often ride overnight trains, although unaccompanied passengers are reminded to keep an eye on their valuables and lock their doors at night (if in a sleeping compartment), as some incidents of pick-pocketing have been reported. For quicker train connections between Moscow and St. Petersburg, travelers can take the high-speed SAPSAN train, which takes approximately four hours.

Inclement weather, erratic maintenance and a culture of aggressive driving make road conditions throughout Russia highly variable. Drivers and pedestrians should exercise extreme caution to avoid accidents. Traffic police sometimes stop motorists to levy cash "fines", but the scope of this problem has declined in recent years. Criminals occasionally prey on travelers, especially in isolated areas. At the same time, the Moscow's Committee for Tourism and Hotel Industry reported a low crime rate against foreign tourists in 2016.

In Moscow and St. Petersburg, the metro (subway) can be an efficient and inexpensive means of transportation. However, for non-Russian speakers, it can be difficult without researching the route in advance. Be sure to carry a metro map with you and learning the Cyrillic alphabet is useful. The Yandex metro map application is very helpful.

Marked taxis are prevalent in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and as noted online ride hailing applications, such as Uber and GetTaxi, are used widely in major cities. Short-term business travelers may wish to consider renting a car and driver for extensive excursions, or hire taxis

through their hotels for shorter trips. Car rentals are another option that has become available recently, although driving in Russia can be difficult for the uninitiated.

The Russian railway complex is of particular strategic importance to the Russian government, contributing about 0.2- 0.3% to the country's GDP and employing more than 800,000 workers. Third largest in size, after the United States and China, the Russian railway network expands over 85,200 kilometers, of which 43,300 kilometers are electrified. The fleet of the rolling stock comprises 11,100 freight locomotives (diesel and electric), 6,100 diesel switching locomotives and 3,100 passenger locomotives (diesel and electric). The number of freight railcars is estimated at 1,218,169 (2015). A considerable portion of the rolling stock is outdated and is in need of either decommissioning or renewal.

The majority of the country's rail infrastructure network and the locomotive fleets are owned by OAO Russian Railways (RZD), a state-owned-enterprise, operating freight and passenger railway services. Supported and funded by the Russian government, RZD has been pursuing a comprehensive reform process since 2001, to achieve greater efficiency and competitive advantage in the domestic and global markets.

Besides RZD, the Russian railway complex also comprises operations of private rail companies and industrial enterprises that have their own fleets of locomotives and railcars, and their own networks of rail tracks. Compared to RZD, their share of locomotives is rather insignificant (1,163 versus 20,300), while the share of freight railcars is much greater (1,123,012 versus 95,157). (Analysis was prepared by U.S. Embassies abroad.)

U.S. Department of State Press Statements

Unsafe Russian Military Practices

Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC

January 29, 2018

The United States notes with the highest level of concern the latest incident of unsafe Russian military practices, over the Black Sea on January 29. As confirmed by U.S. Naval Forces Europe, a Russian SU-27 engaged in an unsafe interaction with a U.S. EP-3 in international airspace, with the Russia pilot closing to within 5 feet and crossing directly in front of the EP-3's flight path. While the U.S. aircraft was operating under international law, the Russian side was flagrantly violating existing agreements and international law, in this case the 1972 Agreement for the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas (INCSEA). This is but the latest example of Russian military activities disregarding international norms and agreements. We call on Russia to cease these unsafe actions that increase the risk of miscalculation, danger to aircrew on both sides, and midair collisions.

Russia's Violations of Georgian Sovereignty

Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC

January 26, 2018

The United States condemns the Russian Federation's ratification of an agreement with the de facto leaders in Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia regarding a joint military force. We do not recognize the legitimacy of this so-called "treaty," which does not constitute a valid international agreement.

The United States' position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia is unwavering: The United States fully supports Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

The United States views ratification of this agreement as inconsistent with the principles underlying the Geneva International Discussions, to which Russia is a participant. The United States urges Russia to withdraw its forces to pre-war positions per the 2008 ceasefire agreement and reverse its recognition of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Remarks on Russia's Responsibility for the Ongoing Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Paris, France

January 23, 2018

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Again, I want to thank Foreign Minister Le Drian for hosting today's signing ceremony for the launch of the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

This meeting was about two things: stopping chemical weapons attacks and denying impunity to those who use or enable the use of such weapons. For an indication of what these weapons can do to humans, one need look no further than East Ghouta in Syria. Only yesterday more than 20 civilians, most of them children, were victims of an apparent chlorine gas attack.

The recent attacks in East Ghouta raise serious concerns that Bashar al-Assad's Syrian regime may be continuing its use of chemical weapons against its own people. Whoever conducted the attacks, Russia ultimately bears responsibility for the victims in East Ghouta and countless other Syrians targeted with chemical weapons since Russia became involved in Syria.

In September 2013, Russia pressed for, negotiated and agreed to the framework for the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons – a diplomatic understanding between the United States and Russia requiring the verifiable destruction of Syria’s entire chemical weapons stockpile.

In so doing, Russia assumed responsibility as guarantor for ensuring that its Syrian allies cease all use of chemical weapons and fully declare its chemical weapons stockpile for destruction under international oversight.

The U.S.-Russia diplomatic framework was legally anchored by the United States and Russia in a decision of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and Resolution 2118 of the UN Security Council.

In addition, in March 2015, Russia supported the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2209, which emphasized that those responsible for the use of any toxic chemical as a weapon, including chlorine, must be held to account.

Russia has not lived up to these commitments. Since two thousand – April 2014, there has been mounting evidence that Syria continues to illicitly possess chemical weapons and use them against its own people.

The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission has confirmed multiple incidents of chemical weapons use in Syria, including the use of the toxic industrial chemical chlorine as a weapon. Some of these incidents, including the April 4th sarin attack, were later attributed to Syria by the OPCW UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, an independent panel of impartial experts established in August 2015 by the UN Security Council’s Resolution 2235, with the full support of Russia.

There is simply no denying that Russia, by shielding its Syrian ally, has breached its commitments to the United States as a framework guarantor. It has betrayed the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2218[1], and on these occasions has twice[2] vetoed UN Security Council resolutions to enforce the Joint Investigative Mechanism and continue its mandate.

Russia’s failure to resolve the chemical weapons issue in Syria calls into question its relevance to the resolution to the overall crisis. At a bare minimum, Russia must stop vetoing and at least abstain from future Security Council votes on this issue.

Over 25 like-minded countries are here today to ensure that those who use chemical weapons will be held accountable. France, the UK, Germany, Turkey, and many others are here today to uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention and its vision of a world free of these heinous weapons.

We will use this Partnership to facilitate greater information sharing about chemical weapons use, including sanctions information to collect and preserve such information and to strengthen the capacity of states to hold responsible parties accountable. This initiative puts those who

ordered and carried out chemical weapons attacks on notice. You will face a day of reckoning for your crimes against humanity and your victims will see justice done.

We call on the community of responsible and civilized nations to put the use of chemical weapons to an end. The choice is yours. The people of East Ghouta are watching and the rest of the world is watching as well.

Thank you.

Russia's Restrictive Media-Focused Legislation

Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC

November 28, 2017

New Russian legislation that allows the Ministry of Justice to label media outlets as “foreign agents” and to monitor or block certain internet activity presents yet another threat to free media in Russia. Freedom of expression—including speech and media which a government may find inconvenient—is a universal human rights obligation Russia has pledged to uphold.

The United States has previously highlighted the threat posed by Russia’s Foreign Agents Law, which has been used to justify a constant stream of raids, harassment, and legal proceedings that effectively obstruct non-governmental organizations from doing their work. Expanding the Foreign Agents Law to include media outlets opens the door to onerous requirements that could further stifle freedom of speech and editorial independence in Russia.

The United States urges the Russian government not to use this legislation to further restrict the operation of media outlets or freedom of expression.

Furthermore, the Russian Government’s attempt to justify new, media-focused legislation as a response to the transparency requirements in the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 (FARA) is disingenuous and inappropriate. FARA does not police the content of information disseminated, does not limit the publication of information or advocacy materials, and does not restrict an organization’s ability to operate.

Joint Statement by the President of the United States and the President of the Russian Federation

Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

November 11, 2017

President Trump and President Putin today, meeting on the margins of the APEC conference in Da Nang, Vietnam, confirmed their determination to defeat ISIS in Syria. They expressed their satisfaction with successful U.S.-Russia enhanced de-confliction efforts between U.S. and Russian military professionals that have dramatically accelerated ISIS's losses on the battlefield in recent months.

The Presidents agreed to maintain open military channels of communication between military professionals to help ensure the safety of both U.S. and Russian forces and de-confliction of partnered forces engaged in the fight against ISIS. They confirmed these efforts will be continued until the final defeat of ISIS is achieved.

The Presidents agreed that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. They confirmed that the ultimate political solution to the conflict must be forged through the Geneva process pursuant to UNSCR 2254. They also took note of President Asad's recent commitment to the Geneva process and constitutional reform and elections as called for under UNSCR 2254.

The two Presidents affirmed that these steps must include full implementation of UNSCR 2254, including constitutional reform and free and fair elections under UN supervision, held to the highest international standards of transparency, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate. The Presidents affirmed their commitment to Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence, territorial integrity, and non-sectarian character, as defined in UNSCR 2254, and urged all Syrian parties to participate actively in the Geneva political process and to support efforts to ensure its success.

Finally President Trump and President Putin confirmed the importance of de-escalation areas as an interim step to reduce violence in Syria, enforce ceasefire agreements, facilitate unhindered humanitarian access, and set the conditions for the ultimate political solution to the conflict. They reviewed progress on the ceasefire in southwest Syria that was finalized the last time the two Presidents met in Hamburg, Germany on July 7, 2017.

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