

**Name:**

## **Soviet Union Country Profile**

### **Role in World War I**

Russia was actively engaged in WWI fighting along side Great Britain and France against Germany and the other Central Powers. In the process it lost more than 3 million soldiers and civilians. By 1917, Russia was beginning to lose the war militarily and her economy was on the verge of collapse. The situation got so bad that a revolution occurred under the leadership of the Bolsheviks. After a bloody civil war, a new communist government emerged and the Soviet Union was born. The Soviet Union withdrew from WWI before it was over so that it could begin to stabilize itself politically and rebuild its poor economy. It was forced to give up large amounts of land in Eastern Europe to the Central Powers as a consequence.

### **Historical Background, 1918-1936**

At various points during the interwar years the Soviet Union's communist government increased its control of the nation's economy. The government's efforts to guide economic development helped the Soviet Union to withstand the worst effects of the world-wide Great Depression. Diplomatically and politically, however, the Soviet Union was isolated during the interwar years. This was due in part to the fact that the Soviet Union had withdrawn from WWI but even more because many European nations feared communism. Because the Soviet Union withdrew from WWI in 1917, it was excluded from the Treaty of Versailles negotiations. When the lands previously given to the Central Powers were divided up by the Allies into new Eastern European nations, the Soviets came to increasingly resent its former allies and also to fear a future invasion. After World War I but before the rise of Adolf Hitler, the Soviets and Germans had occasionally agreed to work together. In one case, Germany and the Soviet Union signed an economic treaty and in another case, the Soviet Union allowed German military forces to train on Soviet land. Friendly relations ended, however, when Hitler came to power and began denouncing communism. When Germany began rearming, the Soviet Union signed a treaty of mutual assistance with France on May 2, 1935. In that treaty, the Soviet Union agreed to assist France if it was attacked by an outside power without provocation. The treaty however was written carefully – France had to be actively engaged defending itself before the Soviet Union was obligated to enter into conflict. Within the framework established by the treaty with France, the Soviet Union also signed a mutual defense agreement with Czechoslovakia.

### **Foreign Policy**

Because the Soviet Union was not a democracy during the interwar years, public opinion had a minimal effect on the foreign policies of the Soviet Union. In fact, during the Great Purge of 1937, Stalin ordered the imprisonment or killing of hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens suspected of being traitors. Because of these internal struggles and a fear of even more casualties, most Russian leaders wanted to avoid another war. During these early years, the Soviet Union's foreign policy was pragmatic; it was interested in preserving its communist system. One way to ensure Soviet safety was for other nations in Europe to become communist. To this end, the Soviet Union established the Communist International in the hopes of spreading communism to other nations. This group addressed Joseph Stalin's fear that Western Europe would save itself by pushing aggressive nations like Germany to the east. The Soviet Union therefore felt obligated to work with countries to stop fascist governments. If it ensured communism's survival, the Soviet Union was willing to assist countries who were opposed to fascism even if they were opposed to communism. Going to the aid of any nation in Western Europe, however, would require Poland or Romania to allow the Soviet "Red" Army to pass. Although the Soviet Union was not willing to publicly commit to fighting against fascism, they encouraged Western Europe to resist fascist aggression wherever it occurred.

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## Country Profile Questions

1. What are the greatest issues facing your country?
2. What countries do you see as potential allies?
3. What countries cause you see as potential threats?
4. List your top 3 foreign policy goals in order of importance.