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Russia

The Enigmatic Government: Corruption in the Russian Federation

Russia has drastically changed over the previous few decades. From millions of indentured servants to the western stereotypical family of two parents and one child, Russia has definitely changed. While it may not be as drastic as countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of Russian families are below the poverty line. In rural Russia, people consider children as expensive and, as a result, usually limit themselves to a single child. At that, the majority of families in rural Russia are considered poor. Alas, it was not always like this. Before the democratization of Russia, farmers, school teachers, and agronomists were held in high esteem since they were the ones who impacted the future generations. Now, the times have changed, and they can barely make a living.

Over the past few centuries; Russian political leaders have impacted their populous immensely. From the dictatorship of the Czars to the democracy of Putin; the civilians have always been caught in the crossfire. During the rule of Peter the Great, his sole focus was on military power and conquering surrounding countries. This was so much so that he completely neglected the population. As a result, 1/3 of the population had been reduced to serfdom. These staggering numbers lead to the abolition of serfdom by Alexander II. Yet, the civilians still could not catch a break. During the time period of the Russian revolution, there were multiple civilian based conflicts. For example, when soldiers were ordered to open fire on strikers in a Petrograd factory, the February revolution started. This led to the abdication of Czar Nicholas II and a vacuum in the Russian government which left a large amount of the Russian populous starving. In reiteration, oblivious leaders have radically affected Russian food security over the previous 400 years.

Corruption in the Russian government is a major problem that impacts its citizens in virtually every way. In fact, Russia is 133th of 176th place on the Corruption Perception Index (Corruption in Russia). Over the past year, the Russian government is estimated to have accepted over \$400 billion in bribes. Yet, this is not new for the Russian populous. In the 18th century, it was customary for high-ranking Russian officials to accept bribes (AKA kormleinea). Even now bribery and corruption are considered to be the main obstacles in Russia's economic development. Bribery in Russia has influenced recent elections, media coverage, and, inadvertently, food security. For example, bureaucrats in Russia have contributed to deforestation and lack of viable farmland. On top of the fact that Russia's farmland has been decreasing, major corporations have bribed the government to allow them to build edge cities where they should not. This has impacted Russia's food security in even major cities, as Russia now has to import 63% of its agricultural products and food. That is the second highest percent in all of the G8 countries.

Suffice to say, they can still grow food, but it is severely limited. Russia only has 3 main areas of viable farmland. These three areas consist of Kazakhstan area, Ukraine area, and the Ural district. They also have 3 main crops: barely, wheat, and corn. While this may seem profitable, over 13% of the fall planted crops die over Russia's harsh winter. Bribery and corruption affect Russia even at this level of subsistence. The corruption levels are allowed to persist because over 50% of Russian farms are still burdened with astronomical debt as a result of the 1990's collapse of the Soviet Union. The aforementioned chaos results in a "circle" of bribery and corruption. Initially, it begins with the fact that Russian farmers have no money. Then, when the time comes to buy new equipment, they cannot finance it unless they get a loan from the local bank. The catch is, the only way to get a loan from a bank is to bribe the management. Once they have the new equipment, they can finally harvest their crops. Then, because the infrastructure in small Russian towns is virtually nonexistent, the farmers have to sell their produce to a middle-man that has the vehicles/machinery to transport the produce across the poor roads. By the time the produce gets to its intended destination, the farms receive almost no profit from the ordeal. This has prompted some Russian farmers to literally stop farming.

Russia also has major livestock and endangered animal threats. The main threats to Russia's biodiversity and large carnivores is the overhunting of prey species such as deer and wild boar, poaching for skins and body parts used in traditional Chinese medicine, and habitat loss. The latter threat results from logging, fires set by people, and development. Humans directly cause 75 to 85 percent of tiger deaths (WCS.org). The tiny population of leopards is threatened by a lack of genetic diversity, introduced diseases, and catastrophic events. This means that, due to the staggering lack of natural predators, Russian fauna can multiply at an exponential rate. Furthermore, this can add to the fact that the massive herbivorous populations have contributed to the lack of Russia arable farmland, and are a major threat to their food security.

They are receiving foreign aid, though. Beef ranchers in the United States have honed the characteristics of some robust and meaty breeds of cattle such as Angus and Hereford. But because of trade restrictions, ranchers cannot always export frozen meat from the animals. They can, though, send breeding bulls and heifers on exotic international journeys from ranches in the Midwest to places like Russia, where they are encouraged to prosper and propagate, sometimes under the watchful eye of the American ranchers themselves. Lastly, organizations like the Wildlife Conservation Society have attempted to increase the number of natural predators on Russia's plains. After years of studying their social structure, land-use patterns, food habits, reproduction, mortality, and relationship with other species (including humans), the WCS has tracked more than 60 tigers since 1992.

However, this is not without complication. For one, Siberian tigers cannot be preserved in nature reservations. This is because they need an large amount of land to effectively breed and procreate. Because of this, the WCS have been working specifically with people who share their area with these big cats. Also, contrary to popular belief, the WCS has also been working with hunters to improve the hunter-tiger relations. They have been

doing this by making tigers appear as less of a threat. Conversely, some hunters are focused on the money and can bribe conservation officials to let them hunt the endangered animals. If this were to cease, Russia's corruption rate would decrease, and the overall health of the country would increase through, in this case, massive amounts of viable farmland.

The amount of environmental problems in Russia is unfathomable. There are currently 31 nuclear reactors operating throughout the Russian Federation, and 7 of them are past the recommended lifespan (USGPO). These reactors need to be shut down, or they will present major problems to the surrounding area. Most people are, in fact, wondering why they haven't been shut down. The answer to that is corruption. These NPP's are still running because they are paying millions in bribes to stay active. If the regulatory officials stopped taking bribes, they could potentially save lives and stimulate the surrounding economy. Alas, this is not the only environmental issue. 75% of Russia's surface water is polluted, and only 8% of the total water is even treated (USGPO). This stunning lack of water revitalization has led to the spread to multiple waterborne pathogens, including cholera. Lastly, the large scale disposal of chemical wastes in Russia's waterways has led to a staggering amount of deceased fish, and little water-based food for the surrounding area. To top it off, Russia has the 3rd worst air in the world. 43.8 million tons of pollutants are currently clouding Russia's airways (National Intelligence Council). This has contributed to 17% of child illness, and 10% of adult illness. Russia needs to take corruption out of the picture and regulate pollution, or else their situation will continue to deteriorate.

Russia's corruption rate is contradictory to their current healthcare methods. Russia has more physicians, hospitals, and health care workers than almost any other country in the world on a per capita basis. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the health of the Russian population has declined considerably as a result of social, economic, and lifestyle changes. Russia has also gone through numerous healthcare reforms over the past two decades. The most recent one, initiated by Vladimir Putin, has increased the healthcare spending to what it was in Soviet Russia. Soviet Russia's healthcare system was the definition of universal, so this proverbial blast to the past is a godsend.

One of the strangest things is that the healthcare is not relative to the average income. If one were to look at the Russian GNI, they would see that the overall Russian income has increased by 50% since 2006 (Forbes). This is largely due to the fact that pensions have doubled since then, yet, the Russian lower class is still making an estimated \$315 a month. While that is significantly below living range, well educated, upper-middle class Russians are fighting for increased pay for their lesser off brethren. As Forbes also states, "It's not exactly a shock, indeed it's entirely unsurprising, that the best-educated, most productive, and wealthiest Russians are increasingly dissatisfied with the country's brittle and unrepresentative political institutions." This just goes to show that even the higher per capita income Russians are not satisfied by their countries current political dilemma.

While Russia's current political problem has decreased incrementally, the process has been strengthened by the fact that their literacy rates are higher than the United States

(Index Mundi). This means that the Russian rural, lower class actually have the ability to make decisions regarding their future and food security, and they would have already changed its political system wasn't built on bribery. Essentially, with such a high literacy rate, Russia's rural class will have a say in its future once the corruption desists.

One substantial way that Russia can cease its overall corruption problems is if they revamped their court system. For example, international crime syndicates such as the Russian Mafia run amok in Russia because they know they can bribe the judge. This leads to criminals adversely affecting the lower and middle class because of their 18% crime rate (CIA World Factbook). Also, the crime is not visible in just bribery and corruption, but it is also present in drug trafficking, money laundering, human trafficking, extortion, murder for hire, and fraud. Trafficking, in the form of human/arms/drugs, is the second largest problem that Russia has. As long as Russia continues their inability to focus on crimes, more present issues such as rural income and food security cannot be addressed.

Once Russia can tackle their crime problem, they can then move to food security and rural income enhancements. Currently, global climactic change presents a very big issue in Russia. While GCC will supposedly increase the amount of arable land in Russia, it will also increase the scarcity of water resources and encourage weed and pest proliferation, and it is expected to increase the short-term risks associated with an increase in extreme weather events and natural disasters. This, if not preemptively tackled, will cause major disaster in the Russian rural areas.

Suffice to say, there are certain organizations that aim to tackle this problem before it begins, with or without the help of the Federation. United Way, for example, is dedicated to improving peoples' lives in Moscow and eventually in Russia. They marshal volunteer and monetary resources to make a positive impact the lives of children, youth, seniors, and influence the policies of Moscow and Russia. Organizations such as this make me believe that there is hope for Russia in the future, and I believe that if they can make these changes without the help of the federation, they can go on to improve Russia in a holistic perspective.

The most substantial problem that corruption in Russia contributes to is, as we all know, food security. To recapitulate, because of the major corruption in the Russian agriculture sector, the number of overall livestock production has decreased from 60 million to just above 15 million. This problem has been growing at a linear rate because of their geography, as well as many other factors. On top of that, Russia now has to import 63% of its food related products, putting it at the second most import related G8 country in the world. Most individuals speculate that this is because of the fact that rural Russian farmers live in so poor conditions, that of the urban denizens want to seek employment out of major cities. Lastly, and most importantly, Russia loses an estimated \$1billion a year to illegal logging (WWF). Literally half of the EU imports their wood from Russia. The most grotesque part about this is that politicians have the ability to stop it but choose to take bribes instead. This logging problem is the largest contributor to Russia's current economic crisis, and it's directly related to the corruption of government officials.

There are multiple ways we, as citizens, can go about handling these problems. At the very least, we can donate to organizations such as United Way, which pledges' to improve peoples lives in Moscow and, eventually, the entire federation. These miniscule donations will help increase the living standard in Russia and decrease the overall corruption. Even a slight decrease in Russia's corruption levels can bring millions of dollars to their economy. This exponential increase in funding will not only improve Russian agriculture, but will also allow issues such as food security to perpetually fade away. Because, as the famous Fyodor Dostoevsky once said, "Power is given who dare to lower themselves to pick it up. Only one thing matters, one thing; to be able to dare!" For I, as well as Dostoevsky, believe that if we dare to make the change, the change will come fourth.

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