

Ivan IV or Ivan the Terrible, 1530–84, grand duke of Moscow (1533–84), the first Russian ruler to assume formally the title of Tsar.

Ivan succeeded his father Vasily III, who died in 1533, under the regency of his mother. When she died (1538), the regency alternated among several feuding boyar families. Boyar rule ended only in 1546, when Ivan announced his intention of becoming Tsar. He was crowned in 1547. As Tsar, Ivan attempted to establish Tsarist autocracy at the expense of boyar power. In the early years of his reign, he reduced the arbitrary powers of the boyar provincial governors, transferring their functions to locally elected officials. The former boyars' council was replaced by a "chosen council" consisting of members who owed their status to the Tsar.

In 1566, Ivan summoned what was probably the first general council of the realm (*Zemsky Sobor*), composed of representatives of different social ranks, including merchants and lower nobility. After reorganizing the army, Ivan conquered Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan (1556), thereby inaugurating Russia's eastward expansion. The conquest of Siberia by the Cossack Yermak took place late in his reign (1581–83). Ivan also began trade with England via the White Sea in the mid-1550s. To improve his access to the Baltic Sea, he undertook (1558) a campaign against Livonia. In the resulting war with Poland and Sweden, he was at first successful but was later defeated by Stephen Bathory, king of Poland and Lithuania. The peace treaties (1582, 1583) forced the Tsar to renounce his territorial gains and cede additional territory to Sweden.

In his later years, Ivan's character, always stern, grew tyrannical. Apart from the reverses of the war, the change has been attributed to humiliations at the hands of the boyars during his childhood; a serious illness (1553) and resistance at that time to his efforts to secure the succession of his infant son; the death of his wife, Anastasia Romanov (1560), whom historians credit with exercising a moderating influence; and the defection to Poland of his favourite, Prince Andrew Kurbsky (1564). Suspecting conspiracies everywhere, he acted ruthlessly to consolidate his power. In 1565 he set aside an extensive personal domain, the *oprichnina*, under his direct control. He established a special corps (*oprichniki*), responsible to him alone, to whom he granted part of this domain at will. With the help of this corps, he diminished the political influence of the boyars and forcibly confiscated their lands in a reign of terror. Many boyars were executed or exiled.

Ivan formally abolished the *oprichnina* in 1572, although in effect it continued until 1575. Fits of rage alternated with periods of repentance and prayer; in one of his rages he killed (1581) his son and heir, Ivan. Although the exact number of his wives is uncertain, Ivan probably married seven times, ridding himself of unwanted wives by forcing them to take the veil or arranging for their murder. Despite his cruelty, he was a man of intelligence and learning. Printing was introduced into Russia during his reign. Two sons, Fedor I and Dmitri, survived the Tsar, but after his death his favourite, Boris Godunov, gained power.