The Russian Realm

Two transition zones mark the margins.
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm:
Physiographic Regions

The Russian Plain (1)
- Continuation of North European lowland
- Russia’s core area
- Ural Mountains (2)
  - North-south mountains not tall enough to hinder transportation
  - Divides Russia in two vast expanses of low relief:
    - Russian Plain to the West
    - Siberia to the East

Russian Plain as the Eurasian heartland:
- Center of great landmass
- Major influence on history
- Potential vulnerability

Siberia
West Siberian Plain (3)
- World’s largest unbroken lowland where rivers flow northward, like the Ob River
- Central Siberian Plateau (4)
  - East of the Yenisey River
  - Higher relief
  - Most sparsely populated areas in the habitable world

Yakutsk Basin (5)
- Moderate topography drained by the Lena River
- Eastern Highlands (6)
  - Remote jumble of ranges

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Physical Geography of the Russian Realm:

Physiographic Regions

Kamchatka and Sakhalin
- Pacific Ring of Fire
- Volatile volcanism
- Kamchatka Peninsula
- Sakhalin Island
- Prevailing earthquakes
- Oil and gas reserves

The Southern Perimeter
- Central Asian Ranges (7)
  - High relief location of Lake Baykal
- Caucasus Mountains (8)
  - Barrier and zone of conflict for Russia and neighbors

Concept Caching:
Avacha Volcano, Kamchatka Peninsula

Physical Geography of the Russian Realm:
Harsh Environments

- Climate context: continentality
  - Inland climatic environment remote from moderating and moistening maritime influence
- Environmental effect:
  - Permafrost: water in the ground permanently frozen
  - Tundra: bare ground and rock with lichen, mosses, and low grass
  - Taiga: "snowforest" of coniferous trees

Physical Geography of the Russian Realm:

Climates of Russia and Neighboring States

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Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: Harsh Environments

Climate and Peoples
• Climate and weather make farming difficult:
  – Seasonal temperature extremes
  – Variable rainfall
  – Short, undependable growing seasons
• Limitations on agriculture explain realm’s population distribution.

Map Analysis Activity: Comparing Climate and Population
1. What areas on the map are absolutely not suited to agricultural activity? Why?
2. Beyond climatic constraints on farming, what else influences the realm’s population distribution?
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: Harsh Environments

Climate Change and Arctic Prospects
• Lengthy northern coastline on the Arctic Ocean
  – Mostly frozen throughout the year
• Global warming and possibilities for the future
  – Melting of Arctic Ocean’s ice cover, opening up of Arctic ports and even passage through the Bering Strait
  – Shrinking the area of permafrost
  – Improvement of agriculture on the Russian Plain
  – New oil and gas reserves
  – Expanding the Russian geographic realm northward

Ecologies at Risk
• Global warming and environmental disruption:
  – Animal and human communities have adapted to the harsh prevailing climate conditions of the arctic.
• New oil and natural gas exploration:
  – Offshore environments could also face dangers as these new resources become exploited.
• Globalization forces are infiltrating a part of the world long protected by distance and nature.

Russia’s Natural Riches
• Nearly all raw materials required by modern industry are present:
  – Oil and natural gas
  – Coal, iron ore, and other metals
• Much of the realm is yet to be fully explored.
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**Russian Roots**

- 1000 years ago: Slavic settlement, or Rus
- Established in present-day Ukraine and southwestern corner of the Russian Plain
  - Location had physical landscape favorable to settlement and agriculture
  - Many “Russians” today see Ukraine as their historic heartland
- Eventually spanned ecological regions, of northern forests and southern steppes, or semiarid grasslands

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**Russian Roots: The Mongol Invasion**

- Mongol-Tatar horse armies were sent to conquer Russes.
- Russian Plains Russes were vulnerable on open steppes.
- Forest Russes were able to fend off the Tatars.
- Russes paid tribute to the Mongol-Tatar invaders.
- Moscow established trade with other Russes.
- Mongols attacked Moscow again and failed.
- Some Tatars stayed in the periphery of the realm.
- Many eventually converted to Islam.
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**Russian Roots:**

**Grand Duchy of Muscovy**

- 14th century rise
  - Rule of princes or dukes
  - Extension of trade and religious ties
- Three centuries of territorial growth
  - By 16th century...
    - Was a military power in nearly constant warfare
    - Was an imperial state with centralized administrative control

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**Building the Russian Empire:**

**Czarist Russia**

- Peter the Great led a modern, European-style state:
  - St. Petersburg built as a forward capital on edge of Swedish-held Finland on the Baltic
  - Developed as Russia’s leading port for trade
    - Researched shipbuilding for Russia to become a naval power
- Other czars continued to conquer peoples and territory:
  - Russian colonists settled southeastern frontiers and beyond
Russians in North America

- Russians were the first white settlers in Alaska:
  - Fur traders, in search of sea otter pelts
  - From Siberia, crossing the Bering Strait
  - Moved south along the Pacific coast, stopping just north of San Francisco
- Russian departure:
  - Competition with American, Canadian, and British hunters who were destroying sea otter populations
  - Russia sold off its North American holdings in 1867

Building the Russian Empire: Nineteenth-Century Expansion

- Extension into Eurasia continued:
  - South- and westward
  - Central Asia
  - Including Muslim peoples given some autonomy
  - Trans-Siberian Railroad and occupation of Manchuria
    - Threatened Japan and sparked war in 1904
    - Defeated by Japan, losing some territory
  - Expansion through imperialism
    - Necessary because of the limitations of Russia’s site

Building the Russian Empire: Nineteenth-Century Expansion

- Russian expansionism annexed and incorporated many nationalities and cultures.
- Russia controlled as many as 100 different nationalities.
- The Russian Revolution was a struggle among Russian citizens:
  - Communities won out, creating the Soviet Union.
  - Colonized people were given autonomy and identity, yet strengthened political and economic subjugation.
The Soviet Union: The Political Framework

- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)
  - Based on ethnic identities
  - Divided into 15 Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs)
  - Broadly corresponded to a major nationality’s territory
  - Within the SSRs, smaller minorities were designated Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs)
  - Below that were Autonomous Regions

- Complicated, cumbersome and poorly designed political framework

The Soviet Union: A Phantom Federation

- Federation: indicates a sharing of power between central government and subdivisions
- Difficulty of multinational federation
  - Communist planners revised the cultural map
  - Forced relocation of ethnic minorities in the east
  - Russification saw the settlement of ethnic Russians throughout the Russian SSR and non-Russian SSRs
- Highly territorially and politically centralized on the Russian Republic
The Soviet Union: The Soviet Economic Framework

- Economic experiment: Communism
  - Centrally planned economy by communist leaders had two principle objectives:
    1. Accelerate industrialization
      - As a command economy, state planners assigned production of certain goods to particular places
      - No thought to existing or efficient economic geographies
      - Expensive manufacturing with no competition
    2. Collectivize agriculture
      - Never productive and incurred loss of millions of lives

The New Russia

- Demise
  - The centrally planned economy failed.
  - Cold War arms race drained resources.
  - Russification fueled drive for independence by ethnicities of the non-Russian SSRs
- Implosion of the Soviet Union: 1991
  - Last Soviet president resigned.
  - SSRs declared their independence, depriving Russia of crucial agricultural and mineral resources.

The New Russia: A Complex Cultural Mosaic

- Russian dominance
  - Majority of realm’s population
  - Most widely dispersed
- Non-Russians
  - Along realm’s borders
    - Other Slavic peoples
    - Beyond the Caucasus Mountains
    - Turkic peoples from Central Asia
The New Russia: A Complex Cultural Mosaic

Map Analysis Activity:
Comparing Peoples, Cities and Surface Links

1. What physical and human-made features correspond with the patterns of the Russian realm's peoples?
2. What other geographic features not mapped help to explain the patterns of culture and settlement?

The New Russia: Cities Near and Far

- Comparatively low rates of urbanization
  - Transcaucasus region even less urbanized
- Urban network
  - Moscow and St. Petersburg anchor the Russian core
  - Historic urban centers
  - Post-czarist industrial cities along the Volga River
- East of the Urals, cities thin out
  - Russian Far East: post naval power
  - Kamchatka Peninsula: urban desertion
  - Capitals of Transcaucasus
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The New Russia:
The Near Abroad

- Collapse of Soviet Union
  - Loss of Eastern European satellite states under Soviet political dominance and former republics
- Near Abroad: former Soviet republics and a new Russian sphere of influence
  - Russia's policy of intervention in any threat along its borders or against Russian minorities

What do you think?
- Does Russia have the right to intervene in other Near Abroad states, regardless the reason? Why?

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Regional Issue:
How Far Do Russia's Right in the Near Abroad Really Go?

In Favor of Strong Russian Influence
- It is necessary to protect Russia and its allies in the Near Abroad.
- History of strong Russian influence was beneficial to countries of the Near Abroad.
- Conflict is directed at Russia, just as much as Russia is blamed for conflict.

Opposed of Strong Russian Influence
- Experience of Russians in the former republic was never good.
- Russia's influence in the Near Abroad was all colonialism, except in name.
- Nothing is gained from assertive Russian violence in the Near Abroad.
### A Realm in Transition

- **Russian Federation:**
  - Still bears the marks of the Soviet era
  - Strives for good relations with the Near Abroad
  - Maintains cohesion and further economic well-being

- **Possibly questionable future of the Russian Federation:**
  - As a state that borders 14 other countries and 4 other realms
  - Challenges to manage its massive territory and diversity

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