Chapter 2A:
The Russian Realm
The Russian Realm

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

1. The Russian Plain
   - Continuation of North European lowland
   - Russia’s core area

2. The Ural Mountains
   - North-south mountains
     - Not tall enough to hinder transportation
   - Divides Russia in 2 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

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3. West Siberian Plain
   - World’s largest unbroken lowland where rivers flow northward, like the Ob River

4. Central Siberian Plateau
   - East of the Yenisey River
   - Higher relief
   - Most sparsely populated areas in the habitable world

5. Yakutsk Basin
   - Moderate topography drained by the Lena River

6. Eastern Highlands
   - Remote jumble of ranges
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: *Physiographic Regions*

**Kamchatka and Sakhalin**
- Pacific Ring of Fire
  - Kamchatka Peninsula
    - Volatile volcanism
  - Sakhalin Island
    - Prevalent earthquakes, oil & gas reserves

**The Southern Perimeter**

7. Central Asian Ranges
   - High relief location of Lake Baykal

8. Caucasus Mountains
   - Barrier & zone of conflict for Russia & neighbors
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: Harsh Environments

• Climate context: **continentiality**
  – Inland climatic environment remote from moderating & moistening maritime influence

• Environmental affect:
  – **Permafrost**: water in the ground is permanently frozen
  – High latitude ecology
    • **Tundra**: bare ground & rock with lichen, mosses & low grass
    • **Taiga**: “snowforest” of coniferous trees
Figure 2A-3
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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
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: 
**Harsh Environments**

Map Analysis Activity:  
**Comparing Climate & 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 & possibilities for the future
  - Melting of Arctic Ocean’s ice cover, opening up of Arctic ports & even passage through the Bering Strait
  - Shrinking the area of permafrost
  - Improvement of agriculture on the Russian Plain
  - New oil & gas reserves
  - Expanding the Russian geographic realm northward
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: Harsh Environments

Ecologies at Risk

• Global warming & environmental disruption
  – Animal & Human communities have adapted to the harsh prevailing climate conditions of the arctic

• New oil & 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 & nature
Russia’s Natural Riches

• Nearly all raw materials required by modern industry are present
  – Oil and natural gas
  – Coal, iron ore & other metals

• Much of the realm is yet to be fully explored
Figure 2A-5
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Russian Roots

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

- Mongol invasion
  - Mongol-Tatar horse armies sent to conquer Russes
  - Russian Plains Russes vulnerable on open steppes
  - Forest Russes were able to fend off the Tatars
    - 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
    - Eventually being converted to Islam
Russian Roots: Grand Duchy of Muscovy

- **14th century rise**
  - Rule of princes or dukes
  - Extension of trade & religious ties

- **3 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**

- Building a modern, European-style state
  - St. Petersburg a **forward capital** was built 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

- Continued to conquer peoples & territory
  - Russian colonists settled southeastern frontiers & beyond

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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 & 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- & westward
  - Central Asia
    - including Muslim peoples given some autonomy
    - Trans-Siberian Railroad & occupation of Manchuria
      - Threatened Japan & sparked war in 1904
      - Defeated by Japan, losing some territory

- Expansion through imperialism
  - Necessary because of the limitations of Russia’s site
A Multinational Empire: Nineteenth-Century Expansion

• Russian expansionism annexed & incorporated many nationalities & cultures
  – Controlled as much 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 & identity, yet strengthened political & 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 & poorly designed political framework
The Soviet Union: 
A Phantom Federation

- **Federation**: indicates a sharing of power between central government & 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 & non-Russian SSRs
- Highly territorially & politically centralized on the Russian Republic
The Soviet Union: 
*The Soviet Economic Framework*

- Economic experiment: Communism
  - *Centrally planned* economy by communist leaders had 2 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. To *collectivize* agriculture
     - Never productive & incurred loss of millions of lives

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The New Russia

• Demise
  – Structural failure of the centrally planned economy
  – Drained resources of the Cold War arms race
  – 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
    • Russia lost crucial agricultural & 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 people from Central Asia
Map Analysis Activity:

Comparing Peoples, Cities & 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 & 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: past naval power
    • Kamchatka Peninsula: urban desertion
  – Capitals of Transcaucasia
The New Russia: The Near Abroad

- Collapse of Soviet Union
  - Loss of Eastern European *satellite states* under Soviet political dominance & former Republics
- **Near Abroad**: former Soviet Republics & 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?
Regional Issue: How Far Do Russia’s Right in the Near Abroad Really Go?

In favor of Strong Russian Influence
• 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 in is directed at Russia, just as much as Russia is blamed for conflict

Opposed of Strong Russian Influence
• Experience of Russians in the former republics 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
  - Strive for good relations with the Near Abroad
  - Maintain cohesion & further economic well-being

- Questionable future of the Russian Federation
  - As a state that borders 14 other countries & 4 other realms
  - Management of its massive territory & diversity