THE RUSSIAN REALM – Part 1

Defining the Realm
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
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: Physiographic Regions

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
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: Physiographic Regions

Kamchatka and Sakhalin
- Pacific Ring of Fire
  - Kamchatka Peninsula
  - Volatile volcanism
- Sakhalin Island
  - Prevalent 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
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
  - High latitude ecology
    - **Tundra**: bare ground and rock with lichen, mosses and low grass
    - **Taiga**: “snowforest” of coniferous trees
CLIMATES OF RUSSIA AND NEIGHBORING STATES

B  DRY CLIMATE  C  HUMID TEMperate CLIMATE  D  HUMID COLD CLIMATE  E  COLD POLAR CLIMATE  H  HIGHLAND CLIMATE

<table>
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<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h=hot</td>
<td>c=short, cool summer</td>
<td>b=cool summer</td>
<td>d=very cold winter</td>
<td>Unclassified highlands</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Taiga (snowforest)

Figure 2A-3
© H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
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.
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: Harsh Environments

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
Physical Geography of the Russian Realm: Harsh Environments

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.
Despite current dependence on Russia for energy, Ukraine and Moldova are increasing their economic ties with the European Union. Conversely, 68.2% of Belarus’s imports and 47% of its exports are with Russia.

Principal Russian Far East exports are fish, timber, oil, natural gas, coal, and minerals.

Over 75% of the people in the Central Asian republics are Muslim and share religious and economic concerns with Southwest Asia.
Water Issues

- **River Systems**
  - Dnieper River is the principle river of the Ukraine, used as a transport conduit to the World Ocean and a energy resource (hydroelectric dams)
  - Volga River is the chief waterway of European Russia used for transport, it is also a site for many hydroelectric power plants
  - The Ob, Yenisy, and Lena Rivers are all located east of the Urals, and flow from south to north into the Arctic Sea
Water Issues

- **Rivers, Irrigation, and the Loss of the Aral Sea**
  - Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers have long been used for irrigation of commercial cotton agriculture.
  - Diverting the water of these two rivers for agricultural use was the cause of the loss of the Aral Sea, once the fourth largest lake in the world.
  - The loss of the Aral Sea has been described as the largest man made ecological disaster on earth.
  - The loss of the Aral Sea has also impacted climate change as well as human health.
  - Efforts to increase water flows to the sea have been effective, in 2006 the water level in the sea had risen 10ft.
Figure 5.7
World Regional Geography, Fifth Edition
© 2011 W.H. Freeman and Company

The Aral Sea is a large inland sea located in Central Asia. It is divided into two parts: the Northern Aral Sea and the Southern Aral Sea. The sea has shrunk significantly due to the diversion of rivers for irrigation purposes. The map shows the 1960, 1989, 2004, and 2007 shorelines, highlighting the extent of the shrinking Aral Sea.

Key features on the map include:
- Northern Aral Sea
- Southern Aral Sea
- 2008 shoreline
- 2007 shoreline
- 2004 shoreline
- 1989 shoreline
- 1960 shoreline
- Uchsay
- Muynog
- Shymkent
- Taraz
- Tashkent
- Dushanbe
- Ashkhabad
- Mary
- Kara Kum Canal
- Samarkand
- Bukhara
- Karshi
- Termiz

The map also highlights Iowa (I) and the border between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
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
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.
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
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 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 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 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 people from Central Asia

Concept Caching: Buryat and Russian Boys in Ulan Ude, Buryat Republic

© Barbara Weightman
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: 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 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?
### Regional Issue:
**How Far Do Russia’s Right in the Near Abroad Really Go?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Favor of Strong Russian Influence</th>
<th>Opposed of Strong Russian Influence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- It is necessary to protect Russia and its allies in the Near Abroad.</td>
<td>- Experience of Russians in the former republics was never good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- History of strong Russian influence was beneficial to countries of the Near Abroad.</td>
<td>- Russia’s influence in the Near Abroad was all colonialism, except in name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conflict in is directed at Russia, just as much as Russia is blamed for conflict.</td>
<td>- Nothing is gained from assertive Russian violence in the Near Abroad.</td>
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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