

Chapter 2





Russia



CONCEPTS, IDEAS, AND TERMS

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REGIONS

-  RUSSIAN CORE AND PERIPHERIES
-  EASTERN FRONTIER
-  SIBERIA
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*T*HE RUSSIAN state a geographic realm? A look at a globe yields an affirmative answer. Russia is the world's largest state territorially, it has a substantial population, it has common borders with countries from Norway to North Korea, and it extends from the Arctic Ocean to the Black and Caspian seas. More than twice as large as the conterminous United States and stretching across 11 time zones, Russia is the planet's giant.

For most of the twentieth century, Russia was the cornerstone of the Soviet Union, one of the world's two superpowers with a mighty military and a large arsenal of nuclear weapons. With a communist ideology and a global alliance that stretched from Havana to Hanoi, the Soviets built a political and economic system that extended far beyond Russia's boundaries.

Even now, there is more to Russia than lies within its political borders. Russia, like France and Spain and other former colonial powers, lay at the heart of a colonial sphere that continues to this day to carry the imprints of empire. In the centuries of the conquering czars, Russian armies drove far into Russia's periphery and established a permanent Russian presence from Transcaucasia to Central Asia. During the seven decades of communist colonization, Russian settlers by the millions moved into non-Russian territories from Kaliningrad to Kazakhstan. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, just as in the case of British, French, Portuguese, and other empires earlier, its colonial settlers were left stranded, in many cases far from home in newly independent countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The new leaders in post-Soviet Moscow had many problems, and one of these was the well-being of those Russians beyond its borders. Several million ethnic Russians returned home, but many

millions more remained—and continue to remain—under the jurisdiction of non-Russian governments (see Table 2-1).

Travel from Rostov in the southwest across the nearby Ukrainian border to Donetsk, and you will have left Russia but not Russia's cultural landscapes (Fig. 2-1). Travel from Kurgan east of the Urals across the Kazakhstan border to Petropavlovsk, and don't expect to see anything different: northern Kazakhstan is as Russian as southern Russia itself. Russian minorities in Estonia, Latvia, Moldova, and other former colonies continue to look to Moscow for support when their privileges or rights are abridged. In Moscow, the geographic concept of a **Near Abroad** took hold, a sphere of influence in the former Soviet periphery where Russia would reserve the right to protect the interests of its kin. As time went on, and Russian expatriates either returned home or adjusted to their new situation, that notion lost its urgency. Still Russia projected its power onto small neighbors when it perceived the need and opportunity, as it did in the Georgian province of Abkhazia, where its actions fomented secessionist ideas and had the effect of destabilizing the government in Tbilisi, Georgia's capital.

During the 1990s, postcommunist, post-Soviet Russia was a reorganizing state, struggling to achieve democratic government, to reform its economy, to deal with minority issues, and to define a new role in the world. It was a time of chaos and setbacks, of corruption and opportunism, of administrative weakness, of cultural breakdown and military failure. Russia's first elected president, the amiable, unpredictable, ineffectual, pliable Boris Yeltsin, in some ways personified the rudderless state. Surveys indicated that a majority of Russian

MAJOR GEOGRAPHIC QUALITIES OF

Russia

1. Russia is the largest territorial state in the world. Its area is nearly twice as large as that of the next-ranking country (Canada).
2. Russia is the northernmost large and populous country in the world; much of it is cold and/or dry. Extensive rugged mountain zones separate Russia from warmer subtropical air, and the country lies open to Arctic air masses.
3. Russia was one of the world's major colonial powers. Under the czars, the Russians forged the world's largest contiguous empire; the Soviet rulers who succeeded the czars took over and expanded this empire.
4. For so large an area, Russia's population of under 142 million is comparatively small. The population remains heavily concentrated in the westernmost one-fifth of the country.
5. Development in Russia is concentrated west of the Ural Mountains; here lie the major cities, leading industrial regions, densest transport networks, and most productive farming areas. National integration and economic development east of the Urals extend mainly along a narrow corridor that stretches from the southern Urals region to the southern Far East around Vladivostok.
6. Russia is a multicultural state with a complex domestic political geography. Twenty-one internal Republics, originally based on ethnic clusters, function as politico-geographical entities.
7. Its large territorial size notwithstanding, Russia suffers from land encirclement within Eurasia; it has few good and suitably located ports.
8. Regions long part of the Russian and Soviet empires are realigning themselves in the postcommunist era. Eastern Europe and the heavily Muslim Southwest Asia realm are encroaching on Russia's imperial borders.
9. The failure of the Soviet communist system left Russia in economic disarray. Many of the long-term components described in this chapter (food-producing areas, railroad links, pipeline connections) broke down in the transition to the postcommunist order.
10. Russia long has been a source of raw materials but not a manufacturer of export products, except weaponry. Few Russian (or Soviet) automobiles, televisions, cameras, or other consumer goods reach world markets.



citizens yearned for a stronger government, more security (Islamic terrorism in Moscow alone took hundreds of lives), a harnessing of the opportunists, known as **oligarchs**, who had used their ties to government to enrich themselves, and much more stability than the new administration was able to provide.

And that is what Russia got when President Vladimir Putin succeeded Yeltsin and was subsequently reelected. Putin left no doubt: he intended to restore Russia's military power, reinforce its economy, weaken political opposition, imprison oligarchs, muzzle the media, defeat the

terrorists in their home base, protect Russian interests beyond the country's borders, and reassert Russia's global geopolitical role. In 2004, when a close presidential election in neighboring Ukraine pitted a pro-Moscow candidate against a pro-Europe opponent, Putin actually campaigned for the pro-Russian candidate. When the election, narrowly won by the candidate he favored, was voided because of widespread fraud, he angrily denounced that action. Europe and Russia are drifting apart, not converging, and the geographic-realm boundary in Figure G-2 is as divisive as ever.

DEFINING THE REALM

As we noted in the Introduction, geographic realms usually are bounded not by sharply etched borders, but by zones of transition. In the case of the realm dominated by Russia, this certainly is the case, and Russia's imperial history has much to do with it. In Chapter 1 we noted how *Belarus* is a component of neither Europe nor Russia, a malfunctioning state that was part of the Soviet Union and today remains a throwback to the days of authoritarian pol-

itics and stagnant economics. This country fits neither the European nor the Russian realm criteria, although a convergence with Russia appeared more likely in 2005 than any opening toward Europe. A second transitional area is the *Transcaucasus* between the Black and Caspian seas. Here, as we note later, Russia has an internal problem with a set of ethnic "republics" of which one, Chechnya, has caused a still-unfolding disaster by rejecting Moscow's

Table 2-1
SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OTHER 14 EX-SOVIET REPUBLICS

Name	Population (Millions)	Percent Russians	Religion	Official Language
Armenia	3.2	1	Armenian Orthodox (Christian) 65%	Armenian
Azerbaijan	8.4	3	Shi'ite Muslim 93%	Azerbaijani
Belarus	9.7	11	Belarussian Orthodox, Roman Catholic 49%	Belarussian Russian
Estonia	1.3	26	Estonian Orthodox, Estonian Lutheran 34%	Estonian
Georgia	4.5	6	Georgian, Russian Orthodox 40%; Sunni Muslim 11%	Georgian
Kazakhstan	15.2	30	Sunni Muslim 47%; Russian Orthodox 8%	Kazakh
Kyrgyzstan	5.2	13	Sunni Muslim 75%	Kyrgyz; Russian
Latvia	2.3	29	Christian Churches 40%	Latvian
Lithuania	3.4	6	Roman Catholic 79%	Lithuanian
Moldova	4.2	13	Eastern Orthodox 46%	Romanian
Tajikistan	6.9	1	Sunni Muslim 85%	Tajik
Turkmenistan	5.9	6	Sunni Muslim 87%	Turkmen
Ukraine	46.7	17	Ukrainian Orthodox 30%	Ukrainian
Uzbekistan	27.3	6	Sunni Muslim 76%	Uzbek

rule with armed resistance. Here, too, lie three former Soviet colonies, now independent countries, that are nonetheless drawn into the Russian orbit: Georgia, Armenia, and, to a lesser degree, Azerbaijan. And still another transitory area lies, as we noted, in Russian-populated northern *Kazakhstan*. There is indeed more to the Russian realm than lies within Russia itself.

And within its borders, Russia still is an empire. It was the Soviet Empire that disintegrated, not the Russian one: about 20 percent of Russia's more than 140 million inhabitants are non-Russians, including numerous minorities large and small whose presence is reflected by the administrative map. The Chechens are but one of those minorities, many of which look back upon a history of mistreatment but most of which have accommodated themselves to the reality of Russian dominance. Russia's failure in Chechnya should not obscure what was in fact a remarkable success of the Yeltsin administration: avoiding the collapse of administrative order and the secession of minority-based "republics" throughout the country. For a time, it seemed that Tatarstan, the historic home of Muslim Tatars, would declare independence along with other minorities long unhappy under Soviet-Russian rule. But Yeltsin's government gave these peoples ways to express their demands and to negotiate their terms, and in

the end the Russian map stayed intact—except in the Transcaucasus. Still, one of the risks inherent in a return to "strong" government is a reversal of this good fortune. Chechnya's rebellion and Muslim Chechens' terrorist actions have already made life much more difficult for other minorities on the streets of Moscow and other cities, where many ethnic Russians equate minority appearance and dress with rebellion and risk. Alienating Russia's other minorities risks the future of the state itself.

ROOTS OF THE RUSSIAN REALM

The name *Russia* evokes cultural-geographic images of a stormy past: terrifying czars, conquering Cossacks, Byzantine bishops, rousing revolutionaries, clashing cultures. Russians repulsed the Tatar (Mongol) hordes, forged a powerful state, colonized a vast contiguous empire, defeated Napoleon, adopted communism, and, when the communist system failed, lost most of their imperial domain. Today, Russia seeks a new place in the globalizing world.

Precommunist Russia may be described as a culture of extremes. It was a culture of strong nationalism, resistance to change, and despotic rule. Enormous wealth was



In the 1960s visitors to the (then) Soviet Union, one of the authors of this book among them, were shocked by the fate of virtually all of the country's Christian churches, whose condition ranged from bad repair to outright ruin. Architecturally ornate and historic church buildings with superb murals and exquisite glasswork stood empty, subject to the elements and vandalism. Doors and furniture had been taken for firewood; some churches served as barns, others as storage. In his atheist zeal, Josef Stalin ordered the demolition of one of Moscow's religious treasures, the Christ-the-Savior Cathedral (other Moscow cathedrals fared better and were turned into museums). This photograph symbolizes the reversal of fortunes following the collapse of the Soviet Union: religion is again a part of Russian life, the Russian Orthodox Church again dominates the religious map, and a reconstructed Cathedral of the Savior again stands where it did before the communist era. © Harf Zimmerman

concentrated in a small elite. Powerful rulers and bejeweled aristocrats perpetuated their privileges at the expense of millions of peasants and serfs who lived in dreadful poverty. The Industrial Revolution arrived late in Russia, and a middle class was slow to develop. Yet the Russian nation gained the loyalty of many of its citizens, and its writers and artists were among the world's greatest. Authors such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky chronicled the plight of the poor; composers celebrated the indomitable Russian people and, as Tchaikovsky did in his *1812 Overture*, commemorated their victories over foreign foes.

Under the czars, Russia grew from nation into empire. The czars' insatiable demands for wealth, territory, and power sent Russian armies across the plains of Siberia, through the deserts of interior Asia, and into the mountains along Russia's rim. Russian pioneers ventured even farther, entering Alaska, traveling down the Pacific coast of North America, and planting the Russian flag near San Francisco in 1812. But as Russia's empire expanded, its internal weaknesses gnawed at the power of the czars. Peasants rebelled. Unpaid (and poorly fed) armies mutinied. When the czars tried to initiate reforms, the aristocracy objected. The empire at the beginning of the twentieth century was ripe for revolution, which began in 1905 (see box titled "The Soviet Union, 1924–1991").

The last czar, Nicholas II, was overthrown in 1917, and civil war followed. The victorious communists led by V. I. Lenin soon swept away much of the Russia of the past. The Russian flag disappeared. The czar and his family were executed. The old capital of Russia, St. Petersburg, was renamed Leningrad in honor of the revolu-

tionary leader. Moscow, in the interior of the country, was chosen as the new capital for a country with a new name, the *Soviet Union*. Eventually, this Union consisted of 15 political entities, each a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). Russia was just one of these republics, and the name *Russia* disappeared from the international map.

But on the Soviet map, Russia was the giant, the dominant republic, the Slavic center. Not for nothing was the communist revolution known as the Russian Revolution. The other republics of the Soviet Union were for minorities the czars had colonized or for countries that fell under Soviet sway later, but none could begin to match Russia. The Soviet Empire was the legacy of czarist expansionism, and the new communist rulers were Russian first and foremost (with the exception of Josef Stalin, who was a Georgian).

Officially, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics endured from 1924 to 1991. When the USSR collapsed, the republics were set free and world maps had to be redrawn. Now Russia and its former colonies had to adjust to the realities of a changing world order. It proved to be a difficult, sometimes desperate journey.

RUSSIA'S PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Russia's physiography is dominated by vast plains and plateaus rimmed by rugged mountains (Fig. 2-2). Only the Ural Mountains break an expanse of low relief that extends from the Polish border to eastern Siberia. In the western part of this huge plain, where the northern pine

The Soviet Union, 1924–1991

For 67 years Russia was the cornerstone of the Soviet Union, the so-called Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Soviet Union was the product of the Revolution of 1917, when more than a decade of rebellion against the rule of Czar Nicholas II led to his abdication. Russian revolutionary groups were called soviets (“councils”), and they had been active since the first workers’ uprising in 1905. In that year, thousands of Russian workers marched on the czar’s palace in St. Petersburg in protest, and soldiers fired on them. Hundreds were killed and wounded. Russia descended into chaos.

A coalition of military and professional men forced the czar’s abdication in 1917. Then Russia was ruled briefly by a provisional government. In November 1917, the country held its first democratic election—and, as it turned out, its last for more than 70 years.

The provisional government allowed the exiled activists in the Bolshevik camp to return to Russia (there were divisions among the revolutionaries): Lenin from Switzerland, Trotsky from New York, and Stalin from internal exile in Siberia. In the ensuing political struggle, Lenin’s Bolsheviks gained control over the revolutionary soviets, and this

ushered in the era of communism. In 1924, the new communist empire was formally renamed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or Soviet Union in shorthand.

Lenin the organizer died in 1924 and was succeeded by Stalin the tyrant, and many of the peoples under Moscow’s control suffered unimaginably. In pursuit of communist reconstruction, Stalin and his adherents starved millions of Ukrainian peasants to death, forcibly relocated entire ethnic groups (including a people known as the Chechens), and exterminated “uncooperative” or “disloyal” peoples. The full extent of these horrors may never be known.

On December 25, 1991, the inevitable occurred: the Soviet Union ceased to exist, its economy a shambles, its political system shattered, the communist experiment a failure. The last Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev, resigned, and the Soviet hammer-and-sickle flag flying atop the Kremlin was lowered for the last time and immediately replaced by the white, red, and blue Russian tricolor. A new and turbulent era had begun, but Soviet structures and systems will long cast their shadows over transforming Russia.

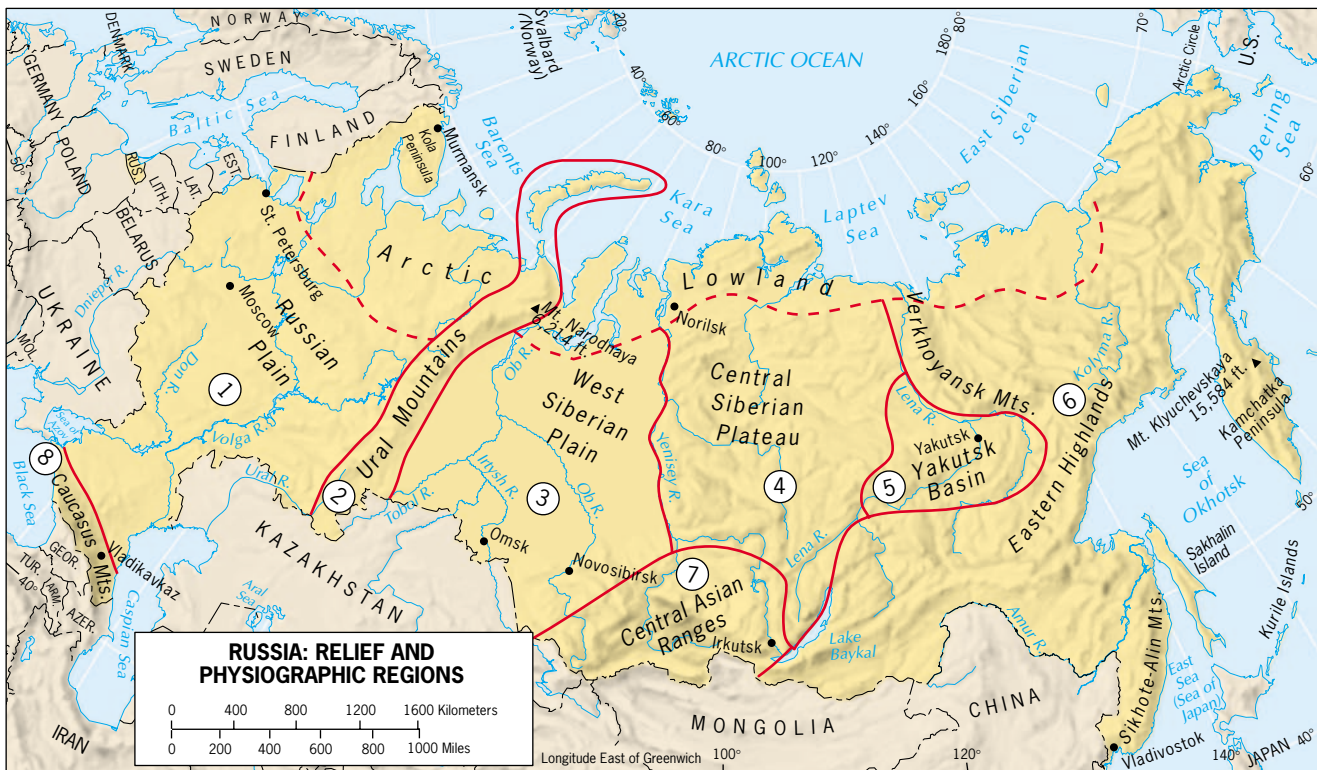


FIGURE 2-2 © H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

forests meet the mid-latitude grasslands, the Slavs established their domain.

The historical geography of Russia is the story of Slavic expansion from its populous western heartland across interior Eurasia to the east and into the mountains and deserts of the south. This eastward march was hampered not only by vast distances but also by harsh natural conditions. As the northernmost populous country on Earth, Russia has virtually no natural barriers against the onslaught of Arctic air. Moscow lies farther north than Edmonton, Canada, and St. Petersburg lies at latitude 60° North—the latitude of the southern tip of Greenland. Winters are long, dark, and bitterly cold in most of Russia; summers are short and growing seasons limited. Many a Siberian frontier outpost was doomed by cold, snow, and hunger.

3 It is therefore useful to view Russia's past, present, and future in the context of its **climatology**. This field of geography investigates not only the distribution of climatic conditions over the Earth's surface but also the processes that generate this spatial arrangement. The Earth's atmosphere traps heat received as radiation from the Sun, but this *greenhouse effect* varies over planetary space—and over time. As we noted in the introductory chapter, much of what is today Russia was in the grip of

a glaciation until the onset of the warmer Holocene. But even today, with a natural warming cycle in progress augmented by human activity, Russia still suffers from severe cold and associated drought. If the enhanced global warming cycle continues, Russia (in contrast to low-lying countries faced by rising sea levels) may benefit. But that will take generations.

4 Currently precipitation totals, even in western Russia, range from modest to minimal because the warm, moist air carried across Europe from the North Atlantic Ocean loses much of its warmth and moisture by the time it reaches Russia. Figures G-7, G-8, and 2-3 (below) reveal the consequences. Russia's climatic **continentality** (inland climatic environment remote from moderating and moistening maritime influences) is expressed by its prevailing *Dfb* and *Dfc* conditions. Compare the Russian map to that of North America (Fig. G-8), and you note that, except for a small corner off the Black Sea, Russia's climatic conditions resemble those of the U.S. Upper Midwest and Canada. Along its entire north, Russia has a zone of *E* climates, the most frigid on the planet. In these Arctic latitudes originate the polar air masses that dominate its environments.

By studying Russia's climates we can begin to understand what the map of population distribution (Fig. G-9) shows. The overwhelming majority of the country's

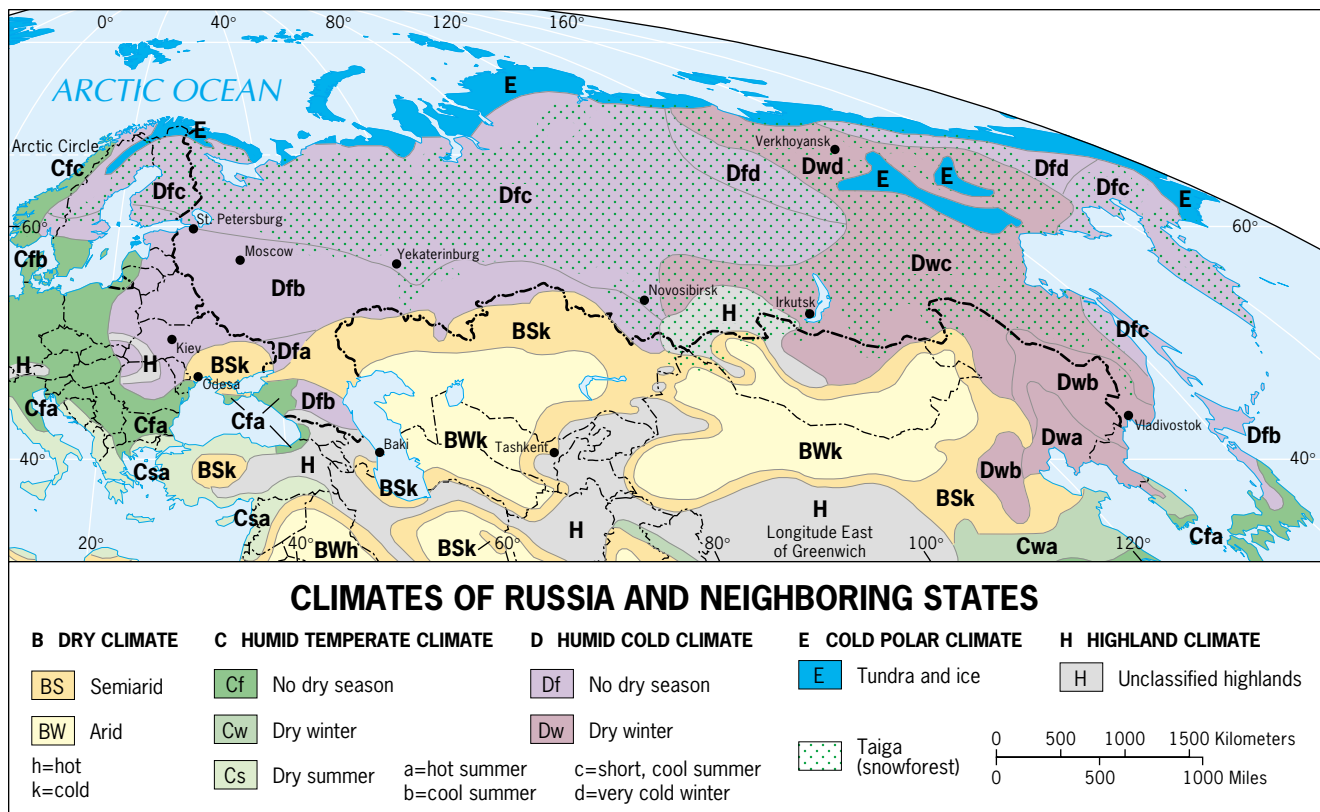


FIGURE 2-3 © H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

142 million people are concentrated in the west and southwest, where climatic conditions were least difficult at a time when farming was the mainstay for most of the population. This map is a legacy that will mark Russia's living space for generations to come.

- 5 Climate and weather (there is a distinction: *climate* is a long-term average, whereas **weather** refers to existing atmospheric conditions at a given place and time) have always challenged Russia's farmers. Conditions are most favorable in the west, but even there temperature extremes, variable and undependable rainfall, and short growing seasons make farming difficult. During the Soviet period, fertile and productive Ukraine supplied much of Russia's food needs, but even then Russia often had to import grain. Soviet rulers wanted to reduce their country's dependence on imported food, and their communist planners built major irrigation projects to increase crop yields in the colonized republics of Central Asia. As we will see in Chapter 7, some of these attempts to overcome nature's limitations spelled disaster for the local people.

Physiographic Regions

To assess the physiography of this vast country, refer again to Figure 2-2. Note how mountains and deserts encircle Russia: the Caucasus in the southwest (8); the Central Asian Ranges in the center (7); the Eastern Highlands facing the Pacific from the Bering Sea to the East Sea (Sea of Japan) (6). The Kamchatka Peninsula has a string of active volcanoes in one of the world's most earthquake-prone zones (Fig. G-5). Warm subtropical air thus has little opportunity to penetrate Russia, while cold Arctic air sweeps southward without impediment. Russia's Arctic north is a gently sloping lowland broken only by the Urals and Eastern Highlands.

- Russia's vast and complex physical stage can be divided into eight physiographic regions, each of which, at a larger scale, can be subdivided into smaller units. In the Siberian region, one criterion for such subdivision would be the vegetation. The Russian language has given us two terms to describe this vegetation: **tundra**, the treeless plain along the Arctic shore where mosses, lichens, and some grasses survive, and **taiga**, the mostly coniferous forests that begin to the south of where the tundra ends, and extend over vast reaches of Siberia, which means the "sleeping land" in Russian.
- 6
- 7

The Russian Plain (1) is the eastward continuation of the North European Lowland, and here the Russian state formed its first core area. Travel north from Moscow at its heart, and the countryside soon is covered by needleleaf forests like those of Canada; to the south lie the grain fields of southern Russia and, beyond, those of Ukraine. Note the Kola Peninsula and Barents Sea in the far north: warm water from the North Atlantic comes around north-

ern Norway and keeps the port of Murmansk ice free most of the year. The Russian Plain is bounded on the east by the Ural Mountains (2); though not a high range, it is topographically prominent because it separates two extensive plains. The range of the Urals is more than 2000 miles (3200 km) long and reaches from the shores of the Kara Sea to the border with Kazakhstan. It is not a barrier to east-west transportation, and its southern end is densely populated. Here the Urals yield minerals and fossil fuels.

East of the Urals lies Siberia. The West Siberian Plain (3) has been described as the world's largest unbroken lowland; this is the vast basin of the Ob and Irtysh rivers. Over the last 1000 miles (1600 km) of its course to the Arctic Ocean, the Ob falls less than 300 feet (90 m). In Figure 2-2, note the dashed line that extends from the Finnish border to the East Siberian Sea and offsets the Arctic Lowland. North of the line, water in the ground is permanently frozen; this **permafrost** creates another obstacle to permanent settlement. Looking again at the West Siberian Plain, we see that the north is permafrost-ridden and the central zone is marshy. The south, however, has such major cities as Omsk and Novosibirsk, within the corridor of the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

8

East of the West Siberian Plain the country begins to rise, first into the central Siberian Plateau (4), another sparsely settled, remote, permafrost-affected region. Here winters are long and cold, and summers are short; the area remains barely touched by human activity. Beyond the Yakutsk Basin (5), the terrain becomes mountainous and the relief high. The Eastern Highlands (6) are a jumbled mass of ranges and ridges, precipitous valleys, and volcanic mountains. Lake Baykal lies in a trough that is over 5000 feet (1500 m) deep—the deepest rift lake in the world (see Chapter 6). On the Kamchatka Peninsula, volcanic Mount Klyuchevskaya reaches nearly 15,600 feet (4750 m).

The northern part of region (6) is Russia's most inhospitable zone, but southward along the Pacific coast the climate is less severe. Nonetheless, this is a true frontier region. The forests provide opportunities for lumbering, a fur trade exists, and there are gold and diamond deposits.

Mountains also mark the southern margins of much of Russia. The Central Asian Ranges (7), from the Kazakh border in the west to Lake Baykal in the east, contain many glaciers whose annual meltwaters send alluvium-laden streams to enrich farmlands at lower elevations. The Caucasus (8), in the land corridor between the Black and Caspian seas, forms an extension of Europe's Alpine Mountains and exhibits a similarly high *relief* (range of elevations). Here Russia's southern border is sharply defined by *topography* (surface configuration).

As our physiographic map suggests, the more habitable terrain in Russia becomes latitudinally narrower

from west to east. Beyond the southern Urals, the zone of settlement in Russia becomes discontinuous (in Soviet times it extended into northern Kazakhstan, where a large Russian population still lives). Isolated towns did develop in Russia's vast eastern reaches, even in Siberia, but the tenuous ribbon of settlement does not widen again until it reaches the country's Far Eastern Pacific Rim.

EVOLUTION OF THE RUSSIAN STATE

Four centuries ago, when European kingdoms were sending fleets to distant shores to search for riches and capture colonies, there was little indication that the largest of all empires would one day center on a city in the forests halfway between Sweden and the Black Sea. The plains of Eurasia south of the taiga had seen waves of migrants sweep from east to west: Scythians, Sarmatians, Goths, Huns, and others came, fought, settled, and were absorbed or driven off. Eventually, the Slavs, heirs to these Eurasian infusions, emerged as the dominant culture in what is today Ukraine, south of Russia and north of the Black Sea.

From this base on fertile, productive soils, the Slavs expanded their domain, making Kiev (Kyiv) their southern headquarters and establishing Novgorod on Lake Ilmen in the north. Each was the center of a state known as a *Rus*, and both formed key links on a trade route between the German-speaking Hanseatic ports of the Baltic Sea and the trading centers of the Mediterranean. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Kievan Rus and the Novgorod Rus united to form a large and comparatively prosperous state astride forest and steppe (short-grass prairie).

The Mongol Invasion

Prosperity attracts attention, and far to the east, north of China, the Mongol Empire had been building under Genghis Khan. In the thirteenth century, the Mongol (Tatar) "hordes" rode their horses into the Kievan Rus, and the state fell. By mid-century, Slavs were fleeing into the forests, where the Mongol horsemen had less success than on the open plains of Ukraine. Here the Slavs reorganized, setting up several new Russes. Still threatened by the Tatars, the ruling princes paid tribute to the Mongols in exchange for peace.

Moscow, deep in the forest on the Moscow River, was one of these Russes. Its site was remote and defensible. Over time, Moscow established trade and political links with Novgorod and became the focus of a growing area of Slavic settlement. When the Mongols, worried about Moscow's expanding influence, attacked near the end of the fourteenth century and were repulsed, Moscow

emerged as the unchallenged center of the Slavic Russes. Soon its ruler, now called a Grand Duke, took control of Novgorod, and the stage was set for further growth.

Grand Duchy of Muscovy

Moscow's geographic advantages again influenced events. Its centrality, defensibility, links to Slavic settlements including Novgorod, and open frontiers to the north and west, where no enemies threatened, gave Moscow the potential to expand at the cost of its old enemies, the Mongols. Many of these invaders had settled in the basin of the Volga River and elsewhere, where the city of Kazan had become a major center of Islam, the Tatars' dominant religion. During the rule of Ivan the Terrible (1547–1584), the Grand Duchy of Muscovy became a major military power and imperial state. Its rulers called themselves czars and claimed to be the heirs of the Byzantine emperors. Now began the expansion of the Russian domain (Fig. 2-4), marked by the defeat of the Tatars at Kazan and the destruction of hundreds of mosques.

The Cossacks

This eastward expansion of Russia was spearheaded by a relatively small group of seminomadic peoples who came to be known as Cossacks and whose original home was in present-day Ukraine. Opportunists and pioneers, they sought the riches of the eastern frontier, chiefly furbearing animals, as early as the sixteenth century. By the mid-seventeenth century they reached the Pacific Ocean, defeating Tatars in their path and consolidating their gains by constructing *ostrogs* (strategic fortified waystations) along river courses. Before the eastward expansion halted in 1812 (Fig. 2-4), the Russians had moved across the Bering Strait to Alaska and down the western coast of North America into what is now northern California (see box titled "Russians in North America").

Czar Peter the Great

When Peter the Great became czar (he ruled from 1682 to 1725), Moscow already lay at the center of a great empire—great, at least, in terms of the territories it controlled. The Islamic threat had been ended with the defeat of the Tatars. The influence of the Russian Orthodox Church was represented by its distinctive religious architecture and powerful bishops. Peter consolidated Russia's gains and hoped to make a modern, European-style state out of his loosely knit country. He built St. Petersburg as a **forward capital** on the doorstep of Swedish-held Finland, fortified it with major military installations, and made it Russia's leading port.

Czar Peter the Great, an extraordinary leader, was in many ways the founder of modern Russia. In his desire to



FIGURE 2-4 © H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

remake Russia—to pull it from the forests of the interior to the waters of the west, to open it to outside influences, and to relocate its population—he left no stone unturned. Prominent merchant families were forced to move from other cities to St. Petersburg. Ships and wagons entering

the city had to bring building stones as an entry toll. The czar himself, aware that to become a major power Russia had to be strong at sea as well as on land, went to the Netherlands to work as a laborer in the famed Dutch shipyards to learn the most efficient method for building

Russians in North America

The first white settlers in Alaska were Russians, not Western Europeans, and they came across Siberia and the Bering Strait, not across the Atlantic and North America. Russian hunters of the sea otter, valued for its high-priced pelt, established their first Alaskan settlement at Kodiak Island in 1784. Moving south along the North American coast, the Russians founded additional villages and forts to protect their tenuous holdings until they reached as far as the area just north of San Francisco Bay, where they built Fort Ross in 1812.

But the Russian settlements were isolated and vulnerable. European fur traders began to put pressure on their Russian competitors, and St. Petersburg found the distant settlements a burden and a risk. In any case, American, British, and Canadian hunters were decimating the

sea otter population, and profits declined. When U.S. Secretary of State William Seward offered to purchase Russia's North American holdings in 1867, St. Petersburg quickly agreed—for \$7.2 million. Thus Alaska, including its lengthy southward coastal extension—the Alaskan “panhandle”—became U.S. territory and, eventually, the forty-ninth State. Although Seward was ridiculed for his decision—Alaska was called “Seward’s Folly” and “Seward’s Icebox”—he was vindicated when gold was discovered there in the 1890s. The twentieth century proved the wisdom of Seward’s action, strategically as well as economically. At Prudhoe Bay off Alaska’s northern Arctic slope, large oil reserves were tapped in the 1970s and are still being exploited. And like Siberia, Alaska probably contains yet-unknown riches.

ships. Meanwhile, the czar's forces continued to conquer people and territory: Estonia was incorporated in 1721, widening Russia's window to the west, and major expansion soon occurred south of the city of Tomsk (Fig. 2-4).

Czarina Catherine the Great

Under Czarina Catherine the Great, who ruled from 1760 to 1796, Russia's empire in the Black Sea area grew at the expense of the Ottoman Turks. The Crimea Peninsula, the port city of Odesa (Odessa), and the whole northern coastal zone of the Black Sea fell under Russian control. Also during this period, the Russians made a fateful move: they penetrated the area between the Black and Caspian seas, the mountainous Caucasus with dozens of ethnic and cultural groups, many of which were Islamized. The cities of Tbilisi (now in Georgia), Baki (Baku) in Azerbaijan, and Yerevan (Armenia) were captured. Eventually, the Russian push toward an Indian Ocean outlet was halted by the British, who held sway in Persia (modern Iran), and also by the Turks.

Meanwhile, Russian colonists entered Alaska, founding their first American settlement at Kodiak Island in 1784. As they moved southward, numerous forts were built to protect their tenuous holdings against indigenous peoples. Eventually, they reached nearly as far south as San Francisco Bay where, in the fateful year 1812, they erected Fort Ross.

Catherine the Great had made Russia a colonial power, but the Russians eventually gave up on their North American outposts. The sea-otter pelts that had attracted the early pioneers were running out, European and white American hunters were cutting into the profits, and Native American resistance was growing. When U.S. Secretary of State William Seward offered to purchase Russia's Alaskan holdings in 1867, the Russian government quickly agreed—for \$7.2 million. Thus Alaska and its Russian-held panhandle became U.S. territory and, ultimately, the forty-ninth State.

A Russian Empire

Although Russia withdrew from North America, Russian expansionism during the nineteenth century continued in Eurasia. While extending their empire southward, the Russians also took on the Poles, old enemies to the west, and succeeded in taking most of what is today the Polish state, including the capital of Warsaw. To the northwest, Russia took over Finland from the Swedes in 1809. During most of the nineteenth century, however, the Russians were preoccupied with Central Asia—the region between the Caspian Sea and western China—where Tashkent and Samarqand (Samarkand) came under St. Petersburg's control (Fig. 2-4). The Russians here were still bothered by raids of nomadic horsemen, and they sought to establish their authority over the Central Asian steppe

FROM THE FIELD NOTES

"Not only the city of St. Petersburg itself, but also its surrounding suburbs display the architectural and artistic splendor of czarist Russia. The czars built opulent palaces in these outlying districts (then some distance from the built-up center), among which the Catherine Palace, begun in 1717 and completed in 1723 followed by several expansions, was especially majestic. During my first visit in 1994 the palace, parts of which had been deliberately destroyed by the Germans during World War II, was still being restored; large black and white photographs in the hallways showed what the Nazis had done and chronicled the progress of the repairs during communist and post-communist years. A return visit in 2000 revealed the wealth of sculptural decoration on the magnificent exterior (left) and the interior detail of a set of rooms called the "golden suite" of which the ballroom (right) exemplifies eighteenth-century Russian Baroque at its height." © H. J. de Blij



country as far as the edges of the high mountains that lay to the south. Thus Russia gained many Muslim subjects, for this was Islamic Asia they were penetrating. Under czarist rule, these people retained some autonomy. Much farther to the east, a combination of Japanese expansionism and a decline of Chinese influence led Russia to annex from China several provinces east of the Amur River. Soon thereafter, in 1860, the port of Vladivostok on the Pacific was founded.

Now began the events that were to lead to the first involuntary halt to the Russian drive for territory. As Figure 2-4 shows, the most direct route from western Russia to the port of Vladivostok lay across northeastern China, the territory then still called Manchuria. The Russians had begun construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad in 1892, and they wanted China to permit the track to cross Manchuria. But the Chinese resisted. Then, taking advantage of the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900 (see Chapter 9), Russian forces occupied Manchuria so that railroad construction might proceed.

This move, however, threatened Japanese interests in this area, and the Japanese confronted the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. Not only was Russia defeated and forced out of Manchuria: Japan even took possession of the southern part of Sakhalin Island, which they named Karafuto and retained until the end of World War II.

THE COLONIAL LEGACY

10 Thus Russia, like Britain, France, and other European powers, expanded through **colonialism**. Yet whereas the other European powers expanded overseas, Russian influence traveled overland into Central Asia, Siberia, China, and the Pacific coastlands of the Far East. What emerged was not the greatest empire but the largest territorially contiguous empire in the world. At the time of the Japanese war, the Russian czar controlled more than 8.5 million square miles (22 million sq km), just a tiny fraction less than the area of the Soviet Union after the 1917 Revolution. Thus the communist empire, to a large extent, was the legacy of St. Petersburg and European Russia, not the product of Moscow and the socialist revolution.

The czars embarked on their imperial conquests in part because of Russia's relative location: Russia always lacked warm-water ports. Had the Revolution not intervened, their southward push might have reached the Persian Gulf or even the Mediterranean Sea. Czar Peter the Great envisaged a Russia open to trading with the entire world; he developed St. Petersburg on the Baltic Sea into Russia's leading port. But in truth, Russia's historical geography is one of remoteness from

the mainstreams of change and progress, as well as one of self-imposed isolation.

An Imperial, Multinational State

Centuries of Russian expansionism did not confine itself to empty land or unclaimed frontiers. The Russian state became an imperial power that annexed and incorporated many nationalities and cultures. This was done by employing force of arms, by overthrowing uncooperative rulers, by annexing territory, and by stoking the fires of ethnic conflict. By the time the ruthless Russian regime began to face revolution among its own people, czarist Russia was a hearth of **imperialism**, and its empire contained peoples representing more than 100 nationalities. The winners in the ensuing revolutionary struggle—the communists who forged the Soviet Union—did not liberate these subjugated peoples. Rather, they changed the empire's framework, binding the peoples colonized by the czars into a new system that would in theory give them autonomy and identity. In practice, it doomed those peoples to bondage and, in some cases, extinction. 11

When the Soviet system failed and the Soviet Socialist Republics became independent states, Russia was left without the empire that had taken centuries to build and consolidate—and that contained crucial agricultural and mineral resources. No longer did Moscow control the farms of Ukraine and the oil and natural gas reserves of Central Asia. But look again at Figure 2-4 and you will see that, even without its European and Central Asian colonies, Russia remains an empire. Russia lost the “republics” on its periphery, but Moscow still rules over a domain that extends from the borders of Finland to North Korea. Inside that domain Russians are in the overwhelming majority, but many subjugated nationalities, from Tatars to Yakuts, still inhabit ancestral homelands. Accommodating these many indigenous peoples is one of the challenges facing the Russian Federation today.

On the basis of physiographic, ethnic, historic, and cultural criteria, therefore, Russia constitutes a geographic realm, although transition zones rather than sharp boundaries mark its limits in some areas. Encircled by mountains and deserts, ruled by climatic continentality, unified by a dominant culture, and unmatched on Earth in terms of dimensions, Russia stands apart—from Europe to the west, China to the east, Central Asia to the south. But Russia, as we will see, is a society in transition. The realm's boundaries are unstable, still changing. To the west, Belarus at the opening of the twenty-first century was redirecting its interests from Europe toward Moscow. In the Caucasus, Armenia and Georgia effectively were in the Russian realm's orbit. In Central Asia, millions of Russians still live across the border in northern Kazakhstan.

In the 1990s, Russia began to reorganize in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. This reorganization cannot be understood without reference to the seven decades of Soviet communist rule that went before. We turn next to this crucial topic.

THE SOVIET LEGACY

The era of communism may have ended in the Soviet Empire, but its effects on Russia's political and economic geography will long remain. Seventy years of centralized planning and implementation cannot be erased overnight; regional reorganization toward a market economy cannot be accomplished in a day.

While the world of capitalism celebrates the failure of the communist system in the former Soviet realm, it should remember why communism found such fertile ground in the Russia of the 1910s and 1920s. In those days Russia was infamous for the wretched serfdom of its peasants, the cruel exploitation of its workers, the excesses of its nobility, and the ostentatious palaces and riches of the czars. Ripples from the Western European Industrial Revolution introduced a new age of misery for those laboring

in factories. There were workers' strikes and ugly retributions, but when the czars finally tried to better the lot of the poor, it was too little too late. There was no democracy, and the people had no way to express or channel their grievances. Europe's democratic revolution passed Russia by, and its economic revolution touched the czars' domain only slightly. Most Russians, and tens of millions of non-Russians under the czars' control, faced exploitation, corruption, starvation, and harsh subjugation. When the people began to rebel in 1905, there was no hint of what lay in store; even after the full-scale Revolution of 1917, Russia's political future hung in the balance.

The Russian Revolution was no unified uprising. There were factions and cliques; the Bolsheviks ("Majority") took their ideological lead from Lenin, while the Mensheviks ("Minority") saw a different, more liberal future for their country. The so-called Red army factions fought against the Whites, while both battled the forces of the czar. The country stopped functioning; the people suffered terrible deprivations in the countryside as well as the cities. Most Russians (and other nationalities within the empire as well) were ready for radical change.

That change came when the Revolution succeeded and the Bolsheviks bested the Mensheviks, most of

FROM THE FIELD NOTES

"June 25, 1964. We left Moscow this morning after our first week in the Soviet Union, on the road to Kiev. Much has been seen and learned after we arrived in Leningrad from Helsinki (also by bus) last Sunday. Some interesting contradictions: in a country that launched sputnik nearly a decade ago, nothing mechanical seems to work, from elevators to vehicles. The arts are vibrant, from the ballet in the Kirov Theatre to the Moscow Symphony. But much of what is historic here seems to be in disrepair, and in every city and town you pass, rows and rows of drab, gray apartment buildings stand amid uncleared rubble, without green spaces, playgrounds, trees. My colleagues here talk about the good fortune of the residents of these buildings: as part of the planning of the "socialist city," their apartments are always close to their place of work, so that they can walk or ride the bus a short distance rather than having to commute for hours. Our bus broke down as we entered the old part of Tula, and soon we learned that it would be several hours before we could expect to reboard. We had stopped right next to a row of what must have been attractive shops and apartments a half century ago; everything decorative seems to have been removed, and nothing has been done to paint, replace rotting wood, or fix roofs. I walked up the street a mile or so, and there was the "new" Tula—the Soviet imprint on the architecture of the place. This scene could have been photographed on the outskirts of Leningrad, Moscow, or any other urban center we had seen. What will life be like in the Soviet city of the distant future?" © H. J. de Blij



whom were exiled. In 1918, the capital was moved from Petrograd (as St. Petersburg had been renamed in 1914, to remove its German appellation) to Moscow. This was a symbolic move, the opposite of the forward-capital principle: Moscow lay deep in the Russian interior, not even on a major navigable waterway (let alone a coast), amid the same forests that much earlier had protected the Russians from their enemies. The new Soviet Union would look inward, and the communist system would achieve with Soviet resources and labor the goals that had for so long eluded the country. The chief political and economic architect of this effort was the revolutionary leader who prevailed in the power struggle: V. I. Lenin (born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov).

The Political Framework

Russia's great expansion had brought many nationalities under czarist control; now the revolutionary government sought to organize this heterogeneous ethnic mosaic into a smoothly functioning state. The czars had conquered, but they had done little to bring Russian culture to the peoples they ruled. The Georgians, Armenians, Tatars, and residents of the Muslim states of Central Asia were among dozens of individual cultural, linguistic, and religious groups that had not been "Russified." In 1917, however, the Russians themselves constituted only about one-half

of the population of the entire realm. Thus it was impossible to establish a Russian state instantly over this vast political region, and these diverse national groups had to be accommodated.

The question of the nationalities became a major issue in the young Soviet state after 1917. Lenin, who brought the philosophy of Karl Marx to Russia, talked from the beginning about the "right of self-determination for the nationalities." The first response by many of Russia's subject peoples was to proclaim independent republics, as they did in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and even in Central Asia. But Lenin had no intention of permitting the Russian state to break up. In 1923, when his blueprint for the new Soviet Union went into effect, the last of these briefly independent units was fully absorbed into the sphere of the Moscow regime. Ukraine, for example, declared itself independent in 1917 and managed to sustain this initiative until 1919. But in that year the Bolsheviks set up a provisional government in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, thereby ensuring the incorporation of the country into Lenin's Soviet framework.

The Bolsheviks' political framework for the Soviet Union was based on the ethnic identities of its many incorporated peoples. Given the size and cultural complexity of the empire, it was impossible to allocate territory of equal political standing to all the nationalities; the communists controlled the destinies of well over 100

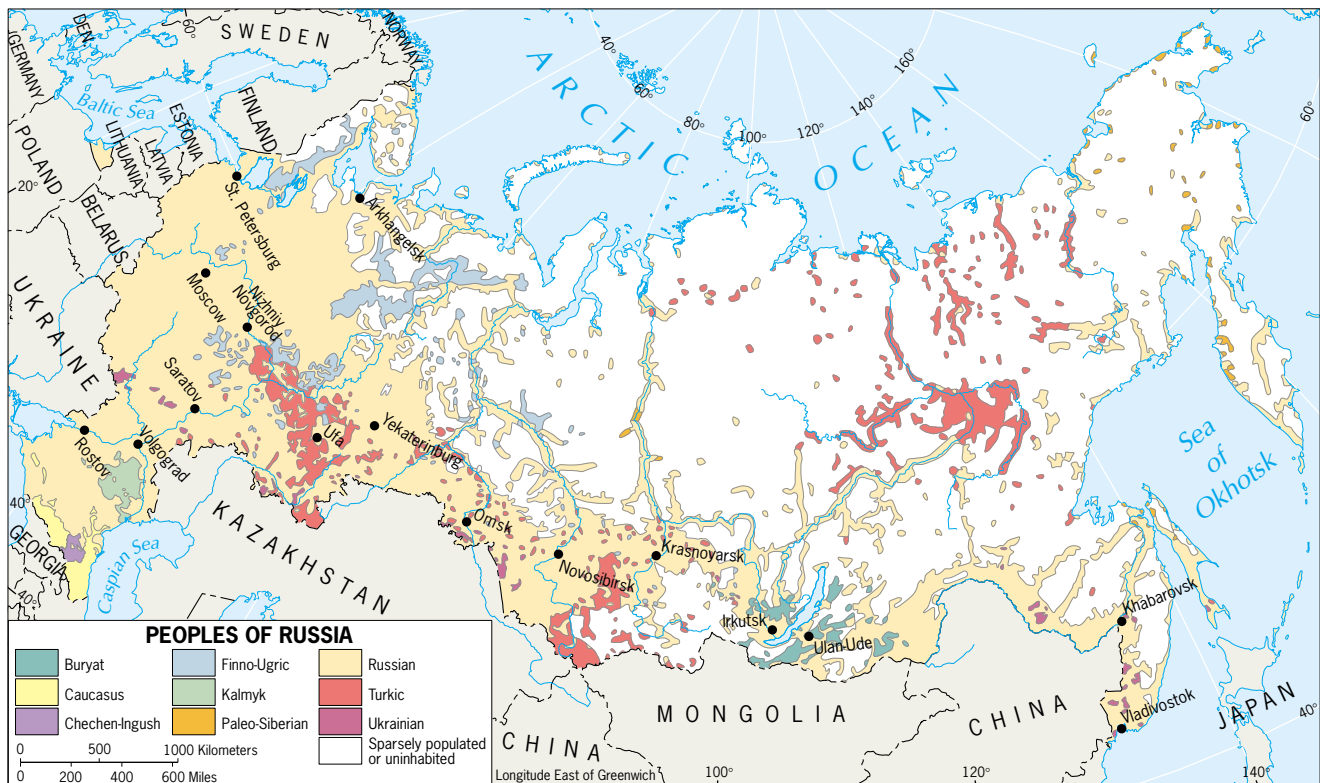


FIGURE 2-5 © H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

peoples, both large nations and small isolated groups. It was decided to divide the vast realm into Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs), each of which was delimited to correspond broadly to one of the major nationalities. At the time, Russians constituted about half of the developing Soviet Union's population, and, as Figure 2-5 shows, they also were (and still are) the most widely dispersed ethnic group in the realm. The Russian Republic, therefore, was by far the largest designated SSR, comprising just under 77 percent of total Soviet territory.

Within the SSRs, smaller minorities were assigned political units of lesser rank. These were called Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs), which in effect were republics within republics; other areas were designated Autonomous Regions or other nationality-based units. It was a complicated, cumbersome, often poorly designed framework, but in 1924 it was launched officially under the banner of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Eventually, the Soviet Union came to consist of 15 SSRs (shown in Fig. 2-6), including not only the original republics of 1924 but also such later acquisitions as Moldova (formerly Moldavia in Romania), Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The internal political layout often

was changed, sometimes at the whim of the communist empire's dictators. But no communist apartheid-like system of segregation could accommodate the shifting multinational mosaic of the Soviet realm. The republics quarreled among themselves over boundaries and territory. Demographic changes, migrations, war, and economic factors soon made much of the layout of the 1920s obsolete. Moreover, the communist planners made it Soviet policy to relocate entire peoples from their homelands in order to better fit the grand design, and to reward or punish—sometimes capriciously. The overall effect, however, was to move minority peoples eastward and to replace them with Russians. This **Russification** of the Soviet Empire produced substantial ethnic Russian minorities in all the non-Russian republics.

The Soviet planners called their system a **federation**. We focus in more detail on this geographic concept in Chapter 11, but we note here that federalism involves the sharing of power between a country's central government and its political subdivisions (provinces, States, or, in the Soviet case, "Socialist Republics"). Study the map of the former Soviet Union (Fig. 2-6), and an interesting geographic corollary emerges: every one of the 15 Soviet Republics had a boundary with a non-Soviet neighbor. Not

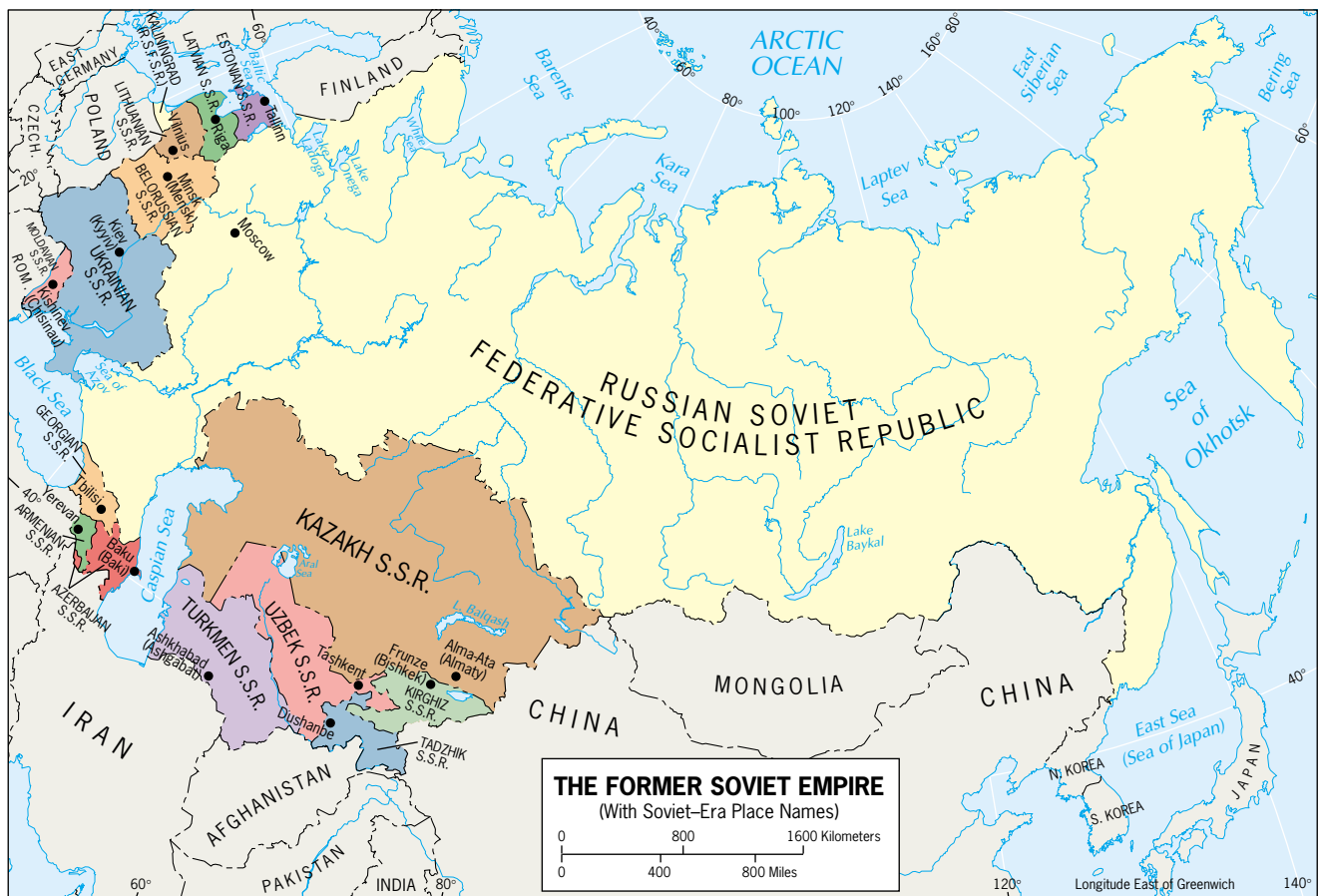


FIGURE 2-6 © H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

one was spatially locked within the others. This seemed to give geographic substance to the notion that any Republic was free to leave the USSR if it so desired. Reality, of course, was different. Moscow's control over the republics made the Soviet Union a federation in theory only.

The centerpiece of the tightly controlled Soviet "federation" was the Russian Republic. With half the vast state's population, the capital city, the realm's core area, and over three-quarters of the Soviet Union's territory, Russia was the empire's nucleus. In other republics, "Soviet" often was simply equated with "Russian"—it was the reality with which the lesser republics lived. Russians came to the other republics to teach (Russian was taught in the colonial schools), to organize (and often dominate) the local Communist Party, and to implement Moscow's economic decisions. This was colonialism, but somehow the communist disguise—how could socialists, as the communists called themselves, be colonialists?—and the contiguous spatial nature of the empire made it appear to the rest of the world as something else. Indeed, on the world stage the Soviet Union became a champion of oppressed peoples, a force in the decolonization process. It was an astonishing contradiction that would, in time, be fully exposed.

The Soviet Economic Framework

The geopolitical changes that resulted from the founding of the Soviet Union were accompanied by a gigantic economic experiment: the conversion of the empire from a czarist autocracy with a capitalist veneer to communism. From the early 1920s onward, the country's economy would be centrally planned—the communist leadership in Moscow would make all decisions regarding economic planning and development. Soviet planners had two principal objectives: (1) to accelerate industrialization and (2) to **collectivize** agriculture. For the first time ever on such a scale, and for the first time in accordance with Marxist-Leninist principles, an entire country was organized to work toward national goals prescribed by a central government.

14 The Soviet planners believed that agriculture could be made more productive by organizing it into huge state-run enterprises. The holdings of large landowners were expropriated, private farms were taken away from the farmers, and the land was consolidated into collective farms. Initially, all such land was meant to be part of a *sovkhoz*, literally a grain-and-meat factory in which agricultural efficiency, through maximum mechanization and minimum labor requirements, would be at its peak. But many farmers opposed the Soviets and tried to sabotage the program in various ways, hoping to retain their land.

The farmers and peasants who obstructed the communists' grand design suffered a dreadful fate. In the 1930s, for instance, Stalin confiscated Ukraine's agricul-

tural output and then ordered part of the border between the Russian and Ukrainian republics sealed—thereby leading to a famine that killed millions of farmers and their families. In the Soviet Union under communist totalitarianism, the ends justified the means, and untold hardship came to millions who had already suffered under the czars. In his book *Lenin's Tomb*, David Remnick estimates that between 30 and 60 million people lost their lives from imposed starvation, political purges, Siberian exile, and forced relocation. It was an incalculable human tragedy, but the secretive character of Soviet officialdom made it possible to hide it from the world.

The Soviet planners hoped that collectivized and mechanized farming would free hundreds of thousands of workers to labor in factories. Industrialization was the prime objective of the regime, and here the results were superior. Productivity rose rapidly, and when World War II engulfed the empire in 1941, the Soviet manufacturing sector was able to produce the equipment and weapons needed to repel the German invaders.

Yet even in this context, the Soviet grand design entailed liabilities for the future. The USSR practiced a **command economy**, in which state planners assigned the production of particular manufactures to particular places, often disregarding the rules of economic geography. For example, the manufacture of railroad cars might be assigned (as indeed it was) to a factory in Latvia. No other factory anywhere else would be permitted to produce this equipment—even if supplies of raw materials would make it cheaper to build them near, say, Volgograd 1200 miles away. Despite an expanded and improved transport network (Fig. 2-7), such practices made manufacturing in the USSR extremely expensive, and the absence of competition made managers complacent and workers less productive than they could be.

Of course, the Soviet planners never imagined that their experiment would fail and that a market-driven economy would replace their command economy. When that happened, the transition was predictably difficult; indeed, it is far from over, and it is putting severe strains on the now more democratic state.

RUSSIA'S CHANGING POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

When the USSR dissolved in 1991, Russia's former empire devolved into 14 independent countries, and Russia itself was a changed nation. Russians now made up about 83 percent of the population of under 150 million, a far higher proportion than in the days of the Soviet Union. But numerous minority peoples remained under Moscow's new flag, and millions of Russians found themselves under new governments in the former Republics.

Soviet planners had created a complicated administrative structure for their “Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic,” and Russia’s postcommunist leaders had to use this framework to make their country function. In 1992, most of Russia’s internal “republics,” autonomous regions, oblasts, and krays (all of them components of the administrative hierarchy) signed a document known as the Russian Federation Treaty, committing them to cooperate in the new federal system. At first a few units refused to sign, including Tatarstan, scene of Ivan the Terrible’s brutal conquest more than four centuries ago, and a republic in the Caucasus periphery, then known as Chechnya-Ingushetia, where Muslim rebels waged a campaign for independence. As the map shows, Chechnya-Ingushetiya split into two separate republics whose names at the time were spelled Chechnya and Ingushetia (Fig. 2-8). Eventually, only Chechnya refused to sign the Russian Federation Treaty, and subsequent Russian military intervention led to a prolonged and violent conflict, with disastrous consequences for Chechnya’s people and infrastructure (the capital, Grozny, was completely destroyed). The Chechnya war continues today and is a disaster for Russia’s government as well (see the Issue Box titled “Chechnya”).

The Federal Framework of Russia

The spatial framework of the still-evolving Russian Federation is as complex as that of the Russian Federative Socialist Republic of communist times. As the twenty-first century opened, the Federation consisted of 89 entities: 2 Autonomous Federal Cities, 21 Republics, 11 Autonomous Regions (Okrugs), 49 Provinces (Oblasts), and 6 Territories (Krays). Moscow and St. Petersburg are the two Autonomous Federal Cities. The 21 Republics, recognized to accommodate substantial ethnic minorities in the population, lie in several clusters (Fig. 2-8).

Russia’s post-1991 governments have faced complicated administrative problems. A multinational, multicultural state that had been accustomed to authoritarian rule and government control over virtually everything—from factory production to everyday life—now had to be governed in a new way. Democratization of the political system, transition to a market economy, sale of state-owned industries (privatization), and liberation of the press and other media must all take place in an orderly way, or the country would, literally, fall apart.

Russia’s leaders knew that their options were limited. They could continue to hold as much power as possible at the center, making decisions in Moscow that would apply to all the Republics, Regions, and other subdivisions of the state. Such a **unitary state system**, with its centralized government and administration, marked authoritarian kingdoms of the past and serves totalitarian dictatorships of the present. Or they could share power with the

Republics and Regions, allowing elected regional leaders to come to Moscow to represent the interests of their people. This is the federal system Russia chose as the only way to accommodate the country’s economic and cultural diversity.

In a *federal system*, the national government usually is responsible for matters such as defense, foreign policy, and foreign trade. The Regions (or provinces, States, or other subdivisions) retain authority over affairs ranging from education to transportation. A federal system does not create unity out of diversity, but it does allow diverse components of the state to coexist, their common interests represented by the national government and their regional interests by their local administrations. Some countries owe their survival as coherent states to their federal frameworks. India and Australia are cases in point.

But to maintain a generally acceptable balance of power between the center and the Regions (or States) is difficult. Disputes over “States’ rights” continue to roil the American political scene more than two centuries after the Constitution was adopted. Russia, which also owes its continuity to a grand federal experiment, is barely more than ten years old. Power shifts continue, and the framework of the Russian Federation will undoubtedly change over time.

An additional problem arises from Russia’s sheer size. Geographers refer to the principle of **distance decay** to explain how increasing distances between places tend to reduce interactions among them. Because Russia is the world’s largest country, distance is a significant factor in the relationships between the capital and outlying areas. Furthermore, Moscow lies in the far west of the giant country, half a world away from the shores of the Pacific. Not surprisingly, one of the most obstreperous Regions has been remote Primorskiy, the Region of Vladivostok.

Still another problem is reflected in Figure 2-8: the enormous size variation among the Republics (and to a lesser extent, the Regions). Whereas the (territorially) smallest Republics are concentrated in the Russian core area, the largest lie far to the east, where Sakha is nearly a thousand times as large as Ingushetiya. On the other hand, the populations of the huge eastern Republics are tiny compared to those of the smaller ones in the core. Such diversity spells administrative difficulty.

But perhaps the most serious current problem for Russia is the growing social disharmony between Moscow and the subnational political entities. Almost wherever one goes in Russia today, Moscow is disliked and often berated by angry locals. The capital is seen as the privileged playground for those who have benefited most from the post-Soviet transition—bureaucrats and hangers-on whose economic policies have driven down standards of living, whose greed and corruption have hurt the economy,

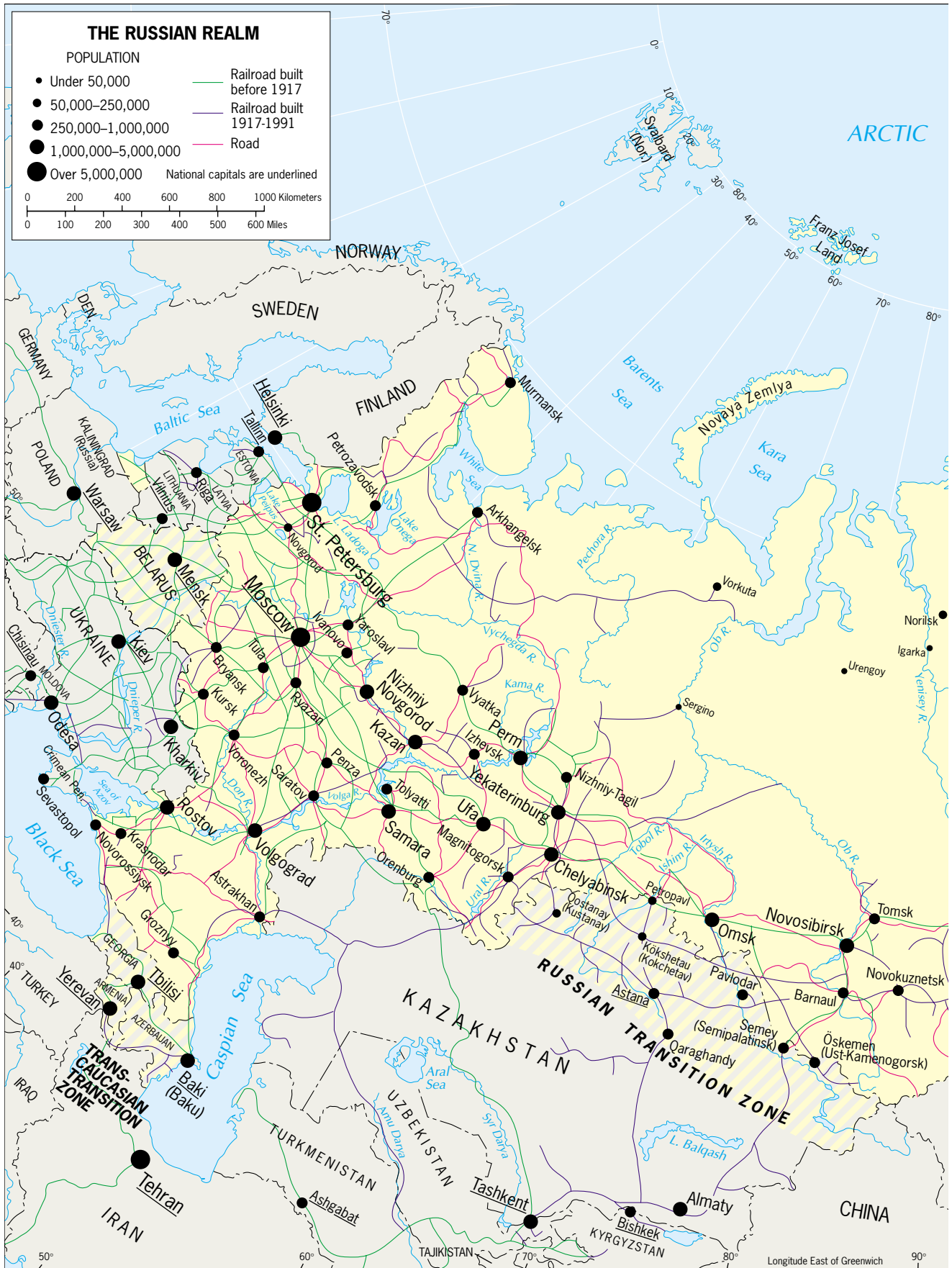


FIGURE 2-7 © H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.





FIGURE 2-8 © H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.