**Russia: Study Guide**

**Physical Geography**

**The Land**

Russia is the world’s largest country and it has much topographical variance. The **Ural Mountains** are considered the boundary between Europe and Asia. They also separate the **North European Plain** to the west from the **Central Siberian Plateau** to the east. Because of the rich, black soil called **chernozem**, ideal for farming, and because the climate is more hospitable, 75% of Russia’s population lives on the North European Plain.

Russia has the longest continual coastline of any country in the world. However, much of the coastline is inaccessible due to ice for all or much of the year. Luckily, Russia has secured ports on the **Baltic Sea** and **Black Sea**, both of which play instrumental roles in Russia’s trade routes. Russia’s port on the Black Sea is Russia’s only warm water port.

**Lake Baikal**, located in southeastern Russia, is Asia’s third largest lake and is the deepest freshwater lake in the world. It is estimated that Lake Baikal contains 20% of Earth’s total supply of fresh water.

The most important river in Russia is the **Volga River**. The river and its tributaries drain much of the eastern portion of the North European Plain. Through natural waterways and manmade canals, the Volga River connects Moscow to the Caspian Sea and Black Sea in the south and the Baltic Sea in the north. Even though the river is frozen for about half of the year, it is still responsible for two-thirds of all of Russia’s waterway traffic and is used extensively to produce **hydroelectric power**.

Because Russia is generally a very cold climate, only about 10% of its land can support agriculture. Much of the land experiences **permafrost**, a permanently frozen layer of soil beneath the ground’s surface. About one-fifth of the Earth’s remaining forestland exists in Russia, mostly in Eastern Siberia.

**The Climate**

Russia is generally a very cold place. The coldest temperature produced on record happened in Eastern Siberia, which is the place that is generally the coldest place in Russia every year.

Russia covers a location of mid- to high- latitudes on the globe. The high-latitude climates include **tundra** and **taiga**. The tundra is a vast, treeless plain that experiences permafrost and is unable to support much animal life or vegetation. Much of the tundra climate zone falls within the **Arctic Circle**. The taiga is thick band of evergreen, coniferous forest that stretches from western Russia deep into Siberia and covers an amount of land equivalent to the size of the United States.

The mid-latitude climates include **humid continental** and **steppe**. Most of the North European Plain has a humid continental climate, with temperatures ranging from 9\*F in the winter to 75\*F in the summer. The southwestern area of land down by the Black Sea and Caspian Sea has a steppe climate, creating vast grasslands conducive to farming. It experiences long, hot summers and cold, dry winters.

**Labeling a Map on the Test**

You will need to be able to label the following things on a map. You will only be asked to label five items from this list:

* Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, Volga River, Ural Mountains, North European Plain, West Siberian Plain, Arctic Circle, Lake Baikal, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Bering Strait

**Cultural Geography**

**The History**

In the 800s, when the Scandinavians invaded what was then **Kievan Rus**, a group of city-states that would become Russia, instead of taking over, they integrated into the culture and language. However, fighting between the city-states weakened them and the neighboring Mongols saw an opportunity. In the 1200s, the **Mongols** invaded from Central Asia, taking control of Kiev (the most prominent city-state at the time) and many other Slav territories. The Mongols, which ruled the area for 200 years, allowed for self-rule, only requiring that a rent or tax of sorts be paid to them.

When the Mongols first invaded, many of the Slavic people fled to the forests, some eventually settling on the banks of the Moskva River. One of these settlements eventually grew into **Moscow**, controlling a territory known as **Muscovy**. The Muscovy princes kept peace with the Mongols for 200 years, even helping the Mongols collect their taxes from other Slav territories. However, in the 1400s, the Muscovy people had grown strong enough to refuse further taxes from the Mongols and eventually drive them out. Once the Mongols had surrendered the area back to the Slav peoples, Muscovy’s prince **Ivan III** brought many of the Slav territories under his rule, thus earning the title of **Ivan the Great**. He expanded his territory, a territory for the first time known as Russia. He is also the man that built the **Kremlin**, a giant fortress of palaces and churches in Moscow that are still used as federal government buildings in Russia today.

In 1533, Ivan the Great’s grandson Ivan IV came into power. He was called **Ivan the Terrible** because he crushed any and all opposition to his power. He also became the first crowned **czar**, supreme ruler, of Russia. He expanded Russia’s territory and influence.

After Ivan the Terrible’s reign, Russia experienced a difficult time of foreign invasion and economic decline. When the **Romanov dynasty** came into power in 1613, the government slowly began to tighten its grip on its people. By 1650, many peasants had become **serfs**, a virtually enslaved workforce bound to the land and under the control of nobility.

Czar Peter I, known as **Peter the Great**, came into power in the late 1600s. Fearing the Europe was leaving Russia in the dust, he was determined to modernize and expand. Under Peter the Great, Russia 1) enlarged its territory, 2) built a strong military, and 3) developed trade with Europe. Peter also 4) secured land from Sweden to gain a port on the Baltic Sea. He also 5) strengthened Russia’s control of Siberia. Finally, he 6) moved the capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg is located on the Gulf of Finland, providing access to the Baltic Sea and, subsequently, to Europe. The port of St. Petersburg became a major strategic asset because, unlike most of Russia’s other ports, it was not icebound the majority of the year.

In the late 1700s, **Empress Catherine the Great** continued to expand Russia’s empire. However, the most notable thing that Catherine the Great did was secured a warm water port on the Black Sea. This was important because it gave Russia water access to Southern Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa. It was also a port that could be used year round.

However, also under Catherine the Great, the **cultural gap** between Russian nobility and Russian working class widened. Russian nobility was becoming more and more European, including using French as their primary language. The rest of the Russian people continued to follow traditional Russian ways. Meanwhile, poverty and heavy work fell even more harshly on the serfs. Also, realize that Russia expanding its borders also brought new people and cultures under its rule and these non-Russian peoples didn’t necessarily accept Russian rule.

The 1800s saw much unrest by the people. There were uprisings and movements, but nothing strong enough to gain any kind of momentum. It did, however, make the Russian nobility nervous and caused them to grasp even more tightly to power and control. In an effort to unify the many different kinds of people under Russian rule, the nobility proposed a policy of **Russification**, which required everyone to speak Russian (even though the nobility were speaking French) and follow Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Refusers were persecuted, specifically the Jews, who were often blamed for Russia’s problems. Ultimately, all this policy did was make the non-Russian people angrier.

The continued discontent led many Russian thinkers and workers toward the idea of **socialism**, a belief that calls for greater economic equality in society. Many Russians especially liked the socialist writings of **Karl Marx**, a German philosopher.

The 1900s saw increased discontent with the iron rule of the Russian nobility. In 1905, one event, later called **Bloody Sunday**, saw the death of nearly 1,000 peaceful protestors when soldiers fired into a crowd of people advocating for better working conditions. In 1917, the hardships suffered due to World War I brought even larger numbers of workers into the streets of the capital. With soldiers joining the throngs, the people demanded “bread and freedom.” Finally, **Nicholas II**, czar at the time, was forced to give up his throne, ending czarist rule in Russia.

Czarist rule ended in March 1917 and was followed by a brief period of representative government. However, in November 1917, the **Bolsheviks**, a revolutionary group led by **Vladimir Lenin**, seized control. The Bolsheviks believed in **communism**, a philosophy based on Karl Marx’s ideas that called for the violent overthrow of government and the creation of a new society led by workers. The Bolsheviks withdrew from World War I, yielding much territory to Germany. Instead, they focused their efforts to take over industry, direct food distribution, establish an eight-hour workday, and reform the army.

Not all Russians supported the Bolsheviks, however. A civil war erupted between the Red Army of the Bolsheviks and the White Army of the anti-Bolsheviks. In 1921, the Bolsheviks, now known as the **Communists**, won the war and established the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics**, commonly referred to as the **USSR** or **Soviet Union**. They also reestablished Moscow as the capital.

In 1924, Vladimir Lenin, the revolutionary leader died and **Josef Stalin** took over. Stalin set out to make the Soviet Union an industrial giant by taking over farms and factories. Millions were either killed or died as a result of hunger, physical hardships, or brutal conditions in labor camps. Stalin also eliminated those within the Communist Party and the military who might threaten his power. He is generally considered one of the most evil men in human history and the death of 20 million people can be linked back to him.

Despite Stalin’s despicable policy and behavior, he was an **ally** to the United States, Great Britain, and France during World War II. When the war began, he made a deal with Germany regarding control of Poland. However, Germany broke that deal and invaded the Soviet Union. This angered Stalin, so he switched sides and ended the war fighting with the Allied Powers.

After World War II, Germany was split into four sections; the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, and France each got one section. Berlin, similarly, was also divided into four sections. Because Berlin was the capital of Germany and also the capital of trade and economy in Germany, but was located deep inside the Soviet Union’s section, the four powers felt it only fair to divide Berlin up as well. Eventually, France, Great Britain, and the U.S. gave back their German land to the German people. However, the Soviet Union, fearing the possibility of a strong Germany, held on to its section, desiring a buffer zone between Western influence and Soviet land. However, the differences between quality of life, modernization, and economic development widened between West and East Germany, highlighting the downfalls of Communist rule.

**The Cold War**

The Cold War was a political, ideological, and strategic struggle between two super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. It lasted 46 years and is called a cold war because it contained all of the aspects, struggles, and outcomes of a war except that there was never actually any fighting directly between the United States and the Soviet Union. We wanted to spread democracy, encourage free markets for trading, and stop the spread of communism and they wanted to secure their borders, and spread communism.

There were six major strategies exercised by both sides during the Cold War:

1. **Brinkmanship:** The strategy of taking a situation to the very brink of catastrophic disaster in order to achieve the most advantageous outcome. An example is the Cuban Missile Crisis, when nuclear weapons were aimed at the U.S. and at the Soviet Union with fingers on the triggers. The result was that nuclear war was avoided and each side was scared into beginning diplomatic talks.
2. **Espionage:** Both sides spied on each other, both through technological means and actual people on the ground gathering intelligence. A U.S. spy plane actually crashed in the Soviet Union and because the self-destruct capability of the plane wasn’t activated, the Soviet Union learned the spying capabilities the U.S. was using.
3. **Foreign Aid:** Both sides thought that by giving aid (supplies, weapons, money, food, etc.) to developing countries that we would gain friends and influence globally.
4. **Alliances:** Out of the aid given by both sides, alliances were born. These alliances ended up being the players on two teams and most of the countries of the world were involved. They either played for the U.S. team (democracy and capitalism) or they played for the Soviet team (communism and socialism).
5. **Propaganda:** This was huge during the Cold War. Both sides used cultural and social methods to advertise their positions in an effort to influence the perspectives of the people. For example, in the U.S. all the bad guys in books, plays, television shows, and movies during this era were Communists and the United States was always depicted as the good guys who were doing the right thing for all people.
6. **Surrogate Wars:** While the United States and the Soviet Union never actually fought directly against each other in any kind of actual war during the Cold War years, they fought a lot of surrogate wars, where the two sides supported opposite sides in a particular conflict. The U.S. wars in Korea and Vietnam and the Soviet Union’s war in Afghanistan are all examples of surrogate wars.

At the end of World War II, the Soviet Union controlled much of Eastern Europe. By 1949, most of those countries had become Soviet **satellites**, countries controlled by the Soviet Union. These satellites strengthened the Soviet Union’s military and supplied much-needed natural resources and manufactured goods to the Soviet Union. The United States, fearing the growing power of the Soviet Union, spearheaded the rebuilding efforts of Europe and also the creation of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO**. NATO was comprised of the U.S. and much of Western Europe and was established solely to coordinate defense against the Soviet Union. In response to the creation of NATO, the Soviet Union established the **Warsaw Pact**, which was a conglomerate of Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union to coordinate defenses against threats from the West.

Following the scare from the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, diplomatic relations were established between the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1969, the U.S.’s President Nixon began negotiations with the Soviet Union that lead to the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty, or SALT 1, which froze nuclear launch capabilities. The 1970s saw the second round of talks, which lead to SALT 2, reducing the number of nuclear warheads on each side.

In 1985, **Mikhail Gorbachev** became the Soviet Union’s premier (their version of the president). Gorbachev was aware of the current, failing, state of the Soviet Union, and, while a dedicated communist, realized the need for change. He wanted to save the Soviet Union. He instituted two policies. **Glasnost** established greater political openness and transparency and **perestroika** called for economic restructuring. Gorbachev’s reforms, however, were not enough to save the Soviet Union.

On June 12, 1987, the U.S.’s President Reagan called on Premier Gorbachev to “tear down this wall,” referring to the Berlin Wall. On **November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell**, spurning on revolutions all over Eastern Europe. By Christmas 1991, the Soviet Union was in shambles. On December 25, 1991, Premier Gorbachev stepped down, yielding his power to Russian President Boris Yeltsin. On **December 26, 1991**, the highest governmental body of the Soviet Union, the Supreme Soviet, met, acknowledged the collapse of the Soviet Union, and disbanded itself. This is the official day the Soviet Union ended and the official end of the Cold War.

**Russia Today**

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia began the long journey toward democracy. They transitioned from a **command economy**, where a central authority makes key economic decisions, to **privatization** and a **market economy**, in which businesses are privately owned and the economic factors of **supply** (things offered for sale) and **demand** (how much people want certain goods) dictate market conditions.

**Nuclear Power**

One of the main reasons that actual fighting never broke out directly between the United States and the Soviet Union was because both powers had **nuclear weapons.** These weapons could do catastrophic levels of damage that would last for decades. However, nuclear power isn’t only used for weapons. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union used nuclear power to meet basic energy needs, specifically electricity and heat. There are currently submarines in the U.S. Navy that run on nuclear power and nuclear power plants exist in countries all over the world. Nuclear power can be a safe and effective way to generate energy. However, there are always risks. Nuclear waste, the by-product of producing nuclear power, can remain radioactive for thousands of years, posing great danger to people and the environment if not disposed of properly.

Another risk is a malfunction at a nuclear power plant. In 1986, a fire broke out in a nuclear reactor at a nuclear power plant in the town of **Chernobyl**, about 60 miles north of Kiev, Ukraine. The fire and subsequent explosion released tons of radioactive particles into the local environment. Due to wind patterns, some radioactive particles were carried great distances and contaminated other countries. Thousands of people were exposed to deadly levels of radiation. By the mid-1990s, over 8,000 people had died as a direct result of the Chernobyl accident and millions more continue to suffer from cancers and other diseases that can be tied back to Chernobyl. Radiation covered thousands of acres of farmland and forests, poisoning the earth and the water supply for years to come.

*Think about nuclear power in terms of weaponry and in terms of energy. Do we need it? Why or why not? Do the possible benefits outweigh the possible risks? If our enemies have nuclear weapons, does it make us more secure if we have them as well? Is nuclear power a viable option for energy production?* ***Make sure you reason out this issue in your head and figure out what your opinion is and why. This will be an essay question on the test.***