

WORLD REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY CONCEPT TEXTBOOK NOTES

Chapter 5 Notes – Russia and the Newly Independent States

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or Soviet Union:

- Region of the world that has changed its political and economic systems entirely in just a few short years.
- During its time, the USSR was the largest political unit on earth, stretching from Eastern Europe to the Pacific Ocean.
- Covered 1/6 of the Earth's surface
- 1991, the Soviet Union broke apart, ending a 70 year experiment with nearly complete government control of the economy, society and politics.
- This controlled economy governed by government bureaucrats was replaced by a capitalist system similar to that of the United States, based on competition among private businesses.

Breakup of the Former Soviet Union:

- Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a loose alliance between Russia and 11 newly independent states has been established.
- Russia, the largest of the former Soviet Union countries, remains predominate due to its size, population, military, and huge oil and gas reserves.

Challenges in Russia:

- Adjusting to market-based economies, globalization, a shift toward democracy, global warming, and some of the worst pollution on the planet.
- The economic transition has caused huge hardship and anxiety
- State run industries have shut down leaving job loss and an end to social services

Benefits of New System in Russia:

- Some are exhilarated by new Economic System and fresh opportunities
- Changes create greater freedoms of expression and movement.
- There are also more consumer products available in Russia

Geopolitics and Russia:

- Former soviet countries are aligning themselves with the European Union, and some western parts of this region may eventually do the same.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER: (pg's 174-175)

1. Why does this region have such severe environmental problems?
2. What changes have economic reforms and globalization brought to this region since the fall of the Soviet Union?
3. Is democracy emerging?
4. Why are populations shrinking in some places and growing in others?
5. How have the massive economic and political changes in this region affected men and women differently?
6. How are identities changing in the Post-Soviet era?

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES (pg 180)

- Soviets believed that nature was the servant of industrial and agricultural progress
- Huge dams, factories, industrial facilities all built without regard to the environment
- “When people become more involved with their stomachs, they forget about ecology.”
- See section in book titled “Urban and Industrial Pollution”

NUCLEAR POLLUTION (pg 182)

- Nuclear pollution and its effects has spread globally
- World’s worst nuclear disaster occurred in Ukraine in 1986 when the Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded
- When it exploded it contaminated Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia and spread a cloud of radiation over much of Eastern Europe
- Nuclear waste dumping has been going on in various cities and into the Arctic Ocean and Sea of Okhotsk

HUMAN PATTERNS OVER TIME (pg. 184-90)

- The core of Russia has been the European Russia, the most densely populated area and home to most ethnic Russians.
- As Russia expands, it conquered a large area inhabited by many other ethnic groups
- These groups of people and their lands remained under control of the Soviet Union (1917-1991), which attempted to create an integrated social and economic unit out of the disparate territories
- The breakup of the Soviet Union reversed this process of Russian expansion

The Rise of the Russian Empire:

- Two main areas in which towns began to crop up; Ukraine and Russia
- Towns of Kiev and Moscow became settled
- Mongols – loose confederation of nomadic pastoral people centered in East and Central Asia
- Slavic Ruler – Ivan the Terrible conquered the Mongols in 1552, marking the beginning of the Russian Empire
- St. Basils Cathedral in Moscow commemorates the victory

- Russian Empire was ruled by a Czar – lived in wealth along with aristocracy while the majority of the people lived in poverty
- Majority of people in Russia were serfs – those legally bound to live on the farm land owned by an aristocrat; if land is sold, the serfs were transferred with it.
- Serfdom legally ended with Czar Alexander II in mid nineteenth century, however, brutal inequities went into the twentieth century, fueling opposition to the czar

The Communist Revolution and its Aftermath:

- In 1917, during WWI, Czar Nicholas II was overthrown in a revolution led by a group called the Bolsheviks
- Inspired by Communism (explained by the German revolutionary philosopher Karl Marx)
- Marx criticized the societies of Europe as inherently flawed because of domination by capitalists – a wealthy minority who owned the factories, farms, businesses, and other means of production.
- The impoverished, property-less majority worked for low wages that undervalued their labor.
- Communism called on workers to unite to overthrow the capitalists and establish a completely classless society without government or currency.
- People would work because of commitment to the common good and share what they produce
- Leader of the Bolsheviks, Vladimir Lenin, believed that people of Russia needed a transition period in which to realize the ideals of communism
- Lenin's Bolsheviks formed the Communist Party, which set up a powerful government centered in Moscow.
- The government would run the economy, taking land and resources from the wealthy and using to benefit the poor majority.
- This strategy did not work and production was not meeting demand

Joseph Stalin's Rule:

- After the death of Lenin, Stalin began to rule the Soviet Union for 31 years as party chairman and premier (1922-1953).
- Solve production shortfalls through rapid industrialization which would be made possible by a centrally planned or socialist economy.
- State would own all real estate and means of production, while government bureaucrats in Moscow directed all economic activity
- Idea behind this was that under a socialist system the economy would grow more quickly and hasten the transition to the idealized communist state in which everyone shared equally.
- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- Large government run Collectivized farms were created to increase agricultural production – If you resisted you were relocated or executed
- Key to achieving economic growth was increasing industrial production

- Mass government investments in gigantic development projects, such as factories, dams, and chemical plants, some of which are still the largest of their kind in the world.
- Government-controlled companies monopolized every sector of the economy
- Significant Success was the result (In the 1930s the United States was going through the Great Depression and the USSR was booming)
- Flaws in Stalin's system
 - Focus only on HEAVY industry – minimal CONSUMER goods
 - Goods and services could have improved the daily lives of people however this was not the focus
 - Ruthless use of secret police, starvation, and mass executions to silence opposition
 - Lucky ones sentenced to labor camps in Siberia
 - 20 million killed

World War II and the Cold War:

- Soviet Union did more than any other country to defeat Hitler's War Machine during WWII.
- In the process 23 million Soviets were killed, more than all of the other European combatants combined.
- After the war, Stalin turned his focus to creating a “buffer zone” between himself and Europe. This would serve as the battleground for future wars.
- The United States watches as Stalin forced his will upon the countries of Eastern Europe and feared that this would continue further into democratic countries in Europe. The economies of many of these countries were used to meet the needs of the Soviet Union. Politics were also controlled from Moscow.
- Result – Cold War; 50 year long global geopolitical rivalry that pitted the Soviet Union vs. the USA
- Setting aside the country's economic and social development, Stalin focused on Military growth and power.
- Promoted Communism in China, Mongolia, North Korea, Afghanistan, Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and various African nations.

The Arms Race and Afghanistan:

- 1960s the USSR and USA locked in a race to build more sophisticated weaponry; this included nuclear weapons
- 1980s the USSR is in severe financial difficulty as its centrally planned economy cannot stand up to America's free market economy.
- Many Soviet allies begin switching sides to follow the better economic system and financial support.
- 1979; Soviet dumps tons of money into building a Soviet-allied regime in Afghanistan. Afghani freedom fighters do not want this to happen and fight back against the Soviets. (Mujahedeen – freedom fighters financed and trained by the USA and Pakistan)

The Post Soviet Years: Democratization and Economic Reform:

- 1985 – Reform-minded president, Mikhail Gorbachev, responded to the various pressures for change by opening up public discussions of social and economic problems (Glasnost)
- Attempted to revitalize the Soviet economy through restructuring (perestroika)
- Independence movements begin to occur in Central Europe
- 12 independent countries emerged from what was once the Soviet Union
- Democracy and free-market capitalism now dominate the former Soviet Union

POPULATION PATTERNS (pg. 188-190)

- 277,000,000 people live in Russia with the majority living in “European Russia.”
- Much less dense than the USA.

Shrinking Populations: High Death Rates and Low Birth Rates:

- Unique change in demographics as populations are shrinking faster than any other country in the world
- Soviet era provided jobs for women and work outside the homes
- Free health care and adequate retirement pensions helped lower incentives for large families
- Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, and an economic recession that followed, population has declined.
- Life expectancy has also dropped; a major cause of this decline is the physical and mental distress caused by job loss and social disruption.
- For males, alcohol abuse and suicide has spiked.
- Heavy pollutants in both the air and water have also contributed.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ISSUES (pg. 190-200)

- A new teaching of free market economies instead of centrally planned economies has increased in schools.

The Former Command Economy:

- Long term goal was to create communism but the short term goal was to end severe deprivation suffered under the Czars.
- This was in some ways met as poverty began to end and basic necessities such as housing, food, health care, education, and transportation were all provided for free or at very low costs.
- Resources, however, were not allocated evenly.