

Geography's impact on russian politics

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For centuries, Russia was cut off from most of Western civilization. This is due in part to Russia's geography. Russia has, what is called a natural barrier. Russia's natural barrier is simply its huge expanse. It is hundreds of miles from Moscow or St. Petersburg to any Western city. This isolation was a hindrance, and an advantage throughout history, politically, socially, and economically. Russia's language is an example of this. It is extremely clear that it resembles no Western European language, and has no native words that are understandable to the typical western European. This is a result of Russia's isolation, and subsequently its geography. Previous to the Napoleonic Wars and Peter the Great's travels to the rest of Europe, Russia was a solitary county. They had no major allies, nor any major enemies (other than the occupying Mongols). The location provided safety, but it meant that any advancement by the peoples around them would go unnoticed, and ultimately they lagged behind. Before Peter the Great, Russia's only major port was Arkhangelsk (Archangel), located on the North Sea, it was covered in ice for five months out of the year. This greatly inhibited Russia's economy. The Russian people had an abundance of furs, such as beaver and bear, that Western Europeans wanted, but with a port such as Archangel they were severely restricted. When the port of St. Petersburg was built, the Russian people advanced socially. The nobles were required to dress, act, and speak French. Peter the Great built a palace for himself, trying to copy the Palace at Versailles. The people of Russia also learned many things from Westerners coming to Russia. Their social advances were innumerable. Militarily, Russia's geography has become an advantage. Because of Russia's distance from France, Czar Alexander felt

safe to allow the trade with Britain the Russian people so deeply needed. The Continental System was crushing the Russian economy, and the Czar freed Russia from it. Napoleon thought that he had the campaign in Russia completely planned out, however he did not count on the Russian weather, and Russia's great expanse. It took months for Napoleon to conquer Moscow, simply because it took so long to get their by foot. After this, the Russians, simply let Napoleon sit and rot in Moscow, waiting for a surrender from Czar Alexander that would never come. By the time Napoleon realized what was going to happen, it was too late. Because most of Russia is not near moderating coastal waters it gets extremely cold, far colder than anywhere else in Europe. When Napoleon decided to withdraw from Russia it was October, and within a week his army was encountering below freezing temperatures. To make matters worse, his army was dressed in summer uniform, with over a month's march ahead of them in freezing temperatures to reach safety. Russia's geography made it impossible for Napoleon to escape in time and salvage his forces. A very similar fate happened to Nazi forces a hundred years later. With Russia's geography comes advantages, Russia has a great defensive advantage in war. However, the geography also has its disadvantages. It was due to Russia's geography that it didn't fully industrialize until midway through the 20th century, and still has economic problems.