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Ch 14 and 15 Response

Russia is the "boogeyman" of Europe, and has been for a long time. The causes for this pereptual(with notable exception) status are complicated, but can be effectively traced back to the geography of Russia in comparison to that of Europe, and that of the region that border the two. Most notably, the European Plain that affords little protection either way, the Chernozem soil of Ukraine and Western Russia that is some of the most fertile in the world, and the agricultural and mineral wealth of the region.

This is not a historical analysis, but a geographical one, so I will not list all of the (many) examples of conflict between European powers and whatever state controlled Russia, but the geography of the European Plain influecned all of them. Without a doubt, the most notable example of this is the Eastern front of World War II, where there were next to no natural obstacles(save for rivers) between the quick-moving German armies and the doorstep of Moscow. There is no mountain line where a defensive line could be drawn, so the only option was to retreat and burn the land behind them, and form a defensive line in the plains. This is far less effective than using a geographical feature as a military force multiplier, and explains the comparative mass of soldiers devoted to the Eastern front - both the Germans and the Soviets had to devote more soldiers to the front because of the lack of natural features. Far more examples can be noted for the geostrategic implications of the European Plain, but in essence, it is a massive flatland that is easy to traverse, and thus easy to invade - Russian rulers have resorted to a system of buffer states to protect themselves from invasion, which can be seen in the modern day *cough* Belarus *cough*.

Now, on to everyone's favorite subject: the geostrategic implications of agriculture. Simply put, the Chernozem("Black Soil" or "Black Earth") of Eastern Europe - most notably Ukraine, Poland, Belarus, and Western Russia - is some of the most fertile soil in the world, making this region the breadbasket of Europe and the world as a whole. In addition, the Donbas region of Ukraine holds massive coal and mineral wealth that makes it a valuable resource for any state that controls it. The region has been a strategic focus for centuries - something also manifested in the Eastern Front of World War II, most notably with the Fuhrer Directive saying that the region must be defended at all costs, far exceeding its military value - and continues to be so today with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

In conclusion, Russia's status as the largest geostrategic competitor to Europe is largely a result of the geography of the region that it controls, and the geography of the region that borders it. There are no natural barriers to invasion, and has led to an expansionist policy of creating buffer states that has been the official modus operandi of Russian rulers. In addition, the agricultural and mineral wealth of the bordering regions has made it a geostrategic target, and has led to the region being a focus of conflict for centuries.