N. AFRICA & S.W. ASIA

CHAPTER #8, SECTION #7
CENTRAL ASIA & AFGHANISTAN
CENTRAL ASIA (TURKESTAN)
BASIC INFO

• Region in Asian continent that extends from the mountains of western China to the shores of the Caspian Sea.

• Pakistan and Iran create southern border of the region

• Russia borders the north.

• Afghanistan is considered a part of the region even though it was never a formal part of the Soviet Union.

• Located on what was known as the Silk Road between Europe and the Far East
  • Long been a crossroads for people, ideas, and trade.

• Extremely varied geography
  • High mountain passes through vast mountain ranges - Tian Shan, Hindu Kush, and the Pamirs.
  • Home to Kara Kum and Kyzyl Kum Deserts - dominate interior with extensive spans of sand and desolation.

• Under sand and prairie grasses lay some of the most extensive untapped reserves of gas and oil on the planet.

• Natural resources are main attraction of the region
  • Drive economic forces that determine the development patterns of individual countries.
  • Multinational corporations have vigorously stepped up their activity in the region.

• Political systems are adjusting from the old Soviet Union’s socialist policies to new democratic systems
  • Subject to high levels of authoritarian rule and corruption in business and politics.
- Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan
  - Part of the former Soviet Union until its breakup in 1991.
  - Independent countries that make up the region called Central Asia.
  - Term *stan* means “land of,” so, for example, Uzbekistan is the land of the Uzbeks.

- Central Asia is referred to as Turkestan because of Turkish influence in the region.
  - People of Turkey did not originate from the Middle East
  - Originated from northern Asia.
  - Swept through Central Asia and dominated region on their way to Middle East.
  - Turkish language and heritage have had most significant impact on the people of Central Asia.
  - Turkmenistan’s name is another reminder of the Turkish connection; it means “the land of the Turkmens.”

- Most groups of Central Asia were nomadic peoples
  - Rode horses and herded livestock on the region’s vast steppes.
  - Continued until the 1920s, when Soviet Union forced many of the groups to abandon lifestyle and settle on collective farms and in cities.
  - Most of people of Central Asia continue to identify culturally with their nomadic past.

- Mix of local and Russian culture in cities
  - Dress and food because of the large influx of Russian populations in the region.
  - More than six million Russians and Ukrainians were resettled into Central Asia during Soviet rule.

- One primary ways people distinguish themselves is through religious practices.
  - Islam was and still is the dominant religion.
  - Most Central Asian Muslims are Sunnis.
KAZAKHSTAN
THE PEOPLE

• Traditional people share Mongol and Turkic heritage
  • Moved into the central Asia region sometime after 1200 CE.
  • Expansion of Russian Empire integrated Kazakhstan and its neighbors
  • Eased transition when the tsarist system of Russian government gave way to the soviet union.
  • Influx of Russian people and culture had major influence on Kazakhstan.
INDEPENDENCE

• Gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991
  • Created world’s largest landlocked nation.
  • Ninth-largest state on the planet in terms of square miles
  • Larger in physical area than of all of Western Europe.

• Vast land host to wide variety of physical landscapes
  • High, snow-capped peaks of the ranges on the Chinese border.
  • Western portions are lowlands bordering the Caspian Sea.
  • Seemingly endless grasslands of the interior are one of the largest steppe regions in the world
  • Large portion of southern Kazakhstan is desert, including the northern regions of the Kyzyl Kum Desert.
UZBEKISTAN
SOME BASICS

- Physically borders all the Central Asian countries.
- Most populous Central Asian country,
  - Population exceeds twenty-seven million.
- Eastern boundary extends deep into Kyrgyzstan territory.
  - Boundary lines were created during the Soviet era
  - Provide central government with more control over its republics by politicizing enclaves to their benefit.
- Called doubly landlocked nation
  - All countries that surround it are also landlocked.
  - Main source of fresh water comes from the Eastern Highland regions.
  - Main rivers have been heavily diverted for irrigation and often depleted before reaching their destination at the Aral Sea.
AGRICULTURE

- Cotton is the main agricultural crop.
  - One of the top producers of cotton in the world
  - Major exporter to world markets.
- Central and Western regions have mainly arid desert climates
  - Rely heavily on the fresh water flowing in from the mountains.
- Agriculture employs a full one-fourth of the population
  - Accounts for one-fourth of the gross domestic product (GDP).
- Extraction of gold, minerals, and fossil fuels are also prime economic activities.
- Country has been transitioning from the old Soviet Union’s command economy, which was controlled by the central government, to a market economy competing in a global marketplace.
POPULATION

• A country of young people
  • One-third of the population is under the age of fifteen.

• Education heavily emphasized during the Soviet era
  • As a result, about 99% of the population is literate
  • One-third of the people still live in poverty.

• Islam emerged in this country after Uzbekistan won its independence in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union.

• Culture of openness
  • Islam has risen in prominence to the point that approximately 88% of Uzbeks profess Islamic beliefs.

• Most commonly spoken language is Persian/Farsi.
MAJOR CITIES

- **Samarkand** and the country’s capital city, **Tashkent**
  - Located in the eastern core region
  - Home to most of the population.

- **Tashkent**
  - Unofficial population of more than three million people.
  - Sits on the convergence of a local river and its tributaries, started as a caravanserai, or oasis for trade, along the Silk Road.

- **Samarkand**
  - Second-largest city
  - Most noted as the central city of the Silk Road as well as an important historical city for Islamic scholars.
  - 2001 - UNESCO declared this 2,750-year-old city a World Heritage Site.
  - One of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world
  - Has been one of the more important cities in Central Asia
ARAL SEA
SHRINKING SEA

• Shared by Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

• Once the fourth-largest body of water in the world
  • Has been reduced to a fraction of its original area.

• 1960 - covered about 26,254 square miles,
  • Area larger than the size of the US state of West Virginia.

• 2009 - covered less than 10% of the same area.
  • Entire eastern portion has become a sand desert
  • Deteriorating hulls of abandoned fishing vessels.

• Loss of water is approximately equivalent to the complete draining of both Lake Erie and Lake Ontario in North America.
CAUSES OF LOSS

- Water loss escalation
  - Syr Darya River, flowed into the northern part of the sea, and the Amu Darya River, flowed into the southern side of the sea, were diverted for the irrigation of cotton and other crops.

- Amu Darya River
  - 1,500 miles long, region’s longest river.
  - Source is the high mountain streams and lakes of the Pamir Mountains.

- Environmental problems
  - Extensive use of pesticides and fertilizers in agricultural processes.
  - Chemicals contaminated the water flowing into the Aral Sea.
  - When water dried up in the sea, the winds carried the buildup of chemicals and salt from the dry seabed over the land, causing serious health-related problems in the nearby human population.
  - Cancer and respiratory illness rates continue to be higher than normal.

- Water and land pollution is a serious problem.
  - Climate around the Aral Sea has changed gradually because of the loss of water from evaporation for precipitation.
  - Climate is getting warmer in the summer and colder in the winter.
MORE CAUSES

• Diversion of water from its northern inlet, the Syr Darya River.

• Other end of the Syr Darya River
  • Soviet Union placed a dam on the river
  • Allowed the overflow from the dam to flow into low-lying dry pans, creating artificial lakes.
  • **Aydar Lake** was created and became the second-largest lake in Uzbekistan.

• Various species of fish were introduced and the lake became a major source for commercial fishing.
  • Hundreds of tons of fish are harvested annually.
  • Just as fishing was declining in the Aral Sea, the fishing industry was growing at Aydar Lake.
EFFECTS OF LOSS

- Decline has destroyed habitats and the local economy.
  - Fishing industry, which employed more than sixty thousand people, has been devastated.
  - Remaining western portion has a rising salt content
    - Contributes to decline of the fish population.
- Soviets conducted biological weapons experiments on an island that was once in the middle of the Aral Sea.
  - Hazardous wastes such as anthrax and toxic chemicals contaminated the land and found their way into the sea.
- Efforts have been made to marginalize the environmental damage of the contamination
  - Damage has not been completely ameliorated.
- Historically been an important environmental location for wildlife.
  - Located in a major flyway for migratory waterfowl
  - Served as an important habitat.
- One of the world’s worst environmental catastrophes.
- The fact that the Aral Sea is located in a region that is not part of the core economic area of the global community has rendered it “out of sight and out of mind” by entities that could potentially provide economic support.
UZBEKISTAN

- Major part of the southern portion located in Uzbekistan
  - Has not contributed the economic attention necessary to halt the sea’s continued deterioration.
- Remaining western portion of the Uzbekistan side of the Aral Sea will continue to shrink if measures are not taken to address the loss of water from the Amu Darya River.
- Eastern side was completely dry by 2009.
- Uzbekistan has responded to the situation by contracting out to various multinational oil companies from Korea, China, and Russia to explore for oil beneath the dry seabed.
ACTIONS TAKEN

• Northern portion, called the **Little Aral Sea**
  • Some success in abating the deterioration of the once-thriving environmental habitat.
  • Major dam has been constructed that partitions off the Little Aral Sea, causing water from the Syr Darya River to increase the water level of the Little Aral Sea and reduce the salt content.

• Canals, dikes, and irrigation processes have been updated
  • Reduce the loss of water
  • Increase the amount that flows into the northern section.

• Development efforts have caused water level to rise
  • Reinvigorate once-struggling fishing industry.

• Efforts have been undertaken by Kazakhstan’s government, which controls the Little Aral Sea.
TURKMENISTAN
SOME BASICS

• South of the Amu Darya River
• Desert country
  • 80% of the country is covered by the Kara Kum Desert, which is among the driest in the world
• Extends from the Caspian Sea to Afghanistan in the east.
• Slightly larger in physical area than the US state of California.
• Southern mountains along the Iranian and Afghan border
  • Reach as high as 10,290 feet in elevation.
• Water from the Amu Darya River has been diverted by the seven-hundred-mile-long Kara Kum Canal through Turkmenistan to help grow cotton and other agricultural products.
SOVIET TRANSITION

- Transition from a Soviet republic to an independent state in 1991 brought many changes.
- Former leader of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, Saparmurat Niyazov
  - Dominated the presidency for fifteen years.
  - Authoritarian rule
  - Notorious for developing a cult of personality.
  - Promoted traditional culture
  - Islam the predominant religion
  - Changed all the names of the days of the week and the months of the year to his name, the names of his family members, and the names of Turkmen heroes or famous people.
  - Image was printed on the currency
  - Large posters of him could be seen throughout the country.
  - Book on important concepts, the *Ruhnama* (*The Book of the Soul*), was to be read by all schoolchildren and the public.
  - After his death in 2006, many of his actions were reversed.
- Country continues to transition to a stable democratic state, though many of the same dynamics of corruption and authoritarian rule remain.
RESOURCES

• Fourth-largest natural gas reserves in the world
  • Top three are Russia, Iran, and the United States.
  • Income from natural gas exports has become the country’s greatest means of gaining wealth.

• Landlocked, government forced to partner with Russia
  • Use Russia’s pipelines to export the natural gas.
  • Do not want to rely on Russia’s monopoly on the pipelines
  • Developed additional pipeline to China
  • Help boost income and profits.

• International corporations are seeking to do business
  • Corner a piece of the vast natural resources.

• Corporate colonialism is extremely active
  • Contributed to a high level of corruption in the government and the business sector.
  • Unclear how much of the country’s wealth filters down to most of the population.
  • Over the past decade, unemployment rates have exceeded 50 percent, and more than half the population lives below the poverty line.
KYRGYZSTAN
BASICS & POPULATION

- Local groups in the mountains of Central Asia make up the population of Kyrgyzstan.
- The forty rays of sun on the country’s flag symbolize the legendary forty tribes of Manas that represent the nation.
- Rugged landscape of mountainous land
  - High ranges of the Tian Shan Mountains
  - Can reach elevations as high as 24,400 feet and cover about 80 percent of the country.
  - Snowfall from mountains provides fresh water for agriculture as well as hydroelectric energy.
  - Food crops can be grown in valleys and the few lowland areas.
  - Mountains hold deposits of metals and minerals that have a strong potential for adding to the national wealth.
- Half the population works in agriculture
  - Self-sufficiency in food production is a major objective for survival
- Oil and natural gas reserves are also available for exploitation.
  - Government is seeking foreign aid and investments to help develop these resources.
- 2009 - had a population of about 5.4 million in a land area about the size of the US state of South Dakota.
  - 30% of the population is under the age of fifteen,
  - 36% of the population is urban.
Transition from a Soviet republic to independence was not smooth.  
- Loss of state social safety net pushed the economy further to the informal sector  
- Trading and small transactions for personal survival were common.  
- Shortages of consumer goods occur in rural areas and small towns.

Isolated country working to integrate itself into the global economy through technology and modernization.

2010 - clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz brought about riots in the streets of major cities  
- More than two hundred casualties and three hundred thousand displaced citizens.  
- Government worked to stabilize itself with new leadership.
MOUNTAINS

• Highest mountain ranges in the world
  • 90% of Tajikistan is mountainous
  • More than half the country is 10,000 feet in elevation or higher
  • Ranges of the Himalayas extend from the south all the way to the western border with China.

• Pamir Knot
  • Pamirs is a mountain range located where the Tian Shan, Karakorum, and Hindu Kush mountain ranges meet
  • Roof of the world.
  • Elevations in the Pamirs often exceed 24,500 feet.
  • Source of the Amu Darya River
  • Home to the longest glacier outside the polar regions (forty-eight miles long in 2009).
  • Great potential for hydroelectric power generation, and Tajikistan is developing the world’s highest dam.
AREA & PEOPLE

- Smallest physical area of any country in Central Asia
- Population of about 7.3 million.
  - One-fourth of the population is urban
  - One-third of the population is younger than fifteen years of age.
- Less ethnic or religious diversity
  - 80% of the people are ethnically Tajik and are Sunni Muslims.
- Natural resources similar in quantity to those in Kyrgyzstan
- Economy is not advanced enough to fully take advantage of its economic potential.
- Half the labor base works abroad and sends remittances back to their families for economic support.
- Unemployment is high, and job opportunities have not been able to keep up with demand.
MAJOR CITY

- **Dushanbe**
  - Capital and largest city of Tajikistan
  - Situated on the confluence of two local rivers
  - Originally a small village
  - Became an administrative center for the region when the Soviet army conquered the area in 1929.
  - Soviets transformed the political and economic landscape and made Dushanbe a center for cotton and silk production.
  - Soviets also transformed the cultural and ethnic makeup of the city by relocating tens of thousands of people from Russia and other regions of Central Asia to Dushanbe.
Transition from a Soviet Republic to an independent country in 1991 was difficult. 1992 to 1997:
- Bitter civil war between regional factions killed more than fifty thousand people.
- Political instability and corruption has hampered the growth of a market economy.
- Political power remains in the hands of the economic elite.
- Debt restructuring with Russia and an infusion of development loans from China have aided the ailing economy.
- Aid from the US helped fund a thirty-six-million-dollar bridge linking Tajikistan and Afghanistan:
  - Opened in August 2007.
  - US aid has also contributed to infrastructure development designed to help US military operations in Afghanistan and in the region as a whole.
- Countries such as Russia, China, and the United States are all looking to gain an advantage with their ties to Tajikistan to exploit the region’s natural resources.
Fun Facts

- Present-day Afghanistan has been conquered by the likes of Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great, and the Mogul Empire.
- Was a buffer zone for colonial feuds between Russia and British India.
- High central mountain range of the Hindu Kush dominates the country and leaves a zone of well-watered fertile plains to the north and a dry desert region to the south.
- Remote region without access to the sea and acts as a strategic link between the Middle East and the Far East.
SOVIET UNION & THE TALIBAN

• 1979
  • Soviet Union took advantage of ongoing ethnic warfare in Afghanistan to inject itself into the country.
  • Soviets pushed in from the north and occupied much of Afghanistan until they completely withdrew in 1989.

• During the Soviet occupation
  • US supported anti-Communist resistance groups such as the Mujahideen with money, arms, and surface-to-air missiles.
  • Missiles were instrumental in taking out Soviet aircraft and MiG fighters
  • Caused a critical shift in the balance of power in the war.
  • One major connections between CIA and Mujahideen was Saudi national named Osama bin Laden.
  • Support from the CIA through bin Laden to the Mujahideen was instrumental in defeating the Soviets.

• Power vacuum left by the retreating Soviets
  • Allowed conflicts to reemerge between the many ethnic factions in Afghanistan.
  • Dozens of languages are spoken in Afghanistan; the top two are Pashtu and Afghan Persian-Dari.

• Dozen major ethnic groups; the top two are Pashtun and Tajik.
  • Groups regularly fight among themselves, but they have also been known to form alliances.

• Rural areas usually led by clan leaders
  • Not part of any official arm of a national government.
  • Forming any national unity or identity is not easy. The national government in the capital city of Kabul has little influence in the country’s rural regions.
**TALIBAN RISE**

- Soviet invasion brought internally warring factions together
- Chaos and anarchy thrived after the Soviet forces withdrew
- **Taliban**
  - Islamic fundamentalist group
  - Fill the power vacuum.
  - Use Islam as a unifying force to bring the country together.
  - The problem - much diversity in how Islam was practiced by the numerous local groups.
  - Sunni Muslim group that adheres to strict Islamic laws under the Wahhabi branch of the faith similar to that of Saudi Arabia
  - Women removed from positions in hospitals, schools, and work environments and had to wear **burkas** (also spelled **burqas**) and be covered from head to toe, including a veil over their faces.
  - Violators were either beaten or shot.
  - Brought a sense of militant order to Kabul and the regions under their control
- Many factions opposed the Taliban - **Northern Alliance**
  - Association of groups located in the northern portion of the country.
  - Civil war between the Taliban and those that opposed them resulted in the deaths of more than fifty thousand people by 1996 when the Taliban emerged to take power in Kabul.
AL-QAEDA AND US INVASION
After the war against the Soviet Union was over
- the US role in Afghanistan diminished.
- Groups that the United States had supported continued to vie for power in local conflicts.

Osama bin Laden remained in Afghanistan
- Established training camps for his version of an anti-Western resistance group called al-Qaeda.
- Just as he had opposed the Soviet Union, he now opposed the United States, even though the United States had supported him against the Soviets.

Saudi government allowed the United States to establish military bases in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf War, and this was one reason for bin Laden’s opposition
- Believed that non-Muslims should not be on the same ground as the Muslim holy sites of Mecca and Medina.
The 9-11 attack in New York City was traced back to al-Qaeda and bin Laden, who was residing in Afghanistan at the time.

**Operation Enduring Freedom**
- United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001
- Removed the Taliban from power
- Dismantled the al-Qaeda training camps.

bin Laden escaped, the terror of the Taliban was temporarily reduced.
- Women were allowed to return to the workplace, and the rebuilding of the country became a priority.

Country was devastated by war and is divided by the human geography
- Various ethnic and traditional groups.
- One of the most impoverished places on Earth.

Armed conflicts did not end with the US invasion.
- After regrouping, the Taliban rallied its supporters on the Pakistani side of the border and returned to the fighting front in Afghanistan against North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and US forces.
DEATH OF BIN LADEN

• Fighting between Western forces and Taliban in Afghanistan continued to provide the exiled bin Laden a platform to promote his al-Qaeda terrorist activities from his hiding place.

• Efforts to locate and marginalize bin Laden continued through to the US presidency of Barack Obama.

• May of 2011, on orders from President Obama, a team of US Navy Seals were sent into the city of Abottabad, Pakistan, to a private compound where intelligence indicated that bin Laden was hiding.
  • In the confrontation, the US Navy Seal team killed bin Laden.
  • Entire operation was conducted without the awareness of the Pakistani government.
  • May have impacted al-Qaeda but has not likely diminished the fighting in Afghanistan.
OPIUM & HEROIN

- World’s largest producer of opium
  - Product extracted from a poppy plant seedpod that can also be refined into heroin.
  - Expanding poppy cultivation as well as a growing drug trade may account for one-third of the country’s income.
  - 80% of the heroin consumed in Europe is grown in Afghanistan.
  - Drug trade has only multiplied the problems in this devastated country.

- Prudent and effective methods for the government to address the drug trade are matters for debate and negotiation.
  - Most of the country is ruled by warlords and clan leaders
  - Have few resources other than tradition and custom.

- Infrastructure has been destroyed through warfare, and its government is dependent on foreign aid
  - Without cannot recover to integrate itself with the global economy.
  - Central Asia has enormous oil and natural gas reserves, and the core economic regions of the world will continue their work to extract these resources for economic gain.
MOVING FORWARD

- Democratic elections held for office of president in Afghanistan beginning in October of 2004.
- Hamid Karzai
  - Country’s first elected president in the twentieth century
  - Reelected as president in 2009 under the cloud of claims of election fraud
- Right to vote was restored to women in the 2004 election.
- To combat voter fraud, people would dip their fingers in ink to indicate they had voted and to ensure they did not vote more than once.
  - Voting has not been a smooth process because democratic rule is new to Afghanistan.
- Afghanistan’s future is insecure.
  - Most of Afghanistan is still ruled by warlords and clan leaders.
  - Taliban has sustained its support from bases on the Pakistani side of the border
  - United Nations (UN) and NATO troops continue to confront the Taliban and work toward stability.