

Central Asia



Learning Objectives

- Understand the significance of the landlocked location of Central Asia
- Learn about historical cohesion of Central Asia, along with its pivotal role in evolution of Eurasia
- This region has become more familiar to U.S. citizens since September 11, 2001
- Become familiar with the physical, demographic, cultural, political, and economic characteristics of South Asia
- Understand the following concepts and models:
 - Loess
 - Pastoralist
 - Theocracy
 - Transhumance
 - Turkestan

Introduction

- **Central Asia is a large, compact, landlocked region within the Eurasian landmass**
- **Central Asia can be divided into two sections. The western section, sometimes called the Caucasus, lies between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.**
- **Until 1991, the region contained only two countries, Mongolia and Afghanistan**
- **Soviet Union's breakup added several more independent countries to the region**
- **After September 11th, Central Asia became more well-established on the map**

Caucasus countries

- Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan
- Georgia and Armenia were the first two Christian nations.



Caucasus Nations

- Nations get names from the Caucasus Mountains, which straddle the area between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea. The mountains actually consist of two ranges. **The higher peaks, called the Greater Caucasus, are to the north.** They include Mount Shkhara, in Georgia. At 17,063 feet (5,201 m), it is the third-highest peak in the Caucasus. The lower mountain range, the Lesser Caucasus, is to the south.

Central Asia

- The eastern section, reaching from the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea to China. = the six “stans”: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. Stans is an ancient Persian word for country.



Steppes, Deserts, & Threatened Lakes

- **Shrinking Aral Sea**

- Use of rivers feeding the sea for agricultural irrigation
- 60% of the sea's total volume has disappeared
- Economic and cultural damages

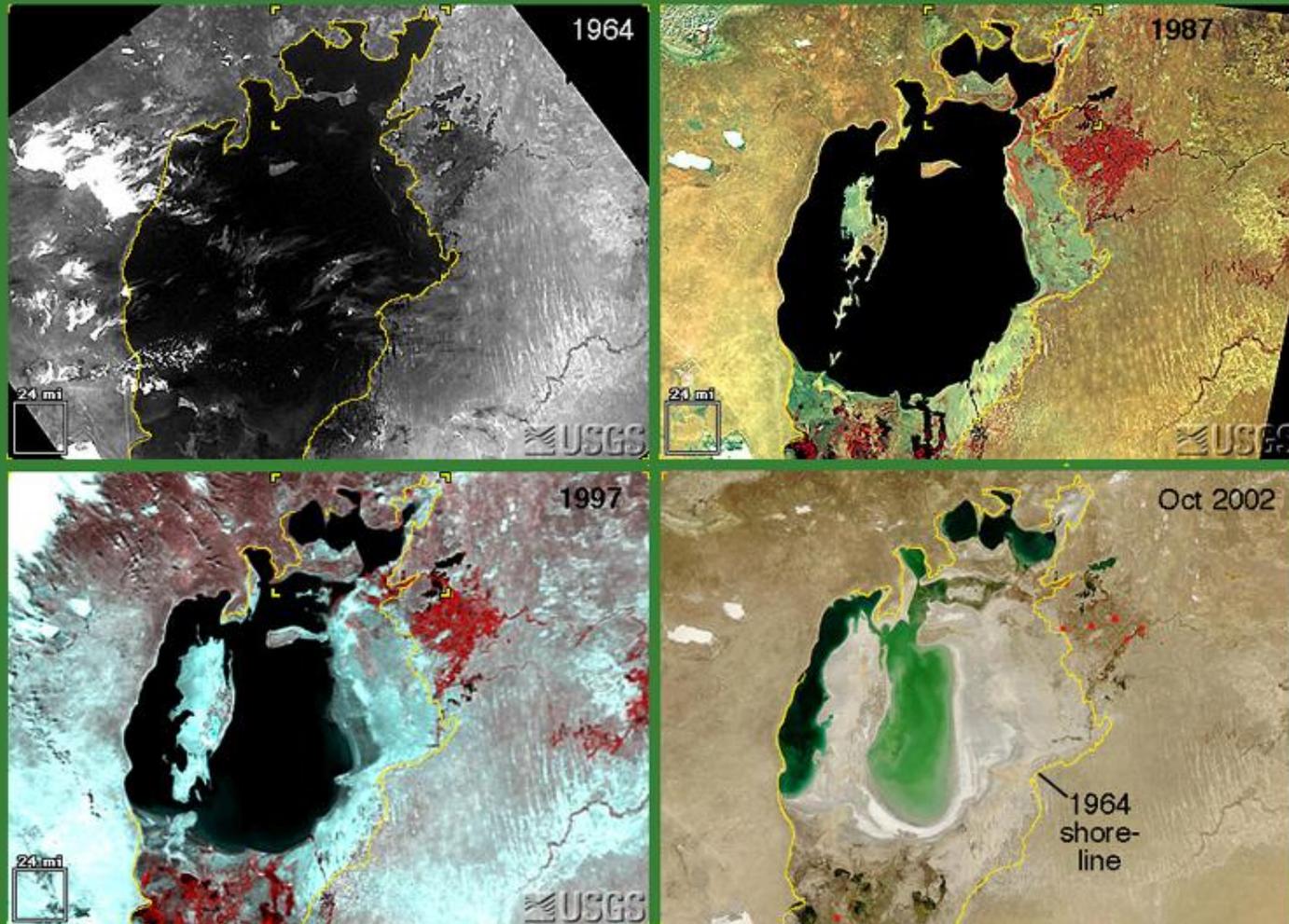
- **Major Environmental Issues**

- **Relatively clean environment due to low population density**

- **Desertification**

- The Gobi Desert has gradually spread southward
- Desertification in northern Kazakhstan
- Much of the region has been deforested

Shrinking Aral Sea (Fig. 10.2)



Effects of 40 years of irrigation on the Aral Sea

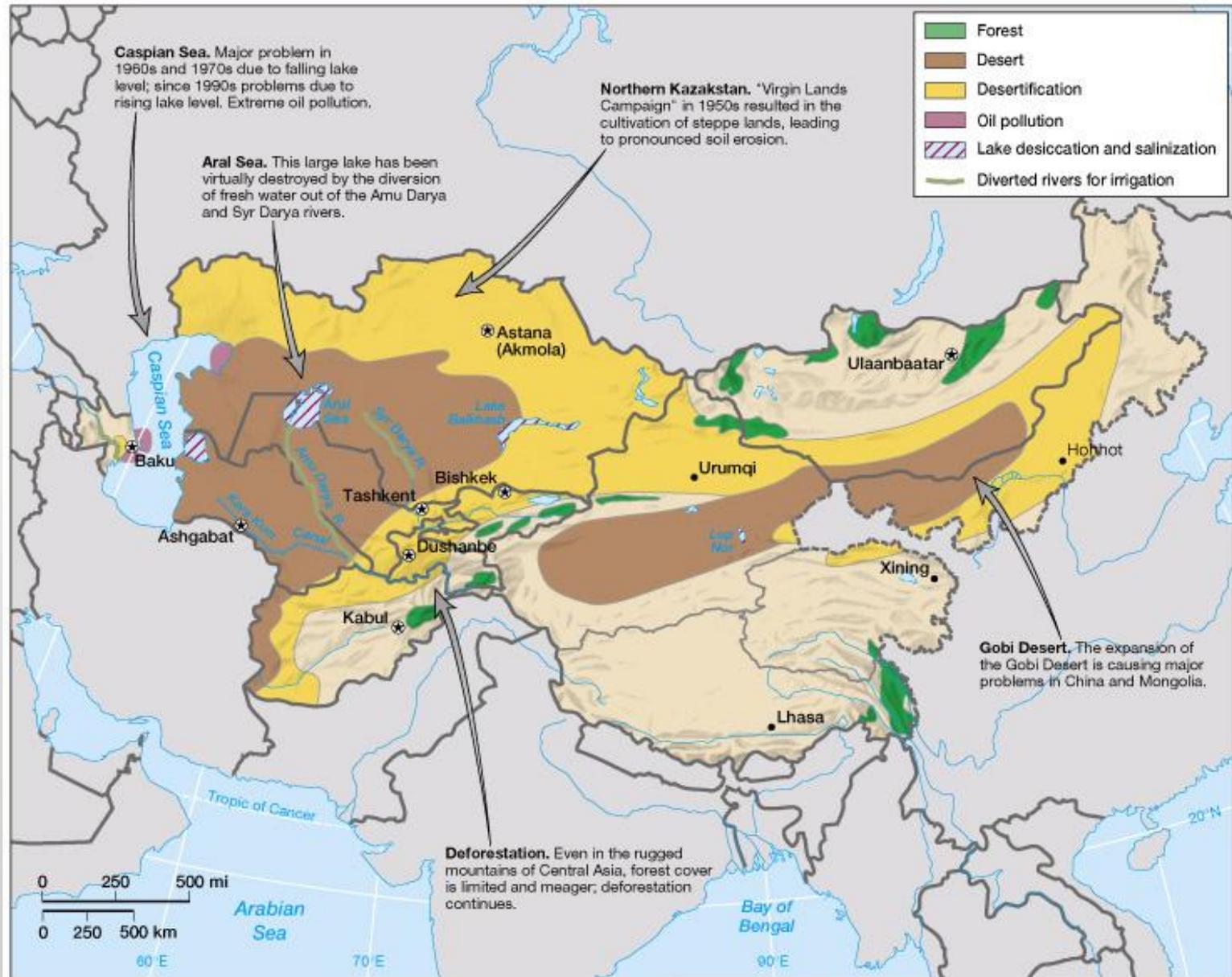
(80% volume reduction, more than doubling of salinity; devastation of fisheries, local climate change)

Sources: USGS Earthshots - Satellite Images of Environmental Change (1964-1999) and NASA Earth Observatory (2002)

Shrinking Aral Sea



Environmental Issues in Central Asia (Fig. 10.4)



- **Major Environmental Issues (cont.)**
 - **Shrinking and Expanding Lakes**
 - **Caspian Sea – world's largest fresh water lake; construction of reservoirs on the Volga River diverted water**
 - **Aral Sea, Lake Balqash shrinking**
 - **Maintenance of their size is dependent on precipitation**
- **Central Asia's Physical Regions**
 - **The Central Asian Highlands**
 - **Formed by the collision of Indian subcontinent into Asian mainland**
 - **Himalayas, Karakoram Range, Pamir Mountains**
 - **Pamir Knot – a tangle of mountains where Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Tajikistan converge**

Tibetan Highlands





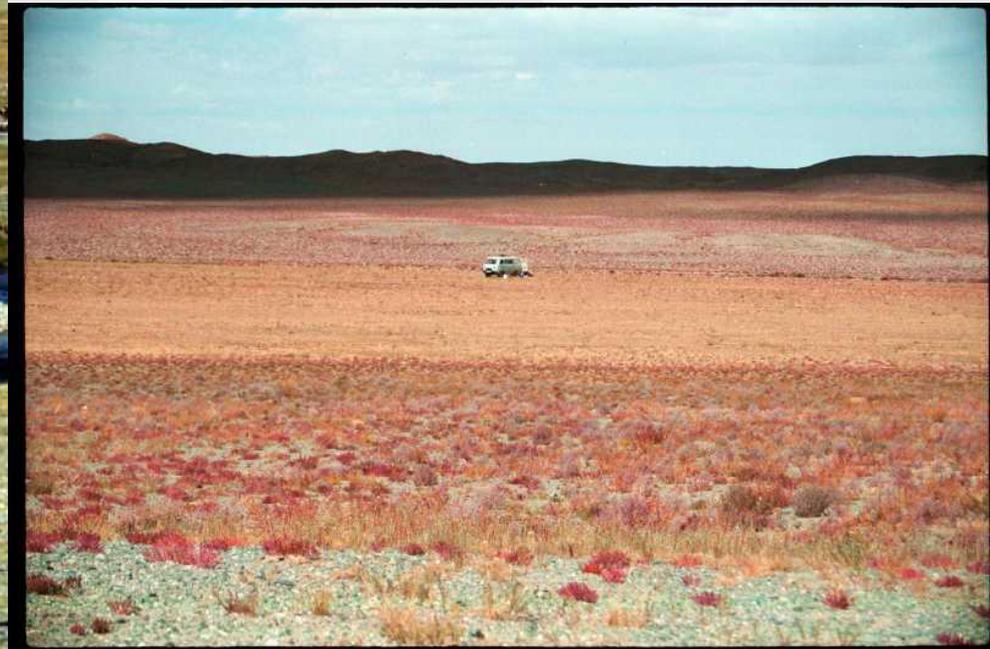
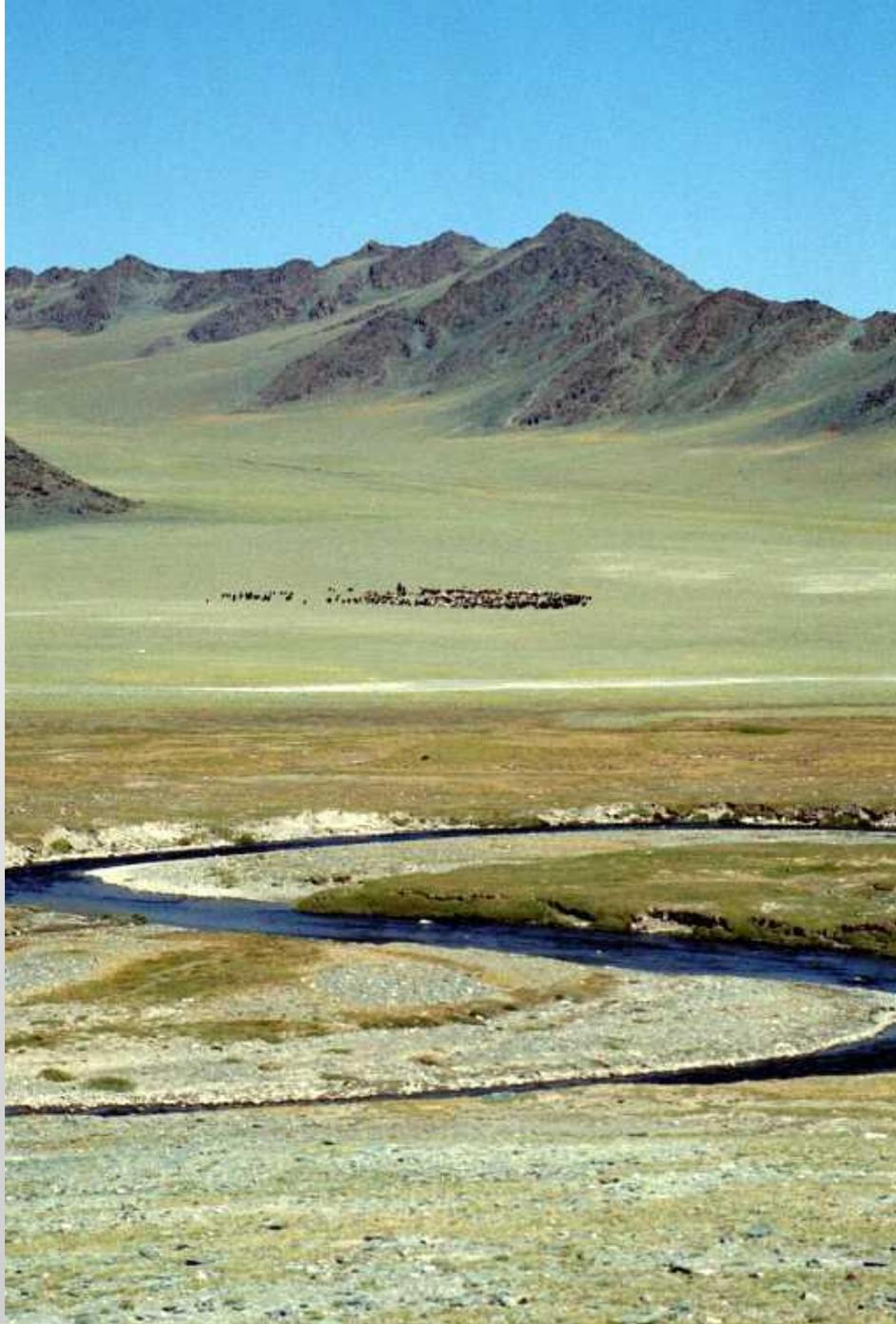
Roads connecting Tibet and China

- **Central Asia's Physical Regions (cont.)**
 - **The Central Asian Highlands (cont.)**
 - Hindu Kush, Kunlun Shan, Tien Shan: peaks top 20K ft.
 - Tibetan Plateau – source area of many of Asia's large rivers
 - **The Plains and Basins**
 - **Central Asia's desert belt**
 - Arid plains of the Caspian & Aral seas to the west
 - Kara Kum and Kyzyl Kum Deserts
 - Several deserts in the eastern portion of the belt
 - Taklamakan Desert in the Tarim Basin
 - Steppe (grassland) and taiga (coniferous forest) in the north

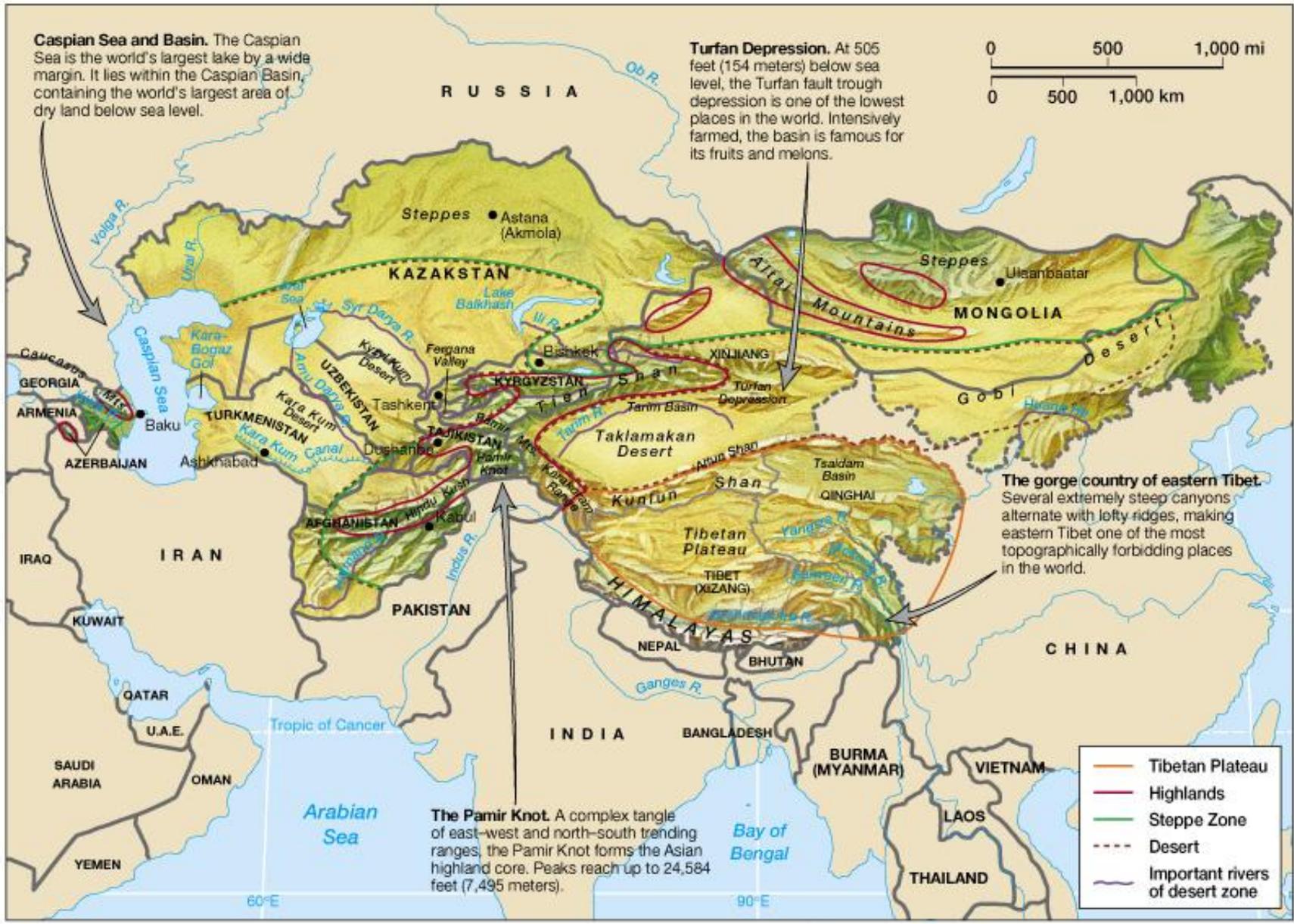
Harvesting wheat on the plains of Kazakhstan



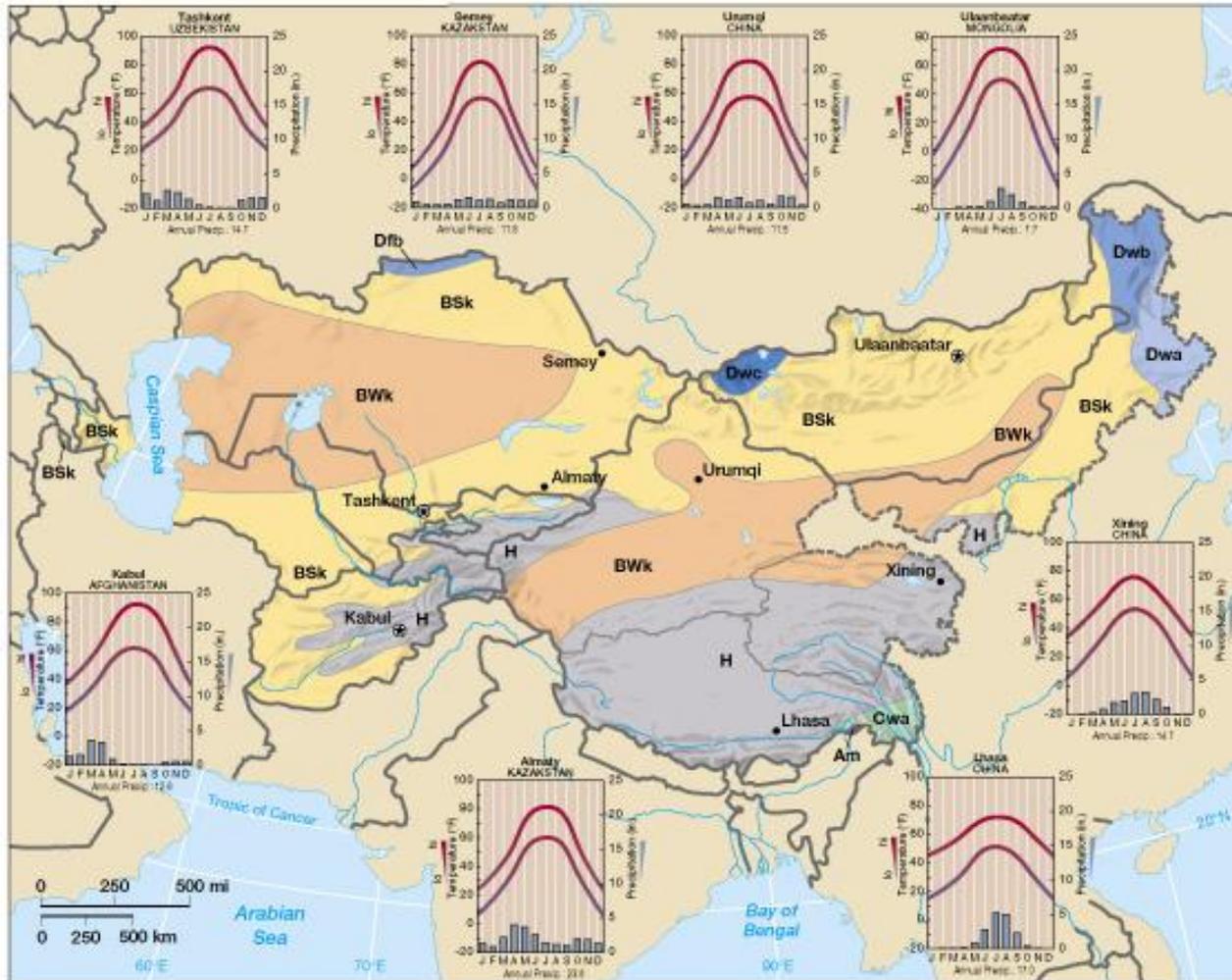
Mongolian steppe (left) and the Gobi Desert after a rain (below)



Physical Regions of Central Asia (Fig. 10.5)



Climates of Central Asia (Fig. 10.7)



A TROPICAL HUMID CLIMATES

Am Tropical monsoon

B DRY CLIMATES

BWk Midlatitude desert

BSk Midlatitude steppe

C MILD MIDLATITUDE CLIMATES

Cwa Humid subtropical, with dry season, hot summers

D CONTINENTAL MIDLATITUDE CLIMATES

Dwa Humid continental, with dry winter, warm summer

Dwb Humid continental, with dry winter, cool summer

Dfb Humid continental, without dry season, cool summer

Dwc Subarctic

H HIGHLAND

H Complex mountain climates

Central Asian Winter



Densely Settled Oases amid Vacant Lands

- Most of the region is sparsely inhabited
 - Too arid or too high in elevation to support human life
- **Pastoralists:** people who raise livestock for subsistence purposes
- **Highlands Population and Subsistence Patterns**
 - Only sparse vegetation can survive in this region
 - Yak pastoralism
 - Sedentary farming in Tibet
 - Isolated valleys in Pamir Range support agriculture and intensive human settlement
 - **Transhumance:** seasonal movement of flocks from winter to summer pastures/meadows

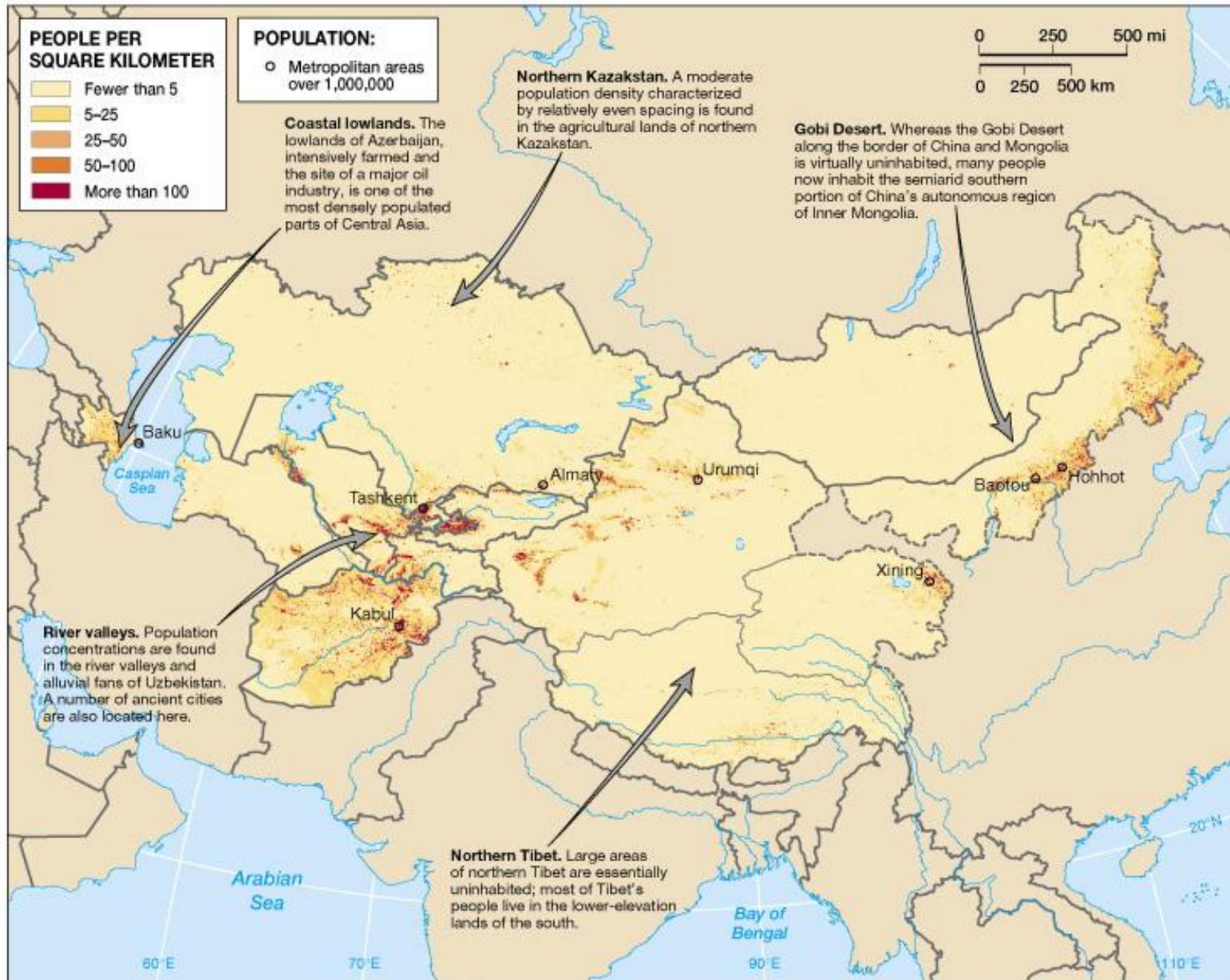
Milking a Yak in Mongolia



Nomad dwelling in Kyrgystan



Population Density in Central Asia (Fig. 10.8)



• Lowland Population and Subsistence Patterns

- **Most Central Asia's desert inhabitants live in narrow belt where the mountains meet the basins and plains**
- Ring-like settlement pattern in the Tarim Basin
- Former Soviet Central Asia population concentrated in zone where highlands meet the plains
 - **Alluvial fans:** fan-shaped deposits of sediments dropped by streams flowing out of the mountains; a fertile area
 - Long been devoted to intensive cultivation
 - **Loess:** silty soil deposited by the wind that provides fertile agricultural soil
- Fergana Valley of upper Syr Darya River (shared by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) and Azerbaijan's Kura River Basin have intensive agriculture

- **Lowland Population and Subsistence Patterns**
 - **Gobi Desert has few sources of permanent water**
 - Pastoralism a common way of life, but many have been forced to adopt a sedentary lifestyle
 - Kazakhstan is major producer of spring wheat
- **Population Issues**
 - Some portions of the region are growing at a moderate rate
 - Growth in western China from migration of Han Chinese
 - Growth in former Soviet zone from high levels of fertility
 - Higher fertility because of Islam? Low level of urbanization?
 - **Afghanistan has highest birthrate of the region**

Population and Settlement: Densely Settled Oases amid Vacant Lands (cont.)

- **Urbanization in Central Asia**
 - River valleys and oases have been partially urbanized for millennia (e.g., Samarkand and Bukhara, Uzbekistan)
 - Conquest of the region by the Russian and Chinese empires started a new period of urbanization
 - Today, urbanization increasing northern Kazakhstan
 - In some areas, cities remain few and far between



Astana, Kazakhstan

A Meeting Ground of Different Traditions

- **Historical Overview: An Indo-European Hearth?**
 - **River valleys and oases were early sites of sedentary, agricultural communities (8000 B.C.)**
 - **Domestication of the horse spurred nomadic pastoralism (4000 B.C.), provided military advantages over sedentary peoples**
 - **Earliest languages were Indo-European**
 - **Replaced by Altaic (Turkish and Mongolian)**
 - **Tibetan kingdom unified in 700 A.D., but was short lived**

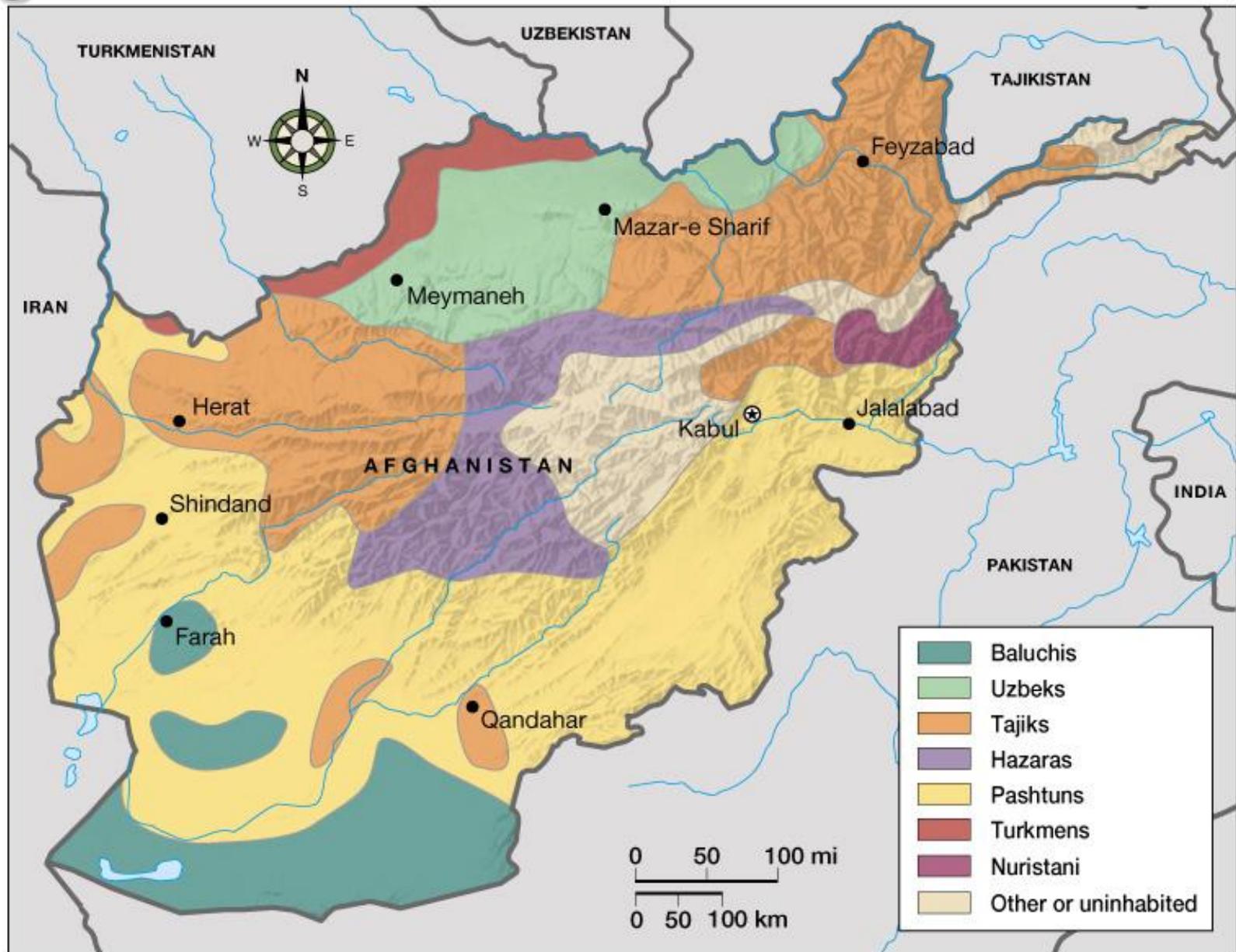


Linguistic Geography of Central Asia (Fig. 10.13)



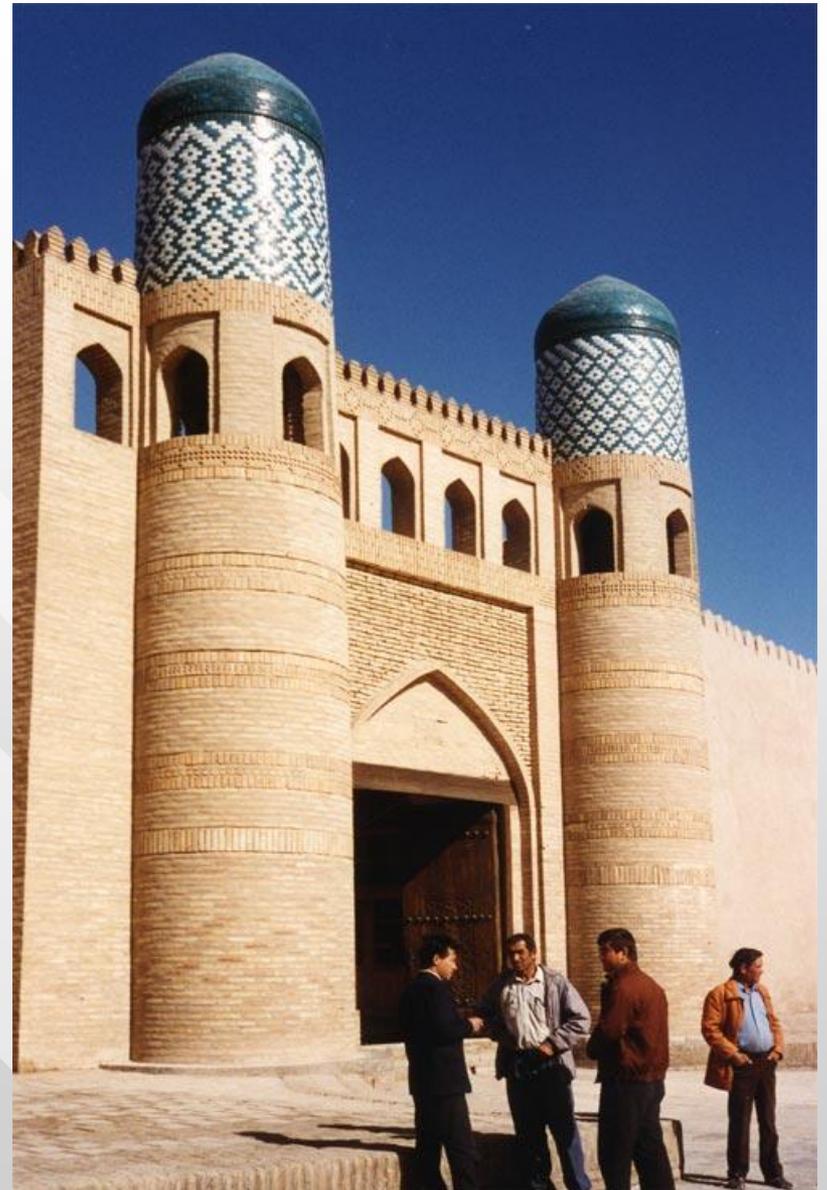
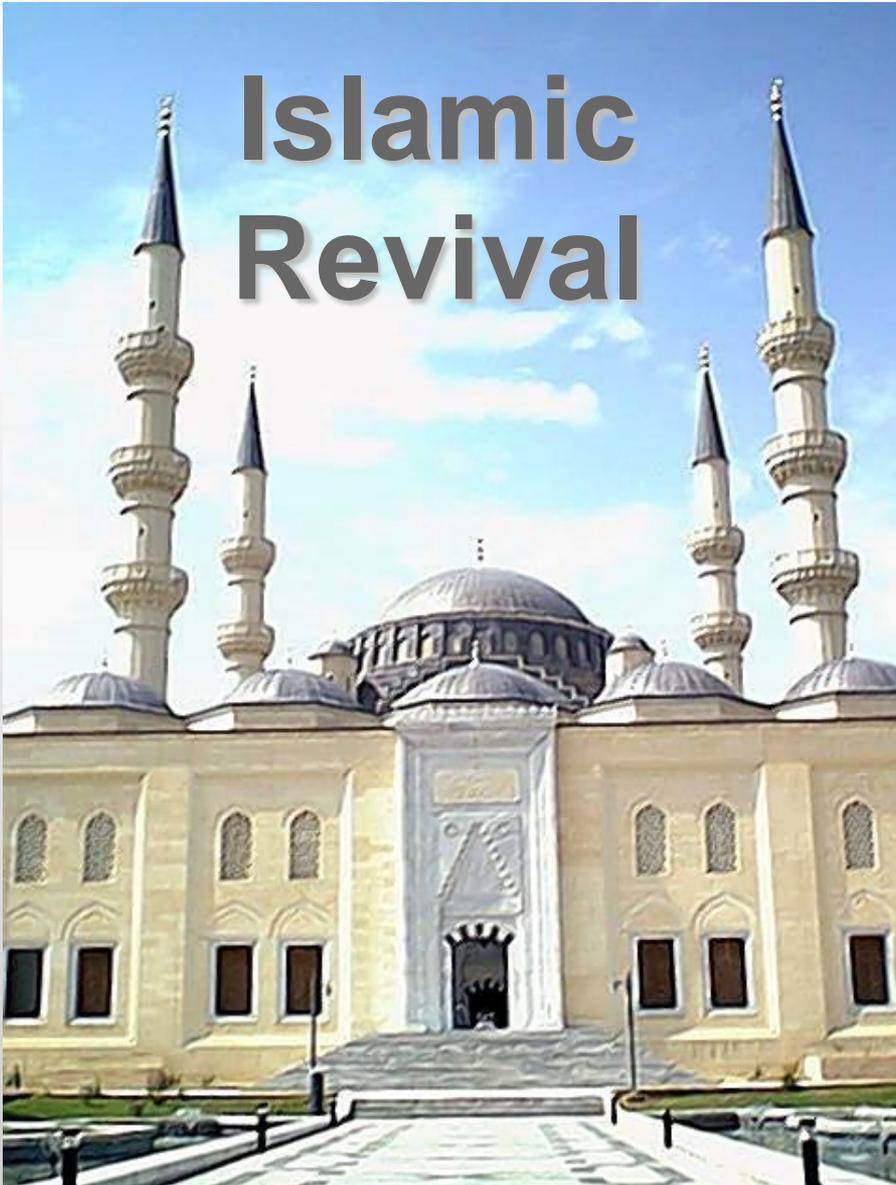
- **Contemporary Linguistic and Ethnic Geography (cont.)**
 - **Linguistic Complexity in the Tajikistan**
 - Indo-European Tajik spoken in the Tajikistan (related to Persian)
 - “Mountain Tajik” spoken in remote mtns. of eastern Tajikistan
 - **Language and Ethnicity in Afghanistan**
 - **Afghanistan never colonized by outside powers; became a country in 1700s under Pashtun leadership**
 - Pashtun ethnic group (40% to 60%)
 - **Dari Speakers**
 - Tajiks in west and north; Hazaras: in the central mountains
 - **11% speak Uzbek (Indo-European)**

Afghanistan's Ethnic Patchwork (Fig. 10.15)



- **Geography of Religion**
 - **Islam in Central Asia**
 - **Pashtuns adopt a stricter interpretation of Islam**
 - **Kazaks are more lax in their interpretation of Islam**
 - **Most of the region's Muslims are Sunni**
 - **Shiism dominant among the Hazaras and the Azeris**
 - **Communists in China, Soviet Union and Mongolia discouraged all religions (including Islam)**
 - **Islamic revival underway as people return to their cultural roots (former Soviet republics)**
 - **Islamic fundamentalism** is a powerful movement in Afghanistan, parts of Tajikistan, and the Fergana Valley
 - **Taliban in Afghanistan**
 - **Extreme fundamentalist Islamic organization**

Islamic Revival



Old Cultural Elements Persist





**Uzbekistan –
monument
from the
Soviet period
– Soviet
Realism
school of art**

Political Reawakening (cont.)

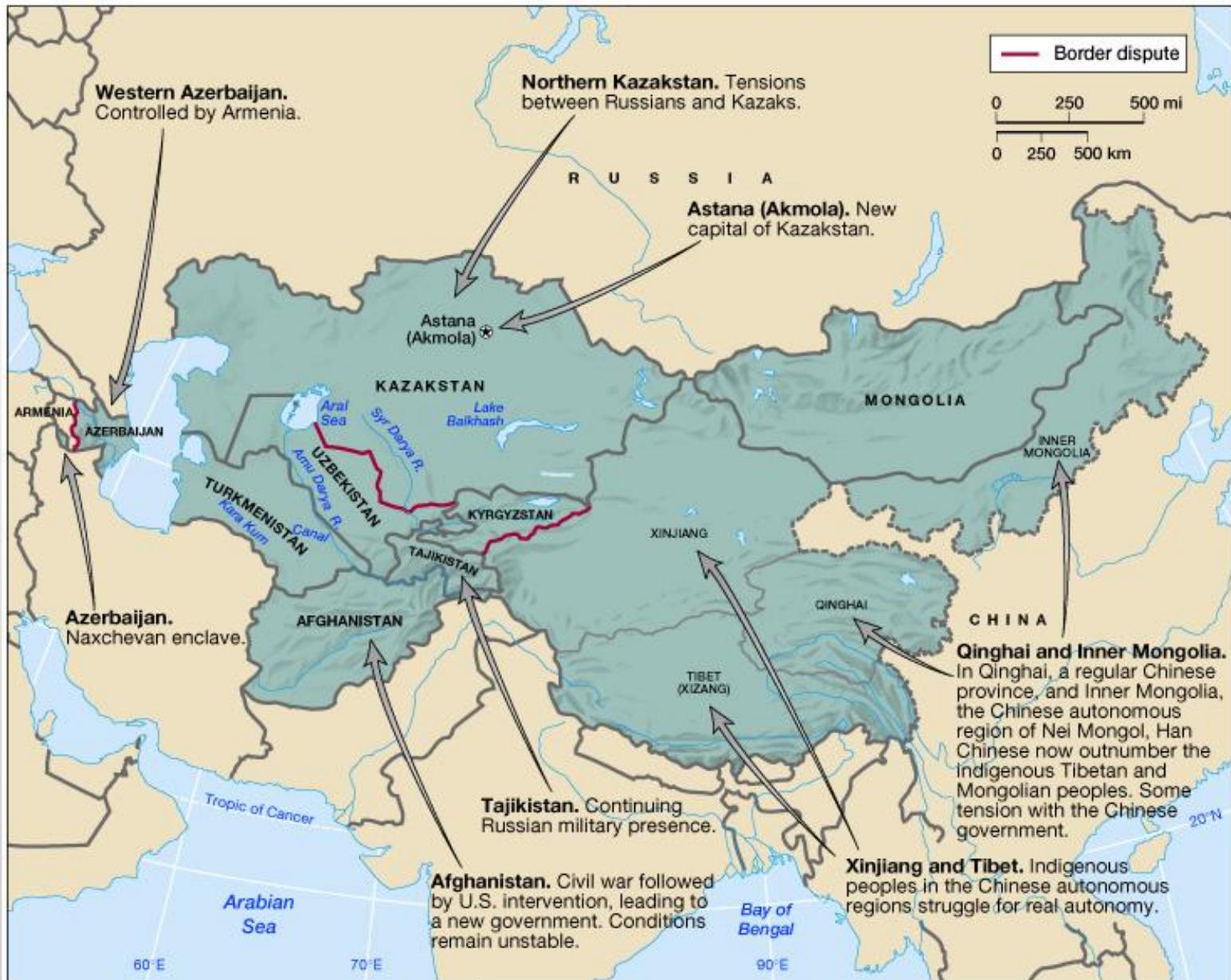
- **Current Geopolitical Tension**
 - **Independence in Former Soviet Lands**
 - It has been difficult for the 6 former Soviet Republics to become truly independent
 - Cooperation with Russia on security issues necessary
 - **Authoritarian leaders** in these nations has made the transition to democracy more difficult
 - These countries have opted to remain part of the commonwealth of independent states
 - Ethnic strife is common in these areas
 - War in Tajikistan in 1991 over ethnic conflicts
 - Invasion of Azerbaijan by Armenia

- **Current Geopolitical Tension (cont.)**
 - **Strife in Western China**
 - **Repression of Tibet, and local opposition to Chinese rule**
 - **Border of China and India still contested**
 - **Chinese control of Xinjiang**
 - **Uygur opposition**
 - **War in Afghanistan before September 11, 2001**
 - **1978: Soviet-supported military “revolutionary council” seized power**
 - **Marxist government began to suppress religion**
 - **Russian invasion**
 - **U.S. and Saudi support rebels**
 - **Soviets withdrew in 1989**

- **Current Geopolitical Tension (cont.)**
 - **War in Afghanistan before September 11, 2002**
 - **1995–1996 rise of the Taliban**
 - **Taliban founded by young Muslim religious students**
 - **Closely associated with the Pashtun ethnic group**
 - **Imposed an extreme interpretation of Islamic law consistent with Pashtun culture**
 - **Other Afghan ethnic groups opposed the Taliban**
 - **The Roles of Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey**
 - **Russia has armed forces in Tajikistan, and transportation routes cross Kazakhstan**
 - **Iran is a major trading partner, and offers access to ports**
 - **Pakistan supported Taliban; now supports the U.S.**
 - **Turkey has close cultural and linguistic connections**

- **International Dimensions of Central Asian Tension**
 - **Islamic Fundamentalism?**
 - Many other Central Nations were concerned that Islamic fundamentalism could affect their nations
 - Islamic movement rose in Uzbekistan (IMU)
 - **After September 11th balance of power shifted**
 - **U.S. with British assistance launched a war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban government**
 - **Bombing campaign and support of Northern Alliance**
 - **Defeated the Taliban and began a process of forming a new Afghan government**
 - **Fighting continues, and U.S. forces remain in Afghanistan**

Central Asian Geopolitics (Fig. 10.18)

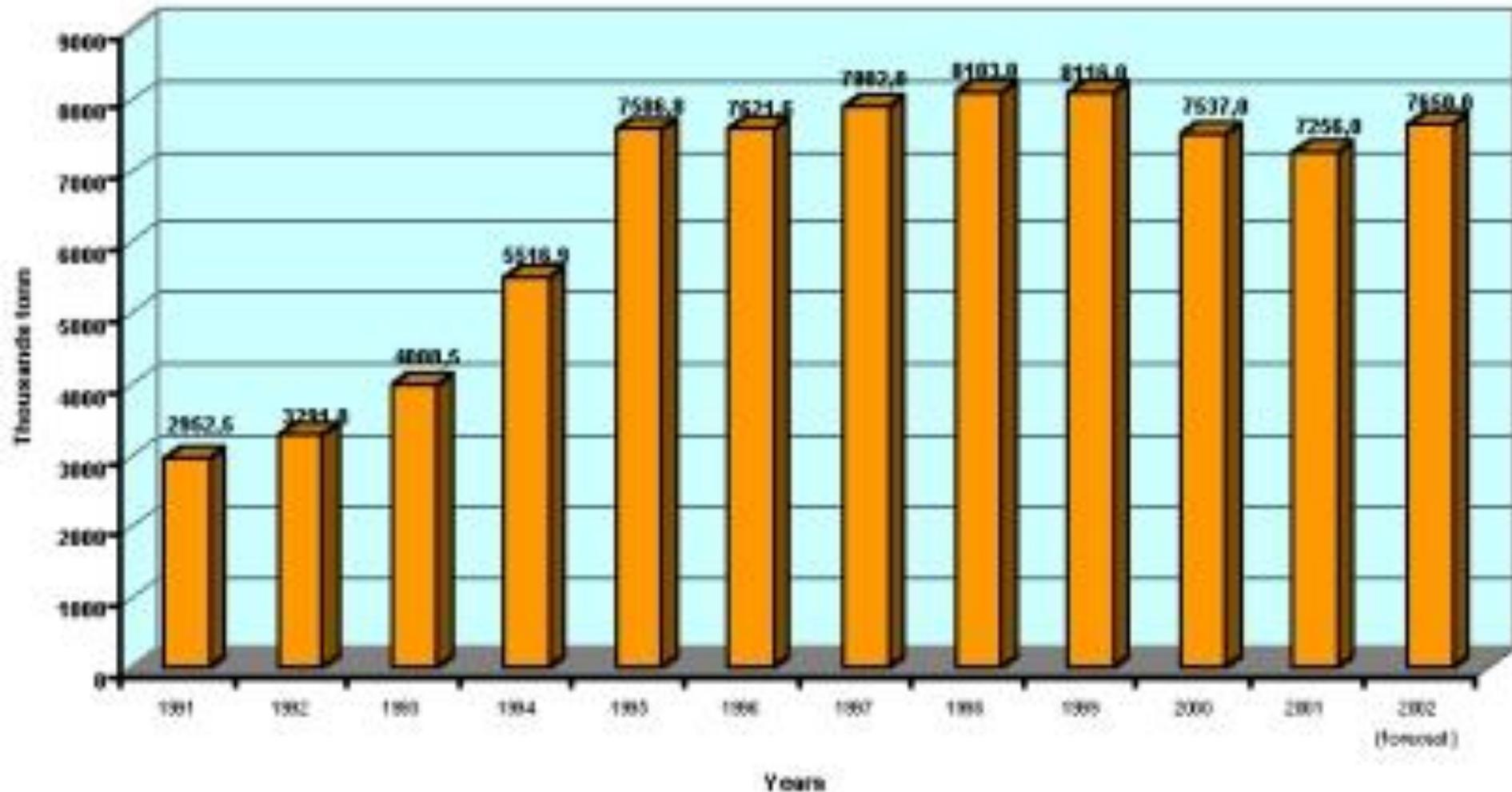


Abundant Resources, Devastated Economies

- **The Post-Communist Economies**
 - **Many Central Asian industries relied heavily on subsidies and oil from the Soviet Union**
 - **Today, no Central Asian country could be considered prosperous**
 - **Kazakhstan is most developed**
 - **Uzbekistan has second-largest economy**
 - **Kyrgyzstan is aggressively privatizing former state-run industries**
 - **Turkmenistan has a large agricultural base**
 - **Tajikistan most troubled of former Soviet republics**
 - **Mongolia, industries not competitive enough in the global market, and it has a meager agricultural base**

Uzbekistan Oil Production

Oil and Gas Condensate Production in the Republic of Uzbekistan



Uzbekistan – Railroad Bridge over the Amu Darya River



• **Economic Misery in Afghanistan**

- **Is the poorest country in the region and has one of the weakest economies in the world, with almost no economic development**
- **Suffered nearly continuous war starting in late 1970s**
- **By 1999, it was the world's largest producer of opium**

Afghanistan is tied to the global economy through its export of illegal drugs Poppy plants making opium.

Poppy Flowers



- **Social Development in Central Asia**
 - **Social Conditions and the Status of Women in Afghanistan**
 - **Average life expectancy is 45**
 - **High infant and child mortality rates**
 - **High illiteracy (only 15% of women can read)**
 - **Women in traditional Afghani society (especially Pashtun) lead constrained lives**
 - **Fall of the Taliban improved their situation**
 - **Many are nervous about their new government's willingness and ability to uphold their rights**

- **Social Development in Central Asia**
 - **Social Conditions in the Former Soviet Republics**
 - **More autonomy among women of the northern pastoral peoples**
 - **In former Soviet republics, women have educational rates comparable to men**
 - **Tajikistan has been relatively socially successful**
 - **Social Conditions in Western China**
 - **The conditions in this region of China tend to be worse off socially as compared to China as a whole**
 - **Around 60% of the non-Han people of Xinjiang are illiterate**

Conclusions

- **Central Asia was dominated for many years by Russia and China**
- **This region is now emerging as a separate entity**
- **It has a rugged terrain, and was historically pastoral**
- **Today, presence of fossil fuels is generating interest, but construction of pipelines is needed**

Conclusions Cont.

- **Experiencing tough times**
 - **Collapse of political and economic systems in early 1990s**
 - **Warfare, armed conflict have damaged economies and infrastructure**
 - **Afghanistan is especially troubled, and emerged as a focus of world interest in September 2001**
 - **It will take time to bring stability to Central Asia**