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**GEOGRAPHIC INTELLIGENCE REPORT**

**UZBEK SSR-TADZHIK SSR -- AFGHAN BORDER**

**CIA/RR-GR-77**

**June 1955**

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PREFACE

Along the fringe of the area of Soviet domination there are countless opportunities for the extension of Russian influence into what is still called the Free World. Such incursions begin with the well known pattern of quiet infiltration, continue through extenuations of normal economic and cultural relations and the more obvious propaganda campaign, and may eventually reach the "incident" or "shooting" stage. In Afghanistan infiltration was underway in the early postwar years and the country is now in the stage of reluctant entanglement in Soviet trade agreements and construction programs. Such arrangements are all conducted at the appropriate diplomatic level and result in showy items of physical improvement that provide quick propaganda returns. They contrast strongly with the fundamentals of human health, livestock raising, and farming with which American organizations are trying to rebuild the country from the ground up. They also make certain Afghan officials feel very smart in being able to play East against West.

All this chicanery requires a number of "ordinary Joes" on the lower rungs of the economic ladder who will spread the word of Communism and produce a climate receptive to a larger share of Soviet control. For this work the ideal man is at hand. The converted Uzbek, Tadzhik or Turkoman of Soviet Central Asia needs little briefing to become an active Propagandist or a "sleeper" in Afghanistan. He speaks the language and knows the way of life, and settles in a northern community that feels a kinship with his place of origin. It is hoped that the geographic background of northern Afghanistan presented in this brief report and those referenced in the Introduction will be of some slight assistance to those who must deal with this problem.

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THE UZBEK-TADZHIK SSR-AFGHANISTAN BORDER

I. Introduction

The area of this study involves approximately the eastern three-fifths of the USSR-Afghanistan border. Its eastern portion lies in one of the most rugged, remote, and unexplored regions of the world and is known only from fragmentary information. Towards the west it grades into rolling plains country that supports sheep raising and irrigation agriculture, with a more pretentious collective-farming system north of the Amu Darya.

Information about the two countries differs so markedly that parts of the study have been divided into Afghan and USSR units, each covering a 20-mile-wide strip on one side of the border. The sections on Boundary, Climate, and Light Factors of course apply to both sides.

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Because it is equal to this report in availability, practically none of the textual information in it is repeated here, but its reference map, CIA 13327, is included as Map 1 of this report.

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II. Boundary Location and Description

An island at the eastern end of Lake Victoria is the dividing point between a watercourse boundary to the west and a land boundary -- largely mountain peak and ridge -- for the remaining hundred miles to the east.

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Where a watercourse forms the boundary, the actual boundary designated is the center of the deepest part of the channel. In upper reaches, where there is no navigation and a "deepest channel" is of little significance, the actual boundary is the midpoint of the stream. All the islands are numbered from west to east and are allocated to either USSR or Afghanistan, in most cases by determining the deepest part of the channel. Islands in the Amu Darya River are numbered 1 to 69, those in the Ab-i-Panja from 1 to 1041, and those in the Pamir River from 1 to 82. The location of the Pamir River is adequately well known: it flows southwest from near the west end of Lake Victoria at about  $37^{\circ}27'N-73^{\circ}35'E$  to its junction with the Ab-i-Wakhan from the east at  $37^{\circ}01'N-72^{\circ}37'E$ . These combined streams form the Ab-i-Panja River which flows generally westward with a loop to the north, and changes its name to Amu Darya somewhere east of the Uzbek-Tadzhik boundary at  $37^{\circ}12'N-67^{\circ}46'E$ . In the absence of boundary maps or maps showing the numbers of the islands, it is impossible to tell precisely where this name-change occurs, but it is certain that the Afghan native uses the term Amu Darya at least as far east as Taliqan and probably applies it farther eastward to the rivers otherwise known as Ab-i-Panja and Ab-i-Wakhan.

Where the boundary is determined by a watercourse, two boundary pillars are erected on the land on opposite sides of the watercourse, one pillar within the territory of each country. The pillars are

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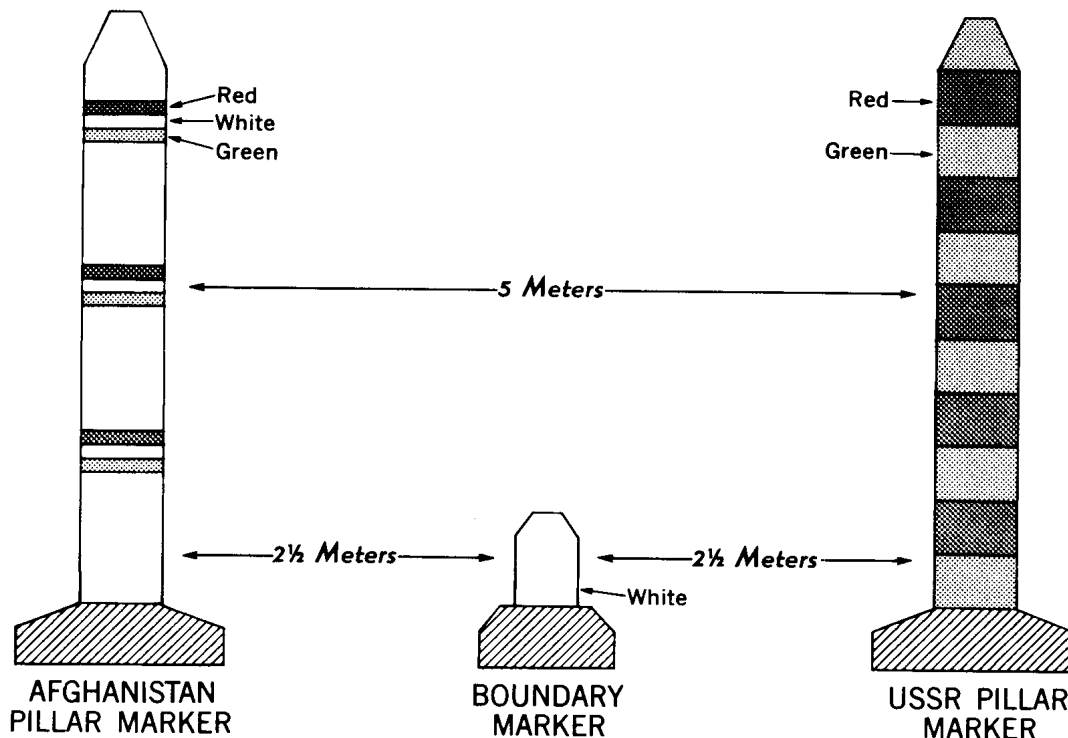
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### USSR—AFGHANISTAN BOUNDARY MARKERS

*Center marker and distances apply to a land boundary only. A watercourse boundary is marked by placing the two large pillars on opposite banks.*

Figure 1.

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marked as in Figure 1, and the pairs are erected at intervals of 2-1/2 km. along the watercourse.

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On the land boundary, a survey station is located approximately every 10 km.; but the nature, size, and appearance of such stations are not known. The station, however, is marked by pillars, as in Figure 1, with the two large pillars 5 meters apart, equidistant from the boundary, and a much smaller pillar on a line between them and directly on the boundary line. The small center pillar is said to be made of wood.

### III. Climate

This is essentially a dry region. On the east is the high, cold, steppe-desert of Eastern and Western Pamir. On the west is a low, warm true desert that extends westward far beyond the borders of Uzbekistan. The zone between them is transitional in temperature (as it is in elevation) and has more rainfall than either; but it is still a dry region.

Throughout the study area summer nights are considerably cooler than the days but both are fairly consistent, or uniform from day to day. Winter weather is variable, as it is in New York or Chicago, with irregular periods of cold and milder temperatures. Winter skies are clouded about half the time, and much less in summer, but contact flying conditions prevail nearly all of the time. Thunder may be heard in spring and summer, but not all thunderheads produce

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rain that reaches the ground. Winds are stronger than most Americans are accustomed to, often reaching gale force in winter.

A. High Mountains of the East

General weather conditions in the eastern Wakhan Corridor and the high rolling hills of Eastern Pamir are very much like those experienced in the mountains of Colorado, but Eastern Pamir has less snow and rain and more severe winters than Colorado. Probably no place receives as much as 5 inches of precipitation, but the low temperatures permit this pittance to support a thin grass and low bush vegetation in places, which in turn supports a few cattle. Snow may fall in any month.

Since the lowest valleys lie well above 10,000 feet, frost (32°F) can be expected on any night in summer. After sunrise the air warms up rapidly to the 60's or 70's, and a person on the ground may want to travel in shirtsleeves, but it is always cool in the shade. The air is usually so clear that sunburn is a constant danger although small dust swirls or rain clouds may occur in the afternoon. Most of the meagre rainfall comes in late spring and early summer and streams are increased to flood stage by melting snows. By late summer or fall, there is little rain and most of the snow has melted -- making September and October the best months for travel on the ground (see Figure 2).

Winters are intensely cold. Daytime temperatures seldom rise above freezing for five solid months and nights average from 0 to 20 degrees below 0°F. Blizzards are frequent, and many places retain a

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cover of snow throughout the winter. Although there may be an occasional year with much less than average snowfall, snow is always an impediment to land transportation in winter. At the other extreme, valleys and passes may be under many feet of drifted snow all winter.

#### B. Transition Zone

From Russian Ishkashim and Khorog in Western Pamir to Chubek, where the Amu Darya reaches 2,000 feet, and Kirovabad a little downstream on the plain, all temperatures increase and rainfall averages about 10 inches a year. In this transition area, winters are not so severe (see Figures 3 and ~~20~~<sup>20</sup>), and summers are distinctly warm. Western slopes are probably much wetter than eastern slopes; e.g. Khorog, in a distinct physiographic pocket, receives 9 inches of rainfall; Kirovabad 10 inches; but Kulyab, 20 miles north of the river, and backed by mountains on the east, is reported to receive 22 inches. Unlike Eastern Pamir, this area, as well as the warm desert plains to the west, has a preponderance of precipitation in winter and practically none in the 4 summer months.

#### C. Western Plains

The low, sandy desert plains of the Amu Darya west of Kirovabad, with 5 or less inches of rain a year, are relatively dryer than the Pamirs. Summer daytime temperatures are usually over 95°F, and the common dust haze occasionally obscures the sun. Nights are usually comfortably cool.

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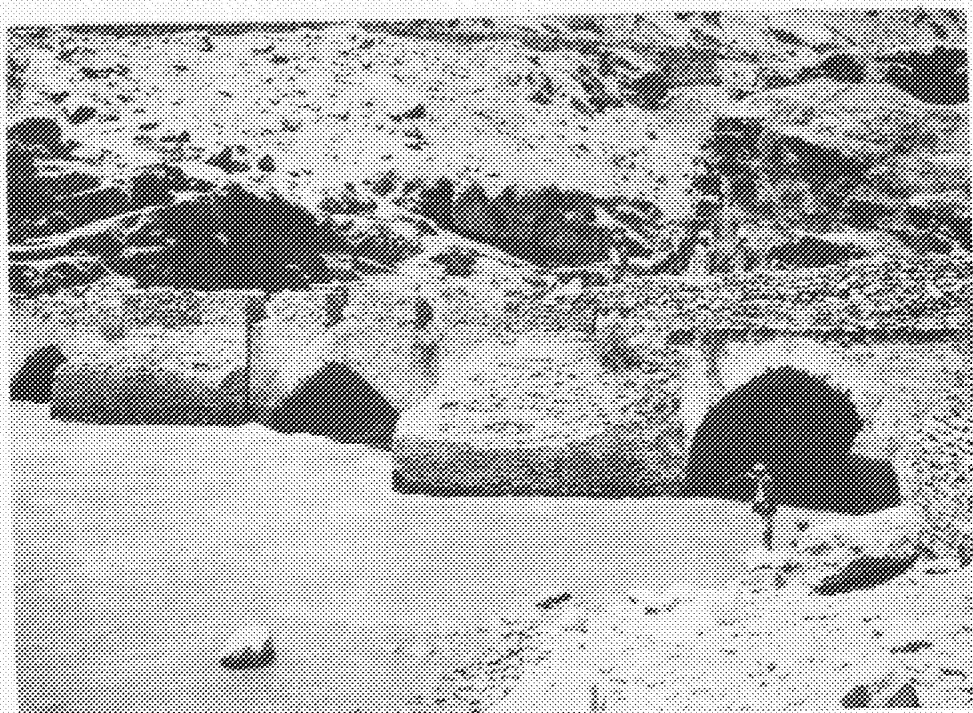


Figure 2. The only bridge over the Kokcha River at Faizabad. Looking northeast, late summer 1954. In June-July the river flows over the top of the bridge for several days. This bridge is visible on Figure 9.

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Figure 3. November snow cover on the trail from Faizabad northwest to the Amu Darya.

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Winter is a period of variable conditions. Rain, sleet, snow, and cloud, followed by clear days and 0° weather, alternate with warm spells in which daytime temperatures reach the 60's and most of the snow melts. During cold spells the temperature occasionally remains below freezing all day. The Amu Darya at Kelif, in the extreme west, may have a solid freeze for 2 weeks at a time, with ice a foot thick.

#### IV. Light Factors

If it were not for the high mountains, the duration of daylight throughout the boundary region would be about the same as at San Francisco or Washington, D.C., and a traveler in the western part of the area would experience a light regime similar to that of those two cities. In the east, of sheer necessity, a person on the ground would travel along valley bottoms rather than on ridges or sidewalls. Mountain tops and ridges would rise 10 to 40 degrees above the line of level sight and cut off several hours of sunlight in all seasons. A valley with southern slopes steeper than 30 degrees would receive no direct sunlight at the valley floor in midwinter.

One has to have lived in a high, dry area to appreciate the tricks that atmosphere can play on the eye. Lack of moisture and dust particles in the air permit so much better vision than most people are accustomed to that distances are judged to be 20 percent to 50 percent of their true value.

Terrain permitting, native homes in the mountainous areas are placed where the sun will strike them as much as possible, as on the northern side of a stream or higher up on a south-facing slope.

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## V. Afghan Side of the Border

### A. Physical Features

#### 1. Terrain

The eastern portion of the Tadjhik-Afghan border area consists of the Wakhan Corridor, from 8 to 40 miles wide and between 8,500 and 21,000 feet in elevation. Bozai Gumbaz is the junction of the west-flowing Aq Su and Ab-i-Wakhan, whose valleys form the two eastern prongs of the Corridor. The Aq Su on the north has a string of swampy lakes in its narrow, flat bottom, which is called the Little Pamir\*, but its northern slopes up to the border are cut by steep, barren, V-shaped valleys. The rest of the Corridor border area slopes steeply down to the north from the Nicholas Range to Lake Victoria and the Pamir River, and from the crest of the Hindu Kush on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to the Ab-i-Panja. These valleys too have relatively narrow flat bottoms, that along the Great Pamir\* (not Pamir River) having a considerable grass cover. Along the Ab-i-Panja between Qala Panja and Ishkashim are open stretches of level flood plain a few hundred feet long, and an unusually large flat area at 36°52'N-72°11'E is hundreds of yards in both dimensions and suitable for a small landing strip.

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\*The generic term pamir means a narrow, flat-floored valley of glacial formation that is no longer occupied by the glacier. Its trough has been partly filled by glacial detritus. It remains flat-surfaced because the main stream is too small to scour deeply.

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As far downstream as its junction with the Kyzyl Su ( $37^{\circ}36'N-69^{\circ}45'E$ ) the Ab-1-Panja continues to flow through steep-walled valleys that have almost no floodplains. The hinterlands on either side are steep and barren and poorly mapped. Below the Kyzyl Su junction the floodplain increases in width to about 2 miles at Ayvadzh (Aiwanj)  $36^{\circ}58'N-68^{\circ}03'E$  (see Figures 4 and 5) and west of Termez it is several miles wide. The whole valley from Hazrat Imam ( $68^{\circ}53'E$ ) to Termez is flat and sandy and easily covered by sentry observation (see Figures 6 and 7). The wide parts of the floodplain may be bordered on the south by sandy clay, drift sand, or sand dunes broken by low hills. Except in the extreme west, the sand area is bounded sharply on its southern margin by foothills that rise to elevations of 4,000-6,000 feet (see Figure 7).

Except for the known and mapped lakes, practically all the area is dry ground although it may be shifting sand in the west and slippery shale in the east. The few marshes are relatively small and probably seasonal, being wettest in spring, driest in late summer, and possibly frozen in winter. East of Chubek in the rugged mountainous region, there may be small swamps at drainage divides. On the Little and Wakhan Pamirs in the eastern part of the Corridor, the large amounts of glacial melt water make travel difficult but also produce abundant grass for the animals. The confused drainage system of Chakmektin Lake and its associated smaller water bodies extends for miles. As it leaves the mountains near Chubek the Amu Darya splits into two

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Figure 4. Valley of the west-flowing Taliqan River, near Khanabad ( $36^{\circ}42'N-69^{\circ}05'E$ ).

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Figure 9. Typical terrain south of the Amu Darya plains and sand area. Looking southeast from a point halfway between Masar-i-Sharif and Tashkurgan.



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Figure 6. Looking northwest from Mazar-i-Sharif across the plain to the Amu Darya, some 60 airline miles away. The large structure in the center of the picture is an Afghan army fort located 3 miles west of the center of Mazar-i-Sharif. August 1954.

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Figure 7. Floodplain of the Amu Darya south of the sand belt, between Tashkurgan and Mazar-i-Sharif. The surface is sandy clay covered by river gravel, occasionally broken by scattered dunes or low hills. Looking south towards the foothills.

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branches and becomes a single channel again about 30 miles downstream. Between the two channels is a semicircular area of Afghan territory known as Urta Tagai (Uzbek: "middle steppe" or possibly "central plain"). Parts of this area are probably swampy during the high-water season (March-August), but much of it is planted to grain and vegetables. West of Urta Tagai, there may be relatively large swampy areas along the river. One such, north of Nazrat Imam ( $68^{\circ}53'E$ ), is ideal for duck hunting. Near Kuduk Toba (Toba  $68^{\circ}15'E$ ) there are reeds in the twin channels.

In the mountain area the drainage pattern is a network of perennial streams and small torrents, all flowing eventually into the Amu Darya. Near Chubek the river itself averages perhaps half a mile wide in the dry season and is fordable from October to March. During the colder part of this period it freezes hard enough to bear wheeled traffic. From Chubek westward the Amu Darya becomes wider and occasionally meanders, depositing sandy islands in many parts of its channel. Near Termez (near the middle of the Uzbek-Afghan border) it probably attains a flood width of 2 miles and a speed of 4 to 6 mph. At Kalif, 50 miles west of Termez, it is reported to range from 330 to 470 yards wide and run 5-6 mph with a depth of 1-3 feet. Everywhere, spring is the time of greatest flow and late summer and winter the time of low water. Many sand and rock islands are obscured by the spring freshets.

The drainage divide between the Ag Su flowing east and north and Little Pamir River flowing southwest lies south of the border and

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centers at about  $37^{\circ}12'N-74^{\circ}06'E$ . Immediately northeast of the Little Pamir River is an area 2 by 5 miles in extent called Chakmakin Lake (13,197 ft. elevation), which is merely a deeper part of the marshy divide. Lake Victoria, centered at  $37^{\circ}26'N-73^{\circ}40'E$ , is 12 miles long, 1 to 3 miles wide, and has no flowing surface outlet but probably seeps westward. It lies astride the boundary at 13,550 ft. elevation. Glacier-fed Lake Shiwa ( $37^{\circ}22'N-71^{\circ}16'E$ ) is nearly round, about 5 miles across, and lies 8 miles west of the Amu Darya, into which it drains. Its surface is over 7,000 feet in elevation and is frozen nearly three-fourths of the year. One source credits it with an altitude of 11,000 feet and a depth of over 100 feet. No other lakes are shown in the area on the British maps at 1:253,440.

## 2. Vegetation and Animal Life

Natural vegetation is so scanty over most of the area that it is of little consequence. The hilly country east of Chubek produces a few small isolated trees and a little grass on the small, flat moist areas, and east of Qala Panja in the corridor there is abundant grass for grazing in the narrow valleys, but elsewhere the slope is too steep and the precipitation too scanty for any vegetation other than occasional scrubby growth (see Figure 18). The usual vertical zonation of vegetation is observable -- with trees at the lowest elevations, grass on the pamirs, scattered alpine-type growths on the lower slopes, and a nearly barren zone just below the snow line. Downstream from Chubek, as valley bottoms become wider and warmer, they

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may support thin scrub or grass (see Figure 8), and scattered trees or thickets; but west of the Kumhuz River (68°07'E) the Amu Darya is flanked by sand and gravel steppe-desert and nearly all vegetation other than licorice and camel thorn grows in a narrow ribbon immediately adjacent to the river. Only in spring and early summer is there enough vegetation to pasture sheep south of the river. The occasional swamp or reed bed at the river's edge may afford uncomfortable concealment.

[redacted] the good fishing in almost any streams, and during the warm season a fisherman will have the usual flies, gnats and mosquitoes for company. Fewer fish can be caught in the muddy flood waters of spring than in the clear streams of summer and autumn. In the sandy plains the gazelle, fox, bustard, and sand grouse are hunted for sport and the ticks are plentiful and affectionate. In the Wakhan Corridor hungry wolves are rather common and will attack animals or men at night. The famous and wary Marco Polo sheep are here too, but succumb only to the elite among huntsmen. While there is very little mention of poisonous snakes in northeastern Afghanistan, it is known that the collection of live snakes is a minor industry on the Russian side and they must therefore be considered a menace throughout the area.

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## B. Peoples

### 1. Distribution and Characteristics

Throughout the area the total population is sparse, and centers of population are in valley bottoms close to the water (see

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Figure 8. Near the Asu Darya northwest of Faisabad. These not-so-rugged hills have a thin cover of short grass, heavier in the lower, less dry places such as in the foreground.

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Figures 9 and 10). There are probably not over 2,000 people in the Wakhan Corridor east of Ishkashim, itself a village of only 2,000. Excluding the major towns of northern Afghanistan -- Faizabad, Khanabad, Kunduz, Tashkurgan, Mazar-i-Sharif -- there are only a few thousand people downstream from Ishkashim. Although many of them are concentrated in ribbons and clusters near the river, in the western plains area there are usually people moving about between the main road and the river or staying overnight in the rebata.

The largest town in the area is Mazar-i-Sharif with a population of 55,000. It used to be the commercial metropolis of the northern plains, but has been overshadowed by Pul-i-Khusri, Baghlan, and Kunduz to the east and south. Khanabad has about 30,000 people, and half a dozen other towns on the route from Shibargan to Faizabad have 10,000 to 20,000. All these towns are compactly built for the sake of protection, and their tilled fields and orchards lie outside the built-up area. Neither these nor the smaller villages are modern in the American sense of the world, although some have wide streets. Sanitation is at a minimum (one American describes it as "nonexistent"); all uncooked foods are suspect; and bedbugs, lice, and the diseases they carry are common. Most of the local population is afflicted with eye diseases, and malaria can be contracted almost anywhere.

The eastern half of the Corridor is inhabited by a few hundred (one report says 600) nomadic Kirghis, who constitute an extension southward from the main tribe in Soviet Turkestan. West of approximately

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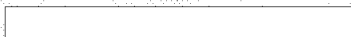
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Figure 9. View of Faizabad ( $37^{\circ}06'N-70^{\circ}34'E$ ) on the Kokcha River, looking east. Note the low bridge, shown also in Figure 8.



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Figure 10. Panorams of Faizabad from west through north to northeast.  
Figure 10 A, northwest portion.

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Figure 10. Panorams of Faizabad from west through north to northeast.  
Figure 10 B, northeast portion. North of the town are cultivated fields.  
The bridge shown in Figures 2 and 9 is to the right of this picture.

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Figure 11. A street in Faizabad, population 20,000 to 25,000, largely Tadzhik.

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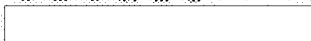
Figure 12. Except for the man at the extreme left this is an all-Tadzhik group at Tola, 35°25'N-68°14'E, about 80 airline miles northwest of Kabul. In the center is the local zamindar. March 1955. *man at left is from Kabul.*



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Figure 13. Three Uzbeks at Dushi,  $35^{\circ}37'N-68^{\circ}41'E$ , about 80 airline miles north northwest of Kabul. The man on the left was photographed a second time in a more jovial mood.



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73°00'E on the Pamir River and 73°30'E (Village of Sarhad-i-Wakhan) on the Wakhan River both sides of the boundary are occupied by Tadzhiks (see Figures 11 and 12) as far downstream as the Amu Darya bend at 38°00'N-71°30'E. These are the Chalchas, or Highland Tadzhiks -- Persian-speaking and nearly all Sunni Muslims. Frequently at odds with the central government, they are excluded from positions of importance but are in demand to fill the ranks of the army.

Downstream from 38°00'N-70°20'E, the sparse population is predominantly Uzbek (see Figure 13) -- a Sunni Muslim, Turki-speaking tribe closely related to the Uzbeks north of the Amu Darya. The Turkomans, living west of Peta Kesar, are also Turki-speaking Sunnis, more closely related to their Soviet namesakes than to the Afghan. The two central groups are largely sedentary, but the Turkomans and Khirgiz raise sheep nomadically.

The sympathies of all these peoples lie to the north rather than the south; therefore they are easily infiltrated from the north, particularly the Uzbeks. As a safety measure the Afghan Government transports loyal Pathans from the south to occupy key civilian positions and assigns Pathan soldiers to northern border posts. No significant Afghan attempt is made to woo the northern tribes by broadcasting either news in their language or their folk tunes, but the Russians exploit this angle, as well as the local poverty. Apparently none of the people wants to migrate north to USSR, although

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the standard of living there is higher than on the Afghan side; instead, defectors occasionally cross the border southward and are automatically arrested as Soviet spies.

As of 1954-55 the pressure is on to permit further legalized infiltration of northern Afghanistan by USSR. Offers of Russian assistance in road building, pipeline laying, and other construction work, as well as proposals for greater economic interdependence, have finally been accepted by an unhappy Afghan Government. Russian trucks are now operating over all portions of the ring road, and notebooks and cameras are standard equipment. Recent enlightened opinion differs on whether this surge of penetration is opportunistic or programmed.

## 2. Restrictive Measures

An indefinite zone at least 20 miles wide adjacent to all Afghan borders is considered restricted for foreigners, and the presence of nonnative personnel there would probably be reported quickly to Afghan authorities. This closes off the Wakhan Corridor completely, but Afghan troops are probably stationed within the Corridor itself.

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Afghanistan attempts to patrol the rest of its border effectively, but because of the relatively small number of gendarmerie the line is considerably more porous than that on the north side of the river.

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C. Economic Activity

From Faizabad to the eastern end of the Wakhan Corridor, most of the population is miserably poor, occasionally being nourished only by their sense of humor, but the Kirgiz are definitely better off than the grubbing Tadzhiks. In years of relative plenty, a party of 4 or 5 travelers might be able to barter for part of its food from the tiny settlements along the way -- chickens, milk, dried peas, hard bread -- and would be wise to carry salt, sugar, candles, soap, and cloth for this purpose. Because there are so few people the whole community immediately becomes aware of any newcomer, and undetected theft is impossible. Spring is the season of greatest want.

West of Faizabad the poverty is not so extreme, and there is usually a surplus of fruit, grain, or sheep. Russian textiles and gasoline can be had for a price. There is little opportunity for concealment that would permit the unobserved gathering of growing food, -- for instance, from gardens or orchards on the edge of town. Fruits, vegetables, and grains are most abundant in summer and fall.

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D. Transportation

Half of all commercial traffic is transported by camels or other animals. Motor transport is increasing very slowly because there are almost no roads in the true sense of the word. Most of the land between the USSR border and the Aq Chah-Kunduz-Faizabad route has heretofore been purposely left unimproved for wheeled vehicles and is now part of the peripheral restricted zone in which all nonlocal traffic is suspect. Soviet-Afghan commercial traffic crosses the Amu Darya by power ferry at Termez, the only legal crossing point, which is reached by a loop of the Soviet railroad from Bukhara and also by Soviet commercial river craft operating from as far downstream as the Aral Sea. Transactions are carried out at Pata Kesar on the Afghan side, where cotton is exchanged for Soviet petroleum products.

The strip of sand 10 to 20 miles wide that lies just south of the Amu Darya from Kunduz westward is a real barrier to wheeled vehicles (see Figures 14 and 15). The combination of sand, aridity, and lack of food and concealment make travel on foot extremely hazardous. A wheeled vehicle must carry a shovel, which will probably be used several times per crossing even when following the tracks that others have used. Between the sand strip and the main road from Kunduz to Shibargan, it is frequently possible to take off across country and find better going than on the more established routes between the Kunduz-Shibargan road and the river. There are apparently three of these "established" routes:

1. From Kunduz north to Khwaja Imam Saiyid and Hazrat Imam.

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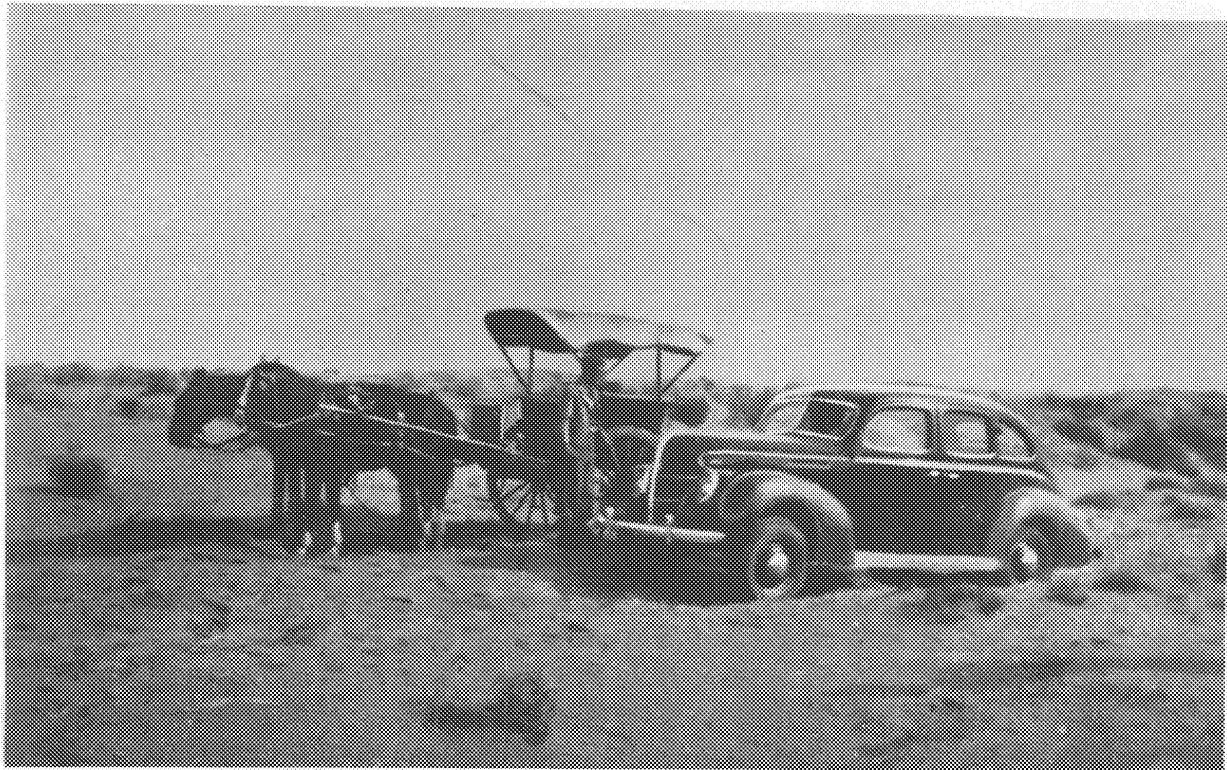


Figure 14. Between Mazar-i-Sharif and Kelif. The automobile has bogged down in sand 50 miles from Mazar-i-Sharif. It seems likely that Soviet engineers will construct a road between these two towns beginning about 1959. The ghadi, pulled by one or two horses or donkeys, is the most reliable means of personal transportation in Afghanistan.

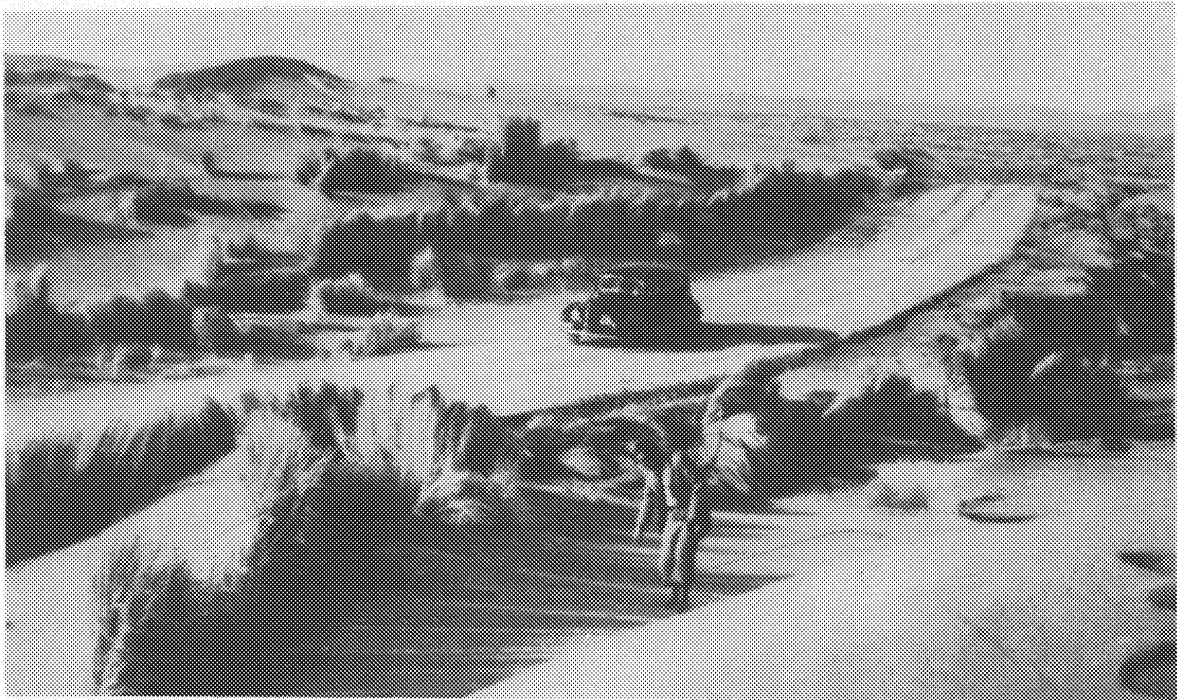


Figure 15. Between Mazar-i-Sharif and Kelif. Only in spring is there enough vegetation to pasture the Karakul sheep in this steppe-desert area.

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Figure 16. Some parts of the area between the ring road and the Amu Darya are easy going. This point is 23 miles northwest of Mazar-i-Sharif on the road to Kelif on the Amu Darya. Looking north, August 1953. Contrast this with Figure 12.

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S-E-C-R-E-T

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2. From Mazar-i-Sharif north to Fata Kesar across the river from Termez.
3. From Mazar-i-Sharif westward, passing south of Balkh and northwestward to Dagla Arossa and Afghan Kelif (see Figure 16).

These have all been natural-surface roads until recently (1953), when the Mazar-i-Sharif -- Kelif route was improved with a gravel surface because of the heavy traffic. The main east-west road itself is a medley of silt, ruts, adobe, and transverse ditches, with a few patches that might be called "fair dirt road" (see Figures 17, 18, and 19).

There are several sites not in the sand belt where it would be possible to land and take-off in a light plane, but the only airstrip is at Mazar-i-Sharif, where the natural surface-natural drainage landing ground is serviced by 20 or 30 people.

East of Kunduz the road through Khanabad and Taligan has the usual poor surface and, in addition, is narrow and treacherous as it winds through the mountains to Faizabad. In the summer of 1949, a new road was built from Faizabad to Zebak, but heavy spring rains in 1953 have made it impassable in several places. Even as a horse trail, this was a tortuous route, -- indicating that a road would require intensive maintenance. Between Zebak and Ichakashim, there is only a horse track. Information on roads in the bend of the Amu Darya north of Faizabad is totally lacking; probably all travel is by horse or on foot (see Figure 20). One hardy soul who traveled

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Figure 17. Six miles southwest of Aq Chah, at the western edge of the study area, on the main road from Aq Chah to Shibargan and Ankhui. December 1945.

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Figure 18. Caravanserai on the main road between Andkhui and Mazar-i-Sharif, 14 miles east southeast of Aq Chah. Looking west, December, 1945.



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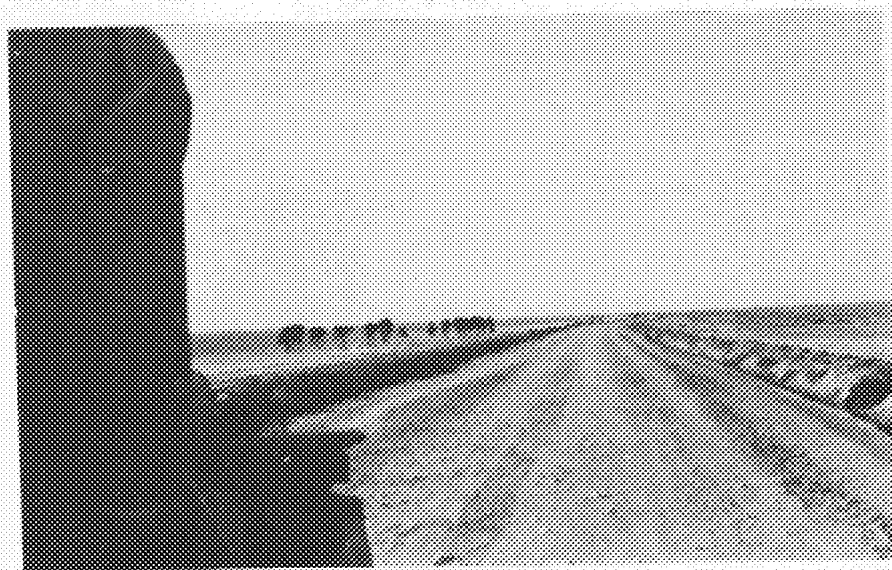


Figure 19. In many parts of the Amu Darya plains the going is as good across country as it is on the road. This picture looks west along the main road between Tashkurgan and Mazar-i-Sharif 9 miles west northwest of Tashkurgan. December 1945.

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Figure 20. A short distance, possibly a few miles, south of the Amu Darya at approximately 70°E. Chopping ice to get horses across rough terrain on the trail between Daung and Chah-i-ab. Note stunted trees on the right.

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several of the routes between Faizabad and Hazrat Imam by jeep was barely able to get through and considers the area fit only for horse travel. However, jeeping must be accompanied by ingenuity; others consider the Faizabad-Hazrat Imam road just plain "jeepable" in terms of Afghan travel.

In the Corridor, all travel is by pack animal or on foot (see Map 1). Although most of the routes are in valley bottoms, some valleys have such steep canyon-walls that they can not be traversed. Just east of Qala Panja and again east of Sarbad-i-Wakhan are canyons that must be bypassed by circuitous routes. The lower Corridor west of Qala Panja is nearly level, and much of its 65 miles is jeepable, provided the vehicle could be flown in or dug past the obstructions at the west end.

## VI. USSR Side of the Border

### A. Physical Features

#### 1. Terrain

The Amu Darya does not mark a major break in relief or general appearance of the natural landscape. Throughout the area of this study it flows through country that is roughly the same on both sides.

Gorno Badakhshanskaya Autonomous Oblast is made up of two distinctly different landscapes. The portion called Eastern Pamir, approximately east of 73°E, is a high desert upland with rounded mountain tops flanked by gentle slopes that grade into wide river valleys (see Figure 21). On an Asiatic scale, it is permissible to

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call it gently rolling. In such an area, there are many poorly drained depressions. Since there is little precipitation to fill them, they are wettest during the high meltwater season of late spring and summer. Valley bottoms are between 11,000 and 13,000 feet in elevation, with mountain tops rising as much as 6,000 feet above them. Some of the peaks are permanently snow-capped but not so many as farther south in the Corridor and beyond. Western Pamir has stronger surface and river erosion. It is a somewhat dissected area of knife ridges, steep slopes, and V-shaped valleys with bottoms between 5,000 and 8,000 feet. In spite of the narrow valley bottoms, the higher temperatures and rainfall make more land suitable for agriculture than in Eastern Pamir. Many of the ridges have a permanent snow cap.

Westward the country continues extremely rugged about as far as  $70^{\circ}30'E$ . This is true inside the big bend of the Amu Darya north of Lake Shiva, as well as north of the river. Bottoms of the major river valleys lie between 4,000 and 8,000 feet but there is little permanent snow cap as ridges reach only to 15,000 feet. At Qala Wazar (Rushan;  $71^{\circ}30'E$ ) the Amu Darya still flows between canyonlike walls (see Figure 22). A little east of  $70^{\circ}E$  the terrain becomes less forbidding, small floodplains appear along the Amu Darya and river valleys to the north, and peaks probably are not over 12,000 feet.

Floodplains of substantial proportions begin in the Chubek-Kulyab area ( $69^{\circ}45'E$ ). Here the Amu Darya reaches 2,000 feet and parts of its

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Figure 21. Rounded hills and broad lower slopes northeast of Lake Victoria in Eastern Pamir.

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*Ab-i-Banja*

Figure 22. Looking due west down the *Ab-i-Banja* Amu-Darys from above the right bank at  $37^{\circ}57'N-71^{\circ}34'E$ . The river here is about 6,500 feet above sea level. The village of Gala Wamar (Kushan) lies 2 miles downstream on the right bank, hidden by the promontory at the right. The Bartang River, flowing southwestward, joins the Amu-Darys about a mile to the left (south) of the camera, the main stream changing its course from north to west-northwest at this confluence. Beyond the bend in the middle distance the Amu-Darys flows west-southwest on a wide flat floor until it is again closely confined by steep banks about 8 miles downstream.

*Ab-i-Banja*

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valley, as well as the lower courses of northern (right bank) tributaries, are swampy. Downstream from Kirovabad ( $69^{\circ}05'E$ ) the plains widen to several miles on both sides and are joined by broad tongues of plainland along the southflowing Vakhsh, Kafirnigan, and Surkhan Darya. Between these rivers irregular north-south ridges rise 3,000 to 4,000 feet above the plain. They extend nearer to the Amu Darya and are most continuous (1) in the river bend east of Kirovabad, where a person would have to climb about 2,000 feet in shortcutting from that town to the Urta Tagai; and (2) along the Uzbek-Turkmen border ( $66^{\circ}32'E$ ), where strong north-south and northeast-southwest ridges come within less than 10 miles of the Amu Darya. The SSR boundary follows the principal north-south ridge, which culminates locally in a peak over 10,000 feet high about 30 miles north of the river.

The plains area itself has large stretches of floorlike terrain, a "paradise" for irrigation machine farming. But it is not all so flat. Some sections are rolling or broken by low hills, and there are considerable areas of sand (see Figure 23), although this feature is not so widespread as south of the river.

## 2. Vegetation and Animal Life

The high altitude and resulting severe climate of the Pamirs and Wakhan Corridor permit only sparse, monotonous, vegetation. Western Pamir and the big bend of the Amu Darya are not quite so desolate as Eastern Pamir, but even here the growth is no more than desert-steppe, or moist desert margins. Much of the Pamirs has no

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Figure 23. Rolling sandy area near the north bank of the Amu Darya in southern Uzbek SSR.

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vegetation at all -- only stony slopes that are steeper in the west and gentler in the east.

Eastern Pamir has practically no tree growth at all (see Figure 20). The land below 14,000 feet has little snow and is essentially a zone of winter cattle pastures consisting of small bushes, feather grass, and wormwood. Moist valleys may have an almost continuous meadow-grass cover, as in the paxirs of the Corridor. Above 14,000 feet is the Alpine zone of high-altitude summer pastures, which lie dormant and snow-covered in winter. Between the two areas transhumance takes place with a schedule somewhat as follows:

- 6 months in fall-winter-spring pastures in the foothills
- 4 months in summer pastures in high altitudes
- 1 month in spring for driving
- 1 month in fall for driving

In Western Pamir, practically the only tree growth -- birch, willow, and cottonwood -- is in narrow ribbons along the streams. Apparently the dryness of winter permits less winter pasturing than to the east and the chief summer grazing areas are in the relatively small valley bottoms, which are sometimes meadow-like.

In southern Uzbekistan and southwestern Tadzhikistan the low plains areas are true desert, with the usual widely scattered tough plants, such as desert sedge. Above 2,000 feet a thin grass cover develops on the moister slopes and continues into the steppe or parklike belt between 3,000 and 8,000 feet. This parklike belt

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develops on the middle and upper slopes of the irregular ridges that extend southward toward the Amu Darya. Deciduous broadleaf trees and bushes are dominant; juniper is secondary. Areas above this, found only on the Uzbek-Turkmen border and east of Kulyab, carry subalpine meadow grasses intermixed with smaller amounts of coarse, prickly grass.

Characteristic of the lower terraces of the Amu Darya and of the rivers that flow into it from the north -- the Surkhan Darya, Kafirnigan and Vakhsh -- is the tugay (forest) vegetation. It consists of a fairly thick growth of maple and poplar trees, eucalyptus, woollybeard grass, wild sugar cane, and tamarisk bush. Tugay belts are choice agricultural sites in an area where nearly everything must be irrigated, and much of this growth has fallen before the plow. However, what is left is prized for small lumber and fuel and as a habitat for the dwindling small-game and bird population.

Animal life does not appear to be plentiful in the Pamirs. Of the small rodents and burrowing animals the tolay hare is the most common, and mountain goats and sheep are the principal larger animals. In some areas the collection of poisonous snakes for sale to serum stations is a minor industry.

West of the big bend of the Amu Darya the game is not necessarily more plentiful, but certainly more is known about it. In the hills of this desert country are found fox, wolf, hyena, hare, porcupine, and probably other small animals. Higher portions are more attractive to

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mountain sheep and large-horned goats while the swifter gazelle prefers the plains edge and open foothills. Pigeons winter in large numbers in the lower mountain valleys, and bustards are numerous in the southern foothills, often feeding in flocks. During winter migration, considerable numbers of swans, geese, ducks, and coots are found on the lakes and broader lower reaches of streams -- many more than in spring and early summer, when the higher waterlevel hinders nesting. Quail and other small birds are caught alive in coops or cages during the hunting season and fattened for eating. The cobra is not uncommon on the low dry plains, and on sandy or pebbly wastelands are tortoises and a variety of lizards, some four feet long. Carp, catfish, and barbel are caught the year round in the rivers, especially the Vahksh floodplain lakes where fishing is an industry. The many mosquitoes and flies carry a full quota of diseases.

The riverine tugay still contain deer and boar and are the only places where pheasants are plentiful. It seems probable that small members of the cat family also inhabit tugay areas.

Nearly all animals -- in hills, plains, or forest -- are protected by law but nevertheless continue to decrease in number from overhunting by a hungry people.

### B. Peoples

#### 1. Distribution and Characteristics

All of the border area shows a mixture of ethnic types. Perhaps the purest ethnic group are the Kirgiz of Eastern Pamir -- tall Mongoloid

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horsemen who cross the Chinese and Afghan borders at will. They are small in number and in population density, but most are highly mobile nomads.

The rest of Tadzhikistan has a ratio of roughly three Tadzhiks and one Uzbek to one or more Russians with a sparse population in the mountainous areas and a greater density in the plains, especially near sources of water. Usually the Tadzhik is of medium height, with black hair and clearcut features, such as the high forehead, strong chin, and prominent nose (see Figure 24). It is less easy to characterize the Uzbek, who shows a considerable variety of features, often being shorter and rounder of head than the Tadzhik. Uzbeks from a considerable element of the population of southwestern Tadzhikistan, and in southern Uzbekistan constitute 60-80 percent of the population, with Russians making up 20-30 percent. Other groups in the southern part of both SSRs are Arabs, Jews, Kazaks, and, of course, Turkomen, who become more important to the west.

The Russian who moved into both SSRs during the last 50 years was clearly a foreigner thrusting himself into an established way of life. He took the areas least densely populated and maintained his national characteristics by creating purely Russian settlements alongside native settlements -- but he ruled the whole land. Three groups of Russians are present:

1. Soviet and party officials and technicians, who live here in "voluntary exile" as the favored few

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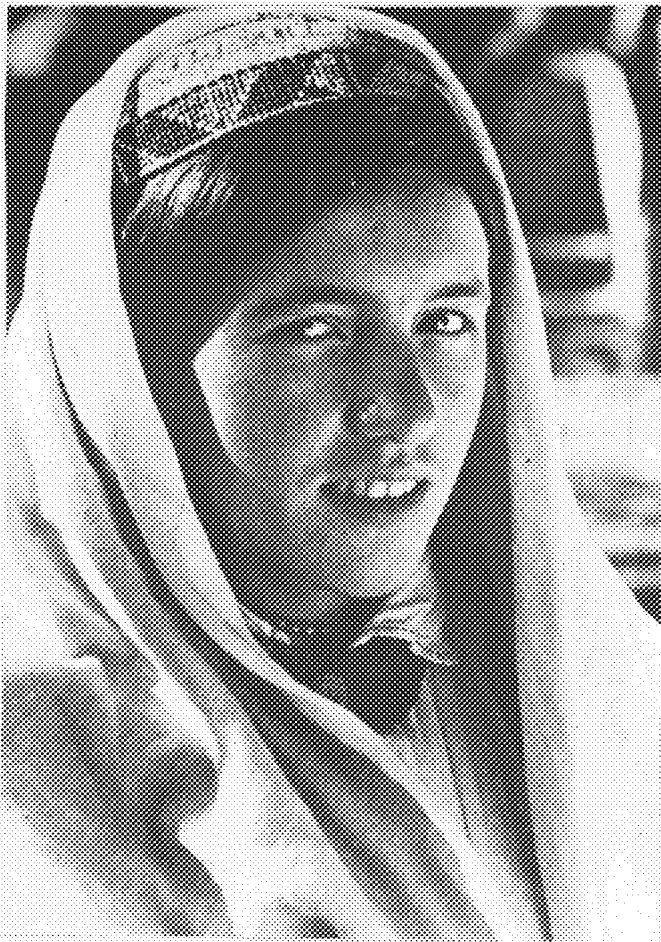


Figure 24. Tadjik girl from the Pamirs. Note that the features are clear and sharp.

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2. A middle group of forcibly resettled people, mostly laborers, who have slight freedom
3. Prisoners and forced laborers, the largest group, which includes satellites, non-Russian elements

Both native and Russian have maintained their ethnic identity. There is little intermarriage; customs are not borrowed except as a practical expediency; leisure hours are not shared; though they work together, they return to their conationals after work. Friction or animosity are not the cause of separation; rather, the two groups are indifferent and contemptuous of each other. The native intelligentsia identifies itself with neither group completely. Although sympathizing with the natives, it gets along with the rulers and is a friendly protector of the masses and a buffer between them and the regime.

Almost without exception the natives are Moslem, but less strongly so than in the past. Islam is losing ground because the native intellectuals feel that all religion is incompatible with progress and westernization, and in spite of being anti-Communist, they like westernization. Thus, there remain chiefly those features of the religion that are practical. The local population is still socially united through Islam and differentiated from intrusive Soviet communities by it, but it is no longer the prime substance of ethnic identification.

The Russian linguistic invasion has done little harm to the native Turki, in spite of Soviet efforts. Moslem intellectuals learn some

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Russian in order to contact their western masters, but they become bilingual and do not lose the mother tongue. Of necessity, Russian is learned more by city dwellers while people in rural communities learn very few Russian words. Thus, the local language survives and the invading language is not genuinely assimilated.

## 2. Control Measures

The problems thrown on the Soviets as a result of Uzbek and Tadzhik nationalism have caused them to take frequent samplings of the status quo and to pursue a policy of what appears to be moderate indoctrination at the lowest level. A party worker may visit a village for a few weeks, make sure the proper radio programs are heard, make speeches, give out literature, and work on the children. Since the Soviets feel that the women of the "provinces" do not take a sufficiently active part in political life, many of these party workers are women. Two female nurses have even been sent to Afghan Faizabad to help out for the past few summers.

Working conditions are very hard for the native laboring population. Collective cotton farmers put in 12 hours a day plus two or three evenings a week to fill the high norms required by the Soviets. Their retaliation is chiefly through petty thievery, which causes the Russians to keep a 3- to 5-man MVD post at every kolkhoz (collective farm). The guards are Russians or Turkomans who hate the Uzbek in particular. Typical orders are to shoot on sight any native walking near a motor transport station at night. In March 1953, the MVD units in Kirovabad and points west were considerably strengthened.

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The border stripping pattern is not uniform. It depends on the importance of the area, nature of terrain and vegetation, number of past violations, and experience of the commander. A minimum precaution is a strip 10 yards wide within a few dozen yards of the border but in more troublesome areas, a second strip may be placed 1 to 3 miles farther back and a third 6 to 10 miles back. Such extreme precautions probably are not applied to any part of the Afghan border, but a commander may strip his flanks, roughly at right angles to the border, if for any reason he feels the need of it. In addition the points through which a not-too-bright escaper, looking for the easiest route, would pass are doubly stripped and watched -- watercourses and villages in a desert area, valley floors in rough terrain, mountain paths, roads, and railroads. East of Chabak there is probably no stripping but only spot control at likely crossing points.

### 3. Towns

In the mountainous sections of Tadzhikistan, cultivable areas and good homesteads are rare. The land cannot support many people and only a few can live in one place. Villages are small, often consisting of 10 to 25 households. Practically all houses have flat roofs -- permissible in a dry area and necessary because of the shortage of timber -- and are oriented and located to catch the sun. Such small communities are, and for many years will be, utterly primitive, but some villages of a couple thousand inhabitants or more are slowly becoming semimodern in the western use of the term.

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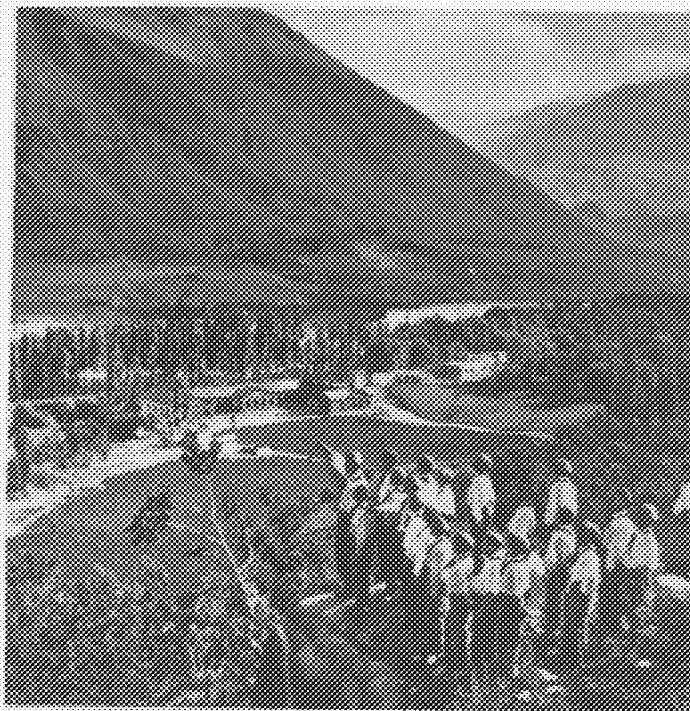


Figure 25. Overlooking part of the town of Khorog, on the Gunt River, near the point where it enters the Amu Darya.

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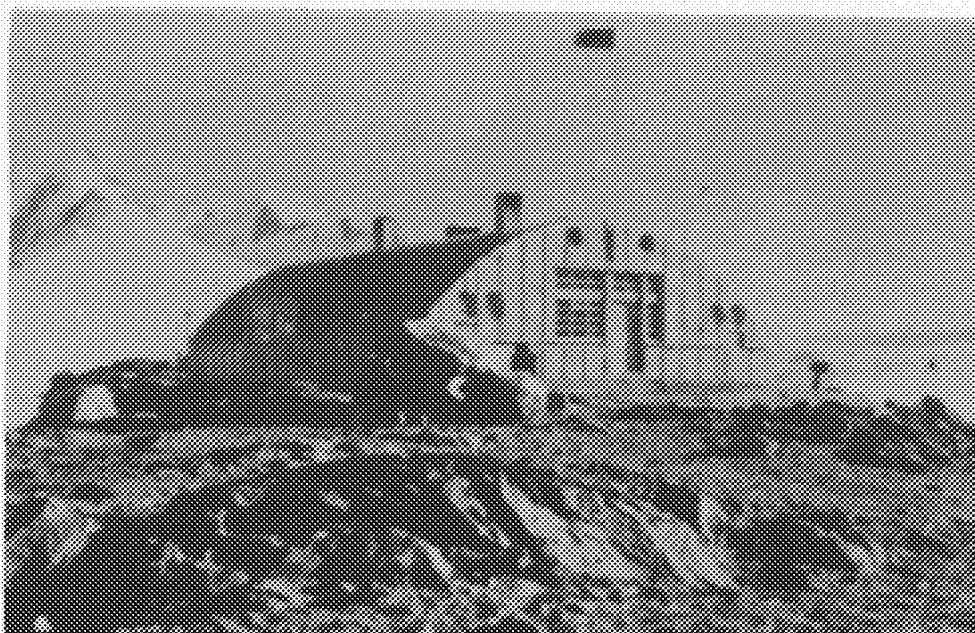


Figure 26. Meteorological station near Khoreg, which probably supplies data for air transportation.

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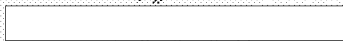


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Figure 27. Hydroelectric powerstation near Khorog. This is probably the Gunt River rather than the Asu Darya. Exact location unknown.

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~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~

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Figure 26. On the grounds of the Botanical Garden on the outskirts of Ehorog. August 1953.

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S-E-C-R-E-T

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One almost-modern town is Khorog, located on both sides of the Gunt River at its junction with the Amu Darya in Western Pamir. At 6,900 feet above sea level, it lies in a pocket in the hills (see Figure 25). Its airfield accommodates at least twin-engine aircraft, which are reported to fly on a regular schedule (see Figure 26). Electricity is supplied (1943) by separate generators in New Khorog, in the army compound on the north bank of the Gunt, and in Old Khorog, 3 miles to the east (see Figure 27). At the airfield is a radar station. The population of 10,000 is connected with Stalinabad by telegraph and with other places by radio. Telephones are used at least locally. Paved streets, a "teachers college", cinema, and agricultural experiment station are other attractions (see Figure 28).

In the dry plains, it is more the rule than the exception to find some of the trappings of modernity. Railroads and the requirements of collective farming have introduced a strong western aspect, particularly in the relatively new settlements of the last two decades. As new land was claimed by irrigation, towns were built for the workers. In general, they are much larger than the villages of the mountains and, in addition to the usual electric lights, telephones, paved streets, movies and schools, may have a cotton gin, food-packing plant, oil-cracking unit, or some other industry connected with their basic work. Since agriculture is practiced everywhere, the tractor station, or machine shop, is common to most settlements. Likewise common to this area is the crowd of Sunday sightseers or picnickers gathered at a water body or other vacation spot.

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C. Agriculture

Cultivation of the soil and the raising of animals are principal occupations throughout the area. Eastern Pamir, formerly strongly nomadic, has now developed seminomadic and sedentary communities. The growing of crops is encouraged by the Russians, particularly through the establishment in 1942 of the Pamir Biological Station at 12,600 feet near Murghab. And with less than 30 frost-free days (at this elevation) 5 inches of rain a year, and otherwise desirable areas strewn with glacial boulders, agriculture needs considerable encouragement. Animal husbandry, chiefly sheep, goats, and yaks, is probably still the economic base.

Western Pamir has carried on agriculture for centuries and has its own experiment station at Pamir Botanical Gardens, 7,500 feet elevation, 3 miles from Khorog. Wheat, barley, potatoes, peas, and other vegetables are raised successfully above 10,000 feet, but fruits are successful only below this altitude. The common mulberry is eaten fresh or ground into flour. Animal husbandry is important but not the economic base, and involves more horses, donkeys, and cows than in Eastern Pamir.

West of the big bend of the Amu Darya the economy is strongly agrarian in the lowlands but emphasizes animals in the hills. Because nothing is grown here without irrigation and there is still a shortage of controlled water, there may be extensive interfluvial areas that are not inhabited and almost completely barren. Fertile soil and long sultry summers permit two crops and a high return from forced collective farming where water is made available.

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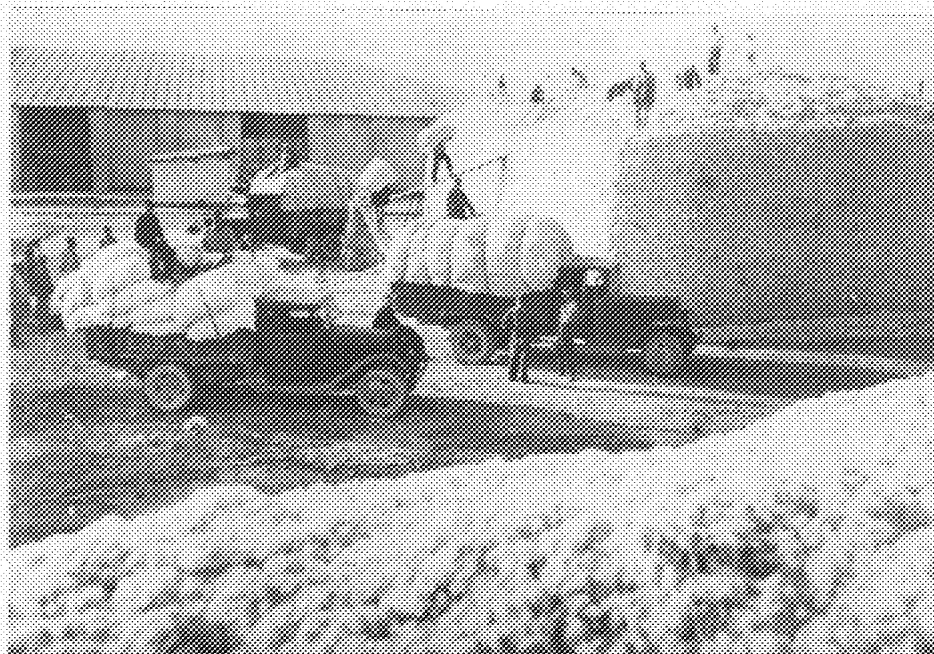


Figure 29. Temporary storage of cotton at a collection station near Kurgan-Tyube in the Vakhsh Valley (37° 50'N).

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Wheat, barley, rice, flax, jute, and vegetables grow well. Nuts are an important food, especially pistachio on low hills in the rayons adjoining the Vakhsh Valley, and walnuts northeast of Kulyab in the Darvazskiy Khrebet (Darvazo Range). Orchards and vineyards are common, and provide important additions to the local diet, as does the raising of small animals. But the major effort in the plains is concentrated on the growing of cotton and, to a lesser extent, sugar cane. Raised by forced labor, Soviet cotton supplies the need for cheap clothing in USSR and now accounts for half the Afghanistan imports of cotton cloth. During picking season collection stations or gins may have mounds of cotton as large as a big barn (see Figure 29).

There appear to be five major areas of irrigation. Inasmuch as irrigation is known to exist outside these areas they probably represent places where the canal system is most dense or continuous. On Map 2, they are represented as strips 4 to 8 miles wide and are located as follows:

1. Along the north bank of the Amu Darya from Kelif in Turkmenistan, across Uzbekistan, to the Tadzhikistan border
2. Along both sides of the Kafirnigan River throughout its lower 20 miles
3. On the east side of the Vakhsh River, extending some 10 miles north and south of Dailikul ( $37^{\circ}30'N$ ), and from the southern end of this strip, east-southeastward to the Amu Darya

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4. Near Kirovabad along the north side of the Amu Darya, where its course lies northwestward, extending from 12 miles southeast to 6 miles northwest of the town.
5. Immediately north and west of the Urta Tagai and west of Chubek

#### D. Transportation

Most of the roads in Eastern and Western Pamir have been built in the last two decades. Hard work in the high mountains gives even the local people "tutak" or mountain sickness, and the chief impetus for road construction has come from Soviet national strategic interests. Khorog seems to be the hub of Soviet transportation in this area. A road of sorts runs along the north side of the Amu Darya at least as far upstream as Qala Panja ( $72^{\circ}35'E$ ) in the Wakhan Corridor and possibly to Lake Victoria ( $73^{\circ}40'E$ ) or Takhtamysh ( $74^{\circ}40'E$ ). The principal road in the area runs roughly east from Khorog to Murghab ( $38^{\circ}10'E-73^{\circ}56'E$ ; see Figure 30) then north to Osh. This is the famous Pamir Highway, which has a dirt or waterbound-macadam surface one to two lanes wide (see Figure 31) and is said to average 11,800 feet in elevation. Snow closes it from October-November to April-May. A north-south road some 20 miles long connects it with the border road at Mazar Tepe (Mogila) at  $73^{\circ}10'E$  on the Pamir River. Khorog is connected to Stalinabad by a similar road, not so high but closed for 6 months in winter. From Khorog, it follows the river westward to Kalai Khumb ( $70^{\circ}45'E$ ), where it turns north thru Garm.

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Figure 30. A portion of the village of Murgab in Eastern Pamir on the Osh-Khoreg road (Pamir Highway). Elevation approximately 12,000 feet. Note the barren hillsides. In the trucks are logs and hay, which must have come from considerable distance.

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Figure 31. On the Stalinabad-Khorog road. The rugged skyline is visible behind the truck.

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From this northern tip of the big bend of the Amu Darya a military road, probably of improved dirt construction for the most part, runs near the river the rest of the distance downstream through Uzbekistan. It connects the southern ends of the major north-south routes that lead to Stalinabad ( $38^{\circ}35'N$ ), the transportation hub of the less rugged area between Kulyab and the Turkmenistan border.

A Russian-standard-gauge ( $5'0''$ ) railroad branches from the main line at Bukhara ( $39^{\circ}45'N-64^{\circ}25'E$ ), reaches the Amu Darya at Samsunovo ( $65^{\circ}15'E$ ), and continues upstream to Termez, where it turns northeast to Stalinabad. The Vakhsh Valley is served by a narrow-gauge (less than  $5'00''$ ) line from Stalinabad, which runs southward through Kurgan Tyube and Molotovabad. It reaches the river and the military road at Nizhniy Pyandzh ( $68^{\circ}35'E$ ). This line has also been extended for 20 miles north of Stalinabad.

These two railroads -- Stalinabad-Termez and Stalinabad-Nizhniy Pyandzh -- are the principal routes of the area. They are paralleled by good roads, although in the Vakhsh Valley the road is some miles from the railroad. A third route, the narrow Kafirnigan Valley, carries a road (but no railroad) from Ayva] to Stalinabad. It lies between the two rail routes. The roads and railroads carry the principal products of the area -- cotton, sugar, vegetables, fruits, and nuts. Probably most of the southern 2 to 5 miles, where border clearing is the chief concern, produce almost no economic goods and leave transportation facilities exclusively for military purposes.

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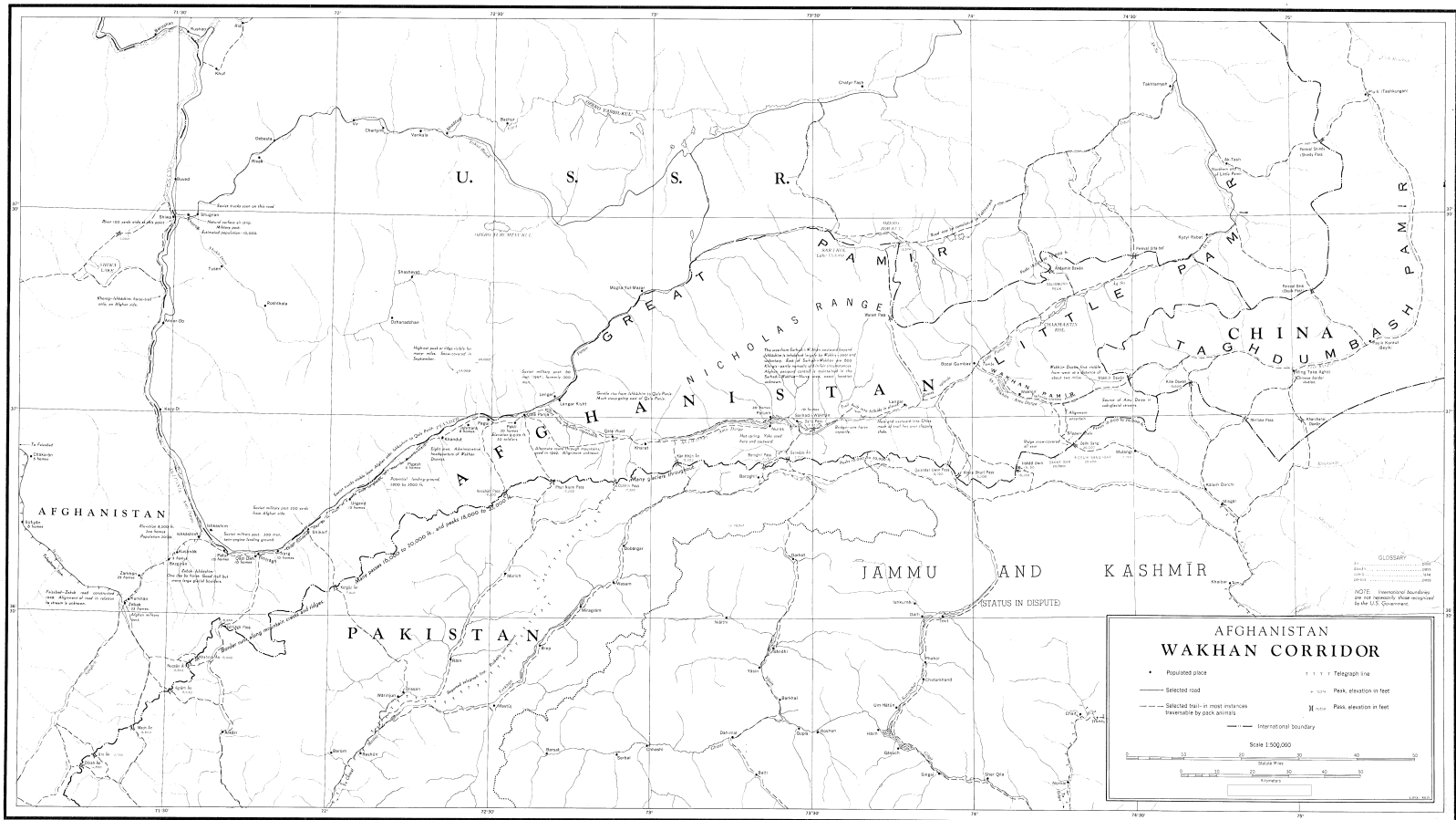
The USSR makes quite a point of its air activity in this area. There are airfields at Murgab, Khorog, Kalai-Khumb, and many places west of Kulyab (see Map 2). It seems likely that a person near the border would see Russian planes nearly everyday.



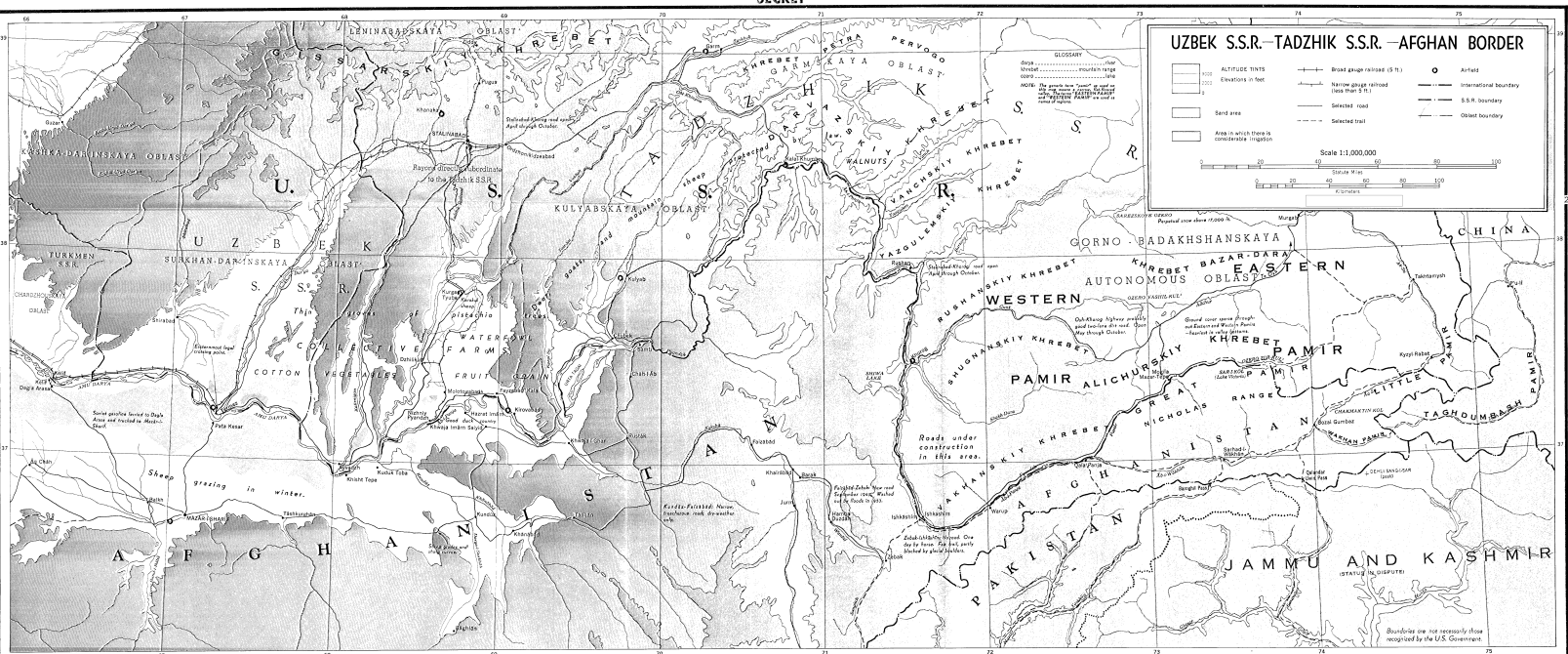
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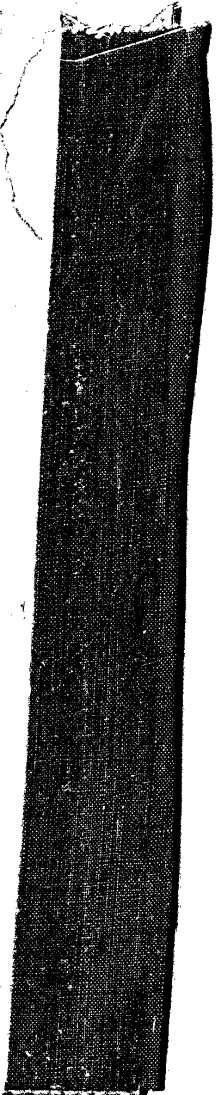




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