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GEOGRAPHIC MEMORANDUM

GEOGRAPHIC BRIEF OF USSR ECONOMIC REGION X

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GEOGRAPHICAL BASE OF THE ECONOMIC REGION X

DESCRIPTION

Kazakhstan and Soviet Central Asia comprise a vast arid and semiarid area that stretches across the southern part of the USSR from the Caspian Sea to the Chinese border. Raw materials -- primarily cotton, grain, and minerals -- are its chief contribution to the Soviet economy. The five republics differ from the European parts of the USSR historically, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically. Basically the people are Turkic, speak Turkic dialects, and have a common history and background of Islamic culture. The area also has large minorities of Iranian (Tadjiks) and Slavic peoples. European culture and technology have made great advances since the advent of Soviet power, but the area continues to retain its distinctive character.

*Kazakhstan and Soviet Central Asia are coterminous with Economic Regions Xa and Xb, respectively. The area, formerly called Turkestan, has under the Soviet regime been divided according to linguistic criteria into five republics: Kazakhskaya, Kirgizskaya, Uzbekskaya, Tadjikskaya, and Turkmenskaya.

A. Economic Region Ka

Economic Region Ka, Kazakhstan, including over a million square miles or about one-eighth of the territory of the USSR, lies immediately north of Soviet Central Asia and extends from the lower Volga and Caspian Sea eastward from more than 1,800 miles to the Chinese border (see Map 27282). In a north-south direction the region extends for more than 1,000 miles -- from the Trans-Siberian Railroad to the Tyan'-Shan' Mountains.

Kazakhstan has extensive areas of arid and semiarid lowlands and basins, hilly uplands, and high mountains. The northern fringe and the western half of Kazakhstan are chiefly lowland areas. In the north, however, the plains are interrupted by the Mugodzharakiye Mountains, a southern extension of the Urals. The east-central part of the republic is a broad expanse of low mountains and hills, the Kazakhskiy Melkosopochnik (Kazakh Upland). South of it is the Betpak-Dala, an undulating arid plateau. The southern half of the republic consists predominantly of flat, sandy lowland desert; but along the southeastern and eastern periphery of Kazakhstan are the high, rugged, parallel ranges of the Tyan'-Shan' and Altay Mountains. A fertile piedmont that varies in width parallels the base of these mountains.

The vegetation of Kazakhstan is very sparse. From the north to the south, four zones can be delimited. The steppe zone in the north, comprising 27 percent of Kazakhstan, has a fairly dense cover of grass and sagebrush. Immediately to the south is the desert steppe, a transitional zone that covers about 22 percent of Kazakhstan and stretches across the republic from west to east. This zone has a sparse cover of vegetation in which sagebrush and drought-resistant and salt-tolerant grasses predominate. The desert zone, occupying the southern part of the republic, includes about 40 percent of

Kazakhstan. Here the vegetation is very sparse, consisting of sagebrush, scattered ephemeral grasses, and salsol. The mountain zone along the eastern and southeastern borders of Kazakhstan covers about 11 percent of the republic. Within the mountains, the type of vegetation varies with elevation, from steppe grass to scattered forests and alpine meadows that extend to the limits of permanent snow.

Kazakhstan has a dry continental climate with cold winters and long, hot summers. Temperatures increase and precipitation decreases from north to south, except in the mountains where annual precipitation ranges up to 40 inches and temperatures decrease as elevations become higher. In the plains areas, precipitation ranges from 12 inches in the north to less than 5 inches in the south. Throughout Kazakhstan, prolonged periods of very cold weather may be expected frequently in the winter. Although the summers are long, hot and dry, the daily ranges in temperature are wide and nights may be cool. Spring and autumn are short, transitional seasons.

Throughout much of the region, rivers and streams terminate in landlocked seas, lakes, or local depressions. The Caspian, Aral, and Balkhash Seas are three of the largest landlocked bodies of water in the world. Only in the north, where the Irtysh and Ishim Rivers flow northward to the Ob', is there any exterior drainage. The major rivers of the region are the Syr-Dar'ya, Ural, Irtysh, Ishim, Ili, and the Chu.

According to an official Soviet estimate, the population of Kazakhstan totaled 8.5 million in 1956 and is increasing rapidly. Between 1940 and 1956 the increase amounted to more than 2 million. About 62 percent of the population is classified as rural. Most of the people are concentrated in northern Kazakhstan, on the southern piedmont, and in the irrigated

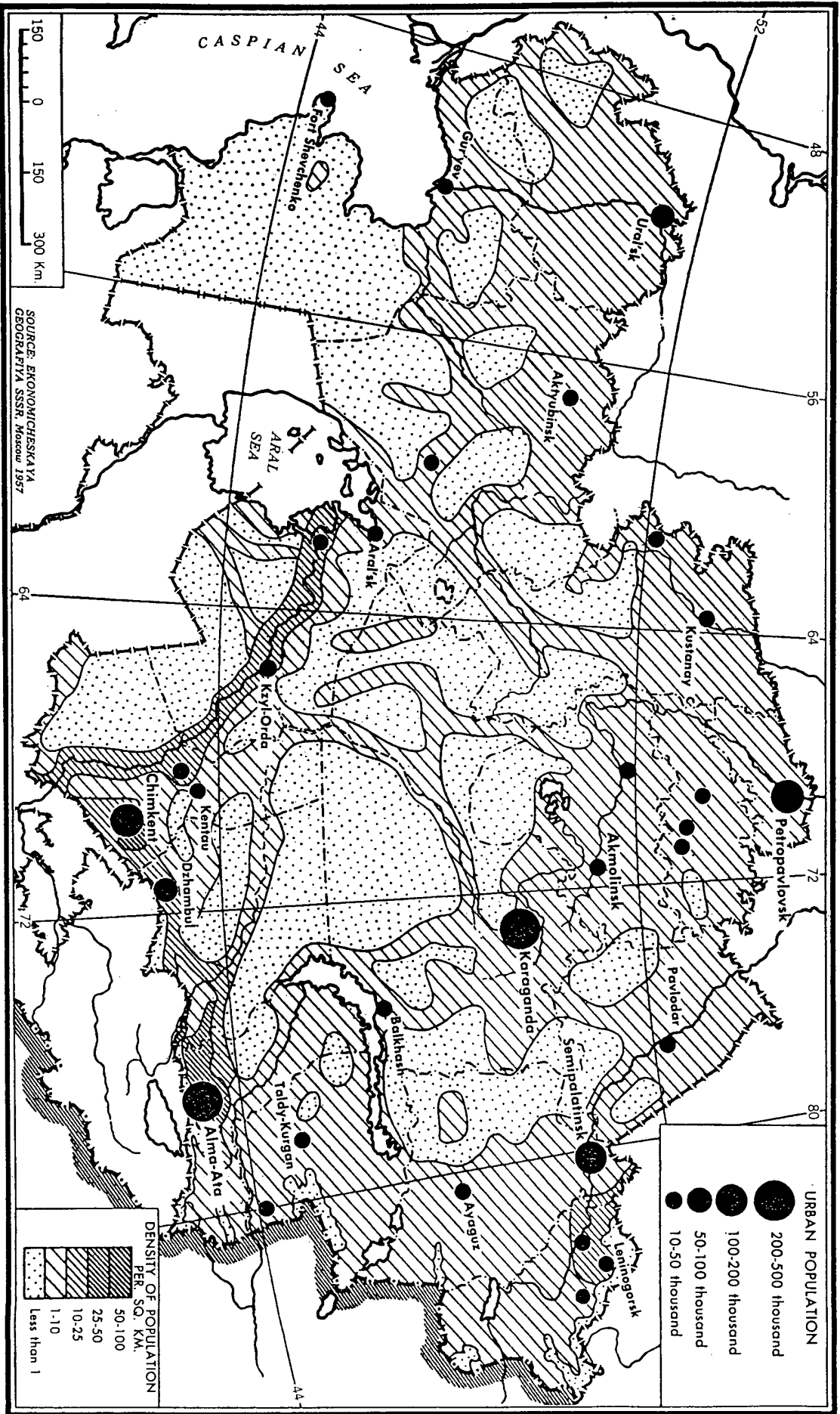
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SOURCE: EKONOMICHESKAYA GEOGRAFIYA SSSR, Moscow 1957

POPULATION DENSITY IN SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN

valleys along the eastern and southeastern margins of the republic (see Map 27335). The central, western, and southern parts of Kazakhstan are very sparsely populated. The main centers of population include Karaganda (350,000 inhabitants), Alma-Ata (350,000), Semipalatinsk (136,000), Chimkent (130,000), and Petropavlovsk (118,000).

Kazakhs, a Turkic people, and other indigenous Central Asian ethnic groups comprise slightly more than 40 percent of the population. Slavs -- primarily Great Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians -- are in the majority. As a result of the New Lands Program, 600,000 new settlers moved to northern Kazakhstan from European USSR between 1953 and 1957. Continued movement of people from European USSR may be expected as economic development of Kazakhstan progresses.

Kazakhstan is important to the Soviet economy both industrially and agriculturally (see Map 27281). Although the Republic has less than 3 percent of the industrial workers in the USSR, its industrial commodities are of primary importance to the nation, and its industry is being expanded rapidly. Mining, metallurgy, and machine building are the chief industries, but the consumer and food industries are also significant. All of the industries are based on the abundant and varied mineral resources of Kazakhstan, one of the richest mineral areas in the USSR. Kazakhstan ranks first in the USSR in reserves of copper, zinc, lead, silver, cadmium, tungsten, vanadium, and chromite; it also has significant reserves of iron ore, coal, petroleum, bauxite, manganese, nickel, cobalt, titanium, phosphorite, asbestos, polydymum, gold, tin, barite, and salt. The Karaganda coal basin is the third largest producer in the USSR, and Kazakhstan is a leading producer of nonferrous and rare metals.

The agricultural economy of Kazakhstan is characterized by a wide variety of crops and by a rapid increase of crop acreages. Wheat and other grains are extensively grown in the north. In the south, irrigation permits the production of a variety of crops, including tree fruits, grapes, vegetables, rice, cotton, and sugar beets. In 1955, Kazakhstan accounted for more than 12 percent (20.6 million hectares) of the total planted acreage in the USSR, and more than 10 percent of the cattle. It also produced about 11 percent of the wool and 8 percent of the meat. By 1956 the total planted acreage had increased to 27.8 million hectares. In conjunction with the New Lands Program, alone, about 20 million hectares of additional land have been brought under cultivation, primarily for grain crops, between 1954 and 1956; and further expansion has been planned.

A sparse rail network provides the major means of overland transportation in Kazakhstan. Three railroads cross the Republic from north to south; and two cross the northern fringe of the area from west to east⁴⁴. The rail lines were built primarily to move mineral and agricultural raw materials to other parts of the USSR and only secondarily as lines of internal communications. The two east-west lines serve as alternate routes to the Trans-Sib Railroads, and those running north-south are feeder lines. Numerous branch lines tap important mineral and agricultural areas. The rail system is being rapidly extended to meet the needs of the expanding economy. River transportation is of minor importance in Kazakhstan. The road system is poorly developed and of only local importance. Although there are a few improved roads in

⁴⁴Several important railroad lines have been omitted from Map 27281. The most important is the Central Siberian Railroad, which will run from Khatanga to Dzhanal. Most of this line has been completed. Other important lines, completed or under construction, include those to Dzhetysay, Turgay, and Ust-Kamenogorsk (to China).

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in the northern and eastern parts of the republic, unimproved dirt roads, motorable tracks, and trails predominate. The chief function of the roads, particularly the new roads, is to supplement the rail network.

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B. Economic Region Kb

Economic Region Kb, Soviet Central Asia, occupies a peripheral position along the southern border of the USSR adjacent to Iran and Afghanistan (see Map 27282). Its area of 475,000 square miles, about one-twentieth of the USSR, includes the Kirgizskaya, Uzbekskaya, Tadzhikskaya, and Turkmenskaya SSR's. It is a land of deserts and mountains and is important economically because of its production of textile raw materials, chiefly cotton.

Low-lying, sandy desert plains and high rugged, barren mountains are the dominant physiographic features of Soviet Central Asia. The vast sandy plains of the Karakum and Aytykum Deserts occupy most of the western two-thirds of the region. On the south the deeply dissected, barren Kopet-Dag Mountains, which rise to elevations of more than 9,500 feet, lie astride the Iranian-Turkmenian border. The lofty Tyan'-Shan', Alay, and Pamir Mountain systems occupy the eastern part of the area. These mountains rise to elevations of more than 24,000 feet and are among the highest in the world. Between the various ranges are wide mountain valleys, constituting rich agricultural and pasture lands. Particularly notable are the Fergana and Vakhsh Valleys.

The vegetative cover of the area is very sparse. More of the surface is bare than is covered with vegetation, and extensive areas are totally without vegetation. Desert species such as short ephemeral grasses, sagebrush, and saxaul predominate in the lowland areas. Desert vegetation is also found in the mountains, but extensive areas are in meadow and forest.

All of the waters of the region drain into inland basins. Although the drainage system is fairly dense in the mountains, there are few rivers in the deserts. The largest are the Am-Dar'ya and Syr-Dar'ya, which flow from

the mountains across the desert lowlands and empty into the Aral Sea. Both rivers are used extensively for irrigation. The smaller rivers that flow from the mountains are soon dissipated in the desert sands.

The climatic regime of the desert plains is characterized by long, very hot summers; cold winters in the north and mild winters in the south; wide annual and daily ranges in temperature; scant precipitation, ranging from 3 to 8 inches; low relative humidity; aridity; and a large number of sunny days. In the high mountains to the east the temperatures are lower, and the winters are very severe. Precipitation varies greatly with elevation and exposure. Although many parts of the mountains receive about the same amount as the desert plains, up to 60 inches have been recorded at some stations.

In 1955 the population of Soviet Central Asia was estimated at 12.4 million, about 6 percent of the national total, and is increasing rapidly. About 66 percent of the population is rural. Between 1940 and 1955, the increase amounted to about 2 million, whereas that of the remainder of the USSR only increased by 4 million.* The bulk of the population is concentrated in the fertile mountain valleys such as Fergana and Kashghar, along the piedmont and main rivers, and in the scattered oases, where population densities may exceed 700 persons per square mile (see map 27153). The deserts and mountains, by contrast, are extremely sparsely populated. The main centers of population are Tashkent (773,000 inhabitants), Stalinsk (191,000), Frunze (190,000), Samarkand (170,000), Ashkhabad (142,000), Andizhan (115,000), and Namangan (104,000).

*United Nations, Economic Bulletin for Europe, Vol. 9, No. 3, Nov. 1957, p. 54.

The Uzbeks, Tadzhiks, Turkmenians, Kirgizi, and other indigenous ethnic groups who comprise about 75 percent of the population live primarily in the rural areas. Whereas the Tadzhiks are of Iranian origin, the other groups are all Turkic. The remainder of the population is of European origin, mainly Slavic, and lives chiefly in the cities.

The economy of Soviet Central Asia is based on irrigation farming, with cotton as the chief crop (see Map 27281). Although including only 3 percent of the sown area of the Soviet Union, Region Kb is highly important as a supplier of raw materials -- cotton, silk, and wool -- for the textile industry. Four-fifths of the cotton of the USSR, about a half of the silk, and most of the karakul skins are produced in the region. The growing of grain, animal husbandry, viticulture, and horticulture are also important agricultural pursuits.

Industry in the area is also closely geared to the growing of cotton and other irrigated crops (see Map 3). Cotton ginning and the production of cotton-seed oil, fertilizers, food products, and cotton-picking and other agricultural machinery are the chief industries. The production of building-materials, and consumer goods, including cotton textiles, is also important. The region has a wide variety of mineral resources including oil, gas, coal, uranium, iron ore, and a variety of nonferrous, rare, and chemical minerals; but their exploitation has been slow in developing. On the basis of these minerals, ferrous and nonferrous metallurgical, oil-refining, chemical, metal-fabricating, and machine-building industries have been established. Nevertheless, Soviet Central Asia is not one of the important industrial areas of the USSR, accounting for only about 2 percent of its gross industrial output and less than 3 percent of its industrial labor force.

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Railroads are the chief means of transportation in Soviet Central Asia. Although sparse, the rail network is adequate to satisfy existing demands. The railroads have been developed primarily to move raw materials to other parts of the USSR and to provide routes of access to the Iranian and Afghan borders. The main rail line in the area leads from Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea across the deserts and connects with the Turksib Railroad in southeastern Kazakhstan. This railroad and its branch lines connects the major population centers and frontier outposts of Soviet Central Asia. River transportation is of minor importance and is limited primarily to the Amu-Dar'ya. The road system, however, is fairly well developed and supplements the rail network, particularly in the more inaccessible areas such as the mountains and border areas. The mountains have well developed systems of good roads, which are the chief routes of transportation. A distinctive characteristic of the road pattern is that many of the major roads lead from the international borders to the interior, obviously for military reasons.

ECONOMIC MAP OF SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA AND KAZAKHSTAN

