Chapter 17
Central Asia, the Caucasus, & Siberian Russia

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Physical Geography of the Region

- *Label on the map in your notes:*
  - 3 Regions
    - Siberia (Eastern Russia), Central Asia, the Caucasus
  - Mountains form borders in this region
    - Caucasus, Ural, Tian Shan Mtns
  - Important Waterways
    - Arctic & Pacific Oceans, Black & Caspian Seas (world’s largest inland sea), and Lake Baikal (world’s largest (by volume) & deepest freshwater lake)
North Siberia’s Ecosystem

- **Tundra** – treeless w/ tiny plants, reindeer, rabbits, fox, polar bears
  - **Permafrost** – permanently frozen soil
- Lots of natural resources, but harsh climate makes it hard to reach them
Central Siberia’s Ecosystem

- **Taiga** – thick coniferous forests w/ brown bears, sable →
  - Few people live there
South Siberia’s Ecosystem

- **Steppe** (dry grassland) plains, plateaus, & mountains
  - Siberian tigers, bear, reindeer, lynx, wolf, wild boar, elk
The Kamchatka Peninsula

• Part of the “Ring of Fire”
  • Mountains
  • Volcanoes
  • Earthquakes
Central Asia’s Ecosystem

- Arid (desert) & semiarid
The Caucasus’s Ecosystem

• Mountains & **deciduous** forests in lowland areas
History of Siberia & Central Asia

• 1000 BC until 1700s:
  • Siberia was **pastoral** (animal herders)
  • Central Asia was invaded often due to the Silk Road trade route to East Asia ➔
  • Georgia & Armenia were early converts to (Orthodox) Christianity in AD 300s
  • Arab invaders brought Islam, the most common religion in Central Asia today in A.D. 700s ➔
History of Siberia & Central Asia

• **1700**: Siberia & Central Asia became part of Russia
  • Built railroads & began to **irrigate** dry land to grow cotton

• **1905**: Trans-Siberian Railroad was completed, allowing coal mines & farms to expand because they could now export their products
Genocide in the Caucasus

• 1915: The Ottoman Empire controlled Armenia during WWI and the Muslim Turks committed genocide against 1.5 million Armenian Christians
History of Siberia & Central Asia

• **1917**: When Russia became the communist USSR farmland was placed in *collectives* run by the government, nomadic herding was banned & gulags (prison camps) were established in Siberia
  - prisoner labor expanded mining & industry in Siberia
  - Soviets built industry, dams & more irrigation and many Russians moved to Central Asia

• **1991**: when the Soviet Union collapsed, the Central Asian republics declared their independence and current boundaries
People in the Region Today

• Ethnicities:
  • The “stans” populations used to be nomadic tribes (Kazakhs, Turkmenis, Uzbeckis, Tajiks, Kyrgyz)
  • The Caucasus: primarily homogenous (similar) populations of Armenians, Azeris, & Georgians
  • Siberia: primarily Russian, with some Mongol or Turkic ancestry

• Culture & daily life vary in urban & rural areas
  • Some rural families live in yurts, while urban Kazakhs live and dress like Europeans.
Lasting Impacts of the Soviet Union on the Caucasus & Central Asia

1. “Recovering” from communism:
   - Each country has struggled to establish stable, democratic governments & free-enterprise economies

2. Ethnic diversity
   - causes conflict due to strong nationalism (desire of an ethnic group to rule themselves as a separate nation)
Lasting Impacts of the Soviet Union on Central Asia

3. Pollution:
   • Many Russians moved there, setting up hastily-built factories that have caused a lot of pollution

4. Changes in traditional nomadic culture:
   • Nomadic tribes were forced to settle & farm irrigated land that was not suitable for farming
     • Overuse & over-irrigation has destroyed the Aral Sea
Environmental Problems near the Aral Sea

- Pollution by chemical fertilizer
- The Aral Sea is drying up! Water from major rivers has been diverted to irrigate cotton fields
  - What effect is this having on this region?
The Disappearing Aral Sea

• The Sea may be completely gone by 2030!
• What can be done?