Full Circle

Identity, Soviet Nationalities Policy, and Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

How did Soviet nationalism impact the diverse ethnic groups of Central Asia? This paper interrogates Soviet "modernization" policy toward different identity groups in modern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Using an International Relations approach, the author problematizes the Leninist ethnoterritorial nationalist framework, arguing the complexities of ethnic identity in the region. As such, the creation of discrete bordered "socialist nations" is an artificial endeavor based on incorrect assumptions about the homogeneity of regional ethnic groups. The repeated divisions of Central Asia during the Bolshevik era attempted to catalyze the development of socialism within governable economic units of the Soviet empire. This phenomenon is clearly articulated in the Ferghana Valley region, which houses Uzbek, Tajik, and Kryrgz populations, among others. The geography of this area is analyzed to highlight the pitfalls of Soviet border delineation. Last, the article further explores the influence of the clan system during the nation-building period and the process of "korenizatsiia" or "indigenization," which was used strategically by both clan leaders and soviet officials to harness political power.

***Keywords**:* Soviet nationalism, Central Asia, ethnic groups, modernization policy, Lenin, ethnic identity, Soviet borders, clan system, korenizatsiia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Ferghana Valley, Bolshevik era, nationalism, nation state

Before there were nations, there were clans. The Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are products of Soviet nationalities policy. This policy, undertaken in the 1920s and 1930s, sought to modernize clans out of existence by partitioning Central Asia into five officially sanctioned nations, each with fixed borders.

"The Soviet system, while brutal and callously profligate with human life, was not simply a continuation of Russian colonialism in another form. In Central Asia, it was a radically modernizing regime that transformed what had been a culturally and politically unassimilated colony of the Tsarist Empire into the nation states we know today."[1]

[1] Alexander Morrison, "Central Asia and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Look at the Balance Sheet at the Centennial," EurasiaNet, October 26, 2017, https://eurasianet.org/central-asia-and-the-bolshevik-revolution-a-look-at-the-balance-sheet-at-the-centennial#:~:text=The%20Soviet%20system,%20while%20brutal%20and%20callously%20profligate

However, are they nation-states? Should they be nation-states? The nation-state is a Western concept of the 19th Century. In applying it to non-Western peoples, does it not become a procrustean bed, defined as "a plan or scheme to produce uniformity or conformity by arbitrary or violent methods?" In the results so achieved, do not the bad outweigh the good?

> "Nationalities were not only promoted but institutionalized; individuals had to perceive themselves as belonging to the nationality of the titular nation they found themselves in, regardless if they actually corresponded to their own…Where nationalities did not exist, or were not clearly identifiable, they were invented and local elites were created to govern over the area…A significant Uzbek minority found itself in Tajikistan and as well as a big Tajik minority in Uzbekistan, hampering nation building…There are many other examples of titular nationalities being excluded from their titular territories. Many of these have led to irredentist claims throughout Central Asia, with the Ferghana Valley being the most prominent example."[2]

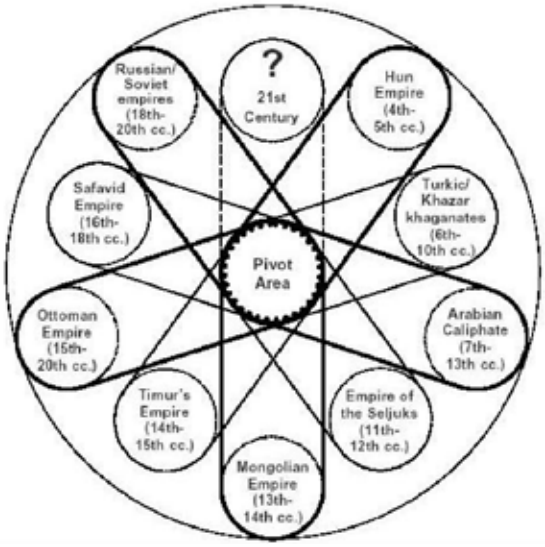
The entire process of national delineation was alien to the history of Central Asia. A fluid frontier between nomadic and sedentary societies, Central Asia was a rich tapestry of peoples, customs, languages, and beliefs that intermingled into an overarching cultural unity.

For two thousand years, Central Asia was a hub of the Silk Road, overland trade routes linking China, Europe, India, and the Middle East. Strategically important and economically wealthy, control of this land was contested by a multitude of local and foreign powers, from tribal confederations to empires, from kingdoms to city-states.

The history of Central Asia was a cycle of imperium, interregnum, and new imperium, of political borders expanding and contracting. It was a cycle, which not only defined, but transcended the region. It was a cycle with such a profound impact on the rest of Eurasia that Central Asia became known as the "geographical pivot of history."

In their 2010 article, "The Heartland Theory and the Present-Day Geopolitical Structure of Central Eurasia," Eldar Ismailov and Vladimer Papava illustrated the cycle in a diagram. (Figure 1)

Figure 1
Evolution of the Pivot Area



Note. From *The Heartland Theory and the Present-Day Geopolitical Structure of Central Eurasia*, by E. Ismailov and V. Papava, p. 91. (https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/Monographs/1006Rethinking-4.pdf)

[2] Salvatore J. Freni, "The Soviet Nationality Policy in Central Asia," Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse 5.03 (2013). http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/731/3/the-soviet-nationality-policy-in-central-asia

At the start of Russia's conquest of Central Asia in the 19th century, the region consisted of two distinct areas: the north, known as the Steppes, which was home to Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads, and the south, where the most fertile lands were controlled by three rival city-states—Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand.

In southern Central Asia, "…the fragmented city-states that emerged from Nadir Shah Afshar's empire (1736–1747) such as Bukhara, Khiva, and Khoqand…that characterized Central Asia on the eve of colonial conquest were thus quite novel in terms of structural power dynamics, yet thoroughly Turko-Perso-Islamic in terms of symbolism, law, and patrimonialism. This period also witnessed what was in many ways the apex of Persianate high culture, building on traditions with roots stretching back to the Timurid period and earlier. Sufism in all of its forms became mainstream. Intellectual elites were polymathic, simultaneously mastering jurisprudence, poetry, medicine, occult sciences, and more. Vernacularization, particularly in literary Central Asian Turki, deepened these currents and carried them to new audiences. The new city-state dynasties competed with one another to build up educational centers to support all of these cultural forms…Many of these cultural, social, and even political forms persisted under [Russian] colonialism, even as the pace of change sped up. Some of the precolonial dynasties persevered under indirect colonial rule."[3]

The October 1917 Bolshevik coup, which overthrew the elected legislature established by the February Revolution, plunged Russia into civil war (1918-1921). From the Steppes to the Pamirs, from the Caspian Sea to the border of China, Central Asia was engulfed in chaos. With the collapse of Moscow's authority, the region was violently politically fragmented among competing groups. There was the Tashkent Soviet [controlled by Russians], the reformist Jadids [Uzbek intellectuals who looked to the Ottoman Empire for inspiration and envisioned one Turkic state for Central Asia], the traditionalist Basmachis, who could be either localists supporting the independence of Bukhara and Khiva or regionalist supporting an independent Turkestan, the locals emirs, themselves, and the Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads.

The anarchy was fueled by the outbreak of widespread famine from 1917 to 1920; "the full scale of the catastrophe,[was] exacerbated…by accompanying epidemics of cholera, typhus, and typhoid. Between 1915 and 1920, the amount of cultivated land declined by half and livestock decreased by 75 percent. Cotton production practically ceased. The losses were not uniform across social groups, of course. Russian peasants saw a decline of 28 percent in their cultivated land and lost 6.5 percent of their livestock; the figures were 39 percent and 48 percent, respectively, for the sedentary indigenous population, and 46 percent and 63.4 percent for the nomads. The civilian population of Turkestan fell by one-quarter

[3] James Pickett, "Central Asia between Empires: New Research on the 18th and 19th Centuries," Asian History, Oxford University Press, June 21, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.713

over the same five years, from 7,148,800 in 1915 to 5,336,500 in 1920. The indigenous rural population declined by 30.5 percent."[4]

For the Bolsheviks, Central Asia had been peripheral to their Marxist revolution. The land lacked an industrial base and a proletariat. It was devoid of nations and a bourgeoisie. It was a Russian colony without political, economic, or cultural integration into Russia. Yet, Central Asia soon became a military priority for the Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks quickly realized they needed to conquer Central Asia to secure their revolution. Economically, the region was a vital source of oil, cotton, and food. Strategically, Central Asia was a buffer against British intervention from India.

In August 1918, the British established a military presence in the Transcaspian oblast, present-day Turkmenistan, in support of the local anti-Bolshevik government. This British expeditionary force, composed of British Indian troops and commanded by Major General Sir Wilfrid Malleson, a former head of Indian Army intelligence, entered through Persia and remained until April 1919.

However, the Bolsheviks were in sufficient control of Central Asia to politically reorganize much of the region. On April 30, 1918, the Bosheviks combined the southern Central Asian oblasts of Turkestan, Samarkand, Ferghana, Semirechie, and the Transcaspian to form the Turkestan Soviet Federative Republic. Two years later, on September 24, 1920, it was renamed the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

That same year, the Bolsheviks overthrew the Khan of Khiva and the Emir of Bukhara, ideological obstacles to Soviet power in southern Central Asia. On February 2, 1920, the Khanate of Khiva was abolished and replaced with the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic. Eight months later, on October 8, 1920, the Emirate of Bukhara was abolished and replaced with the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic. (Figure 2)

Northern Central Asia had been the General-Governorship of the Steppes. On August 26, 1920,

Figure 2
First Communist borders for Central Asia, 1918-1920

Note. Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. By Seb az86556, Wikipedia, August 7, 2024. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkestan_Autonomous_Soviet_Socialist_Republic#/media/File:SovietCentralAsia1922.svg). CC BY-SA 3.0

[4] Adeeb Khalid, "Between Empire and Revolution: New Work on Soviet Central Asia," Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, Volume 7, Number 4, Fall 2006 (New Series), pp. 865-884 (Review), (6) Between Empire and Revolution: New Work on Soviet Central Asia | Adeeb Khalid - Academia.edu

the Bolsheviks renamed it the Kirgiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, an ethno-administrative unit of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. It's borders corresponded to those of present day Kazakhstan, not Kyrgyzstan.

Until the 1920s, Russian sources identified Kazakhs as "Kirgiz" or "Kirgiz-Kaysaks" and Kyrgyz as "Kara-Kirghiz."

Kazakhs were called "Kirghiz" to distinguish them from Russian "Cossacks." The Kyrgyz called "Kara-Kirghiz" [meaning Black Kyrgyz for their black tents] were considered a sub-group of "mountain-dwelling Kazakhs."

Kazakhs and Kyrgyz are closely related linguistically and culturally. In the words of Jambyl Jabaev, a famous Kazakh traditional folksinger, "*My bones are Kazakh, my body is Kyrgyz.*" However, Soviet nationalities policy classified the people as two separate nations.

On 14 October 1924, a Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast was formed. It was detached from the Kirgiz (Kazakh) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and transferred to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic of the USSR.

On April 15-16, 1925, the Kirgiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was renamed the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

A month later, the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast became the Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast. In February 1926, it became the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic within the USSR.

Following the adoption of the 1936 Soviet Constitution on December 5, 1936, both the Kazakh and Kyrgyz autonomous republics were detached from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and made union republics of the USSR as the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic and the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic.

Until 1926, the Bolsheviks had been denied complete control of southern Central Asia by the Basmachi insurgency. "By the end of the 1920s, Soviet historiography had settled on a characterization of the Basmachi as bandits and vilified them as forces of religious fanaticism and dark reaction, as well as being tools of foreign intervention…For their part, Western historiographical evaluations of the Basmachi have shifted over time. Early on, the Basmachi were seen as exemplars of a valiant national resistance to Soviet rule, a view that has been embraced by the post-Soviet regimes in Central Asia itself. In the 1980s, during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the Basmachi came to be seen as noble forerunners of the Afghan mujahidin. Now, the circle has closed, and the Basmachi are often portrayed as 'jihadist' precursors to the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. What all these characterizations share is a lack of any real feel for the era and any basis in thick documentation."[5]

According to *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, "The main arena of the Basmachi movement in Turkestan in 1918-20 was the Fergana Valley. In August 1919, the leader of the 'Turkestan Muslim White Guard'

[5] Op. cit. Adeeb Khalid (6) Between Empire and Revolution: New Work on Soviet Central Asia | Adeeb Khalid - Academia.edu

Madamin-bek concluded a military-political agreement on joint actions against Soviet power with the Commander of the kulak army K. Monstrov (Southern Kyrgyzstan). The Basmachi reached its greatest development in September-October 1919, when the combined armed forces of the Fergana Basmachi and the kulak army captured Osh, Jalal-Abad, blockaded Andijan and began to threaten Fergana. Soviet troops of the Turkfront (commander M.V. Frunze) defeated the kulak-Basmachi army by the beginning of March 1920…By April 1921, up to 7,000 Basmachi remained in Fergana, about 7,000 in Bukhara, and 1,000 in Khiva…By the end of 1922, the main forces of the Basmachi in Fergana and Khorezm were routed…The Basmachi gangs of Ibrahim-bek in Bukhara and Djunaid-khan in Khorezm managed to hold out the longest. Djunaid-khan's gang was liquidated in early 1924; Ibrahim-bek's gangs (about 4 thousand people) were routed in 1926."[6]

Despite Basmachi activities, in 1924, the Bolsheviks, now called Communists, made the first attempt at the national delineation of southern Central Asia. It was based on Lenin's ideas, initially advocated in 1913, that Russia be divided along ethnic lines. In January 1916, this became Lenin's doctrine of the self-identification of the working people. Three years later, in March 1919, Lenin restricted the right to self-determination of working people to only the "exploited masses."

Lenin took an uncompromising stance on "nations" and "national rights," but one based on the inequality of nations. There were "backward" nations and "civilized" nations. There were oppressor nations and oppressed nations.

This theory of "good ('oppressed-nations') nationalism formed the conceptual foundation of the Soviet Union and [the] policy of compensatory 'nation-building' was a spectacularly successful attempt at a state-sponsored conflation of language, 'culture,' territory and quota-fed bureaucracy…the Bolsheviks appeared to be the first state to institutionalise ethnoterritorial federalism, classify all citizens according to their biological nationalities and formally prescribed preferential treatment of certain ethnically defined populations."[7]

This ethnoterritorial federalism was ideologically crafted. Each unit would be, in fact, a carbon copy of the others. There would be a cookie-cutter mold to delineation in which all political entities would be nationalist in form for diversity and socialist in content for uniformity. A political crucible in which nations are wedded to Socialism to create a Soviet people.

But what is a nation? In "Marxism and the National Question" (1913), Stalin wrote that "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a

[6] "Basmachi," The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, Academician, 2000-2024, https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/

[7] Galym Zhussipbek , History of the Central Asian Region – 1700 to 1991," Legacies of Division: Discrimination on the Basis of Religion and Ethnicity in Central Asia," (9) HISTORY OF CENTRAL ASIA – 1700 TO 1991 | galym zhussipbek - Academia.edu

common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."[8] That definition would guide the implementation of Soviet nationalities policy.

It was ill-advised, however, to apply such a definition to the peoples of Central Asia. There, "it is difficult to identify distinct ethnic groups prior to the twentieth century. First of all, there was the problem of overlap and intermixing between groups. Populations and dialects blended into each other without any clear boundaries… People who claimed a common history or descent did not necessarily speak the same language; people who spoke the same language and lived on the same territory did not necessarily consider themselves to belong to the same ethnic group. As an example of the second phenomenon… certain tribes that lived on the territory of present-day Turkmenistan. They spoke Turkmen dialects, lived interspersed with the Turkmen population, and appeared in every way to be Turkmen. Yet they viewed themselves -- and were viewed by their Turkmen neighbors -- as Arabs, descendants of one of the early Muslim caliphs. These groups, known as 'sacred tribes,' played a special role as religious leaders and mediators in Turkmen communities…Along with the question of blurred boundaries between ethnic groups, there was the matter of multiple levels of identity. Supraethnic and subethnic loyalties often were more important to people than ethnic categories. Particularly among sedentary Central Asians, it was common to consider oneself simply a "Muslim" or to identify with the state or region in which one lived— the Bukharan emirate, or the city of Samarqand. Among educated elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some identified with a supraethnic Turkestani or Turkic identity."[9]

Stalin's definition of a nation had an ominous qualification. "It goes without saying that a nation, like every historical phenomenon, is subject to the law of change, has its history, its beginning and end…"[10]

Over time, Soviet censuses became a testament to this "law of change" and the end of nations. The number of officially recognized nationalities would be continuously reduced from 172 to 106 and finally to 60.

In Central Asia, small nationalities like the Sart and Dungan were first recognized and then omitted from the Soviet Census. This occurred in a process of "ethnic consolidations" where smaller groups were combined with larger ones. "To cite just one example, there were a number of groups in the mountainous areas of what is today Tajikistan who spoke languages that were

[8] Shoshana Keller, "The Bolshevik Revolution: Contradictions and Paradoxes, Hamilton College, Central Asian History - Keller: Bolshevik revolution - Hamilton College

[9] Adrienne L. Edgar, ""Identities, Communities, and Nations in Central Asia: A Historical Perspective," Presentation from "Central Asia and Russia: Responses to the 'War on Terrorism,'" a panel discussion held at the University of California, Berkeley, October 29, 2001, Sponsored by the Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies; the Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post Soviet Studies; the Caucasus and Central Asia Program; and the Institute of International Studies at UC Berkeley

https://iseees.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/edgar_2001-1029.pdf#:~:text=Guided%20by%20the%20work%20of%20ethnographers%20and%20linguists,republics%2C%20each%20named%20for%20a%20single%20ethnic%20group

[10] Op. cit. Shoshana Keller, Central Asian History - Keller: Bolshevik revolution - Hamilton College

quite different from Tajik and were not originally considered Tajiks. These 'Pamiri nationalities' were eventually defined as 'mountain Tajiks' and incorporated, at least officially, into the Tajik ethnic group."[11]

The only purpose of national delineation was to advance Socialism. Lenin would impose Marxism, a Western ideology based on concepts of industrialization and class struggle in Central Asia where such concepts were alien to most of the indigenous population. The indigenous population was the majority population. The 1897 Russian Census found the population of the region to be 89 percent Turkic. Adding the Iranian Tajiks, the indigenous population was 97 percent. Instead of industrialization and class struggle, indigenous society was characterized by nomads and agriculturalists, religion, tradition, and the clans.

Among the indigenous population, there existed a sense of a shared, if inchoate, identity—one not based on nationality but on an overarching cultural unity.

> "Common outlooks, their sense of justice, language and conditions of life closely related all these large and small groups of Turks to each other. Differences among the Uzbeks, Kirghiz (Kazakhs), Turkmen and others are explained by the cattle-breeding, agricultural and urban way of life, and dialects were formed under the greater or smaller influence of the Persian and Arabic languages with terms borrowed from them. That is why all the groups communicated without any difficulties."[12]

However, Lenin insisted on fragmenting Central Asia through "national delineations." In 1919, Lenin dispatched a commission to Central Asia [the Turkcommission], which on January 15, 1920, issued a report recommending Turkestan be partitioned into three national republics—Kirghiz (Kazakh), Uzbek and Turkmen.

There was a paradox in the opinion of these Bolsheviks. To them, the shape formations of the soviet republics of Turkestan, Bukhara, and Khorezm were "artificial." But so would be the shape formations of the three "national" republics they proposed. They believed the multinational character of Turkestan, Bukhara, and Khorezm had a negative impact on those societies. But the Soviet society fashioned by Lenin, their sponsor, was to be multinational in character.

T. R. Ryskulov, N. Khodjaev, G. Bekh-Ivanov, and other local Party officials opposed the proposal to abolish the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, and the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic and replace them with three national republics. Known as the Turkdelegation, they traveled to Moscow in an attempt to dissuade Lenin from adopting the proposed partition.

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[12] Dr Mirzohid Rahimov & Dr Galina Urazaeva , "Central Asian Nations & Border Issues," Conflict Studies Research Center, 2005, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319903644_Central_Asian_Nations_Border_Issues

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> "The Turkdelegation claimed that the division of the tight-knit oblasts of Turkestan was inexpedient and to do that would be supersensitive. Of primary importance in preserving the integrity of Turkestan was the scarcity of water. The climatic and soil conditions of Turkestan gave rise to artificial irrigation, with strictly distributed irrigation systems and a necessary division of the population into cattle-breeding and agricultural ways of life. It would not be possible to break the irrigation links with the long established right to water use; or the alteration of cattle-breeding and land-farming households with their existing system of interchange of products and raw materials between certain oblasts of Turkestan ...Exploiting the resources of Turkestan, its timber and fish resources, located along the shore of the Aral Sea, and in rivers and lakes, also required a single economic policy. Then, the Turkdelegation considered that the division of Turkestan would break the uniform plan of railway and post-and-telegraphic communication, and the regular supervision over international and currency accounts with neighbouring Asian states and foreign trade." [13]

Their efforts failed. On June 16, 1920, Ryskulov submitted a report to Lenin. "It argued as follows: if to reach the goals of national self-determination one has to divide Turkestan into three republics, this would not be the logical ending, as it would be necessary to establish six more republics: Tajik, Kipchak, Kara-Kalpak, Djungan, Tarachin and Russian, because in rendering self-determination to the three large nations (the Kirghiz (Kazakh), Uzbeks and Turkmen), the plan subordinated to them the smaller nationalities."[14]

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[13] Ibid. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319903644_Central_Asian_Nations_Border_Issues

[14] Ibid. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319903644_Central_Asian_Nations_Border_Issues

Ryskulov's concern was in response to a rising popular belief within Central Asia that with a national republic, the titular nation would be in complete control of the territory and have the right to expel those whom they considered non-natives.

To resolve differences, Lenin sent a letter to Communist officials in Turkestan in 1920 asking "them to investigate how many states should be there and what they should be named…the idea of sovereign and independent ethnic-based states was alien and exotic for the locals. The concepts on the division of Turkestan were vague. The Bolsheviks applied to Vasily Bartol'd, a well-known scholar on Central Asia, with the question how they should divide the region. He warned them that Central Asia had no historic experience of the paradigm of an ethnic state, and it would be a great mistake to divide the region along ethnic lines now." [15]

However, the region was divided repeatedly between 1924 and 1936. Lenin and Stalin believed nationalism was a prerequisite for modernization and socialism. They believed it was necessary to establish national republics in order to foster class divisions. From class division would emerge the proletariat and the peasantry that were necessary for the consolidation of Soviet power in Central Asia. By promoting officially sanctioned national identities, it was assumed the appeal of local nationalisms in Central Asia would fade under the impact of modernization and socialism. An international identity, the Soviet people, would then replace national identities.

National delineation was a comprehensive program of 'nation-building' by the state in which the Soviets allotted to each officially recognized national minority its own territory (however small) and created for each a standardized written national language whether or not one had ever previously existed.

Initiated by Moscow and implemented by local cadres, the process was based upon the ethnographic findings of late Tsarist and early Soviet census data in conjunction with "raionirovanie," the creation of viable economic units.

What Bolshevik leaders and their local allies shared was a Western vision of Central Asia. They viewed its peoples through the lens of 19th-century European nationalism. They were, in fact, "nationalists" without "nations."

National delineation would correct this deficiency by constructing socialist nations. To achieve this, the Bolsheviks, initially politically weak in Central Asia, had to make timely concessions and form tactical alliances with various groups, including the Jadids of Bukhara and Turkestan, the Kazakh intelligentsia educated in Russia, local nationalists, Muslim reformers, and others. By doing so, the Bolsheviks successfully coopted many local adversaries into the emerging Soviet political structure with positions in the party and the government and

[15] Anara Tabyshalieva, "Central Asia: Imaginary and Real Borders," The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, December 19, 2001, https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/7055-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2001-12-19-art-7055.html

power in the local administrations. All that was required of them was to parrot the party line on the class struggle. Such cooptation was officially known as korenizatsiia or indigenization.

Its greatest victory was in the national delineation of the intellectuals of Central Asia who now defended their language and their 'nation' against their Central Asian neighbors, not Russia. Moscow was no longer their enemy but the mediator of their conflicts.

In 1924, two national republics were created as union republics of the USSR, which had been established by the Soviet republics of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Transcaucasia in 1922. The western part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, formerly the Russian oblast of Transcaspia, became the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic.

The Bukharan People's Soviet Republic and the southeastern portion of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, previously the Russian oblast of Ferghana, became the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. The remaining part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was incorporated into the Kirghiz (Kazakh) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic of the USSR. (Figure 3)

> "Quite a bit of fudging had to be done in assigning populations to their 'correct' republics. Populations located on the border between two prospective republics often could not easily be identified as belonging to one group or another. On the border between the projected Uzbek and Turkmen republics, there were people who spoke dialects with a mix of Turkmen and Uzbek elements and who were unable to say whether they were Uzbeks or Turkmen. Another border group claimed to be Turkmen, only to have this identification declared 'erroneous' by Soviet ethnographers. Some of the major cities of Uzbekistan had populations consisting predominantly of Tajik speakers." [16]

Figure 3

Map of the national state delimitation of the republics of Central Asia (1924-1925)

Note. Light pink designates Central Asian republics as part of the RSFSR in 1924. By Hellerick, Wikimedia Commons, July 25, 2019. *(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_national_state_delimitation_of_the_republics_of_Central_Asia_(1924-1925).svg) CC BY-SA 4.0.*

While the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic was a single ethno-administrative unit, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was not. It included the non-Turkic Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist

[16] Op. cit. Adrienne L. Edgar, https://iseees.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/edgar_2001-1029.pdf#:~:text=Guided%20by%20the%20work%20of%20ethnographers%20and%20linguists,republics%2C%20each%20named%20for%20a%20single%20ethnic%20group

Republic, which was located in eastern Bukhara and southern Ferghana. This subunit was detached from the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in December 1929 and made a separate union republic of the USSR as the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic.

But this new national republic lacked a common Tajik identity. "The new Tajik government had to start nation-state building from scratch. Apart from the fact that eponymous people accounted for an absolute majority (74.6 per cent) of the republic's population, there was little else to bind them together. A Tajik scholar has written that 'Tajiks who lived in the Hisor Mountains did not have knowledge about Tajiks residing in Khujand. And Tajiks of the Zarafshon Valley were not in the least cognisant of the life of Tajiks in Gorno-Badakhshan." [17]

The new Tajik Republic was enlarged to include Sughd in the northeast. As a result, the border of Uzbekistan contracted from its 1927 delineation. But by 1938, it had expanded to the northwest, incorporating the Karakalpak Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. (Figures 4 and 5)

In these national delineations, the situation of Karakalpaks (the black hats) was unique. Part of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, formerly the Khanate of Khiva, they were not designated a national republic. Related to the Kazakhs by language, customs, culture, and history, they were transferred twice to the jurisdiction of other soviet republics.

"The Karakalpak province [yellow in Map 7] was incorporated into Soviet

Figure 4
Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, 1927

Note. By Geoalex, Wikipedia, September 26, 2011. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uzbek_SSR_in_1927.jpg). CC BY-SA 3.0

Figure 5
Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, 1938

Note. By Geoalex, Wikipedia, September 23, 2011. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Uzbek_SSR_01.12.1938.jpg). CC BY-SA 3.0

Kyrgyz Republic (later it was renamed to Kazakhstan), at that time an autonomous part of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic (RSFSR). Then it was directly subordinated to the RSFSR and in 1932 upgraded to

[17] "Tajikistan in the Soviet Union," Facts and Details, April 2016. https://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Tajikistan/sub8_6a/entry-4850.html#chapter-5

> an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). In 1936, it became a part of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic also as the Karakalpak ASSR…The distinctiveness of the Karakalpaks is not questioned, as it is definitely a different nation [from the Uzbeks]. However, [today's] officials in Tashkent still seem to be doing their best to unify administrative practices, and are gradually promoting a model of centralized control over the situation in the autonomous republic and over its natural resources, including oil and natural gas under the dried Aral Sea bottom. Meanwhile, the desire for the full independence of Karakalpakstan has not disappeared. It is not openly manifested, but some segments of the population are secretly sympathetic to this idea…Article 1 [Constitution of Uzbekistan] states that 'The Republic of Karakalpakstan has the right to secede from the Republic of Uzbekistan on the basis of a nation-wide referendum held by the people of Karakalpakstan."[18]

Inter-ethnic tensions resulting from national delineations in Central Asia were not limited to Karakalpaks and Uzbeks. The Ferghana Valley, home to the Khanate of Kokand, was partitioned among the Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republics. The borders established were meandering, geographically irrational, and incomplete.

Known as the "heart of Central Asia," the Ferghana Valley covers an area of 8,500 sq mi, roughly the size of Belgium. The most densely populated region in Central Asia; it is home to 12-15 million people or one-fifth of the total population of Central Asia. This represents approximately one-third of the population of Tajikistan, one-third of the population of Kyrgyzstan, and one-quarter of the population of Uzbekistan.

Under Soviet nationalities policy, the historic administrative unity of the Ferghana Valley was shattered. The complex fabric of society was nationalized and compartmentalized into Uzbek, Tajik, or Kyrgyz. Although administratively trifurcated, both the economy and the infrastructure of the Ferghana Valley were integrated.

But "the establishment of republican borders… acted to inscript new geopolitical entities onto both the landscape of the Valley and the consciousness of its inhabitants. It is unlikely that the original cartographers ever thought that the borders they were creating would one day delimit independent states: rather, it was expected that national sentiment would eventually wither away. Soviet planning approached the Valley in this light. Gas, irrigation, and transport networks were designed on an integrated basis. The industrial, urban, agricultural and transport planning projects of one state spilled freely over into the territory of its neighbour. Although sometimes formalised by inter-state rental contracts, rents were seldom collected nor was land reclaimed when the period of tenure expired. The result was a highly complicated pattern of land-use

[18] Dr. Igor Savin, "Karakalpakstan: a little-known autonomy in the post-Soviet Central Asia," International Centre for Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity Studies (ICELDS), 2017-2019, https://www.icelds.org/2018/05/10/karakalpakstan-a-little-known-autonomy-in-the-post-soviet-central-asia/

that wantonly transgressed the administrative boundaries of the republics. Those borders themselves had never been fully demarcated: border commissions in the 1920s and 1950s had failed to complete their work, leaving different maps showing different borders."[19]

Further complicating the border issue, each of the three republics has/had exclaves in the territory of the others. An exclave is a piece of land politically part of one state but physically located in another. A state within a state. Originally, there were eight exclaves. Uzbekistan has four in Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan has two in Kyrgyzstan, one in Uzbekistan.

Kyrgyzstan had one exclave, which was located in Uzbekistan. On April 15, 2024, it was incorporated into the latter. "In accordance with the terms of a bilateral agreement, Barak -- a 208-hectare cutout of Kyrgyz territory entirely surrounded by Uzbekistan -- was absorbed by the larger country, with Kyrgyzstan receiving an equivalent parcel of Uzbekistan's Andijon Province in exchange. Barak residents are set to be permanently resettled in that area by the end of the summer…the land swap deal that worked for Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is likely a 'unique case' that may not be replicable for other exclaves in Central Asia."[20]

Two exclaves are anomalies. Sarvak belongs to Tajikistan and is located in Uzbekistan but the population is 99% Uzbek. While Sokh belongs to Uzbekistan and is located in Kyrgyzstan, the population is 99% Tajik.

With or without exclaves, with or without incongruous borders, to insure the new national states of Central Asia were stable, rival loyalties had to be eliminated. The most powerful competitor was the clan. An entity the Soviets viewed as primordial. Soviet nationalities policy was to modernize clans out of existence; replaced by larger national identities, themselves, to be superceeded by international "working class" solidarity.

> "The Soviets hoped that 'tribalism' and kin-ship solidarities would be destroyed by the rise of class antagonism, which they actively promoted. At the same time, they pursued a policy of 'tribal parity,' a form of affirmative action for politically weak descent groups, as a way of disrupting existing balance of power between groups. But attempts at providing tribal parity only succeeded in making 'tribes' more real, and the languages of kinship and class became deeply intertwined." [21]

The clans adjusted to Soviet reality and manipulated the Soviet policy of korenizatsiia or indigenization to advance their interests within state and party organs. The case of Islam Karimov is an example. Born in Samarkand, his father was a Uzbek, his mother was a Tajik, and he would

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[19] Nick Megoran, "The critical geopolitics of the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley boundary dispute, 1999–2000," Political Geography, Volume 23, Issue 6, August 2004, Pages 731-764, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0962629804000320

[20] Chris Rickleton, "Farewell Barak: Uzbekistan Absorbs Kyrgyz Exclave As Part Of Historic Border Deal," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Ferghana Valley Bureau, April 23, 2024, https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-kyrgyzstan-barak-exclave-historic-border-deal/32917744.html

[21] Adeeb Khalid, "Constructing Nations in Soviet Central Asia," Asian History, May 24, 2023, https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-708?rskey=3M92Rq&result=3

become president of Uzbekistan. In Samarkand, clans are often ethnically mixed. Geography and socioeconomics, more than nationality or religion, define a clan. Karimov's rise within the power structure of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was facilitated by Sharaf Rashidov, Uzbekistan's Communist Party boss since 1959 and de facto leader of the Samarkand clan, and Ismail Jurabekov, Uzbekistan's Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers and recognized godfather of the Samarkand clan.

In providing services, opportunities, or necessities, clans were an effective alternative to an inefficient Soviet bureaucracy. They provided "the normative and organizational basis for internally powerful and cohesive networks… of relations, horizontal and vertical, which remain bound by identity bonds [of kinship real or fictitious] as the economic necessity of patronage rises and falls…Although the Soviet regime had visibly homogenizing effects on clans' social structure, in settling nomadic clans and collectivizing agriculture the Soviets also preserved and fostered kin and clan villages and increased clans' territorial attachment." [22]

So, instead of Soviet Central Asian republics being national in form, socialist in content, they became national in form, clan-ist in content.

A symbiotic relationship arose between the state and the clans. To function, Soviet Central Asian republics needed the support of the clans. In exchange for that support, select state and party organs were allocated to clans. To retain clan cohesion, the clans needed control of select state and party organs to provide patronage for their clientele.

In Turkmenistan, the Teke clan ran the government; the Balkan clan handled the energy trade, and the Mary clan controlled the cotton market and, allegedly, the drug trade.

In Kazakhstan, of the three clan confederations, the Major Zhuz, located in the southeast, controlled the government and security services, while the Minor Zhuz, situated in the west next to the Caspian Sea, exerted influence over the vital energy sector.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Buguu clan controlled the republic until the 1930s, when they fell out of favor with Stalin. The Sarybagysh clan then effectively ruled the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic for the next 70 years.

In Uzbekistan, the Samarkand clan controlled the Ministry of the Interior and the Tashkent clan ran the National Security Service. It has been alleged that a power struggle among the clans was behind the response to the Andijan events of 2005 in which the government violently crushed both civilian protestors and armed insurgents. Some Central Asian experts suggest the events may have been provoked by clans seeking to stage a coup d'état against Karimov in retaliation for his radical reshuffling of clan representation in the security services in 2004 and 2005.

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[22] Kathleen Collins, "The Political Role of Clans in Central Asia," Comparative Politics, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Jan., 2003), p. 174, The Political Role of Clans in Central Asia on JSTOR

Clan disputes could even start and end civil wars, as occurred in Tajikistan from 1992 to 1997.

Today, Central Asia consists less of states that possess clans and more of clans that possess states. Historically, the primary social bond in Central Asia was the clan. The Russian Empire accepted clans. The Soviet Union tried to replace clans with nations and failed. First, the Soviet and then the post-Soviet national republics were co-opted by the clans. With the resurrection of clans to power and influence, Central Asia came full circle.

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