CS

CENTRAL ASIA

Officer Block 2 and Enlisted Block 3

An Introduction to the Central Asia Region

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CENTER FOR ADVANCED OPERATIONAL CULTURE LEARNING

Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization (RCLF) Program

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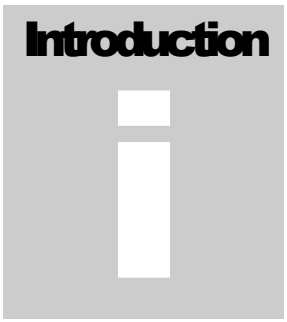


Introduction

One must distinguish between the study of regions, countries, and cultures. Chapters 1 through 6 in this document introduce a region and provide some information about its countries and their relationships. They do not introduce a culture or cultures. Those chapters simply provide knowledge about the region and the environment in which people with different cultures live.

Regions and states do not have a single culture; instead they have multiple, diverse cultures. Cultures are not necessarily bound by national borders. There may be multiple cultures in a single state, while people sharing a single culture may live in more than one state.

The case study in Chapter 7 is about one specific culture in the region. Building upon the information provided in chapters 1 through 6, Chapter 7 introduces one of the many cultures in the Central Asia region, using concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General document.

Why This Region is Relevant to You as a Marine

The Central Asia region is located at the crossroads between the large states of Russia, China, Pakistan, and Iran. The region is prone to conflicts and natural disasters that may require quick U.S. response.

Historically, Central Asia has acted as a route for the movement of people and goods between Europe and Asia (also known as the Silk Road). The region is an important source and transit point for oil and gas, which were previously owned by the Soviet Union. The region also produces and transits vast quantities of illegal drugs.

Because of Afghanistan, the region has attracted considerable U.S. efforts and resources since 2001. The region is seen both as a source of violent extremism and a bulwark against the spread of instability. However, U.S. presence in the region has been decreasing with the winding down of operations in Afghanistan. As a result, Central Asia is seeing an increasing presence of other big states, particularly Russia and China, aiming to protect their own political and economic objectives.

The U.S. military has limited ties with countries in the region. One exception is Afghanistan, where the U.S. remains committed to assisting the country's security forces' efforts in combating terrorism and other threats.

U.S. Marines and Mongolian soldiers traing together during Exercise Khaan Quest 2014 in Mongolia (Source: DVIDS)

Sandwiched between China and Russia, Mongolia is seeking closer military ties with the U.S. Since 2003 the country has been a host to Khaan Quest, an annual multinational peacekeeping operations exercise, regularly attended by U.S. Marines.

The U.S. military's ties with the other countries in the region have seen ebbs and flows since they became independent in 1991. Needing their logistical support for operations in Afghanistan, the U.S. initially established a substantial footprint in those countries and developed relatively intensive contacts with the national militaries. The decreasing American presence in Afghanistan and the continued reliance of the post-Soviet republics in the region on Russian military presence for their security, led to a declining U.S. military presence in those countries. The persistent instability in the region, however, may force those countries to once again seek closer military ties with the U.S.

Chapter 1

Geographic Overview

Why a Geographic Overview Matters to You as a Marine

Geographic features include physical and biological factors tied to location, topography, climate, soil, environmental hazards, flora, and fauna. These features influence human and social characteristics such as beliefs, behaviors, social organization, economy, and politics, to name a few. This is not to say that geography determines how people and societies behave, but rather that it has varying effects on what they believe and do.

The locations of rivers, mountains, deserts, and coasts have great influence on where people live, what crops can be raised, and what modes of transportation are suitable. Climate and weather influence how people dress, work, and earn a living. Natural disasters like hurricanes, flooding, and earthquakes can devastate a region, and dislocate a great number of people.

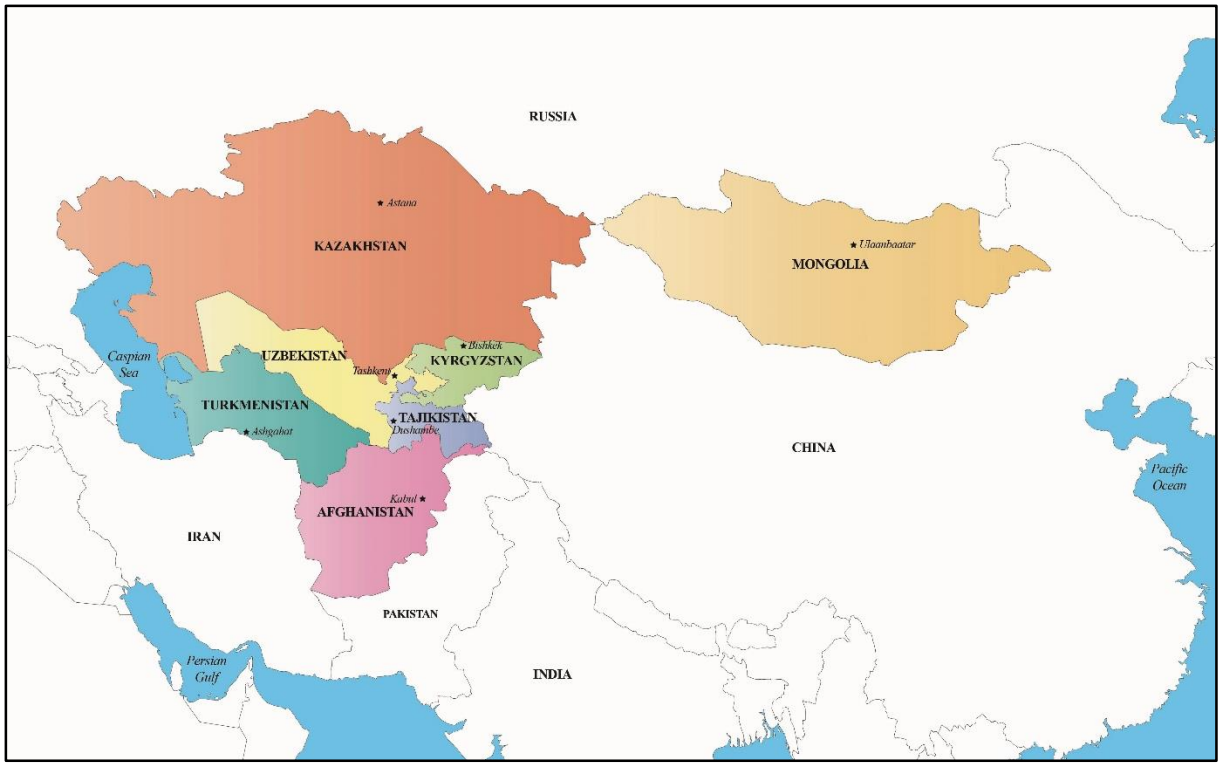
Global Location

A landlocked area between Russia and South Asia, the RCLF-designated Central Asia region spans almost the entire Asian continent along a west-east axis, extending from the Caspian Sea, which separates Asia from Europe, all the way to East Asia, the easternmost tip of Mongolia located less than 500 miles from the Pacific Ocean.

Countries

The Central Asia region includes the following countries: **Afghanistan** (capital city of Kabul), **Kazakhstan** (Astana), **Kyrgyzstan** (Bishkek), **Mongolia** (Ulaanbaatar), **Tajikistan** (Dushanbe), **Turkmenistan** (Ashgabat), and **Uzbekistan** (Tashkent). The total area of the region is over 2.3 million square miles (by comparison, the U.S. total area, minus Alaska and Hawaii, is close to 3 million square miles.

The term *Central Asia* is most commonly used to refer to the ex-Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. For the purpose of the RCLF program, however, Afghanistan and Mongolia have been added to this category.



Central Asia region (Source: CAOCL)

Topography

Due to its size, the region has a diverse topography. Grasslands and plains dominate the northern areas, part of the Eurasian steppes. The northeastern part is distinctly elevated; Mongolia is largely a plateau, with an overall elevation at about 5,180 feet above sea level. The northwestern part, on the other hand, is mostly lowlands; some areas along the Caspian Sea in Kazakhstan are even below sea level.

Moving southward, the land becomes semi-desert and then desert. The Gobi Desert in southeast Mongolia and extending into China, is the largest desert in Asia, covering 500,000 sq. miles. Kyzyl Kum Desert covers over 110,000 square miles in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Kara Kum Desert, one of the largest sand deserts in the world, occupies over 130,000 sq. miles and nearly 80 percent of Turkmenistan's territory.

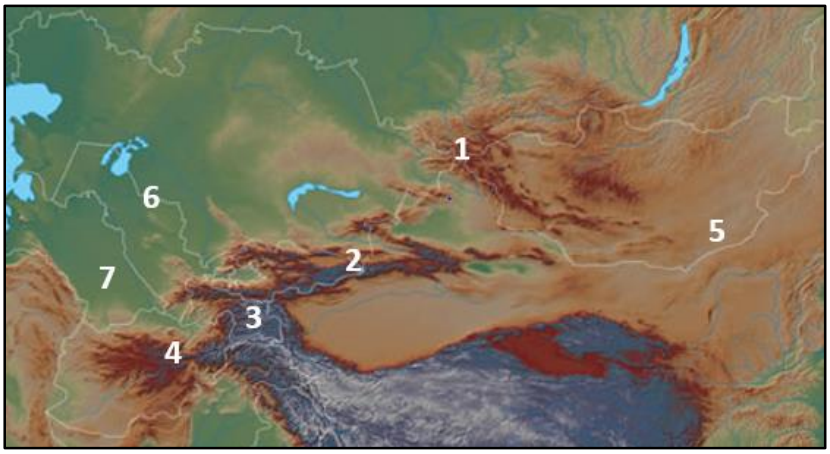

Tereli National Park in Mongolia (Source: U.S. Department of State)

There are two significant mountain ranges in the region. The Altai mountain range is where Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Russia, and China come together. Its highest peak is Belukha, standing at 14,784 ft. Because of their high latitude, these mountains have an artic character.

The range forms the divide between the arid land of inner Asia and the massive rivers that flow northward through Siberia into the Arctic Ocean.

Another main mountain range, Tien Shan, extending east-to-west, is where Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and western China come together. Its highest peak is Victory Peak, standing at 24,406 ft. Although surrounded by arid lowlands to the north and south, at very high elevation, the range is able to capture moist arctic air from the northeast.

Victory Peak in Tien Shan stands at 24,406 ft. By comparison, the 14,504 feet-high Mount Whitney, in California, is the tallest mountain in the continental U.S., not including Alaska.



Topography and key geographic features of Central Asia (CAOCL)

1) The Altai mountain range is where Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Russia, and China come together; 2) Tien Shan mountain range is located on the border between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and western China; 3) Pamir mountain range; 4) Hindu Kush mountain range between Afghanistan and Pakistan; 5) Gobi Desert between Mongolia and China; 6) Kara Kum Desert covers parts of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan; 7) Kyzyl Kum Desert covers most of Turkmenistan.

There are two smaller mountain ranges in the region – Hindu Kush and Pamir. Hindu Kush runs northeast to southwest and divides the Valley of Amu Darya River to the north from the Indus River valley to the south. The range runs through Afghanistan and forms the country's borders with Pakistan and China. Hindu Kush's highest peak is Mount Tirich Mir, which rises near the Afghanistan-Pakistan borer to 25,230 feet. To the east, Hindu Kush buttresses the Pamir Mountains. Most of the Pamir range lie within Tajikistan, but it also reaches into Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China. Its highest point is Ibn Sina Peak at 23,405 ft. Due to elevation latitude, most of the mountain ranges in Central Asia are permanently covered in ice and snow, and there are many glaciers.

TACTICAL TIP: Movement in most parts of the region is difficult and at high altitude. This will impact the ability of acclimatized Marines to move, work, and fight. Water consumption will be higher and reliance on individual and small unit water purification systems will become necessary to avoid carrying large quantities of water. Different technical difficulty ascent grades may require Marines' different fitness levels ranging from good basic and cardio-vascular fitness to a high degree of fitness with previous climbing experience in strenuous climbing.

Key Terrain: Fergana Valley

One of the most important topographic features in Central Asia is the Fergana Valley, an approximately 8,500 square mile-large depression surrounded on three sides by the Tien Shan and Pamir mountain systems. The majority of the valley is in Eastern Uzbekistan, with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan each claiming partial ownership. Surrounded by vast tracts of rugged mountains, arid steppes, and deserts, Fergana valley has plenty of water and fertile soil and as a result has traditionally had the highest population density in Central Asia.

Fergana Valley (Source: GRIDA)

Rivers and Bodies of Water

While the region as a whole is relatively well endowed with water resources, those resources are unequally distributed and poorly managed. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are the only two littoral states of the Caspian Sea – the largest salt-water lake in the world.

Water has long been a source of conflict in Central Asia. While some countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have plenty of water resources, the other countries in the region regularly experience water shortages. In addition, conflicts, population settlement patterns, and a history of mismanagement have led to inequality in access to water within countries.

Syr Darya, Amu Darya, and the Aral Sea drainage basin (Source: Wikipedia)

Rivers in the region have a great hydropower potential, only 8 percent of which has been developed.[1] The two most important rivers in the region are Syr Darya and Amu Darya and their respective tributaries, mostly fed by snow- and glacier-melt from the Pamir, Hindu Kush and Tien Shan. The two rivers account for 90 percent of Central Asia's river water and 75 percent of the water needed for its irrigated agriculture (these numbers do not include Afghanistan and Mongolia).[2]

Syr Darya and Amu Darya flow into the Aral Sea. The Aral Sea drainage basin is shared by all of the countries in Central Asia except Mongolia. The use of the two rivers for irrigation during Soviet times caused a sharp drop in sea level. Once the world's fourth largest lake, starting in the 1960s, the Aral Sea's size shrunk by more than 90 percent. As the lake dried up, its increasingly salty waters became polluted with fertilizers and pesticides. The strong winds in the region also blew dust from the exposed lakebed and settled onto fields, degrading the soil.[3] The greatly diminished lake also has had an effect on the regional microclimate, making winters colder and summers hotter and longer. Another large lake in the region is Lake Balkhash, located in Kazakhstan.

Satellite photos of Aral Sea in 1973 (left) and 2009 (right) (Source: NASA)

There are numerous other rivers, which the countries in Central Asia share with countries outside the region. Some of the waterways are navigable.

One liter of Aral Sea water once had 14 grams of salt, but in 2007, the same volume had more than 100 grams – twice the salinity of the oceans.

Climate and Weather

Central Asia is a landlocked region, which determines its continental climate. The average temperatures range from 32-39° F in January to 82-90° F in July. There are large fluctuations in temperatures, both between seasons and between day and night.[4] For example, summers in Kara Kum desert in Turkmenistan can be as hot as 125° F and winters can be as cold as 3° F. The Central Asia region has high solar radiation and relatively low humidity. However, diverse terrain and altitude also lead to diverse microclimates. For example, although humid air reaches Central Asia, the region's mountains trap the moisture and very little rain falls in the lowlands.

As a landlocked country beyond the reach of moist air, Mongolia sees limited humidity and precipitation. Known also as "Land of Blue Sky," the country typically experiences 230-260 sunny days a year.

Precipitation

Average annual precipitation varies widely, ranging from less than 2.8 inches in the plains and deserts to 94 inches in the mountains of central Tajikistan. Annual precipitation in the lowlands and valleys is between 3 and 8 inches, concentrated in winter and spring, while in foothills it ranges between 12 and 16 inches. On the southern and southwestern sides of the mountain ranges, it is between 24 and 31 inches. At country level, the driest country is Turkmenistan with 6 inches annually on average, and the wettest is Tajikistan with 27 inches annually.

Environmental Hazards

Tectonic plates (Source: Wikipedia)

A powerful earthquake in 1948 in Turkmenistan's capital of Ashgabat killed 176,000 people, or 80 percent of the city's population.

Central Asia is vulnerable to a number of natural disasters including earthquakes, floods, drought, landslides, avalanches, strong winds, and extreme temperatures. Most of Central Asia is very active seismically; the earthquake activity is among the highest in the world.[5] The seismicity is generated by the collision of the Indian and the Eurasian plates. Earthquakes in Central Asia (excluding Afghanistan and Mongolia) caused 6,683 deaths from 1988 to 2007.[6] There are countries in the region where majority of the population lives in areas of high or very high seismic hazard (almost 100 percent of population for Kyrgyzstan, 88 percent for Tajikistan, and 80 percent for Uzbekistan[7]). The majority of populations in Mongolia, Turkemnistan, and Kazakhstan lives in areas with seismic hazard levels considered low to moderate.

The most frequently occurring natural disasters are water-related, including floods, mudflows and the collapse of lakes in high altitudes. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, 95 percent of the settlements are located along rivers, which are prone to severe floods.[8]

Chapter

2

Historical Overview

Why History Matters to You as a Marine

History provides a knowledge of how people, institutions, and states in a region evolved into what they are today. It also provides insights into people's collective memory about their group and others. In other words, history not only shapes a region's current affairs, but also tells us something about the historical roots of the individual and group identities of its inhabitants.

History does not predict how groups, institutions, and states in a region may behave in the future. Instead, it provides insights into what is possible and probable.

Early History

Most of Central Asia's area, particularly to the north, is part of a vast grassland extending westward from Mongolia to Hungary in Europe, facilitating human migration and providing grass, the raw material essential for great nomad empires. Thus, very early on in history, the steppes of Central Asia became home to pastoral-nomadic people. To the south, agricultural oases became home to sedentary farming people. The nomads and the farmers developed a symbiotic relationship, mainly exchanging agricultural and animal products. This relationship, however, was uneasy. In constant search of fresh grass and water, the nomads frequently clashed with each other and with the farmers.[9]

Both nomads and farmers also frequently came under pressure from people outside Central Asia. Thus, Central Asia became one of the sources and the crossing route of some of the greatest migrations in human history. For much of its history, the region was at the hub of a vast network of routes that connected the people and cultures of Asia and Europe.

The Iranian people

In the 4th century B.C., after defeating the Persian Empire, Alexander the Great campaigned in southern Central Asia on the way to creating one of the world's great empires.

According to archeological artefacts, the beginning of human history in Central Asia dates back some 25,000 to 35,000 years ago.[10] The first group of people to be identified by name rather than by their artifacts were Indo-Iranian tribes which, around 20th century B.C., moved southeastward from an area north of the Caspian and Black seas in what is today Russia. They gradually emerged as the dominant ethnicity across both sedentary Central Asia and the steppe, either displacing the people who preceded them or absorbing them. These Iranian people dominated Central Asia (except for Mongolia) for the next 2,500 years,

creating powerful nomad confederations in the steppes and sedentary empires to the south (including the Persian Empire). Their ancestors are found mostly in modern Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

To the east of the lands settled by the Indo-Iranian people, in modern Mongolia, the signs of first human presence date back approximately 40,000 years ago. Although there are artifacts pointing to the presence of agricultural settlements, Mongolia was dominated by nomadism, either introduced by the Indo-Iranian people from the west, or arising independently in the region. From time to time, the nomads in Mongolia rose to prominence by creating powerful confederations and challenging the Chinese kingdoms to the south.

Starting in the 7th century B.C., and build over some two millennia, the Great Wall was constructed by the Chinese to keep at bay the nomadic tribes to the north (Source: Wikipedia)

The Turkic people

The dominance of the Iranian people in Central Asia (except in Mongolia) came to an end with the emergence of another nomadic people in the steppes around the Altai Mountains in the A.D. 5th century – the Turkic tribes. Starting in the 6th century the Turkic people moved westward and pushed the nomadic Iranian people south. Soon, organized into an empire, the Turkic people controlled a vast tract of land stretching from the Black Sea to Mongolia. Their migration southward into land occupied by sedentary people was stalled first by a Chinese penetration of the region, and later, in the early 8th century, by the arrival of a conquering force of Arab Muslims.

The modern Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turkmens, and Uzbeks are descendants of the Turkic people who began moving into Central Asia in the 6th century.

In a decisive battle in the mid-8th century, the Arab army defeated the Chinese army near Tashkent. The Chinese withdrew to the east of Tien Shan, an event that marked the end of Chinese presence and influence in Central Asia (a notable exception is Mongolia). Once the Arabs established control over the sedentary population of western Central Asia, the local aristocracy began to convert to Islam in order to remain the ruling elite. Between the 9th and early 11th centuries, an Iranian dynasty, the Samanids, was recognized by the Arabs as the official rulers of the southern part of Central Asia. Arabs were also able to spread Islam to the Turkic nomads to the north through missionaries.

Although both groups embraced Islam, the nomadic Turkic people of the northern steppes and the sedentary Iranian people of the south did not live peacefully side by side. In the early 11th century the Turkic tribes finally overwhelmed the Samanid dynasty and pushed the Iranian people to the south, into present-day Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The migration of the Turkic people to the south, all the way to northern Afghanistan, marked the beginning of a process that ultimately transformed the ethnic makeup of a large part of Central Asia, turning it from mostly Iranian to mostly Turkic. Today, the descendants of these Iranian people make up the majority only in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, while there are small minorities in other countries in Central Asia.

The Samanids frequently warred with the Turkic people from the steppes of Central Asia. Turkic slaves from these conflicts (so-called Mameluks) were highly valued for their military skills and sold to the Arabs.

Turkic tribes often clashed with each other for dominance and at different times a single tribe was able to dominate the others to create a powerful empire. For example, the Qarakhanid were Turkic people who defeated the Samanids and pushed southward. The Seljuk Turks, another group of Turkic people, in the 11th century dominated not only parts of Central Asia but also conquered Baghdad, the capital of the Arab Caliphate, and later defeated the Byzantine Empire. The Ottoman Turks moved from Central Asia to Anatolia and created one of the greatest empires in the world, lasting from the 14th to the 20th century. Turkic rulers also frequently formed alliances with other groups, including Samanids, Arabs, Mongols, Iranians, and others in order to acquire more power and territory.

Carved memorial to an ancient Kyrgyz warrior (Source: U.S. Dept. of State)

The Mongols

Genghis Khan as depicted in a 14th century Chinese album (Source Wikimedia)

In the late 12th century a military leader known as Temujin succeeded in uniting the previously quarreling Mongol tribes in eastern Central Asia (modern day Mongolia). In the early 13th century, he took the title "Genghis Khan" and swept over most of Asia, reaching all the way to Ukraine in Europe. After Genghis Khan's death, his empire was divided into numerous states (known as khanates), which Mongols and Turkic people continued to dominate. The impact of the Mongol conquest was so profound that in the next six centuries, one's right to rule in Central Asia derived from the ability to trace one's ancestry back to Genghis Khan himself.

The Mongol conquest accelerated the migration of Turkic tribes into Central Asia, including Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Kazakh and other tribes. In the 14th century, Timur (Tamerlane), a member of one of those migrating Turkic tribes, managed to create a large empire by conquering territories well beyond Central Asia, including in India, China, Russia, Anatolia, and Trans-Caucasus. After Timur's death, his heirs ruled numerous khanates, focusing less on warfare and more on consolidating power in Central Asia.

Mohammed Alim Khan, the last ruler of Bukhara was overthrown by the Red Army in 1920. He traced his ancestry to Genghis Khan (Source: Library of Congress)

The Mongols in eastern Central Asia continued to fight the Chinese and each other until the late 17th century, when they were defeated by the Chinese. The Chinese allowed the Mongols some autonomy, maintaining control over them with a series of alliances and intermarriages – as well as by using force – until 1911.

The Russians

In the 16th century a new powerful state appeared to the north of Central Asia that would alter the course of history in the region. After consolidating the Russian Empire's possessions in Europe, Russian rulers embarked on territorial expansion in Asia. Russian rule was extended over Siberia all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Next Moscow moved southward into Central Asia. Starting in the early 18th century, the Russians advanced on the Kazakh khanates and by the mid-19th century were in full

control over modern-day Kazakhstan. In the second half of the 19th century, Russia moved further south and conquered the sedentary populations in Central Asia, reaching all the way to Afghanistan.

Great Britain possessed vast colonies in South Asia and feared Russia's southern thrust. Seeking to check Russian advances, Great Britain sought to dominate Afghanistan, fighting three wars in the country between 1839 and 1919. Afghanistan, ruled by a dynasty based in the Pashtun tribes since the mid-18th century, managed to keep virtual independence, although Britain exercised some control over the country's foreign affairs. In 1919, Afghanistan gained full independence.

Russia's advance to the south marked a century-long struggle between Russia and Great Britain for dominance in Central Asia. This struggle is often referred to as "The Great Game."

By the end of the 19th century, the Russian Empire controlled most of Central Asia, except for Mongolia and Afghanistan. The region was called Russian Turkestan and was governed from Tashkent. The Russian conquest of most of Central Asia marked the beginning of a dramatic political and socio-economic transformation of the region. This process only accelerated after the Bolsheviks took power in Russia in 1917 and later established the Soviet Union.

Soviet propaganda poster in Kazakh language, 1933 (Source: EurasiaNet)

This transformation was caused by four important developments. First, millions of ethnic Russians moved into Central Asia as administrators or in search of jobs in newly established industries. Second, Russian, and later Soviet rule disrupted the nomadic way of life in the steppes, and changed land-use and property patterns among the sedentary people. The Soviets nationalized land and created collective farms, while forcing millions to take jobs in newly created industries in farming, construction, mining, and manufacturing. Third, the Russians, and especially the Soviets, embarked on a vast modernization effort in Central Asia. In the process, they disrupted cultural patterns associated with family, clan, land, Islam, gender relations, and identity, while imposing new patterns, including the introduction of communist ideology and modern advancements in government, technology, education, medicine, and social relations. The aim of the radical transformation was to inculcate the communist ideology and to modernize all citizens. The process was designed to break down Islamic norms and practices and to eliminate tribal and ethnic loyalties, and to create new "socialist people." Fourth, in pre-Soviet times, Central Asian people were divided into khanates comprised of clans and tribes. In an attempt to eradicate clan and tribe identities and loyalties, starting in the 1920s, the Soviets established modern national territories and identities. Soviet leaders partitioned the peoples in the region into Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek nationalities with their respective territories.[11] In the 1920s and 1930s, these territories became constituent republics of the Soviet Union. The creation of the republics allowed for the creation of national histories and languages, and ultimately of new identities.

Modern History

Mongolia and Afghanistan were the first countries in Central Asia to become independent states. As mentioned earlier, Mongolia was dominated by the Chinese Empire until 1911, although the country maintained a degree of autonomy. This control ended when the Chinese Manchu dynasty collapsed and was replaced by the Republic of China. When China attempted to reassert control over Mongolia, a joint Mongol-Russian force defeated the Chinese force and Mongolia declared independence in 1921. In 1924, Mongolia became a republic and until 1991 remained a communist state with very close ties to the Soviet Union. Soviet influence in Mongolia not only addressed Mongolian fears of renewed Chinese dominance but also led to dramatic political and socio-economic transformation in the country, similar to what was taking place in the Soviet republics of Central Asia. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to dramatic changes in Mongolia, and by 1992 the country embarked on democratic reforms and established a market economy.

Group of Soviet Special Forces soldiers in Afghanistan, 1988 (Source: RIA Novosti)

Afghanistan gained full independence in 1919 after the third Anglo-Afghan war. Afghanistan carefully balanced its relations with the Soviet Union and Great Britain until shortly after WWII, when Great Britain withdrew from South Asia and Pakistan became Afghanistan's new neighbor to the southeast. In 1973, the monarchy of Afghanistan was overthrown by a communist coup d'état and the country became a communist republic. In 1979, the threat of a Pashtun tribal insurgency against the communist government prompted the Soviet Union to intervene with a massive military force to support the government. After failing to defeat the insurgency, the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989 from Afghanistan, which then descended into civil war and chaos.

By 1996, one Islamic fundamentalist group, the Taliban, gained control over most of the country. Because the Taliban gave refuge to a terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, which committed a series of terrorist acts against the United States, the U.S. intervened in the country and overthrew the Taliban in 2001. The U.S. and its allies maintained a massive military presence in the country until 2014.

A statue of Vladimir Lenin in the city of Osh, Kyrgyzstan (Source: EurasiaNet; photo David Trilling)

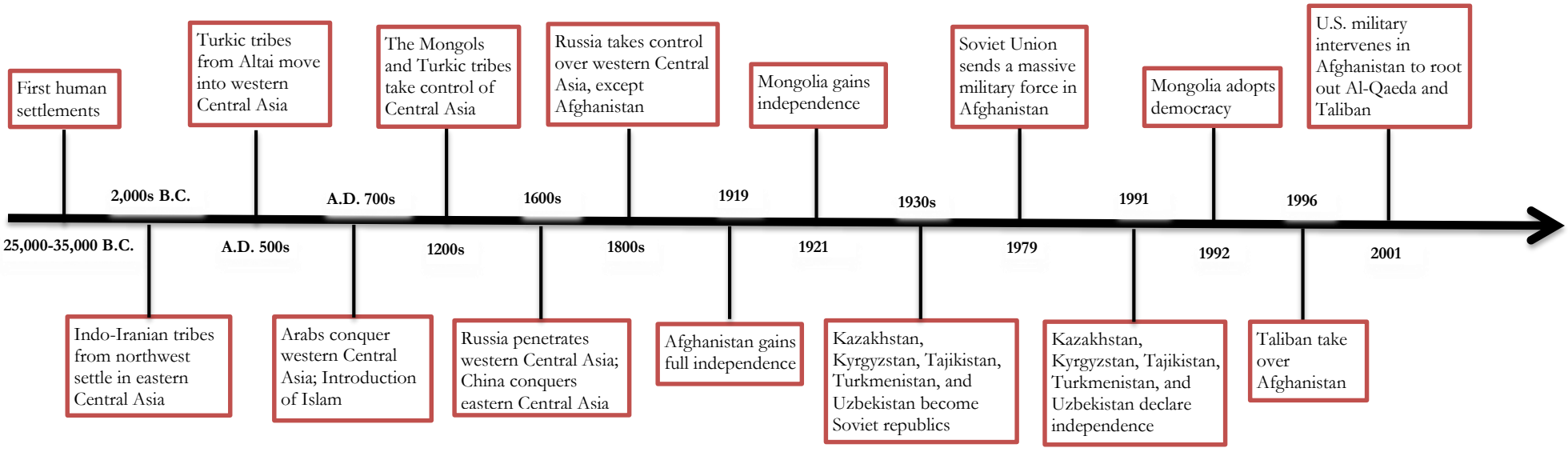
Meanwhile, the disintegration of the Soviet Union had led to the independence of the rest of the states in Central Asia. In 1991, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan declared independence. The end of Soviet rule in these countries unleashed long-dormant ethnic and regional rivalries within the countries that sometimes escalated to violent conflicts. Independence also disrupted political, economic, and social patterns that had existed for more than a century, and gradually began to create new ones. The five new states were completely unprepared for independence as they had no history of statehood and limited experience in self-governance. Therefore, politically, the transition to independence was built on their Soviet legacy. The states retained many of the institutions and practices they knew from Soviet times. The communist elite of the Soviet republics largely became the elite of the newly independent states. After 70 years of living under authoritarian Soviet rule, the five new states remained authoritarian.

Scythian ornament, 500 B.C.

Genghis Khan

Mongolia's flag, 1924-1940

Nazarbaev, one of Central Asia's longest serving leaders



Alexander the Great

Tomb of Tamerlane in Samarkand

Ships resting on dried up Aral Sea seabed

U.S. Marines in Afghanistan

Chapter 3

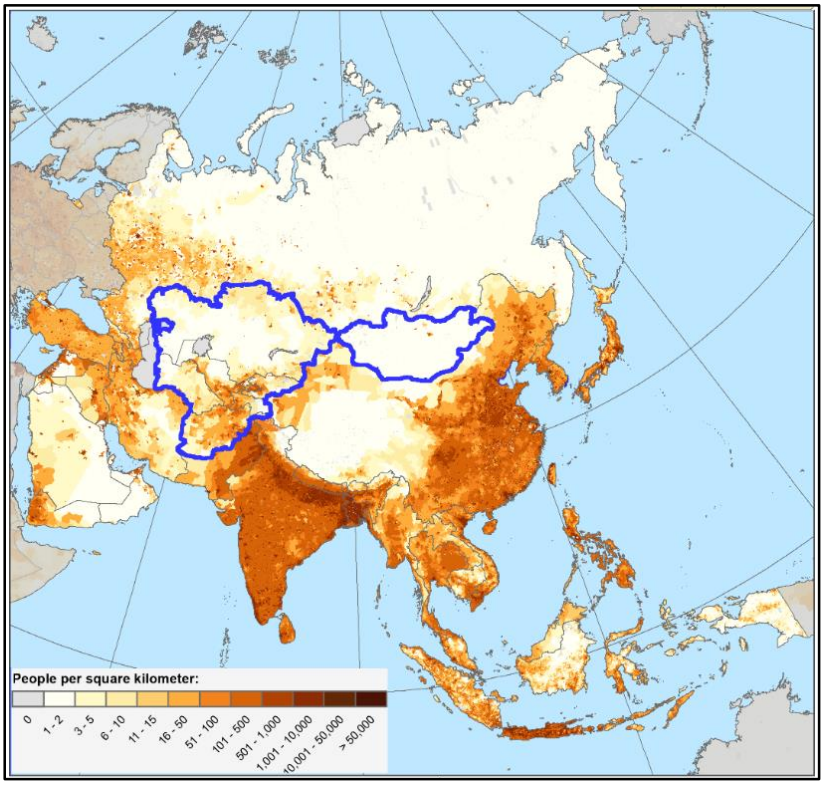
People and Society

Why People and Society Matter to You as a Marine

Missions across the range of military operations require Marines to understand, and work with, foreign populations. Knowing the people in the region, including their ethnicities, languages, and religions, as well as the way they live in social entities, enables Marines to create a mental picture of the human dimension of the region.

Population

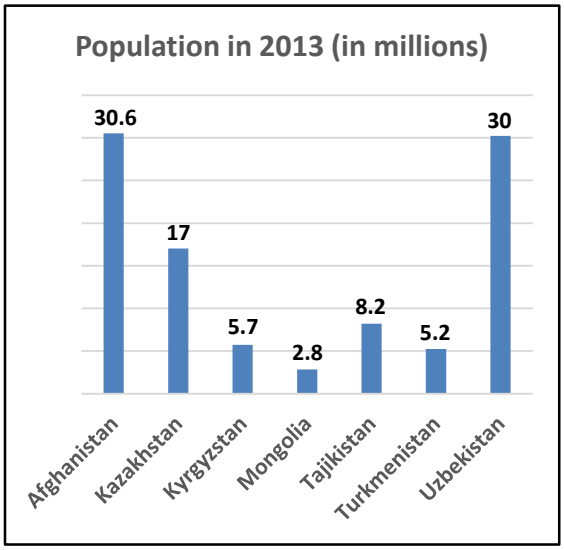
Central Asia is characterized by some of the most sparsely populated areas in the world. Most of the region is too arid or too high in elevation to support human life. Most Central Asians live in narrow belts where the mountains meet the plains and river basins. Afghanistan and Uzbekistan are the first and second most populous countries in the region respectively; together they account for more than 60 percent of the population in Central Asia.



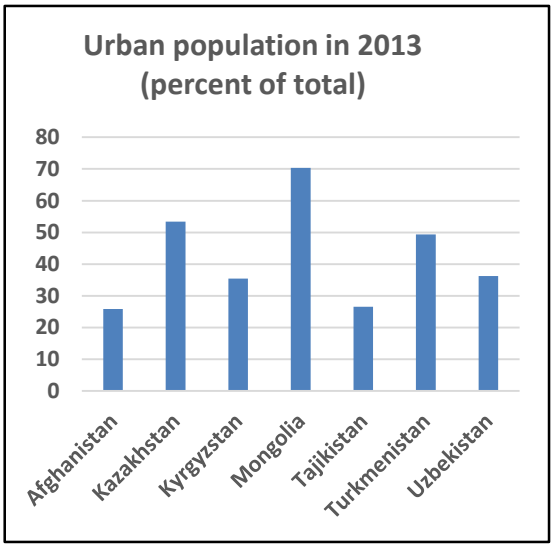
Population density in Central Asia (Source: Center for International Earth Science Information Network)

The population in the region is largely rural. Only two countries (Mongolia and Kazakhstan) in the region have majority populations who live in urban areas; however, both countries have a small share of the total Central Asian population. Communist rule in Central Asia (except in Afghanistan) was one of the leading factors in the dramatic population increase in the region. The Soviets introduced universal healthcare and modern medical practices that increased life expectancy and decreased infant mortality rates. This trend, combined

with traditional high fertility rates, led to a dramatic population increase. In addition, after Soviet rule was established in the 1920s and 1930s, the region witnessed a massive influx of Slavs from the European part of the Soviet Union, mainly Russians and Ukrainians, in search of jobs in newly created industries. The region also became a recipient of mass deportations of ethnic Germans, Chechens, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, Koreans, and others from other parts of the Soviet Union, immediately before and after WWII. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and consequent civil conflicts forced millions of Afghans to seek refuge abroad, mainly in Pakistan.[12]

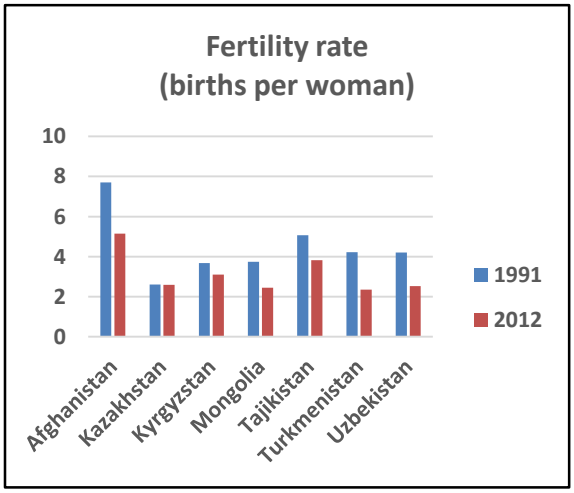


Source: World Bank



Source: World Bank

Although the region is no exception to the worldwide trend of declining birth rates in the last several decades, all countries in Central Asia maintain a robust fertility rate (birth per woman) and the total population continues to increase. Thus, although the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, and especially Kazakhstan, witnessed the outmigration of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians after the countries declared independence in 1991, as well as the return of deported populations to their homelands, the rates of population growth quickly recovered. Similarly, although the wars in Afghanistan drove millions out of the state, the country continued to experience a rapid population growth due to very high birth rates.



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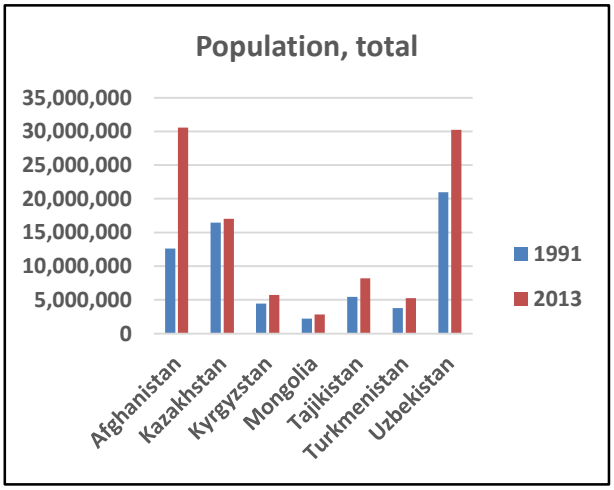


Source: World Bank

Ethnic Groups

The faces of people belonging to different ethnic groups in the city of Osh, Kyrgyzstan (Source: EurasiaNet)

With the possible exception of Afghanistan, each state in Central Asia is dominated by a single ethnic group. For example, ethnic Kyrgyz are the majority in Kyrgyzstan, while ethnic Uzbeks are the majority in Uzbekistan. The size of majorities ranges from as high as 85 percent and 82 percent respectively in Uzbekistan and Mongolia, to as low as 63 percent in Kazakhstan. Being in the majority gives an ethnic group great power in politics, economics, and culture. In addition to being a majority in their own country, many ethnic groups are also minorities in neighboring states. For example, ethnic Uzbeks are 80 percent of the population in Uzbekistan, but also 9 percent of the population in Afghanistan, 3 percent in Kazakhstan, 14 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 15 percent in Tajikistan, and 5 percent in Turkmenistan. Of note, Afghanistan is the only country in the region with no ethnic group in clear majority.

Country	Main ethnic groups
Afghanistan	Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Hazara 9%, Uzbek 9%, Aimak 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baloch 2%
Kazakhstan	Kazakh (Qazaq) 63%, Russian 24%, Uzbek 3%, Ukrainian 2%
Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyz 65%, Uzbek 14%, Russian 13%
Mongolia	Khalkh 82%, Kazak 4%, Dorvod 3%, Bayad 2%, Buryat-Bouriates 2%
Tajikistan	Tajik 84%, Uzbek 14%
Turkmenistan	Turkmen 85%, Uzbek 5%, Russian 4%
Uzbekistan	Uzbek 80%, Russian 6%, Tajik 5%, Kazakh 3%, Karakalpak 3%, Tatar 2%
Source: CIA Factbook, 2015	

Men from the Jewish community of Bukhara, Uzbekistan (Source: EurasiaNet)

There are many smaller minority groups in Central Asia including Uighurs, Tatars, Germans, Zakhchins, Darigangas, Uriankhais, Dungans, Jews, and many others.

Before Russia occupied most of the region, and especially before Soviet rule, most of the people in Central Asia did not possess ethnic self-consciousness as we know it today. Thus people did not perceive themselves as Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, or Uzbek, but rather identified themselves according to: tribal, clan, or family affiliation; social hierarchy; religious affiliation; regional affiliation; etc.[13] Family ties, for example, were much more important than any other ties. People were mixed in cultural and linguistic terms; frequently, they spoke two or more languages, including a Turkic language and Persian.

The formation of ethnic and national consciousness ensued only after the Soviet regime. For the purposes of modernization and administration, the regime began to classify the diverse populations into a limited number of ethnic and national categories. It created five Soviet republics in the region and encouraged the emergence of distinct ethnic and national groups out of the diverse and multicultural people living in Soviet-controlled Central Asia.

Unlike the states in Central Asia which were dominated first by Russia and then the Soviet Union, the diverse people in Afghanistan and Mongolia did not experience pressure from a state authority to embrace particular ethnic identities and affiliations.

Religion

Central Asia is dominated by three religions – Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. Of them, Islam is the prominent religion in the region, with most Muslims adhering to the Sunni branch of Islam. The religion was first introduced to the region at the beginning of the 8th century by the invading Arabs. As Islam spread, the population preserved many practices associated with earlier faiths. Islam thrived for centuries in the region, although the Russian invasion introduced new ideologies and ideas. However, the practice of Islam suffered a serious blow once the Bolsheviks took control of Russia. The new regime adhered to communist ideology which rejected religion. Mosques were shut down, Muslim worship and ceremonies were prohibited, and women were forbidden to wear the veil. Instead, the communist regime actively promoted atheism and the teaching and practice of communist ideology. By the 1960s restrictions on religion eased, but the state still imposed strict control over mosque and church affairs and religious practices.

Telyashayakh Mosque in Samarkand, Uzbekistan is home to the Samarkand Kufic Quran, the oldest Quran in the world (Source: U.S. Department of State; Photo by Jose Javier Martin Espartosa)

After the Soviet republics in Central Asia gained independence in 1991, the population increasingly took interest in religion. The region has witnessed a dramatic growth in mosque construction, while people have increasingly begun to observe Islamic holidays and traditions. In addition, the ruling elites of the newly independent states have actively promoted Islam as part of the cultural and historical heritage of the nation. At the same time, elites have also tried to impose tight control over religious activities, fearing that the unrestricted spread of Islamic interpretations and practices might threaten their control of power.[14] With the exception of Tajikistan, all states forbid religious parties, maintain Soviet-era oversight bodies, and exercise control over the appointment of clergy.[15]

Mongolia's experience with religion in the last century has been very similar to the one of the former Soviet republic in Central Asia. By the time China lost control over Mongolia at the beginning of the

20th century, religious institutions in the country were very powerful – a large portion of the population either became monks or lived on Buddhist monastery lands. After the Soviet-supported communist regime took firm control of the country, Buddhist institutions were gradually stripped of their power, while atheism became the official policy.[16] Like in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, after the end of communist rule, Mongolia witnessed an increased interest in religion.

Tsogchin (Main) Temple at the Amarbayasgalant Monastery, Mongolia (Source: U.S. Department of State)

Unlike all other countries in Central Asia, Afghanistan did not experience a government attempt to eliminate religious beliefs and practices in the last century. On the contrary, since the 1990s, the population in the country has faced an attempt by one Islamic movement – the Taliban – to impose strict interpretations of Islamic beliefs and practices, including Islamic law – the Sharia. Unlike in Afghanistan, only a small minority in the rest of Central Asia approves of the introduction of Sharia in their countries. Governments in the region are also aggressively prosecuting groups perceived as promoting Sharia.

Sharia: the moral code and religious law of Islam that deals with many topics, including crime, politics, and economics, as well as personal matters such as sexual intercourse, hygiene, diet, prayer and fasting.

Christianity is the second largest religion in the region. It is most common among ethnic Russians, who generally adhere to the Eastern Orthodox denomination. The third largest religion in the region is Buddhism; most of its followers live in Mongolia. It is important to point out that although a majority of Mongolians profess to adhere to Buddhism, almost 40 percent declared no religious affiliation in a national 2010 census.[17]

Country	Religious affiliation (percent of population)		
	Muslim	Christian	Buddhist
Afghanistan	99		
Kazakhstan	70	26	
Kyrgyzstan	75	20	
Mongolia	3	2	53
Tajikistan	90		
Turkmenistan	89	9	
Uzbekistan	88	9	

Source: CIA


Members of the Russian minority in Dushanbe, Tajikistan mark Easter (Source: EurasiaNet)

Many people in the region believe in a syncretistic blend of two or more religions, mixing Islamic, Christian Orthodox, Buddhist, and Pagan beliefs and practices.

Languages

Language is an extremely important element of people's identity in Central Asia and language issues play a crucial role in the process of nation-building, especially in the post-Soviet states of the region.[18] People in the region speak numerous language that can broadly be divided into several language families.

Language family	Languages
Turkic	Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Uzbek
Mongolian	Mongolian
Iranic	Tajik, Dari, Farsi, Pashto
Slavic	Russian, Ukrainian

In addition to the languages included in the table, each language family includes numerous other languages spoken by smaller groups of people in the region. Languages in the same family have common origin and some of them can mutually intelligible – for example, Russian and Ukrainian.

Traditionally, many people in the region speak more than one language. Minorities, for example, tend to speak not only their native language but also the language of the dominant ethnic group in the states. In addition, most of the people in the region tend to live side by side or in proximity to people of other ethnicities which facilitates the learning of more than one language.

Country	Main languages in use
Afghanistan	Dari (official), Pashto (official), Uzbek, Turkmen, Balochi, Pashai
Kazakhstan	Kazakh (official), Russian
Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyz (official), Uzbek, Russian (official), Dungun
Mongolia	Khalkha Mongol (official), various Turkic languages, Russian
Tajikistan	Tajik (official), Russian
Turkmenistan	Turkmen (official), Russian, Uzbek
Uzbekistan	Uzbek (official), Russian, Tajik

Lingua franca is a language that is adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different.

Before Soviet rule, people in Central Asia (except Mongolia and Afghanistan) spoke multiple Turkic languages and dialects as well as forms of Persian. The Soviets promoted the learning and use of four distinct Turkic languages – Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Uzbek – along with a uniform Tajik language, all based on existing dialects in the newly created republics in the region. In addition, there were several other Turkic languages – Uighur, for example – spoken by minorities. Aided by the introduction of modern education, including massive adult literacy programs and mass media, the new languages soon became the language of communication in the region. All languages were written in the Cyrillic alphabet, the alphabet of the Russian language.

Along with the codification of the new local languages, the Russian language also spread across most of Central Asia. It became a required subject of instruction in educational institutions at all levels, and the language of business and government. In fact, the Russian language became the *lingua franca* of people in the Soviet Central Asia. This process of Russification was noticeable not only in urban areas where the elites and the educated often acquired their educations and skills in Russian-only educational institutions, but also to a lesser degree in rural areas. Although the Soviet government supported education in the native languages, Russian language was privileged.

In 2012 the Kyrgyz parliament drafted a bill requiring that all government documents be written in Kyrgyz only. Traditionally, all government paperwork in Kyrgyzstan was written in Russian and submitted to a government office which translated documents into Kyrgyz.

More than twenty years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russian language continues to exert a powerful influence in the post-Soviet states of the region. Russian continues to be the *lingua franca* for many people and the language of business and government in some states. In addition, the post-Soviet states still remain, to a certain extent, divided between the urban Russified and mostly Russian-speaking people, and the rural, either mostly Turkic- or mostly Persian-speaking people. However, the states in the region continue to aggressively eliminate the use of the Russian language, by means of adopting the titular language and, in some countries, by switching from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet. This process is especially noticeable in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where the governments, soon after declaring independence, actively promoted the use of the national language, while eliminating the use of the Russian language. In other countries, including in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where large Russian minorities reside, the process of marginalization of the Russian language has been more gradual.[19] Because of the extensive ties between the two countries, Russian language also reached Mongolia, although not to the extent it did in the Soviet Central Asian republics.

The Interplay Between Ethnicity, Language, and Religion

Religion, language, and ethnicity in Central Asia are intricately connected. For example, those who consider themselves ethnic Uzbek tend to identify themselves as Muslims (although not necessarily as practicing), and they speak Uzbek. Those who consider themselves ethnic Russian tend to be Eastern Orthodox Christian and speak Russian, regardless of whether they live in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, or Uzbekistan.

Informal Social Networks

Reliance on informal networks based on kinship and clan affiliation as well as circles of friends and acquaintances in everyday life is a major characteristic of societies in the region.[20] These networks and circles are key sources of information, knowledge, and resources in every aspect of life. The networks have strong bonds based on trust. Members of the networks go out of their way to reinforce these bonds, spending substantial time and resources in the process.

Starting in the early 20th century, the Soviet regime attempted to suppress kinship and clan networks in Soviet Central Asia, considering those practices backward and a barrier to modernization.[21] Despite the repression and forced modernization of societies, the networks not only survived but successfully adapted. Decades of repressive communist rule, in conjunction with a constant shortage of goods and services, forced people to use their networks as a way to avoid the watchful eye of the regime and to acquire scarce resources. The adaptation of traditional networks in Soviet Central Asia as a form of

social organization had political and economic consequences that still persist in the now independent post-Soviet states.

Informal social networks based on clan and kinship are especially powerful in Afghanistan. Lack of a strong state authority in the country has enabled informal networks to flourish, providing safety, resources, and identity to their members.

The informal networks are still ubiquitous in all countries in Central Asia, although modernization has partially undermined them. The turbulent history of the region in the last several decades – including civil wars, foreign invasions, scarcity of resources, and weak national and state institutions – has ensured the survival of the networks. Some of those networks have even expanded as their members monopolized political power after the communist regime's collapse left a power vacuum in most countries.

Family Structure

Societies in Central Asia are group-oriented. The family, including the extended family, is the most important group in all countries. It is typically built around one line of the family, usually descending through a male relative. In many places in the region, it is common for three generations to live under one roof. Unmarried children tend to live with their parents and a set of grandparents. The family is the most important institution in the region. The honor, name, and image of the family are extremely important, and many people in the region attach greater value to the honor of the family name than their own lives or the lives of their relatives.

The extended family includes much more than the American version of brother, sister, mother, father, and grandparents. It includes cousins, many times removed as well.

People rely on the immediate and extended family for emotional and financial support, as well as child- and elder-care assistance. In general, the extended family provides a safety net during hardship. The importance of maintaining these bonds and obligations is taught and encouraged from youth. Family ties also serve as a foundation of social and professional interaction. People expect their kin to show favoritism, to help them out, or to receive assistance. This attitude – which may appear to an American as nepotism and cronyism, permeates all levels of public and business life, from low-level bureaucrats to national institutions, to business corporations.

Traditionally, marriages were arranged by the parents of the bride and groom. The bride and the groom also tended to be what Americans would consider underage; this is still widespread in some regions in Central Asia.[22] Marriage frequently involved the practice of bride-kidnapping, which is still widespread in Kyrgyzstan. Although the practices of arranged, underage, and bride-kidnapping marriages are no longer the rule throughout the region, they still occur in certain areas. There are several reasons for the decline of these practices. Seventy years of Soviet rule in parts of Central Asia led to dramatic social and cultural changes, including in the institution of marriage. Soviet laws banned polygamy, bride-kidnapping, and underage marriage, while state policies encouraged women to pursue educational and job opportunities. As a result, traditional marriage practices were disrupted and new ones were created. For example, while forced marriages involving bride-

According to the United Nations Children's Fund, 57 percent of marriages in Afghanistan involve girls below the legal age of 16.

It is estimated that 35-45 percent of all marriages in Kyrgyzstan occur through bride-kidnapping.

kidnapping largely disappeared, many young people still paid tribute to the tradition by arranging consensual bride-kidnappings – a ceremonial kidnapping was arranged after the bride had already consented to marriage.[23] Changes to family structure also included the gradual decline in family size – couples, especially those in urban areas, chose to have fewer children than in the past.

Unlike the Soviet republics in Central Asia, Afghanistan did not experience dramatic changes to family structure in the last century. Although the country witnessed the change in family and marriage patterns in urban areas, the overwhelming rural character of Afghanistan's population assured the preservation of traditional family patterns.

The end of Soviet rule led to the resurgence of traditional marriage practices in the post-communist states in the region. Those practices include polygamy, early marriage, arranged marriage, unregistered marriages, and bride-kidnapping.[24] However, the prevalence of these practices varies between states and regions. For example, rates of officially registered marriages involving girls aged 15-19 ranged from 0.9 percent in Kazakhstan to 19.1 percent in Kyrgyzstan.[25] In Afghanistan, 57 percent of marriages involved girls under the age of 16.[26] These rates do not include unregistered underage marriages, as many parents opt to marry their underage children in a religious ceremony only and register the marriage once the spouse has reached the age of 18. Rates of bride-kidnappings, forced marriages, and unregistered marriages also tend to be much higher in rural areas.[27]

In most countries in Central Asia, couples must go through a civil ceremony in order to be officially married. A civil ceremony typically includes only close family and friends, and the church or mosque ceremony is a grander affair. In some areas, wedding celebrations can last more than a day. The families of the newlyweds spare no expense to offer the wedding guests a memorable feast.

Extended families do not share dwellings, but members are obliged to promptly help any member of family in time of need. This obligation often includes non-relative neighbors, classmates, and fellow soldiers. Therefore, the idea of "acquaintance" is much more significant in the region than in American society.

Gender

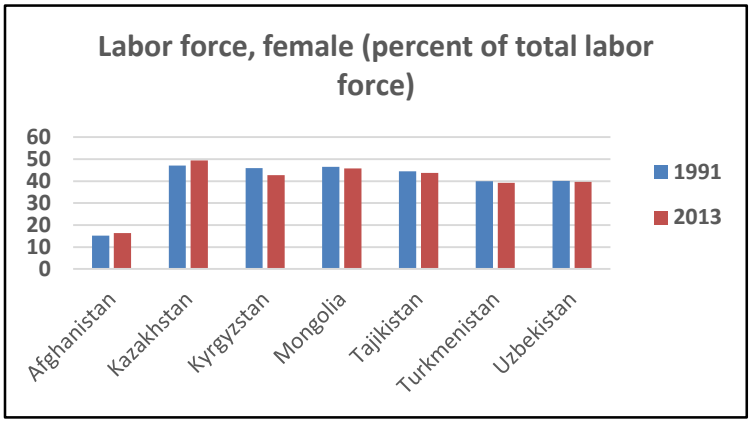
Societies in Central Asia are deeply patriarchic, especially in rural areas.[28] There are clear male and female roles. Custom casts males as breadwinners, heads of households and the defender of familial honor. Females, on the other hand, are expected to manage the household and tend to children. In most places, women are respected, but not as equals. Children of both sexes are given clear guidance on gender norms and are actively corrected for departing from the norm. Correct displays of appropriate gender roles are regularly encouraged until adulthood.

The concept of gender equality in the region is not as important as in the United States. Nevertheless, there are wide variations in gender relations across the region. One of the reasons for this variation is the Soviet legacy. Soon after the Soviets took control in parts of Central Asia, the central government proclaimed that men and women were equal in all aspects of social, economic, and political life – a dramatic departure from existing norms in the region.[29] Moscow introduced laws and policies that empowered women in family and marriage matters, education, economic activities, and political life. Accordingly, women found jobs outside the home in all sectors of the economy, including leadership positions. They earned an increasing share of the household income and gained a voice in family and social matters. Similar processes took place in Mongolia as well.

After the Soviet republics of Central Asia gained independence, many women in the region witnessed the erosion of their social and economic power. Political instability, civil strife, and economic turmoil collectively eroded their social and economic status. In addition, the political elites of the newly independent states, in an attempt to eliminate the communist ideology as a foundation of political and social life, turned to nationalism, Islam, and traditional (pre-Soviet) values and norms. Thus, the governments in the region often defend the image of women staying home to manage households and rear children as a return to traditional values.

Female farmers in Tajikistan receive certificates for land-use rights (Source: USAID)

Despite the strong patriarchic tradition, women in Central Asia have high participation in the labor force. This is a legacy of communist rule, which promoted gender equality in many spheres of life, particularly in employment choices. Women traditionally work in the health and education sectors, as well as on the family farms. Many women also turn to self-employment in the informal sector – trading at commodity and food markets, catering, household services, and processing of agricultural products – in attempt to add to the family income. Unlike the other countries in the region, the percentage of women in Afghanistan working outside the home is very low.



Source: World Bank

Class

In the past, membership in the Communist Party was the main path to high status in the Soviet republics and Mongolia. A selected group of Communist Party leaders and bureaucrats (the so-called *nomenklatura*) had extensive privileges and access to resources. In general, however, the societies were relatively egalitarian – there were no great disparities in wealth. Since gaining independence in 1991, wealth, and access to power are the new measure of success in the former Soviet states. Many members of the former *nomenklatura* used their connections, knowledge, and political power to accumulate wealth.

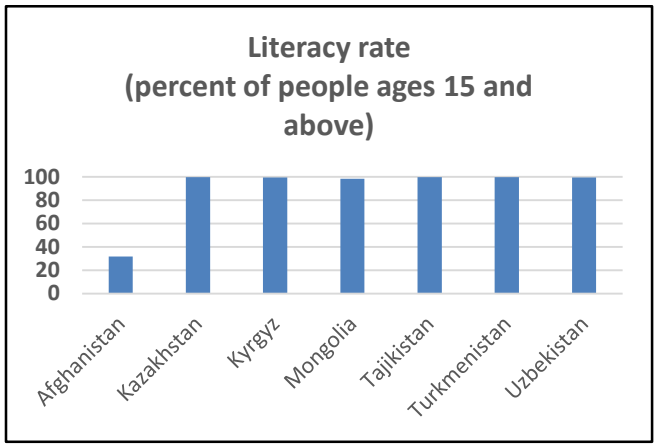
There are a number of factors that determine the social class of a person in the region. The most important include wealth, the type of post held in government, occupation, kinship and clan affiliation, family prestige, value of home, neighborhood location, and social reputation (based on either fact or often on rumors).

Urban dwellers, especially those in the largest cities, tend to look down on those who either live in rural areas or have recently migrated from the countryside. This plays a major role in the region's social stratification. The rural populations tend to favor traditional notions about norms, lifestyle, behavior, dress, and music.

Ethnicity tends to affect one's social status. Ethnic majorities in the region tend to see themselves as their respective country's hosts, while the ethnic minorities are seen as guests. In the eyes of majorities, hosts and guests are supposed to act accordingly. This attitude inevitably relegates minorities to inferior status in society. Accordingly, ethnic minorities see themselves as being discriminated against by the majority in employment, culture, and access to political power. This perceived discrimination is reinforced by the fact that ethnic minorities tend to live in geographic enclaves and further isolate themselves from opportunities available to the majorities.

Education

With the exception of Afghanistan, all countries in the region have a universal, state-supported education system, and literacy rates are similar to those in the Western world. The education systems are highly centralized and local school districts have limited authority over budgets and curriculum. In effect, the education systems in the region remain unable to provide education of sufficient quality. Problems include lack of funding and qualified educators, inadequate school infrastructure, and the use of outdated teaching and training methods. Many ethnic minorities complain that states are attempting to eliminate education in minority languages by cutting school budgets.[30]



Source: World Bank

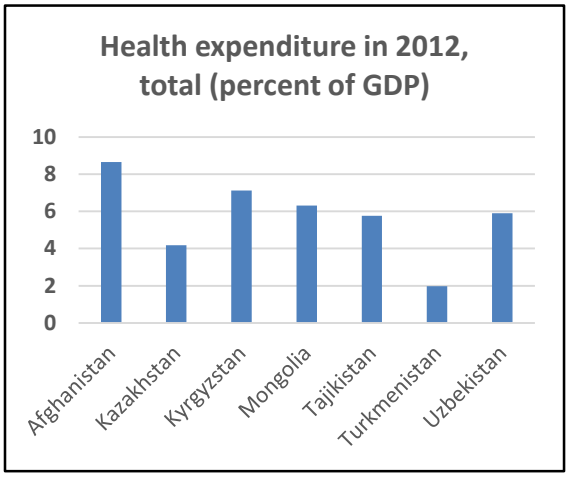
Decades of conflict in Afghanistan devastated the education system. By the time the United States intervened in the country in 2001, girls and women were almost completely excluded from educational opportunities.[31] After the Taliban were overthrown, the education system was gradually rebuilt. However, it was estimated that by 2011, 38 percent of school-age children still had no access to school. Accordingly, only 26 percent of Afghanistan's population was literate. The rates of education and literacy for girls and women are generally worse, as a great number of them have even more limited educational opportunities – the literacy rate among women in the country was only 12 percent.[32]


Afghan schoolgirls (Source: USDA)

Health Care

Under communist rule, all countries except Afghanistan had a universal healthcare system which although not of high quality provided medical services to all citizens. After the collapse of communist rule, the states experienced deteriorating health services in the 1990s due to declining health expenditures, economic crises, and mismanagement. During the second half of the 1990s, the states embarked on slow healthcare reforms while gradually increasing funding to support the system. The countries also benefitted from pre-existing healthcare infrastructure and human resources established during communist rule. Accordingly, basic health indicators began to improve – maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates decreased, while life expectancy at birth increased.[33]

Decades of conflict in Afghanistan destroyed the already poor healthcare system. Due to extreme poverty, lack of resources, violent conflicts, and a poor healthcare system, Afghanistan continues to have one of the world's worst health indices, including life expectancy and infant mortality rates.[34] Many infectious diseases, such as acute respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases, measles, and malaria continue to plague the population. Although the country has experienced great improvements in the healthcare system since the overthrow of the Taliban, Afghanistan still has a very low quality of healthcare and the health indices are the worst in the region. There are also great variations in healthcare provisions across the country, especially between urban and rural areas. While the capital city of Kabul provides basic healthcare services, most rural areas lack the most basic facilities, equipment and trained personnel. Ongoing violence in many rural areas prevents real healthcare improvements; nevertheless, the country's healthcare system is gradually being built.



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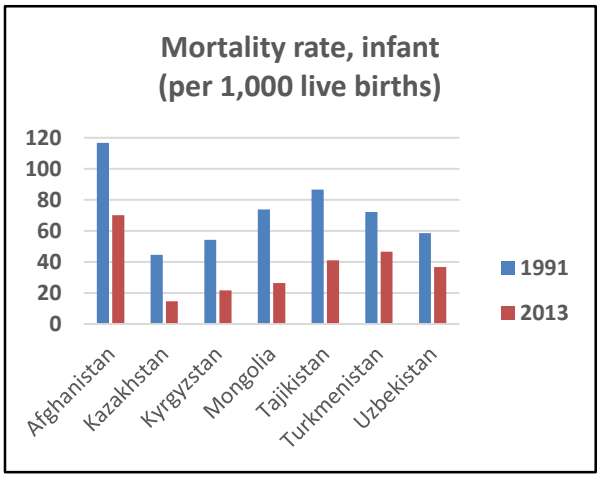

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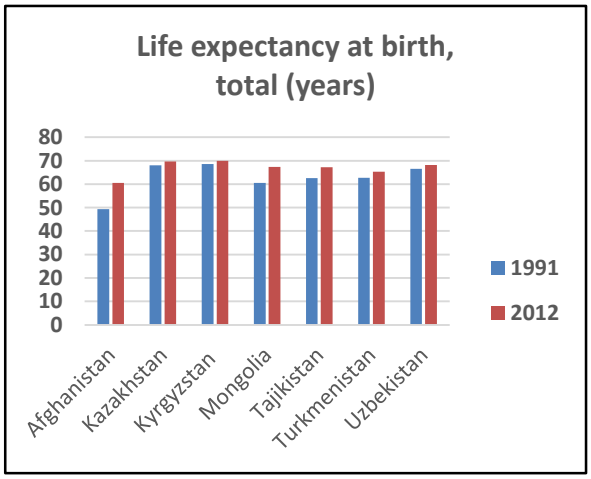


Source: World Bank

Chapter 4

Government and Politics

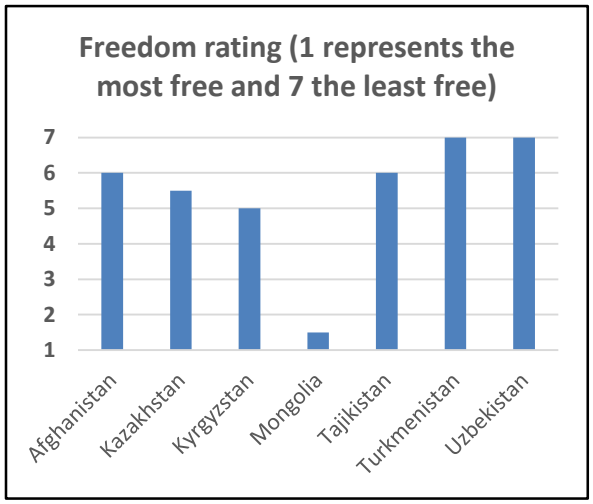
Why Government and Politics Matter to You as a Marine

Most people live in states governed by formal and informal institutions. Marines need to know how power and authority are distributed in the state by studying the formal and informal structures of governments in the region. In addition, Marines need to understand how people, groups, and institutions exercise power and authority, in other words, what comprises politics in the states.

Political Order

With the exception of Afghanistan, the countries in Central Asia are secular republics, in which political power is supposed to be shared among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. In the region, only Afghanistan is an Islamic republic. Regardless of the formal constitutional order, how political power is divided and exercised in the states varies from country to country. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, for example, the president is the most powerful figure, dominating over all branches of government. At the other extreme, in Mongolia, the three branches of government provide checks and balances to prevent a single institution or person from dominating politics in the country.

In 2015, Freedom House, an independent think-tank, produced its annual survey on the state of freedom around the world as defined by the state of civil liberties, political rights, freedom of expression, democratic governance, rule of law, etc.[35] The report classified only Mongolia as "free," Kyrgyzstan as "partly free," Afghanistan and Kazakhstan as "not free," and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as among the "least free" in the world.



Source: Freedom House

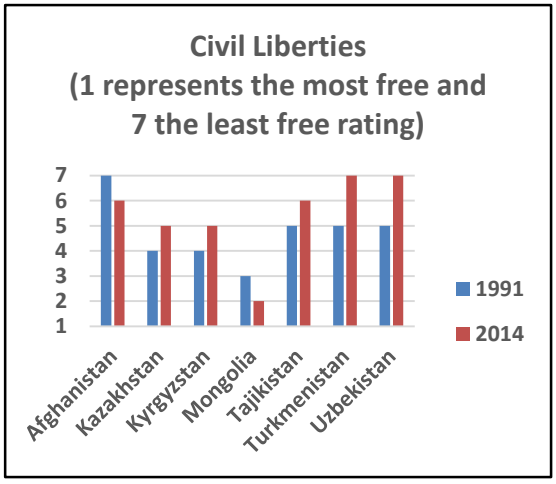
All states in the region hold regular elections which vary in terms of competitiveness and fairness. Elections in Mongolia, and to a certain extent in Kyrgyzstan, see the participation of diverse political parties which compete for power, while having relatively fair access to resources, media outlets, and voters. On the other hand, the other countries in the region hold elections that are neither free nor fair – opposition parties are either banned or face

numerous hurdles, and government-favored parties and candidates receive the lion's share of media time and resources. Outright corruption and election rigging are frequently the norm.

Political parties in all countries are largely build around patronage networks rather than political ideologies. Political corruption, not only during elections, is endemic. With the exception of Mongolia, the rule of law in all countries is very weak. The states maintain control over the judiciary, while corruption among judges is rife. Mongolia is somewhat of an exception, as the judiciary is independent, although corruption among judges is still persistent.

The five post-Soviet states

After the former Soviet republics in Central Asia gained independence in 1991, they experienced relatively limited political change. The ruling communist elites in the five Soviet republics managed to hold on to power and become the ruling elites in the newly independent states. In the process, they shed their commitment to communist ideology and embraced nationalism as a foundation of statehood. The ruling elites remained in power by applying Soviet techniques to independent statehood – concentrating power in a single institution, limiting political dissent and freedom of speech, prosecuting political opponents, keeping control over the economy, creating a police state, etc. Although the states hold regular elections, they are neither free nor competitive – most of the political parties allowed to participate in politics support those in power, while opposition candidates are either excluded from the process or denied access to resources and media time. In addition, citizens have very limited civil and political freedoms, while the state is empowered to exercise control over many aspects of daily life.



Source: Freedom House

For most of the time since independence, each the five newly independent states has been ruled by a "strongman," usually the country's president, who has dominated all branches of government and politics in the country. Those leaders have usually presided over vast networks of family and clan members, friends, and associates, dispersing favors and resources as a way to maintain the political status quo.[36] As a result, the institutions that were supposed to provide check and balances – legislative branch, the courts – in practice merely rubber stamp the leader's policies.

A *strongman* is a leader who rules by the exercise of threats, force, or violence.

The transition from Soviet rule to independence varied across the five newly independent states. Some experienced stability and few changes, while others witnessed instability and frequent change. For example, the communist leaders of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – Nursultan Nazarbayev, Saparmurat Niyazov, and Islom Karimov, respectively – ushered the three

Turkmenistan's first president, Saparmurat Niyazov, declared himself president for life. His dictatorial and eccentric style of rule included changing his name to Turkmenbashi (leader of Turkmen), and officially renaming months and days of the week after family members, national heroes, and historical events.

states into independence, quickly consolidated power as presidents, and eliminated political opposition. As a result, the three states reached a high level of stability, as the leadership quickly and sometimes violently rooted out any perceived challenges to the political status quo. As of 2015, Nazarbayev and Karimov were still in power without sign of relinquishing their presidencies.

Conversely, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, experienced volatile transition. Upon declaring independence, Tajikistan quickly descended into a civil war in which competing regional groups fought for dominance in the state until 1997. In 1994, Emomali Rahmon became the country's president, and by 2015 was still head of state. Although the president concentrated power in his hands and suppressed political dissent, the country still has genuine political opposition. Unlike other former Soviet states in Central Asia, the government in Tajikistan is still unable to exert full control over all regions in the country; occasionally, government forces skirmish with regional strongmen's forces.[37]

Like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan experienced a volatile post-independence transition. In the decades after declaring independence, popular revolts overthrew two of the country's presidents. In 2005 a mass movement forced the resignation of Kyrgyzstan's first president, Askar Akayev. His successor, Kurmanbek Bakiev, suffered a similar fate five years later when mass spontaneous protests against economic policies and political repression forced him to flee. The second revolt was also accompanied by clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in an ethnically mixed region of the country. Kyrgyzstan did not witness the emergence of a strongman capable of dominating the country and keeping stability through repression and the dispensing of resources and favors. This led to instability. However, it also provided the country with a rare chance to create a more democratic political system as diverse political interests were accommodated through compromise and access to power. Consequently, unlike other post-Soviet republics in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan experienced periods of democratization and authoritarianism. By 2015, the country was considered to be the only "partly free" one among the post-Soviet states in the region.

Mongolia

Mongolian Parliament in session (Source: U.S. Embassy in Mongolia)

Contrary to the post-Soviet states in Central Asia, not only did Mongolia experience a peaceful and stable transition after the end of communism, but the country also managed to create a relatively stable and democratic political system. The former communist party managed to win relatively free and fair elections in 1990 and 1992, but lost to the opposition in 1996. Since then, the country has witnessed free and fair elections held on a regular basis with uncontested and peaceful transfers of power. Although at the time of communism's collapse the country had no democratic experience, in a short time, Mongolia managed to build a remarkably stable and democratic political system.

Afghanistan

Due to decades of violent conflict and a lack of central governance, Afghanistan experienced the most volatile process in creating the nation's governing institutions. The outcome of this process is still very uncertain as the international coalition, which overthrew the Taliban in 2001, is gradually withdrawing from the country and national authorities face hurdles governing. As of 2015, the country lacked a stable and democratic political system and government. The parliamentary elections in 2010 and the presidential elections in 2014 were deeply flawed – international observers and opposition parties claimed widespread fraud and ballot rigging, declaring the process illegitimate. After pressure from the international community and donors, Afghan leaders negotiated a solution to the crises. However, even with government in place, the country has had a hard time maintaining stable institutions, while facing renewed Taliban assaults, lack of administrative capacity, and widespread corruption at all levels of government and society. In addition, the government is unable to establish its authority over the entire territory of the country, especially in places where the Taliban and local power brokers exert their own power.

Informal Power

Local elders attend a Jirga at the Tagab District Center in Afghanistan's Kapisa province (Source: U.S. Army)

The region has a long tradition of informal power centers. When the Soviet republics of Central Asia declared independence, their leaders faced what they perceived as great challenges. None of the newly independent states had any state or democracy experience – governing was done by Moscow either directly or through directives. The new state leaders also faced mobilized populations which demanded resources and representation, while newly emerging political figures challenged those already in power. The new states also faced an uncertain international environment after the Soviet Union collapsed, as they were free to pursue their own national interests and assure security for their own citizens. Thus, the leadership of the new states was concerned mostly with maintaining stability, security and their own personal survival at the top, rather than building the foundations of stable national and political institutions. Seeking to address immediate concerns, these leaders resorted to informal politics – creating vast personal networks of political, economic, and social associates that would maintain both the stability of the states and the political status quo. These were patronage networks used by the heads of state to dispense resources and favors to its members as way of gaining and maintaining loyalty.[38] Membership in these networks was based on belonging to a leader's extended family, clan, region, past professional contacts, friendships, etc. To this day, careful management of the network is essential in keeping the leader in power. Failure to do so may result not only in one's loss of power, but also in one's exile from the country.[39]

Afghanistan, too, has extensive networks exercising informal power. Here the informal power structure consists of regional and ethnic leaders, who tend to be even more powerful than in the other

countries in the region. Those leaders often maintain groups of armed men who ensure the safety of their patron and exercise the administration of justice. The informal power structure uses decision-making mechanisms that provide representation and participation to various leaders of informal networks. A key mechanism for decision-making includes the so-called *Shuras* or *Jirgas* – gatherings of leaders who make decisions based on equality and fairness to all participants.[40] Although the informal power structure exists outside the formal government, there is a tradition of close ties between formal and informal political structures.[41]

Chapter 5

Economic Overview

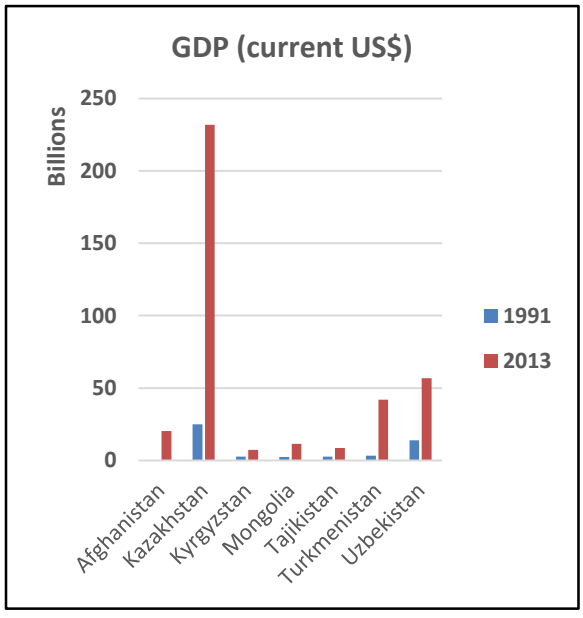
Why Economy and Infrastructure Matter to You as a Marine

The goods and services that people exchange, the infrastructure that people use to move them, and the formal and informal structures that make exchange possible all play critical roles in survival. A thorough understanding of a region is impossible without knowledge of its economy because the region's political, social, and cultural trends both reflect and shape economic developments and trends.

Economic Transition

The countries in Central Asia share some common characteristics which similarly affect their formal economies, including lack of direct access to the sea, underdeveloped transport infrastructure, and commodity-oriented economies and exports. With the exception of Afghanistan, all of them also have a long history of government control over the economy, particularly during communist rule. The region also has a long tradition of informal economic activity, especially small traders and family-size enterprises, which usually operate outside the control and taxing powers of governments.

All countries in the region have been experiencing significant economic changes since the early 1990s. At the wake of their independence in 1991, the five Soviet republics in Central Asia were the poorest republics in the Soviet Union. The sparsely populated Mongolia and the war-ravaged Afghanistan also were very poor. Since the early 1990s, all states except for Afghanistan have made great strides in transforming their economies and achieving economic growth. Although not the most populous country in the region, Kazakhstan has the largest economy in the region, reflecting the presence of more diversification and the abundance of natural resources, especially energy resources. At the other extreme, Afghanistan is the poorest country in the region, reflecting the consequences of war in the last 30 years. The rest of the countries have achieved various degrees of economic development due to the different economic policies implemented since the early 1990s and the availability of natural resources in the countries.



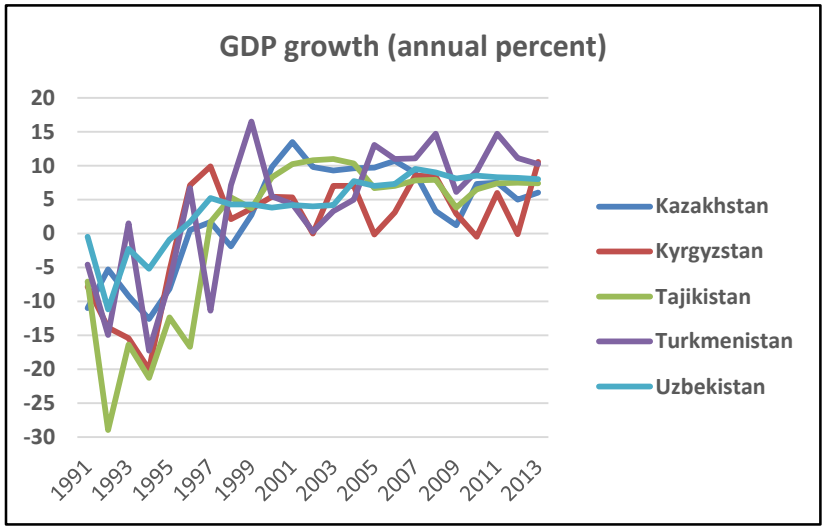
Source: World Bank

The five post-Soviet states

For 70 years, until 1991, the Soviet republics of Central Asia were part of the Soviet economy – a centrally-planned market system in which state-owned industries relied heavily on Moscow for direction and subsidies. Private property did not exist and the state did not allow free enterprise activities.

Before the establishment of Soviet rule, economies in the region were underdeveloped. Early on, the Soviet rule introduced some modern industry, particularly in urban areas. However, agriculture, already the dominant sector of economy, and the extraction of natural resources for export to the industrial centers of the Soviet Union, became the dominant industries in Soviet Central Asia. The Soviets nationalized or collectivized agricultural and pastoral land and livestock, forests, mineral wealth, and already existing industries. Agriculture expanded further and made some regions overly dependent on a single crop. For example, Uzbekistan became the largest source of cotton in the Soviet Union (cotton was produced also in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan). However, cotton required the expansion of irrigation, which demanded greater capacity than Central Asian rivers could supply. As a result, the Azov Sea received less water and its size declined by 90 percent. Fertilizers and the cultivating of a single crop also exhausted the soil.

The planned economy was also inefficient and inadequate to meet the demands of consumers. Cumbersome bureaucracy, corruption, and ignorance of market mechanisms further reduced the effectiveness of the economy. State-owned companies provided employment and a wide range of social services like housing, healthcare, education, and recreational facilities, which undermined economic efficiency.



Source: World Bank

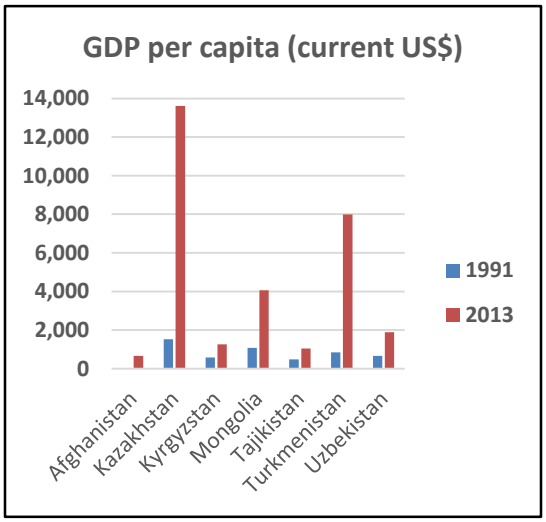
After the Soviet states of Central Asia gained independence in 1991, they faced a turbulent economic transition. Lacking direction and subsidies from Moscow they gradually began to transform into free-market economies and opened up to the world market. However, this process was uneven across the region. Existing infrastructure, including roads, railroads, and pipelines, had been built to take raw materials northward, to the Soviet Union's interior, rather than to regions within the countries or the world market. The newly independent countries also had no experience in dealing with foreign states economically. This problem was compounded by the exodus of many educated ethnic Russians and Ukrainians from the new states – a "brain drain" that disproportionately affected the urban population, especially bureaucrats, managers, and the highly qualified. Independence also disrupted supply and demand networks inherited from the integrated Soviet economy.

As a consequence of these trends, the economies of the newly independent states experienced a sharp economic decline – economic activity slowed down, inflation raised sharply, and unemployment, previously unknown under Soviet rule, increased dramatically. Kyrgyzstan, for example, saw its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decline by 45 percent between 1991 and 1995.

The new states adopted different strategies in their economic transition. Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser extent Kazakhstan, was relatively quick to adopt reform including privatization, letting the market determine prices and less government interference in the economy.[42] Uzbekistan chose a more cautious approach, completing small-scale privatization, but retaining state control over big industries and the prices on the market. Turkmenistan adopted only minimal reforms, while the civil war in Tajikistan prevented the country from applying any meaningful reforms.

Signs of oil wealth in downtown Astana, Kazakhstan (Source: US Department of State; photo by Robin Shaffer)

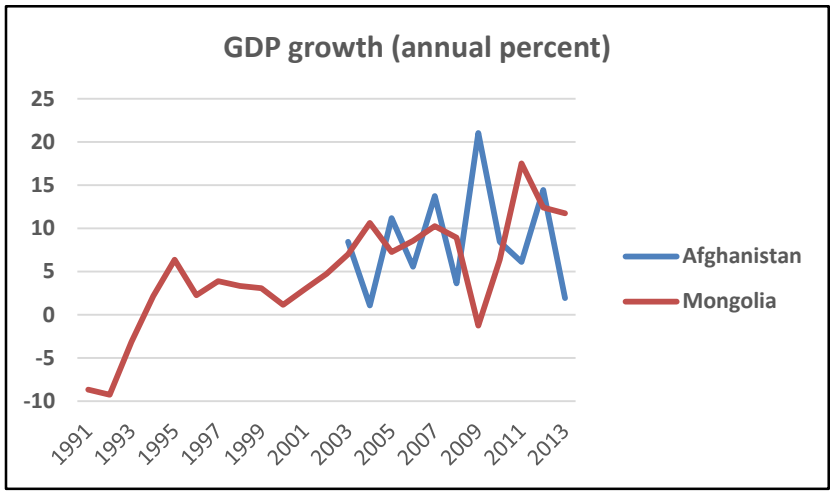
Since 2000, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, rich in oil, gas, gold, copper, coal, and cotton, experienced rapid economic growth due to high global demand for those commodities. Dependence on commodity exports, however, also made these states vulnerable to fluctuating prices on the world market. Thus, whenever the price of oil and gas declined, the economies of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan experienced declining revenues and more modest economic growth. A spike in energy prices, on the other hand, led to more rapid economic growth and increased government revenues. Less dependent on oil and gas revenues, Uzbekistan enjoyed more steady economic growth. On the other hand, poor in natural resources, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have experienced only moderate economic growth since the 2000s.



Source: World Bank

Because of the high prices of energy resources on the world market in the last fifteen years, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan also have the highest GDP per capita in the region. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, remain the poorest countries among the five post-Soviet states. Economic growth notwithstanding, the five countries also witnessed increased economic inequality. Accustomed to relatively equal distribution of income (except for the privileged communist elite), people in the new states now experience wide variations in income depending on their region in the country, profession, and education. Inequality was also spurred very early on by the nature of the privatization process in the 1990s when insiders and other well-connected people (usually the former communist elite) gained control of the most valuable state assets, overwhelmingly to the detriment of everyone else.

Mongolia and Afghanistan



Source: World Bank

The nature of Mongolia's economic system before the 1990s was similar to those in the Soviet states in Central Asia – a highly centralized, planned economy isolated from the world market. Rich in natural resources, chiefly coal, copper, gold, zinc, and untapped oil reserves, the country experienced a very rapid economic growth starting in the 2000s, due to the growing global demand for commodities. By 2012 Mongolia was the leading exporter of coal to China. With extensive reserves, the country has the potential to increase production of commodities considerably. However, reliance on commodity exports has also made the country vulnerable to fluctuations in world prices. In addition, the country is overly dependent on the economic developments in a single country, as 90 percent of its exports go to China.[43] The availability of natural resources and the considerable investments made by wealthy international corporations have also allowed the government to postpone important economic reforms to control public spending, diversify the economy, and address pervasive corruption. Consequently, any future decline in the prices of commodities on the global market is bound to have dramatic consequences for the national economy.

Mongolia's fast economic growth has had a dramatic impact on the country. The government embarked on an ambitious investment program, mainly in construction and infrastructure. The growth also impacted population patterns, as thousands of people moved to urban centers. In 1989, 27 percent of Mongolia's population lived in the country's capital city of Ulaanbaatar. By 2010, 45 percent of the population lived in the city. This trend is expected to continue.[44] By contrast, the countryside, already very sparsely populated, witnessed rapid depopulation.

Thirty years of war and conflict destroyed the already underdeveloped economic infrastructure and institutions in Afghanistan. Lack of security, political instability, and international isolation kept the economy underdeveloped. Since 2002, the country has been the recipient of massive international economic assistance. However, after more than a decade of international help, Afghanistan remains economically underdeveloped. Most of the economic projects are driven by the donor community, but the country itself is still unable to build a self-sustaining economy.[45]

Afghanistan is rich in natural resources including coal, copper, lithium, gold, natural gas and oil. Most of the deposits, however, remain unexplored as international and domestic companies fear the continuing armed conflicts, the lack of institutional framework to support business activity, and widespread corruption at all levels.

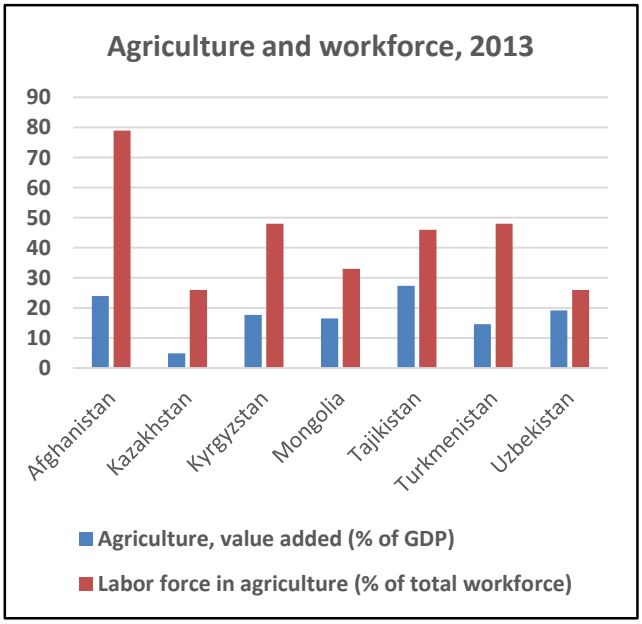
Industry

Country	Main Industries
Afghanistan	small-scale production of bricks, textiles, soap, furniture, shoes, fertilizer, apparel, food products, non-alcoholic beverages, mineral water, cement; handwoven carpets; natural gas, coal, copper
Kazakhstan	oil, coal, iron ore, manganese, chromite, lead, zinc, copper, titanium, bauxite, gold, silver, phosphates, sulfur, uranium, iron and steel; tractors and other agricultural machinery, electric motors, construction materials
Kyrgyzstan	small machinery, textiles, food processing, cement, shoes, sawn logs, refrigerators, furniture, electric motors, gold, rare earth metals
Mongolia	construction and construction materials; mining (coal, copper, molybdenum, fluorspar, tin, tungsten, gold); oil; food and beverages; processing of animal products, cashmere and natural fiber manufacturing
Tajikistan	aluminum, cement, vegetable oil
Turkmenistan	natural gas, oil, petroleum products, textiles, food processing
Uzbekistan	textiles, food processing, machine building, metallurgy, mining, hydrocarbon extraction, chemicals

Source: CIA

Agriculture

Agriculture has a relatively limited contribution to the formal economy of the countries in the region, ranging from only 5 percent in Kazakhstan to 27 percent in Tajikistan. However, for most countries in the region, agriculture remains the most important sector of the economy in terms of employment – nearly 40 percent of the total workforce in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, and almost 80 percent in Afghanistan, are occupied in agriculture (by comparison, less than 1 percent of the workforce in the U.S. is involved in agriculture). However, the lack of investment, the prevalence of small-scale farming, and the low-tech approach to agriculture make the sector ineffective and labor intensive.



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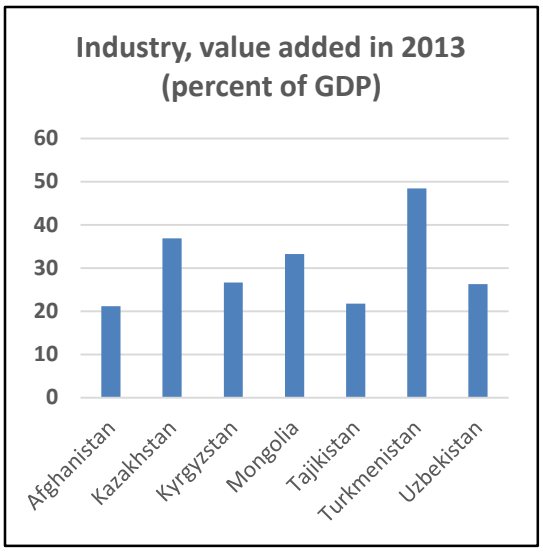

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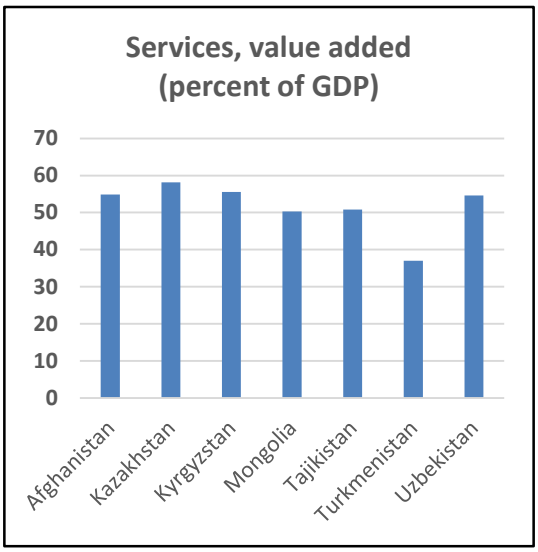


Source: World Bank

Informal Economy

The informal economy includes those economic interactions and exchanges that are not recognized, regulated, controlled, or taxed by a state government.[46] Informal economies facilitate the exchange of both legal and illegal goods and services.

All countries in the region have significant informal economies. They range from an estimated 15 percent in Uzbekistan to over 30 percent in Kazakhstan.[47] The size of Afghanistan's informal economy is even bigger, due to decades of conflict. Only recently did the country develop the institutions capable to exert any control over economic activity, including collecting taxes.[48] However, the state is still unable to force citizens, both poor and rich, to change their attitudes toward paying taxes. As a result, the state budget will remain dependent on foreign donors rather than taxes.

The informal economy allows employers, employees, and the self-employed to increase their take-home earnings. On the other hand, it causes a loss of budget revenues for governments and negatively affects public finances. Those involved in the informal economy also lack steady work and social security. According to one study released in 2011, 65 percent of the labor force in Kazakhstan and 58 percent in Kyrgyzstan does not contribute to the state retirement pension scheme.[49]

Kyrgyz women in the Naryn region whip wool for felt (Source: U.S. Department of State)

The informal economies in Central Asia used to be much larger immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union due to civil wars and the lack of functioning state institutions in the newly independent states. In general, civil strife, economic crises, corruption, certain cultural traditions, and dysfunctional state institutions tend to favor the growth and persistence of the informal economy. However, in the last decade, the relative political stability in the five countries enabled the states to limit the size of their informal economies.

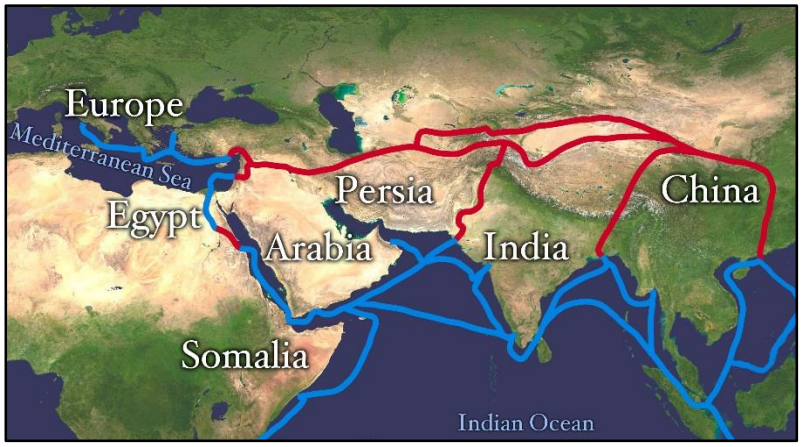
In addition to the legal business activities and exchanges taking place in the informal economy, there is also widespread criminal activity in these countries including drugs, smuggling, gambling, prostitution, human trafficking, etc. The most significant among them is the production and trafficking of illicit drugs. Afghanistan accounts for 80 percent of global opium production (5,500 tons per year).[50] The rest of the countries in Central Asia act as a transit route for drugs produced in Afghanistan. Profits from the production and trafficking of drugs are shared among producers, criminal gangs, insurgents, and many public officials.[51] Officially, the state neither controls nor taxes profits from the drug trade. However, may people who work for the state as a member of the government do profit from this activity.

Foreign remittance – transfer of money from migrant workers to their families or other individuals in their home countries.

For some of the countries in Central Asia, foreign remittances are the most important source of national income. Millions of people from the region work abroad, mainly in Russia, as seasonal or permanent laborers – 2.5 million Kazakhs and 1.1 million Uzbeks find employment there.[52] It is estimated that in 2013, Tajiks working abroad sent home up to four billion dollars, equivalent to 49 percent of the country's GDP, while in the same year foreign remittances represented 32 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP.[53] Some of the countries' high dependence on foreign remittances from Russia, makes them vulnerable to developments there. Thus, when the Russian economy suffered a crisis starting in 2014 due to lower oil prices and the country's confrontation with Ukraine, the flow of remittances to Central Asia plunged. It also forced many migrant workers to return to Central Asia, which increased unemployment numbers in the region.

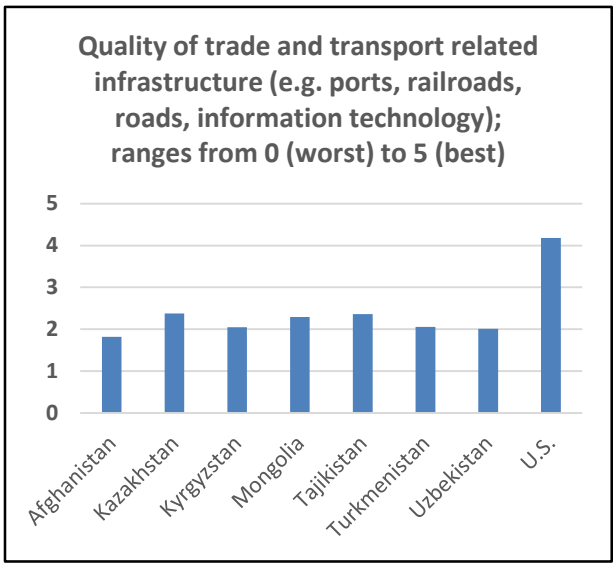
Transport Infrastructure

Central Asia used to be a transit region along an ancient trade route known as the Silk Road, linking China with the Roman Empire. From approximately the 2nd century BC to the mid-15th century, goods and ideas travelled between Asia and Europe, while benefitting cities and empires in Central Asia along the way. In terms of development, the movement of ideas, technology and scientific knowledge along the vast network of routes was as important as the trading of goods. The end of this movement in the 15th century (due to the discovery of a sea route from Europe to Asia) doomed prosperous cities along the road to gradual decay. For the next five centuries, the region became increasingly isolated from the rest of the world, due primarily to political reasons and advancements in sea transportation. Only after the end of communism, and especially during the economic growth fueled by the export of commodities in the 2000s, did the region's transportation infrastructure receive substantial investments.



The Silk Road (in red) (Source: Wikipedia)

Central Asia is challenged because it is a landlocked region, resulting in high transportation costs, reduced competition, and lower trade with the outside world. The region also suffers from the legacy of communist rule and, in the case of Afghanistan, decades of violent conflicts.[54] The transport infrastructure in the Soviet republics in Central Asia and Mongolia, which was relatively well-developed, was designed to transport natural resources northward to the interior of the Soviet Union. By contrast, poor infrastructure in Afghanistan was devastated by war and lack of investments and was cut from its neighbors to the north. In addition, the infrastructure pattern established links with the interior of the Soviet Union rather than between or within the republics. The end of communist rule posed new hurdles to the development of transport infrastructure. The emergence of five new independent states created new states' borders that further complicated the construction of new transport infrastructure. The mountainous terrain in some areas of the region also complicated the construction and maintenance of transportation networks. As a result, the infrastructure to support interaction with the outside world and within the region has yet to be fully built. To further exacerbate challenges to access, little progress has been made in the integration of air transport infrastructure.



Source: World Bank, 2014

Energy Corridors and Infrastructure

One of the reasons for Central Asia's growing importance is energy. Rich in energy resources, the region is located near energy-hungry states, including China, India, and the countries in Europe. As a result, the region has become a major energy producer and hub.

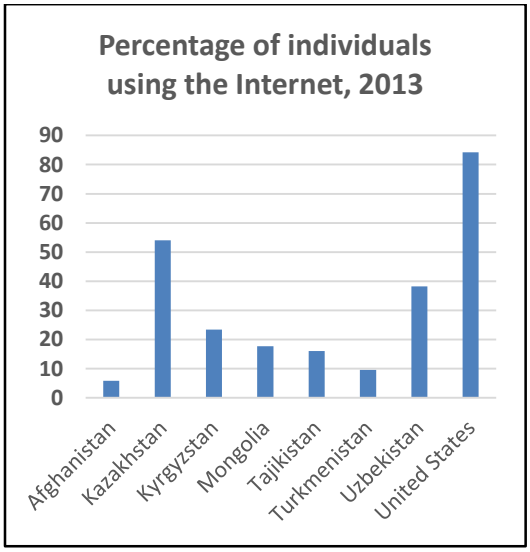
All states in the region except Mongolia and Afghanistan used to have an integrated energy infrastructure controlled by Moscow. After the five republics in Central Asia gained independence, this system disintegrated. All national energy generating and distribution companies were either placed under full state control or privatized. In the last two decades Russia managed to restore some of its presence in the energy sector in the region, this time through privatization of assets.

Major oil and gas pipelines in Central Asia (Source: EIA)

Trying to escape dependence on Russia as a destination and transit route for energy, the newly independent states began to develop new energy fields and develop routes to new markets, especially in China and Europe.[55] For example, Turkmenistan built pipelines to deliver its growing gas and oil exports to China and planned to expand deliveries to South Asian and European markets, thus diminishing its previous dependence on Russia as a destination and transit route.

For many years the region had poor communications infrastructure, and the number of phone lines was limited. In the last decade, however, all of the countries in the region have invested in mobile phone infrastructure and now cell phones are ubiquitous; in some countries many people have more than one cell phone.

Most of the countries in the region have witnessed a relatively slow raise in the access to and use of the Internet. The percentage of people online is well below what we see in the United States.



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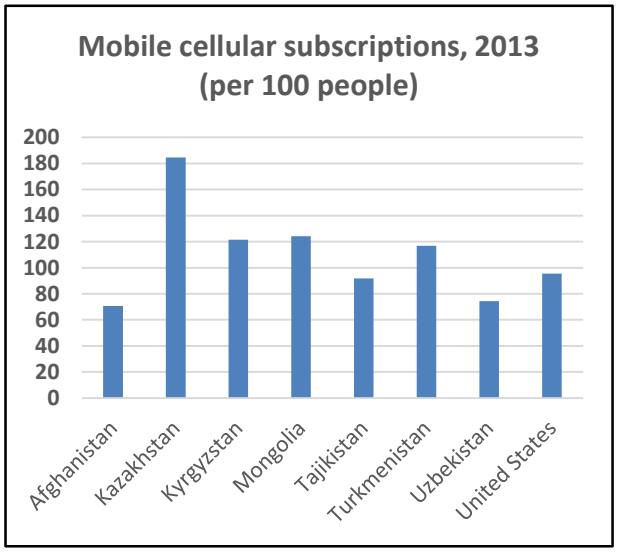


Source: World Bank

Chapter

6

Regional Security Issues

Why Regional Security Issues Matter to You as a Marine

A thorough understanding of a region is difficult without an account of its most significant security challenges. These challenges tend to affect not only relations between states in the region but also the behavior of its people and the choices they make. Regional security issues encompass a host of topics ranging from wars between states, to insurgencies, to organized crime, to weak institutions, to systemic corruption. Some of them involve violence, while others weaken states and societies and have the potential to turn low level conflicts into violent confrontations.

Introduction

The countries in Central Asia face multiple security challenges ranging from armed conflicts, to organized crime, to widespread corruption. The roots of these challenges are numerous, but can be grouped in a few categories.

First, for all states except Afghanistan, there is the communist and Soviet legacy. Being part of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union – or being dominated by Moscow in the case of Mongolia – denied them the chance to develop independent political and state institutions. In other words, the countries had no history of statehood. When the states gained independence in 1991, they lacked the essential experience and institutions to quickly establish a stable order. Ravaged by decades of violent conflicts, Afghanistan, too, has experienced hard time building functioning political and state institutions.

In some states, the transformation of political and state institutions seems to have posed little threat to order and stability. In other countries, however, the transformation in the last two and a half decades has been volatile, often leading to instability and violent conflict. Even in those states that have come a long way in establishing order and stability, political and state institutions are still not sufficiently consolidated and therefore might destabilize the states in the future.

Second, the region has a complex mix of ethnic groups, which have a long history of peaceful coexistence – many people speak more than one language, inter-ethnic marriages are frequent, and people easily interact with those from other cultures on daily basis. In the past, however, differences between ethnic groups have been exploited for political ends, resulting in violent confrontations. Under Russian and later Soviet rules, authorities were able to prevent violence, disagreements and conflicts between ethnic groups from escalating into full-blown armed struggles. The collapse of the Soviet Union removed this tempering outside force. When the Soviet republics declared

independence, various ethnic groups found themselves minorities in newly independent states – their political, economic, and social power significantly curtailed. Long simmering disputes between ethnic groups resurfaced and new ones emerged. On the other hand, the newly independent states lacked the institutions to mediate frictions between ethnic groups; sometimes, the state itself stirred frictions between groups.

Among the states in the region, Mongolia was arguably the only one that avoided ethnic conflicts in the last century. Afghanistan on the other hand, experienced multiple conflicts, although ethnicity was only one of many factors accounting for the confrontations.

Third, the countries are located in a region where the interests of large outside powers intersect. China, the U.S., Iran, and above all Russia, consider this region important to their national security and accordingly play a role in regional politics. The policies of large outside powers in the region often contradict each other.

Fourth, the region is near volatile, conflict-prone states and areas including the Middle East and Pakistan. Conflicts in these areas often affect developments in Central Asia.

Fifth, for political and historic reasons, the countries in the regions do not find it easy to cooperate with each other. That makes it difficult to solve existing conflicts within and outside their borders and to prevent new ones.

Regional Security Issues:

- **Ethnic conflicts**
- **Militant groups**
- **Conflicts between states**
- **External powers**
- **Governance and rule of law**

Ethnic Conflicts

Russian and later, Soviet presence in most of Central Asia prevented ethnic disputes from escalating into violent conflicts. Disputes were usually arbitrated and decided in Moscow, and Soviet authorities used repression to keep a lid on potentially explosive conflicts. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, however, exposed long-simmering tensions among ethinc groups. In addition, the creation of five new states created new power relationships between ethnic groups – while some people became members of a majority in a new country, others found themselves belonging to a new minority. The differences between belonging to a majority or a minority meant differences in access to political, economic, and social power. The creation of new states also disrupted existing social and economic networks within and between ethnic groups, which created new friction points.[56]

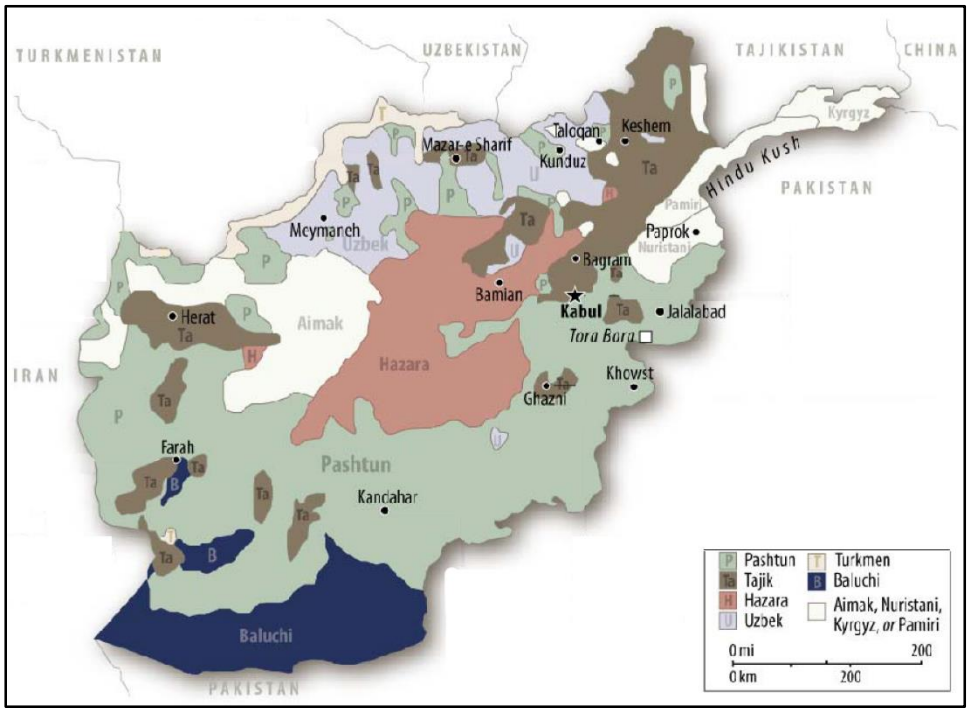
Similiar frictions exist between ethnic groups in Afghanistan as the country has a history of conflicts along ethnic lines. In the 1990s, more than 100,000 people died during the civil war among the Pashtuns and the smaller Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek populations, following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. There are similar fears that the final withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan may trigger not only the Taliban's push to take control of the coutnry but also another civil war.[57]

One should not overestimate ethnic differences as a cause of conflict. Individuals' primary loyalty in Afghanistan, for example, is to kin, village, or region; people do not necessarily see themselves as members of an ethnic group. Intermarriage, bilingualism, and shifting political alliances tend to be more important than ethnic affiliation.[58] In the past, conflicts have emerged along ideological and cultural lines, pitting modernizers against conservatives, and urban elites against rural power holders. However, when conflicts persist and violence escalates, people also begin to identify more strongly with their respective ethnic group and conflicts increasingly turn along ethnic divides.[59] In other words, ethnicity has been only one of many elements present in Afghanistan's conflicts.

Similarly, in the rest of Central Asia, individual loyalties reflect identities based on territory, clan, tribe, and family, rather than ethnicity. The Tajik civil war from 1992-97 was fueled by multiple factors; ethnic frictions was only one them. In fact, the main driving force of the conflict seems to have been a struggle for power between regionally-based groups, some of which resented the concentration of power in the hands of groups in the north of the country. Similarly, a 2005 revolution in Kyrgyzstan began in the southern part of the country, whose elites had long resented the power of the wealthier elites in the north. Members of the southern elite, however, resorted to exploiting ethnic differences to mobilize people for action – inevitably, inter-ethnic clashes ensued.

Ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, none of which is the majority of population. There is no reliable data on the ethnic compositon of the population, but it is estimated that the main groups include: Pashtun – 42 percent; Tajik – 27 percent; Hazara – 9 percent; Uzbek – 9 percent; Aimak – 4 percent; Turkmen – 3 percent; and, Balochi – 2 percent. Afghanistan is not only a multiethnic country, but also one whose ethnic groups have ethnic kin in neighboring countries. In fact, there are more Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Uzbeks in neighboring countries than in Afghanistan.



Map of Afghanistan's ethnic groups (Source: CRS)

Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghnistan, are the most politically influential group historically, and they are seen as the founders of the Afghan monarchy in the mid-18th century. They live primarily in the southern and eastern provices of the country. The Pashtuns comprise five major groups or confederations, each having different power and influence. Although in the past, the various

confederations have quarreled over power, most Pashtuns generally see their ethnic group as the rightful ruler of Afghanistan. Significantly, many Pashtuns live in northwestern Pakistan – the result of the 1893 agreement between Afghanistan and Great Britain, establishing the border between Afghanistan and British territorial possessions in India. The agreement cut across the Pashtun tribal areas and as a result, some Pashtuns remained in Afghanistan while others found themselves in territory, which in 1948 became Pakistan.

The second largest ethnic group, Tajiks, live predominantly in the northern, northeastern, and western Afghanistan and maintain ties with their ethnic kin across the border in Tajikistan. The Hazaras, who are mostly Shiite Muslims, have historically been looked down upon and discriminated against by most other Afghans, who are mostly Sunni Muslims. Most of them live in the mountainous central provinces of Afghanistan. During the late 19th century, in attempt to consolidate state power, Afghanistan's ruler embarked on a military campaign against the Hazaras and as a result, as much as 60 percent of the Hazara population perished.[60] Persecution against Hazaras continued in the 20th century – the Taliban killed many Hazara because of their Shia faith.

Uzbeks and Turkmen, both Turkic-speaking people, live mostly in the northern part of the country. Both groups have ethnic kin across the border, in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, the country descended into civil war. Various factions, often formed along ethnic lines, battled for power. The country was in turmoil until one Islamic fundamentalist group, the Taliban, gained control of most of the country in 1996. The Taliban asserted repressive control of society based on extremist interpretation of Islam. The group found support mostly among Pashtuns, while the members of other minorities in the country resented their rule. In fact, until 2001, when the United States intervened and overthrew the Taliban, an alliance of ethnic minorities, known as the Northern Alliance, continued to battle the Taliban and maintained control of parts of northern Afghansitan.

After 2001, Afghanistan began to build new governing institutions. The international community involved in the reconstruction of the country assumed that previous conflicts in the country were based on ethnicity and therefore the new political order had to provide representation of all ethnic groups. As a result, members of all ethnicities were included in government, including the security forces.[61] However, tensions among ethnic groups have persisted. Many Pashtuns, for example, resisted the new political order. Pashtuns have traditionally been Afghanistan's politically privileged group, ruling the country for most of the time since the mid-18th century. Many Pashtuns believe their ethnic group is entitled to lead the country. However, they fear that the overthrow of the Afghan monarchy in 1973, the Soviet intervention in 1979-89, and the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, have gradually marginalized Pashtuns' power status in the country, while empowering other ethnic minorities. Fear of declining political power explains why some Pashtuns support the Taliban – they see Taliban's grab for power as a way to restore Pashtun dominance in Afghanistan.[62] The attempt by some Pashtuns to see a Pashtun-controlled Afghanistan pits them against all other minorities in the country. Members of other ethnicities fear that once international military presence in the country ends, the Pashtuns will seek to rule alone while treating members of other ethnic groups as second-class citizens.[63]

Frictions between ethnic groups in Afghanistan involves not only access to political power but also to natural resources. During a prolonged drought in 2008, for example, nomads from the Kuchis minority entered grazing lands claimed by the Hazaras. The resulting confrontation threatened to escalate into a major inter-ethnic conflict.[64]

Ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet states

After the five Soviet republics in Central Asia gained independence, they adopted policies that favored each new state's majority ethnic group at the expense of the minority groups. The new policies favored the majority in hiring, required fluency in the language of the majority, decreased funding for minority cultures, and generally amounted to discrimination against ethnic minorities. In other words, the states' independence created new power relationships between the majority and minorities that could easily be exploited to mobilize groups for political action.

Ethnic conflict in Tajikistan

From 1992 to 1997 a civil war raged in Tajikistan, claiming the lives of over 50,000 people and displacing another 700,000.[65] The conflict pitted the government's forces against a loose and diverse coalition of groups representing regional, democratic, Islamic, and some outright criminal interests. Although the reasons for the conflicts are complex and the war cannot be defined as an ethnic conflict, ethnicity and nationalism were factors in it. Ethnic Uzbeks and other minority groups were mainly aligned with the government forces, while groups living in the eastern part of the country were aligned with the opposition.

Gorno-Badakhshan Province in Tajikistan (in green) (Source: CIA)

Eastern Tajikistan, also known as Gorno-Badakhshan Province, is a mostly mountainous region taking nearly 45 percent of the country's territory but home to only 3 percent of its population. Most of the region's population of 250,000 are Shia Muslims who speak Pamiri languages, while most other Tajiks are Sunni Muslims and speak Tajik. Because of its terrain, Gorno-Badakhshan has long been isolated from the rest of the country and its population has developed a distinct identity.

A peace agreement signed by all parties to the conflict in 1997 restored a relative calm in the country. The agreement gave all parties to the conflict representation in government and a stake in power. Even the Islamist party was recognized as a legitimate political player and thus Tajikistan became the only country among the former Soviet republics in Central Asia which incorporated an Islamist party in the political order. However, tensions between the government and people in Gorno-Badakhshan remained. The elite in the capital city of Dushanbe continued to regard the region with suspicion. The people and the elite of the region, for their part, continued to demand more autonomy and to view government policies as discriminatory including in language policies, economic development, and politics.[66]

Ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan

The city of Osh in Kyrgyzstan (Source: CIA)

In June 2010, ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks clashed in the city of Osh and its surroundings in southern Kyrgyzstan. What started as a dispute between youths escalated into riots claiming the lives of some 420 people and many more wounded. More than 110,000 ethnic Uzbeks fled to Uzbekistan and an additional 300,000 temporary fled their homes but remained in Kyrgyzstan. The majority of the victims of violence were ethnic Uzbeks.[67] The reasons for the eruption of violence are still a matter of debate. Some of them include the economic crisis in the city, high unemployment, especially among young people, and the lack of educational and economic opportunities. These issues were skillfully used by local Kyrgyz leaders, who saw the early 2010 overthrow of President Bakiyev, a southerner, as another move by leaders in northern Kyrgyzstan to dominate politics in the country. Kyrgyz leaders in the south skillfully exploited the economic and social issues in Osh and the surrounding areas to mobilize the local population and consolidate their power in response to perceived northern gains. The easiest way to mobilize ethnic Kyrgyz was to appeal to their nationalism and to stoke their fears of the ethnic Uzbeks in their midst. As a result, a local dispute escalated into days of riots and violence. It is alleged that authorities in the city did not attempt to stop the violence, and in some cases, actively assisted Kyrgyz gangs.

After the end of violence, both local and national authorities did not do enough to promote ethnic reconciliation. Although most ethnic Uzbeks returned to their homes, they complained about continued discrimination and prosecution. Pledging to prosecute the perpetrators of violence, authorities disproportionately went after ethnic Uzbeks while ignoring ethnic Kyrgyz perpetrators. Government assistance to the displaced and those who lost property in the riots was allegedly funneled mostly to ethnic Kyrgyz. In addition, political rhetoric across the country became increasingly nationalistic, which further strained relations between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks.[68] It must be noted that during the crisis, Uzbekistan was reluctant to openly intervene in the conflict.

Ethnic conflict in Kazakhstan

Since gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has experienced a period of mostly peaceful relations between its ethnic groups. However, the country has also gone through a dramatic transformation of its ethnic make-up. In 1991, no ethnic group in the country was in the majority. An exodus of ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians, gradually turned ethnic Kazakhs into a majority. Although government's policies did not outright discriminate against non-Kazakhs, it clearly favored ethnic Kazakhs. For example, while the Kazakh language was declared the state language and Russian was designated an official language, knowing the Kazakh language proved an advantage in finding a job and making a career.

Home to over 100 ethnic groups, Kazakhstan is prone to ethnic tensions.[69] Kazakh government has been especially careful not to antagonize the Russian minority – the largest one in the country – fearing a reaction from Moscow. These fears became especially intense when, starting in 2014, Moscow annexed parts of Ukraine and provided military assistance to Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine – actions justified as a policy of protecting ethnic Russians abroad. Kazakhstan feared that Moscow may use a similar justification to intervene in Kazakhstan and annex territories populated by ethnic Russians.[70] The political elite of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan has not so far expressed a desire to secede from Kazakhstan and join Russia. However, many ethnic Russians also resent Kazakh policies seen as discriminatory against them and favoring the ethnic majority.[71]

Ethnic groups in Kazakhstan in the early 1990s (Source: Library of Congress)

Militant Groups

All states in the region, except for Mongolia, see militant groups as a threat to national security. The threat is especially acute in Afghanistan where decades of war have spurred the emergence of multiple militant groups seeking various outcomes, ranging from using force to impose the Sharia and Islamic form of government, to violent criminal activities for the purpose of enriching a particular group. The two most influential groups are the Taliban and the Haqqani Network; although Haqqani is under the umbrella of the Taliban, the group maintains separate command and control structure. Both groups suffered devastating losses during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and needed several years to rebuild their capabilities, albeit only partially.

In the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, militant groups' activities became a security issue shortly after the countries declared independence in the early 1990s. The end of Soviet rule, which had promoted atheism, prompted many people in the region to begin to practice Islam more openly. Although the great majority of the population in the newly independent states supported a secular form of government, a small minority in each country also preferred the establishment of government based on Sharia. An even smaller minority among those advocating the adoption of Sharia were willing to go as far as to use violence to overthrow the government. Those militants organized in several groups, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Group of Uzbekistan (it changed its name to the Islamic Jihad Union in 2005), Akromiya in Uzbekistan, and the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan.

Exploiting the weaknesses of the newly independent states and their porous borders with Afghanistan, militant groups initially managed to challenge the authorities and even gain control over small swats of territory either on their own of in alliances with other anti-government groups. The Islamic Renaissance Party fought in the Tajikistan's civil war in 1992-97, and as part of the agreement ending the war, it gained a legal status as a political party. However, two significant factors in the 2000s curtailed the ability of militant groups to challenge the power of states in the region. First, the states consolidated their powers and enabled their security forces to effectively deal with militant groups. Second, the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan destroyed the networks providing logical support to those groups.

All states in the region, with the exception of Mongolia, are concerned that the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan will create a security vacuum to be exploited by militant Islamic groups. The governments in the region have been relatively successful suppressing these groups (in the case of Afghanistan, with a heavy U.S. military presence) but now they fear their revival if militant groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan will exploit a reduced U.S. presence in the region. Authorities in the region fear that the Taliban could once again take over Afghanistan and provide a safe haven to militant groups seeking to attack in the rest of Central Asia. In preparation of the U.S. withdrawal, states to the north of Afghanistan are changing their security policies, including fortifying their borders and entering into security cooperation agreements with each other and Russia.[72]

States are also increasingly worried about the threat posed by the return of their nationals who have travelled to Syria for terrorist training to fight on the side of the Islamic State against the Syrian government.[73] In fact, there are signs that the Islamic State has tried to establish a foothold in Afghanistan.[74]

There are three main caveats concerning fears about the power of militant Islamic groups to challenge the states in Central Asia. First, the initial success these groups enjoyed in the 1990s was due to the relative weakness of the state and its security apparatus to address challenges to national authorities. Governments in the region, while still plagued by numerous problems, are in a far better position now to confront militant groups. Second, governments in the region tend to exaggerate the threat of Islamic militancy as a justification to go after political opponents, even when they are not motivated by religion. For example, a popular uprising by the population in Andijon, Uzbekistan in 2005 was brutally suppressed by authorities, which claimed to have acted to end a revolt by Islamic terrorists.[75] Third, unlike the 1990s, when outside players took very limited interest in developments in the region, large states, including the United States, Russia, China, Turkey, and India share an interest in stemming the flow of militancy in the region and accordingly spend resources supporting governments in the region.

There are several significant militant groups in the region, which have in the past challenged the governments in the region and may be able to do so in the future. The Taliban and the IMU are particularly capable.

The Taliban

The Taliban emerged in the early 1990s among the Pashtun tribes in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar following the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989.[76] Amid the chaos of civil war, the Taliban attracted popular support by vowing to bring peace and stability. The organization implemented laws and policies according to the Sharia. While imposing order and ending chaos, the Taliban prohibited behavior deemed un-Islamic, requiring women to wear *burqa*, banning

alcohol, music and television, and jailing men whose beards were too short. In 1996, the Taliban captured Kabul and by 1998, it managed to bring most of the country under its control. Ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras in northern Afghanistan opposed the Taliban, seeing them as a continuation of the traditional Pashtun hegemony of the country. They formed the Northern Alliance, managing to keep the northern part of the country out of Taliban control. In the late 1990s, the Taliban also began to provide safe haven to al-Qaeda, a terrorist organization headed by Osama Bin Laden. While the Taliban aimed to impose Islamic rule in Afghanistan, and possibly in Pakistan, al-Qaeda sough to start a global jihad.

After the September 11th terrorist attacks organized by al-Qaeda, the United States and its allies intervened in Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban, while either killing members of al-Qaeda or driving them out of the country. Many Taliban fighters found refuge in the tribal Pashtun areas in Pakistan. Gradually, the Taliban was able to rebuild its networks in Afghanistan, and by 2005, it was able to mount insurgent attacks against American and allied troops. Under the leadership of Mullah Omar, the Taliban funded its insurgency largely through drug trade. By the late 2000s, the Taliban was able to mount attacks throughout the country. In 2013, Afghan forces assumed responsibilities from the international coalition for providing security, while American and coalition forces gradually began withdrawing from the country. As of early Spring 2015, more than 4,000 U.S. military personnel have given their lives in Afghanistan.[77]

The American drawdown emboldened the Taliban and it expanded its control of pockets in the south, east, and north of the country. At the same time, however, the Taliban appeared unable to challenge Kabul's authority in the major population centers, short of suicide attacks on the civilian population and limited armed assaults on government buildings. It is yet to be seen how the Afghan government and the security forces will handle the Taliban in the context of a declining international military presence.

The end of Soviet rule in Central Asia saw a number of Islamist groups emerge, especially in the Fergana Valley, including the United Tajik Opposition, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The first two fought in Tajikistan's civil war and as part of the agreement ending the war, the United Tajik Opposition gained a legal status as a political party. Among the post-Soviet states in Central Asia, Tajikistan is the only one to have an Islamic party operate legally.

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

Established in 1998 in northern Afghanistan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) originally focused on overthrowing the government of Uzbekistan and replacing it with an Islamic state.[78] In 1999, several hundred fighters from IMU and other Islamic groups invaded Kyrgyzstan, established control over several villages, and sought to create a springboard for jihad in Uzbekistan. A joint operation involving Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Kazakh forces drove the militants out of Kyrgyzstan. The next year, IMU invaded Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan but once again was driven out and sought refuge in Afghanistan.

When the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in the early 2000s, IMU pledged loyalty to the Taliban. It also expanded its original goal and sought to establish an Islamic state in Central Asia, rather than in Uzbekistan alone. The U.S. offensive in Afghanistan decimated IMU and killed many of its leaders. Many of its members took refuge in the Pashtun tribal areas of Pakistan and in northern Afghanistan. Unable to operate outside Afghanistan and Pakistan, IMU has increasingly recruited non-Uzbeks, including Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Afghans, Arabs, Chechens, and some Westerners.[79] In 2014, IMU's leader, Usmon Ghazi, swore allegiance

to ISIS, a radical Islamist movement seeking to create an Islamic state in the Middle East. The governments of the former Soviet republics in Central Asia fear that drawdown of American troops in Afghanistan will enable IMU to rebuild and launch attacks north across the border.

In the post-Soviet states, authoritarian governments have used the perceived threat from militant Islamic groups as justification to suppress political dissent in the countries. In addition, many criminal activities, including murder, kidnapping, and extortion have been presented by authorities as the acts of Islamic militants, while, most likely, they have been perpetuated by common criminals with no ideological agenda.[80]

Other militant groups

In addition to the militant groups mentioned above, there are other groups that pose various degrees of threats to security.[81] Although one of the main objectives of the U.S. military's invasion in Afghanistan – the expulsion of al-Qaeda – has largely been accomplished, there are indications that the organization has been trying to regroup in the country. It is yet to be seen whether the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Afghanistan will lead to a revival of the group in the country. Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Lashkar-i-Janghvi, and Harakat ul-Jigad Islami are mostly Pakistani-based militant groups, which also operate occasionally in Afghanistan. Another significant militant group is the Hizb-e-Islami-Gulbuddin. Based in Afghanistan, the group is aligned with the Taliban, although the two sometimes clash over control of territory.

Conflicts Between States

In addition to domestic conflict, the states in Central Asia face interstate conflicts. The combination of co-mingled ethnic groups in all states, the seemingly arbitrary borders drawn by outside powers, the rise of nationalism, and the competition for scarce resources, lead to frictions between states in the region.

It must be pointed out that, unlike other regions, Central Asia underwent a relatively peaceful transition following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the creation of five new states. There were violent internal conflicts (in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, for example), but relations between states, however tense, did not turn violent. Nevertheless, there remains friction that under certain circumstances may lead to armed conflicts.

Conflicts over borders and ethnic minorities

As the Historical Overview section in this paper points out, except for Afghanistan and Mongolia, there had never existed any independent state with the current names or current borders in Central Asia. The international borders in the region (again, except for Afghanistan and Mongolia) are a legacy of the Soviet rule. Moscow created the borders of the five Central Asian republics in the 1920s and 1930s with seemingly little consideration to geographical, cultural, and ethnic composition. In fact, it was impossible to create republics whose borders correspond to ethnic divisions, because no such neat divisions existed; ethnic groups traditionally mixed in Central Asia. Thus, when the five republics gained independence in 1991, each new state had multiple minority groups. In addition, the newly independent states failed to negotiate their new borders, adding to further confusion.

The combination of lack of a tradition of long existing statehood and national borders, and the separation of nations by the new borders, created frictions between states in the region. For example, Bukhara and Samarkand, two cities in Uzbekistan, are seen by Tajikistan not only as populated mostly

by ethnic Tajiks but also as important sites to Tajik identity and culture.[82] Uzbekistan, for its part, disputes these claims and fears that Tajikistan may assist groups demanding the end of Uzbek control over the cities. Turkmenistan claims Khiva, a city in Uzbekistan, as historically Turkmen, rather than Uzbek. Another city in Uzbekistan, the capital city of Tashkent, is claimed by Kazakhstan as historically its own.

In addition to being on the receiving end of claims, Uzbekistan has claims of its own, due to the large Uzbek minorities in neighboring states. So far, Uzbekistan has been reluctant to exploit Uzbek minorities in its relations with those states, but neighboring capitals fear Tashkent's intentions in the region. The fears are especially acute in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, where large numbers of ethnic Uzbeks live in enclaves close to the border with Uzbekistan.

The issue of border demarcation is especially serious in the Fergana Valley. The valley – home to multiple ethnic groups and shared by Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan – is vitally important to the economies of all states and has the highest population density in Central Asia. The states sharing the valley have so far failed to settle their national borders. Only about half of the 971-kilometer border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and a quarter of the borderline between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, for example, have been delimited clearly.[83] The border areas frequently see clashes involving both civilians and the militaries of the countries.[84]

Enclaves in Fergana Valley (Source: RFE/RL)

To complicate matters, there are multiple enclaves in the valley – territorial units belonging to one state, but located in another state. There are four Uzbek enclaves in Kyrgyzstan; one Kyrgyz enclave in Uzbekistan; one Tajik enclave in Uzbekistan; and, two Tajik enclaves in Kyrgyzstan.

The new international borders also created barriers to interaction between people in places wherein none existed in the past. Border crossings are notoriously difficult in the region, slowing interaction between people and trade between states. Harassment and extortion of travelers are everyday occurrences, further adding to tensions in the region.[85]

Conflicts over resources

As the Geographic Overview in this paper points out, Central Asia is rich in resources. However, they are unequally distributed among the states. Some states have plenty of water resources, while others have very limited ones; some states exploit some of the world's largest gas and oil fields, dramatically increasing their national wealth in the process, while other states rely on imports for their energy needs.[86] For all countries in the region, except for Afghanistan and Mongolia, these disparities did not use to be an issue as they were part of one state and there was Soviet-wide system to address scarcities among regions. Dams in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan stored water in autumn and winter and released it in spring and summer to irrigate crops in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. In exchange, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan provided energy resources to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.[87] After these states gained independence, however, the system gradually disintegrated and accordingly, disparities

in resources created conflicts between states. What further aggravates resource conflicts between states is the high population growth alongside the effects of a decaying infrastructure.

Water is the most precious resource in the region and its availability and use create intense conflicts between the states. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have plenty of annual rainfall and large quantities of water stored in the mountain glaciers, while other countries, including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, have a shortage of water resources.[88] Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have large deposits of gas and oil, while the water-rich Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have to import energy resources.

The Kurpsai Dam on the Naryn River in Kyrgyzstan (Source: Photo by HylgeriaK; Wikipedia)

The two most important rivers in the region, Syr Darya and Amu Darya and their respective tributaries, form the Aral Sea drainage basin (see Geographic Overview chapter). The downstream countries in the basin – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan – are wealthier than the upstream countries, including, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan. The upstream and downstream countries' interests clash as the former need water for irrigation, while the latter seek to exploit the rivers' hydropower potential and thus meet their energy needs. Due to these clashing interests, the states have had hard time meeting their obligations whenever they had concluded agreements on the use of water resources.[89]

Irrigation canal in Turkmenistan (Source: Photo by Yovashan Annagurban, RFE/RL)

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have problematic relations, including disagreements over water-sharing. As an upstream country, Tajikistan affects water flow to Uzbekistan. On the other hand, Uzbekistan provides energy to Tajikistan and is a transit point of Tajikistan's trade routes to Russia. Both countries have used resources as means to exert pressure on each other. Tajikistan's decision to complete the construction of the Rogun Dam on the Vakhsh River in order to meet its electricity needs is opposed by Uzbekistan, which fears that the project will affect water flow downstream. Uzbekistan has used gas deliveries and border controls in attempts to pressure Tajikistan to stop the project.[90] Each country also accuses the other in attempts to undermine their national security by providing support to militant groups. Uzbekistan also opposes the construction of a large dam on the Naryn River upstream in Kyrgyzstan.[91] In addition, Uzbekistan has tense relations with Turkmenistan over water sharing and ownership over oil and gas fields in the Caspian Sea.

External Powers

The Soviet Union dominated most of Central Asia until the early 1990s and mostly prevented any other states from interfering in the region's affairs. The disintegration of the Union, however, not only created new states in the region but also ended the region's isolation. Large states increasingly sought to benefit from the weakened Russian presence in the region, and also to influence the policies of its states.

Russia

Russia's role in Central Asia has changed significantly in the last decades.[92] The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the first time Moscow lost control of most of the region since the 19th century. In the 1990s, Russia was preoccupied with internal weaknesses and crises and made only limited attempts to reassert its dominance in the post-Soviet states. Following the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, Moscow showed no intention of reasserting its presence in the country. The newly independent states, for their part, sought to build their nations, and partially in opposition to the Russian legacy, increasingly turned to their pre-Russian history, culture, and identity. The declining Russian influence was also accompanied by the exodus of millions of Russians, choosing to settle in Russia rather than live as minorities in newly independent countries.

At the same time, the end of communism in the region also opened the countries' previously isolated economies to the world market. The vast natural resources, especially in Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Turkmenistan began to attract foreign investors and the attention of foreign governments. Commodities, which had previously been sent to Russia or had been unexplored, began to find their way to new markets.

By the late 1990s, Russia's political, economic, social, and military influence in Central Asia declined dramatically. This influence diminished even further in the early 2000s, following the U.S. military's intervention in Afghanistan. In addition to a significant military presence in Afghanistan, the U.S. also established more extensive relationships with the rest of the governments in Central Asia. In support of the mission in Afghanistan, the U.S. built the Northern Distribution Network – and air, land and sea supply routes that supported U.S. and NATO troops from the north.

The greater U.S. presence in Central Asia in the 2000s, prompted Russia's initial attempts to reestablish its presence and influence in the region. Domestic stability in the country and high commodity prices in the world enabled Russia to adopt a more aggressive approach in returning to a region it considers important to its national security. Russia has long feared the threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism in the south, including Central Asia and in its own North Caucasus (this explains why Moscow grudgingly acquiesced to U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and the use of the Northern Distribution Network). Russia also resented what it saw as the growing presence of the United States in the region and the expanding Chinese commercial interests throughout Central Asia. It also must be pointed out that Russia's push back into the region was part of an overall Russian policy of regaining its influence in the entire former Soviet space, not only in Central Asia.

As the U.S. military presence winds down in Afghanistan, Russia is even venturing back into the country it had occupied until 1989. Following the overthrow of the Taliban, Moscow had always refused to provide troops to the NATO mission in the country. With the impeding end of this mission, however, Russia has gradually embarked on financing various development projects in the country,

including some that were originally started during the Russian occupation.[93] It also began to invest in education, providing funds for Russian language learning and scholarships for study in Russia.

Russia also sought to expand its economic influence and especially to regain control of Central Asian energy resource exports, as it considered the region a competitor on the global energy market. The countries in the region were busy building energy supply routes to China and Europe that bypassed the old Soviet routes, and Russia naturally feared this as a threat to its dominant position on the market.[94]

Russia's efforts to regain dominance in Central Asia were facilitated by several trends. First, Russia has traditionally seen Central Asia as its backyard, an area to be controlled, yet to be denied to other powers. This attitude is reinforced by a long history of Russian and later Soviet possession of the region. Any attempt by other powers to establish economic or military presence in the region is seen as a threat to Russian security. Thus, in Russia's view, it has no choice but to maintain presence and control in the region. Accordingly, as early as 1994 several former Soviet republics – including Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan (Uzbekistan left the organization twice), and others – created the Collective Security Cooperation Organization, a defense pact in which Russia still has a dominant role.[95]

Second, the former Soviet republics fear that that withdrawal of American and NATO troops from Afghanistan will create a security vacuum to be exploited by Islamic fundamentalists not only in Afghanistan, but also in the rest of Central Asia. Although apprehensive of Russia's intentions in the region, Central Asian governments concluded numerous political, security and economic agreements with Moscow as a security guarantee against instability to the south. Although all post-Soviet states in Central Asia are apprehensive about their security, they diverged on their approach to Russia. Among them, Kazakhstan maintains the closest relationship with Russia, developing extensive political, economic, and military links. Having a large Russian minority and sharing a long border, the country has been careful not to antagonize Moscow. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, two of the more unstable countries in the region, concluded basing agreements with Moscow for long-term Russian military presence on their territories and became recipients of large Russian aid. About 7,000 Russian troops are stationed in Tajikistan, with additional personnel and equipment planned to be deployed in the near future. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, on the other hand, have chosen a more reserved approach. Turkmenistan has attempted to avoid any arrangements with neighboring countries and instead remain isolated and neutral. Uzbekistan, the most powerful in the region in terms of population and military capabilities, seeks to become a regional leader and therefore has tried to keep Moscow at a distance.

Third, during the 2000s, Russia experienced a very high economic growth due to relative political stability in the country and above all, the very high energy prices on the world market. Flushed with cash from energy exports, Russia embarked on military modernization and a more aggressive foreign policy. In the past, Moscow had attempted to create regional organizations that would bind the states in Central Asia under Russia's leadership, although these attempts were of limited success. In 2015, however, numerous states in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, created the Eurasian Economic Union, an economic union of five states (the other two are Belarus and Armenia) introducing the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people as well as common policies among the members states. Due to the size of its economy, Russia inevitably emerged as the dominant state in the union. Russia's rapid economic development in the 2000s and

the relatively slower economic growth in Central Asia prompted millions of people from the region to seek temporary or permanent employment in Russia.

Fourth, the post-Soviet states in Central Asia have institutional weaknesses that make them concerned about domestic stability. Even states that have managed to avoid protracted civil conflicts like Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan do not have the institutions that guaranteed stability in the long run. The political elites in those five states are obsessed with survival; only being in power can assure their survival.

It must be pointed out that Russia is not universally successful in extending its influence in Central Asia. It is most successful in Kazakhstan, whose leader is one of Russia's president Vladimir Putin's closest allies. Relationships with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan also are close, but the two countries' small size and weaknesses make them less significant in Russia's policies in Central Asia. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have developed working relationships with Moscow, but have also managed to keep Russia's influence in the countries in check – Uzbekistan because of its regional ambitions and size, and Turkmenistan because of its intent to stay isolated from its neighbors. Russia has also normalized relations with Mongolia, but its influence over the country has declined greatly compared to the pre-1991 period. However, Moscow is content with this state of bilateral relations as long as no outside power, especially China and the United States, seems to dominate Mongolian security policies. Mongolia for its part has so far managed to carefully balance its relations with Russia and China, so not to offend either of them. Russia's return to Afghanistan has begun only recently and it is yet to be seen how Russia's role in the country evolves, if and when the U.S. completes the withdrawal of its military forces from the region.

Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, a strategically located peninsula in Ukraine, and Moscow's support of an ethnic Russian insurgency in eastern Ukraine, spurred fears in some Central Asian states about Russia's intentions in the region.[96] Kazakhstan is especially apprehensive as its large Russian minority lives along the border with Russia.[97] Some leaders fear that, as in Ukraine in 2014, Russia may use the presence of ethnic Russians in Central Asia as a pretext for a more aggressive intervention in their affairs, including a military intervention.

China

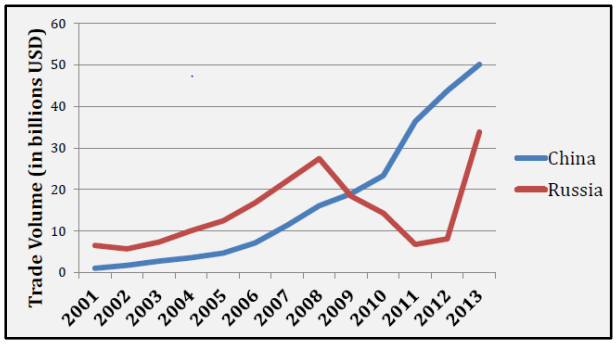
China's presence and influence in Central Asia has been increasing in the last two decades.[98] Beijing's main objectives in the region include ensuring border security, peaceful relations with states, and access to trade and natural resources.[99]

Because of resources and proximity, the region is a cheap, reliable source of energy and commodities to the fast-growing Chinese economy. China has invested billions of dollars in the energy and commodity sector in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Mongolia, while providing billions of dollars of loans to Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. It was projected that by late 2015, Turkmenistan would deliver 20 percent of China's gas needs from the world's second largest gas field.[100] A pipeline delivers oil from Kazakhstan to China, and a gas pipeline between the two countries was expected to become operational at the end of 2015. To support energy deliveries, China also invested in the expansion of the regional infrastructure, including new highways and railways.

While the countries in the region export mainly energy and commodities, while China was increasingly importing diverse goods in the other direction. In fact, by the 2010s, China became the region's leading

trade partner, surpassing Russia. In 2014, 89 percent of Mongolia's exports went to China, while 37 percent of its imports came from China.[101] Afghanistan is the exception in the region as the country's trade with both Russia and China is relatively limited.

In addition to economic interests, China has strategic and security interests in Central Asia. For many years, China had a negligible presence in the region. With growing tensions in Southeast Asia and especially in the South China Sea, China is increasingly seeking to establish solid relationships with governments in Asia's interior.[102] China fears that the surge of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia may spill into its western province of Xinjiang, home to a large number of Uyghurs, Turkic speaking Muslims living throughout Central Asia. To counter this threat, Beijing has sought security cooperation with governments in Central Asia.



China's and Russia's trade with Central Asia, excluding Afghanistan and Mongolia (Source: IMF)

While heavily investing in Central Asia, China has remained very sensitive to Russia's role in the region, making sure that Moscow does not see China's growing economic presence as a challenge to Moscow's political and security interests.[103] Russia, for its part, though welcoming China's greater economic involvement in the region, resents initiatives for region-wide economic cooperation dominated by China. Therefore, it has repeatedly undermined projects promoted through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – the regional organization, established in 2001, comprised of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – and instead promoted the Eurasian Economic Union, which excludes China. Nevertheless, China's economic influence in the region has only grown, at Russia's expense, since the 2008 global financial crisis.

Pakistan

Most of Pakistan's interest in Central Asia is focused on Afghanistan. The relationship between the two countries is defined by the division of the Pashtun population between them – while there are nearly 15 million Pashtuns in Afghanistan, Pakistan is home to between 30 million and 35 million. This division is the result of the 1893 agreement between Afghanistan and Great Britain which established the so-called Durant Line, separating British India from Afghanistan. The Durant Line ran through Pashtun tribal areas. No Afghan government has recognized the Durant Line as the formal international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, considers any attempts by Afghans to either change the border between the two countries or to unite all Pashtuns in one state as a threat to its national security.

To stave off any threat by Pashtun nationalism, Pakistan has sought to maintain influence over Afghanistan's politics, and especially over its Pashtun population and leaders. Accordingly, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the ensuing Afghan resistance presented Pakistan with an opportunity to influence Pashtuns. It provided military and financial assistance to those armed factions that favored radical Islam rather than to those who might favor the unification of all Pashtuns, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.[104] The Soviet withdrawal did not alter Pakistan calculations. Instead, Pakistan provided aid to the Taliban, a Pashtun-dominated movement which promoted Islamic rule and had no interest in Pashtun nationalism. Again those calculations were not altered when the Taliban, too, were

overthrown in the wake of the U.S. intervention in 2001; Pakistan continued to provide assistance and save haven to trusted Taliban and Pashtun factions. Pakistan's support to the Taliban pits the country on collision course with Afghanistan, as authorities in Kabul see the continued Taliban insurgency as the main obstacle to peace and stability in the country.[105]

Iran

Many Afghans share ethnic and linguistic links with majority of people in Iran (see Historical Overview section). Dari, one of the official languages of Afghanistan, and the Tajik language are very similar to Farsi, Iran's official language. In addition, the Hazaras in Afghanistan share Shia Islam with Iranians, and Iran has traditionally gone at great lengths to support Shia Muslims in the Middle East.

Iran benefitted from the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, which was seen by Tehran as an extremist Sunni group prosecuting Shia Muslims. While Iran has developed friendly relations with the new authorities in Kabul, it also has provided political and economic support to the Hazaras. Iran has also promoted the use and learning of Farsi in the country.

Iran's overall security interest in Afghanistan is seeing that no outside power dominates the country. Thus, although Iran benefitted from the overthrow of the Taliban, Tehran fears the United States' presence in the region and seeks its complete withdrawal from Afghanistan.

United States

The American military's intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 marked the beginning of the largest ever U.S. presence in Central Asia, a region that has traditionally attracted little attention from Washington. The increased presence was not confined to Afghanistan but, for logistical reasons, also spilled over into the rest of Central Asia.

In the 2010s, the U.S. began to gradually wind down operations in Afghanistan and accordingly its entire presence and commitment to the region declined. Accordingly, American presence in the rest of Central Asia declined.[106] However, there is no plan to make a complete withdrawal from the region. The U.S. has made a ten-year financial commitment to Afghanistan for the period 2014-24, and has concluded a military partnership agreement with Kabul, that includes continued American military presence in the country.

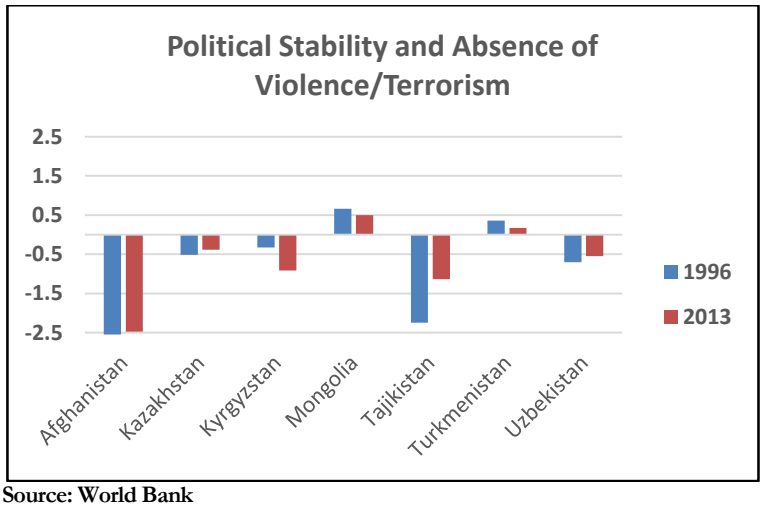
One of the most important American bases in Central Asia outside Afghanistan was in the Transit Center at Manas International Airport in northern Kyrgyzstan. The base began operation at the end of 2001, serving the U.S.-led war in Kyrgyzstan. The logistics hub was engaged in aerial refueling, and personnel and cargo airlift. From 2001 to 2014, the Manas base handled more than 33,000 refueling missions, moved more than 5.3 million servicemen in and out of Afghanistan, and served 42,000 cargo missions.[107] However, consistent with the U.S. declining involvement in Afghanistan and Russia's policy of reasserting its influence in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan decided to end American use of the base in 2014. In addition, Kyrgyz authorities entered into an agreement with Moscow leasing the base to Russia for 15 years.

U.S. military's presence in the transit center in Manas was not without controversy. When Kyrgyzstan's president, Askar Akaev, was overthrown in a popular revolt, the new government criticized Washington for supporting the deposed president in the past, even as he had revealed himself as

corrupt and antidemocratic leader.[108] The public opinion also turned against American military presence in Manas as it was revealed that members of Akaev's family had received kickbacks from companies delivering fuel to the air base.

Governance and Rule of Law

Although all states in Central Asia have gone some way in the last two and a half decades toward establishing stable state and political institutions, they are still very vulnerable to external and internal sources of instability. The institutions of governance, including parliament, judicial system, bureaucracy, political parties, and other institutions suffer from various shortcomings, including lack of transparency and accountability, arbitrary decision-making, weak rule of law, a tendency to serve the interest of those in power, lack of checks and balances, incompetence, corruption, etc. As a result, the institutions of governance are frequently unable to function properly, do not meet public expectations, and lack public trust. In addition, the presence of an active insurgency in Afghanistan further weakens the institutional order in the country.



The assessment of political stability and absence of violence reflects perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically-motivated violence and terrorism (Estimate ranges from approximately -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance).

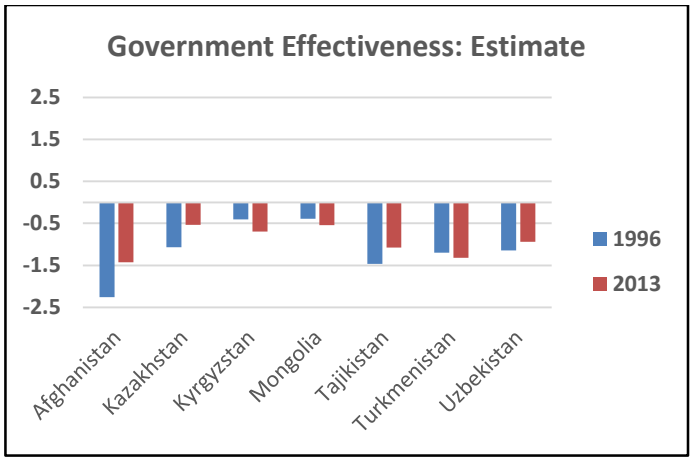
Source: World Bank

There are differences between the states. Since the end of communist rule in the early 1990s, Mongolia has managed to hold relatively free and fair elections on a regular basis and has witnessed the peaceful transfer of power from one political party to another. As the only democracy in Central Asia, the country has managed to maintain relative stability and, unlike most other countries in the region, has not witnessed violence. However, political, economic, and social challenges facing Mongolia make political and social order precarious and the country is far from becoming a predictably stable country.

Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have also achieved a certain degree of political stability. However, this stability has been achieved through authoritarian forms of government, which freely use force against domestic opposition in the name of preserving the status quo. The three countries are ruled by strongmen, and their political systems lack the foundations for an orderly leadership succession. In general, the concentration of power tends to corrupt governing institutions and in the long run weaken them. Under these conditions, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan face potentially unstable periods when their long-standing, aging presidents are to be replaced. The three states' reliance on energy exports also makes their economies and societies vulnerable to the energy prices in the world market. In addition to political and economic vulnerabilities, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan face the

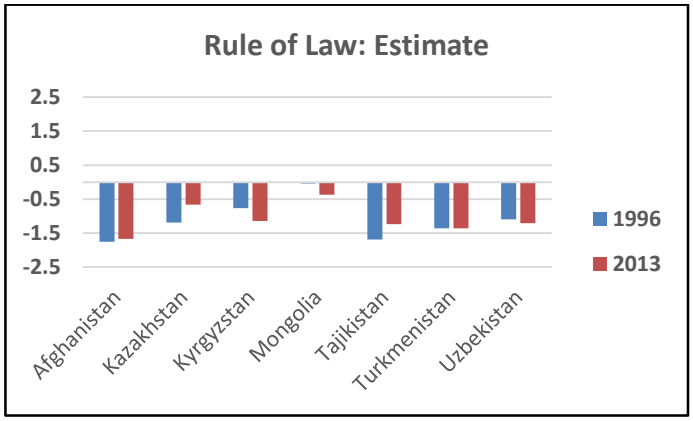
challenge of ethnic conflicts and militant groups. Lacking a democratic mechanism for peaceful transfer of power, the countries may witness a struggle among various elites to fill the power vacuum.

Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are the most unstable states in Central Asia. Civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and lack of development have collectively undermined institutional and state order. Paradoxically, all three states have occasionally managed to hold relatively free elections. However, these democratic attempts have not translated into good governance or stable constitutional order.



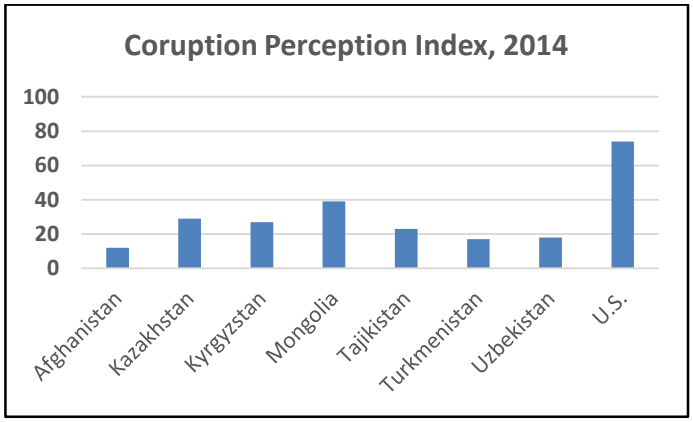
Source: World Bank

Assessment of government effectiveness reflects perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies (ranges from approximately -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance).



Source: World Bank

Assessment of rule of law reflects perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence (ranges from approximately -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance.



Source: Transparency International

The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be. A country's score indicates the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)

Governments in the Central Asia are less than effective, having problems performing essential governing and management tasks, and falling way short in meeting the expectations of their citizens. Government institutions are not only vulnerable to corrupt practices but some of them are actively involved in criminal activities. For example, as part of the Western attempts to eradicate drug trade in Central Asia, and especially in Afghanistan, the U.S. and its allies spent considerable efforts assisting Afghanistan's neighbors to the north in their attempts to end drug trafficking. These efforts, however, mostly failed as officials at the highest level of governments in most states actively participated in facilitating the drug trafficking.[109]

One of the reasons for the instability inflicting all post-communist countries in Central Asia is the transition from one political system to another one, and in the case of Afghanistan, from a brutal Sharia based system to a more representative system. Studies indicate that moving any transition from one form of government to another increases the likelihood for instability and violence.[110] For example, it was during the transition from an oppressive Soviet rule to a more liberal political order when tensions between ethnic groups in Central Asia escalated into armed clashes.

Although all states in Central Asia have attained a degree of stability, their incomplete political and economic transitions pose many risks to stability. The states are most susceptible to political and economic instability during changes in the domestic and international environments.

Chapter

7

Case Study: The Culture of Ethnic Uzbeks in the City of Osh, Kyrgyzstan

The case study in this chapter introduces a culture from the Central Asia region, using the concepts introduced in the Operational Culture General (OCG) document (see attached document).

Introduction

Kyrgyzstan is home to a diverse population, including numerous ethnic, religious, and other cultural groups. The largest minority in the country, ethnic Uzbeks live mostly along the eastern edges of the Fergana Valley on the border with Uzbekistan and comprise around 14 percent of the country's 5.7 million people.[111] The largest compact group of ethnic Uzbeks is located in the southern city of Osh, near the border with Uzbekistan.[112]

Kyrgyzstan (Source: RFE/RL)

The city, which is the second largest after Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, is the regional capital of Osh Province. According to Kyrgyz authorities, the 2015 population of Osh numbered 270,000.[113] However, the population climbs to over 500,000 when the city's suburbs are added to the total. Osh is home to multiple ethnic groups, which, in addition to the Uzbeks, include Kyrgyz, Russians, Meskhetian Turks, Tajiks, Azeris, Romas, and others. Although there is no official data on the numbers of each group, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz are by far the dominant ethnic groups, though neither seem to have a clear majority.

City of Osh (Source: U.S. Forest Service)

Uzbeks have been living in Osh for centuries and, until recently, were by far the dominant ethnic group in the city. Although the city has an ancient history, including being part of the Silk Road, it never gained a prominent role in Central Asia before the Soviet era. It was the Soviet authorities that elevated the status of the city to that of a regional center. However, the city was included in the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) when Moscow created the Soviet republics of Central Asia in the 1930s. As a result, the ethnic makeup of the city began to change, especially after the Second World War, when the population increased dramatically and thousands of rural Kyrgyz moved in. Gradually, Uzbeks lost their status as a dominant group and Osh was no longer perceived as an Uzbek city. During Soviet times, these changes did not matter much to Uzbeks in Osh, as its inhabitants were considered Soviet citizens. Uzbeks in Osh could visit, study, or work in any place in the Uzbek SSR. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 however, Uzbeks living in Osh became citizens of an independent Kyrgyzstan and crossing the border with the newly independent Uzbekistan became problematic.

Year	Population
1880	3,307
1926	29,538
1939	33,315
1959	68,309
1979	168,136
1989	211,045
1996	243,310
2015	270,300

Population of Osh, 1880-2015

Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are evenly split in the city, each ethnic group comprising nearly 45 percent of the total population. Osh has a long history of being a home to people with diverse backgrounds and cultures. The inclusion of Osh in Kyrgyzstan, the dramatic growth of its population, and the scarcity of land let to tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. In 1990, a land dispute between Kyrgyz and Uzbek escalated into armed interethnic violence in and around Osh, claiming the lives of more than three hundred people. In 2010, a dispute between Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth in Osh grew into days of riots that engulfed the mostly Uzbek neighborhoods of the city and nearby towns and villages. Nearly 420 people were killed, 111,000 ethnic Uzbeks fled to Uzbekistan, and an additional 300,000 temporarily fled their homes to other areas of Kyrgyzstan.[114]

The great majority of Uzbeks in Osh live in neighborhoods, called *mahallas*, which are physically, socially, and culturally distinct from the rest of the city. They are home to most of the Uzbeks in the city and rarely home to non-Uzbeks. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the culture of Uzbeks living in the Uzbek neighborhoods of Osh.

Physical Geography

The city of Osh is located where the southern ranges of Tian Shan Mountain give way to the Fergana Valley. The valley is a flat heartland, which extends about three hundred kilometers west to east and about seventy kilometers north to south. Two major rivers and numerous tributaries make the valley very fertile. The city is located at an altitude of 700-1,000 meters. Location made Osh an integral part of the Fergana Valley. Over the centuries Osh's location in the southeastern corner of the Fergana Valley facilitated the city's integration in the valley's socio-economic fabric based on irrigated farming, trade, and crafts. The city's location also made it one of the transit points of the Silk Road, supporting trade between China and Europe. During Soviet rule, the city was further integrated into the valley through the development of industries and large-scale farming.

Fergana Valley and its surroundings (Source: CAOCL)

Topography, location, and natural resources alone are not the only factors that have defined the development of Osh. Soviet authorities portioned Fergana Valley's territory among the Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz Soviet republics in the 1920s. While Uzbekistan received most of the valley's fertile lands, Osh became part of Kyrgyzstan, despite its majority Uzbek population. This decision had two important consequences for Osh's future use of land. First, after becoming an administrative center, the city witnessed a major industrialization and an influx of rural Kyrgyz. Accordingly, land had to be allocated to accommodate economic expansion and newcomers. Second, allocating land for urban development – industry, housing, and farming – became constrained by the city's location, sandwiched between the mountain and the border with Uzbekistan. Land became one of the most valuable resources in Osh.

Although Soviet authorities demarcated Osh in Kyrgyzstan, the city continued to be an integral part of the Fergana Valley. Osh continued to develop extensive economic, social, and cultural links with other settlements in the valley. On the other hand, geographic distance and rugged mountains prevented the city from connecting with Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek. For example, the difficult six-hundred-kilometer road between Bishkek and Osh was improved only in the 2000s. In contrast, the

transportation infrastructure connecting Osh with the rest of Fergana Valley, much of which is located in Uzbekistan, was well developed and facilitated the city's ties with the rest of the valley. However, geography and topography had their limitations. After Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan became independent states in 1991, the border between the two former Soviet republics became an international border, which made crossing between Osh and the rest of Fergana Valley more difficult. Starting in the late 1990s, Uzbekistan imposed various restrictions on travel from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan, which further isolated the city. Only during the 2000s, with growing prosperity and especially with the growth of Osh as a trade center, did the city witness the building of transportation and infrastructure networks linking it with the rest of Kyrgyzstan and with international markets.

The Ak-Buura River runs through Osh and acts as the city's central axis, as its main thoroughfares run parallel to the river. The city also has multiple water channels, mostly in Uzbek neighborhoods. Most of the channels are about two feet wide and function as both gutter and water supply for washing, cleaning, and watering gardens.

Ak-Buura River runs through Osh (Source: Panoramio; Photo by AmanovDmitry)

In the middle of the city there is a rocky formation called Sulaiman-Too (Solomon Mountain). Visible from any point in Osh, the mountain is considered a sacred place and a major place of pilgrimage in Central Asia. At its highest point, the mountain towers 191 meters above the city.

Osh has a typical continental climate. The high temperatures during the coldest month, January, average 36° F, while during the hottest month, July, they average 91° F. Precipitation is low, merely 16.4 inches annually – summers are very dry, while falls and winters witness most of the rainfall.

Sulaiman-Too in the middle of Osh (Source: UNESCO)

Because of the arid climate, Osh has limited vegetation – agriculture, gardens, and the limited vegetation in the city are supported by water from the river and water channels. This makes the city vulnerable to torrential rains, landslides, and mudflows, which, in the past, have taken casualties, made thousands homeless, and destroyed property and agricultural lands. Osh is also located in a seismic zone and as a consequence, most buildings are one- or two-story high. However, during Soviet rule, authorities also build four- and five-story apartment blocks, which are in use to this day.

Economy of the Culture

Under Soviet collectivization policies, the peasants were forced to give up their individual farms and join large collective farms.

Soviet authorities considered Central Asia to be a backward, tradition-bound place in need of a progressive, socialist civilization. Accordingly, authorities adopted wide-ranging political, social, and economic policies aimed at transforming the region. The economic policies included industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. Economic development was based on a model of command economy in which the means of production were state-owned and economic activity was controlled by central economic planning. It also involved centralized investment decisions, assigned production goals, controlled prices, and near-full employment.

For much of its history, Osh was mainly an agricultural, trade, and craft center, with few small-scale industries. The Soviet policies of industrialization and collectivization, however, transformed the city's economy dramatically. Especially after WWII, the city witnessed a rapid industrial growth. While developing a massive cotton growing sector in the Fergana Valley (mainly in Uzbekistan), the Soviets built a textile plant in Osh, which employed more than 11,000 people. Authorities also built a silk plant, a pump factory, a building construction factory, and a dairy plant. To service the new industries and the growing population, the city built transportation-servicing depots and production facilities for milk, bread, meat, and vodka. The city's economy also became highly integrated in the Soviet economy.

In the second part of the 20th century, industries became the largest employer in Osh and fueled its dramatic population growth. Thousands of ethnic Kyrgyz moved to the city, taking on jobs in the newly-build factories. To compensate the lack of skilled labor, Soviet authorities encouraged ethnic Russians and Ukrainians to relocate to Osh to serve as managers, engineers, educators, and medical workers, and in the process created a professional class in which ethnic Uzbeks were a minority.

Raisin sellers in the city of Osh (Source: State Magazine)

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Kyrgyzstan's independence led to a dramatic change in Osh's economy. The regional and union-wide economic network collapsed, and the city lost both economic guidance and subsidies from Moscow as well as access to the former Soviet market. For example, the largest employer in Osh, the textile factory, lost Uzbekistan as a supplier of cotton, as Uzbekistan preferred to sell cotton on the world market for hard currency. In addition, the production of cotton in the Fergana Valley declined as farmers, without the pressure from the planned economy, increasingly turned to growing foodstuffs at the expense of cotton. As a result, the textile plant closed and its thousands of workers became unemployed. Similarly, other large factories in Osh either closed or continued to work at greatly reduced capacity. Many other workers employed in ancillary services – bus drivers, mechanics, construction workers, and others – also lost their jobs.

Facing the collapse of the Soviet planned market, Kyrgyz authorities adopted reforms aimed at transforming the economy into a free market. The state eased state interference, ended price controls, returned land to farmers, and encouraged private entrepreneurship. In the short run, however, these reforms had negative effects on the population of Osh – inflation and unemployment skyrocketed,

social inequality increased, and criminality became widespread. This hardship came as a shock to a population accustomed to near-full employment, stable prices, and cheap or free social services. As a result, most Uzbeks in Osh in the 1990s considered the market to be chaotic, criminal, and exploitative.

In the 1990s Osh experienced a dramatic transition from a planned economy to a free market economy. In other words, the region witnessed a fast change from one system of exchange to another.

In the 1990s, facing hardship in Osh, Uzbeks began to compare economic conditions in their city with economic conditions in Uzbekistan. Authorities in Uzbekistan adopted very limited economic reforms, preserving the state's interference in the market, including state ownership of industries, price control, and funneling of resources to favored, politically-connected businessmen. Uzbekistan's economy also benefited from the country's greater wealth from cotton and oil. In other words, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan adopted different policies to transition from the Soviet economic model. Uzbeks in Osh, citizens of Kyrgyzstan, still maintained extensive ties with Uzbekistan. They compared the two models of economic transition and seemed to prefer the latter, condemning the one in Kyrgyzstan.

Shuttle trade refers to the activity in which individual entrepreneurs buy goods abroad and import them for resale in street markets or small shops.

Most of the Osh Uzbeks' understanding of economic conditions in Uzbekistan was shaped by Uzbekistan's state-owned TV channels, which were widely watched in Osh. These channels did, and still do, disseminate official state propaganda, painting a rather rosy picture of life in Uzbekistan. Television news provided a constant stream of news and programming showcasing the operation of factories and the construction of new buildings and roads in the country, while presenting Uzbekistan's president as a wise political and business leader. Uzbekistan's TV channels completely ignored the many economic and social problems faced by the country. Thus, the impression Uzbeks in Osh had about economic development in Uzbekistan was skewed. Only in the 2000s, following the improvement in economic conditions in Kyrgyzstan and the growing awareness of the oppressive character of the political regime in Uzbekistan, did Uzbeks in Osh begin to place a higher value on the economic system in their city. In fact, the restrictive, state-dominated economy of Uzbekistan created shortage of consumer goods and starting in the 2000s, Kyrgyzstan, with its more liberal economic system, became a source of consumer goods for citizens in Uzbekistan. Uzbeks in Osh benefited from this supply-and-demand dynamic between the two states by dominating the growing shuttle trade across the border.

Since Kyrgyzstan gained its independence, ethnic Kyrgyz have gradually moved to dislodge ethnic Uzbeks from their dominant economic positions in the city. As a result, while Uzbeks continue to dominate parts of the economy, particularly in trade, retail, and craft, Kyrgyz increasingly dominate the top positions of most large state and private enterprises.

Uzbeks' tradition of sedentary farming, craft, and trade still enables them to compete economically in Osh, although they are facing an increasingly stiff competition from the Kyrgyz, who are exploiting their dominant political position in the country. Uzbeks still control the retail industry, almost all the service industries (auto repairs, restaurant services, currency exchange, and others), and much of the craft labor. The Uzbek workforce in these industries increased dramatically in the 1990s as many workers lost their jobs in factories and economic reforms created new job opportunities. Many Uzbeks

also became shuttle traders crossing the border with Uzbekistan and moving goods between the two countries – in most cases only with that which they could carry on their person. By 2012, retail and trade accounted for 80 percent of the city's GDP.[115]

Kyrgyz, on the other hand, have a tradition of pastoral life associated with the production of milk, wool, meat, and rugs. After Kyrgyzstan's independence, however, by exploiting their newly found status as a majority in the state and the exodus of ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, and other Europeans who occupied managerial positions in Osh, Kyrgyz increasingly came to dominate the top positions of most large state and private enterprises. Kyrgyz also increasingly took on economic activities traditionally dominated by Uzbeks, especially in trade and retail. This trend accelerated after the riots in 2010, which hastened the declining economic status of Uzbeks in the city.

Recommended Readings: For more on the conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Osh, see:

U.S. Department of State, *Kyrgyz Republic: Focus on Southern Kyrgyzstan* (October 2011), http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/187973.pdf

International Crisis Group, *Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South* (March 2012), http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/222-kyrgyzstan-widening-ethnic-divisions-in-the-south.pdf

Another important development in the Uzbek community was labor migration. Due to poverty and lack of economic prospects, many residents of Osh chose to seek employment abroad, mostly in Russia, either as seasonal laborers or long-term migrants. To this day, the absence of many Uzbeks (and Kyrgyz) who seek employment abroad is felt through the city, as most extended families have at least one, if not several members away. The remittances that migrant workers send home sustain the economy and the social fabric in Osh. Migration also somewhat eases the pressure to build housing for the expanding Osh population.

Uzbeks in Osh have adopted various economic and social strategies to survive in the new economic environment since Kyrgyzstan gained its independence. First, they became less dependent on the state for employment, goods, and services by utilizing their tradition in agriculture, trade, craft, and entrepreneurship skills. Private enterprise, previously illegal under Soviet rule, was easily embraced by Uzbeks.

Second, the informal economy expanded substantially. The United Nations Development Program estimated in 2015 that the informal economy is between 20-40 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP, and higher in retail and trade.[116] Another report estimated its size at 50 percent.[117] Informal economic activity is especially common in cross-border trade, which constitutes a large share of Uzbeks' economic activity in Osh. Although no precise data is available for Osh, it is safe to assume that a great number of Uzbeks in the city are involved in the informal economy as many of them are employed in trade, retail, services, and crafts. Unable to find jobs in the formal economy, the informal economy became the fallback option.[118] For example, many Uzbeks became shuttle traders. Some of those traders expanded their operations by involving members of their families and traveling to other countries in Central Asia, Russia, China, and as far as South Korea. One study in 2006 found the size of the informal economy in Osh to be more than a third of the city's economy.[119]

A third strategy Uzbeks in Osh adopted to cope with economic hardship was to emigrate permanently or to seek seasonal work abroad, especially in Russia. Temporary labor migrants generally work in low-skilled occupations, including in construction, retail, services, and agriculture. The vast majority of migrant workers are young males. Remittances from migrant workers abroad are a large source of income for Uzbeks in Osh (the UNDP estimates that 31 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP is formed by remittances from abroad[120]).

The transition from a Soviet, planned economy to market economy also posed a culture shock to Uzbeks in Osh, especially those of more advanced age. Those raised on Soviet economic values prized industrial and agricultural production as the true core of economic activity, while regarding all other economic activities as less valuable, contributing little to economic wealth and even as parasitic. Thus, many Uzbeks observed with alarm the disappearance of factory jobs in the 1990s and the growing number of workers taking on jobs in trade, retail, and services. Many of these new economic activities were disparaged as ethically objectionable and even criminal. Trade, for example, was considered as the making of profit from distribution rather than the making of a product. Many Uzbeks objected to this economic system because they considered the new economic activities, especially in trade, retail, and money exchange, as incompatible with what they perceived as an Uzbek work ethic that values hard and honest work to the benefit of one's family and community.

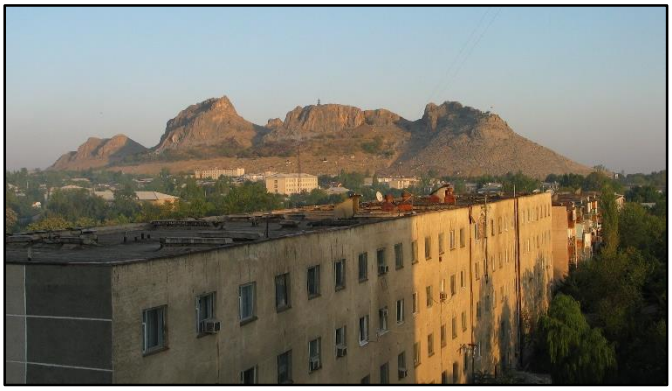
A border crossing on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border (Source: RFE/RL)

The new market economy, which was perceived as chaotic and lawless, presented a great challenge to hard-working Uzbeks. The perceived economic chaos, lack of laws, and corruption, also explain why Uzbeks favored a stronger role for the state in the economy, an enabler of growth and stability in the market. Thus many Uzbeks in Osh, especially in the 1990s, favored Uzbekistan's economic model, in which the role of the country's president was seen as vital. It must be pointed out, however, that although many Uzbeks in Osh were critical of the economic system in Kyrgyzstan, they benefitted greatly from growing demand for consumer goods, which were readily available on the market in Osh, form Uzbekistan's people. In fact, as the second wealthiest city in Kyrgyzstan, Osh owes its expanding prosperity to the free market and, above all, the flow of foreign goods passing through the city market on the way to Uzbekistan.

Social Structure

As mentioned earlier, Uzbeks in Osh comprise around 45 percent of the population in the city. Since Osh's incorporation in Kyrgyzstan, the Uzbek population has been experiencing a gradual decline in its political, social, and economic status at the expense of growing Soviet, and later Kyrgyz presence in the city. Facing this tendency, Uzbeks have responded by using their community's way of life to create and actively maintain an insulated society that carefully controls its interaction with the outside world, while trying to preserve its own culture and cohesion.

Uzbeks in Osh see themselves as a people with distinct identity and culture – community oriented, conservative, and religious. They choose to live compactly together in neighborhoods, called *mahallas*, as a way to preserve their culture and identity. The mahalla is seen as the primary site of traditional Uzbek culture. It is believed to be the only place where one can live according to the Uzbek way of life. The mahalla is the place where Uzbeks maintain traditions, including child rearing, fruit cultivation, wedding celebrations, community assistance, and strengthening family and social networks.



A typical apartment block in Osh (Source: Wikipedia)

Uzbek mahallas are starkly different from the other neighborhoods in the city. The mixed or non-Uzbek neighborhoods were built during Soviet rule and reflected the Soviet vision for its citizens. After WWII, authorities built districts with apartment buildings with sewers, plumbing, electricity, gas, and garbage collection, as well as city infrastructure, including parks, medical facilities, schools, streets, and shopping centers. These districts were designed to accommodate the city's growing workforce – mainly rural Kyrgyz – at a low cost and maximum efficiency. The Uzbeks, however, resented the new living conditions and stayed away from the districts – most turned down offers to live in the new apartments when their homes were demolished to clear space for new apartment districts. Instead, displaced Uzbeks demanded land from city authorities to build new mahallas. Land shortage, due to the city geography and topography, forced displaced Uzbeks to build the new mahallas in the city's inhospitable hilly borderland, which had previously been uninhabited. Despite Osh's severe land shortage and the lack of proper infrastructure in the mahallas, both new and old, Uzbeks continue to prefer mahalla housing to other forms. Uzbeks' persistent commitment to living in mahallas has also coincided with the gradual exodus of the limited number of non-Uzbeks living in them.

The mahalla is seen not only as the place that preserves Uzbek culture and identity, but also as a physical sanctuary. When under duress, Uzbeks retreat to their mahallas. During the 2010 riots, Uzbeks in Osh erected and manned make-shift barricades at the entrances of their mahallas in attempt to keep Kyrgyz out of their neighborhoods.

Unlike the orderly, deliberate look of Soviet-built neighborhoods, the structure of Uzbek mahallas is seemingly chaotic, with narrow and sometime unpaved streets. Rows of single- or two-floor residences reveal very little to the street, with rough, blind walls built of mud or factory brick, or the occasional window that is barred and draped. Metal gates facing the street allow passage into the property. Each residence consists of an integrated set of separate structures arranged around an outdoor courtyard. The courtyard functions as a common area for domestic activities – cooking, cleaning, socializing and resting. The courtyard also has a low wooden platform used for sitting and eating by all in the household. Unlike Kyrgyz houses, the doors and windows of the structures in the mahalla homes face the internal courtyard, rather than the street.

The mahalla's layout reflects Uzbeks' ability to hold on to traditional structures and values. For example, although the Soviets spent considerable effort to control mahalla's inhabitants – naming mahallas and streets, associating each house with a number, creating the mahalla committees, etc. – Uzbeks managed to limit the extend of Soviet control. Even today, Uzbeks are unable to tell you the official names of their mahalla and street and do not know the official address of their neighbors. Instead they use landmarks – the mahalla's mosque or the homes of people they know – to navigate the neighborhood. Mahalla inhabitants use reference points that are unknown and invisible to non-residents. Even home business are not marked by commercial signs and the outward appearance of a house where such businesses operate is indistinguishable. Yet all inhabitants of the mahallas know where these businesses are located. To outsiders, the mahallas, with its endless rows of seemingly identical homes, narrow, winding streets and cul-de-sacs, looks like a chaotic and hostile place. In fact, most non-Uzbeks rarely venture into the mahallas and warn foreigners to stay out of them. To Uzbeks, however, the mahallas are full of life and activities – a place where everyone knows everyone and little remains secret.

Tea house is a traditional Central Asian place for drinking tea and socializing (Photo: Evgeni Zotov, Flickr)

Ethnic identity

Uzbeks in Osh consider themselves distinct from the Kyrgyz in the city. The two groups speak different languages, have different histories and memories as settlers in the city, and claim to have different cultures. Yet, the categories of "Uzbek" and "Kyrgyz" were invented by the Soviet state only relatively recently, in the 1920s. Up to that point, people in Central Asia were multicultural, multi-lingual, and most individuals did not perceive themselves as belonging to a specific ethnic group or a nation. The ancestors of modern day Uzbeks and Kyrgyz did not think of themselves as "Uzbeks" and "Kyrgyz." Instead, they saw themselves as belonging to family, clan, tribe, or a region. The Soviets, however, created ethnic categories (called "nationalities") with their distinct language, culture, and history. Belonging to a specific nationality was reinforced not only through administrative policies (including the nationality in one's passport, for example), but also through education, the arts, literature, and propaganda. In the case of the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, the relatively small differences between in language, culture, and way of life (sedentary vs. nomad) were reinforced and people were encouraged to think of themselves as belonging to distinct nationalities.

Uzbeks in the city are acutely aware that they are different not only from the Kyrgyz but also from the Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, who live in another country, in a very different political, social, and economic environment, all of which inevitably influences their culture. Since independence in 1991, the differences between Osh Uzbeks and Uzbeks in Uzbekistan have only been increasing.

Kyrgyz consider Uzbeks in Osh a minority group that demands too many rights and dominates the economy at the expense of ordinary Kyrgyz. The basic premise of Kyrgyz nationalism after independence defined Kyrgyz as the dominant nationality in the state and all ethnic minorities as inferior groups. Accordingly, Kyrgyz authorities promoted Kyrgyz in most positions of power, including in multiethnic cities like Osh. As a consequence of this aggressive form of nationalism, Uzbeks feel their community is under threat by the majority Kyrgyz, the riots in 1990 and 2010 being the most striking examples of their declining fortunes in Osh. On the other hand, Uzbeks in Osh feel abandoned by Uzbekistan. Since the late 1990s, for example, Uzbekistan has maintained a tight control on its border with Kyrgyzstan, creating numerous barriers to ties between Uzbeks in Osh and Uzbekistan. In addition, Uzbekistan's leadership discouraged Uzbeks in Osh from seeking any autonomy and refused to intervene with Kyrgyzstan's leadership on their behalf. During the 2010 riots, Uzbekistan's president resisted calls for assistance and was very slow to open the border to Uzbek refugees escaping the violence in Osh. Thus, Uzbeks in Osh find themselves caught between two states, but lack a meaningful sense of belonging to either.

Refugees from Kyrgyzstan struggle to cross the steep embankment of a canal to escape into Uzbekistan (Source: EurasiaNet)

Social status

The Uzbek community in Osh is a relatively egalitarian society, without big social divides or a steep hierarchy. Walking on the streets of a mahalla, an outsider will have a hard time distinguishing between the household of a wealthy, high-status family and the one of an average family. Nevertheless, Uzbeks accord a higher social status to some members of the community. Among them, elders are especially revered as wise men providing moral direction and mediating community and family conflicts in the mahalla.

The introduction of a market economy in Osh created a class of prosperous individuals. They continued to live in the mahallas while gaining higher social status and more political power, both in the mahalla and in the city. These individuals gained respect and deference from their neighbors as they used their wealth for the betterment of the community in the form of construction projects, street repairs, tree planting, common access to water in channels, dealing with city authorities, and others. The respected elders and newly rich entrepreneurs have no means to enforce decisions, but their decisions are followed by the people in the mahalla, nonetheless. For example, people in the mahalla are mobilized every spring to clean up the street's water channels.

Ethnicity tends to affect one's social status. Uzbeks in Osh see themselves as being discriminated against by the majority in areas like employment, culture, language, and access to political power. This perceived discrimination is reinforced by the fact that Uzbeks in Osh tend to live in geographic enclaves and further isolate themselves from the rest of the city. Perceptions of discrimination grew dramatically after the riots in 2010.

Osh Uzbeks do not see themselves as a minority. They claim to have lived in the city for centuries and point out that Kyrgyz settled in the Osh only recently and have used their newly acquired political power to push Uzbeks out. Uzbeks' self-perception as a disadvantaged and discriminated against community pits them against Kyrgyz. Kyrgyz in Osh, on the other hand, see themselves as a people with a unique historical claim to the land in Kyrgyzstan, a land which was taken from them by the Russians and later the Soviets, and a land that Uzbeks now occupy and claim as their own.[121]

Religion

The overwhelming majority of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Osh are Sunni Muslims. In the 1920s, Soviet authorities initiated a forceful campaign of de-Islamization in Central Asia, a process consistent with the communist ideology's goal of creating an atheist society. The Soviets' effort to root out "Islamic traditionalism" included the forceful unveiling of women and encouraging them to join the workforce, closing Islamic schools, and destroying mosques and the religious elite. After WWII, only a small number of Muslims, mostly old men, were allowed to attend the few remaining mosques.

Uzbek men attend Friday prayers at the Mamakhan Ogly Nobijon Hajji Mosque in Osh (Source: EurasiaNet)

All mahalla mosques in Osh were destroyed or converted to other uses in the 1920s. The Soviets preserved only a few mosques in the city. After 1991, Uzbeks began to rediscover Islam – attendance in these mosques climbed and Uzbeks in mahallas began to build new ones (The weekly sermons in the mosque are delivered in the Uzbek language). Uzbeks also created informal Quran study groups and the appearance of religious devotion in everyday life increased. Eateries and food sellers in the mahallas stay closed during the fasting month. In the evenings, the local TV stations carry various kinds of Islamic programming. Although not all Uzbeks in Osh are becoming more religious, the pressure to put on a good Islamic face has increased. In contrast, Kyrgyz in Osh remain less religious than Uzbeks, perhaps reflecting their nomadic tradition.[122]

> Soviet authorities regularly engaged in the practice of destroying or repurposing religious buildings across the entire Soviet Union into food, weapons, or other supply storage, sometimes even swimming pools, in an effort to eradicate religion.

After 1991, Osh Uzbeks began to acquire Islamic knowledge in a grass-roots effort – in mahalla homes people organized regular meetings of peer groups of up to 15 members to study Islamic practices, doctrine, and Arabic. Although the imam of a local mosque generally led a group, most groups were taught by non-clerics. These meetings were widely popular after 1991, but by late 2000s the sense of communal fervor was gone. Today very few such groups continue to meet.

Family

The Uzbeks prefer a nuclear family with multiple children. Upon marriage all sons are expected to leave the house, except for the youngest son and his nuclear family who are supposed to stay with the parents and until their death, when he inherits the house. While the youngest son is expected to

remain at home, there is very little expectation of daughters providing help after marriage. Once the daughter is married, she is expected to remain at her husband's house and help her parents-in-law.

In practice, after WWII, families had had to delay the move-out of sons for years after their marriage and the birth of grandchildren. This was due to shortage of land and the cumbersome bureaucratic requirements the Soviets instituted for building new houses. After independence, bureaucratic barriers to building new homes were eased and free market housing appeared. However, land shortages persisted and in many households married sons had no choice but to delay moving out. Each house in the mahalla is now inhabited by a multigenerational household, made up of different generations living in different structures around the courtyard.

When the space runs short, the married sons and their families leave the house and build their own houses, preferably in the same neighborhood. Land shortage, however, has forced many young Uzbek families to leave their old mahallas and settle in the new mahallas in the unhospitable hills outside Osh. The dispersal of married sons to the new mahallas has left extended families weaker in comparison to earlier generations.

Gender

Uzbek culture in Osh is deeply patriarchic. In pre-Soviet Osh, mahalla houses maintained a gender division that allowed women to work away from the gaze of visiting men (that also explains why doors and windows in the mahalla houses face an inner courtyard, rather than the street). The forced Soviet modernization in Central Asia, however, moved women into the open by forcing them to join the workforce outside the mahalla.

After marriage, men continue to socialize intensively with their network of friends and acquaintances while their new wives are mostly confined to the husband's parents' house with chores and babies. Because the Soviets encouraged the employment of women outside the house, they were expected to do this in addition to their traditional house chores.

Families keep control over their children's activities, but female children come under particularly tight control, especially in their teenage years. Although allowed to go outside the mahalla on their own for work or school, they are supposed to account for any times spend outside home. Female children are also heavily involved in house chores in addition to their work or studies. The daughter and daughter-in-law are expected to serve guests in the house but usually they are not expected to converse with them.

Language

Uzbeks in Osh speak the Uzbek language, while Kyrgyz speak the Kyrgyz language. Although the two languages have some important differences, they are both are Turkic languages. When an Uzbek speaks in Uzbek and the Kyrgyz speak in Kyrgyz, they understand each other well, not only because the two languages are related but also because Osh residents grow up hearing both languages. Most Uzbeks and Kyrgyz also use the Russian language, one of the most visible legacies of the Russian, and later Soviet rule in the region. During Soviet rule, Russian language was the official language and a compulsory subject in all educational institutions. Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Osh also used their own languages including in schools, universities, and work. However, if one wanted to grow professionally, Russian was a must. Russian was especially popular among the ruling elite of the city – most of the

educated and the professionals, regardless of their ethnicity, received their education and training in Russian institutions. To this day, Russian remains the lingua franca in Osh.

Until the riots in 2010, the population of Osh managed to maintain a balance in the use of languages in the city, without much conflict. Most people did not object to the use of the three main languages – Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Russian. For example, the city's main independent TV station, OshTV, broadcasted in all three languages. In one segment, a TV anchor could be reading in Kyrgyz, in the next a TV corresponded in Uzbek, and then an interview was conducted in Russian, all without subtitles or interpretations. Almost all TV viewers could understand all three languages.

The marginalization of Uzbek and the expansion of Kyrgyz in Osh were gradual and subtle. Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991 marked the beginning of the shift in language use in the city. Kyrgyzstan increasingly promoted the study and use of Kyrgyz, while keeping Russian as an official language. The study and use of Uzbek, however, faced numerous obstacles. Authorities increasingly financed Kyrgyz schools, while decreasing funding for Uzbek schools. Kyrgyz-language classes in school became compulsory for all children regardless of ethnicity and Kyrgyz also became a requirement for state and city jobs. Uzbeks increasingly felt their language marginalized in the city.[123] The decline of city and state support to Uzbek schools was also a part of a general trend of diminishing resources devoted to Uzbek cultural institutions, including theaters, cultural centers, Uzbek-language media, and others. The decline of the use of Uzbek language in Osh accelerated after the 2010 riots – many Uzbek schools closed, the most popular Uzbek-language TV station was transferred into Kyrgyz hands, and Uzbek-language print media disappeared.[124]

Political Structure

The nature of political structure in Osh's Uzbek culture is influenced to a great extent by Central Asia's changing political fortunes. Central Asia's integration in the Russian Empire in the 19th century began the political transformation of the region, a process that was dramatically accelerated with the establishment of the Soviet rule. The Soviets imposed a political structure dominated by the Communist party. All decisions – political, economic, and social – were made by communist party functionaries appointed by the higher communist leadership in Moscow. Many of the appointed leaders were not locals; one of the ways the Soviets kept control over faraway places in Central Asia was to appoint outsiders, who pledged loyalty to their political masters in Moscow, rather than to local interests.

The communist party organization in Osh operated in a very hierarchical manner – a city party committee at the top controlled party cells throughout the city. Party cells operated in all institutions, including factories, universities, schools, collective farms, and others. Authorities also established neighborhood committees (called *mahalkom*), which included Uzbek mahallas, that were attached to a Communist party cell. These neighborhood committees were based on a traditional Uzbek form of community self-government, and thus represented a Soviet attempt to co-opt a traditional political structure to rule the mahallas. Mahalla committees acted as intermediaries between a mahalla's inhabitants and the state, issuing city and state papers to residents (a new building permit, for example) and keeping tabs on their activities. Committees organized lectures on communist ideology for mahalla residents, and reported its activities to a district executive committee. Each mahalla committee had sub-committees dealing with specific issues – women, veterans, families, or celebrations.

In addition to co-opting the mahalla committees, authorities reorganized the city for the purpose of administering its affairs and controlling its citizens. For the first time, mahallas were named and assigned specific boundaries. Mahalla streets, too, were named, and houses were assigned individual addresses. In other words, individuals and households became associated with a specific location so that they could be counted, controlled, or otherwise held accountable to the state.

In addition to creating a new power structure in Osh, Soviet rule also gradually transformed the ethnic composition of the power elite in the city. Along with the ethnic Russians and others from the European part of the Soviet Union who moved to Osh to take on managerial and administrative jobs, the city witnessed a massive influx of Kyrgyz. In accordance with Soviet policy to promote local nationals to leadership positions, Kyrgyz gradually joined the city's elite, in effect gradually eroding Uzbeks' access to power.

Political structure since independence

Although Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan have not created their own political party since Kyrgyzstan's independence, they have managed to win seats in consecutive elections for the national parliament. However, the number of ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan's parliament has always been smaller than Uzbeks' share of the country's population. Since 1991, Uzbeks have also occupied only a limited number of senior positions in government at all levels, including in the executive and judiciary branches, as well as the local governments.[125] Similarly, the formal political representation of Uzbeks in Osh has not reflected their numbers in the city – since independence, ethnic Kyrgyz have managed to dominate the city's formal political structure despite having a share of the population comparable to that of the Uzbeks. The fact that the city government is Kyrgyz-run means that municipal resources, including land, water, and electricity – always in short supply in Osh – go first to Kyrgyz neighborhoods, rather than to Uzbek mahallas.

Uzbeks in Osh who manage to hold positions of power, either at the local or national level, do so by combining formal with informal instruments of power.[126] Those leaders are elected or appointed to local and national positions of authority, a process facilitated by the ruling Kyrgyz elite which sees them as useful in "controlling" the Uzbek minority. In addition to their formal authorities, these leaders win the loyalty of Uzbeks in Osh by providing benefits – jobs, social services, favors – to Uzbeks. In other words, Uzbek leaders in Osh develop patronage networks by buying the loyalty of Uzbeks in the city. One of the reasons Uzbeks seek the help and assistance directly from Uzbeks in power positions is because of the weakness of the state and its overwhelming domination by ethnic Kyrgyz, including state and city governments and institutions, in Kyrgyzstan. State and city governments have ineffective and corrupt institutions; politically connected Uzbeks, however, are able to deliver where the formal institutions fail.

Since independence, Uzbeks in Osh have consistently considered the state as weak and ineffective, both at national and local level. For example, at the local level, Kyrgyz authorities preserved mahalla committees as an element of the formal political structure. However, Uzbeks increasingly marginalized the committees and did not seek them unless on the rare occasion of a need for official documents. Instead, Uzbeks resorted to reviving the informal power structure that had governed life in the mahallas. Although forced to deal with formal authorities at local, city, and national level, Uzbeks always have the option of seeking informal access to power-holders, in most cases ethnic Uzbeks themselves.

According to the Operational Culture General lesson, authority does not always equal power. In the case of political structure in Osh's Uzbek community, however, authority does equal power. The Uzbek holders of political and administrative offices at the city and national level are also the most powerful individuals.

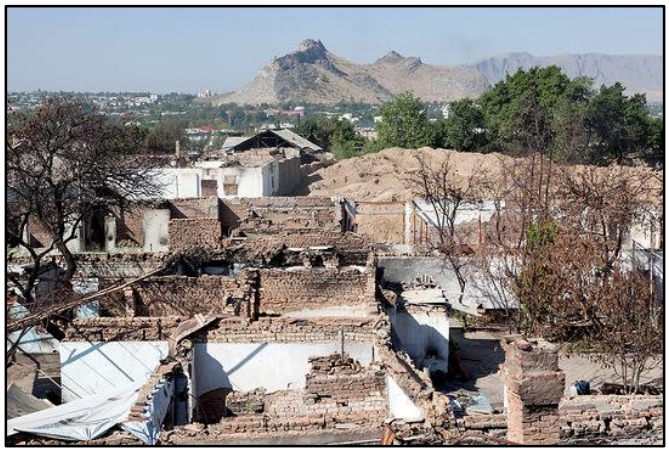
The question of autonomy

Uzbek woman casts a vote in the 2011 presidential elections in Osh (Source: EurasiaNet)

Uzbeks in Osh are acutely aware of their diminishing influence in the city and resent the Kyrgyz' growing presence and power in the city. However, they are also very reluctant to demand more autonomy within Kyrgyzstan, as any such calls have been few and far between. In 1990, an unofficial Uzbek organization called *Adolat* (Justice) emerged and made demands for Osh's autonomy within Kyrgyz SSR. Other members of the Uzbek community went as far as to call for the transfer of the city to Uzbek SSR. These calls, however, were resisted not only by Kyrgyz authorities, but also by the leadership of the Uzbek SSR. After Kyrgyzstan became independent, Uzbeks in Osh resisted making demands for cession or autonomy and instead sought incremental improvements in their community's rights and freedoms. In addition, Uzbekistan's president, Islam Karimov, actively discouraged Uzbeks in Osh from changing the city's status.

In the 2010s Kyrgyz nationalist leaders in Osh argued that local Uzbeks were seeking to secede from Kyrgyzstan and join Uzbekistan. Exploiting the economic and social hardships faced by the city's Kyrgyz, they insisted that Uzbeks needed to accept their inferior place in Osh. These themes appealed to Kyrgyz citizens and many of them, especially the young and unemployed, were mobilized for action. Thus Kyrgyz nationalists exploited ethnic differences to rally people and gain more power.[127]

Political structure after the 2010 riots



Heavily damaged houses in Uzbek mahalla near Sulaiman-Too (Source: EurasiaNet)

The riots in 2010 increased the political marginalization of Uzbeks in Osh. Thousands left the city and those who remained became reluctant to participate in political life for fear of being targeted.[128] Kyrgyzstan has also experienced a rise in Kyrgyz nationalism, which targets Uzbeks as a potential threat to the state.[129] This tendency perpetuates the challenge Uzbeks face when they attempt to attain formal positions of power both on national level and in Osh. Uzbeks in Osh are increasingly resorting to an informal structure of power as a way to address their interests.

Belief System

Uzbeks in Osh long for a mythic, pre-Soviet, pristine Uzbek culture, which for them includes respect for elders, concern for the communal good, proper behavior among women, honesty, hard work, and industriousness. They blame Soviet rule for the erosion of traditional values and strive to restore them. Uzbeks see the mahalla not only as the place that resisted the onslaught of the Soviet state against Uzbek culture, but also the place where this culture can be restored.

One of the key concepts in understanding the belief system of Uzbeks in Osh is *tarbiya*, which refers to a person's upbringing, training, and discipline and that has a moral and religious connotation. Uzbeks believe that the mahalla, with its close-knit community, provides the only proper environment for the growth of moral and ethical individuals and community. Elders in the community serve as the guiding authority, overseeing its moral direction, mediating conflicts, and correcting transgressions. An individual's proper education, socialization, and personal growth are seen as responsibility not only of the nuclear family, but also of the whole community in the mahalla. Under tarbiya, the community is responsible for everyone, and everyone is accountable in turn to the community. Elders in the mahalla, for example, can ask an individual to either stop a certain behavior or leave the neighborhood for good if his or her behavior is deemed immoral. Another way inhabitants maintain the cohesion of the community and its moral code is to not sell property in mahalla to unrelated individuals. When a house goes up for sale in the mahalla, it is normal for neighbors to have a say in who is allowed to buy the house. Following the renewed interest in Islam, Uzbeks infuse tarbiya with a religious connotation. For example, in their effort to reverse the growing pollution in the mahalla, many argue that polluting the waters in the channels ought to be considered a sin.

It must be pointed out that tarbiya does not apply to the mahalla's community only. Just like the elders in the mahalla, the state is often seen as one of the authorities with responsibility for overseeing the growth of a moral and ethical society. The state must be responsible for setting the right conditions for political, social, and economic development for the benefit of all its citizens.

Uzbeks' notion of tarbiya notwithstanding, they recognize that the mahalla community has yet to achieve the desired moral and ethical goals. Many Uzbeks point out that members of the community fail in this regard. They cite a lack of respect for elders, alcohol consumption, deviations from what they consider proper Uzbek norms, especially among the youth. Those same Uzbeks, though, blame Soviet rule for the current failings of the community as well as the weakness of the Kyrgyz state, which allows for chaos, corruption, and the lack of proper direction for the society.

Although members of the Uzbek community can clearly articulate what they consider to be the proper Uzbek norms, beliefs, and behavior, there are signs that those are not universally accepted by all Uzbeks in Osh. Many Uzbeks find mahalla's way of life too conservative and oppressive. As a result, many either move out of the mahalla and settle in other parts of the city, or develop human connections and activities outside the neighborhood where they live. Most of the disillusioned are women, young men, the Russian-educated, the divorced, and socially progressive individuals.

Variation in beliefs and behaviors

Generally speaking, Uzbeks in Osh live in a physical isolation and cultural alienation from the rest of the city and Kyrgyzstan. This has contributed to a consolidation of local identity and beliefs. Uzbeks in Osh also display relatively limited variations in beliefs.

What accounts for the relatively limited variations in beliefs among Uzbeks in Osh compared to the rest of society in Kyrgyzstan is its physical isolation from the rest of the city, its shared history and memories, and its strong ethnic identity.

Since 1991, Uzbeks in Osh have been experiencing great changes that have affected people's beliefs and behaviors. For example, economic changes have forced individuals to become more self-reliant and less reliant on the state for goods and services. In addition, with the collapse of the local economy thousands were left unemployed, which forced a significant number of people to move abroad in search of jobs, prompting many women and elderly people to take on more economic and social responsibilities.

Another reason for the limited variations in beliefs and behaviors among the Uzbeks in Osh is that those who do not share the perceived proper set of beliefs stay out of the mahalla. Some Uzbeks, who find the prevailing values and beliefs in the mahalla too oppressive or too different from their own simply leave the neighborhood and settle elsewhere in the city. Others leave because their behavior is considered unacceptable in the mahalla and they are pressured to move out by their neighbors.

Conclusion

You might have noticed that the case study does not include all, or even many, of the concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General document. This is only natural; a comprehensive body of literature devoted to the study of a single culture is rare. In fact, Marines are frequently called upon to operate in areas where current information on local culture is scarce. What the OCG and the chapters in this document do is help Marines learn about their assigned region and acquire skills and concepts that will assist them in operating effectively in complex cross-cultural situations in any part of the globe when information is scarce or rapidly changing.

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