

and political problems. And they share a specific geopolitical space, poorly organized and fractured by potential conflict within and ringed by potentially competitive powerful states. All four of these shared characteristics that have important implications for regional security.

THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION

A. The Historical Legacy and the Problem of Identity

At the root of many of the political insecurities of the new states of Central Asia is the fact that none has ever in its history existed as an independent state. Historically, the communities of the region were either rudimentarily organized (as with the nomadic Kazakhs and the mountain Kyrgyz), were parts of contiguous empires (viz. the long history of Persian control or influence over Samarkand and Bukhara and the four hundred year Russian occupation of Northern Kazakhstan), or were organized into states the borders of which bear little resemblance to the current territorial dispensation (as with the Emirate of Bukhara).

None of the titular nationalities in the region have a nation state tradition. In some instances, distinctions between them have been weak.⁶ Traditional identities, consequently, are narrower and localistic, based on village, region, clan, or extended family. Prior to the Soviet era, the identities of "Uzbek", "Kazakh", or "Kyrgyz" meant little to the communities of the region.

Soviet nationalities policy did little to promote national consolidation. The Soviet territorial dispensation in Central Asia was arbitrary, leaving large populations of "Uzbeks" in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tadzhikistan, or of "Kazakhs" in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and so on. The border delineations of northern Kazakhstan left a much larger population of Russians in the republic than would otherwise have been the case.

Such actions were deliberate. Russian Turkestan was carved up into pieces in order to prevent the coalescence of any broad turkic identity. The Soviet government encouraged the national cultural development of the dominant nationalities in order that this shattering of turkic identity become fixed. They drew the borders in such a way as to ensure tension between the republics over traditional lands and places.

⁶ For example, until 1926, Kazakh and Kyrgyz were considered one language. See Ronald Wixman, The Peoples of the USSR: An Ethnographic Handbook (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1988), p.108.