



# The Russian-Soviet legacies in reshaping the national territories in Central Asia: A catastrophic case of Tajikistan



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## ABSTRACT

In every period of history many parts and territories of the world divide and get a new shape. There are lots of such examples. One clear example is the so-called 'Grate Game' and division of Central Asia by the British and Russian Empires. In general, Central Asian region has been under Russian influence for more than 150 years. Today in the 21st century Central Asia once again is facing a new 'Great Game', but this time with new and non-traditional powers in the region like the U.S. and China, which challenge the influence of region's traditional power – Russia. This paper tries to touch upon the situation and the tragic fate of Tajiks during the Russian-Soviet empires within the different political entities, administrations and territories. It analyzes the impact of Russian and Soviet legacies and territorial policies on Tajiks and Tajikistan. According to the findings of this paper, most of the previous Western and other foreign authors occasionally and briefly opine about this topic, especially about the catastrophic impact of the Russian and Soviet territorial legacies to the Tajik nation, in their work mainly focusing on the history of Central Asia. The paper draws together the main conclusions of relevant literature and tries to fill the gap within the body of existing literature and understandings concerning the topic.

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## 1. Introduction

Today's Republic of Tajikistan was a part of historical-geographical areas of Khurasan and Mawarannahr.<sup>1</sup> Tajiks are the only national group of Aryan and Persian (Iranian) descendants in a predominantly Turko-Mongol environment in Central Asia. Tajiks are characterized by different scholars and sources as following: 'Tajiks, an Aryan people were the first to settle in Central Asia'

(*Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, Vol. 5, 2002, p.395), 'the earliest known inhabitants of Central Asia' (Becker, 2004, p.5; Sengupta, 2003, p.57), 'the oldest settled population of Central Asia' (Masov, 2003, p.15), 'the oldest aborigine of the region' (Masov, 2003, p.15); the 'only autochthonous people' (Mamadaliyev, 2013) and "the most ancient and civilized people of Central Asia (Mamadaliyev, 2013); 'the oldest inhabitants of this region' (Abdullaev & Akbarzadeh, 2010, p.1); 'indigenous inhabitants' (Peimani, 1998, p.44) and original Iranian inhabitants and population of Central Asia (*Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, Vol. 5, 2002, p.404; Peimani, 1998, p.44), etc. Russian orientalist Piotrovskiy recognizes and describes the history of Tajiks as "the highest civilization on the 'Silk Road' in a time, when the

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<sup>1</sup> Called *Transoxiana* by Greeks and *Turkestan* by Russians.

ancestors of Russians still didn't show themselves by anything" (Piotrovskiy, 2013). The Soviet leader Stalin also has expressed his opinion about the Tajiks: "Tajiks are the special nation. They are not Uzbeks, not Kazakhs, not Kyrgyzs. They are Tajiks, the most ancient nation of Central Asia. Tajik means a holder of crown, as they were called by Iranians and the Tajiks proved it. Among all non-Russian Muslim people in the territory of the USSR, the Tajiks are the only non-Turk, an Iranian nation" (quoted in Masov, 2005, p.152; Nevezhin, 2003, p.272).

Tajiks had their last state of Tajik (Persian) origin of Samani empire during 9th-10th centuries with capital city Bukhara. The Samani empire ruled much of today's Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and other areas. During the era of Samani empire, the process of the formation of Tajik people completed. Since then for ten centuries until the conquest of Russian and Soviet empires in 19th and 20th centuries, Central Asia was mainly ruled by the nomadic Turko-Mongol tribes and dynasties. But, in all those Turko-Mongol kingdoms the Persian language and culture remained to play a key role. Tajiks, until the independence of Tajikistan in 1991 from the USSR, included in the following empires, dynasties, kingdoms, states, etc.:

- (1). Pre-Islamic period – 1. Persia's Achaemenid Empire (the First Persian Empire), 550-330 BCE (Capital: Pasargadae, Ecbatana, Persepolis, Susa, Babylon); 2. Seleucid Empire (Greek-Macedonian Hellenistic state), 312 BC-250 BC (Capital: Seleucia on the Tigris (305-240 BC) & Antioch (240-64 BC)); 3. Greece-Bactrian Kingdom, 250 BC-140 BC (Capital: Balkh, Alexandria on the Oxus. Included Bactria and Sogdiana in Central Asia); 4. Kushan Empire, 30 BC-410 AD (Capital: Bagram, Peshawar, Taxila, Mathura); 5. Parthian Empire (Ashkoniyon), 247 BC–224 AD (Capital: Asaak (Iran), Hecatompylos (Iran), Amol (Iran), Ecbatana (Iran), Ctesiphon (Iraq), Susa (Iran), Mithridatkird-Nisa (Turkmenistan)); 6. Sasanid Empire (Sosoniyon) (the last pre-Islamic Persian Empire), 224-651 (Capital: Ctesiphon (Iraq)); 7. Hephthalite Empire (Haytoliyon), 450-567 (Capital: Kunduz (Badian), Balkh (Baktra), Sialkot (Sakala).
- (2). Islamic period – 1. Ummayyad Caliphate, 671-750 (Capital: Damascus); 2. Abbasid Caliphate, 750-875 (Capital: Kufa, Baghdad, Ar-Raqqah); 3. Tahirid Dynasty (Persian origin), 821-873 (Capital: Marv, Nishapur); 4. Saffarid Dynasty, 873-900 (Capital: Zaranj); 5. Samanid Empire, 875-999 (Capital: Bukhara, Balkh); 6. Ghaznavid Dynasty, 998-1186 (Capital: Ghazna, Lahore); 7. Qarakhanid Dynasty, 1005-1212 (Capital: Balasagun, Kashgar, Samarqand); 8. Shansabani/Ghurid Dynasty, unclear date-1215 (Capital: Firuzkuh, Ghur, Ghazna); 9. Great Seljuk Empire, 1040-1157 (Capital: Nishapur, Isfahan, Hamadan, Marv (Merv)); 10. Khwarazmian Dynasty, 1162-1221 (Capital: Gurganj, Samarqand, Ghazna, Tabriz); 11. Mongol Empire, 1221-1359; 12. Temurid Dynasty, 1370-1507 (Capital: Samarqand, Herat); 13. Shaybanids, 1501-1599 (Appanages: Balkh, Bukhara, Samarqand, Khwarasm, etc.);

14. Ashtarkhanids, 1599-1753 (Capital: Bukhara); 15. Manghits, 1753-1920 (Capital: Bukhara).
- (3). Modern period: 1. Turkistan<sup>2</sup> Governor-Generalship of Tsarist Russia, 1867-1918 (Capital: Tashkent); 2. Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, 1918–1924 (Capital: Tashkent); 3. Bukhara People's Soviet Republic, 1920-1924 (Capital: Bukhara); 4. Tajikistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Uzbek SSR, 1924–1929 (Capital: Dushanbe); 5. Tajikistan Soviet Socialist Republic within the USSR, 1929–1991 (Capital: Dushanbe); 6. Republic of Tajikistan, 1991–present.

There were three states in Central Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the Bukhara Emirate, Khiva Khanate and Kokand Khanate (Keller, 2001, p.5; Roudik, 2007, pp.67, 72). These states-kingdoms were not established according to national principle. Various ethnicities and nationalities of the modern Central Asian republics lived in those kingdoms. Most of the territories of the modern Tajikistan were included in Bukhara Emirate and a small part in Kokand Khanate. Among these kingdoms the Bukhara Emirate was the biggest.

The Russian Empire paid more attention to Central Asia from the mid-nineteenth century. As Pierce points out, "The Russian movement into Central Asia in the nineteenth century was a late phase in an expansion already in progress over several centuries" (Pierce, 1960, p.17). In 1858 the Asian Department of the Russian foreign ministry sent three missions (Kudryavtsev, 2002, pp.572–574) to Central Asia, officially called "scientific expeditions" to East Iran (Khurasan) and Herat (Afghanistan) headed by N.V. Khanikov, to East Turkistan headed by Ch.Ch. Valikhanov, and a diplomatic embassy to Khiva and Bukhara headed by N.P. Ignatev (Akdes, 1980, pp.503–523; Becker, 2004, p.12) with the purpose of becoming familiar with the region, facilitate its future conquest and "to help Saint Petersburg to work out the measures of future resistance to England's influence in the region ..." (Andreev, 1999). Soon, Central Asia was conquered by the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In March 1863 the Emperor of Russia Alexander II approved the decree of the Special Committee on conducting military actions in Central Asia – in Kokand and Khiva Khanates and Bukhara Emirates (Andreev, 1999). In order to appease the European governments (first of all the British) the Russian Foreign Minister Prince Alexander Gorchakov wrote and addressed to powers a historical circular (Bokiev, 1994, p.14; Becker, 2004, pp.14–15; Glushenko, 2000, p.17; Karrer d'Ankos & Bogatyrenko, 2006, p.28; Keller, 2001, p.5; Namazova, 1995, p.119; Pierce, 1960, p.20; Roudik, 2007, p.73) a justification for Russian advance in Central Asia, which was sent on 21 November 1864 to all Russian ambassadors to foreign countries (Shirokorad, 2003, p.96). The circular highlighted Russia's mission for the safety of its borders and trade relations and also to civilize the "half-savage vagrant people" (Andreev, 1999) of Central Asia, whose "wild and violent

<sup>2</sup> Also spelled as *Turkestan*.

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