
KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN LIKELY TO SIGN BORDER TREATY SOON TO AVOID WORSE PROBLEMS

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Nearly 30 years after the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), many former Soviet states are still struggling to deal with the delimitation and demarcation of their borders. In the cases involving Armenia and Azerbaijan or Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (see EDM, January 28), in particular, this issue has involved regular and often-large scale ethno-national violence. Yet, most of these unresolved border struggles have taken place without much attention from Moscow or the West. Collectively, those conflicts highlight a general failure by all sides and outside observers to appreciate just how difficult this process has been due to the nature of these young republics Soviet inheritance. Even if all parties to any such border disagreement are committed to avoiding conflict and finding a resolution, working through these issues will continue to be difficult.

In large part, the pattern of border disputes across the post-Soviet space reflects three widely held views, all of which are wrong. First, many in Moscow and even more in the West have forgotten how often republic borders were changed throughout the course of Soviet history. They were shifted a minimum of 200 times, sometimes involving large territories (such as the shift of Karakalpakistan from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to Uzbekistan), often angering those who lost control of those lands and whetting the appetite of the winners for even more (Paul Goble, Can Republic Borders Be Changed? RFE/RL Report on the USSR, September 28, 1990).

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