
RUSSIAN RHETORIC TOWARD CENTRAL ASIA GROWS INCREASINGLY HOSTILE

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On January 23, Russian historian Mikhail Smolin stated that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan did not exist as nations before the 1917 October Revolution while appearing on the set of the Mestro Vstrechi talk show on Russias NTV channel. Commenting on the history of Central Asian states, Smolin explained that Kazakhstan was originally part of Russia, and Uzbekistan was created from several Central Asian peoples by the Soviet authorities (Anhor.uz, January 23).

Smolins scandalous remarks became the latest example of Russias increasingly hostile rhetoric toward the Central Asian countries. Moscow has employed this rhetoric since the start of the war in Ukraine. These statements resemble those used against Ukraine before its invasion, denying the regional states history and agency as sovereign states, threatening invasion and annexation, and accusing them of pursuing policies aimed at discriminating against ethnic Russians.

The Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have a long-standing common history with Russia. The region came under the Russian Empires control in the 19th century and then became part of the Soviet Union, gaining independence only in 1991. Even after the regional states became independent, the Kremlin viewed them as part of its backyard. Moscow claimed for itself the exclusive right to influence the region, which limited Central Asias political, security, and economic engagement with other regional and global actors.

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