Title
Soviet Simulacrum: The Almaty Metro and Kazakh Independence

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The Almaty Metro and Kazakh Independence

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ABSTRACT

Kazakhstan has spent much of its newfound independence searching for an identity destroyed and warped by decades of Russian influence. This tension is represented in the physical form via the Almaty Metro. The Metro in the former capital and largest city in Kazakhstan serves as a powerful symbol and microcosm for how Russian cultural influences still manifest themselves in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Opened twenty years after the collapse of the USSR, the Almaty Metro maintains striking visual and operational similarity to its Soviet counterparts. Previous scholars such as Beissinger, Stefany, and Jenks[1] have discussed both the relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia in the Soviet period as well as the symbolic importance of the Moscow Metro, but none have examined the continuity of such relationships and symbols through the lens of post-Soviet infrastructure in Kazakhstan. Metros hold a particular importance in the post-Soviet world for both what they are and what they represent. Seeing as the Almaty Metro was the second metro opened since the fall of the USSR, and the first outside of Russia, the product and the process of the Metro provides valuable insight to Kazakhstan's political motivations and continued path of independence. This thesis examines Soviet urban planning, the history of Kazakhstan, an analysis of the construction and design of the Almaty Metro and uses each of these elements to better understand each other.

[1] Mark R. Beissinger, "Soviet Empire as "Family Resemblance'','' *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006): 294–303, https://doi.org/10.2307/4148594; Michael G Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," n.d., 279; Andrew L Jenks, "A Metro on the Mount: The Underground as a Church of Soviet Civilization," *Technology and Culture* 41, no. 4 (2000): 697–724, https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2000.0160.

INTRODUCTION

In December of 2011, Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city and former capital, opened the first line of its metro system. While the Metro was new, it also had significant architectural and operational callbacks to metro systems designed by the former government of Kazakhstan, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or USSR. Kazakhstan had been independent of the Soviet Union for twenty years to the month by the time that the Almaty Metro opened, yet to anyone familiar with the layout and design of Soviet Metros, it seemed to fit well within the canon.

The question of Kazakh independence is a difficult concept, for which the lens of postcolonialism seems inadequate. Is a nation that still speaks the language of the colonizer, has the colonizer as its largest trade partner, and continues to use and create a built environment according to the colonizer's standards truly independent? On the other hand, does it matter? Are these things incidental to daily life and kept for their ease of use, with not enough influence to be worth changing? Even the lens of postcolonialism is difficult to use fully, as it is still debatable whether the USSR engaged in colonialism in Kazakhstan, and to what extent such actions can be compared to other colonial histories.

This is precisely why the case of the Almaty Metro is so compelling, the physical space of the Metro, as well the story behind it, can tell us more about the complex nature of the relationship between Kazakhs and Russians over the course of multiple decades, governments, and revolutions. In this sense, the Metro serves as a primary source in and of itself, a permanent and highly visible statement on this complex relationship. More so, the Metro's highly expensive and technically complicated nature requires careful decision-making. Nothing is an accident, and few things are a coincidence with a project of this size and scale. The final product and all its

implications are the deliberate result of multiple intentional decisions made in an independent Kazakhstan.

This thesis is hampered by its understanding of the Almaty and the historical context by a couple of key factors. First, I can only read Russian at an elementary level, and have no knowledge of Kazakh. This has made utilizations of primary sources extremely difficult. In addition, such primary sources can be difficult to obtain outside of physical archives which are located thousands of miles away, not accessible due to both budgetary reasons and the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, since metro systems in the USSR were considered military installations, finding technical documents like station plans can be more difficult than usual. In addition to the primary source language barrier, there is also many barriers to secondary sources. Within English-speaking academia, there is very little focus on Kazakhstan and even less on Almaty. A decent amount of this thesis relies on primary online sources based in Kazakhstan, and nearly all of them would be unavailable to access without the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine. Even in the course of writing this thesis, sources that were hosted on their original site while doing preliminary research had gone offline by the time I started editing, and entirely inaccessible without the Wayback Machine.

In addition, there are some key terms that may change when describing the same or similar things. The dominant language in Almaty has shifted a couple of times throughout its history, always politically motivated, and twice in a non-Latin script. This has led to some debate and some change as to how to spell certain relevant words. The first and most common is Almaty, the city was previously known by its Russian name Alma-Ata, and throughout the thesis the latter spelling will be used within quotations from primary sources. In addition, the name of Kazakhstan has shifted a couple of times. Whilst a member of the USSR, it was formally the

Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, or KSSR. Since independence, the country has been known as the Republic of Kazakhstan or simply, Kazakhstan. In recent years the government has been making a push to use the Kazakh-language spelling Qazaqstan[2]. Since this push has had very little weight to it[3], and most news outlets both foreign and domestic continue to write Kazakhstan, for the purposes of this thesis, the traditional spelling will be used. The USSR, or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, is another acronym for which Soviet is interchangeable for the purposes of this thesis. Any references to World War II will use the Russian/Soviet/Kazakh denomination of Great Patriotic War. Additionally, for the purposes of this thesis, Kazakh will refer to anyone of Kazakh nationality regardless of ethnicity. If the person or groups' ethnicity is of particular importance, then it will be specified. There are also two sections that deal with current events in Almaty and Kyiv, these sections are accurate as of the time of this writing, but as they are ongoing situations, they may become outdated in the future.

This thesis uses the Metro as a through line between multiple points in history, from Russian Imperial, to Soviet, to independence, as well as examining the different ideologies and policies from each of those time periods in both how they relate to the Metro, but also to the modern Kazakh state. Using a something so common, like a metro system, as a lens to understand incredibly complex and controversial geopolitical and cultural relationships may seem like an exercise in overthinking, but it is precisely the commonality of public transportation that allows us to view the unique qualities of the Almaty Metro's as reflections of broader historical themes.

[2] Microsoft Word also does not recognize this spelling as legitimate.

[3] There has been no discussion in the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Place Names put forth by Kazakhstan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Brief History of Kazakhstan

While academic and popular parlance equates Russia with the USSR, the Soviet Union was internationalist from the start. As Perry Anderson notes, it was "the first and only state in history to include no national or territorial reference in its name".[4] Much of the USSR's vast territory was located thousands of miles away from Moscow in the five Central Asian republics: Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. While the USSR's government was based in Moscow, and its territory largely overlapped with the Russian Empire's, the USSR as a government as well as its citizens should not be conflated with being entirely Russian. These territories, and others in Eastern Europe, were of vital importance economically, militarily, and politically to the USSR, though the vast diversity of peoples and geographies also proved to be difficult to manage under a central government in Moscow.

Figure 1. Political Map of modern-day Kazakhstan and its neighbors.

The Kazakh Steppe had been home to a variety of nomadic tribes for centuries. The word Kazakh can be traced to the Turkish word *Kazak* which can be interpreted as "nomad".[5] Kazakhs

[4] Perry Anderson, "Internationalism: A Breviary," *New Left Review*, no. 14 (April 1, 2002).

[5] "The Etymology of the Word 'Kazakh,'" accessed March 3, 2022, https://e-history.kz/en/news/show/8347/.

are a Turkic people group, and the Kazakh language belongs to the Turkic language group. According to legend, the Kazakh people are descended from 300 warriors,[6] also known as sons of the mythical Alash who left their ancient homeland and eventually settled in the steppe. These warriors are the basis of the major nomadic tribal divisions.[7]

These modern nomadic tribes were introduced to Islam in the 7th century, though as Saniya Edelbay notes, the religion never took root to the same extent as in the more sedentary Central Asian nations like Uzbekistan,[8] and tribal culture remained strong. When the Kazakh Steppe was absorbed into the Russian empire, many of its residents remained nomadic and the Russian influence remained minimal.[9] Though as the 19th century turned to the 20th, the Russian Empire began creeping more and more into nomadic Kazakhs lives, and tensions between the two groups were increasing.[10] 1.5 million Slavic settlers moved into the northern Kazakh steppe between 1896 and 1916,[11] which would be the first of several major attempts to import Slavs into the Kazakh Steppe.

After the October Revolution, what would become Kazakhstan underwent a significant amount of political and territorial changes. The Central Asian portion of the Russian Empire did eventually become a part of the USSR, but the transition was by no means a seamless one. Since the turn of the century, there were multiple communist,[12] nationalist, pan-Turkic, and pan-

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[6] Called "dzhigits".

[7] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 15.

[8] Saniya Edelbay, "Traditional Kazakh Culture and Islam," *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 3, no. 11 (2012): 122–33.

[9] Adeeb Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective," *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006): 236, https://doi.org/10.2307/4148591.

[10] Alun Thomas, *Nomads and Soviet Rule: Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 7–8.

[11] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 19.

[12] "The Idea of Muslim National Communism: On Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev," Viewpoint Magazine, March 23, 2015, https://viewpointmag.com/2015/03/23/the-idea-of-muslim-national-communism-on-mirsaid-sultan-galiev/.

Islamic movements attempting to create independent nation-states in Central Asia.[13] The most notable of these attempts was the Alash Orda, who ran the self-proclaimed Alash Autonomy from 1917-1920.[14] As the 19th century progressed, the Russian Empire began operating in more blatant and brutal forms of colonialism in the Kazakh steppe, the massive amount of ethnic Russians brought into Kazakhstan under the Tsar brought with them "Tsarist agrarian policies, mass expropriation of Kazakh lands for the newcomers, and increasing impoverishment of the masses".[15] This sudden and violent influx of ethnic Russians prompted an exploration into national liberation among Kazakh elites.

The Alash Orda was formed[16] as a political movement to protect and preserve "Kazakhness", with its capital in Alash-Kala (now known as Semipalatinsk) in the eastern portion of the country.[17] The Alash movement took many moderate political stances,[18] and after taking power in Kazakhstan shortly after the 1917 revolution, briefly aligned with the White Army. Near what would be the end of the Alash Orda's rule, the movement sided with the Bolsheviks largely due to the revolutionaries' nationalities policy.[19] After initially suffering major defeats to, and later being absorbed by the Bolsheviks, the Alash Orda, along with any serious hope for a Kazakh independence for decades to come, were dissolved.[20]

The Bolshevik government, while ostensibly supporting the right to self-determination of the hundreds of ethnicities within the USSR, continued many Tsarist trends in Kazakhstan,

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[13] Thomas, *Nomads and Soviet Rule: Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin*, 11.

[14] Alima Auanasova et al., "The History of the Alash Party in the Context of the Impact on the Processes of Constitutional Acts," *Ancient Asia* 12, no. 0 (August 24, 2021): 14, https://doi.org/10.5334/aa.234.

[15] Mambet Koigeldiev, "The Alash Movement and the Soviet Government: A Difference of Positions," n.d., 156, https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no14_ses/06_koigeldiev.pdf.

[16] With its capital in Semipalatinsk, not Almaty.

[17] "The 'Alash' Party and Its Contribution to Kazakh Identity," accessed January 17, 2022, https://abaicenter.com.

[18] Koigeldiev, "The Alash Movement and the Soviet Government: A Difference of Positions," 159.

[19] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 19.

[20] "The 'Alash' Party and Its Contribution to Kazakh Identity."

including the decline of the population of ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan. In 1925, after the Bolsheviks had taken control of the steppe, only 58 percent of the republic were ethnic Kazakhs, compared to 81 percent in the Tsarist era.[21] After the Red Army defeated the White in the Russian Civil War, the new Bolshevik government formed a series of Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics, which were part of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, until Kazakhstan received full republic status. Once the area received full republic status in 1936, it became known as the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR), with its capital in Alma-Ata. The city was on the receiving end of many developments during the Soviet period, as was the case across the Union in provincial capitals such as Kyiv, Yerevan, and Riga. Unlike many of the other republican capitals, however, Almaty was not a well-established city by the time it was proclaimed the capital.[22] In spite of this, Almaty became the most significant city in the KSSR and remains the cultural and economic center of present-day Kazakhstan.

The present-day nation of Kazakhstan is largely a result of Russian and Soviet colonialism, which imposed a nation-state where none previously existed. As such, the creation of a Kazakh nation also meant the creation and re-creation of a Kazakh people who inhabited it. This is not to say that Kazakh people did not inhabit the steppe before encounters with Russians, but rather encounters with Russians and particularly Soviet Russians caused irreparable damage to Kazakh culture, lifestyle, and demographics. Those remaining were left with a drastically different sense of nation, culture, and self than their ancestors.

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[21] Koigeldiev, "The Alash Movement and the Soviet Government: A Difference of Positions," 165.

[22] Kyiv, for example, was the heart of the Kyivan Rus', widely claimed as the cultural predecessor to major Slavic nation-states such as Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Yerevan is not only one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities, but also the heart of Armenian civilization and culture. Due to the nature of the USSR, not only were these incredibly significant cities relegated to simple Republican Capital status, but relatively smaller cities like Almaty, Ashgabat, and Bishkek were simultaneously elevated through this process, becoming developed into major centers of politics, culture, and economic activity.

Soviet Nationality Policy

The early Bolshevik government, now in power of a multi-continental, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic state, adopted the *Korenizatsiia*[23] policy. Korenizatsiia "sought to enhance the position of the non-Russians by promoting them into leading positions in the party, the government, and the trade unions", and was an attempt by the overwhelmingly urban ethnically Russian Bolsheviks to win over the overwhelmingly rural and multi-ethnic Russians.[24] As a part of Korenizatsiia, dozens of the ethnic minorities in the USSR were given some form of self-determination within the new Union.[25] Even within the republics, there existed autonomous regions, republics, and districts all created to allow for some level of self-governance according to ethnic and religious practices. In addition, the policy "reserved quotas of industrial, administrative and political positions for Central Asians, launched campaigns for mass literacy and indoctrination with Soviet ideology, and called for the emancipation of women".[26] This policy attempted to impose a western form of political and cultural practice on a group of people who were not industrialized and did not subscribe to European notions of the nation-state, but for its time and in context, remains remarkably progressive, albeit short-lived. In the early years following the revolution, the still young an idealist Soviet government was heavily invested in spreading the revolution worldwide, through a policy of internationalism. Lenin and other early Soviet leaders emphasized that while the revolution may have taken place in Russia, the revolution was rooted in emancipating the proletariat worldwide. Soviet inspired and aligned

[23] Meaning "indigenization" or "nativization".

[24] George Liber, "Korenizatsiia: Restructuring Soviet Nationality Policy in the 1920s," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 14, no. 1 (January 1991): 16, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1991.9993696.

[25] Valerii Tishkov, "Glasnost and the Nationalities within the Soviet Union," *Third World Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (October 1989): 191–207, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436598908420199; H. Seton-Watson, "Soviet Nationality Policy," *The Russian Review* 15, no. 1 (1956): 4, https://doi.org/10.2307/125778.

[26] "Central Asia and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Look at the Balance Sheet at the Centennial | Eurasianet," accessed March 5, 2022, https://eurasianet.org/central-asia-and-the-bolshevik-revolution-a-look-at-the-balance-sheet-at-the-centennial.

revolutions happened across the vast Russian Empire (including what is now Kazakhstan), and across the world. In 1919, the Communist International (also known as Comintern or Third International) was established to support and facilitate the global spread of Soviet-style socialism. After Stalin came to power, Soviet policy focused much more inward, with Stalin now advocating for "Socialism in one country", rather than a broad internationalism and Korenizatsiia was abandoned.[27]

One could argue that domestic policy and foreign policy of the Soviet Union overlapped significantly. The USSR was comprised of dozens of nationalities, religions, ethnic groups and territorial/climatic features. Thus, the Soviet government needed a set of policies and practices to deal with the many "nationalities" within the Union. Soviet nationality policy can be summed up in the slogan "nationalist in form, socialist in content", where the previously international doctrine of socialism was now focused on specific national groups, even within the same political entity.

A key part of the nationality policy under Stalin was Russification, the process of making non-Russian cultures more Russian, particularly regarding language. Russian was, and often still is, the lingua franca across the Soviet Union and its successor states. Russification can be described as imperialism in many ways, but any acts of imperialism were not rooted in a desire to Russify, but rather Russification was a byproduct of economic and political dominance.[28] Russification of both language and demographics took strong hold in Kazakhstan. Russians have made up a sizable plurality in the country since the Russian Empire, with the numbers of Russians living in Kazakhstan significantly increasing during the Stalin years and remaining high

[27] Lenin and Trotsky also turned towards nationalism as opposed to internationalism due to the Russian civil war, but this was largely out of tactical necessity rather than being rooted in ideology.

[28] Seton-Watson, "Soviet Nationality Policy," 10.

to this day. The Russification of language is also still very much present to this day. The Kazakh language was converted from a Turkic script to a Cyrillic one, as were nearly all minority languages in Central Asia.[29]

The process of Russification in Kazakhstan was successful by many measures. Russian is still spoken by a vast majority of Kazakhs[30], Russia is Kazakhstan's largest trade partner[31], Russian movies and TV shows remain popular in Kazakhstan, and the two countries generally have amicable political and cultural relationships. Russification is shown in the built environment as well. While the USSR and Russia are not to be conflated, metros built in the Soviet style were in all cases constructed under a government based in Moscow, with the lone exception being the Almaty Metro. During the two periods of Kazakh self-rule, the Alash Orda and the current period, the capital was in the steppe, not the mountains. Almaty itself is a Russian creation, with the roots of its importance being Russian interest. The metro that serves the heavily Russified city in both architectural style and signage (which is in Russian), is an exemplification of Kazakh Russification.

Kazakh Famine and Virgin Lands Campaign

A major factor in the creation of Almaty as the center of the new Kazakh nation was the explicit exploitation of the 1930-33 famine in Kazakhstan to remove nomadism from the Kazakh cultural identity. To what degree the Soviet government, particularly Stalin and Filipp Goloshchyokin (First Secretary of the Kazakh Regional Committee of the Communist Party),

[29] "Kazakhstan's Alphabet Switch Reflects Wider Societal Changes," Emerging Europe, October 12, 2021, https://emerging-europe.com/news/kazakhstans-alphabet-switch-reflects-wider-societal-changes/.

[30] "The State of Language in Kazakhstan," American Councils, accessed March 16, 2022, https://www.americancouncils.org/news/across-globe/state-language-kazakhstan.

[31] "Kazakhstan Trade Balance, Exports, Imports by Country and Region 2017 | WITS Data," accessed March 16, 2022, https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/KAZ/Year/2017/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/all.

knew of and were responsible for the famine is up for debate.[32] Regardless, the famine was devastating to the Kazakh people. “Though Kazakhs constituted just under 60 percent of the republic’s total population on the eve of the famine, some 90 percent of those who died in the Kazakh famine were Kazakhs. The famine claimed the lives of more than a million Kazakhs, approximately 40 percent of all Kazakhs in the republic".[33] The famine was also particularly devastating to livestock herds:

> During the famine some ninety percent of the republic’s livestock herds perished, dealing a devastating blow to pastoral nomadic society. Without their herds, Kazakhs could not nomadize. They had no livelihood or means of acquiring food. Prior to the famine, being Kazakh was closely intertwined with being a nomad. But with the death of their animal herds, most Kazakhs were forced to sedentarize, or take up settled lives—a dramatic reorientation of identity.[34]

The massive loss of life among nomadic Kazakhs, combined with the devastation of their livestock meant that even the few nomadic Kazakhs that were spared remained unable to continue their way of life. The prodigious destruction of Kazakh life and traditional lifestyle helped contribute to the new creation of the Soviet Kazakh identity, without the so-called backwards elements of Kazakh society such as “kinship ties, allegiances to a hereditary elite, and the Kazakh pastoral nomadic way of life”.[35] These traits, among others were seen as direct barriers to “essential features of socialism, whereas national identity could facilitate development

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[32] For more see:

Payne, Matthew J. “Seeing like a Soviet State: Settlement of Nomadic Kazakhs, 1928-1934Cameron, Sarah I. The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan. Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 2018. Cameron, Sarah. “The Kazakh Famine of 1930-33: Current Research and New Directions.” East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies 3, no. 2 (September 10, 2016): 117–32. https://doi.org/10.21226/T2T59X.

[33] Sarah I. Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan* (Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 2018), 5.

[34] Sarah Cameron, “The Kazakh Famine of 1930-33: Current Research and New Directions,” *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 3, no. 2 (September 10, 2016): 120, https://doi.org/10.21226/T2T59X.

[35] Cameron, 120.

and liberation from primitive nomadic norms".[36] In total across Central Asia, nearly a quarter of the population lost their life in a "violent fashion" between 1920 and 1945.[37] In addition, Kazakhstan was a common destination for deportees of various ethnic and religious groups targeted by Stalin's purges. Poles, Germans, Koreans, and many more were violently relocated to Kazakhstan throughout the 1930's and during the Great Patriotic War.[38] Many of these new arrivals would be put to work in gulags or on communal farms,[39] though many would also make their way to Almaty.

Almaty experienced large growth after the famine and continued to experience large growth after it ended. One of the factors that helped Almaty's demographic changes was the fact that Kazakhstan did not possess the same (or any) battlefields as Eastern Europe did during the Great Patriotic War. Though Kazakhstan was not the site of any major battles, it should not be forgotten either that nearly half a million Kazakhs died fighting in the war.[40] After the war, with Kazakhstan largely physically unscathed, and its population greatly reduced, Khrushchev's government began the Virgin Lands campaign, in which largely ethnic Russians began populating and farming the Kazakh Steppe. The Virgin Lands campaign was massive, converting 43 million hectares of land in southern Russia and northern Kazakhstan into farmland, primarily for wheat, between 1954 and 1964.[41] This campaign brought in nearly a million Slavs into the

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[36] Alun Thomas, "The Caspian Disputes: Nationalism and Nomadism in Early Soviet Central Asia," *The Russian Review* 76, no. 3 (July 2017): 507, https://doi.org/10.1111/russ.12141.

[37] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 8.

[38] "The Soviet Massive Deportations - A Chronology | Sciences Po Violence de masse et Résistance - Réseau de recherche," April 18, 2019, https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/fr/document/soviet-massive-deportations-chronology.html.

[39] Ilan Greenberg, "Politics, Economics and Time Bury Memories of the Kazakh Gulag," *The New York Times*, December 31, 2006, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/31/world/asia/31kazakhstan.html.

[40] Martha Brill Olcott, "Kazakhstan's Soviet Legacy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed December 26, 2021, https://carnegieendowment.org/2011/11/30/kazakhstan-s-soviet-legacy-pub-46096.

[41] Alexander V Prishchepov et al., "Sixty Years of the Virgin Lands Campaign in Russia and Kazakhstan: An Assessment from an Economic, Ecological and Political Perspective," n.d., 39.

Kazakh steppe and made Kazakhs an ethnic minority in the KSSR by the 1950's.[42] While the Virgin Lands campaign was largely centered around moving Slavs into northern Kazakhstan for agricultural purposes, the massive influx of people moving into Kazakhstan in general led to a greater demand for housing in Almaty as well.[43]

Urbanization and industrialization were both rapidly accelerated worldwide during the 20th century, but in Kazakhstan, these phenomena were exacerbated by explicit policies by the Soviet government to depopulate nomadic lands and fill the city with industrial workers and the steppe with collective farmers. These two events entirely shifted the Kazakh identity and economy away from nomadism and the Kazakh state to an industrial one with an urban center, which remains true to this day.

Soviet Empire and Colonialism

The Kazakh famine is not only historically significant for its scale and demographic implications, but also an important moment in the development of the relationship between the Soviet Union and the Kazakh people. Some historians such as Douglas Northrop describe the Soviet Union as an empire which acted in a colonialist manner, with events like the 1930-33 famine and the Virgin Lands Campaign being prime examples of colonial brutality, saying that while the USSR "may not have been a classic overseas empire like that of the British or Dutch, the USSR did have a somewhat comparable political, economic, and military structure; a parallel cultural agenda; and similarly liminal colonial elites."[44] Even the terminology of the "Virgin Lands" of the Kazakh steppe evoke historically colonial notions of empty land ripe for the

[42] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 21.

[43] Catherine Alexander, "Soviet and Post-Soviet Planning in Almaty, Kazakhstan," *Critique of Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 168,176, https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X07076787.

[44] Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2004), 22, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctvrf8cpn.

taking, especially since we know the steppe was not empty, just not sedenterized or industrialized. Other historians do make the explicit comparison to "classic overseas empire" such as historian of gender in Central Asia and the USSR Paula Michaels, who likens Soviet colonial practices to those of Belgian colonizers in the Congo.[45] However, a key component of many traditional forms of colonialism, such as the Belgian colonization of The Congo, is often a racialization, with a creation and enforcement of racial or ethnic hierarchies. The degree to which the Soviet government in Moscow engaged in racialization of Kazakhstan is more complex than, say, the Belgians in the Congo.

This is not to say that there was not a racialization component to Soviet empire, in many instances the Soviets would refer to Central Asians as "backward" or as pejorative "little brothers" needing guidance from Moscow and thought of Central Asian cultures and environments as undeveloped. [46] Stalin himself wrote that the USSR held an imperative to "raise the cultural level of [its] backward people" while he was the People's Commissar for Nationalities Affairs,[47] "backward people" in this case referring to those in the "east" which included Central Asians as well as hundreds of ethnic groups across the Union. Modernization was a common theme for Soviet actions in Central Asia, with the Soviets viewing themselves as bringing modernity to an undeveloped land filled with backward people.[48]

However, the early Soviet government also in many cases explicitly promoted Kazakh language and encouraged Kazakh ethnic identity, though that was largely during the short-lived Korenizatsiia era. Regardless, even though many of those in Moscow might have held some

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[45] Paula A. Michaels, *Curative Powers Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 7.

[46] Natalie Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle: Space, Synecdoche, and the New Capitals of Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 53; Thomas, "The Caspian Disputes," 506.

[47] Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization," 238.

[48] And arable land.

contempt for ethnic Kazakhs, it was nowhere near comparable to the racialization of indigenous peoples by other European empires.

Even among authors who disagree with the notion that the USSR can be characterized as an empire, many concede that many of the actions in Soviet Kazakhstan certainly resemble European colonialism. Examples include: the famine, the erasure of nomadism, and the rise of the Russian language. Despite this, calling the USSR simply colonialist or as Reagan said "an evil empire"[49] is reductive at best. Political Scientist Mark Beissinger writes that "modernization and integration, not colonization and the perception of difference, were the driving forces behind Soviet actions".[50] He also notes the lack of anticolonial resistance as a proof that the USSR in Central Asia cannot be categorized as an empire, at least not in the traditional sense. He notes that the *glasnost* policies of the Gorbachev era led to a growing independence movement in the Baltics and the Molotov-Ribbentrop territories, but when faced with the same policies, those in Central Asia overwhelmingly voted to remain part of the USSR and noted that there were no major independence movements.[51]

Beissinger calls into question both the theory of continuity of the Russian Empire, the idea that the USSR inherited the colonial system of the Russian Empire, and the meaning of the word empire itself. He ultimately concedes that depending on your definition of the word empire, that the USSR was an empire, but urges those using the word empire to describe the USSR to fully understand the contextual differences between traditional European empires such as the British or Spanish and the USSR.[52]

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[49] Reagan Foundation, *"Evil Empire" Speech by President Reagan - Address to the National Association of Evangelicals*, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcSm-KAEFFA.

[50] Beissinger, "Soviet Empire as "Family Resemblance'','' 296.

[51] Beissinger, 301–2.

[52] Beissinger, 302–3.

Journalist Salvatore Freni does subscribe to the continuity theory, but acknowledges that the goals of the USSR differed significantly from the Russian Empire, saying that the Soviets accelerated "processes of modernization that the Russian Empire had already begun. However, building socialism in a region where no working class existed, and intellectuals based their knowledge primarily on religious texts presented inherent challenges".[53] Here, Freni still is forced to acknowledge the new context that the USSR operated under. Even when some of the actions of the USSR may have resembled colonial actions, they had entirely new motivations which made them fundamentally different from previous European empires.

Soviet historian Michael Stefany places significantly more agency on the Kazakhs than those who paint the USSR as a more traditionally colonialist state. He argues that the Kazakhs "were not simply passive recipients of Russian/Soviet culture, but were shaping and relating to it according to their own cultural predilections... retaining important elements of their native culture such as eating habits, burial practices, and an ingrained respect for elders".[54] This view again acknowledges the Soviet political dominance, but provides important clarity as to what degree Kazakh culture was able to withstand many trials and tribulations.

A major distinction between the Soviets and traditional colonial empires is also that they engaged in the same or similar processes domestically within Russia as they did in places like Ukraine and Kazakhstan. As scholar of Central Asian history Adeeb Khalid puts it "Colonial conquest transformed colonized societies, but colonial empires seldom used state power to transform societies, cultures, or individuals in the way attempted by the Soviet state"[55]. As much as Kazakh nomads were seen as backwards, so were Russian peasants, not far removed from

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[53] Salvatore J. Freni, "The Soviet Nationality Policy in Central Asia," *Inquiries Journal* 5, no. 03 (2013), http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/731/the-soviet-nationality-policy-in-central-asia.

[54] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 35.

[55] Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization," 233.

serfdom. As Khalid again puts it "the Soviet civilizing mission was not underpinned by the racial or ethnic superiority of any one group… Russian peasants, after all, also had their way of life and their culture transformed, their religion assaulted, and their modes of social intercourse civilized. The transformation of Central Asia therefore cannot be read as an encounter between 'Soviet' outsiders and an authentic, indigenous population".[56] It was common for most empires to justify their brutal tactics as some way of "civilizing" or "bringing modernity" to "savage" peoples, this was often just a guise to enact racial hierarchies that allowed for colonizers to strip the land of its natural resources and exploit the labor of its inhabitants. In the Soviet case, though, the government was explicitly attempting to destroy previous ways of life, yes, but the government did so equally within the center and the periphery, without distinction in the application of force or brutality. It actively sought to erase the differences between the two purported poles of colonial power.

The comparison of the USSR to traditional European empire is complicated, but there is considerably more similarity to the growth of the continental United States rather than a multi-continental monarchical empire. In his book "Internal Colonization", Steven Sabol likens Russian influence in Central Asia to American westward expansion, both colonial endeavors but with enough key differences in practice and justification to render them different than European style colonialism. Sabol writes: "The Bolsheviks believed there was one path to progress and that various nations were located at different points along the path. The Bolsheviks aimed to dramatically accelerate the modernization of the former Russian Empire, which for them meant industrialization, urbanization, secularization, education, universal literacy, and territorial

[56] Khalid, 250.

nationhood".[57] One of the key differences with even this comparison though is again the lack of racialization from the Soviets. Whereas Americans saw the west as "untamed" and essentially uninhabited land that was theirs for the taking, the Soviets acknowledged the Indigenous people of Central Asia and unlike the Americans, chose to integrate them into the Bolshevik movement rather than commit a genocide against them.

Furthering the complicated idea of colonialism in Central Asia, one could view the Bolshevik revolution itself as an anticolonial revolution. Bolshevism was explicitly and vehemently anti-colonial in its ideology, and had just violently overthrown a European colonial empire. The early Korenizatsiia policy reflected this, with the Soviet government explicitly denouncing Russian cultural hegemony and giving ethnic minorities not only more freedom but more material support. More than this, Central Asia by definition was post-colonial by the time of the revolution, as the colonial government had been overthrown and self-governance was established. Though in the case of Kazakhstan, as well as the other Central Asian republics, they soon came to be under the control of a government based in Moscow again.

Based on the actions of the USSR including but not limited to: famine, destruction of nomadic life, ethnic replacement policies, the use of Kazakhstan as a deportation destination, political dominance, and language replacement, the USSR did engage in a uniquely Soviet form of colonialism in Kazakhstan. Due to the historical and political context, this form of Soviet colonialism cannot be in good faith be compared to any other notable example of colonialism. Soviet historian Alun Thomas writes that "Colonialism is better understood as a mentality than an ideology"[58], especially in the context of the fiercely ideologically anti-colonial Bolsheviks.

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[57] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*, 1st ed. (Cornell University Press, 2001), 126.

[58] Thomas, *Nomads and Soviet Rule: Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin*, 21.

The Bolsheviks, and more prominently, their successors, often acted in ways that resemble colonial actions. Despite this, is vitally important to emphasize that Soviet colonialism cannot be compared directly to previous European colonial empires. The motivations of the Soviets drastically change the context for both the colonizer and colonized. The Soviets engaged in colonialism, yes, but it is a form of colonialism that is uniquely Soviet and cannot be accurately compared to any form of colonialism seen before or after the USSR.

COLONIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Colonial powers have long used infrastructure to serve their material and ideological goals in the lands they have colonized since colonial powers have existed. Traditional colonial empires have historically constructed infrastructure like railroads in order to facilitate resource extraction to the metropole, but they often also engaged in city building in order to facilitate such developments. Infrastructure also serves as a physical and long-lasting bond between the colonized lands and the colonizer, even after an area has politically decolonized, the legacy of the colonizer is semi-permanently entrenched in the landscape. Ports, freeways, railyards, airports, factories, etc. were all placed specifically to serve the needs of the colonizer, rather than the colonized. Housing, transportation, and associated industries all follow the aforementioned infrastructure projects and continue to build upon themselves even after political decolonization. While with enough time, money, and political willpower, cities can be redesigned to better serve the needs of local residents, the structures and legacies left by colonial powers often make both the necessary money and willpower impossible to obtain in a timely manner. In many cases, the city itself is an invention of colonialism, either as a conception or also a location. Almaty serves as both.

Within the scope of colonialism, there also exists the subset of settler colonialism, that is, a form of colonialism meant to fully remove the native population in favor of the colonizing force. This is perhaps most famously demonstrated in the United States, where the indigenous population was forcibly removed and/or killed to make way for white settlers in every state. Settler colonialism contrasts with more traditional forms of colonialism such as the British colonization of India. Make no mistake, the colonization of India was violent and the associated "divide and rule" system still has violent implications to this day, but the Indian population was never fully removed or murdered, nor was this the intention of British colonizers.

Patrick Wolfe, a historian who focused his work on settler colonialism, discusses the importance of agriculture to settler colonialism. Agriculture, he writes,

> enables a population to be expanded by continuing immigration at the expense of native lands and livelihoods. The inequities, contradictions and pogroms of metropolitan society ensure a recurrent supply of fresh immigrants… Indigenous people are either rendered dependent on the introduced economy or reduced to the stock-raids that provide the classic pretext for colonial death-squads.[59]

It is important to note that Wolfe was explicitly referring to colonialism in pursuit of capitalist expansions, in America, Australia, and Israel. This is one of the many examples of how the question of whether colonialism was practiced in Central Asia and to what degree becomes increasingly complicated. The aforementioned quote about Indigenous Americans can be applied to Soviet policy in Central Asia but is missing a key context of intention. In America, Australia. And Israel, settler colonialism is practiced in order to advance capitalist market expansions, which was not the case in the USSR.

[59] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387–409, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240.

Infrastructure is a vital component to perpetuating settler colonialism. Settler colonialism often includes a group of initial settlers of the frontier, who continually push the boundary of the colony further. These frontiersmen[60] develop towns along the way which then continue to grow and demand larger state support, including physically connecting the town to the metropole via road, railroad, electrical grid, telephone pole, etc., until the frontier is simply a growth of the metropole.[61]

In Kazakhstan, Russians engaged in settler colonialism through the combination of the famine and the Virgin Lands Campaign, decimating the native Kazakh population and encouraging the survivors to sedentarize in Almaty or on collective farms, and moving Russians into lands formerly used by nomadic people. These new Russians would then agriculturalize lands previously untouched by industrial farming, propagate more Russians, and brought with them the infrastructure necessary to do it, both in the steppe as well as bureaucratic growth in Almaty.

Planned Capitals

Cities are notable for many reasons, their inherently large populations guarantee them to have a large social, cultural, and economic impact on the region and country that the city finds itself in. The impact of a city, and the idea that a city can not only represent itself but the history, culture, and ideals of a larger people or nation, is not lost on those with power. This is especially obvious in the cases of planned capitals, where space, design, and the built environment are explicitly constructed to convey very specific ideas to its: residents, employees, visitors, and those elsewhere in the country.

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[60] And they often are men.
[61] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 393.

Washington, D.C. in the United States and Nur-Sultan in Kazakhstan perhaps represent the best examples of planned capitals and the ideas they are meant to represent. Washington, D.C. was master planned by a Frenchman, Pierre Charles L'Enfant, shortly after the U.S. Constitution was ratified. Before any roads or buildings were constructed, location was a key factor in the plan of the city. The newly independent United States still had a core conflict: slavery. With the country divided between the southern states which relied on the labor of enslaved persons and the northern states either already had or who would soon come to abolish the institution of slavery. The location of D.C., existing along the Potomac River and split between Maryland in the north and Virginia in the south was a compromise to not tip the balance of representational power. L'Enfant's plan included a grid layout with many diagonally intersecting grand avenues, with the Capital at the center.[62] The Capital and White House were mapped to be the focal points of the new city and were constructed in a grand fashion in order to demonstrate the power and legitimacy of the fledgling nation to visitors. The Capital utilized significant Greco-Roman imagery and design motifs as a reference to the Greek and Roman democracies that the Founding Fathers envisioned themselves as a form of successor state to.[63] D.C. is one of the first examples of a planned capital city of a major nation that remains the capital city to this day and provides a blueprint to city planners the world over in how to represent abstract ideas in physical space.

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[62] Pierre Charles L'Enfant, *Plan of the City of Washington* (Philadelphia, 1792), https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3850.ct000509/; Smithsonian Magazine, "A Brief History of Pierre L'Enfant and Washington, D.C.," Smithsonian Magazine, accessed March 15, 2022, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-brief-history-of-pierre-lenfant-and-washington-dc-39487784/.

[63] "Neoclassical | Architect of the Capitol," accessed March 15, 2022, https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/buildings-grounds/neoclassical; "Why Do So Many Public Buildings in the U.S. Look Like Greek Temples? | Glimpses," *Zócalo Public Square* (blog), September 20, 2018, https://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2018/09/20/many-public-buildings-u-s-look-like-greek-temples/viewings/glimpses/.

On the other side of the spectrum, Kazakhstan is the site of one of the world's newest planned capitals. Shortly into Kazakhstan's independence in 1997, the capital was moved from Almaty to its current location in Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana[64]). There were a couple of notable reasons for the move, including a desire to be more centrally located.[65] Whether or not it was the main intention, the creation of a new capital also allowed the newly independent Kazakhstan (and its autocratic leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev, for whom the city was named after[66]) to express its values in physical space from the ground up.

Due to the Republican and tiered-city systems, capitals hold even more importance in post-Soviet nations. They represent the centers of economic and political investment, as well as act as a representative for how said country wishes to present itself to the outside world. The move to Nur-Sultan also signaled an explicit goal for the newly Kazakh government to distance itself from the capital of the Soviet past.

Kazakhstan is the only country that has changed its seat of power in the former USSR. This can be viewed as a combination of two interlinked factors. Almaty is not so much a Kazakh city that was absorbed by the USSR but a Russian town that was turned into a city by the Soviets[67]. Almaty has little to no importance in Kazakh culture and Kazakh society, which is not only nomadic, but also largely based in the steppe, not the mountains where Almaty is located. In addition, the nascent government wanted to cement itself as a new and explicitly Kazakh government, which was hard to express physically in a Soviet city like Almaty. Because of these two factors, rather than rebuild significant portions of a city not many had long-standing cultural

[64] Which means "Capital" in Kazakh.

[65] Mehmet Arslan, "The Significance of Shifting Capital of Kazakstan from Almaty to Astana: An Evalution on the Basis of Geopolitical and Demographic Developments," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 120 (March 2014): 98–109, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.02.086.

[66] Another slight parallel to Washington D.C. also named after the respective nations' first president.

[67] This is unlike nearly all other capitals of the former USSR like Yerevan, Kyiv, Moscow, and Tbilisi, which have hundreds of years of cultural significance to their respective nations.

or historic ties to, Nazarbayev elected to simply build a new city that would reflect his goals for what Kazakhstan should be.[68]

Figure 2. Clockwise from left: The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, The Khan Shatyr mall, Baiterek Tower, and the 2017 Astana Expo.

Nur-Sultan's city center, where the main political, economic, and cultural institutions of Kazakhstan are located, was built in an ultra-modern design style. Whereas the US Capital was built to look like Athens or Rome, Nur-Sultan was erected based on a futurist vision. The legislature for example, is a pair of twin modernist skyscrapers. Across the river from the Presidential Palace is the "Palace of Peace and Reconciliation", a towering Foster and Partners designed glass and steel pyramid. On the opposite end of the main thoroughfare[69] is another Foster and Partners building that sums up the construction of the modern Kazakh identity well. It is the Khan Shatyr, a large shopping mall covered by a neo-futurist transparent tent. The tent both harkens back to the yurts that were once common across the Kazakh steppe and provides incredible climate control in a city that experiences both scorching summers and harsh winters.[70] Furthermore, the Khan Shatyr is likewise a monument to capitalism and consumerism, something that could not have ever been built in the Soviet era. The centerpiece of Nur-Sultan,

[68] And to stroke his ego by building a new city in his vision.
[69] Which is similar in size and concept to the National Mall in D.C.
[70] It is also in many ways a monument to Kazakhstan's nomadic past.

both geographically and architecturally, is the Baiterek[71] Tower. An imposing white tower which opens at the top to encase a large golden sphere, the design is based on a Kazakh legend about a bird who laid an egg in the tree of life.[72] These landmarks, among others, emphasize in physical form the desire of the modern Kazakh government to present itself as a modern, rapidly advancing state.

Through the examples of D.C and Nur-Sultan, we can see the immense representational power that cities hold. Natalie Koch's book *The Geopolitics of Spectacle* deals with the presentation of space and the built environment in the new capitals of Asia, including a section devoted to Nur-Sultan. In the book she discusses why cities are such strong tools for symbolism and synecdoche.

> A city is a prime site for seeing representational economies in action, given the tremendous range of people and surfaces coming together in time and space. Buildings, streetscapes, skylines, and urban infrastructures are just as important in today's cities for their symbolic meanings as for their functional utility. The idea that built landscapes can be fashioned and interpreted symbolically hinges on a commonplace assumption that the urban form's exterior actually reflects some interior social reality. That is, many buildings, monuments, and even public infrastructures come to be seen as having a symbolic value that extends well beyond their functional purpose.[73]

The symbolic value that Koch describes was well-known by many planners, but especially by those in the Soviet Union. Soviet planners, not beholden to corporate interests or subject to public comment, took every opportunity to reinforce symbolism in the urban environment whenever possible. Nearly every public facing building and street has some reference to a great historical figure that represented either Russian culture[74], Soviet Values[75], war heroes[76], or great

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[71] Also spelled Bayterek.
[72] "Bayterek Tower," Atlas Obscura, May 17, 2012, http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/bayterek-tower.
[73] Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle*, 22.
[74] e.g., Alexander Pushkin or Yuri Gagarin
[75] e.g., Molodezhnaya (youth) or Mira (peace)
[76] Particularly of the Great Patriotic War (WWII).

socialists. And every major architectural or planning project such as construction of a metro or a skyscraper was done with the explicit intention of promoting socialism. This mindset has persevered in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, albeit with much fewer references to socialism.

Tiered Cities

A central tenet of Soviet power was the hierarchy of cities. Moscow served at the apex of the pyramid of cities for the entire length of Soviet history, with Saint Petersburg, Kyiv, and Tashkent all a level below. These cities, Kyiv and Tashkent in particular, were not chosen at random. Kyiv, as the symbol of Ukraine represents a much longer and more complicated relationship between Russia and Ukraine than the scope of this thesis provides. Tashkent was the jewel of Soviet Asia, serving as the central projection of Soviet power thousands of miles from Moscow. These cities both received metro systems during the Soviet period, and the ways in which they received them and how they were manifested provide insight into the Soviet tiered city system.

Tashkent

Kazakhstan's urbanization was a bloody process that began only quite recently, especially considering the long history of the Kazakh people. Nearby Uzbekistan however, had a longstanding urban tradition dating largely due to its geographic prominence along the Silk Road. Many of Central Asia's great historic cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, and Khiva are all located upon what was once the Silk Road in modern-day Uzbekistan.[77]

The Tashkent Metro, despite being built after the Kyiv Metro[78] and after the Soviets had ostensibly moved away from the grandest and most palatial station designs, bears more aesthetic

[77] It is important to note that these cities are all nearby modern border lines, which do not necessarily reflect historic borders and that urbanism is not a uniquely Uzbek phenomenon within Central Asia

[78] Opened in 1977 and 1960, respectively.

resemblance to Moscow or Saint Petersburg than Tbilisi or Nizhny Novgorod. This is no coincidence, as the Tashkent Metro, along with other Soviet development projects in Central Asia were built explicitly to serve as a symbol of Soviet development to the third world.[79] With such a designation, Tashkent received much grander and more intricately decorated stations than any cities outside of northwestern Russia.

Soviet Metro policy was, among other things, highly linked with Soviet conceptualizations of development. A Metro system served as a symbol of a developed city, and when that city was also the capital of one of the non-Russian republics, often represented the development of the republic and the nationality within it. In Tashkent, the Metro served as the next step in the logical progression of urban transportation following the tram and trolleybus "becoming symbols of the Uzbek capital's progress under socialism and a solution to the increasing population concentration in the Tashkent region".[80] Many of these Soviet ideas of development existed alongside a derogatory attitude towards Central Asians and their existing urban designs. Soviet planners engaged in urban renewal across Central Asia, tearing down existing urban forms and replacing them with ones that better fit the new Soviet identity.

In 2001, the Tashkent Metro opened a new line, making it one of the first of the Soviet-built Metros to expand significantly. This new addition brought with it much criticism however, as workmanship was considered shoddy and multiple construction issues became clear shortly after opening.[81] The opening of the new line showed that the Metro served and continues to serve its primary purpose, moving people, regardless of political intent. While a significant portion of

[79] Jeffery James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization & the Third World Order* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 236; Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle*, 54.

[80] Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 43.

[81] Stronski, 229.

this thesis has dealt with the social, artistic, and political implications of Metro construction in the former USSR, their existence and use are largely simply a testament to the efficiency of the Metro as a concept. The construction issues in Tashkent's new line highlight how difficult Metro construction and maintenance can be, especially when the system was inherited from a nation and a political system that no longer exists.

Tashkent also serves as a prime example of the hierarchy of Soviet cities, which was rigid and enforced from the top down.

> With Moscow at the apex of the country's urban hierarchy, the capitals of the other fourteen union-level republics were the next step down. Republic capitals served a secondary purpose and did not receive the same lavish attention as Moscow, but they were nonetheless adorned according to their status in the urban hierarchy. Other cities around the country took on a unique significance in the USSR's early state-making efforts, such as Stalin's spectacular greenfield development of Magnitogorsk, which Kotkin chronicles, and Tashkent as the privileged showpiece of the Soviet Union's modernizing capabilities in Central Asia.[82]

As the Republic capital, Almaty was at the top of the hierarchy within Kazakhstan, as well as above smaller republican capitals like Ashgabat, Dushanbe, and Bishkek. Yet, it remained a tier below Tashkent, Kyiv, and Saint Petersburg[83], all of whom were significant provincial cities in-turn situated below Moscow. In Central Asia, Almaty had high status, but despite both cities being "highly Russified and already equipped with some cultural infrastructure... Tashkent was the main city of Central Asia, which represented the Soviet modernization project for Asian countries".[84] This meant that it was Tashkent who would receive their Metro in 1977, rather than Almaty, and that Tashkent would be considered the center of the Central Asia region, rather than Almaty, though both were a rung under Moscow. Through the tier system, the Soviets picked

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[82] Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle*, 54.

[83] Which, in practice, were more like regional capitals as well as republican capitals.

[84] A. K. Bustanov, "Settling the Past:Soviet Oriental Projects in Leningrad and Alma-Ata" (University of Amsterdam, 2013), 159, https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/1577040/118505_07.pdf.

"winners" and "losers". Some cities, like Tashkent, were picked as winners, able to be the center of their region and receive vast amounts of money for development projects. Other cities, like Bishkek[85], were viewed as not much more than simple towns with special designations. Almaty, only 100 miles from Bishkek and 200 miles from Tashkent[86], found itself somewhere in the middle of this tier system.

Kyiv

Kyiv also serves a non-Asian example of how the Soviet tiering system worked. Russian and subsequently Soviet occupations of the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv have long maintained two ideas: that Kyiv is the ancestral birthplace of the Slavic people and is therefore treated with the appropriate reverence, but also that Moscow is the center of the Slavic world. The historical relationship between both Kyiv and Moscow (as well as Ukraine and Russia) is complex and filled with tension, which still very much exists as the Russian Federation is currently occupying the illegally annexed regions of Crimea and portions of eastern Ukraine and at the time of this writing, has recently launched an invasion against the entire country, including attacks on Kyiv.

Kyiv has often served as a second-tier city to Moscow and the Soviet period was no exception. Kyiv was the third Soviet city to receive a Metro, after Moscow and Saint Petersburg, but the construction of the Kyiv Metro also marked a notable shift away from the grandeur of the Moscow Metro. Owen Hatherley's *Landscapes of Communism*, an architectural study of post-communist nations and cities, describes the reason for Kyiv's less grand Metro design as such:

> Kiev was the testing bed for a new pared-down form of Metro decoration and, as with that, the first examples just look like Stalinist stations that have been denuded of some of their fancy dress, rather than any kind of distinctive new style... So in Metro histories Kiev,

[85] Also known as Frunze.
[86] As the crow flies.

> where the first line was completed in 1960 (partly to designs submitted in 1949), is where sanity or boredom takes over, according to your taste or your politics.[87]

Regardless of your tastes or your politics, what is clear is that the Soviet government clearly thought of Kyiv as a second-tier city, and that thought was clearly expressed in the physical landscape of Kyiv's Metro. The Kyiv Metro itself is a reflection of how Kyiv was envisioned by Soviet leadership in Moscow – important enough to be the first non-Russian city to receive a metro, but not important enough for it to be particularly beautiful or expansive.

Almaty still is within a tier system. Since the capital was moved to Nur-Sultan in 1997, the city is now on the second tier again. The Metro is one of the few major developments that has served Almaty, as much of the funding and the interest is in drawing people to the new capital rather than improving the old one. It is fitting then, that the Soviet-style metro is being opened in the most Russified city under a tier system it found itself under the Soviet period.

KAZAKH NATION BUILDING

Jeltoqsan

While the famine and the Virgin Lands Campaign had done tremendous demographic damage to ethnic Kazakhs, by the 1980's, "Central Asian birthrates in the USSR outpaced Russians by 3-4 times".[88] In addition to there being more Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, the demographic changes were accompanied by sweeping political changes too. Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR in 1985. During his short-lived tenure as the final person to hold such a position, Gorbachev instituted a series of reforms

[87] Owen Hatherley, *Landscapes of Communism: A History Through Buildings* (The New Press, 2015), 273–74.

[88] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 13.

aimed at preventing the collapse of the USSR,[89] better known as Perestroika. A major part of the Perestroika platform was *glasnost*,[90] which widely promoted increased transparency and democratization of the authoritarian Soviet government. Though widely appreciated in the west, Perestroika and *glasnost* were met with opposition in Central Asia. Many Central Asians viewed Perestroika as "merely a means by which the central government was attempting to re-impose both Russian culture and political domination on their republics. Perestroika also posed a direct economic threat to the South, which had benefited from special attention on the part of Moscow during the Brezhnev years".[91] This is coupled with the fact that Gorbachev, in contrast to his predecessor, had a disdain for Central Asia, and view the republics as colonies rather than indispensable parts of the Union.[92] It is not hard to see why Perestroika was not met with the same enthusiasm in Central Asia as it was given in the Baltics.

These factors help explain the background to why the Jeltoqsan[93], or December 1986 protests happened. The exact details of the days differ based on whose account you listen to, but what is known for sure is that anti-government demonstrators arrived in Brezhnev square in Almaty, and many were killed and injured. The protests began after longtime first secretary of the Communist Party of the KSSR, ethnically Kazakh Dinmukhamed Kunaev was replaced by a Russian, Gennady Kolbin. Kunaev was relatively popular among Kazakhs but wished to retire after a long career in politics. Kolbin was chosen by Moscow to be his replacement, despite having never served in Kazakhstan, not being of Kazakh descent, or having any other meaningful connection to Kazakhstan.[94] This decision, along with the Gorbachev-era policy of *glasnost*

[89] Though many suggest his reforms accelerated its collapse.
[90] "Openness" or "transparency" in English.
[91] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 26–27.
[92] Stefany, 27.
[93] also spelled Zheltoksan.
[94] Darkhan Umirbekov, "Almaty 1986 Protests: Finding the Unpublished Testimony," The Journalist As Historian, March 26, 2019, http://www.journalist-historian.com/?p=439.

inspired thousands of Almaty students to take to the streets and demand that a more representative leader be installed.

During the demonstrations, there was intense and fatal violence between the police and protestors, The official death count listed by the KSSR government was three, but the US Library of Congress estimated deaths to exceed 200.[95] Hundreds more were likely injured.[96]

While the initial protests failed in removing Kolbin, his tenure was short-lived regardless. After three years in office, another series of violent anti-Caucasian protests in southwestern Kazakhstan led to Kolbin being recalled back to Moscow in 1989.[97] His replacement was an ethnic Kazakh who had been rising quickly in the Kazakh Politburo, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Nazarbayev would continue to rule Kazakhstan for the rest of its time in the USSR, as well as well into Kazakhstan's independence. Nazarbayev eventually retired from the presidency in 2019 and retained many of his other political positions including Chairman of the Security Council of Kazakhstan until January 2022.

More important than the debatable success of the protests stated goals, the Jeltoqsan represent a watershed moment for Kazakh nationalism. Those in Moscow had previously thought of the Kazakhs as thoroughly Russified and docile, but the events of December 1986 had caused many Kazakhs to "rethink their centuries-old relationship with Moscow and Russia—and even to

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[95] Glenn E. Curtis and Library Of Congress. Federal Research Division., "Kazakstan - Reform and Nationalist Conflict," in *Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan: Country Studies.* (Washington, D.C. : Federal Research Division, Library of Congress : For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., [1997], 1997), 16, http://countrystudies.us/kazakstan/6.htm.

[96] Catherine Putz, "1986: Kazakhstan's Other Independence Anniversary," The Diplomat, December 16, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/1986-kazakhstans-other-independence-anniversary/.

[97] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Refworld | Chronology for Russians in Kazakhstan," Refworld, accessed February 10, 2022, https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38ab1e.html.

Kolbin would later die in Moscow in 1998, while riding the Moscow Metro.

question the veracity of the Party itself".[98] In this way, the Jeltoqsan, not the imminent collapse of the USSR, can be viewed as the beginning of Kazakh independence.

Independence

In December 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed. While in hindsight the writing was seemingly on the wall, at the moment it was jarring and abrupt. The collapse of the USSR remains a topic of interest for historians, politicians, and laypersons alike because of its immense global and local ramifications. Some point to Gorbachev and Perestroika as the beginning of the end, others cite the fall of the Berlin Wall or the de facto loss of 6 of the USSR's constituent republics in 1990,[99] some also point to the increasing nationalist protest across the non-Russian republics, and hard-liners will say that the USSR only collapsed when it officially dissolved in December 1991.

The actual timeline of the process of dissolution is extremely complex and beyond the scope of this thesis, but due to bureaucratic processes, Kazakhstan remained the last state to officially leave the USSR and was technically the entirety of the Union for about four days.[100] While this might seem like nothing more than bar trivia, it is representative of the complex relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia. Whereas some of the other periphery republics left the USSR as soon as they were able, such as Lithuania, who maintains that their inclusion in the USSR was a military occupation against the will of the Lithuanian people, the Kazakh government (headed by Nazarbayev) had little to no interest in either the dissolution of the Union or a breaking of ties with Russia in particular. The successor organization to the USSR, the Commonwealth of Independent States, which promotes political, economic, and military

[98] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 236.
[99] In chronological order: Lithuania, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, Armenia, and Georgia.
[100] "How Kazakhstan Became The Entire Soviet Union For 4 Days," accessed March 4, 2022, https://www.amusingplanet.com/2019/06/how-kazakhstan-became-entire-soviet.html.

cooperation between many of the former Soviet republics, notably Kazakhstan and Russia, was formed in Almaty.[101]

While the Russians have been the perpetrators of many great tragedies against the Kazakh people, the KSSR had also been recipient of many favorable trade policies, and enjoyed significant development under Soviet rule, with Almaty being an excellent example of both the tragedies and spoils of such a relationship. The city grew from a small military outpost to a thriving metropolis at the heart of the Central Asian economy with many of its residents enjoying a standard of living never seen in their lineage, but it came at the cost of not only millions of lives, but also the traditional Kazakh culture. However, in independent Kazakhstan we saw no major desire by any of those in power to return to said traditional culture in any meaningful way. Nazarbayev, himself a Soviet-era leader, sought stability and economic growth above all, and as such has maintained the new Kazakh culture that was created as a result of Soviet industrialization and urbanization.

The transition to independence in Kazakhstan, like the rest of the Union, was jarring. While the writing was on the wall for the USSR, seemingly no one in power recognized its imminence or ramifications. The collapse of the USSR cannot be understated in its tremendous negative consequences for millions of people across continents. The collapse represented one of the largest losses of economic output, living standard, and life expectancy during peacetime in human history.

In Russia, output fell by 45% during 1989-1998, as death rates increased from 1% in the 1980s to over 1.5% in 1994, equivalent to over 700,000 additional deaths annually. In

[101] "Agreements Establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States" (European Commission for Democracy Through Law, 1992), https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL(1994)054-e.

Kazakhstan, gross national income decreased by 36% from 1990-95.[102] In some former Soviet states embroiled in military conflicts, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Tajikistan, GDP in 2000 was 30-50% of pre-transition levels. Even without military conflict, Ukraine's GDP fell by nearly two thirds. In Eastern European countries, output fell less, averaging 20-30% over 2-4 years. However, due partially to favorable geological conditions that endowed the nascent Kazakhstan with large natural gas deposits, as well as a certain level of economic and political stability under Nazarbayev's rule, by 2006 Kazakhstan rebounded to represented 60% of Central Asia's GDP, despite making up only a quarter of the region's population.[103]

In addition to growing the country's economy, a priority for Nazarbayev's government was a promotion of "Kazakhness". This was no easy task. While there had existed a Kazakh culture prior to Russian political and cultural dominance, this traditional nomadic culture no longer existed by the time of independence. In addition, at the time of the USSR's collapse, Kazakhs still did not make up a majority of the population in Kazakhstan. The nascent Kazakh government had a tremendous task ahead of them. They had to manage the transition from a command economy to a market economy, maintain political stability in the wake of the USSR's collapse, and develop a brand-new idea of what it means to be Kazakh, outside of Russian influence, all with the republics ethnic namesake being a minority in their own country.

One of the early goals of the Nazarbayev government was to settle the issue of the many ethnic groups that call Kazakhstan home. This was no easy task during the Soviet period, and it remains a divisive issue to this day. Nazarbayev implemented a Schrodinger's nationality policy,

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[102] Arslan, "The Significance of Shifting Capital of Kazakstan from Almaty to Astana."

[103] "What Explains the Post-Soviet Russian Economic Collapse?," The Wire, accessed February 10, 2022, https://thewire.in/economy/post-soviet-russian-economic-collapse.

where Kazakhstan was simultaneously the state of the Kazakh ethnic group but also a civic state comprised of citizens of all ethnicities. This policy has been heralded as a success by the government, with Nazarbayev declaring Kazakhstan "one people – one nation", though the validity of that statement is questionable at best. Tensions remain high between the dominant Kazakh ethnic group and the various ethnic minorities that also call the country home.[104] This constant tension has made the already difficult task of building a Kazakh nation more complicated due to the need to balance such a task with maintaining the rights of millions of non-ethnic Kazakhs.

The diminishing role of the Russian language is another key goal of the Nazarbayev government, though Russian remains a commonly spoken language as well as a lingua franca within Kazakhstan and across the former USSR. In Kazakhstan, nearly 90% of the population still speaks Russian, and a little less than half of the schools teach at least partially in Russian.[105] Language has been and remains a significant barrier for the Nazarbayev government in promoting Kazakhness but is also a reflection of how closely bound the country's economic and cultural life is to Russia. Most trade is conducted in Russian, and films/TV are rarely in Kazakh, if the latter is even an option.

Nur-Sultan was a marquee moment in the creation of the modern Kazakh state. Again, there were many reasons why the capital was moved from Almaty, but certainly one of the factors was an idea that Almaty was too far gone in regard to the Russian influence that permeated the city.[106] The formerly Soviet, presently Kazakh leadership was well aware of the

[104] Beate Eschment, "Kazakh and/or Kazakhstani? The National Identity of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Its Citizens" (ZOiS, 2020), https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_4_2020.pdf.

[105] "Kazakhstan: Teaching in Russian Makes Language Nationalists See Red | Eurasianet," accessed March 5, 2022, https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-teaching-in-russian-makes-language-nationalists-see-red.

[106] Arslan, "The Significance of Shifting Capital of Kazakstan from Almaty to Astana."

translation between representational power in the built environment into political power, and likely realized that the city could not be rebuilt according to the new ideals of the new state, and instead opted to build a new city.

Almaty of course could not have been and was not abandoned. The Metro is a prime example of this, such a project which was constantly reaffirmed as one of national importance and its enormous budget confirmed that Almaty and its' residents were still of vital importance to the republic. Almaty was only important as an economic and demographic center though, and in some ways actively worked against the state making goals of the independent Kazakh government by serving as a semi-permanent reminder of the Soviet legacy, something the Metro is no small part of.

BUILDING THE METRO

Soviet Urban Planning

Constructing infrastructure was one of the ways in which the USSR established its legitimacy. The purpose for this was dual - both as a successor to former Russian Imperial holdings as well as the world's first self-proclaimed socialist government. "Constructing socialism"[107] quite literally required the construction of socialist ideals in physical space. Socialist thinkers prior to the October Revolution had explored the physical manifestation of socialism, though this was largely theoretical, as there had never been a socialist government with the power and resources necessary to build socialist space. Socialism, especially after the Russian revolution, having never been the explicit goal of any ruling party or government before in human history. While Soviet planners were tasked with constructing socialism, they were also

[107] Jenks, "A Metro on the Mount," 702.

tasked with figuring out what that meant. In a place like Russia, with centuries of firmly established cities, this presented an extra challenge of changing what already existed. However, in the minds of Soviet planners, Central Asia existed as a blank canvas. As political geographer Natalie Koch writes:

> Urbanism was a key element of their "civilizing mission" across the newly Soviet lands of Eurasia… With the Bolshevik rise to power, planners positioned cities as bastions of progress and modernity, and they were tasked with spreading new communist ideals to the rest of the state's territory… Urbanism in Central Asia was especially symbolic because these territories had only somewhat recently been incorporated into the Russian Empire on the eve of the October Revolution. This meant that the Bolsheviks did not inherit firm bureaucratic networks of territorial administration in the region… Furthermore, [Kazakh nomads'] mobile lifestyle was considered a threat and a sign of cultural backwardness. Imperial authorities therefore deemed settlement of these groups' imperative for "the advancement of enlightened rule." Colonial efforts to "civilize" space in Central Asia (that is, to fix people in place) had their roots in the Russian imperial era…the Bolsheviks seamlessly adopted Russian colonial narratives about being the bearers of civilization. It was in this context that urban development came to be seen as one of the primary tools of the Soviet civilizing mission in Central Asia.[108]

To better understand how Soviet notions of urban planning and development were used in Central Asia, we must first better understand Soviet urban planning, which was a unique subfield practiced similarly across the Union, including in Kazakhstan.

Soviet urban planner N.A. Milutin outlines the basic principles of socialist urban planning, their backgrounds, and examples of said principles in practice in his seminal work "Sotsgorod". These practices were based on analyses of Marx, Engels, and Lenin,[109] none of whom were urban planners by trade. *Sotsgorod* deals initially with the philosophical nature of what it means to plan a city based on socialist values, which "represent[ed] a unique effort to draft a physical plan that is the embodiment of a modern social, political, and industrial creed"[110]

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[108] Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle*, 52–53.

[109] N. A. Miliutin, *Sotsgorod: The Problem of Building Socialist Cities*, ed. George R. Collins and William Alex, trans. Arthur Sprague (The MIT Press, 1975), 49, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6353.001.0001.

[110] Miliutin, 1.

and then proceeds to lay out more precise details into things like room sizes in apartments.[111] One of the more surprising components of the socialist analysis in *Sotsgorod* is the contempt for the city as a concept, summed up by Engels' description of the "abolition of the antithesis between town and country".[112] Lenin viewed the increased proliferation of communications and transportation infrastructure as a way to promote a move away from concentrating so much political, economic, and cultural power in cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg and a way to further democratize those forces[113].

This envisioned blurring of the city and the country never happened. Throughout the 20th century, the world rapidly accelerated the already strong trend of increasing urbanization[114] and the Soviet Union was no exception. While Soviet planners may have read *Sotsgorod*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and *The Housing Question*, and been systems are arguably the most efficient form of urban transportation. Metro systems also served as prime examples of constructing socialism outside of the factory or farm.[115] All Metros, by their nature, serve large masses of people, usually at disproportionately lower (or relatively lower) income brackets and are some of the most direct contacts that a government has with its constituents since it is used nearly every day by those that do use it. Metros also tend to operate at financial losses,[116] but act as a net social and environmental positive, perfect for a nation ostensibly unconcerned with the

[111] All based on socialist principles, of course.

[112] Frederick Engels, "On the Abolition of the Anithesis between Town and Country," in *The Housing Question*, 1873, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/hist-mat/hous-qst/ch03b.htm.

[113] Miliutin, *Sotsgorod*, 61.

[114] A trend that would continue to grow well into the 21st century as well, with a majority of the world population now living in cities.

[115] Jenks, "A Metro on the Mount," 702.

[116] Certain systems, like Hong Kong's MRT operate at a profit, but it is an outliner due to Hong Kong's unique land ownership system.

profit motive. The Moscow Metro and the subsequent metros built by the Soviets served as prime examples of socialist values, both in aesthetics, and in practice.[117]

As the first metro built in the Soviet Union, constructed in the post-revolutionary seat of power, the Moscow Metro was a massive project aimed at much more than simply transporting people from point A to point B. "The [Moscow] Metro integrated operational, aesthetic, and ideological work to provide a majestic school in the formation of the new man. Aesthetics were particularly important tools for teaching Soviet power and for converting peasants into docile urbanites".[118] The new man in this case specifically referring to the idea of the "New Soviet Man" that the USSR was keen on creating out of peasants and farmers. This new Soviet man (and woman) was a product of a series of both top-down and bottom-up cultural changes in early Soviet society.[119] The ideals of the new Soviet person focused heavily on living within the confines of a new moral code, where drinking, smoking, debauchery, greed, excessive family ties, and religious beliefs were all frowned upon.[120] The ideals of the new Soviet person also centered heavily around promoting certain behaviors that were seen as essential to the new Soviet way of life such as: hard work, physical fitness, social harmony, gender egalitarianism,[121] modesty, and a general emphasis on not standing out too much.[122] The ideas of the new Soviet person were especially communicated visually, rather than through decrees or literature.[123] And both architectural design as well as decorative ornamentation within the Moscow Metro especially served to communicate the idea of the new Soviet person to the masses.

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[117] Hatherley, *Landscapes of Communism: A History Through Buildings*, 273–74.
[118] Jenks, "A Metro on the Mount," 697–98.
[119] Catriona Kelly, *The New Soviet Man and Woman*, ed. Simon Dixon (Oxford University Press, 2016), 4,5, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199236701.013.024.
[120] Kelly, 4.
[121] Though this was never an ideal that was lived up to.
[122] Kelly, *The New Soviet Man and Woman*, 4, 5, 7, 11, 13.
[123] Kelly, 3.

Figure 3. Komsomolskaya Station in Moscow, an oft-cited example of the opulence of Soviet Metro design

In *Sotsgorod*, Soviet architecture was prescribed to be beautiful by its design, a socialist interpretation of form following function, with Miliutin saying: “An intelligent structural solution needs no covering mask of decoration. A healthy face needs no powder".[124] Yet, in the Moscow Metro, there was powder galore. In Moscow, “Metro builders said they used more marble in the first line than was used in the entire Tsarist period”.[125] This proved to be a very fitting comparison. Soviet metros were intended to be “palaces of the people” where the wealth of the entire Union would be on display for the common person. The Moscow Metro’s early stations feature chandeliers, gilded accents, elaborate and intricate designs, and artwork depicting Soviet history and exalting socialist values. Subsequent Soviet metros are known the world over for their grandeur and intricate decoration, but none are quite as opulent as Moscow’s.

Soviet cities and the metros that served them were built with a one size fits all approach. Socialist planning in the USSR, as outlined in Sotsgorod, represented a desire to build and rebuild cites according to not only a master plan at the micro level but also a macro level. Since the planning principles were derived from the “science” of Marxism, they were viewed as applicable globally, with little concern for regional customs, culture, history, and topography.[126]

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[124] Miliutin, *Sotsgorod*, 77.
[125] Jenks, “A Metro on the Mount,” 710.
[126] Miliutin, *Sotsgorod*, 49, 66.

The October Revolution was intended to be a total and complete revolution, political, economic and cultural. The old ways of constructing and running cities were based on monarchical and capitalist values, and the new Soviet government was tasked with building and rebuilding cities and the society they were in around these new values from the top down. Cities, like pamphlets or speeches, were to be used to visually promote and physically enforce the ideas of the "New Soviet Man" and the principles of Marxism-Leninism. This was done equally in medieval Russian cities like Moscow as well as across the Union in growing cities like Almaty, where these values and principles would not have to compete with entrenched infrastructure and culture.

Soviet Metro Policy

The Soviet Union by no means was the only purveyor of metro systems, or even necessarily exceptional in quantity or quality of building them. Metros, as a form of urban transportation, have quite a few intrinsic benefits that have led them to be implemented across the world. As Soviet engineers remarked, "The metro is the only mode of transport which has a carrying capacity of 50,000 passengers per hour in each direction and can average a speed of 40—48 kph" (24-30 mph).[127] This, combined with the fact that metros are often grade-separated (either above or below-ground) make them exceptionally efficient at moving large quantities of people quickly and cheaply. As such, most of the world's major cities have metros or similar systems as a part of a comprehensive transportation network. Some nations and cities also recognized the representational power that metros hold, such as Paris and Budapest both of which built grand systems at the turn of the century. Other systems, like New York City's offer

[127] Paul M. White, "Planning of Urban Transport Systems in the Soviet Union: A Policy Analysis," *Transportation Research Part A: General* 13, no. 4 (August 1979): 237, https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-2607(79)90049-9.https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-2607(79)90049-9White, 237.

prime examples of how private interests harnessed the efficiency of metro transit in dense urban areas with much less regard for any representational power or room for ornamentation.

Cities, like the metros within them, are not uniquely Soviet in their size or concept, but nevertheless, the Soviet government placed a large emphasis on them. Within the USSR, large cities (which often also served as republican capitals), served as economic backbones forming the spine of the entire Soviet economy. This importance was highlighted even more after the fall of the union, as in the recession period of the 1990's, large cities in the FSU accounted for 4/5ths of their respective national GDP's.[128]

Though the Soviets pursued metro construction for efficiency reasons, it is undeniable that metro construction was also pursued for social and political reasons, such as reinforcing the hierarchy of cities. A commonly cited justification for Soviet cities receiving metro systems is that cities with a population over one million inhabitants would receive a metro.[129] While Tbilisi's Metro finished construction before the city had reached one million inhabitants[130], this was a strong rule for the other Soviet metros. Almaty officially reach one million residents in 1983, and construction on the metro started shortly thereafter[131]. In this way, Soviet metro policy continued to reinforce an implicit hierarchy of cities. Cities, like the republics they were located in, existed at different social, political and economic levels within the union. These differences were concretized by things like metros, which would not be built until the city had reached certain thresholds.

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[128] Alla Pakina and Aiman Batkalova, "The Green Space as a Driver of Sustainability in Post-Socialist Urban Areas: The Case of Almaty City (Kazakhstan)," *Belgeo*, no. 4 (May 18, 2018): 2, https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.28865.

[129] This is not necessarily unique, all the metro systems in the United States except Cleveland's were built well after their respective cities reached a population of a million.

[130] Joseph Salukvadze and Oleg Golubchikov, "City as a Geopolitics: Tbilisi, Georgia — A Globalizing Metropolis in a Turbulent Region," *Cities* 52 (March 1, 2016): 39–54, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.11.013.

[131] "Almaty, Kazakhstan Metro Area Population 1950-2022," Macrotrends, accessed January 31, 2022, https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/21682/almaty/population.

"Socialism theoretically provided architects with a blank slate upon which to build new cities. Soviet power nationalized the land and gave state planners the ability to refashion the entire urban area, not just small parts of it, as was the case before the revolution".[132] Metro construction was one part of a larger project by the Soviets to either construct or reconstruct the built environment, which would in turn construct a society in which its residents embodied the principles of socialism.

Almaty was then due for a metro not only for the simple fact that it was rapidly approaching the one million residents mark, but also for the inherent efficiencies of metro systems. Murat Tankibayevich, the head of the company responsible for the construction and operation of the Almaty Metro, describes the raison d'être for the Metro as such: "to reduce the load on passenger cars and electric transport, as well as to improve the environmental situation in the city of Almaty".[133] Simultaneously emphasizing the efficiencies of transport via metro for both traffic and environmental reasons. An additional unstated reason is the strategic military use of metros as bomb shelters, which was still a very valid concern amidst the still raging Cold War.

Whereas the government in Moscow was the granter of metros, both politically and economically, they also enforced explicitly and implicitly a series of design standards that make Soviet metros instantly recognizable as a category of their own. Deep, palatial stations, long escalators with attendants at the bottom, clocks that count upwards since the last train left rather than downwards for the next train coming, tokens as fare payment, intricate ornamentation, and a triangular network pattern are all quintessentially Soviet metro design characteristics. These shared design features, among others, make Soviet metros a sub-category of their own, with a

[132] Stronski, *Tashkent*, 41.

[133] Murat Tankibayevich, Реальный взгляд на Алматинскую подземку [A real look at the Almaty subway], accessed June 22, 2021, http://www.almaty-metro.narod.ru/podz.html.

common design language across decades, continents, and with the case of Almaty, even governments. Due to all of their political, economic, and military implications, metros in the USSR hold much more significance than mere methods of transportation. They serve as status symbols, educational tools, economic drivers, bomb shelters, art galleries, and emphasize the governments interest in the growth of a city.

Soviet period in Almaty

Prior to the October Revolution, Almaty was little more than a small fort known as Verny,[134] established in 1867.[135] Almaty suffers from a few geographical setbacks. Almaty also rests on the foothills under the Ile-Alatau mountains, which result in pollutants being trapped in the air and diminished air quality despite Almaty having comparatively fewer overall emissions than other larger cities.[136] The Tien Shan Mountain range (of which the Ile-Alatau are a part of) contribute to increased seismic activity. Almaty had historically suffered two devastating earthquakes in 1887 and 1911,[137] and like all cities in seismic zones, is constantly under the threat of another major one occurring at any moment in time. The city also features a wide variety of soil types, which can make tunneling especially complex.[138]

For varying reasons in each decade, Almaty grew from a small backwater town into the metropolis it is today. In the cities' infancy, there was still significant local control over planning, as emphasized by the placement of buildings to increase airflow in a city without much

[134] Sometimes also spelled "Verniy", the original Cyrillic is "Верный".

[135] Pakina and Batkalova, "The Green Space as a Driver of Sustainability in Post-Socialist Urban Areas," 2.

[136] Zhanna Baigabulova, "Transport Policy in London: Lessons for Almaty." (University of Oxford, 2010), 3, https://www.tsu.ox.ac.uk/pubs/1050-baigabulova.pdf.

[137] Askar Ospanov and Baurzhan Iskakov, Interview on Almaty earthquake preparedness, November 30, 2004, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/195535.

[138] M.T. Ukshebaev and V.L. Korotkov, "MODERN EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGIES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SUBWAY IN ALMATY," 14, accessed June 22, 2021, https://elibrary.ru/download/elibrary_24303723_97546975.pdf.

of it due to its location near the Alatau mountains.[139] As the city moved into the Soviet period, there was an increase of top-down Soviet planning and construction in Almaty, with buildings and schemes that look copied and pasted from Moscow or Saint Petersburg rather than Central Asia.

Dinmukhamed Kunaev was a major influence in the growth of Almaty as a city. Born in Verny in 1912, he served as the first secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party from 1964 until he was controversially removed in 1986, sparking the Jeltoqsan protests. Kunaev was a civil engineer by trade before entering politics and was "beloved by the architects both of his day and the present… [because he] took a direct interest in… new projects that tried to combine splendor with a sense of local architectural features".[140] "Local architectural features" was a tricky notion as well, considering that truly traditional Kazakh culture is nomadic, the stress on the built environment that Kunaev placed was a product of a Russian cultural mindset to start with.

This Soviet cultural mindset is a strong theme in the KSSR. In the 1970's, the Kazakhs were described as "Arguably the most thoroughly Sovietized of all Soviet citizens".[141] Culturally speaking, Almaty had begun as a Russian outpost in Kazakhstan and had essentially remained as such. When the Soviets attempted to (re)integrate elements of traditional Kazakh culture, they were "so sanitized by the Soviet culture mill that they took on a Disney-like artificiality", leaving the KSSR as "the most placid corner of the region".[142]

In 1978, the General Plan of Almaty was approved by the USSR Council of Ministers, which indicated a route for a potential metro system, and in 1980, the Council ordered a

[139] Alexander, "Soviet and Post-Soviet Planning in Almaty, Kazakhstan," 167.
[140] Alexander, 171.
[141] Stefany, "The December 1986 Alma-Ata Events and the Developing Kazakh Idea," 33.
[142] Stefany, 34.

feasibility study for such a metro.[143] Shortly thereafter, work began on making the Almaty Metro into a reality.

> 137 buildings and structures were demolished, including 92 residential buildings. 268 apartments have been allocated for these works. A significant number of apartments were provided from the city housing stock and specialists who came to the city.[144]

The work finally began on a project that could never have been envisioned even a few decades. Almaty had risen up the Soviet tier system to become one of the few cities within the Union to be granted a metro system, both an economic boon to the city as well as a symbol of the city's progression into Soviet modernity.

Post-Soviet period in Almaty

Construction for the first station on the Almaty Metro, Oktyabrskaya, now known as Raiymbek Batyr[145] began on September 7, 1988.[146] Though the timing of the beginning of the construction of the Metro proved to be very unfortunate. Three years after the first shovels were used, the Soviet Union dissolved. This caused massive economic and political ruptures in the newly independent Kazakhstan and put the entire metro project was placed on a pause, since entire ministries, departments, and trade agreements simply ceased to exist overnight.[147]

Though conversely, the timing in many ways benefitted the denizens of Almaty. Since there were 3 years of construction that began already, along with the prerequisite feasibility studies, land acquisition, etc., by the time that construction stalled, so much had been built and so many workers were involved that it also became unfeasible to completely end construction.

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[143] Alexey Ikonnikov, "LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL," Continent, May 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20160303124550/http://www.continent.kz/2000/10/15.html.

[144] Ikonnikov.

[145] Named after the October Revolution.

[146] "История Строительства Метрополитена [History of the Construction of the Subway]," Metropolitan KMK, accessed June 22, 2021, http://metroalmaty.kz/?q=ru/node/10; Larisa Dubrovskaya, "Almaty – the Youngest Metro System in the CIS Countries," Underground Expert, December 2016, https://undergroundexpert.info/metropoliteny-mira-i-rf/metro-mira/metro-almaty/.

[147] "История Строительства Метрополитена [History of the Construction of the Subway]."

Thus, in the early 1990's a skeleton crew preformed the construction equivalent to treading water underneath the streets of Almaty, working only to maintain what was already built and little more. Excavation continued, station approach work continued, and a significant amount of the engineers and other metro workers were retained for the project post-independence.[148]

While the Kazakh nation and citizens were undergoing the transition into independence, at the macro level, the same transition was happening at the micro level. Throughout the mid-1990's and early 2000's, young professionals entered the Akimat (city government) with new ideas and less experience than their Soviet educated and experienced peers. This created a clash internally, as the "older officials had been socialized into a Soviet bureaucracy that promoted a particular way of doing things for a particular purpose. Although that had been formally lost, many informal practices continued as the only way of getting the job in hand done".[149]

One notable example of Kazakh departure from traditional bureaucracy was the funding scheme of the Almaty Metro. In many of the former Soviet republics, such as Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, metros had significant funding from local governments, but in Almaty, the Metro received nearly all its funding from the national budget.[150] This designation came with it a dependence on the federal government that was more focused on larger nation-building and nation-stabilizing projects in the 1990's than it was on urban transport in a city that the federal government was planning on leaving soon anyway.

The collapse of the USSR led to immense challenges in constructing such a complex project such as the metro. Not only was there only a massive change in political structures and economic policies, but also in mundane situations like sourcing simple construction materials.[151]

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[148] "История Строительства Метрополитена [History of the Construction of the Subway]."
[149] Alexander, "Soviet and Post-Soviet Planning in Almaty, Kazakhstan," 175.
[150] Tankibayevich, Реальный взгляд на Алматинскую подземку [A real look at the Almaty subway].
[151] Tankibayevich.

For example, Kazakhstan was left without many components of an industrial base, something the 14 other republics previously compensated for, even in 1990 Kazakhstan was importing concrete tubing from neighboring Uzbekistan.[152] This effected all sectors of the Kazakh economy, and is a microcosm for the complex and often chaotic nature of international relations between nations who were quite recently all part of the same federative system.

International Involvement

After the fall of the Soviet Union, roles previously filled by the state, such as planner and constructor, were supplanted by capital. Seeing as Kazakhstan was and still is a relatively poor country, this capital came in the form of international corporations, eager to get a piece of the new markets created by the collapse of the USSR and the new market economies in the 15 former republics. While trying to court investors and contractors for the metro project, the Akimat ran into numerous issues ranging from corruption to a lack of interest based on return on investment. The exact details of many of the dealings and agreements between international corporations and the Akimat were often not made public, but what we do know is that the city had a difficult time transitioning from state-controlled engineering and construction to a hybrid model.

The first major deal with an international corporation to help construct the Almaty Metro was with SNC Lavalin. The Canadian engineering firm was selected as a construction partner in 1995[153] to finish the construction of the Metro. The SNC Lavalin company did conduct a feasibility study for metro construction, but the deal fell through.[154] Why the deal fell through is

[152] Maxim Holbreicht, "ПРОБЛЕМЫ АЛІМА-АТИНСКОГО МЕТРО [PROBLEMS OF THE ALMA-ATA METRO]," *Vechernyaya Alma-Ata*, June 25, 1990, http://www.almaty-metro.narod.ru/problemy.html.

[153] Tankibayevich, Реальный взгляд на Алматинскую подземку [A real look at the Almaty subway].

[154] Saken Khasenov, "Будет Метро в Алматы Через 48 Месяцев [There Will Be a Metro in Almaty in 48 Months]," *Express K*, January 28, 1999, http://www.almaty-metro.narod.ru/budet.html.

not publicly available, but around the time that dealings with the Akimat began, SNC Lavalin became embroiled in a series of legal issues with multiple international contracts. In 1996 SNC Lavalin entered a contract with the government of Kerala, India to modernize three hydroelectric power plants to the tune of $33 million US dollars. This number however turned out to be massively inflated, and the work done by the firm led to a decrease in output at the power plant.[155] Overbudget and delivered late, the SNC Lavalin project represented one of the largest cases of corruption in Kerala's history and led to the court-ordered discharge of Kerala's chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, who was Kerala's Minister for Electricity at the time of the deal.[156]

SNC Lavalin was also subject to criminal investigation related to bribery in the early 2000's in their native Canada, leading to the imprisonment of their CEO in 2017.[157] The company was also subject to criminal fines after a guilty plea related to corruption charges and bribery in Libya.[158] In all, the firm has been subject to investigations, fines, and criminal charges across the world. Charges of bribery and shoddy construction were also reported in Quebec,[159] Bangladesh,[160] and Saskatchewan.[161]

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[155] "CBI to Grill Pinarayi in Lavalin Case," *The Indian Express* (blog), February 18, 2008, https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/cbi-to-grill-pinarayi-in-lavalin-case/.

[156] "SNC-Lavalin Case Explained: How Kerala CM Vijayan Came to Be Prosecuted, Discharged," *The Indian Express* (blog), October 5, 2020, https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/snc-lavalin-case-explained-pinarayi-vijayan-cbi-case-appeal-6663205/.

Vijayan, the first Marxist in India to be indicted for corruption, would later win another election to become Chief Minister again in 2021.

[157] Vincent Larouche, "SNC-Lavalin: le DPCP pourrait aussi porter des accusations [SNC-Lavalin: the DPCP could also lay charges]," *La Presse*, February 12, 2019, sec. Justice et faits divers, https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/justice-et-faits-divers/actualites-judiciaires/201902/12/01-5214375-snc-lavalin-le-dpcp-pourrait-aussi-porter-des-accusations.php.

[158] "SNC-Lavalin Division Pleads Guilty to Fraud over Libya Activities," *BBC News*, December 18, 2019, sec. US & Canada, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50751905.

[159] "SNC-Lavalin Sues Former CEO for Millions over Hospital Bribery Scandal | CBC News," accessed February 19, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/snc-lavalin-pierre-duhaime-1.5043663.

[160] "Former SNC-Lavalin VP Charged in Bangladesh Bribery Probe | CBC News," accessed February 19, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/former-snc-lavalin-vp-charged-in-bangladesh-bribery-probe-1.1858961.

[161] "SNC-Lavalin-Built Carbon Capture Facility Has 'Serious Design Issues': SaskPower | CBC News," accessed February 19, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/snc-lavalin-carbon-capture-project-saskpower-1.3291554.

While we do not know the exact reason(s) that the Akimat ultimately never engaged in any serious construction with SNC Lavalin, they have a clearly established pattern of trying to bribe officials, particularly in developing nations and it would not be unlikely for them to attempt to bribe Akimat officials which could have left them uninterested in further dealings. Though it is also possible the deal fell through for other reasons as corruption is not exactly a non-starter in Kazakhstan. The country did not rank above a 30 out of 100 for levels of perceived corruption according to transparency international until 2017.[162] This level of corruption is common across the former Soviet Union, a legacy from a time when bribery and corruption were necessary to go about life.

In 2005 Austrian engineers from "Beton und Monierbau" (Concrete and Construction) began tunnel construction at the Zhibek Zholy station".[163] While the official website of the Akimat lists Beton und Monierbau, the company actually responsible for construction was an Austrian subsidiary of the larger German Beton und Monierbau. The Austrian subsidiary, which largely focused on tunnelling, has since rebranded itself as BeMo and neither companies' website directly references or link to each other.[164] BeMo seems to be a highly regarded expert in the field of tunnelling, having contracted work across the world, working on some of the biggest names in urban transportation, including: Crossrail in London, East Side Access in New York City, Regional Connector, and Purple Line extension in Los Angeles.[165] BeMo happily lists

[162] "2017 Corruption Perceptions Index," Transparency International, 2017, https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2017.

[163] "История Строительства Метрополитена [History of the Construction of the Subway]"; "Company Profile, Underground Construction and Tunnelling," May 2020, 16, 19, https://www.bemo.net/uploads/tx_bh/bemo_firmenprofil_en_inkl_datenblaetter_stand_05-2020.pdf?mod=1591252145.

[164] "Profile -," BeMo Tunnelling GmbH, accessed February 19, 2022, https://www.bemo.net/en/about-us/profile/.

[165] "Tunnelling -," BeMo Tunnelling GmbH, accessed February 19, 2022, https://www.bemo.net/en/projects/tunnelling/.

details of the work done for more prestigious projects and locales on their website, which only features western Europe, the United States and Canada. In their company profile they do very briefly mention work elsewhere, such as in Kazakhstan, Russia, Tanzania, and Venezuela.

The work done in Russia was a motorway tunnel in Ufa, west of the Ural Mountains and not far from the Kazakh border[166], in 1995 and 1996. There is no other reference or mention to any other post-Soviet or even eastern European nation in the project list on BeMo's website. This either means that the Akimat selected BeMo for its clearly demonstrated competence in tunnelling construction, or that there was possibly some contact between the planners in Ufa and in Almaty. The latter is not a farfetched idea. The relationship between Kazakhs and Russians has remained strong since the collapse, particularly regarding economics and bureaucracy. Especially considering that Ufa is also a similarly sized city to Almaty, the Akimat was probably more interested in BeMo than other companies because of their experience in Ufa.

There were 4 major bidders to construct the trainsets that would serve as Almaty's rolling stock. Metrovagonmash (Russia), Siemens (Austria), Hyundai Rotem (South Korea), and Kazenergoengineering (Kazakhstan, though production was to be based in China) all submitted bids to the Akimat. Hyundai Rotem ended up winning the bid, for reasons that the director of the State Metro Construction agency at the time, Amir Kaidarovich details:

> The ratio of technical and price characteristics of this company was the most optimal. In addition, Hyundai was the only company that agreed to build cars that meet our requirements. The rest said: here are our standard cars, and they cost so much. But, unfortunately, our tunnels with a diameter of 5.10 meters were designed from the very beginning for Russian cars. Therefore, we were faced with a choice: either to buy serial Russian railcars that do not meet many of our technical requirements, or to choose a manufacturer who will build them specifically "for us".[167]

[166] Relatively speaking.

[167] Amir Galiev, Дорогое удовольствие [Expensive Pleasure], December 22, 2007, https://time.kz/news/archive/2007/12/22/2321.

Kaidarovich mentions how the Akimat was stuck by the Soviet-era tunnelling, which limited the ability to purchase trainsets either to a Russian vendor, who apparently make outdated trainsets for captive audiences, or the only company willing to make custom train cars. Regarding the Metrovagonmash cars, while they might fit the most basic requirements, as the second[168] metro system built in the post-Soviet sphere, the Akimat was interested in putting 21st technology at the forefront of construction. The new Rotem cars feature: air-conditioning, disc brakes, an automatic coupling system, and can be fully automated.[169] It is curious however, that Metrovagonmash was unwilling to adapt or adjust its' trainsets to the demands of the Akimat, as they currently specially produce trainsets for both Sofia and Budapest to fit their special technical requirements.[170]

In addition to the Russian connection there is also a slight cultural connection between Kazakhstan and Korea with many "Koryo Saram"[171] living in Kazakhstan, the Russian Far East, and Siberia. Many Korean Kazakhstanis came to the country in the same way many non-ethnic Kazakhs did, via Stalinist deportations. More than 100,000 ethnic Koreans were deported to Kazakhstan, with many resettling in Almaty. Today, roughly 333,000 ethnic Koreans live in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.[172]

Hyundai Rotem entered a contract to provide trainsets for the Almaty Metro in 2008, and delivered them in 2010, one year before the system opened.[173] Despite the fact that

[168] The second was built in Kazan, Russia in 2005.
[169] Galiev, Дорогое удовольствие [Expensive Pleasure].
[170] "TMH - Metro Trains," accessed February 20, 2022, https://tmh.global/products/metro/.
[171] Literally: "Korean People" in Korean.
[172] German Kim, "Korean Diaspora in Kazakhstan: Question of Topical Problems for Minorities in Post-Soviet Space," 2003, https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/publictn/89/contents-63.pdf.
[173] "Railway Systems-Project Record View," accessed February 19, 2022, https://www.hyundai-rotem.co.kr/Eng/Business/Rail/Business_Record_View.asp?brid=28.

Metrovagonmash now had a product that could compete with the custom Rotem cars[174], the Almaty government decided to renew their deal with Hyundai Rotem in 2018 to fulfill increased demand on the line 1 extension.[175]

While unfortunately the exact details of every contract that the Akimat entered into with foreign companies is unknown, what we can see is a clear and demonstrated willingness to work with foreign experts in order to build the new metro in a cheap and efficient manner. However, with little previous experience in a field apparently rife with corruption, the government of Almaty found itself consistently entering in non-starter negotiations and ending relationships as quickly as they were formed. We can also see a lack of willingness from international capital to loan and fund construction of such a project, which could be indicative of the project being too ambitious from its Soviet period inception. After all, Almaty is not a particularly large city, and Kazakhstan is not a particularly wealthy nation.

Physical Infrastructure Comparison

One of the most immediately obvious vestiges of the Soviet legacy of the Almaty Metro is the use of tokens as fare payment. Tokens had previously been common forms of fare payment the world over,[176] as they are much more difficult to counterfeit than paper tickets. However, beginning in the 90's and early 2000's most transit systems began transitioning to RFID cards as a means of fare payment. Difficult to counterfeit, and much more convenient to the rider to carry than tokens, RFID smart cards have been integrated in nearly every major city's transit system.

[174] "Deina," accessed February 20, 2022, https://tmh.global/products/klyuchevye-proekty/new-generation-of-metro-trains/.

[175] "Railway Systems-Project Record View."

[176] "Transit Tokens – Numista," accessed February 19, 2022, https://en.numista.com/catalogue/index.php?ct=exonumia&tttr=y&p=2#e_azerbaidjan.

Figure 4. Metro tokens clockwise from top left: Kyiv, Almaty, Moscow, and Tashkent.

However, in the former Soviet Union, token machines are still a common sight, even in conjunction with smart cards. Baku, Kyiv, Minsk, Tashkent, Tbilisi, and St. Petersburg have all accepted transit tokens well into the 2000's, with Yerevan and Tashkent still only accepting tokens as of 2019. In all these cases, the systems were built and opened entirely under Soviet direction, which makes the fact that Almaty utilizes tokens that much more interesting. The Almaty Metro also uses a smart card, called "Smart Card" in Russian and not Kazakh. There seems no explanation for Almaty's use of tokens other than an enduring mindset from senior engineers and planners left over from the Soviet Union. Metro engineers were clearly aware of smart card technology and its benefits since they were implemented from the beginning, but still chose to implement tokens. While tokens may still be used in other cities in order not to disrupt passenger routines much, the Almaty Metro was brand new, there was no need to introduce such an outdated fare payment system into such a modern metro system.

Figure 5. Metro logos from top left: Kyiv, Almaty, Moscow, and Tashkent.

The Almaty Metro's logo is remarkably similar to that of Soviet metros as well. Consisting of a simple letter M, visually similar logos can be found in Moscow, Kyiv, Tbilisi, Baku, Tashkent, Minsk, Kazan, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Samara, and of course Almaty. Using the letter M for metro[177] in a metro's logo is a very common design choice across the world.[178] One could argue that this logo design is more common than uncommon, so it is no surprise that the Almaty metro uses such a logo. However, the letter type of the M used in the logo, and its explicit use on the token bears a striking similarity to Moscow.

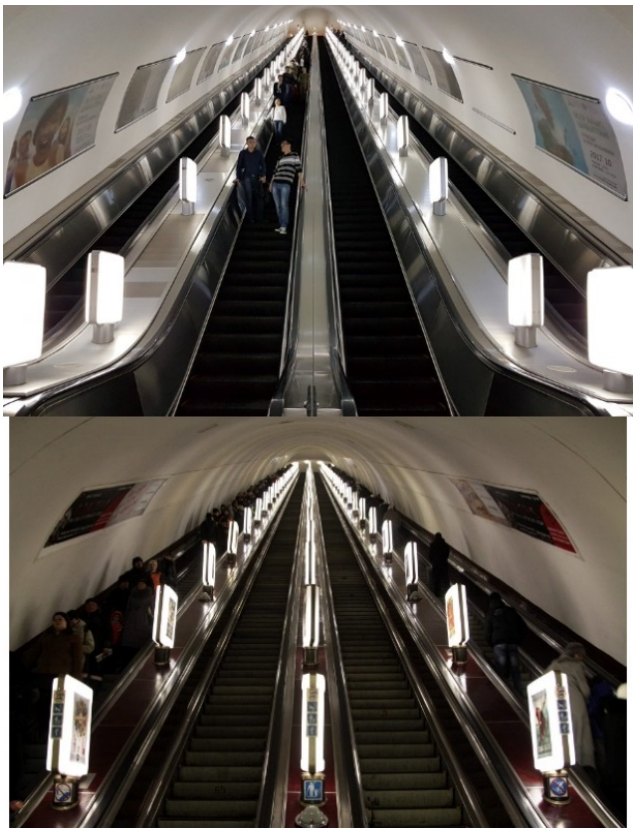

Figure 3. Above: Escalators in the Abay Station in Almaty. Below: Escalators in the Maidan Nezalezhnosti station in Kyiv.

Soviet metros can often be identified by their extremely long and relatively fast escalators, often with attendants at the bottom[179]. As bomb shelters as well as means of transport, the Soviet metros were incredibly deep, often hundreds of feet or dozens of meters below ground. This is much too far of a distance to have a simple set of stairs or a slow-moving escalator bringing passengers to and from the surface. Some escalators ran at speeds of nearly 3 feet or 0.9 meters a second,

[177] Or a similarly applicable letter in the nations' languages' word for metro.

[178] Notable examples include Sydney, Rio de Janeiro, Medellin, Prague, Cairo, Paris, Budapest, Rome, Mexico City, Doha, Istanbul, and Los Angeles.

[179] At the bottom of the escalators, it was common to find a small box with pensioners who would enforce rules and encourage safe and efficient passenger flows, though many of these escalator attendants are now losing their jobs as the profession is being phased out.

though for safety and efficiency reasons they run slightly slower now, still often faster than western counterparts though.[180]

Figure 4. Above: Almaly Station in Almaty. Below: General Andranik Station in Yerevan. Both are deep pylon stations.

The station designs in the Almaty Metro are also remarkably similar to various systems across the FSU. The Soviets commonly used 2 types of platform layouts, as do most metro and heavy rail systems around the world. The first is an island platform, where passengers stand on an open platform in between tracks and can enter trains going in either direction. The second is a side platform layout, where the tracks are in the middle of the station and passengers board on platforms against either wall. Passengers in side platform stations must take extra care to ensure they wait on the correct platform because changing platforms requires walking up and subsequently down an extra set of stairs. In Almaty, 8 of the total 9 stations are island platform stations, with only one of the original terminal stations, Alatau, being a side platform station. Within those island platform stations, especially those constructed before Line 1 was extended to include the Sayran and Moscow stations, feature a common construction characteristic of Soviet metro station: deep pylon and deep column stations. These two stations are characterized by their

[180] Marcus Wong, "Escalator Attendants of the Former Soviet Union," *Euro Gunzel* (blog), December 23, 2015, https://www.eurogunzel.com/2015/12/escalator-attendants-former-soviet-union/.

Figure 5. Above: Abay Station in Almaty. Below: Sukharevskaya station in Moscow. Both are deep column stations.

large central halls, with either large columns or large pylons separating the main hall and the track.[181] These stations were the most common in the Moscow Metro's early days[182], as they were the easiest to construct deep underground with the technology at the time. In 1938 a demonstration of new station architectural possibilities opened. The Mayakovskaya station of the Moscow Metro is the world's first example of the deep column station, where instead of massive and costly pylons, steel columns were used to support the large underground structure.[183] The last and least common of the Soviet designs that is exhibited in Almaty is that of the single vault deep station. Rather than digging three similarly sized circular tunnels and connecting them with either pylons or columns, the deep vault station builds two tunnels for trains and then a large arch above them which has the earth underneath it excavated, creating a large open space in the platform. This technology was first debuted in the Saint Petersburg Metro in 1974, with only one station utilizing this technology in Moscow.[184]

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[181] "Строительство Пилонных Станций [Construction of Pylon Stations]," Nashe Metro, accessed February 21, 2022, https://nashemetro.ru/construction/pilon/.

[182] From 1935 to 1956.

[183] "Строительство колонных станций [Construction of column stations]," Nashe Metro, accessed February 21, 2022, https://nashemetro.ru/construction/column/; "The People's Palace: Exploring Moscow Metro's Evolving Designs," *Railway Technology* (blog), December 10, 2018, https://www.railway-technology.com/features/moscow-metro-stations/.

[184] "Строительство Односводчатых Станций Глубокого Заложения [Construction of Single Vault Deep Stations]," Nashe Metro, accessed February 21, 2022, https://nashemetro.ru/construction/odnosvod/. Washington D.C.'s Metro also utilities this technology significantly.

Despite benefitting from decades of technological and engineering advances, the designs of the Almaty Metro stations followed a similar chronological pattern to that of Moscow's Metro. The earlier and most central of the stations of the Almaty Metro, Zhibek Zholy, Almaly, Baikonur, and Auezov Theater, all utilize the deep pylon technology[185], while the two stations built as extensions to Line 1, Sayran and Moscow, utilize the deep column design. Unlike Soviet-era metros, the deep vault technology and design was used from the start in Almaty, in the island platform terminal station, Raiymbek Batyr, uses the deep vault station design.

Figure 6. Above: Soviet-era sketch of the Raiymbek station. Below: The finished Raiymbek Station, a deep vault style station.

At every level, from the company logo, to the form of payment, to the design and layout of nearly every station in the Almaty Metro, we see a clear connection to a specifically Soviet way of constructing metros. With the exception of the new trains and lack of explicitly socialist imagery or station names, one could ride the Almaty Metro and assume it was opened along with

[185] Or at least appear to.

the Tashkent Metro in 1977, deep into the Soviet period, and have very little physical evidence contradicting you.

What's in a Name?

While the Kazakhs have participated in (and continue to participate in) de-communization, many of the old ways of thinking still permeate the culture. For example, the Soviets placed a heavy emphasis on honoring figures through naming streets, buildings, parks, etc. after various political, cultural, and war heroes. Street names were an extremely common and widespread use of this practice, and street names in Kazakhstan remain a contentious political issue[186]. The Soviet emphasis on naming streets after important figures continued in post-Soviet Almaty, with only three streets in the city center not named after people,[187] though many of the streets had their named changed to reflect de-communization. This emphasis was not placed on the Metro, with only two of its stations named after people. The Raiymbek station is named after Raiymbek Batyr, a legendary Kazakh warrior who led the resistance to Mongol invasions in the 18th century, and for whom many streets and mosques are named after. The other station named after a person, Abay,[188] which is named after Abay Qunanbaiuly, a popular Kazakh poet and philosopher who served as an inspiration to the Alash Orda, and whose name/likeness is celebrated across Kazakhstan. These stations are even debatably not named after people, but rather named after the streets that they serve, which happen to be named after people, as most of the streets in central Almaty are.

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[186] Mehmet Volkan Kaşikçi, "The Soviet and the Post-Soviet: Street Names and National Discourse in Almaty," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 8 (September 14, 2019): 1345, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2019.1641586.

[187] Kaşikçi, 1362.

These streets are Dostyq, Zheltoqsan and Zhibek Zholy, named after Friendship, The Jeltoqsan protests, and the Silk Road, respectively.

[188] Also spelled Abay.

Most public transit stations outside of the former Soviet Union are named for their geographic location either by naming the station after the major streets/intersections or neighborhood(s) the station serves, as most public transit agencies consider wayfinding to be a top priority and naming a station something that has no geographic basis in the surrounding area can be extremely confusing to riders.[189] Though this is generally true, especially outside of the former Soviet Union, there still exists many stations that are named or renamed to promote the life and/or legacy of people that are of interest by the current government to promote.[190] Paris, for example,[191] has stations named after: Alexandre Dumas, Charles de Gaulle, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gabriel Peri,[192] George V, Pierre and Marie Curie, and countless stations named after the streets they serve which are named for major figures.[193] The last practice of naming a street after a major figure and then naming the station after the street is extremely common[194] which allows a city/transit agency to both revere the figure in question while also maintaining easy wayfinding.

While something like the name of a place may seem like a minor detail, Natalie Koch notes: "Soviet citizens, like so many others around the world, understood [place names] to be principal sites of encounter with the outside world… capital cities are where many foreigners first come to know a polity, place, region, or territory".[195] Place names can easily and quickly

[189] Some transit agencies, like Los Angeles' Metro, will have official names that are not in line with the colloquial names, such as the Civic Center/Grand Park station which is officially the Civic Center/Grand Park/Tom Bradley station, named after the Los Angeles mayor responsible for the creation of Metro's rail services.

[190] Public transit agencies can also choose to sell naming rights to a station to a corporation for advertisement purposes such as NRG station in Philadelphia.

[191] Other cities across the world such as: Algiers, Buenos Aires, Atlanta, Istanbul, and Mexico City, among others, also have stations named after great figures that are not related to the geographic location of the station.

[192] A hero of World War II, like many stations and streets in the FSU.

[193] There is also a Stalingrad station commemorating the Soviet victory in the Battle of Stalingrad.

[194] Examples include Rio de Janeiro, Toronto, Cairo, Berlin (including the "Karl Marx Street" Station), Tehran, and Manila.

[195] Koch, *The Geopolitics of Spectacle*, 55.

convey whatever idea the conveyer wants to foreigners through names of places like large airports[196] Whereas infrastructure such as airports are often given names to represent the city, region, or country to outsiders, local infrastructure such as metro stations serve a much larger percentage of residents at a regular basis. The names chosen for stations are intended to cement the greatness of the figure into the minds of those living in the city.

One of the planned extension stations that has yet to be opened to the public is set to be named after Bauyrzhan Momyshuly, a Kazakh hero of the Great Patriotic War. This is particularly interesting since none of Almaty's existing stations are named solely after people, and the person in question is a Soviet hero of Kazakh descent rather than a hero of or for an independent Kazakhstan. The Bauyrzhan Momyshuly station complicates the naming significantly, as before its existence one could make the argument that the Akimat was moving away from old Soviet naming conventions in favor of a more efficient and international naming system, but the introduction of the Bauyrzhan Momyshuly station shows the old Soviet mindset is still present in some ways.

Turn of the Century

In 2002, a new general plan for the city of Almaty was developed. This was to replace the existing plan from 1992. In the plan, the authors emphasize the importance of "garden city" aesthetics, building and maintaining safe transportation infrastructure, and ensuring ample housing availability.[197] In addition to the general plan ideas, there exists a separate subsection devoted entirely to discussing transportation in Almaty. The plan recommends three metro lines,

[196] Examples include Indira Gandhi airport in Mumbai, Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris, Benito Juarez airport in Mexico City, JFK airport in New York City, George Bush airport in Houston, and recently, the Harry Reid airport in Las Vegas, among others.

[197] "О Генеральном плане города Алматы [About the General plan of the city of Almaty]," Adilet: Legal information system of Regulatory Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, July 16, 2002, https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P020001330_.

laid out in a triangular network pattern, in large part to curb air pollution. Due to the location of the city next to the Alatau mountain range, air pollution can often get trapped and blanket the city, and while this was already an issue during the Soviet period, it became of increased importance post-independence as private car-ownership became easier.

Metro development accelerated after 2005, when Nazarbayev approved the "Program for the development of the city of Almaty until 2010" in which the metro became a “priority investment project”. This designation brought in significant funding and a provided a jolt of construction not seen since the Soviet period. The last 7 years of construction, starting from this moment in 2005, were responsible for 90% of construction work done post-independence.[198] Though the priority investment project designation injected millions of tenge into the project, the 2008 recession’s global effects would mean that the Metro would not come out unscathed. 24 out of the 57 billion tenge allocated to finish the Metro was cut in 2008. Though this cut did not last long, in 2009, Nazarbayev said of the Metro “the question of the subway for Almaty is not an idle one” and allocated back 22 billion tenge to the project.[199]

[198] “ИСТОРИЯ СТРОИТЕЛЬСТВА МЕТРОПОЛИТЕНА [HISTORY OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SUBWAY],” Almaty Metro Kurylys, accessed June 25, 2021, http://www.almatymetro.kz/en/aboutcompany/istoriya-stroitelstva-metropolitena.

[199] Vitaliy Murashkin, “Работники алматинского метрополитена провели митинг в поддержку решения главы государства [Workers of the Almaty metro held a rally in support of the decision of the head of state],” Kazakhstan Today, April 10, 2009, https://www.kt.kz/rus/state/rabotniki_almatinskogo_metropolitena_proveli_miting_v_podderzhku_reshenija_glavi_gosudarstva_1153482889.html.

In December 2011, 33 years after the first plans were drawn up and 23 years after construction began the Almaty Metro opened to the public.[200] Much had changed from the original plans drawn up by Soviet engineers. Not only had things changed at a micro level, such as station naming, design, and construction procedures, but it opened into a world entirely different from the one in which it began. The Soviet Union had collapsed, and the city served by the metro had transitioned from a republican capital to a national capital to a major city.

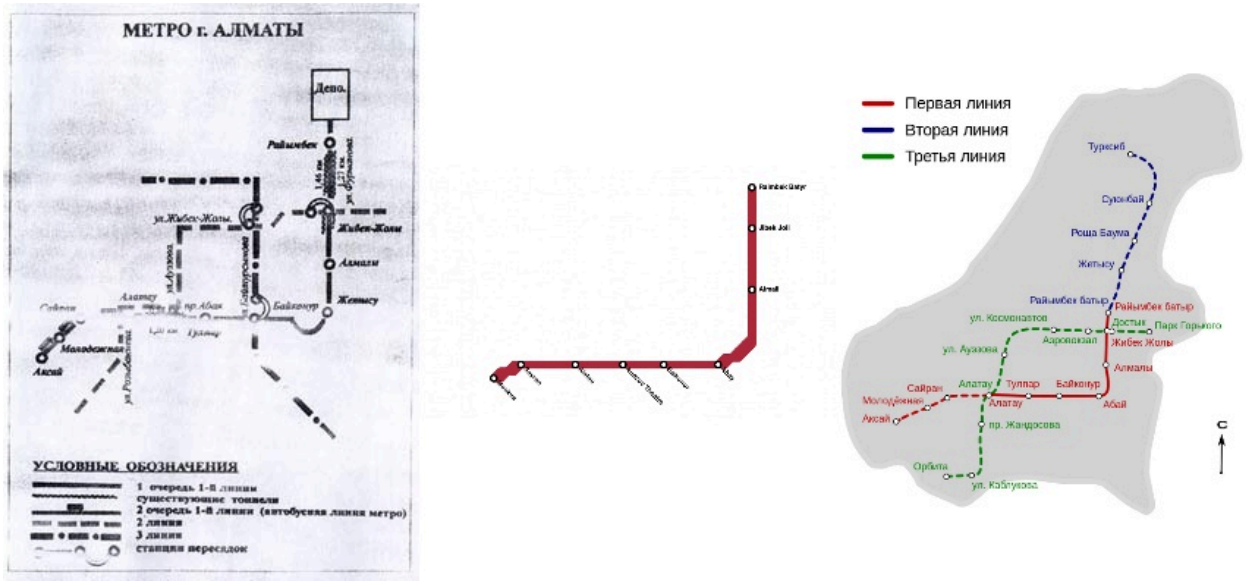

Figure 7. From left to right: Soviet-era map of the Almaty Metro, Current map of the completed line 1, and projected future system map.

The Metro, and its story remain unfinished. Line 1 was expanded to include the Sayran and Moscow stations in 2015.[201] Construction is underway on another two-station expansion to Line 1, which was set to open in 2021 as the first half of a four-station expansion but is currently delayed.[202] A major cause for the indefinite delay was the arrest of the chairman of the board of

[200] It was also about 2 weeks before the 20th anniversary of Kazakh independence.

[201] "Almaty Metro," Explore Almaty, accessed February 19, 2022, https://www.almaty-kazakhstan.net/travel/almaty-metro/.

[202] Peter Karandashov, "Как проходит строительство новых станций метро в Алматы (фото) [How is the construction of new metro stations in Almaty (photo)]," Nur.KZ, June 1, 2019, https://www.nur.kz/society/1795417-kak-prohodit-stroitelstvo-novyh-stancij-metro-v-almaty-foto/?

the Almaty Metro, Kairat Reimov on fraud charges.[203] Interestingly, one of the northern extensions is set to have an above ground segment and station,[204] something that was a rarity in Soviet metros, but has been used in post-Soviet Moscow[205]. In addition, talks for a second line were underway prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but their current status is unknown.

As a part of the first extension of the metro, two new stations were opened: Sayran and Moscow. The Moscow station is seemingly named after the nearby Moscow shopping center but was originally named Molodyozhnaya[206]. The station was renamed as a part of a quid pro quo naming deal between the Akimat and Moscow. In 2011 the chairman of the Moscow Metro announced that a new metro station will be named "Alma-Atinskaya" after the Russian name for Almaty, and at the same time that a future metro station in Almaty will be renamed after Moscow. Both promises were fulfilled.[207]

The complex relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan added another wrinkle in January of 2022, when Kazakhstan and Almaty were the site of the largest protest movement since the Jeltoqsan. The protests began in response to an increase in fuel prices after removal of the price cap, they soon became overarching anti-corruption and anti-government protests. These protests quickly turned violent, with state forces killing at least 225 people.[208] In response to the

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[203] "The Case of Almatymetrokrylys Was Commented on by the Police - News Mail.Ru," October 5, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20211005163659/https://news.mail.ru/economics/39229123/?frommail=1; "Police Refused to Disclose Details on Case of Almatymetrokurylys Head," Kazakh Telegraph Agency, 11 2019, https://kaztag.kz/en/news/police-refused-to-disclose-details-on-case-of-almatymetrokurylys-head.

[204] Elena Ilyinskaya, "В следующем году в бюджете необходимо предусмотреть 4,5 млрд. тенге для строительства второй очереди алматинского метрополитена - аким Алматы [Next year it is necessary to provide 4.5 billion tenge in the budget for the construction of the second stage of the Almaty metro - akim of Almaty]," KazInform, December 10, 2010, https://www.inform.kz/ru/article/2330489.

[205] And across the world.

[206] Russian for "youth".

[207] "The Moscow Metro Station in the Brateevo District Will Be Called Alma-Atinskaya. :: Society :: RBC," accessed February 21, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20181229222035/https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/20111129145516.shtml.

[208] Reuters, "Kazakhstan Puts Unrest Death Toll at 225," *Reuters*, January 15, 2022, sec. Asia Pacific, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/kazakhstan-says-225-bodies-delivered-morgues-during-unrest-2022-01-15/.

unrest, the Russian dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization[209] sent 2,000 troops into Kazakhstan at the request of current president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. While analysts seem to think that there are not many immediate long-term implications in the sense that Kazakhstan might now "owe" Moscow or that Moscow is trying to control Kazakh domestic affairs[210], in historical context it follows a well-established pattern of Russia meddling in Kazakh domestic affairs and diluting Kazakhstan's independence.

In addition, while Nazarbayev was already resigned from the presidency, the January 2022 protests led to his removal from many notable positions, including Kazakhstan's security council. At the time of this writing, the situation is ongoing, but it is worth watching how the Kazakh government wishes to move towards or away from Russia in this new post-Nazarbayev period.

[209] Essentially a Russian version of NATO.

[210] "Kazakh-Russian Relations in the Context of the War in Ukraine," accessed March 7, 2022, https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/kazakh-russian-relations-in-the-context-of-the-war-in-ukraine/.

CONCLUSION

When one rides the Almaty Metro today, they will see not a modern metro with some strange Soviet remnants left over, but rather a quintessentially Soviet metro with a couple of modern quirks. Some of this is unavoidable. Even if the Akimat was interested in removing all traces of Soviet legacy from its new metro system, so much construction had been done above and below ground that such an undertaking would so incredulously expensive that it is not even worth considering as a viable option. However, so many aspects that are unique to only Soviet metros are present in the metro that opened 20 years after the USSR's dissolution that it cannot simply be only a case of being too expensive to not build. The visual design and operational similarities to Soviet metros was a conscious choice made by Kazakh planners.

Over the course of Kazakhstan's independence, there were many opportunities to change or alter the design and operation of the Metro to reflect a more internationally styled system. The project was also not something that flew under the radar, where people did not care enough to change it. The Metro became a project of national importance in 2005, and as such received significant attention from the public and the government, none of whom objected to continuing to build the metro in the Soviet style. The leadership in Kazakhstan certainly had to be aware of both the history behind why and how metros were built in the USSR and had to also be aware of the ideas such a design was supposed to convey, as most were educated in the Soviet Union. Despite such awareness, there was no decision made to move away from the Soviet style. One possible scenario is that engineers and planners simply did not care and thought of these design styles as unimportant enough to not warrant an expensive redesign process. Metros and other tools of public infrastructure are often overlooked, and this is precisely why they are such powerful as tools of social education and development. The Soviets were explicitly aware of and

exploited the fact that whether or not the audience knows it, public infrastructure influences people in subconscious ways. It seems that the engineers and planners of the Almaty Metro were among those affected by this influence, as evidenced in the final product.

It again comes as no surprise then, that whilst the government might ostensibly promote a stronger Kazakh state less reliant on Russia, and enact surface-level policies to do so, the reality is that both the Russian state and Russian culture remain remarkable influences on Kazakhstan, over 30 years after it has ostensibly been independent from Russia. Part of the problem is that anticolonialism is not a strong force in Kazakhstan. Many of its residents are still ethnic Russians, who have little interest in the development of a uniquely Kazakh nation, and among the non-Russians, many are not necessarily anti-Russian. In this sense, the metro can be seen as an embodiment of the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mentality. This attitude was precisely the goal of Soviet metro policy. By politicizing nearly every facet of a project viewed by the public as largely technical and simply a neutral method of transporting people, the Soviets managed to both convey their ideology and do so to a degree that the approach of how to construct infrastructure permeated through Kazakh planners and government officials minds well after the USSR ceased to exist.

Conversely, this also calls into question the effectiveness of using design to influence politics and society. Soviet metro design was intended to impart Socialist values unto its users. The Almaty Metro follows Soviet design principles, yet there is little to no socialist movement in Kazakhstan today. This could be because the values meant to be imparted are not necessarily part and parcel of a Socialist government, but that was also the point. To the average user, a metro station is an innocuous space, simply a transit point from A to B, but Soviet planners exploited this very fact in order to advance their ideology.

In this regard, the Soviet mission to completely change Kazakhstan from the ground up worked. The Soviets aimed for not only a political revolution, but also a social one, where the ways of the past would make way for the New Soviet Man, industrialization, and modernism. While the socialist aspect of Soviet ideology is not particularly present in Kazakhstan today, the New Kazakh Man, as an offshoot of the New Soviet Man, is. The Soviets managed to have a lasting cultural impact on the Kazakh people long after the USSR collapsed.

Metros are like time capsules. The entire visual and auditory experience is planned and semi-permanent. On a street, construction of new buildings, demolition of old ones, new cars, and updated signage can all indicate the passage of time. Underground, few features ever change visually, save for updated advertisements, wayfinding signage, and the occasional new trainset. In other former Soviet cities these are actual time capsules from a Soviet past, but in Almaty, the Metro acts as a sociocultural time capsule. In the time capsule of the Metro, we see the old Soviet values and ideals that still clearly exist within the psyche of Kazakh planners, expressed in the built environment. It is for these reasons that a trip on the Almaty Metro is not just from one station to the next, but a journey into Kazakhstan's Soviet past and complicated future.

FIGURES

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