

18. The Collective Security Treaty Organization. History of creation, fundamentals of activity, organizational structure [Electronic source]. Available at: https://odkb-csto.org/25years/index.php?sphrase_id=72639 (accessed: 10.02.2022)
19. Report and order on the implementation of the state strategy of anti-corruption policy of the Kyrgyz Republic [Electronic source]. Available at: https://mvd.gov.kg/anticorruptional_politic (accessed: 22.02.2022)
20. Tugelbaeva B.G., Osmanova A.S. Realizatsiia antinarkoticheskoi programmy v Kyrgyzstane. // Protivodeistvie narkougroze na sovremennom etape pravovoi i sotsialno-gumanitarnyi aspekty: ilometres mezhdunarodnogo nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara. – Krasnoyarsk: Siberian Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2020. – 88 P.
21. Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020. Cultivation and Production. Executive Summary // United Nations Office on drugs and crime [Electronic document]. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/20210503_Executive_summary_Opium_Survey_2020_SMALL.pdf (accessed: 20.02.2022)

Received 28.06.2022.

Accepted for publication 12.07.2022.

AZIZ NIYAZI. VORUKH – THE TERRITORY OF THE TAJIK-KYRGYZ DISCORD. ON THE ISSUE OF THE INITIAL DEMARCATION OF THE SOVIET PERIOD. Part 1

Keywords: interethnic conflicts; Central Asia; Ferghana Valley; Vorukh enclave; Kyrgyzstan; Tajikistan; national-territorial division.

Aziz Niyazi,

PhD(History), Senior Research Associate,

Centre for the Study of Central Asia,

Caucasus and the Urals-Volga region,

IOS, RAS

e-mail: aziz.niyazi@mail.ru

© A. Niyazi 2023

Citation: Niyazi A. Vorukh – the Territory of the Tajik-Kyrgyz Discord. On the Issue of the Initial Demarcation of the

Soviet Period // Russia and the Moslem World, 2023, № 1 (319), P. 52–63. – DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2023.01.04

Abstract. The Tajik enclave of Vorukh on the territory of Kyrgyzstan is an explosion-dangerous point of tension, which is very difficult to defuse. Many sections of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border near Vorukh remain non-delimited. Interethnic conflicts are constantly taking place there. In the course of the negotiations on the drawing of clear lines of borders, the opposing parties turn to various kinds of documents that are beneficial for their positions. Tajik experts prefer to rely on documentary sources of the initial period of national-territorial demarcation in Soviet Central Asia, their Kyrgyz colleagues – on post-war documents confirming the separation of Vorukh from the main part of Tajikistan. At the same time, there exists an ideologized radicalization of views on the status of Vorukh in the media of the two republics. Some argue that it has always been and remains an enclave. Others say that it was not originally an enclave and is not at present, since the lands connecting it with the “mother territory” were illegally annexed. In the article based on the analysis of modern expert assessments and documents of the 1920s on the drawing of borders between the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region of the RSFSR (later the Kyrgyz ASSR) and the Uzbek SSR, and later In the Tajik SSR, it is concluded that Vorukh was not an enclave at that time.

On the Tajik-Kyrgyz border near the village of Vorukh and in the surrounding territories, there are occasional conflicts between the local Tajik and Kyrgyz population. In recent years, clashes between citizens have typically been accompanied by armed confrontations between soldiers of the two countries. Warring parties report their dead and wounded, destroyed houses and households, and accuse each other of provocations. After that, the authorities of various ranks and from different departments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan announce that further steps will be taken in order to resolve the conflict, while law

enforcers and citizens habitually brace themselves for a new round of confrontation.

Vorukh is a large Tajik village and a territory of the same name located within the Kyrgyz Republic. This *jamoat* (rural commune) is part of the city of Isfara in Sughd region of Tajikistan and is surrounded by the administrative territories of Kyrgyzstan. For Tajikistan, Vorukh is currently considered to be an exclave, and for Kyrgyzstan it is an enclave [1]. To date, the fact that the two republics claim the lands of Vorukh and the adjacent territories remain a sticking point in the process of relieving rather strong border tensions [2]. Over time, the Vorukh issue has been further aggravated due to demographic reasons, as well as land and water shortages. The struggle for local living space coincided with the general post-Soviet social disaster and the rise of nationalism in the republics of Central Asia. Moreover, the escalation of tensions on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border coincided with the increase in destructive natural and climatic effects on the environment and local communities. Explosive situation in this region is gradually building up not only due to all abovementioned destabilizing factors. Over the past 3–4 years, the militarization level of border territories between the two states has noticeably increased. Military subunits with army equipment are being pulled along the border; fortifications of layered defences are set up by both sides.

To reduce tensions, the precise demarcation and demarcation of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in the areas of national and territorial disputes seem to be the first and most feasible step. So far, approximately 600 out of over 900-kilometer border between the two states have been finally agreed on [3]. Dozens of disputed areas, most of which are located in the areas of Isfara and Batken, remain undivided [4]. The parties cannot come to an agreement on their ownership, since they refer to different documents and historical events of the Soviet era, use different rules and experience of international law to determine the boundaries. Demarcation is further complicated by the frequent

interspersing of Kyrgyz and Tajik settlements and economic areas. Sometimes they form a chessboard pattern. Borders often run along the streets of villages or cross the same road in several places. The issue is aggravated by the fact that every now and then the Tajik media publish materials claiming that Vorukh is neither an exclave nor an enclave, but is an integral part of the Republic of Tajikistan, illegally cut off from its “mother territory”.

Bishkek maintains that Vorukh remains a Tajik enclave on the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic [5]. At the same time, the opponents refer to solid facts, strong arguments and counterarguments. This is not surprising, since the history of the formation of Vorukh as an enclave is so convoluted that both disputing sides have their own truths based on selective convenient facts.

During negotiations on the Vorukh problem, Kyrgyz experts usually refer to the situation in the late 1950s and following periods. At that time, the movement of local borders as part of economic reforms resulted in Vorukh becoming a standard enclave. They produced documents that described local borders more clearly. As a rule, the Tajik side insists that the documents of 1924–1929 should be considered. That was the time when major decisions regarding the formation of the Central Asian republics were made; their main outlines are still largely based on those decisions.

The information on the setting of borders in the Vorukh region at the dawn of Soviet era is abundant. It should be noticed that the most significant of the sources indicate that Vorukh was not originally an enclave. This is supported by multiple documents and maps of the 1920–1930s.

During the Central Asian national and territorial division in 1924, the territory of Vorukh was included in the Isfara volost (Konibodom District, Fergana Region of the Uzbek SSR) [6]. Part of this volost – the Vorukh lands – was wedged into the neighbouring Batken District (Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast),

which was part of Russia [7]. Vorukh was connected to the rest of Uzbekistan by a mere strip of land that ran through small Tajik villages and rural roads along the bed of the Isfara River. That stretch of land (Vorukh with a narrow corridor connecting it with the 'mainland') was about 40–45 km long from north to south and 1–3 km wide.

Shortly after the initial demarcation in October 1924, the leadership of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast appealed to the central Soviet government requesting to expand its territory at the expense of the Sokh and Isfara administrative entities of the Uzbek SSR, which were deep into its territory. However, this appeal was rejected based on the evaluations of the joint inter-republican commissions. Isfara and Sokh, which were populated mainly by Tajiks, remained under the jurisdiction of the Uzbek SSR. Apparently this decision was strongly influenced by the fact that they were inhabited mainly by the Tajik population. Tajiks were mainly engaged in farming and had close connections with the settled Uzbek population. At that time territorial priorities were given to settled land users engaging in irrigated agriculture, since the boundaries should not cross existing water management systems. Moreover, the Soviet government was guided by a simple and clear principle of actual use of the area at the time of demarcation. Belonging of the territory was usually determined by the predominance of one or another ethnic group in a given area.

The issue of national and territorial demarcation in the regions of Vorukh and Sokh was supposed to be resolved, but in many ways the local ethno-cultural and economic structures could not fit into the projects designed by the revolutionaries. Moreover, national interests often began to prevail over common sense locally and therefore come into conflict with the basic rules of administrative and economic division. In Moscow, however, the leadership often did not quite understand social processes in Central Asia. Government officials knew little about regional geography, national identity of the locals and economic ties between them. As a result, during the formation of new

administrative divisions in Central Asia, some territories were transferred back and forth between the republics multiple times. Naturally, this situation also affected Vorukh and the adjacent areas, which was a colourful ethno-territorial and cultural mosaic.

Despite the fact that the central government declared the “final settlement” of the national and territorial demarcation in the Fergana Valley at the end of 1924, mutual claims regarding the disputed territories remained. Most often these claims involved fertile lands located along the Isfara and Sokh rivers. To clarify the boundaries of new public entities, the Central Asian Liquidation Committee set up a commission, which on March 17, 1925, updated border lines between the state formations in Central Asia. On May 4, 1925, the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee approved them in a resolution [8]. The Uzbek SSR retained the Isfara volost and the Sokh volost. In addition, by the decision of the Plenum of the Central Asian Liquidation Committee, about 34 thousand hectares of disputed territories were transferred from the Kara-Kyrgyz ASSR to the Tajik autonomy within the Uzbek SSR. The objective of the transfer was to preserve a direct corridor connecting Vorukh with the Isfara volost of Uzbekistan (later Isfara District of Tajikistan). It should be noted that this land in the Khujand-Leilek direction was used by the Vorukh residents until 1924 [9].

Once again, all the new Central Asian state formations filed over 50 claims on the newly established borders. Under the updated demarcation, there were more than twenty wedgings and inclusions, tens of kilometres long, in the Fergana Valley on the border of Kyrgyzstan [10]. The Kyrgyz side was dissatisfied with the fact that demarcation was based on nationality without consideration for the specifics of the nomadic way of life: at one time of the year the majority of the population of the area turned out to be a minority among the settled population at another. It was also ignored that some irrigated lands belonged to nomads from ancient times (most likely due to their conquests) and they leased them to settled farmers. Excessive sinuosity, strip system

and multiple inclusions in foreign territories when establishing borders in the Fergana Valley were also criticized.

The Kyrgyz side once again brought the issue of the Isfara volost to the fore, since it occupied significant territories wedged into the borders of the administrative entity. It was mentioned that some nomadic settlements and pastures were located within its borders. The belonging of Sokh, which was later turned into an Uzbek exclave, was also questioned. The Joint Commission headed by D.I. Petrovsky studied the claims of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region [11]. On August 30, 1926, based on the criticism of the commission's work by the Regional Executive Committee of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region and the complaints of its chairman I. Toychinov to the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, [12] the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee decided to transfer the Isfara volost and the Sokh volost to the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region from the Uzbek SSR in their present borders [13]. However, on September 10, 1926, the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union ruled against the inclusion of the Isfara volost and the Sokh volost within the borders of the Russian SFSR, leaving it in the Uzbek SSR [14]. Disputes persisted, and in order to settle mutual claims, the Joint Commission under the leadership of Byashim Kulbeshеров was established. On January 27, 1927, after re-examination of the border issues, the commission announced its decision to leave the Isfara volost within the territory of Uzbekistan. At the same time, the Sokh volost and a number of settlements and lands adjoining it were proposed to be transferred to the Kyrgyz ASSR [15]. On May 3, 1927, the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, chaired by M. Kalinin, approved the proposal of the commission headed by B. Kulbeshеров and decided to separate Sokh from the Uzbek SSR and annex it to the Russian SFSR. However, the very next day, May 4, 1927, the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union, once again chaired by M. Kalinin, resolved the Sokh issue

in favour of the Uzbek SSR [16]. Thus, Sokh and Vorukh, which were predominantly populated by Tajiks, remained part of Uzbekistan. Only a small part of the settlements and lands adjacent to them were transferred to Kyrgyzstan.

It was proposed to leave these territorial disputes at that. Nevertheless, the leadership of the Kyrgyz ASSR remained dissatisfied and on May 7, without putting it off, Zh. Abdrakhmanov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Kyrgyz ASSR, composed a letter to I.V. Stalin, outlining numerous reasons for disagreeing with the decision of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union [17]. Apparently, by that time Moscow was tired of considering the endless flow of complaints, claims and proposals of the Central Asian comrades. Perhaps the Kremlin was annoyed by its own misunderstanding of the reasons for never ending difficulties in the formation of the national statehood of the republics of Central Asia. Either way, it was recommended that mutual claims be forgotten until better times. Meanwhile, it was high time for epoch-making economic achievements.

In May 1927, the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee decided to refuse to consider any petitions related to redrawing of borders for three years [18]. The same year, to emphasize that the national and territorial division between the Uzbek SSR and the Russian SFSR was completed, a map with the new borders between the two republics was issued. On this map, Vorukh was directly connected with the Isfara District (Khujand Region of the Uzbek SSR) [19].

After the Tajik SSR was formed at the end of 1929, it absorbed the Khujand Region of Uzbekistan (now Northern Tajikistan), thus making Vorukh part of a new independent republic. As before, it was connected to the 'mother' territories by a small strip of land along the Isfara River. This could be seen on the map "Formation of the Tajik ASSR (1924) and Formation of the Tajik SSR (1929)", which was published by the General Directorate of Geodesy and Cartography of the USSR in 1934 [20].

Therefore, there is solid ground for acknowledging that during this crucial time of establishing the state borders of the Soviet republics of Central Asia between 1924 and 1927, Vorukh was not an Uzbek exclave surrounded by the territories of the Kyrgyz ASSR, since it was directly connected to the rest of Uzbekistan. Subsequently, when the boundaries of the Tajik SSR were drawn in 1929, Vorukh once again was connected to the main territory of the republic by a strip of land, and, therefore, was not a Tajik enclave on the territory of Kyrgyzstan.

In later years, during collectivization, modernization of industry and industrialization of agriculture, economic feasibility of developing a single state naturally prevailed over national interests. During the planning and developing of both large and small territorial and production complexes in Central Asia, all the borders were often moved by central, republican and even local authorities. Sometimes it was done in order to reduce tensions that arose when water and land resources were used. Due to the haste and their conditional character of border lines, their movements were not always documented. In some cases the decisions of the central authorities were not legally confirmed by the neighbouring republics or reflected in bilateral agreements. Over time, after multiple rearrangements, Vorukh was cut off from the main territory of Tajikistan – the history of it will be examined in Part 2 of this article.

References

1. Exclave is a non-sovereign region, separated from the main ('mother') territory of the country and surrounded by one or more states. The same territory is an exclave for the country to which it belongs, and an enclave for the state to which it does not belong, but is surrounded by its territory. In scientific works, the term enclave is used when it comes to the surrounding state, and the same territory is called an exclave when it comes to the 'mother' state. In journalism and everyday life, the term enclave is commonly used.
2. More than 90 percent of the Vorukh population are Tajiks. According to the leadership of the *jamoat*, at the end of 2017, there were about 33 thousand

residents and 2700 individual *dehkan* farms. On average, each farm occupied approximately 37 acres. Consequently, all the peasant plots in Vorukh occupy a little less than 100 thousand square kilometers. These are mainly foothill fields, orchards, hayfields and pastures. Source: Enclave Vorukh: the territory of noble teachers, engaged girls and Soviet motorcycles. [Electronic source] // Website "Asia-Plus". URL: <https://asiaplustj.info/news/tajikistan/20171201/anklav-voruh-territoriya-blagorodnih-uchitelei-pomolvlelnnih-devushek-i-sovetskih-mototsiklov> (accessed: 11.05.2022).

3. On April 16, 2022, the President of Kyrgyzstan, Sadyr Japarov, announced that 664 km out of the 972 km of the shared border with Tajikistan had been agreed on. Source: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan called the actions of the Kyrgyz side on the border a provocation. [Electronic source] // Website "INTERFAX". URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/844726> (accessed: 12.06.2022).
4. Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan: what the ministers discussed. [Electronic source] // Website "SPUTNIK News". URL: <https://tj.sputniknews.ru/20220514/mid-tajikistan-kyrgyzstan-granitsa-1048443704.html> (accessed: 14.06.2022).
5. *Evgeny Rodionov*. On whether Vorukh is an enclave, or Kyrgyz expansionism through the prism of international law. [Electronic source] // Website "Avesta". URL: <https://avesta.tj/2014/02/17/yavlyaetsya-li-voruh-anklavom-ili-kirgizskij-ekspansionizm-cherez-prizmu-mezhdunarodnogo-prava/> (accessed: 14.06.2022).
6. *Khamrokhon Zarifi*. The land of Vorukh is the territory of Tajikistan forever. [Electronic source] // Website "Asia-Plus". URL: <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/opinion/20210331/hamrohon-zarifi-zemlya-voruha-territoriya-tadzhikistana-navsegda> (accessed: 10.04.2022).
7. *Orunbay Akhmedov*. Vorukh enclave in Kyrgyz territory. [Electronic source] // Website "AKIpress". URL: http://mnenie.akipress.org/unews/un_post:20933 (accessed: 14.06.2022).
8. *Zhazgul Masalieva*. Sokh, Vorukh... How they look on the maps of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. [Electronic source] // Website "24 KG". URL: https://24.kg/obschestvo/214502_soh_voruh_kak_oni_vyiglyadyat_nakartah_kyrgyzstana_tadjikistana_iuzbekistana/ (accessed: 01.05.2022).
9. Between 31 January, 1927 and 10 May 1929 – Isfara District of the Khujand Region of the Uzbek SSR; between 10 May, 1929 and September 1929 – Isfara District of the Tajik ASSR; between September 1929 and 16 October, 1929 – Isfara District of the Khujand Region of the Tajik ASSR; between 29 August, 1930 and 16 March, 1938 – Isfara District of the Tajik SSR; between 16 March, 1938 and 27 October, 1939 – Isfara District of the Leninabad Region of the Tajik SSR.

10. On October 27, 1924, the strategic national and territorial division of Soviet Central Asia was started with the resolution of the II session of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. On the basis of the Khorezm SSR and the Bukharan SSR, as well as the Turkestan ASSR, the Uzbek SSR and the Turkmen SSR were formed. The Tajik ASSR was part of the Uzbek SSR, and the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region was part of the Russian SFSR. Source: Decree of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR of October 27, 1924 "On the demarcation of the Soviet republics in Central Asia and on the entry into the Union of the SSR of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic". [Electronic source] // Website "LIBUSSR". URL: http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_2222.htm (accessed: 01.06.2022).
11. Minutes No. 7 of the meeting of the plenum of the Central Asian Liquidation Committee dated March 17, 1925. Central State Administrative District of the USSR, f. 1235, op. 120, d. 32, P. 8–9. Quoted from: Alamanov S.K. *Anklavy v Tsentralnoi Azii: istoriia voprosa i sovremennye problem*. // Post-Soviet studies, 2018. – Vol. 1, No. 5. – P. 454.
12. *Dubovitsky V.V.* History of the Tajik people. – Dushanbe, 2011. – Vol. 6. – P. 638–639.
13. *Alamanov S.K.* *Kratkaia istoriia i opyt resheniia pogranichnykh problem Kirgizii*. – Bishkek, 2005. – P. 90. Alamanov S.K. *Anklavy v Tsentralnoi Azii: istoriia voprosa i sovremennye problem* // Post-Soviet studies, 2018. – Vol. 1, No. 5. – P. 456.
14. On May 25, 1925, the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region was renamed the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region; on February 1, 1926, it became the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. On December 5, 1936 became a full-fledged subject of the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz SSR.
15. *Alamanov S.K.* *Formirovanie gosudarstvennoi granitsy Kirgizskoi Respubliki istoriia sovremennye problemy puti resheniia*. [Electronic source] // Website "TOPNEWS". URL: <http://www.topnews.kg/blog/view/3186> (accessed: 07.06.2022).
16. Minutes No. 69 of the meeting of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets dated August 30, 1926. Central State Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, f. 21, op. 3, d. 156, p.11. Quoted from: Alamanov S.K. *Anklavy v Tsentralnoi Azii: istoriia voprosa i sovremennye problem* // Post-Soviet studies, 2018. – Vol. 1, No. 5. – P. 454–456.
17. *Alamanov S.K.* *Anklavy v Tsentralnoi Azii: istoriia voprosa i sovremennye problem* // Post-Soviet studies, 2018. – Vol. 1, No. 5. – P. 454.
18. Minutes No. 4 of the meeting of the Joint Commission of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR on clarifying the boundaries between the Uzbek SSR

- and the Kabardian Autonomous Region dated January 27, 1927. Central State Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic, f. 21, op. 1, d. 5, p. 178–178b.
19. In the Resolution of the meeting of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR dated May 4, 1927, it was determined that Vorukh was not an enclave but a full-fledged part of the Isfara Region of the Uzbek SSR. This decision was taken into account by the Decree No. 15/4 of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Uzbek SSR dated May 23, 1927 and the Decree No. 27 of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Kyrgyz ASSR dated June 7, 1927. Source: *Bakhmaner Nadirov*. How Vorukh became an “enclave”. History of the Tajik-Kyrgyz conflict. [Electronic source] // Website “Asia-Plus”. URL: <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20210405/kak-voruh-stal-anklavom-istoriya-tadzhiksko-kirgizskogo-konflikta> (accessed: 23.06.2022).
 20. *Orunbay Akhmedov*. Vorukh enclave in Kyrgyz territory. [Electronic source] // Website “AKIpress”. URL: http://mnienie.akipress.org/unews/un_post:20933 (accessed: 14.06.2022).
 21. *Abashin Sergei*. National demarcation in the Fergana Valley: how it all began. [Electronic source] // Website “Medina Publishing House”. URL: <http://idmedina.ru/books/islamic/?4695> (accessed: 12.07.2022).
 22. Information about this map, which is now located in the Central State Archive of Russia, is provided by an independent expert, Evgeny Rodionov. In particular, he notes that the map is sealed with the seal of the USSR Central Executive Committee and signed by the Secretary of the Central Executive Committee A.S. Yenukidze. Its text description is signed by I.P. Magidovich, a well-known geographer and the chair of the Commission for Clarifying the Borders of New State Entities under the the Central Asian Liquidation Committee. Both of documents were approved by the Decree of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR on March 17, 1927. Quoted from: Evgeny Rodionov. On whether Vorukh is an enclave, or Kyrgyz expansionism through the prism of international law. [Electronic source] // Website “Avesta”. URL: <https://avesta.tj/2014/02/17/yavlyaetsya-li-voruh-anklavom-ili-kirgizskij-ekspansionizm-cherez-prizmu-mezhdunarodnogo-prava/> (accessed: 14.06.2022).
 23. The map “Formation of the Tajik ASSR (1924) and Formation of the Tajik SSR (1929)” drawn up and designed by factory No. 4 of the General Directorate of Geodesy and Cartography of the USSR in 1934. [Electronic source] // Website “Fedoroff”. URL: https://fedoroff.net/load/maps/karta/karta_tadzhikistana_1924_1929_goda/90-1-0-1347 (accessed: 11.07.2022).