



## MODERNIZATION EXPERIMENTS IN THE BUKHARAN AND KHOREZM PEOPLE'S SOVIET REPUBLICS AND THEIR LIQUIDATION (1920-1924)

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**Abstract.** This article provides a comprehensive scientific analysis of the socio-political, economic, and cultural modernization experiments in the Bukharan and Khorezm People's Soviet Republics (1920-1924) and the historical process of their liquidation. The study examines the structural reforms initiated by the Young Bukharans and Young Khivans (Jadids), the distinct institutional features of these new state entities, and the ultimate collapse of their asymmetric cooperation with the Soviet regime. Utilizing archival records and contemporary historiography, the author demonstrates that the dissolution of these republics was primarily driven by the central Bolshevik government's geopolitical strategies and the 1924 national-territorial delimitation, rather than domestic socio-political failures.

**Keywords:** Bukharan People's Soviet Republic, Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, Jadids, modernization, Young Bukharans, sovietization, national-territorial delimitation, crisis of independence.

### Introduction

The year 1920 marked a monumental paradigm shift in Central Asian history, characterized by the violent collapse of centuries-old monarchical regimes—the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva. In their stead, two unique political entities emerged: the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic (BPSR) and the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic (KPSR). These states occupied an ambiguous, transitional space within the broader geopolitical orbit of Soviet Russia (RSFSR). Led initially by local national-reformist intellectuals, popularly known as the Jadids (operating under the political banners of the Young Bukharans and Young Khivans), these republics became testing grounds for an ambitious synthesis of national independence, democratic modernization, and progressive Islamic statehood (Rajabov 2011).

However, the historical trajectory of the BPSR and KPSR was defined by a profound, systemic contradiction. For the local reformist elite, the establishment of the republics represented a genuine opportunity to implement comprehensive modernization programs covering education, economic restructuring, and administrative institutionalization free from absolute dynastic despotism.



Conversely, for the Bolshevik central leadership in Moscow, these "People's" republics were viewed merely as temporary, tactical buffer states destined for rapid sovietization and ultimate integration into the centralized Soviet imperial apparatus (Becker 1968). This paper investigates the multifaceted modernization experiments carried out between 1920 and 1924, analyzes the structural constraints imposed by Bolshevik intervention, and deconstructs the political mechanisms that led to the abrupt liquidation of both republics during the national-territorial delimitation of 1924.

### **Methodology and literature review**

This research employs a historical-comparative and source-critical methodology, analyzing the structural evolution of both republics within the context of changing Soviet-mideast geopolitical dynamics. The historiographical landscape surrounding the BPSR and KPSR can be categorized into three distinct paradigm groups.

Soviet historiography, represented by scholars such as Ishanov (1969) and Inoyatov (1978), framed the history of these republics as a natural, inevitable transition from feudal backwardness to socialist revolution, facilitated by the "fraternal assistance" of the Russian proletariat. Within this Marxist-Leninist framework, the independent modernization initiatives of the Jadids were systematically minimized or dismissed as "bourgeois-nationalist deviations," while the armed national resistance (the Basmachi movement) was flattened into a reactionary class conflict.

Western historiography, most notably Becker (1968) and Carrère d'Encausse (1988), provided a critical counter-narrative. They focused heavily on the mechanics of Soviet military intervention and the asymmetric treaties that gradually stripped Bukhara and Khiva of their nominal sovereignty. These scholars interpreted the republics as classic puppet states, though they acknowledged the genuine, tragic efforts of the local intelligentsia to preserve autonomy.

Mustaqillik davri (modern) Uzbek historiography initiated a comprehensive re-evaluation of the period. Historians like Rajabov (2011, 2021) and Alimova (2015), utilizing previously restricted state archives, emphasize the agency of the BPSR and KPSR leadership, highlighting their status as legitimate expressions of Uzbek national statehood and reformism. Furthermore, recent works by Litvinov (2023) shed light on the complex interaction between traditional legal structures and Soviet administrative impositions during this transition.

### **Results and discussion**





First, the structural nature of the modernization reforms was deeply progressive. Upon assuming power in the wake of the Red Army's military interventions in early 1920, the reformist governments of Bukhara (led by figures like Fayzulla Xodjayev) and Khiva launched radical institutional transformations. Unlike the RSFSR, these republics did not initially implement immediate socialist economic policies; their constitutions guaranteed private property, land ownership, and freedom of trade (Ishanov 1969). The core of the Jadid modernization project was centered around educational and cultural secularization. The BPSR and KPSR governments established a network of new-method (Usul-i Jadid) schools, founded national museums, and initiated state-sponsored printing presses to foster a modern civic identity. A prime example of their forward-looking foreign policy was the decision by the Bukharan government to send dozens of young students to Germany in 1922 to study engineering, medicine, and agriculture (Alimova 2015). This move demonstrated a clear intention to build an independent technocratic elite capable of operating outside the narrow confines of Russian cultural hegemony.

Second, the structural survival of both republics was rapidly compromised by their asymmetric economic and military alliances with the RSFSR. Treaties signed in 1921 nominally recognized the absolute independence of the BPSR and KPSR, but supplementary financial and military clauses tied their state apparatuses directly to Moscow's mandates (Becker 1968). The cycle of economic subordination was executed through three distinct phases: first, the elimination of national currencies (such as the Bukharan tilla and Khivan ruble); second, the unification of customs zones under the Central Asian Economic Bureau; and third, the mandatory raw material export of cotton and silk at fixed Soviet prices. This economic containment strategy systematically dismantled the financial independence of the republics, turning their economies into agrarian appendages tasked with supplying raw cotton to industrial Russia.

Third, the modernization experiments took place against a backdrop of intense political destabilization and ideological polarization. The Jadid leadership was caught in a dangerous crossfire between internal traditional resistance and external Soviet pressure. A vast segment of the conservative clerical elite and rural populace viewed the secularizing reforms of the Young Bukharans and Young Khivans as an existential threat to Islamic tradition, sparking a massive surge in the armed national liberation movement (Basmachi), led by figures like Ibrahim-bek in Bukhara and Junaid-khan in Khorezm (Rajabov 2021). The central Bolshevik leadership used this very instability to justify deeper military



intervention, permanently stationing the Red Army within the republics to pressure the local governments to purge moderate reformists and replace them with dogmatic communists. The situation worsened in late 1921 when Enver Pasha joined the anti-Soviet resistance, transforming the BPSR into an active war zone and severely crippling its capacity to execute domestic reforms.

Fourth, the path to direct sovietization and ultimate liquidation became inevitable by 1923. Moscow engineered internal political coups within the local central executive committees. Progressive leaders who resisted total Soviet integration were systematically labeled "unreliable" or "bourgeois elements" and purged from the state apparatus. The evolutionary path shifted from independent reform in 1920, to military-occupied Soviet satellites by 1922, and finally to total liquidation in 1924.

The final phase of liquidation was executed through the mechanism of National-Territorial Delimitation (*natsionalnoye razmezhevaniye*) in 1924. Bolshevik leadership argued that the trans-ethnic composition of the Bukharan and Khorezm republics—which housed large, intertwined populations of Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Tajiks—obstructed the natural development of socialist nations. In September 1924, the fifth convocations of the Bukharan and Khorezm All-People's Kurultays (parliaments), now entirely dominated by Soviet-backed communist factions, passed resolutions declaring their own dissolution (Ishanov 1969). The territories of the BPSR and KPSR were subsequently carved up and absorbed into the newly created Uzbek SSR, Turkmen SSR, and various autonomous oblasts, effectively erasing Bukhara and Khiva as distinct political units from the map of Central Asia.

### **Conclusion**

The historical trajectory of the Bukharan and Khorezm People's Soviet Republics between 1920 and 1924 stands as a critical, transitional chapter in the struggle for Central Asian modern statehood. Far from being passive Soviet puppets from their inception, these republics represented a dynamic, authentic attempt by the Jadid intelligentsia to orchestrate an indigenous path toward modernization, balancing progressive secular reforms with national and religious identities.

The ultimate failure and liquidation of these modernization experiments were not caused by an inherent incapacity for self-governance or domestic reform. Rather, they were the direct result of systematic geopolitical containment, economic strangulation, and direct military-administrative intervention by the Soviet state. The forced dissolution of 1924 effectively cut short a unique model



of non-capitalist, national-democratic development, replacing it with a highly centralized, totalitarian Soviet framework that would define the region for the next several decades. Further research utilizing newly unclassified regional archives will undoubtedly enrich our understanding of this critical historical turning point.

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