

# Establishment of Soviet Power in Central Asia

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## **Abstract**

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was indeed a multinational state, with a vast and diverse territory inherited from the Tsarist conquests that took place from the early 16th century to the first quarter of the 20th. The Russian empire's final territorial acquisition was the region known as Turkestan, which is now called Central Asia. Significant changes occurred with the Tsarist Imperial Decree of June 25, 1916, and the Bolshevik Revolution of November 7, 1917. The Bolshevik Revolution marked the beginning of transformative processes that further altered Central Asia. Following the revolution, civil war erupted across the young Soviet states. Muslim guerrillas, referred to as "Basmachis" by the Soviets, fought against the Bolsheviks during the 1920s. However, by the early 1930s, the Soviet forces had largely crushed the armed opposition. As Bolshevik power consolidated in Central Asia, certain administrative changes were implemented. The former Tsarist Governorate-Generals of Turkestan and the Steppe Region were transformed into the Turkestan and Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) in 1918 and 1920, respectively. Additionally, the vassal khanates of Bukhara and Khiva became People's Republics in 1920, appearing to be independent but ultimately under Soviet control. Overall, the history of Central Asia within the context of the USSR reflects a complex interplay of conquests, revolutions, civil wars, and administrative changes that shaped the region's political landscape during the early 20th century.

**Keywords:** Turkestan, Basmachis, steppe region, Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs), Khanates

## **Introduction**

The final outsiders to arrive on the Central Asian scene were the Russians. However, when Russian expansion into the Balkans was halted by their defeat in the Crimean War in the 1850s, they turned their attention southwards towards Turkestan [1]. Russia encountered relatively little resistance and rapidly conquered major cities in the region: Chimkent in 1855, Tashkent in 1865, Bukhara (under Russian protection) in 1868, Khiva (also under Russian protection) in 1873, Kokand in 1875, and Mary in 1884 (Vaidyanath 1967). The Russian administration sought to maximize the interests of the Russian autocracy while also filling the vacuum left by the suppression of the former khanates.

The Turkistan National Liberation Movement was a response to the Bolsheviks' attempt to reconquer Turkistan. It can also be seen as the culmination of Russia's long history of intrusion into Central Asia, known as the "Eastern Question" and the "Great Game in Asia," as famously described by Kipling (Kaushik 1976). The provisional government that replaced the Tsar adopted an uncertain attitude towards the national-colonial question. While initially promising recognition of the right to self-determination for all people, the provisional government's indifferent approach to the national problem disillusioned various nationalities in the region.

In 1917, the Council of People's Commissars, after the Bolshevik Revolution, made promises of equality and sovereignty for the nations of Russia and the right to self-determination, including the right to form independent states. Muslim Communists such as Tatar Mir Said Sultan Galiev and Uzbek Faizullah Khojaev took these promises seriously and sought to bring about changes driven by communist ideals, pan-Islamism, and pan-Turkism (Vaidyanath 1967). However, the 1924 delimitation of republican boundaries in Central Asia served as a major barrier to nationalist aspirations. As Stalin gained power, Muslim Communists were purged, accused of being "nationalist bourgeois," and liquidated in the Great Purge of the 1930s, effectively bringing Central Asia under the political control of the Soviet Union.

## **Theoretical Understanding**

Geopolitics is the study of international relations from a geographical perspective. In other words, it is also defined as the practice of states

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competing for dominance and control of the territory. Central Asia, due to its geopolitical importance, has always attracted the attention of major schools of geopolitical thought, especially ‘the school of political landscape’ (English school) and the school of geopolitical organism’ (German school). This region has also been the core of Russia’s and the former Soviet Union’s geopolitical imagination. Since the emergence of independent Central Asian Republics (CARs), a struggle has erupted to control space in this region for hydrocarbon resources and various other reasons.

The Central Asian region was a zone of the triangular contest between Britain, Russia, and China during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which has been romanticized as the ‘Great Game’ (Warikoo 1989). During the Soviet period, the entire region was closed to external powers. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the strategic importance of Central Asia became distinct. Today, Central Asia is vital to international security by virtue of its geographic position, and those with access to it will play a critical role on the global stage. Due to the geographical proximity of Turkey, Iran, China, Russia, and India to the Central Asian region, these countries are going to play an important role in the geopolitics of this region. China and the USA have a global interest in terms of energy needs and are trying to get a strategic foothold worldwide. So, they want to increase their influence in the geo-strategic and geo-economically important Central Asian region.

The paradigm shifts designated in the international sphere after 1991 have considerably altered the geopolitics of the whole world, forgetting away the existing systems that had been built up after the World Wars. The unexpected appearance of the new Central Asian countries reminds us that no great power has collapsed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century without their successor states undergoing civil wars or regional conflicts, which made the circumstances more complicated. The Soviet Union’s breakup has altered the Central Asian position accidentally by setting a new geopolitical calculation for them. Half of the countries in Central Asia sit on the vast resources of oil and gas, and the same numbers of countries are at the higher end of controlling the water resources. Apart from that, the new Central Asian countries are yet to keep aloof from instability, both internally and externally. The struggle of external powers for actual space and interests has made the condition of Central Asia vulnerable.

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However, the five Central Asian countries have adopted different paths because of their location, size, and natural resources, thereby focusing on security (domestic and international) and policy issues that were not there before independence. With the combination of the above three features, Central Asia appeared mainly in the geopolitical imagination of Mackinder, Haushofer, and Spy man. Mackinder had given importance to the geostrategic position of the Central Asian region in his “heartland theory” (Megoran and Sharapova 2005). Later, it influenced the European powers as a mechanism for their policies (particularly for the British to maintain their foreign policy to secure their colonies).

The Central Asian region is an area of interest for Russia to retain its external influence in view of the prospect of military threats to its southern border. For many years, the exit points of Central Asia were under Moscow directly. At present, the mounting geopolitical equation and the resources needed to provide the five Central Asian countries with an orientation away from their Russian connections Apart from that, the arrangement of geographic proximity, economic opportunity, ethnic and cultural ties, and religion deliberately push them in every direction, not only based on historical preferences but also on national interests. The tilt of Russia towards Central Asia persists greatly in the supply of resources and raw materials because of the joint routes. Hence, the disengagement of Central Asia with Russia is hardly desirable from an economic point of view. Even today, many Russians are unable to accept a shift in the status of the newly independent states. They continue to see the former Soviet southern border as Russia’s outer frontier.

### **The founding of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic**

The creation of national republics for the peoples of Central Asia was difficult, as they were divided between three state units, viz., Turkestan, Khiva, and Bukhara. It was anti-colonial, anti-feudal, and anti-capitalist in character. The strong desire of the people was to get rid of the burden of Tsarist colonialism and native exploiters. The establishment of Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics was thus the first step towards the founding of national states by the peoples of Central Asia.

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In an extremely complicated and intense class struggle, the Third Territorial Congress of the Soviet Union of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies met in Tashkent on November 15, 1917, and continued its session until November 22, 1917 (Olcott 1981). The central point of contention during the congress was the issue of power in the territory of Turkestan, leading to debates between the Mensheviks, the Right Socialist Revolutionaries, and the Bolsheviks. Simultaneously, the so-called Congress of Muslims, which consisted entirely of bourgeois nationalists and reactionary clergymen, also convened in Tashkent. During the proceedings, on November 17, the Congress of Muslims rejected the idea of transferring all power to the Soviet Union and instead proposed the formation of a regional governing body composed of bourgeoisie representatives, both local and Russian.

This was conveyed to the Third Regional Congress of Soviets by Sher Ali Lapin, a leader of the *Ulema*, who addressed the Congress on the organization of power. After a long debate lasting several days, the Third Congress of Soviets rejected the proposal of the Menshevik and Right SR groups to share power with the bourgeoisie and bourgeois nationalists. It adopted a declaration at the instance of the Bolsheviks and "maximalists," proclaiming the victory of Soviet power in Turkestan and recognizing the existing central power and its forms of organization. It categorically rejected the idea of sharing power with "Muslims" as well as the compromising Russian groups that defended the Provisional Government and took a stand against the Revolution. The Third Regional of Soviets voted for the establishment of an 18-member Council of People's Commissars, including three representatives of Muslim workers. The Fourth Territorial Congress of Soviets supported this proposal at the instance of the Bolsheviks. The *Nakaz* (instruction) adopted by the Third Regional Congress of no doubt whatever as to the complete absence of antipathy towards Muslims. The Declaration did contain several drafting mistakes. The bourgeois nationalists came out openly against Soviet power towards the close of November 1917. The firm refusal of the Third Congress to surrender power to them led to the convening of the so-called Regional Muslim Congress in Kokand on November 27, 1917. It was attended by about 200 delegates, the vast majority of whom came from Fergana (150 delegates). Syr-Darya provided 22 Samarkand 23, Transcaspia 1, and Bukhara 4 delegates only. It consisted of representatives of such political parties as *Shuro-i-Islamia* and *Alash Orda* (Kaushik 1976).

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The Congress actively discussed the suggestion for the entry of Turkestan into a “South-Eastern Union” headed by the counter-revolutionary leader Dutov. The so-called autonomous government of Kokand was at first headed by a Kazakh-Pan-Turkish Mohammed Jan Tanishbay-uli, who was soon replaced by another Kazakh Shuro-i-Islamist, Mustafa Chokayev (Olcott 1981). The post of Defense Minister in the Kokand government was occupied by a white-guard Russian general. The Kokand autonomists maintained close relations with Dutov, the British Consul-General in Kashgar, and Menshevik-SR organizations. The slogan of autonomy was only a cover for their counter-revolutionary aims. The Kokand autonomy movement was not a national movement of Central Asian Muslims against Russians. Diverse shades of opinion existed among the bourgeois nationalists of Central Asia. First, there were the pan-Islamists who proclaimed that all Muslims in Russia were a single nation and that they should act unitedly. The pan-Turkists, ignoring national differences among the Muslims in Russia, sought to create by artificial means a Turkic nation composed of Tatars, Azerbaijanians, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Turkmens, and Kirgiz. The bourgeois nationalists knew that the idea of nationalization of land and national territorial autonomy, as advocated by the Bolsheviks, was becoming increasingly popular among the Muslim working masses. So they also hastened to proclaim their loyalty to them.

In September 1917, during the Second Extraordinary Regional Muslim Congress, a proposal was put forth for an autonomous Turkestan Republic with a bicameral Parliament. The upper house, known as the Senate of the Clergy, was intended to ensure that all laws framed by the Parliament adhered to the Sheriat (Sharia law).

The question of autonomy resurfaced at the Fourth Regional Congress of Soviets held in Tashkent from January 19 to 26, 1918. A Bolshevik leader named Tobolin, who has been accused of opposing Turkestan’s right to autonomy, addressed this issue in his speech at the Congress. Tobolin expressed the view that while autonomy was a legitimate aspiration, immediate implementation was not feasible due to the threat posed by the counter-revolution and the ongoing conditions of war in the country. The Bolshevik group presented a resolution before the Fourth Congress, which was approved by a significant majority, stating that the matter of autonomy was closely connected with the broader

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national question arising from the Russian Revolution. They argued that it should be approached solely from a revolutionary standpoint.

The Kokand autonomists launched a military attack on the city organ of Soviet power on the night of January 30–31, 1918, by laying siege to the fort of Kokand. This compelled the Soviet government to take strong military measures against them. After the defeat of the White Cossacks near Samarkand, the Red Guards from Fergana and Andijan also moved towards Kokand. In their ranks, there were many natives. Military action began on February 19 and continued up to February 22, 1918, when the Kokand Autonomists were crushed. After the dissolution of the Kokand government, the Bourgeois nationalists began to organize the Basmachi [2] (brigand) bands in the Fergana valley. In April 1918, the Fifth Regional Congress of the Soviet Union of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants', and Muslim Dekhans Deputies of Turkestan was convened (Paksoy 1991). As the majority of the deputies of the Fifth Congress were from the native population, speeches were translated into the Uzbek language. The Sixth Regional Congress of the Soviet Socialist Republic was held in October 1918. The first constitution of the Turkestan ASSR, which the Sixth Regional Congress of Soviets adopted in October 1918, had the full concurrence of the Center. In fact, this constitution, as well as the one later adopted by the Ninth Regional Congress of Soviets of Turkestan in September 1920, The Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic began to draw the local people into the work of government from its very inception. Village Soviets and People's Courts Composed of representatives of local nationalities fully familiar with the native languages, customs, and traditions, they were set up almost everywhere in the period 1918–1924. Local people's representatives now constitute the majority in the administrative bodies.

### **Founding of Soviet Republics in Khiva and Bukhara**

The victory of the October Revolution in Russia and Turkestan had great significance for the further development of the revolutionary struggle of the masses against the rulers of Khiva and Bukhara. These feudal principalities were no longer semi-colonies, and the people could now rest assured of the full sympathy and support of the new regime in the task of liberation from the despotic rule of the Khan and Emir. In 1918, Junaid Khan, a Turkmen feudal chieftain, assumed dictatorial powers in Khiva. In close touch with the British in Iran and in alliance

with the counter-revolutionary Admiral Kolchak, Junaid Khan repeatedly attacked the Turkestan ASSR on the basis of the treaty concluded with the RSFSR on April 9, 1919 (Olcott 1981). The Khivan reactionaries were also in constant contact with the underground anti-Soviet Turkestan Military Organization founded in Tashkent with the active help of the American Consul-General Tredwell, French agent Castagne, and British Col. Bailey. While Junaid Khan was thus conspiring against Soviet power, the *dehkans'* revolutionary movement continued to grow in Khiva. The Communist Party of Khiva, which was established in September 1918, began to organize the revolutionary movement. Under their guidance and in alliance with the Left Young Khivans, armed uprisings occurred at several places in the Khanate. The revolution in Khiva was victorious on February 2, 1920, resulting in the overthrow of the regime of Said Abdullah Khan, a puppet in the hands of Junaid Khan. The First All-Khwarezm Kurultai of the People's Representatives, which met on April 30, 1920, proclaimed the establishment of the Khwarezm Soviet People's Republic. The First *Kurultai* adopted a constitution of the Republic, which transferred all power in the center as well as in local places to the Soviets of working people (Muminov 2022).

The revolution in Khiva had distinct characteristics. The industrial proletariat in Khiva was relatively small, and the majority of the population were dekhans (peasants). Therefore, the initial stage of the revolution was a popular democratic one rather than socialist in nature. It led to the establishment of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the working masses, with the aim of paving the way for a transition to the socialist stage, which was to be accomplished through the soviets (workers' councils).

Similarly, Bukhara, like Khiva, was governed by feudal despotism and enjoyed the protection of Tsarist Russia. It served as the second-largest source of cotton for Russia, with Ferghana being the first. During the First Russian Revolution, a significant bourgeois nationalist movement known as Jadidism emerged. However, the Jadidists primarily focused on cultural and educational endeavors. It was only after the February Revolution that they began to demand moderate political reforms rather than advocating for a full-scale revolution.



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From the beginning, the Emir took a hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union. He ordered mobilization of the army three times between November 1917 and March 1918 and maintained contacts with Dutov, leader of the Orenburg Cossacks, and also with the Kokand Autonomists. He was also in communication with General Malleon, commander of the British troops in Iran. At the beginning of 1918, the Emir mobilized an army of 30,000 along the railway line, posing a great threat to Soviet power in Turkestan. On February 28, 1918, Kolesov proceeded to Bukhara with a force of 500–600 Red Guards (Roudik 2007). He demanded recognition of Soviet power in Russian settlements in Bukhara and democratization of administration by the induction of representatives of the young Bukharans. When the Emir turned down his demands, Kolesov launched his military action on March 2, 1918. The Emir declared a ‘holy’ war against Kolesov, who had to retreat towards Samarkand. Kolesov was saved from annihilation by timely reinforcements from Turkestan. On March 25, the Emir was forced to sign an agreement in Kizil-Tape undertaking to revoke the mobilization of troops and expel all the counter-revolutionaries from his territory, and he received a Soviet commissar in Bukhara. The first attempt to overthrow the Emir’s rule thus ended in failure. The masses did not side with the young Bukharans. The Emir moved still closer to the British imperialists in spite of the Kizil-Tape Agreement. In April–May 1918, several hundred camels loaded with British arms reached Bukhara through Afghanistan. In October 1919, Col. Bailey reached Bukhara from Tashkent and began to hatch a plan of action against Soviet Turkestan. The Turkestan Commission in Tashkent sent two missions to the Emir in January and March 1920, headed by Frunze, who tried to impress, but these efforts to bring the Emir to a sensible path of good- neighborly relations failed. The Emir mobilized 50,000 troops in August 1920 and gave a call for *jihad*, or the “holy” war against the Bolsheviks. Under the impact of the October revolution, a revolutionary movement was rapidly growing in Bukhara, in which the communist party of Bukhara, founded in September 1918, was taking a leading role. The Fourth Congress of the Party, held in Chardjui between August 6 and 19, 1920, decided to launch an armed revolutionary action to overthrow the Emir’s regime. The revolution was launched by the communist party of Bukhara on August 28, 1920, by seizing Chardjui. After heavy fighting in Bukhara, the citadel of despotism fell on September 6, 1920. On October 5, 1920, the First Kurultai met

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in Bukhara and proclaimed the establishment of the Bukharan people's Soviet republics (Khalid 2010).

### **Transition to Socialist Republics**

The revolutions in Khiva and Bukhara were accomplished by the non-proletarian and peasant masses, and due to a number of objective and subjective factors, they could not immediately develop into socialist revolutions. The task of socialist transformation in Bukhara and Khiva was really a very complicated one, and there were many difficulties in the way. The bulk of the population was poor, illiterate, and fanatically attached to religion. The few primitive industries that were there had stopped functioning. Cities in these republics were the main centers of handicrafts, with trade capital dominating. State trading and state industrial undertakings came into existence as a result of the nationalization of privately owned enterprises and other property owned by the Tsarist government. In Bukhara, there were some 32 industrial undertakings, of which 25 were cotton-cleaning plants. Khiva had 31 industrial undertakings, of which five belonged to foreign capitalists. They formed the nucleus of a future socialist industry. Following the merger of the Party of Young Bukharans and Young Khivans with the Communist Party, the ranks of the latter greatly swelled. At the Fourth Conference of the Central Committee of the RC(B) with the responsible workers in national republics, Stalin pointed out that not a single *dekhan* was included in the Council of *Nazirs* of the BPSR, and all higher posts there were filled by exploiting elements of society (Paksoy 1991).

In late 1922, significant political and social changes took place in the lives of the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic (BPSR) and the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic (KPSR), which facilitated their transition towards becoming socialist republics. By the end of 1922, the main Basmachi group, led by Enver Pasha, had been defeated, resulting in the waning of the Basmachi movement in Bukhara. Concurrently, Basmachi bands under Junaid Khan and other Turkmen tribal leaders were also eliminated (Holdsworth 1952). This marked the decline of armed resistance in the region.

After 1923, a period of peaceful reconstruction began in both republics. Bukhara experienced a notable increase in the total sown area, which had reached pre-war levels by 1924. The government took proactive measures to develop cattle breeding, with a particular focus on the

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breeding of Karakul sheep. To support this initiative, special cooperative societies were established to facilitate the purchase of Karakul sheep, and a substantial sum of two million gold roubles was allocated for this purpose.

These efforts toward peaceful reconstruction and agricultural development contributed to the stabilization and progress of the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic and the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic during the post-revolutionary period.

### **National-State Delimitation of 1924**

In 1924, national Soviet Socialist Republics were formed as a result of the national-state delimitation of the Turkestan ASSR and the Bukhara and Khwarezm SSR. Two of them—the Uzbek SSR and the Turkmen SSR—were formed as Union Republics within the USSR. The Tajik came into existence as an autonomous Soviet socialist republic within the Uzbek SSR; the Kazak areas of Central Asia became united in what was then called the Kirgiz autonomous socialist republic within the RSFSR; Karakalpakia entered the Kirgiz ASSR as an autonomous oblast; and the Kirgiz formed an autonomous socialist republic within the RSFSR under the name of Kara-Kirgiz ASSR. These Soviet Socialistic Republics and autonomous oblasts united the principal people of Central Asia into their national state forms for the first time in history (Kaushik, 1976). The determination of national frontiers was not an easy task. The Territorial Commission had to undertake expeditions to study the national composition of a number of disputed areas and ascertain the wishes of the people concerned. In the determination of the territory and frontiers of the Soviet national republics and autonomous oblasts, the national factor was no doubt most important. In organizing national states, special consideration was given to territories where national groups lived in a compact mass. But besides the national factor, such factors as the mode of life and economic integrity of the territory organized into national republics or autonomous oblasts were also taken into consideration. Thus, the ethnic map of Central Asia was more justly drawn after the national delimitation in 1924. The removal of old anomalies created better conditions for the ultimate solution to the national question in Central Asia. The national-state delimitation created the basis for the speedy removal of economic and cultural backwardness. By eliminating the grounds for national antagonism, it enabled the

people of Central Asia to be drawn into the historic task of building socialism.

### **The Soviet Nationality Policy**

The basic purpose of Soviet nationalists was to secure its territorial integrity and stability by overturning various nationalist movements, especially separatist movements (Döm, 2017). All Soviet leaders tried to keep all the nations under the Soviet Union together while putting forward many different policies regarding nationalism. The Soviet nationality policy is unique in the sense that it is not only aimed at the establishment of formal equality between the erstwhile oppressed and oppressing nations but also at the elimination of factual inequality between them. The Tenth Congress of the Party (1921) set before itself the task of liquidating the inequality between the various nations.

In the post-delimitation phase after 1924 (Rahimov and Urazaeva 2005), the focus shifted to the task of levelling up the big gap in the economic and cultural development of Central Asia and the central parts of Russia. Democratic state political measures, through their great help in making the national question considerably less acute, cannot by themselves solve it completely. For an ultimate solution, radical changes in the socio-economic structure are needed. Historical experience has shown that the role of state-political institutions is conditioned by many factors. Under the condition of monopoly capitalism, even such democratic institutions as federation, national autonomy, and referendum have been adapted to the socially nefarious aim of perpetrating national oppression and exploitation.

### **Socialist Industrialisation**

The industrialization of Central Asia began with the successful implementation of the First Five-Year Plan (Knickerbocker, 1931). During this process, technical equipment was introduced to agriculture, and numerous experienced political functionaries and specialists from Russia were sent to Central Asia to support the development. The achievements of the Second Five-Year Plan in the republics of Central Asia were really remarkable. The second plan gave great attention to the development of heavy industries. The power and cotton production in the Uzbek SSR rose immensely. Socialist industrialization helped to bridge to a large extent the big gap in the level of development of the

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central region of Russia and Central Asia and thus made an important contribution to the final solution of the national question.

### **Monoculture**

The keynote of Soviet nationalities policy and development strategy was a high degree of integration of their economic, political, and cultural aspects, where monoculture was the nodal point, which implies a mass collectivization campaign was encouraged in agriculture.

During the Soviet era, compulsory education for children was introduced, along with the establishment of a modern public health system. The regime also focused on comprehensive scientific and technological development, promoted the arts, fostered the creation of a national intelligentsia, worked towards the emancipation of women, and aimed to build a new life rich in spiritual content. Moreover, it was the Soviet regime that revitalized many great monuments to Central Asia's ancient culture and literature, providing them with a new lease of life.

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During the Soviet era, the epic tales of Central Asia, such as the *Manas* [3] of Kyrgyzstan, were documented in writing and published. The poetry of Central Asian classics, folk tales, and songs were also published in their original languages in significant quantities and translated into the languages of several other Soviet republics. Thanks to the efforts of the Soviet government, the rich cultural heritage of Central Asia has now found its rightful place in the treasure house of human civilization.

### **Conclusion**

It has been evident that the establishment of Soviet power in Central Asia during the 20th century was one of the episodes of the Civil War period that has been largely overlooked by Western scholars. This episode involved the Basmachi, or Freeman's Movement. The opposition that the Bolsheviks faced in Turkestan was arguably the most pervasive challenge to Soviet rule. A widespread armed conflict between Red forces and the Basmachi persisted for six years and enjoyed support from virtually all sectors of Turkestani society. Unable to overcome the Basmachi solely through conventional military methods, the Soviet authorities were compelled to adapt their previously implemented

economic and social policies to establish a stable political order in the region.

### Endnotes

- [1] The Russian conquest of the region of Central Asia known as Turkestan. The territories, comprising parts of present-day Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan,.
- [2] “Basmachi” is derived from Baskinji, simply meaning attacker, and was initially applied to a group of brigands. During the tsarist period, these brigands existed when Turkistan independence was lost and tsarist occupation began in Turkmenistan, Crimea, and Bashkurdistan.
- [3] The “Epic of Manas” is an epic poem in verse, said to be over a thousand years old, about a tribal leader named Manas and his adventures in Central Asia. Sometimes called the “Iliad of the Steppes,” the story has been passed down orally over the generations by “Manas-tellers” and was not written down until the 1920s.

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