

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE BUKHARA EMIRATE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST THE SOVIET ARMY

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Abstract

This thesis presents a comprehensive historical analysis of the fall of the Bukhara Emirate and the armed resistance movement against Soviet forces during the period of 1918–1926. The study examines the military-tactical aspects of the Red Army's Bukhara Operation of 1920, the organizational structure, leadership, and geography of the Basmachi movement, and the Soviet suppression policies and their consequences. Employing historical-descriptive, comparative, and postcolonial methodological frameworks, the research demonstrates the limitations of both Soviet-era interpretations — which characterized the movement as a reactionary uprising — and oversimplified post-Soviet narratives that frame it exclusively as a national liberation struggle. Findings indicate that the movement comprised an intertwined complex of national, religious, social, and political motivations, with peasant participation playing a more significant role than traditionally acknowledged. The thesis establishes a scholarly foundation for future monographic research drawing on archival materials from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and British colonial records.

Keywords

Bukhara Emirate, Basmachi movement, Red Army, Soviet conquest, Central Asia, postcolonial historiography, Fergana Valley.

INTRODUCTION

Problem statement and relevance of the research

The liquidation of the Bukhara Emirate and the armed resistance against it constitute one of the most dramatic pages in the history of Central Asia at the beginning of the 20th century. After the Red Army captured the city of Bukhara on September 2, 1920, the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic was officially proclaimed. However, this political change aroused strong discontent among a large part of the population. The clergy, the leaders supporting the old order, and ordinary peasants continued the armed movement against the Soviet authorities. This movement became known in history as "pressing" - although this word was originally introduced into the dialogue to disparage the rebels.

The topic of the research is relevant in several respects: firstly, the crisis of the Bukhara Emirate and the Soviet invasion radically changed the geopolitical balance in Central Asia; secondly, the printing movement, as a unique example of the people's struggle against colonialism, played an important role in the formation of regional national consciousness; thirdly, an objective analysis of the events of this period still remains a controversial issue in today's Uzbek historiography.

Research goals and objectives

The main goal of this thesis is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the process of the liquidation of the Bukhara Emirate and the armed resistance movement against the Soviet army based on historical documents, scientific sources in Russian and Uzbek. To achieve the goal, the following tasks were set:

To determine the socio-political situation of the Bukhara Emirate and the causes of the crisis;



To consider the military-tactical aspects of the Bukhara operation of the Red Army (1920);
To analyze the organizational structure, leaders and geography of the subversive movement;

To assess the policy of the Soviet authorities to suppress the movement and its consequences.

METHODS

Source base and historical research approach

The study is based mainly on historical-descriptive, comparative analysis and problem-chronological methods. Operational documents stored in the funds of the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA), reports of Soviet commanders and local interrogation protocols were studied as primary sources. Monographs by S. Ginzburg, M. Irisov, B. Khait and Yo. Abdullayev were analyzed as secondary sources.

Methodologically, this study also uses elements of the theory of postcolonial historiography. In Soviet sources, the printers are usually described as "bandits" and "counter-revolutionaries", therefore it was necessary to distinguish the political-ideological layers of these designations. An attempt was made to restore an objective picture of events using the method of critical analysis of sources.

Chronological and geographical scope

The chronological scope of the study covers the years 1918-1926: the period of the rise of the Jadids and the national liberation movement in the Bukhara Emirate was taken as the lower limit, and the period of the completion of the main military phase of the printing movement was set as the upper limit. Geographically, the Bukhara region, the Fergana Valley, and Eastern Bukhara (part of the territory of present-day Tajikistan) were the focus of the study, since it was in these regions that the movement took its most acute form.

RESULTS

The collapse of the Bukhara Emirate: causes and process According to the results of the study, the crisis of the Bukhara Emirate occurred under the influence of a number of interrelated factors. First, the First World War and the revolutionary changes in Russia disrupted the regional political balance. Second, internal conflicts in the Bukhara Emirate - the struggle between the Jadid movement and the clergy and the traditional elite - weakened state governance. Third, the establishment of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic in 1920 further squeezed the Bukhara Emirate from the south.

The Red Army under the command of Mikhail Frunze crushed the troops of Emir Said Olimkhan in four days in the Bukhara operation, which lasted from August 29 to September 2, 1920. Artillery and aviation were widely used during the operation. The weak centralization in the emirate and the lack of a unified military command made the defense ineffective; the emir himself fled to Afghanistan.

The printing movement: organization and military activities

The printing movement did not have a centralized organization, but consisted of many independent groups led by local leaders - Ibrahimbek, Anvar Pasha, Madaminbek, Junaidkhan. In 1921-1922, the movement reached its peak: according to estimates, during this period the number of insurgents operating in the Fergana Valley at one time exceeded 20 thousand. Anvar Pasha, having joined the movement in 1921, provided it with a certain degree of political and military coordination, but after his death in August 1922, the movement disintegrated again.

The Soviet authorities initially applied decisive military measures: the number of troops was increased, the telegraph and railway infrastructure was actively used. Later, the policy of partial concessions within the framework of the NEP (New Economic Policy) - trade liberalization, the permission of some religious figures to work - served to narrow the social base of the movement. By 1926, the movement had lost its main strength and split into separate scattered groups, although activity continued on a small scale until the early 1930s.



DISCUSSION

The Nature of the Movement and Its Historical Assessment

The printing movement has been historically interpreted in two ways. In Soviet historiography, this movement was mainly assessed as a "reactionary uprising organized by the feudal lords and the rich." In post-Soviet and modern Uzbek historiography, it has been reinterpreted as a national liberation struggle and resistance to colonialism. Our research has shown that both directions are one-sided in the face of the complex nature of the movement: national, religious, social, and ordinary criminal motives coexisted within the movement.

The scientific significance of the study is that it provides a deeper analysis of the social composition of the movement's participants and shows that the share of peasants in it is relatively high - this class is often overlooked in traditional historiography. This proves that the movement cannot be interpreted solely as a reaction of the aristocratic elite.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

In conclusion, the collapse of the Bukhara Emirate in 1920 and the printing movement are a decisive historical turning point in the formation of the modern political geography of Central Asia. In order to more fully assess the history of the movement, documents from Afghan and British archives should also be involved in the future, since one issue that needs to be understood - the influence of external geopolitical forces on the movement - has not yet been sufficiently studied. Also, the oral history method - interviews with descendants of those who participated in the movement - allows us to include local memory in historical research.

This thesis lays the foundation for further study of this historical period in a broad international context and for new monographic studies based on a comprehensive analysis of archival materials from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

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