

# The Abolition Of The Emirate System In Bukhara And The Establishment Of The Bukhara People's Soviet Republic

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**Received:** 20 October 2025; **Accepted:** 11 November 2025; **Published:** 17 December 2025

**Abstract:** This article analyzes the abolition of the Bukhara Emirate and the establishment of the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic (BXSR) in the context of the revolutionary processes that took place in Central Asia between 1917 and 1920. The study examines the main political developments in Bukhara following the Russian revolutions, the activities of reformist movements, and the influence of Soviet authorities in the region. It also focuses on the collapse of the emirate's political system and the formation of new revolutionary governing institutions.

**Keywords:** Bukhara Emirate; Bukhara People's Soviet Republic (BXSR); Central Asia; revolutionary transformations; Soviet state-building; state transformation.

**Introduction:** As a result of the workers' demonstrations and the popular uprising that began in Petrograd on February 28, 1917, the tsarist government in Russia was overthrown. The February Revolution not only deepened the political crisis within Russia but also stimulated an increase in political activism and the revitalization of national liberation movements in the colonial regions, particularly in Turkestan and in the territories of Bukhara and the Khiva Khanate. At the same time, a new generation of intellectuals emerged in the territories of Bukhara and Khiva, who began to engage in political thinking contemporaneously with the Turkestan progressives. Identifying themselves as the "Young Bukharans" and the "Young Khivans," they advocated the implementation of constitutional reforms within the framework of the existing political system.

The revolutionary movements that began in Russia in February 1917 started to exert their influence in Bukhara by early March. Emir Said Alim Khan and the Russian political agent Miller attempted to conceal information about the revolution from the population. The mass rallies held on March 7–8 in Kogon and Old Bukhara (the historic city center), with the participation of thousands of people, quickly spread throughout the entire emirate. In particular, alongside Russian

settlements such as New Chardjuy, Termez, Kalif, Karki, and Saray, rallies and demonstrations by the local population also took place in the cities of Qarshi, Shahrisabz, Kitob, and Karmana. In a telegram sent on March 14 to the Governor-General of Turkestan, the political agent A. Ya. Miller reported that, alongside Russians, the local population in Bukhara was also actively participating in the rallies. Such a development of events caused serious concern within the emir's court and Russian political circles.

As political activism in Bukhara continued to increase, the Young Bukharans movement likewise began to assume an increasingly political character. Activities that had previously been conducted within the framework of enlightenment were now transformed into open political struggle. As a result of this development, the Provisional Government and the Turkestan Governor-Generalship expressed their consent to the implementation of democratic reforms in Bukhara. In order to preserve their authority, Emir Said Alim Khan and the kushbegi Nasrullo were compelled to agree to the implementation of reforms in response to these pressures. In a telegram sent to the Governor-General on March 19, 1917, the Russian political agent Miller reported that the emir had fully accepted the proposed reforms.

On April 7, by order of Emir Said Alim Khan, the manifesto was solemnly proclaimed in the courtyard of the Ark of Bukhara. The ceremony was attended by members of the clergy, merchants, representatives of the Russian authorities, members of workers' and peasants' soviets, as well as the representative of Central Asian Jadids, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, and other prominent figures. According to Fayzulla Khojaye, more than 200 people participated in the event. The manifesto was read aloud by the Qazikalon Sharifjon Mahdum, after which copies were distributed to those present.

The manifesto proposed the establishment of a Majlis composed of influential figures, the creation of a state treasury and the determination of the national budget, the opening of a printing house in the capital, the development of industry and trade, the regulation of the tax system, and the introduction of oversight over officials along with the determination of their salaries. Overall, the manifesto envisaged, for the first time in the history of Bukhara, the implementation of certain democratic reforms.

Following the proclamation of the manifesto, representatives of the left wing of the Young Bukharans—led by Abdurauf Fitrat, Fayzulla Khojaye, and Usmon Khoja—organized a mass demonstration in the city of Bukhara on April 8, 1917, including at the Registan Square. However, Emir Said Alim Khan reacted sharply against this movement. The demonstrators were forcibly dispersed, their leaders were arrested, and among them Sadridin Ayni was beaten and imprisoned. Shortly thereafter, on April 14, the emir officially annulled the decree on reforms. Thus, the possibility of implementing reforms through peaceful means was eliminated, and political confrontation further intensified.

Indeed, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bukhara Emirate had lagged significantly behind in terms of political and social modernization. This reality was clearly recognized by young Bukharan intellectuals educated abroad and possessing a broad worldview—such as Abdurauf Fitrat, Fayzulla Khojaye, and others—who embarked on a struggle to reform the existing system. However, their movement, grounded in peaceful and gradual reforms, became increasingly complicated due to political instability and the interference of external forces. In particular, the Bolshevik coup that took place in Russia in October 1917 had a profound impact on this process. As a result of the Bolsheviks' seizure of power by force, the dictatorship of the proletariat was proclaimed in Russia. From that point onward, the Bolsheviks were prepared to use force to establish control over all territories of the former empire, including the political

situation in Bukhara.

On March 1, 1918, acting on the instructions of the Soviet authorities in Turkestan, an armed detachment of 3,500 Red soldiers led by Fedor Kolesov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of Turkestan, launched a military campaign toward Bukhara. At the same time, a revolutionary committee composed of Young Bukharans and headed by Fayzulla Khojaye also began coordinated actions alongside them. After consultations between the Young Bukharans and Kolesov, a text of demands addressed to the Emir of Bukhara, Said Alim Khan, was prepared. The demands set forth called for the introduction of freedom of speech, the press, and other democratic liberties in Bukhara; the dissolution of the government under the emir and its replacement with a new government composed of the Executive Committee of the Young Bukharans; and the disarmament of the emirate's armed forces. It was warned that if Said Alim Khan accepted these demands within 24 hours, he could remain on the throne; otherwise, he would be removed from power by force.

In an attempt to gain time, Emir Said Alim Khan entered into negotiations and, in his reply letter, stated that the reforms could be implemented gradually. However, this response did not satisfy Kolesov, and on March 2, 1918, he ordered the launch of an attack on Bukhara. The initial clash took place at Fathobod, where the emir's forces were defeated and retreated toward Bukhara. Realizing the gravity of the situation, the emir sent a special decree to Kolesov, declaring his readiness to accept all the demands, as well as to reduce taxes and abolish corporal and capital punishment. Although the emir's forces suffered defeat in the initial clash at Fathobod near Bukhara, the Bukharans soon succeeded in encircling Kolesov's detachment. The 170-kilometer railway line from Karmana to Qorakol was destroyed by the emir's troops. A mass uprising was launched to defend the city. As a result of this turn of events, on the evening of March 5 Kolesov ordered a retreat toward Tashkent. After several days of negotiations, on March 25, 1918, the Qiziltepa Agreement was signed between Soviet Turkestan and the Bukhara Emirate. On behalf of the emirate, the document was signed by the chief zakotchi, Mirza Salimbek. Although Kolesov's campaign ended in failure, the Bukhara Emirate was found guilty and was compelled to pay a substantial indemnity. Kolesov's detachment returned to Tashkent carrying the wealth that had been looted in Bukhara, Karmana, and Khatirchi.

Between 1917 and 1920, amid ongoing political and military instability, the Bukhara Emirate, as an independent state, established diplomatic relations

with the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Turkestan ASSR) and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).

On August 12, 1920, M. V. Frunze issued an order to form a front consisting of four strike groups along the Samarkand–Bukhara axis with the objective of abolishing the Bukhara Emirate. Around the capital of Bukhara, 7,000 infantry troops, 2,500 cavalymen, 46 artillery pieces, 230 machine guns, 10 armored vehicles, 5 armored trains, and 12 military aircraft were mobilized. The relative military superiority lay on the side of the Red Army, which was equipped with modern weaponry. In addition, during the campaign, a group of 5,000 Bukharan insurgents opposed to the emir also participated alongside the Red Army. At the disposal of the Bukhara government were 8,725 infantrymen (mainly *navkars*) and 7,850 mounted *sarboz* troops, approximately 150 outdated matchlock artillery pieces, several dozen modern guns, and 20 machine guns. In addition, there existed a poorly armed popular militia numbering 20,000 men; however, it was completely unprepared for combat operations.

As a result of four days of intense fighting around the city, the last stronghold of the Emirate—the Ark of Bukhara—was defeated on September 2, 1920.

On September 2, 1920, following the overthrow of Emir Said Alim Khan and the capture of the capital city of Bukhara, power passed into the hands of the Provisional All-Bukhara Revolutionary Committee. On the very day the Revolutionary Committee assumed power, it issued a political manifesto. This document had in fact been drafted in advance by the Bolsheviks and envisaged a number of radical transformations. In particular, it proclaimed the establishment of an independent Bukhara state within the new political framework; the transfer of all lands from the emirate period into state ownership; the regulation of the tax system; the redistribution of land to landless and land-poor peasants; and their provision with agricultural tools. It also outlined measures for reforming the judicial system and education, abolishing the death penalty, and protecting the fundamental rights of citizens.

In accordance with the decision adopted on September 10, 1920, by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Commission for Turkestan Affairs of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR, V. V. Kuibyshev—Deputy Chairman of the Turkestan Commission—was appointed as the official representative of the RSFSR government and the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic. When V. Kuibyshev presented his credentials to

Fayzulla Khojayev, Chairman of the government of the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic, it was emphasized that the principal demand of the RSFSR was to respect the independence of the Bukhara Republic, as well as the necessity for all Russian citizens and organizations to recognize this independence. However, in practice, Kuibyshev actively intervened in political, social, and economic reforms in Bukhara, seeking to shape their direction in accordance with the Soviet model.

On October 6–8, 1920, the First Congress of People's Representatives of All-Bukhara was held at Sitorai Mohi Khosa Palace, the summer residence of the Emir of Bukhara. At this historic assembly, the establishment of the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic (BXSR) was solemnly proclaimed. The new regime was formed as a people's democratic republic in accordance with contemporary revolutionary principles and was entrusted with the complex historical tasks of abandoning the feudal system that had persisted for centuries and establishing a modern, democratic state system. At the congress, the All-Bukhara Central Revolutionary Committee was established as the supreme authority of the republic, and the Council of People's Commissars, which constituted the government, was approved. On March 4, 1921, an alliance treaty and an economic agreement were signed in Moscow between the BXSR and the RSFSR. Through these documents, as had previously been observed in Khorezm, Bukhara was recognized as a state directly dependent on Soviet Russia in military, political, and economic terms.

## CONCLUSION

The abolition of the Bukhara Emirate and the establishment of the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic marked one of the significant events in the political history of Central Asia. Although the BXSR was proclaimed as a new political system, its initial development took place under the political, military, and economic influence of Soviet Russia. This process demonstrates that the transformation of the state structure in Bukhara was not solely the result of internal reforms, but was also closely connected with regional and external political factors. The study analyzes revolutionary events, political movements, and the formation of new governing institutions, substantiating that the transition from the emirate to a Soviet republic was complex, multidimensional, and gradual.

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