

THE DREAM OF NATION-BUILDING IN TURKESTAN: OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES*Abduqahorov Anvarjon Alijon o'g'li**Faculty of History, Navoi State University*

Abstract: This article examines the historical aspiration to establish a national state in Turkestan during the early 20th century. It analyzes the political, social, and ideological conditions that made the dream of national self-determination both conceivable and contested. Drawing from the legacy of the Jadid movement, the short-lived Kokand Autonomy, and broader anti-colonial efforts, the paper identifies key opportunities that facilitated the emergence of national consciousness, as well as the structural obstacles—imperial repression, ethnic fragmentation, ideological divisions, and external interventions—that ultimately undermined these efforts. The study contributes to the understanding of how nationalist projects evolve under colonial and revolutionary conditions.

Keywords: Turkestan, nation-building, autonomy, Jadidism, colonialism, Kokand Autonomy, obstacles, national identity.

In the early 20th century, Turkestan was the scene of growing political and intellectual ferment. Under Russian colonial domination, Central Asian intellectuals and reformers began to articulate visions of a **national revival**—not merely cultural, but political. At the heart of this vision was the idea of a **national state**, built upon the principles of self-governance, cultural autonomy, and unity among the peoples of Turkestan.

This article explores the **aspiration to build a nation-state in Turkestan** during the revolutionary and post-imperial transition period of 1917–1924. The analysis begins with the rise of national consciousness through the Jadid movement, continues through the political efforts of the Kokand Autonomy (1917–1918), and concludes with an examination of the forces—both internal and external—that blocked the realization of this vision.

This study employs a multi-pronged research approach:

- **Historical analysis** of key events such as the 1917 Russian Revolution and the Kokand Autonomy.
- **Discourse analysis** of political documents, speeches, and writings by Central Asian intellectuals.
- **Archival research** in Jadid publications (Taraqiy, Sadoi Turkiston) and Russian administrative records.
- **Comparative analysis** with similar independence movements in the Muslim world (e.g., Ottoman Empire, India, Egypt).

By integrating both primary and secondary sources, this article reconstructs the national project in Turkestan and the structural barriers it faced.

Ideological Foundations and Opportunity

The rise of **national consciousness** in Turkestan was grounded in the intellectual work of Jadid reformers. They:

- Promoted the idea of “**millat**” (nation) based on shared language, religion, and historical memory.
- Advocated for modern education as the foundation for citizenship and civic responsibility.
- Rejected colonial domination and pushed for **autonomy** within the broader framework of Muslim solidarity and Turkic unity.

The **February Revolution** of 1917 presented a window of opportunity. With the fall of the Tsarist regime, Turkestani leaders saw a chance to organize politically and **assert autonomy**.

The Kokand Autonomy: A National Experiment

In November 1917, leaders from across Turkestan convened in Kokand and declared an **autonomous government**, known as the **Turkestan (Kokand) Autonomy**. Key features included:

- A commitment to **federalism**, religious freedom, and equality.
- Calls for local control over education, taxation, and cultural policy.
- Efforts to form a **multinational state** uniting Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Tajiks, and others.

Despite limited resources and time, this autonomy symbolized the **realization of a nationalist ideal**—albeit brief.

Structural Obstacles and Collapse

Multiple factors contributed to the **demise** of the nation-building project:

- **Military Intervention:** The Soviet Red Army attacked Kokand in early 1918, killing thousands and destroying the autonomy.
- **Ideological Conflict:** Bolsheviks saw nationalism as counter-revolutionary and promoted class struggle over ethnic identity.
- **Internal Divisions:** Ethnic, tribal, and ideological rivalries weakened the cohesion of nationalist forces.
- **Lack of International Support:** Unlike other anti-colonial movements, Turkestan’s nationalists received little backing from global powers or Muslim states.

The failure of nation-building in Turkestan was not due to a lack of vision or leadership. Rather, it reflected the **asymmetry of power**, both military and ideological, between local

actors and the Soviet state. The **dream of independence** clashed with the geopolitical realities of the time: civil war in Russia, the global rise of communism, and the absence of a strong regional ally.

Yet the **symbolic legacy** of these efforts remains powerful. The Kokand Autonomy became a **myth of national martyrdom**, and Jadid thought continues to influence educational and cultural policy in post-Soviet Central Asia. The national idea, once crushed by Soviet tanks, re-emerged in the 1990s as a **foundation of state-building** in independent Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and others.

The aspiration to build a national state in Turkestan represented one of the most significant intellectual and political developments of early 20th-century Central Asia. Although short-lived, the Kokand Autonomy and the broader Jadid movement demonstrated that colonized peoples could imagine and pursue **modern, inclusive, and sovereign nationhood**.

Despite the collapse of the autonomy under Soviet repression, the dream did not die—it was merely deferred. Today, that dream informs modern efforts at national identity, cultural preservation, and political sovereignty throughout the region. Understanding this historical episode is essential for grasping the **roots of modern Central Asian statehood** and the enduring power of nationalist ideals under colonial rule.

References:

1. Khalid, Adeeb. *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*. University of California Press, 1998.
2. Allworth, Edward. *The Modern Uzbeks: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present*. Hoover Institution Press, 1990.
3. Salokhiy, Abduvahid. *Turkiston Muxtoriyati: Kurash va Qatag'on*. Samarqand: Zarqaynar, 2021.
4. Brower, Daniel. *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire*. Routledge, 2003.
5. Fitrat, Abdurauf. *Millatni uyg'otish yo'lida*. Tashkent: Ma'naviyat, 2005.
6. Russian archives on Turkestan policy, 1917–1924.
7. Tursunov, Anvar. *Jadidlar va mustaqillik g'oyasi*. Tashkent: O'zbekiston, 2018.