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SHARAF RASHIDOV'S DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES (1955–1983): APPROACHES AND DISCOURSES OF HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE 20TH – EARLY 21ST CENTURIES

Abstract. This publication analyzes the scholarly literature on Sharaf Rashidov's diplomatic activities from 1955 to 1983. The period under review covers the beginning and end of Sharaf Rashidov visits to foreign countries. A historiographical review has identified several persistent research discourses to understand Rashidov's international activities: "Soviet Muslims in the context of the 'New Eastern Policy'", "cultural, economic, and scientific diplomacy as soft power", "domestic or foreign diplomacy", and "rational diplomacy". This set of discourses reflects researchers' desire to interpret Rashidov's diplomatic activities using various approaches, from institutional to cultural and civilizational. The relevance of a historiographic analysis of Sharaf Rashidov's diplomatic activities also stems from the need to determine the extent of research on the topic, reconstruct the main stages of its scholarly exploration, and identify promising areas for further research. This publication aims to systematize and critically evaluate the historiographic corpus devoted to the phenomenon of Sharaf Rashidov's diplomacy.

Keywords: Sharaf Rashidov, diplomacy, foreign visits, historiography, discourses, Soviet Muslims, "new Eastern policy", "soft power".

Introduction

The diplomatic activities of Sharaf Rashidov (1917-1983), a prominent Soviet public official and political figure, have been the subject of research for over 50 years. References to Rashidov's international activities first began to appear in scholarly and journalistic literature in the early 1970s, reflecting the growing role of the Union republics in implementing USSR foreign policy. From that time until the present day, a historiographical tradition has gradually emerged that reflects the evolution of the perception and assessment of his international activity.

Both Soviet and contemporary Uzbek, Russian, and foreign researchers have contributed to the development of this historiography, demonstrating ongoing interest in this subject and the need for its further comprehensive study and systematization. Over more than fifty years, the historiography of this topic has featured a variety of approaches: from ideologically biased texts to contemporary research based on critical analysis of sources and an expanded documentary base. The publications typ-

ically examine individual aspects of Rashidov's international activities without fully addressing their content, context, and influence on the shaping of the image of the Uzbek SSR and the USSR in global politics. This study aims to identify and analyze the main historiographical approaches to studying Rashidov's diplomatic activities. It addresses two objectives: a historiographical one, through systematization and critical evaluation of the scholarly literature, and, in part, a specific historical one, through the reconstruction of key interpretive models that developed around Rashidov in the context of foreign policy processes of the second half of the 20th century.

The hypothesis is that during the Soviet period, historiography focused primarily on the ideologically driven aspects of Rashidov's foreign policy missions, while post-Soviet and international historiography has seen a broadening of the research field, including themes of the Islamic factor, soft power instruments, and regional leadership. At the same time, important issues such as Rashidov's diplomatic contacts with European leaders and his interactions with international organiza-

tions remain understudied. Furthermore, there is a lack of scholarly works that critically consider the documents reflecting Rashidov's foreign policy activities.

Historiography of the problem

A literature analysis revealed the following problematic areas, in which Rashidov's diplomacy received varying degrees of coverage: "Soviet Muslims in the context of the 'New Eastern Policy'", "cultural, economic, and scientific diplomacy as soft power", "domestic or foreign diplomacy", and "rational diplomacy".

Soviet Muslims in the context of the "New Eastern Policy"

Gare LeCompte in his 1971 dissertation *Soviet Muslims and the Afro-Asian World* first mentioned Sharaf Rashidov's diplomatic career¹. He provided a detailed analysis of Rashidov's visits to Muslim countries in Asia and Africa, his work promoting the Organization for the Solidarity of Peoples of Asia and Africa (OSNAA), the prevalence of Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, and the public diplomacy Rashidov practiced during his trips to Pakistan, Mali, and Ghana. After this, scholars rarely examined Rashidov's diplomatic activities. A renewed interest in the subject in the 2000s resulted from a growing general interest in the history of the late Soviet Union and a desire to understand the successes and failures of the "Soviet project".

Adeeb Khalid, in his 2007 publication *Being a Muslim in Soviet Central Asia, or an Alternative History of Muslim Modernity* concluded that Sharaf Rashidov's diplomatic activities contributed to strengthening the Soviet Union's position in the countries of the Global South². The researcher emphasized the significance of Rashidov's role in establishing Uzbekistan as a strategic partner in Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War. The author

analyzes Rashidov's diplomacy within the broader context of the history of Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan. In recent years, articles have also been published on the specifics of Soviet foreign policy and, in particular, on the involvement of ethnic Soviet Muslims in the implementation of a new foreign policy concept within the framework of the so-called "New Eastern Policy" of Soviet diplomacy, which was conducted during the *Thaw* period in the late 1950s and early 1960s. One such work is an article by Masha Kirasirova, published in 2011³. The author analyzes this policy as a reflection of the Soviet ruling elite's belief that the "Soviet East" and the "foreign East" shared common or related cultures (national literature, history, traditions), which implied the instrumentalization of Soviet Islam and its influence on the global South. Ultimately, the author concludes that manipulating such notions of *Islam* and the *East* allowed the leaders of the Soviet Muslim republics to influence both the foreign and domestic policies of the Soviet Union.

Soft Power: Cultural, Economic, and Academic Diplomacy

Gregory Glisson published another foreign publication mentioning Sharaf Rashidov in 1986⁴. This article contains the first mentions of Rashidov's visits to Eastern Europe. Glisson examined Rashidov's diplomatic and political strategies and concluded that Rashidov's experience conducting diplomatic negotiations remains relevant today. Overall, the researcher emphasized the importance of personal, cultural, academic, and historical factors in shaping global foreign and domestic policy.

In his 2013 publication, A.M. Kalinovsky examined the process of decolonization and modernization in Central Asia, including the role of Sharaf Rashidov in this process. Kalinovsky characterizes Rashidov as a skilled strategist who utilized culture and art, science and education, as well as the national traditions of Soviet Uzbekistan as an ef-

¹ Le Compte G. Soviet muslims and the afro-asian world. Submitted to the Faculty of the School of International Service of The American University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Area Studies. 1971 / The American University Washington, D.C.

² Khalid A. Being Muslim in Soviet Central Asia, or an Alternative History of Muslim Modernity // Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada. 2007. Vol. 18. № 2. P. 123–143.

³ Kirasirova M. "Sons of Muslims in Moscow": Soviet Central Asian mediators for the foreign East, 1955-1962 // Ab Imperio, 2011. No. 4. P. 106-132. <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2011.0003>.

⁴ Gleason G. Sharaf Rashidov and the dilemmas of national leadership // Central Asian Survey, 1986. Vol. 5. Issue 3-4. P. 133-160. DOI: 10.1080/02634938608400560

fective channel for establishing close political, economic, and diplomatic ties with countries of the Global South in order to contain the penetration of countries of the Global North into Central Asia. Kalinovsky considers Rashidov's role here to be key, as he acted as a mediator between the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Global South⁵.

In 2020, Riccardo Mario Cucciolla published a detailed analysis of Sharaf Rashidov's diplomatic activity on the global stage. Cucciolla emphasized that Rashidov was a significant player in global diplomacy during the Cold War, representing the interests of not only the Center but also Soviet Uzbekistan. Based on an analysis of Rashidov's diplomatic strategies, the author concludes that in his diplomatic missions, the Soviet politician employed economic and cultural diplomacy to achieve his objectives. Cucciolla notes that Rashidov successfully navigated between the Center and Uzbekistan's interests and strengthened international cooperation in Central Asia⁶.

Also in 2020, the Uzbek researcher E. Nuriddinov published an article focusing on the role of Uzbekistan as a "showcase of the Soviet East" in matters of foreign policy and international relations. Nuriddinov analyzed the role of the Uzbek SSR in Soviet foreign policy and concluded that, although Uzbekistan was a "showcase of the Soviet East's success", it was under strict control from the center. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan was able to build its economic, cultural, and spiritual ties with countries of the Global South, a development for which the author attributes Rashidov's key role. It was Rashidov who promoted ideas of solidarity and friendship between Uzbekistan and the countries of Asia and Africa, while simultaneously strengthening Uzbekistan's position within the USSR⁷. In 2023, E. Nuriddinov, together with I. Kosimkhuzhaev, published another article about the phe-

nomenon of Sharaf Rashidov and Uzbekistan's place in Soviet diplomacy. The article emphasizes that Rashidov primarily utilized Uzbekistan's cultural and historical ties with other countries to strengthen international relations⁸.

In 2021, Shakhlo Kurbanova analyzed Rashidov's use of public diplomacy practices, which was carried out through cultural mediators. The author believes that it was cultural diplomacy that led to the further development and expansion of Uzbekistan's foreign economic ties with countries in the Global South during the Soviet period⁹. In 2023, Albina Muratbekova published an article analyzing Central Asian scientific diplomacy during the Soviet period and demonstrating how prominent Soviet leaders promoted ideas of solidarity in countries of the Global South, using these opportunities to develop the Central Asian republics scientifically and culturally. Thanks to their activities, Soviet Central Asia began to be recognized and acknowledged in countries of the Global South and North. Central Asian diplomacy is generally divided into historical periods "tied" to the leaders of the Soviet Union. The article also includes an analysis of Rashidov's diplomatic activities. The author notes that Rashidov succeeded in becoming a key actor in Soviet policy toward countries of the Global South and East. Muratbekova also cites leading Western authors who have studied Soviet diplomacy in countries of the Global South and East¹⁰.

In 2023, Sanjarbek A. Numonzoda (Chonnam National University) analyzed Sharaf Rashidov's diplomatic contacts with countries of the Global South during the Cold War. The author confirms the established historiographic view that Rashidov was a strategist who relied on cultural and public diplomacy to advance Soviet foreign policy interests in South Asia and North Africa, acting as a mediator between the Global East and the Global

⁵ Kalinovsky A. Not Some British Colony in Africa: The Politics of Decolonization and Modernization in Soviet Central Asia, 1955–1964 // *Ab Imperio*. № 2013. № 2. P. 1–31.

⁶ Cucciolla R.M. Sharaf Rashidov and the international dimensions of Soviet Uzbekistan // *Central Asian Survey*. 2020. Vol. 39. Issue 2. P. 185–201. DOI: 10.1080/02634937.2019.1708269.

⁷ Nuriddinov E. Uzbekistan As A "Showcase Of The Soviet East" // *Issues Of Foreign Policy And International Relations* European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine. 2020. Vol. 07. Issue 07. P. 1011–1023.

⁸ Nuriddinov E., Kosimkhuzhaev I. Uzbekistan in the historical retrospective of international relations within the framework of the Union State // *Journal of Advanced Zoology*. 2023. Vol. 44. Special Issue 2. P. 2978–3000.

⁹ Kurbanova Sh.D. The role of Sharaf Rashidov in the development of international cultural relations of Uzbekistan // *Bulletin of Science and Practice*. 2021. Vol. 7. No. 5. Pp. 556–559. <https://doi.org/10.33619/2414-2948/66/61>

¹⁰ Muratbekova A. Soviet Science Diplomacy: How Central Asia was Instrumentalised in Soviet Foreign Policy of Eurasian Studies. 2023. Vol. 14 (1). P. 30–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18793665231159684>.

South. The author also notes that Rashidov possessed the ability to establish personal relationships with leaders of countries and movements¹¹.

Domestic diplomacy versus foreign diplomacy

In 1994, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein's monograph *We Lost Everything in the Cold War*, focused on the diplomatic activities of Sharaf Rashidov. The authors assess Rashidov as a regional diplomat who served as a mediator between the Center, Central Asian countries, and the countries of the Global South. He skillfully adapted to the Center's demands and found common ground with Central Asian national elites to maintain stability in the region.

The authors believe that Rashidov's success in foreign policy was rooted in his efforts to reduce confrontation between various elite groups within Uzbekistan. Thus, Rashidov contributed to maintaining regional stability and advancing Soviet interests both in Central Asia and in several countries of the Global South. Overall, the authors conclude that Rashidov's influence on Soviet foreign policy was largely indirect; he was more of an "internal diplomat"¹². Shokhzhakhon Rashidov expressed a counter-view in a 2021 publication on Rashidov's role in Soviet foreign policy in the 1950s. The author concluded that Rashidov played a key role in fulfilling the USSR's foreign policy objectives during the Cold War. His contribution extends beyond regional policy, encompassing the Soviet Union's international contacts with countries in the Global South and the Global East¹³.

Rational diplomacy

In 2022, U. Khasanov in his article came up with the concept of rationality in Sharaf Rashidov's di-

plomacy. The author examined Rashidov's methodology as a rational actor diplomacy, characterized by maximizing the interests of Central Asian countries while minimizing risks. Khasanov views Rashidov as a strategist in foreign policy management, taking into account the interests of both the Soviet Union as a whole and Uzbekistan, specifically, while taking into account global political trends. Sharaf Rashidov's approach was to leverage Uzbekistan's national traditions, their flexibility, and their rapid adaptation to changing political conditions to influence the global South. The author characterizes this approach as a rational choice in diplomacy¹⁴.

Thus, it can be tentatively concluded that the themes of "rational diplomacy" and "domestic diplomacy" or "foreign diplomacy" are new to the historiography of Sharaf Rashidov's diplomatic activities. However, themes on the role of Soviet Muslims in the implementation of the "New Eastern Policy", as well as Rashidov's cultural and economic diplomacy as "soft power", are actively explored in historiography. A serious gap in the historiography concerns Rashidov's diplomacy in Western countries. This is evidenced by the confusion even in the dating of his visits. For example, Cucciolla's publication provides contradictory dates for Rashidov's visits to Finland, Yugoslavia, Italy, and Czechoslovakia. The banner at the Rashidov Monumental Museum in Jizzakh states that the Uzbek leader visited Austria (1969), Bulgaria (1975), Czechoslovakia (1976), Finland (1954), France (1959, 1967), Ireland (1962), Italy (1964), and Yugoslavia (1963)¹⁵. In fact, Sharaf Rashidov visited Finland in 1955, Yugoslavia in 1965, Italy in 1970, and Czechoslovakia in 1980¹⁶.

Conclusion

The literature review revealed several research discourses within the study of Sharaf Rashidov's diplomacy. The discourse "Soviet Muslims in the

¹¹ Numonzoda S. Sharof Rashidov's Role in Cold War Diplomacy: A Soviet Uzbekistan Perspective // Formosa Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (FJMR) 2023. Vol. 2. № 10. P. 1673–1682.

¹² Lebow R.N., Stein J.G. *We All Lost the Cold War*. Series: Princeton Studies in International History and Politics. Princeton University Press, 1994.

¹³ Rashidov Sh. The role of Sharof Rashidov in the foreign policy of the USSR (50 years of the XX century) // American Journal of social and humanitarian research. 2021. Vol. 2. № 5. P. 112–115.

¹⁴ Khasanov U. Sharaf Rashidov in rational choice diplomacy // Xalqaro munosabatlar. Fanlararo ilmiy-nazariy jurnal. International Affairs Interdisciplinary Scientific and Theoretic Journal. 2022. № 5-6. P. 69-74.

¹⁵ Cucciolla R.M. Sharaf Rashidov and the international dimensions of Soviet Uzbekistan...

¹⁶ Muminov I.T. Foreign visits of Sharaf Rashidov 1955-1983. Collection of materials. Tashkent: Niso nashriyot va matbaa uyi, 2025.

context of the 'New Eastern Policy'" demonstrates that Sharaf Rashidov was recruited by the Soviet leadership to demonstrate harmonious relations between the traditional Asian Muslim world and the socialist one. This, in turn, contributed to the successful promotion of Soviet ideology in Muslim countries in Asia and Africa. The discourse "cultural, economic, and scientific diplomacy" demonstrates how Sharaf Rashidov used soft power to advance Soviet foreign policy, which in turn led to the expansion of the Uzbek SSR's geoeconomic and geostrategic ties. The discourse of "internal diplomacy" presents Sharaf Rashidov as a skilled mediator not only between the Soviet Union's center and the Central Asian Soviet republics but also within Uzbekistan, contributing to the republic's economic, cultural, scientific, and social modernization. As an "external" diplomat, Rashidov, on

the one hand, served as the official representative of the Soviet Union, while on the other, facilitated interactions with the USSR for countries in the Global South. Sharaf Rashidov's open and friendly interactions with peoples similar in tradition and culture, who had recently liberated themselves from colonialism, strengthened ties between the USSR and them and created a positive image of the Soviet state. Furthermore, Rashidov is portrayed as a prudent politician and diplomat who took a realistic approach to global changes and skillfully adapted to them. Thus, the emerging historiography of Sharaf Rashidov's diplomatic mission demonstrates a transition from fragmentary coverage of the topic to a more holistic and multifaceted understanding of the specifics of Sharaf Rashidov's diplomacy in the context of new interpretations of Soviet diplomacy as a whole.

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