



# **UZBEK SSR POLITICAL ELITE: SCIENCE AND SCHOLARSHIP IN THE REPUBLIC DURING THE LEADERSHIP OF NURIDDIN MUKHITDINOV**

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the changes in the field of science in the republic during the reign of Nuriddin Mukhitdinov, the first politician of the Uzbek SSR. The article also highlights a brief biography of Nuriddin Mukhitdinov, the process of justifying the victims of repression, the creation of new research institutes in the Uzbek SSR, issues related to the activities of the Academy of Sciences.

**Key words:** Uzbek SSR, politician, first secretary, Academy of Sciences, science, repressions, television center, oriental studies.

## **Introduction**

A number of contradictory circumstances, conflicts within political and ideological processes, and certain changes in economic and social spheres characterizes the history of Uzbekistan in the 1950s. Examining and objectively assessing the dynamic and multifaceted activities of the first political leaders of Uzbekistan—who worked under the heavy pressure and strict control of the central authorities—constitutes one of the important tasks facing the discipline of history. Indeed, this period holds particular significance in the formation of a new generation of national leadership cadres in Uzbekistan, for figures such as Amin Niyazov, Nuriddin Mukhitdinov, Sobir Kamolov, and Sharof Rashidov, individuals who earned the respect of the people, were shaped and nurtured precisely within the socio-political processes of the 1950s.

The activities of Nuriddin Akromovich Mukhitdinov—one of the prominent leaders, political figures, and Uzbek diplomats of this period—are worthy of high appreciation. During his tenure as a political leader of Uzbekistan and the country in general, particularly in the 1950s–1960s, significant changes took place in the lives of the peoples of the republic.

Nuriddin Mukhitdinov was born on 19 November 1917 in the Allon neighborhood of Tashkent, in the family of a gardener. His father, Shomukhitdin, was a progressive-minded individual for his time. Alongside his primary education, Mukhitdinov mastered Arabic, Turkish, and Russian. The formation of his personality was greatly influenced by Abdulla Avloni and Abdulla Khodiriy. After graduating from the Moscow Institute of Trade and Cooperation (1938), he was assigned to Bukhara, where he served as Deputy Head of the Personnel Department of the Regional Consumer Union and as Director of the Training Complex in the Shofirkhon district.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Mukhitdinov volunteered for the army. He studied at a special military school in Kiev (1939). From 1941 to 1945, he served in the



active army and took an active part in the struggle against fascism. Upon returning to Tashkent in 1946, his political career began. He held the positions of Secretary and First Secretary of the Namangan Regional Party Committee (1947–1950); Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (1950–1951); Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR (1951–1953; 1954–1955); Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan (1953–1954); First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (1955–1957); Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee (1957–1961); and a number of other key positions[1; 28-29]. He served as Candidate Member of the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee (1956–1957) and as a Full Member of the Presidium (1957–1961)[2; 14].

Before Mukhitdinov, no leader from the republics of Central Asia or Kazakhstan had ever been considered suitable for such a high position within the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee.

Among national administrative leaders, N. Mukhitdinov distinguished himself through his ability to inspire confidence, his deep understanding of the socio-political problems of the republic, his fluent and meaningful command of both Uzbek and Russian, and his strong oratorical skills. During the years, he led the republic and worked in Moscow, he earned the respect and affection of the population by boldly presenting various problems of Uzbekistan's national economy to the central authorities and actively striving to secure positive solutions.

At the First Congress of Uzbek Intellectuals held on 11 October 1956, in his speech[3; 8-65] N. Mukhitdinov mentioned—for the first time since the 1930s—the names of the repressed Jadids and national intellectuals such as Abdulla Khodiriy, Fitrat, Cholpon, Akmal Ikromov, and others. He demonstrated great courage in advocating for the rehabilitation and restoration of the good names of the victims of repression[4; 188].

In the pages of the journal *Zvezda Vostoka*, the literary heritage of the Karakalpak poet Berdak was declared reactionary, and Karakalpak Soviet literature was accused of nationalism. Abdunabiyev and Stepanov once baselessly proclaimed the famous epic *Alpomish* to be a work hostile to the people. This matter was also discussed at the Tenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan held in this very hall. In fact, the issue should have been studied comprehensively and thoroughly.”[5]

It should be noted that, following the denunciation of the cult of personality, significant positive changes occurred in Uzbekistan's political life regarding the rehabilitation of repressed individuals, largely due to the initiative of N. Mukhitdinov. The names of state figures such as F. Khojayev and A. Ikromov, as well as writer Abdulla Khodiriy and others, were restored. Writers and poets such as Said Ahmad, Shukhrat, Maqsud Shaykhzoda, and others—who had been subjected to political persecution in the early 1950s—were also rehabilitated[6;108].

During the years of the Second World War, there was a pressing need for scientists' inventions, as well as for their proposals and recommendations aimed at developing the national economy. In this context, on November 4, 1943, the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR was established. Subsequently, this scientific institution expanded, assuming greater responsibilities. During this period, the academy's scientists managed to accomplish significant work.

During N. Mukhitdinov's tenure as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, many achievements were made in the field of science in the republic. During this period, Sharof Rashidov also proudly noted that Uzbekistan had 100



research institutes, its own Academy of Sciences, and a strong printing base[7]. Under N. Mukhitdinov's political leadership, particularly, the activities of the Academy of Sciences were enriched with new research institutes, and substantial efforts were made to develop their material base. For instance, between 1956 and 1958, the establishment of the Institute of Nuclear Physics within the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, the Research Institute of Endocrinology, and the Academy of Agricultural Sciences of Uzbekistan in Central Asia, confirm this assessment.

Moreover, innovations and improvements were introduced in the social life of the population, and positive changes were observed in the standard of living. In this regard, the opening of the first television center in Central Asia in Tashkent, the First Congress of Uzbek Intellectuals, the First All-Union Conference of Orientalists, film festivals for Asian and African countries, and conferences of Asian and African writers, among others, can be directly associated with the political activity of N. Mukhitdinov.

In his report at the XIII Congress of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan on January 27, 1956, N. Mukhitdinov also critically evaluated the activities of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan[8]. As in all periods, his subordinates, often with additional observations, repeatedly reiterated the shortcomings identified by the leading official. However, until that point, no responsible leader had the courage to openly address these deficiencies. This was due to the leaders' lack of courage, indifference, indecision, or inability to recognize existing shortcomings.

*The identified shortcomings were as follows:*

Improper planning in training highly qualified personnel—Doctors and Candidates of Sciences—and the uneven development of all scientific fields.

Between 1945 and 1955, of the 765 individuals admitted to postgraduate studies, only 234 successfully defended their Candidate of Science degrees.

During these years, 290 individuals were expelled from postgraduate programs due to failure to defend their dissertations.

Many Candidates of Science concluded their scientific activity with the dissertation defense and did not produce any further scientific works[8].

In short, N. Mukhitdinov's assessment of the Academy's activities was well founded; he identified all shortcomings based on evidence. However, it should also be noted that these deficiencies were not solely due to the academy's scientists but also involved responsible officials and relevant organizations holding various positions at that time. It was somewhat unreasonable to demand much from scientists without providing them with sufficient opportunities, since the above shortcomings were not solely the fault of the Academy's leadership or its researchers. Various objective and subjective factors also contributed to the situation.

Remaining faithful to historical traditions, additional negative assessments were expressed regarding the institution criticized by the republic's top leader. At that time, Yodgor Nasriddinova, a political figure serving as Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR, also provided a critical evaluation of the Academy's activities. She highlighted the following shortcomings: "The tasks assigned to us in the field of construction improvement require a fundamental restructuring of our scientific research institutions. Unfortunately, the Academy's institutes working in construction and building materials have not mobilized their efforts to address scientific problems associated with implementing industrial methods. One



such problem is creating lightweight constructions for use in hot climates. The Institute of Structures, the Polytechnic Institute, and the Laboratory of Building Materials have long been dealing with this issue, but have not yet resolved it.”[9]

Republican organizations must also assist in the rational use of scientific personnel. At present, the situation is not satisfactory. Scientists are often assigned tasks unrelated to their research, preventing them from focusing on primary investigations. For example, the Chemistry Institute was tasked with developing a topic concerning stains appearing in bricks due to salts. This topic was irrelevant to the institute and improperly assigned, as such stains arise from violations of established technological regulations by the Ministry of Construction Materials.

Moreover, Academy staff are often used as representatives for various agricultural campaigns, which also hinders their research. Additionally, many ministries and administrations delay applying research results to production, which is completely inappropriate”[10]. Zakhirov also provided examples of five factors affecting the Academy’s activities. One example was that, despite the significant results achieved with new organophosphorus compounds against spider mites, cotton bollworm, and thrips, the issue of producing these compounds had not been resolved for three years[10]. Such problems indicated a serious lack of attention to the Academy’s work.

In response to Y. Nasriddinova’s criticism, T.Z. Zakhirov stated: “In the field of construction, the Academy’s activities are accelerating efforts to strengthen prefabricated reinforced concrete structures against ground movement”[10].

In addition, N. Mukhitdinov paid attention to issues in the field of architecture. He criticized the inadequate theoretical and practical training provided to specialists being prepared in this sector. At that time, the training of architects and construction personnel in the republic was unsatisfactory. Higher educational institutions were not sufficiently equipped to train specialists; lecture halls, laboratories, and training grounds were lacking, and the available visual aids did not reflect the contemporary level of technology. The curriculum did not include the study of national architecture. However, the peoples of Turkestan possessed strong and extensive national experience in construction. Therefore, N. Mukhitdinov aimed to harmonize tradition and modernity in new constructions. He also criticized the fact that works on the history and theory of Uzbek architecture had not been written, that no monographs had been published dedicated to the beautiful creations of Uzbek architecture and the work of master craftsmen such as Usta Shirin Murodov and Usta Muso, and that the experiences of these masters were poorly transmitted to the younger generation[11].

During this period, the Institute of Oriental Studies was not only well-known among the institutions of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR but also recognized in the Union and abroad. Delegations from many countries visiting the republic were interested in Uzbekistan’s ancient history. The institute had gained a reputation, particularly in Eastern countries, due to its extensive manuscript collection[12; 29].

According to S. Azimjonova, director of the Institute of Oriental Studies, prior to the establishment of the institute under the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR, the institution mainly conducted bibliographic work, producing only catalog descriptions of manuscripts. Beginning in 1944, systematic study of manuscripts, their publication, and subsequent scientific research were initiated. By 1956, the institute’s manuscript collection comprised



15,000 volumes, containing approximately 80,000 works, of which 27,000 had been published as lithographs[13].

On January 27, 1956, N. Akromovich, in his report at the XIII Congress of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, also addressed the activities of the Academy of Sciences. He noted that the peoples of Eastern countries were increasingly interested in the life and achievements of Soviet workers, as well as in the history, economy, and culture of the Uzbek SSR. He emphasized the need for Orientalists to expand scientific research in these areas[14; 20-25].

During these years, the political leadership of Uzbekistan endeavored to develop the field of Oriental studies and to ensure the institute became a major scientific center. N. Mukhitdinov stated: “Our task is to elevate Oriental studies in the republic to a new, higher level. This will help strengthen friendship and connections between the Soviet Union and the peoples of the East”[15].

Mukhitdinov also informed that, in order to expand contacts with foreign research institutions and facilitate mutual scientific information exchange, a scientific conference of Orientalists was planned to be held in Tashkent in the summer of 1957. The scheduling of such events demonstrated that the development of Oriental studies was a priority for the political leadership of Uzbekistan. Another reason for the increased attention to the institute was the interest of many delegations from Eastern countries in Uzbekistan’s rare manuscript collections.

During this period, the institute’s staff accomplished significant work, much of which continued thereafter. One of the institute’s major achievements was the publication of the first volume of Ibn Sina’s *Canon of Medicine* in Russian and Uzbek, the translation of the second volume into these languages, and the publication of a three-volume catalog of manuscripts preserved at the institute. These accomplishments attracted considerable attention at the time. For example, during the joint meeting of the Presidiums of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR on January 6, 1956, these achievements were recognized as scientific results of the Institute of Oriental Studies[16] and were later acknowledged with pride by the president of the Academy, Kh.M. Abdullaev[17].

On June 30, 1956, the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and Queen Soraya Pahlavi visited Tashkent. During their meetings, T. Zakhirov, president of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR, presented the Shah with the second volume of Ibn Sina’s *Canon of Medicine* in Russian and Uzbek, along with the three-volume catalog of manuscripts held by the Institute of Oriental Studies. The Shah accepted these gifts and remarked: “Your cultural center connects with Iranian scholars, and we will continue exchanging professional experience”[18].

The interest of Eastern countries in the history of Uzbekistan and their attention to rare manuscripts also obliged the republican government to support and promote the development of Oriental studies. For example, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR G. Sultanov emphasized that “in the sixth five-year plan, the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR must become an important center of Oriental studies”[19].

Therefore, in order to fundamentally improve personnel training, to conduct scientific study of the East, and to solve the problems related to the publication of important sources, it was decided to hold the First All-Union Conference in Tashkent in 1957[20].



It is not without reason that people say “criticism is the fruit of progress.” After this, the work of the Institute intensified even more. This is confirmed by the words of S. Azimjonova: “Before the conference (June 1957), Beruni’s *Monuments of the Past Generations* was published in translation. The translation of *The History of India* also began. Two works—*Ubaydullanoma* and *The History of Muqimkhon*—were published in Russian before the conference. It was planned to publish the Russian translation of *Baburnama* and Gulbadan Begim’s *Humoyun-nama*”[21].

For the development of any field and its progress, clear goals and tasks must be defined and government support must be provided; otherwise, problems will accumulate and the field may fragment or even disappear.

Furthermore, on June 4–11, 1957, the First All-Union Conference of Orientalists was held in Tashkent. At the final plenary session on June 11, held at the Alisher Navoi Uzbek State Opera and Ballet Theatre, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, N.A. Mukhitdinov, also participated. In his speech, he discussed the problems, tasks, and solutions in the field of Oriental studies, stating: “Many of the issues discussed at the conference are of great scientific and practical significance. The creative debates held here on important problems of Oriental studies will help develop concrete measures to eliminate existing shortcomings and raise the field of Oriental studies to an even higher level”[22].

### Conclusion

In conclusion, during the political leadership of N.A. Mukhitdinov, significant changes were implemented in the political, socio-economic, and cultural life of the Uzbek SSR. However, there were also serious problems that needed solutions. For example, there were many unresolved issues in construction, housing, and other sectors. At the same time, significant progress was observed in cultural life and science. The foundations for many new directions were laid. In particular, major work was undertaken to improve the activities of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan and to strengthen its material base, with special attention given to Oriental studies.

Although there were various challenges facing Orientalists during the Soviet period, today Uzbekistan has produced prominent scholars and strong master–apprentice traditions have formed. Nevertheless, many of the shortcomings criticized by N.A. Mukhitdinov in his time were not fully resolved and continued in later years. Even today, the field of source studies and Oriental studies faces a shortage of specialists. This is due to the demanding and labor-intensive nature of working with manuscripts, which leads many young people to avoid the field. As a result, solving existing problems becomes even more difficult. Today, eliminating the problems facing science requires coordinated effort from all relevant institutions.

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