

# Soviet Science Diplomacy: How Central Asia was Instrumentalised in Soviet Foreign Policy

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## Abstract

During the years of the Cold War, the opportunities for foreign scientific cooperation by Soviet scholars were limited. However, despite the impediments of the Soviet system, Central Asian science's cooperation with the outside world has continued. In virtue of being of Asian origin and Muslim and having profound knowledge and understanding of the language and civilizational processes of the East, Central Asian people had a special place in Soviet foreign policy. The Central Asians attracted the sympathy of the peoples of the East, which granted them access to their scientific and diplomatic connections. The paper examines how Central Asians used understanding of and ties to the East in diplomacy, for diplomacy, and with diplomacy. First, the paper unpacks the institutional and individual potential of Soviet Central Asian diplomacy and explains how it was used as a tool for Soviet strategy. The paper then examines Oriental studies as a knowledge basis that enabled improved and more in-depth Soviet diplomacy in the East given the pervasive and basic legacy of Oriental studies in studying the East. Further, Soviet involvement in UNESCO programmes in Asia provides insight into how Soviet policy used its soft power through international organisations. In conclusion, the author summarises how science diplomacy was used to further Soviet policy and evaluates the legacy of Soviet science diplomacy in light of recent developments.

## Keywords

Central Asia, science diplomacy, Oriental studies, Asian studies, Soviet diplomacy

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## Introduction

Science diplomacy has become a phenomenon of the 21st century. With the growing globalisation and internationalisation of science, the role of scientists in advancing diplomatic tools has become a common practice. Science diplomacy became one of the major tools that 'seek to strengthen the symbiosis between the interests and motivations of the scientific and foreign policy communities' (The Royal Society, 2010). It is 'the use and application of science cooperation to help build bridges and enhance relationships between and amongst societies, with a particular interest in working in areas where there might not be other mechanisms for engagement at an official level' (European Commission, 2009). Science diplomacy allows countries to

build constructive international partnerships and create a 'flat world' to solve common problems through scientific cooperation (Fedoroff, 2009; Ruffini, 2020; S4D4C, 2019). The Royal Society, in partnership with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), in 2009, developed three dimensions of science diplomacy, such as

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Science in Diplomacy – using scientific advice to inform foreign policy objectives; Science for Diplomacy – using science cooperation to improve international relations among countries; and Diplomacy for Science – facilitating international science cooperation (The Royal Society, 2010).

Despite the fact that the concept of science diplomacy is relatively new, there are numerous examples of how science and diplomacy have been linked throughout history. During ancient times, science diplomacy was built by the personal connections of leaders; since the 18th century, attempts to institutionalise and interlink interest in science and foreign policy have thrived (Turekian, 2018). The times of great geographical discoveries and following colonisation demonstrated how scientific curiosity might be combined with military conquests, which is now framed under the ‘science for diplomacy’ concept. The years of the World Wars resulted in opposing science and diplomacy, when ‘an unprecedented investment of scholars in war’ was witnessed (Ruffini, 2017). With the rise of ‘big science’ in combination with the arms race, ‘unprecedented political attention’ was devoted to science, technology, and international relations (Flink & Schreiterer, 2010). The Cold War years also demonstrated the importance of science diplomacy when, despite political tensions between two opposing blocks, science exchange and cooperation were maintained between Soviet and US scholars, which promoted cooperation rather than hostility (Krasnyak, 2020).

At the same time, the Cold War years limited to some extent the science diplomacy efforts of Soviet scholars. Foreign scientific cooperation was available only to a limited cohort of the elite. For almost the entire history of the Soviet Union, it was impossible to freely travel abroad. The centralised approach to foreign policy did not allow the Soviet republics to independently conduct foreign relations. On top of that, in comparison to the hard sciences, which enjoyed large support from the government and were to a certain degree allowed to conduct joint scientific projects, the social sciences faced a broad range of impediments due to the politicisation and ideologization of the social sciences.

The representation of Central Asians in the Soviet hierarchy was unbalanced and limited to a small circle, which led to the emergence of a narrow line of opportunities where Central Asian republics could demonstrate their strength. Yet, Central Asian science cooperation with the outside world has continued despite the impediments of the Soviet system. In virtue of being of Asian origin and Muslim, with profound knowledge and understanding of the language and civilisational processes of the East, Central Asian people had a special place in Soviet foreign policy towards the Third World. The Central Asians attracted the sympathy of the peoples of the East, which granted them access to the scientific and diplomatic connections with them. A number of

Central Asians achieved significant visibility, power, and influence in the highest echelons of Soviet power due to their contribution to Soviet Eastern policy (Jansen, 2019; Kalinovsky, 2013). Central Asians were used to provide knowledge about the East, to prove and show the Soviet commitment to preserving the inheritance of its former colonial areas, and to strengthen the long-term connections of the Soviet East with the broader East (Kalinovsky, 2020). Central Asian scholars became regular members of high-level delegations to the East while the Central Asian capitals, especially Tashkent, became the strategic Soviet periphery on an international level (Cucciolla, 2020; Kalinovsky, 2013). At the institutional level, Oriental studies and its institutions, as a major structure working on Eastern countries, were utilised to bridge scientific knowledge and Soviet aspirations in the East.

The study seeks to provide a fresh viewpoint on science diplomacy practises by examining how science and foreign policy were utilised in Soviet strategy through an examination of the role of Soviet Central Asia. Applying the notion of science diplomacy, the study makes the following claims: (1) Central Asian scholars and diplomats engaged in science diplomacy, despite its limits; and (2) Central Asians helped strengthen and expand Soviet ties with the East by using science diplomacy instruments.

As in Mauduit and Gual Soler (2020), the paper takes into account two aspects of science diplomacy: diplomacy, defined as ‘the art and practise of conducting international relations’, and science in its broadest sense, which includes natural and social sciences, fundamental and applied technology, and innovation. In light of this, it should be highlighted that the Russian notion of science (*nauka*) transcends that of science as it is understood in English. The Russian word *nauka*, which is more equal to the English words ‘knowledge’ or ‘scholarship’, includes both the natural and practical sciences as well as the social sciences and humanities (Kneen, 1984).

The paper examines how Central Asians used their understanding of and ties to the East in diplomacy, for diplomacy, and with diplomacy. First, the paper unpacks the institutional and individual potential of Soviet Central Asian diplomacy and explains how it was used as a tool for Soviet strategy. The paper then examines Oriental studies as a knowledge basis that enabled improved and more in-depth Soviet diplomacy in the East given the pervasive and basic legacy of Oriental studies in studying the East. Furthermore, Soviet involvement in UNESCO programmes in Asia provides insight into how Soviet policy used its soft power through international organisations. In conclusion, the author summarises how science diplomacy was used to further Soviet policy and evaluates the legacy of Soviet science diplomacy in light of recent developments.

## Diplomatic Capabilities of Soviet Central Asia

Before the formation of the USSR, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan had their own Republican People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and conducted their foreign affairs to a different extent. The 1924 Soviet Constitution changed this mechanism towards the all-Union approach and institutionalised the centralisation of foreign affairs by creating the All-Union People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs. At a time when the victory of the anti-Hitler coalition was already obvious and negotiations were underway to create the United Nations, the Soviet Union sought to include all its union republics in the organisation in order to strengthen Soviet influence in the UN. To this end, in 1944, an amendment was made to the Constitution of the USSR, allowing the Union republics to independently conduct diplomatic activities. By empowering the Soviet republics with the right to conduct separate foreign relations, the Soviet government sought to disguise itself 'as a confederation under international law and a federation under internal law', which allowed the Soviets to legally claim a seat for each union republic in the UN (Aspaturian, 1959; Malik, 1990; Molotov, 1944).

The decision of 1944 was crucial for the Soviet Central Asian republics. They gained an opportunity to conduct foreign relations, conclude international treaties, and exchange diplomatic and consular missions. All Central Asian states had institutionalised their foreign policy establishment in 1944 by creating the union-republican people's commissariats for foreign affairs which were renamed to ministries of foreign affairs in 1946 (Sarsembaev, 1991). However, when only Ukraine and Belarus aside from the Soviet Union were accepted as the founding members of the UN due to their contributions to WWII, the plans for the Central Asian republics were changed. In subsequent years, with Stalinist isolationism, republican ministries of foreign affairs reduced their activities to the level of republican departments of consular services within the all-Union Ministry (Kozybaev, 2001). As a result, Central Asian ministries were busy with arranging citizenships for ethnic Uighur, Dungan, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh repatriates from Xinjiang. The ministries minimised their staff, the Ministry of the Kyrgyz SSR, for instance, had only two employees – an assistant to the minister and a secretary, while the minister himself was listed among the staff of the all-Union Ministry in Moscow (Bogaturov, 2018). Other Central Asian ministries also employed only a few people; the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs was combined with another public service.<sup>1</sup>

The further institutionalisation of the Soviet Central Asian foreign policy establishment received a fresh impetus in the mid-1950s when Khrushchev redefined the role of Central Asia in Soviet foreign policy. In the diplomatic

service, priority was given to relations with adjacent states (Sarsembaev, 1991). The Kazakh SSR was tasked with deepening cultural and economic relations with the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China and with Mongolia. Until 1953, the Consulate General of the PRC functioned in Alma-Ata and mainly worked with Xinjiang. After the Sino-Soviet split, the focus shifted towards dealing with repatriates from China and collecting analytical and research materials on the situation in Xinjiang and China. Similarly, the Kyrgyz SSR attempted to build economic and cultural ties with Xinjiang. Turkmen SSR has established its trade and cultural cooperation with Iran. The Uzbek Republic, being the centre of the Soviet East, was home to the Consulates General of Mongolia (from 1977), Afghanistan (from 1982), and India (from 1987) (Kozybaev, 2001). The Uzbek SSR and the Tajik SSR, with a common Persian heritage and centuries-old cultural, commercial, and religious connections, along with the legacy of the Mughal Empire, followed the centuries-old course with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (Kalinovsky, 2020).

Khrushchev's reforms of the 1960s raised the importance of Central Asia in the USSR's foreign policy when it became the forefront of Soviet Eastern policy. Central Asia became a showcase of Soviet diplomacy. Central Asian representatives participated in various high-level delegations to Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Kalinovsky, 2020). Simultaneously, the functions of the republican foreign ministries were expanded. The union ministry transferred some consular work to republican ministries, including working through the UN and corresponding with and arranging travel documents for Soviet citizens travelling to communist countries (MEA Taj, 1994).

The 1980s marked the restructuration and decentralisation of the all-Union Ministry (Goodman, 1990). With the beginning of the *glasnost* policy, the ministries of Central Asia stepped up their work as full-fledged diplomatic bodies. The Central Asian ministries began to make demands for the advancement of their foreign policy establishments. The new minister of the Kazakh SSR, Mikhail Isinaliev, began to persistently write letters to Moscow with a request to improve the working conditions of diplomats and the ministry itself (Kozybaev, 2001). After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the role of the Tajik foreign ministry was boosted. Tajik diplomats actively participated in the negotiation processes. In 1985, the Tajik Foreign Ministry, for the first time, was tasked with directly building relations with Afghanistan at the state level. In 1990, the Uzbek SSR also concluded direct contact with Afghanistan at the state level (Bogaturov, 2018). In general, the Central Asian ministries were exercising their foreign policy by establishing their own connections and prioritising trade and economic partnerships with neighbouring states.

The 1980s also revealed many problems in the work of the republican ministries, including problems with funding,

lack of prospects for promotion, limited places in the central institutions for the training of diplomats, and limited opportunities for learning foreign languages. For instance, Muslim Bazarbayev, during his tenure (1976–1981) as the Foreign Minister of the Kazakh SSR, made only one foreign trip to Congo as part of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. During the previous 10 years (according to the letter from 1983), operational diplomats from the Kazakh Foreign Ministry did not make a single business trip abroad (Kozybaev, 2001).

The representation of Soviet Central Asian diplomats in the highest diplomatic circles also depended on the Moscow lobby and many other undercurrents. Over the period of 1954–1988, out of 856 appointments made to the post of extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassadors of the USSR, there were only two appointments from the Kazakh SSR and 14 from the republics of Central Asia (Kozybaev, 2001). During the entire Soviet period, only two Kazakhs reached the position of ambassador; four Uzbek diplomats; two Tajik diplomats; one Turkmen diplomat; and one Kyrgyz was proposed to become an ambassador but declined.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, although in the Constitution of the Central Asian Republics, the right to conduct foreign relations was mentioned, in reality, it was mostly declarative. Only with Gorbachev's reforms, the Central Asian republics approved their ministry regulations and started to directly engage in foreign affairs. Subsequently, the institutional reforms of the 1980s and structural and functional changes laid down the institutional foundation for creating the foreign offices of the newly independent Central Asian states.

## Studying the East in Soviet Diplomacy

It is well known that for the realisation of science diplomacy, certain institutional arrangements need to be set up. Since science diplomacy is driven by institutions and institutional support is a must for conducting multilateral scientific cooperation, governments are maintaining their institutions and scientific structures (Turekian, 2018).

With the intensification of Soviet diplomacy in the post-war world and post-Stalin transformations in the Soviet Union, the demand to develop substantial research and relevant institution working on the newly independent Asian and African countries increased. The Soviet government needed a new approach to the East – from its scientific research to diplomatic relations (Mukhitdinov, 1995). In these conditions, Oriental studies, which was a primary discipline that comprehensively studied the countries of the East, increased its significance.

Oriental studies, according to the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, is a set of disciplines that focus on the history, languages, literature, art, religion, philosophy, social structure, economy, and life of the peoples of the East. From

the early Soviet years, Oriental studies was an essential tool of Soviet policy in regard to its foreign and national policies. Studies of the Soviet East were essential to creating Soviet national histories since the ancient and mediaeval history of Soviet Central Asia was written in Oriental languages. Working on the Foreign Orient assumed predominantly contemporary socio-economic, political, and cultural development processes in the East. Geographically, Oriental Studies included classical coverage of the countries of Asia and Northern Africa. Yet, the East itself was divided into the Soviet and Foreign East. The Soviet East included Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as parts of the Volga-Urals and Siberia, whereas the Foreign East included all Eastern countries outside the Soviet Union (Bustanov, 2015).

In the early Soviet years, an interest in the East was pushed by the aim of promoting the Soviet communist agenda abroad and within the Union. The Soviets attempted to institutionalise and centralise their approaches to the East by transferring the Oriental institutions to Moscow, when the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies replaced the Asiatic Museum in Leningrad as a central institution of Oriental studies.

With the rise of the Soviet Union as a superpower, the decolonisation of Asia and Africa, and the ramifications of Cold War rivalries, there was a growing need to expand and strengthen Oriental studies. Accurate and scientific knowledge of classical and contemporary processes in the East has become essential (Clubb, 1958). However, the position of Oriental studies did not meet the political ambitions of the Soviet government. During the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress in 1956, Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan lashed out with criticism that 'while the whole East has woken up, the Institute of Oriental Studies is still sleeping', referring to the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies for lagging behind the political processes of the East (Mikoyan, 1956).

In these conditions, in 1956, Bobojon Gafurov, who had just resigned from the post of the first secretary of the Tajik SSR, was appointed as the director of the Institute of Oriental Studies. From the beginning, Gafurov positioned himself as the new organiser of Soviet Oriental Studies (Kemper, 2015). In line with the Soviet academia's intention to deepen knowledge and cooperation with the countries of Asia and Northern Africa, Gafurov emerged as a skilful organiser of Khrushchev's reforms (Jansen, 2020a). Gafurov made significant changes to the structure of the institute, which changed the development of Oriental studies in the USSR. He had centralised the work of Oriental studies under the Institute of Oriental studies in Moscow, which since then has coordinated all research institutes and universities working in the East. He further created the new branches of Oriental studies institutes in Baku (1958), Tbilisi (1960), Dushanbe (1970), and Yerevan (1971) (Kemper, 2015). He had reorganised the work of the

Institutes of Oriental studies based on the principle that a certain problem has to be studied in respective regions. As a result, Iranian studies were focused at the Institutes of Oriental studies in Leningrad and Dushanbe, Turkology in Leningrad, Tashkent, and Baku, Afghan studies in Moscow and Tashkent, Arabian studies in Moscow, Leningrad, and Tbilisi, the printing of manuscripts in Tashkent and Leningrad, the study of the economics, contemporary history, colonial policy and imperial contradictions of the East in Moscow. In these institutions, Gafurov initiated internal restructuring, paying attention to a deep and profound study of each region. The range and themes of research were significantly enlarged (Gafurov, 1958).

Thanks to Gafurov's extensive connections and support from the highest echelon of the party, he managed to significantly expand the capacity of the central Institute of Oriental studies under the Academy of Science. Saving the old staff, he doubled the number of employees. He achieved great financial support from the government. Gafurov's reforms were intended 'to cover all countries, all languages, all literature, and all problems of the East' (Alaev, 2018).

An expansion of the range of activities of the institute, along with strengthening the research agenda, allowed researchers to have more opportunities for research collaboration and travel. Gafurov had encouraged joint research collaborations with foreign scholars. He also pushed for the publication of works by the Soviet Orientalists in major European and Asian languages (Gafurov, 1958).

As a strong politician, Gafurov had utilised his personal ties and the institute's capacity for working with foreign counterparts.<sup>3</sup> His office was a place for meeting with different ambassadors and foreign representatives. He paid particular attention to the Middle East and South Asia. Minister of Defence of Iraq Salih Mahdi Ammash (1924–1983) and Indian Ambassador to the Soviet Union Durga Prasad Dhar (1918–1975) were frequent guests in his office, while dozens of other interesting stories were left about the visits of high-level foreign guests. It is worth mentioning that Gafurov always wore his traditional skullcap hat during his foreign trips, emphasising his Tajik origins (Yakovlev, 2021).

Gafurov was called an Eastern sage due to his authority and diplomatic talents. He made Oriental studies imperative for enhancing the knowledge of the East, engaging with the international community of Oriental studies, and involving Orientalists in Soviet outreach efforts (Kalinovsky, 2013). Although Oriental studies was considered among the most 'blinkered' directions due to its ideological context, Gafurov managed to defend the institute's activities, explaining the shortcomings as 'the specifics of the East!' (Yakovlev, 2021). He managed to implement his ideas thanks to his academic knowledge, which contributed to using the deep cultural and historical connections to enhance the relationship and to arouse sympathy in India,

Vietnam, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Arab countries, and many other countries (Kalinovsky, 2013).

The career and contribution of Bobojon Gafurov have been studied from various perspectives.<sup>4</sup> In Tajikistan, Gafurovedenie became among the compulsory disciplines at universities. Undoubtedly, his legacy of Oriental studies still impacts the Oriental studies schools of Central Asia. Tashkent reaped significant benefits from institutional division in researching Oriental studies and Oriental manuscripts. Despite various impediments, Gafurov managed to establish a separate Institute of Oriental Studies in Dushanbe in 1970. Thanks to Gafurov's support and indigenous Tajik specialisation, Tajik Orientalists built strong scholarships in Oriental studies. Dushanbe had profound research on the countries of the Near and Middle East and managed to secure its valuable collection of Oriental manuscripts. The Tajik Orientalists were famous for their Oriental literature research and Persian studies.

However, Oriental studies, similar to the general line of the Soviet government, had a centralised yet unbalanced approach. In particular, Tashkent, being the diplomatic centre of Soviet Central Asia, concentrated major research and training in Oriental studies in the Central Asian region. The Institute of Oriental Studies in Tashkent developed principal research on classical and contemporary Oriental studies, the Oriental Faculty of Tashkent State University was a major training centre for Orientalists with dozens of Oriental languages to study. Apart from Tashkent and Dushanbe, which had their own Oriental studies institutes, other Central Asian states were not allowed to create their own centres of Oriental studies. For example, Orientalists of the Kazakh SSR tried three times to create an Institute of Oriental studies in the period from the 1940s to the 1980s, but in vain (Bustanov, 2015). Those who wanted to become Orientalists were forced to go to Tashkent, Dushanbe, or Moscow, Leningrad, or Kazan. Despite such challenges, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen Orientalists still managed to develop their own proficient scholarship in Oriental studies. While all Central Asian scholars were prioritising the research of their national histories through Oriental resources, Kazakh scholars were also focused on Chinese and Uighur studies, Kyrgyz scholars on Dungan studies, and Turkmen Orientalists on Iranian studies.

### Central Asians in Soviet Foreign Policy

It is assumed that science diplomacy is implemented within the framework of at least two governments. However, in conditions where science diplomacy has not been institutionalised, interaction can occur among individuals. Especially when a working model is not defined at the intersection of science and diplomacy, the professional and personal identities of individuals play a decisive role (Young et al., 2020). During Soviet times, when Soviet

restrictions made it difficult for the majority of the population to interact with the outside world, certain individuals found ways to bridge their scientific and diplomatic interests within Soviet realities. Although not referred to as science diplomats, some Soviet Central Asian representatives played a critical role in the diplomacy exercised by the Soviet Union.

According to the Soviet personnel policy, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians were perceived as representatives of one superethnos, enjoying the greatest support at all levels of government (Molchanov, 2011). Besides these Slav fraternal nations, other nations had few chances to compete for top positions and only a few had risen to the level of unionwide organisations, especially within the Central Committee (Rywkin, 2015). Central Asians occupied a disproportionately small share of key positions in power and were more often used in secondary positions to assist in local governance.

At the same time, Central Asia, with its Asian and Muslim population, had its own special place in the Soviet policy. It contributed to some Central Asian individuals breaking through the Soviet system of selection. They managed to reach the highest positions and to influence Soviet foreign policy not only thanks to their individual talents but also because they represented the Soviet East.

### *Central Asians of the Stalin Era*

During the early 1920s, the first cohort of Central Asian intelligentsia and reformers were involved in the work of the centre and contributed to building relations with the East. But most of them became victims of Stalin's purges and were shot on charges of nationalism and pan-Turkism. Turar Ryskulov was among them. He was a Kazakh politician and diplomat who started his career by advocating the interests of the Kirghiz (Kazakh), then Turkic and Muslim interests, and ended up with the Soviets (Hallez, 2014). He was supporting the idea of the unity of Turkistan, believing that Turkestan is a common home for the Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia that were fragmented over the course of history. While serving as the chairman of the Muslim Bureau of the Turkestan Communist Party, Ryskulov supported the creation of the economic union of the Central Asian republics, was engaged in forming the customs union with the Iranian Republic, covering the area between Central Asia, the Transcaucasus, and the Iranian Highlands, the Oman and Persian Gulfs, and the coast of the Indian Ocean; he also participated in the border settlement with China. As the Plenipotentiary of the Comintern in Mongolia, he was involved in the drafting of the first Constitution of Mongolia, under his direction the Mongolian capital gained the present name Ulan Bator (Bol'shina, 2016). Despite his diplomatic and political

service to the Soviet Union, Ryskulov was shot in 1938 on charges of pan-Turkism.

Another example is that of Nazir Torekulov, the first Soviet-Kazakh Ambassador, who played an important role in the establishment of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. His political career included different positions within the Turkestan government in Tashkent during the early 1920s, including his service as the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Turkestan. He knew Kazakh, Russian, Uzbek, Tatar, Turkish, German, and French, and later learned Arabic, which allowed him to conduct enlightenment work together with politics (Mansurov, 2001). In 1922, Torekulov was transferred to Moscow, where he combined being the head of the Central Publishing House with a scientific and teaching position at the Communist University of Toilers of the East. In 1927, Torekulov was sent to the Kingdom of Hejaz, Nejd, and the attached area (known as Saudi Arabia since 1937) as the Soviet Plenipotentiary. For his appointment, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR sent an official request to Stalin (Inform.kz, 2022).

The Soviet Union was the first country that recognised Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud (King Ibn Saud) as the ruler of the Saudi state in 1926, and the Soviet mission in Jeddah was critical for establishing diplomatic ties. During his diplomatic service in Jeddah, thanks to his Eastern mentality and knowledge of Eastern culture and Arabic, Turekulov built close ties with the political establishment and, in particular, with King Ibn Saud and his son Prince Faisal. Turekulov was among the close allies of the King and entered his inner circle. He was interested in intensifying scientific cooperation with the Arabs. He organised Prince Faisal's trip to Moscow, assisted in compiling a map of the route of the Arab traveller Ibn Batuta, who visited the south of Russia in the 11th century, and in 1933, provided the Saudi side with Soviet laboratories to analyse the minerals found on the territory of the Hijaz (Inform.kz, 2022). However, in 1935, the emphasis of Soviet foreign policy was changed, and Turekulov was sent back to Moscow. After a short stay in Oriental institutions, Turekulov was accused of pan-Turkism and was shot in 1937. Impressed by Turekulov's fate, King Ibn Saud, through diplomatic channels, stated that he did not want to see other plenipotentiaries. Subsequently, due to changes in the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and King Ibn Saud's pivot towards the West, the Soviets withdrew their diplomatic mission in Jeddah in 1938, which was revived only in 1990 (Mansurov, 2001; Fnt.kz, 2022).

Considering that at that time the Soviet Union had diplomatic relations with 30 countries and less than 500 diplomats served in the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, the service of both Ryskulov and Turekulov deserves special attention (Zonova, 2017). It is worth mentioning that during Stalin's isolationist foreign

policy, opportunities for Central Asians to breakthrough in their careers were limited; no Central Asian had access to Stalin's immediate circle, and no Central Asian was present in the Politburo (Kalinovsky, 2013).

### *Khrushchev's Era*

The situation changed only when Khrushchev came to power in 1953. The importance of Khrushchev's foreign policy towards the Third World and the positioning of Central Asia in Khrushchev's aspirations have been studied from various perspectives.<sup>5</sup> With the end of the Stalin era, when Khrushchev's term coincided with the mushrooming of newly independent Asian and African states and the thriving of the Cold War rivalry, the Soviet government was in urgent need of sophisticated knowledge about the East.

The Bandung Conference, which gathered 29 Asian and African states, most of which were newly independent, in April 1955, was an important milestone for the Asian and African states and the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement. The Soviets, from the time when the decision to organise a conference was made, had attempted to participate in the conference in any capacity. Nuritdin Mukhitdinov, who served as the First Secretary of the Uzbek Central Committee of the Communist Party, was appointed as the head of the delegation. Mukhitdinov, being an ethnic Uzbek with a knowledge of Arabic and a religious education background, was a perfect candidate to demonstrate the Eastern representation of the Soviets. However, despite various attempts, the Soviets were not invited to the conference. Since the Soviet Central Asian republics were not independent and sovereign countries, as required by the Conference, they were not allowed to attend the conference. The Soviet government decided to send congratulatory telegrams, including from all Central Asian republics, and widely promoted the importance of the conference for the national liberation movement of the Asian and African states and supported the Non-Aligned Movement. The Bandung Conference demonstrated the need to rethink Soviet policy in Asia and Africa and also demonstrated the post-colonial states' suspicion of the Soviet Union's anti-imperialist intentions. It also showed the importance of Central Asia in demonstrating the Soviet Union as an anticolonial and modernised state and in building relationships with non-aligned countries (Kirasirova, 2011; Mukhitdinov, 1995).

Khrushchev and Bulganin's trips to India, Burma, and Afghanistan in late 1955 further confirmed the intention to strengthen the new Eastern policy of the Soviet Union. The Asian tour boosted the career of Nuritdin Mukhitdinov, who has reached an unprecedented level in a few years. At those times, Khrushchev aspired to refresh the Central Committee members with those who supported his political transformations, at the same time diversifying the ethnic mosaic of

the Central Committee. As a result, in 1956, Nuritdin Mukhitdinov was elected as a candidate member of the Communist Party's Presidium of the Central Committee, and 2 years later, he was appointed as a Member/Secretary of the Politburo and transferred to Moscow. Mukhitdinov became the first Central Asian Muslim who was included in the Politburo/Presidium – an inner circle of the highest echelon of the Soviet government. As 'a man of the East and a son of a Muslim', as Khrushchev called him, Mukhitdinov emerged as the major Soviet Asian spokesman for Khrushchev's Third World strategy (Carlisle, 1986; Mukhitdinov, 1995).

Mukhitdinov by becoming Khrushchev's close ally in his domestic power struggles and in implementing Soviet policy with the Third World, had provided significant support to the development of Central Asian states (Kalinovsky, 2013). Mukhitdinov was given large political and diplomatic instruments, which allowed the transformation of Uzbek internal politics and the promotion of Uzbek representation at all Union and international levels. Domestically, he facilitated the modernisation of the country, including its industrialisation, while externally, he lobbied for Uzbekistan's penetration in different international events, making Tashkent a showcase of the modernised Soviet Central Asian city. Mukhitdinov also promoted the development and restoration of the cultural heritage of Uzbekistan and revived the study of national history. Mukhitdinov's role in the Central Asian states was crucial in terms of pioneering Central Asian representation in various domestic and international arenas while promoting Central Asian interests (Kalinovsky, 2013, 2020; Kirasirova, 2011).

Bobojon Ghafurov, another Tajik 'son of the Muslims' and close ally, was among the major interlocutors of Khrushchev's foreign policy with the Third World. His efforts in institutionalising Oriental studies and in making a bridge with the Eastern world were analysed within Oriental studies. As numerous studies have shown (Kirasirova, 2011; Kalinovsky, 2013; 2020; Kemper, 2015), thanks to Mukhitdinov and Ghafurov's efforts in the inner circle of the Moscow establishment, the Central Asian representation in the Soviet foreign policy was boosted and became a crucial part of the Soviet's Third World policy. Central Asia became among the major platforms for developing countries that exemplified the Soviet model of anticolonialism, which integrated indigenous national heritage with technological modernity. Increasing representation of the Central Asian natives allowed to strengthen scientific links and development scholarship on the Eastern states, where Central Asia thanks to their geographical location and historical links had a competitive advantage.

However, it should be emphasised that the imbalanced approach to the Central Asian states meant the Uzbek and Tajik republics received significantly more attention in

comparison to other Soviet Central Asian republics. Khrushchev himself was worried about the unequal relationship of the republics within Central Asia. He warned Mukhitdinov that other Central Asian republics may have envied the attention given to Tashkent and the Uzbek SSR (Kalinovsky, 2013; Mukhitdinov, 1995).

### *Brezhnev times*

After Khrushchev's period of pivot to the Third World, Leonid Brezhnev came to power in 1964. He moved away from the reformist course of Khrushchev. His conservative leadership style led to the stagnation of the Soviet economy and the irremovability of power.

Sharof Rashidov, the first secretary of the Uzbek SSR, became the chief mediator with the Third World under Brezhnev's leadership. He was one of the few Central Asian politicians who served as the Soviet Union's face to the Third World (Kalinovsky, 2013). He became an example of 'how indigenization (korenizatsiya) and the integration of local elites into the Soviet project' were realised. Coming from a traditional Muslim family and being non-Slav, he managed to become an interlocutor and protagonist of Soviet policies with Arab states, African states, and other countries (Cucciolla, 2020). Rashidov took advantage of the "specificity of their national, cultural, and linguistic 'east-ernness'" to advance his political career both at home and abroad (Kirasirova, 2011). Rashidov's figure was famous before he became the first secretary thanks to his international profile. At the time of the intensification of Soviet policy in the East, thanks to the support of Mukhitdinov, Rashidov accompanied the Soviet delegation on most of Khrushchev's foreign tours in the East during the first years of Khrushchev's tenure (Kalinovsky, 2013). He was a key player in consolidating Soviet policy with 33 diplomatic missions. His peripheral internationalism allowed the flourishing of Uzbekistan, making it an example of a modern, Muslim, and Eastern country (Cucciolla, 2020). He made Uzbekistan a strategic Soviet periphery while promoting the Uzbek republic in the international spotlight. At home, he supported the preservation and restoration of historical buildings, which enhanced the visibility of the Uzbek republic and its major cities internationally and in the political centre (Kalinovsky, 2013).

Efforts by active Uzbek politicians allowed Tashkent to become a gem in Soviet policy. Being the centre of Soviet Islam and the capital of the largest non-Slav republic in the Soviet Union, Tashkent was showcased as an example of modernity and development of the Soviet East (Cucciolla, 2020). It became a meeting place for various delegations, while international festivals and conferences had become a commonplace in Tashkent. The importance of Tashkent in working with the Third World has been widely discussed from a different perspective.<sup>6</sup> To make Tashkent a point of

attraction, support from Moscow was essential. At the same time, the internationalisation of Tashkent made it possible to draw more attention to Central Asian studies as well as to the development of Oriental studies. Thus, with the help of Central Asians, Tashkent was able to become the embodiment of the integration of diplomacy and knowledge of the East by attracting different parties together.

### **Diplomacy for Science in Soviet Central Asia**

One of the directions of science diplomacy, Diplomacy for Science, is about the facilitation of international science cooperation. It serves the needs of science alongside political, economic, and personal interests and generates synergies between science and foreign policy (Young et al., 2020). In the post-Stalin years, the Soviet government, along with strengthening its approach to the Third World, stepped up its soft diplomacy outside of ideological blocs in international organisations (Jansen, 2019).

UNESCO, where the Soviet Union became a member in 1954, emerged as an arena to advocate Soviet values through cultural and educational exchange. Membership in UNESCO allowed the Soviets to set up their cultural and intellectual approaches on an international scale. Since the Soviets intended to strengthen the position of the non-Western agenda, it also opened opportunities for Soviet Orientalists to voice out the values of the new Eastern approach (Jansen, 2020b). In international organisations, Central Asia was utilised to demonstrate the Asiatic roots of the Soviets, while Oriental studies were instrumentalised to enhance cooperation with the countries of the East.

The international scientific cooperation activities of the Central Asian republics depended on the centre and within institutional Soviet architecture. The Central Asian republics carried out international scientific cooperation such as conducting internships abroad; participating in international conferences; inviting foreign scientists to the union republics; conducting joint scientific research by the union republics' scholars; bilateral interdepartmental agreements within the Soviet republics; scientific cooperation between universities and research institutes of the union republics; international exchange of scientific books (Sarsembaev, 1991). International organisation was one of the mechanisms used to activate international scientific cooperation in Central Asia.

In 1956, following the UNESCO History of Mankind project, which was blamed for being Eurocentric bias, the UNESCO General Conference in New Delhi put on the agenda the project to study the interaction between the West and the East. The conference members agreed that the development of Eastern civilisation is not widely known in comparison to the Western one. Most consider Western

approaches to be biased, while the East-West project could contribute to the recognition of the contribution of the East to world history (Jansen, 2019). Therefore, UNESCO's new project, called the 'Major Project for Mutual Appreciation of Cultural Values of East and West' (1957–1966), was intended to research East-West relations in order to increase mutual understanding of cultural and civilisational developments and disseminate the results to the general public (Havet, 1958). The project demonstrated a growing interest in Eastern culture when the project tilted toward the studies of the East rather than East-West interaction.

Following an interest in studying Eastern cultures and as a result of the East-West Major Project, the Soviet delegation proposed a new project on the study of civilisations of Central Asia at the 14th General Conference of UNESCO, in Paris in 1966. The proposed project was supported by delegations from Afghanistan, India, Iran, and Pakistan. UNESCO approved the project as the first experimental research project covering the Central Asian region for the duration of 4 years (1967–1970). The geographical coverage of the project included the territories of Afghanistan, Eastern Iran, India, Pakistan, and the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union. Mongolia, from the outset of the project, was interested in joining the project, and in 1969, UNESCO approved Mongolia's appeal to participate in the project and to expand the geographical coverage of the project. Mongolian scientists were very active in research, while UNESCO supported Mongolia's efforts to disseminate the history and culture of the Mongolian people. Later, China joined the project (UNESCO, n.d.).

The aim of the project was to study the civilisations of Central Asian peoples through archaeological research and the study of the history, science, and literature of Central Asia. At the same time, UNESCO highlighted the importance of international scientific cooperation and the dissemination of research results because the fundamental knowledge about Central Asia so far has only been available to a narrow circle of researchers. UNESCO paid special attention to increasing the international recognition of research outcomes and scientific collaboration of all interested parties. Accordingly, the project involved researchers from all Central Asian states, Russia, including Buryatia and the Tuva republics, the South Caucasus, and Baltic states as part of the Soviet delegation. Apart from researchers from the participating states such as Afghanistan, India, Iran, Pakistan, and Mongolia, the project involved scientists from England, Norway, France, and Czechoslovakia (Gafurov & Miroshnikov, 1976).

The project was divided into 5 themes: (1) archaeology and history of Central Asia during the Kushan period; (2) art of Central Asia during the Timurid period; (3) contribution of Central Asian peoples to scientific development (IX–XIII centuries); (4) literature of Central Asian peoples; and (5) history of ideas and philosophy of Central Asia. Each theme

had one main coordinating country, which led the entire international coordination of the theme. During the first 2 years, the project was tasked with organising the system of research institutes that would coordinate the research as well as creating a research team. As a result, all the main participants in the project institutionalised their efforts and created committees that coordinate the work of researchers in their country (Gafurov & Miroshnikov, 1976).

The experimental project on Central Asia was the first extensive collaboration of Soviet scholars with the scientists of the region. The project gained international attention and allowed scientists all over the world to be involved in studying the Central Asian historical and cultural development aspects. The conferences within the project were held in Dushanbe (1968), New Delhi (1969), Samarkand (1969), Kabul (1970), Islamabad (1970), Ashgabat (1972), and Ulan Bator (1972), whereas the coordination meetings were held in Paris in 1967, 1971, and 1973 (UNESCO, 1979).

An unprecedented experience in international scientific collaboration had opened new opportunities for further research dissemination. All participating states gained experience in the institutionalisation of international scientific cooperation. The creation of the International Association for the Study of the Cultures of Central Asia in 1973 was an important continuation of the project that opened the next stage in the development of international cooperation in Central Asian studies.

For Soviet Orientalists, the experience of UNESCO provided an unprecedented opportunity to participate in international scientific cooperation, and for the first time, Central Asia was in the spotlight. Considering that the ability of Soviet Orientalists to interact with foreign scholars depended on instructions from above, interaction within the framework of UNESCO made it possible to assess Soviet approaches in Oriental studies and to demonstrate the strength of Soviet scholarship.

## Conclusion

Using the newly coined framework of science diplomacy, the paper attempted to examine how the East was instrumentalised in Soviet science diplomacy. The paper utilised three major definitions of science diplomacy to assess the level of engagement between science and diplomacy and how this engagement formed the Soviet policy. The paper shows how 'Science in Diplomacy', in the example of the Eastern policy, was used to form foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union based on scientific and indigenous knowledge about the East. 'Science for Diplomacy' was used in the form of scientific cooperation, both at the level of individual and institutional ties and at the state level, to improve international ties with the countries of Asia and Africa. The implementation of 'Diplomacy for

Science' is demonstrated in the case of participation in UNESCO's projects in Asia, and especially in a special project on Central Asia that facilitated not only international scientific cooperation but also acquainted Soviet scholars with the mechanisms of conducting international scientific cooperation.

Although the Central Asian republics had limited representation and a voice in Moscow politics, Central Asians became the main agents of Soviet policy in the East. By examining the trajectory of the development of diplomacy and Oriental studies, an attempt was made to identify how certain individuals used the limitations and challenges of Soviet politics in order to combine state interests with the scientific and indigenous interests of the parties. As a result of the diplomatic, institutional, and individual efforts of Central Asian decision-makers, international scientific cooperation within UNESCO was possible to realise, which subsequently raised interest in Central Asia studies and broadened the scientific and diplomatic network of Soviet scholars.

It should be reminded that science diplomacy in Central Asia has existed for centuries. The Soviet period demonstrates that Central Asia which was an intellectual hub bridging India, China, the Middle East, and Europe with its scientific exchanges starting from the mediaeval 'Age of Enlightenment' has continued its centuries-long experience of integration of science cooperation with diplomatic activities. Although 'science as a broad basis for diplomacy' was recognised during the Cold War rivalry, it cannot be denied that in pre-Soviet times, Central Asia played a significant role in linking scientific endeavours with international relations thanks to their profound scientific inquiries and ability to speak Arabic, Persian, and Turkic languages, along with their unique geographical location connecting the East with Europe and Northern Africa.

At present, in spite of the fact that Central Asian countries are following their multivector policies and are open to being engaged in science diplomacy efforts by joining international initiatives on global and regional issues, the level of science advancement and the attention paid to scientific underpinnings in foreign policy is relatively low. The Soviet period despite the limitations of the Soviet system allowed to produce and disseminate science while finding the ways to link scientists from opposing blocks and maintaining scientific exchange that resulted in the development of science. The examples of Central Asians given here are indicative not only of understanding how Soviet scientific diplomacy was carried out but also to remind us of the possibilities of deep scientific knowledge and individual ambitions, which made it possible to find ways of interaction in closed international affairs. By integrating science with diplomacy in the globalised world, we have opportunities to gain more benefits from scientific cooperation and exchange.

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## Notes

1. For instance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakh SSR was filled by the current Deputy Prime Minister for Social Policy and/or the Minister of Culture while some periods until 1960s the post of minister itself was abolished. In Tajik SSR until 1989 the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs was concurrently headed by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Tajik SSR.
2. From Kazakh SSR was Nazir Turekulov in Saudi Arabia and Malik Fazylov in Mali and Morocco; from Uzbek SSR Anvar Kuchkarov in Togo, Nuritdin Mukhitdinov in Syria, Sarvar Azimov in Lebanon and Pakistan, Rafiq Nishonov in Sri Lanka and concurrently in the Maldives, Jordan, Bahadyr Abdurazakov in Somalia; from Tajik SSR Jabbor Rasulov in Togo; Mirzo Rakhmatov in Yemen and Mavritania; from Turkmen SSR – Kuliev, Klych Mammadovich in Tunisia; from Kyrgyz SSR Zakon Turdukulov had an appointment to become ambassador to Togo, but declined due to family reasons.
3. Despite common limitations, Gafurov had managed to travel to academic events in Munich (1957, 1976), Manila (1960), Dhaka (1962), Baghdad (1962), Geneva (1963), Delhi (1964, 1966, 1969, 1970), Paris (1967, 1973), Istanbul (1973), Islamabad (1974), Mexico City (1976), where represented the Soviet delegates. His trips to Kuwait, South Yemen, and Saudi Arabia were a breakthrough due to the lack of diplomatic relations with the USSR (Yakovlev, 2021). Gafurov's visit to Mecca when he made the hajj caused a sensation, and he explained that for his compatriots as it would be the most important fact in his life (D'yakov, 1995).
4. For instance, Jansen (2020a); Yountchi (2011); Kalinovsky (2013); (Yakovlev, 2021); (Alaev, 2018). Gafurov's legacy in Tajikistan and his followers were studied in Gafurovedenie (2010).
5. Kirasirova (2011) scrutinised how the new Eastern policy of the Soviet Union rendered 'sons of Muslims' and Central Asians as interlocutors of the Soviet Eastern policy. In her dissertation, Kirasirova (2014) shows how the Moscow-based Central Asian mediators were utilised in the interaction of the two 'Easts' with

one another and the Soviet centre. Kalinovsky (2013) analysed Khrushchev's efforts in de-Stalinization, consolidation of power, and shift towards the Third World that facilitated the economic and cultural modernisation of Central Asian republics while at the same time boosting the value of Central Asia in Soviet politics. Kalinovsky (2020) further investigated Central Asia's place in reaching out to the Third World and in the Global Cold War. Jansen (2020b) looks at how Khrushchev's diplomacy of spiritual solidarity in Asia instrumentalised Soviet intellectuals in implementing internationalism.

6. The importance of Tashkent in the internationalisation of Soviet policy was extensively studied by Stronski (2010); Eby (2021); Tashkent in the context of the Soviet Third World policy was covered by Kalinovsky, 2013, 2020; Kirasirova, 2011; Cucciolla, 2020; Jansen, 2019.

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