

COVERAGE OF NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY IN SOURCES**Usmanova Kumush Anvar kizi**

Samarkand State University named after Sharof Rashidov

Bachelor student of the department of Historiography and Source Studies

E-mail: usmonovakumush@gmail.com<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20532357>

Abstract: This article examines the historiographical and source-based foundations of the 1916 Turkestan uprising within the context of the colonial policies of the Russian Empire in Central Asia. The study analyzes the political, economic, and social transformations that emerged in Turkestan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a result of imperial conquest and colonial administration. Particular attention is devoted to the mobilization decree of June 25, 1916, its implementation, and the large-scale resistance movement that followed throughout the region. The research is based on a comparative and critical analysis of various historical sources, including official imperial documents, military reports, archival materials, witness testimonies, memoirs, periodical publications, and foreign historiographical works. Special emphasis is placed on the accounts of Aleksey Kuropatkin, Aleksandr Kerensky, G. I. Broydo, N. E. Kolesnikov, S. O. Kochin, and Mustafa Choqay, whose observations reveal different dimensions of the uprising and the colonial system. The article also evaluates the reliability, subjectivity, and ideological orientation of these sources from a source-critical perspective. The research further argues that Soviet class-based interpretations fail to fully explain the essence of the events. Instead, the available body of historical sources supports the interpretation of the 1916 uprising as a broad national liberation struggle directed against Russian colonial domination. The article contributes to modern historiography by providing a critical reassessment of the uprising through an interdisciplinary and source-oriented approach.

Key words: Turkestan uprising of 1916, Russian colonialism, national liberation movement, mobilization decree, source criticism, historiography, Aleksey Kuropatkin, Aleksandr Kerensky, Mustafa Choqay, colonial administration, social resistance, Turkestan history, imperial policy, Central Asia, archival sources.

Introduction. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the territory of Turkestan was drawn into a process of profound political, economic, and social transformation as a result of its conquest by the Russian Empire. Colonial policy exerted a serious impact on the traditional way of life, economic activity, and national-cultural values of the local population. Various forms of protest movements and national liberation struggles emerged throughout Turkestan. Among these processes, the 1916 Turkestan uprising occupied a particularly significant place as one of the largest manifestations of resistance. In historiography, different approaches have been applied to the study of the events of this period, largely depending on the nature of the sources used and the interpretation of those sources. In particular, Soviet historiography often interpreted national liberation movements within the framework of class struggle, whereas the post-independence period created opportunities to approach these events from a new national perspective. In foreign and émigré historiography, these issues were studied in a relatively independent and critical manner. From this perspective, an in-depth and objective study of national liberation movements in Turkestan first requires an analysis of their source base. Historical sources – official documents, archival materials, periodicals, memoirs, and foreign studies – are of great importance in revealing the essence of these events. However, each of these sources possesses its own characteristics, making critical analysis essential.

Literature review and methodology. After Aleksey Kuropatkin was appointed Governor-General of Turkestan on July 30, 1916, he examined the socio-political situation in the region on

the basis of the imperial decree and submitted his observations to the Ministry of War. According to his account, neither the local population nor the administrative apparatus had been sufficiently prepared to implement the mobilization decree. Nevertheless, the hasty introduction of the policy of labor conscription produced serious social tensions and tragic consequences. According to the source, this policy led to migratory movements among the population in certain regions. For example, Kyrgyz groups in the Semirechye region and certain groups in the Fergana Valley planned to cross into Chinese territory, while the Turkmen population intended to migrate toward Afghanistan. This demonstrated that the mobilization policy generated sharp discontent among the local population. In his statement, Kuropatkin emphasized that although the process of conscripting men between the ages of nineteen and forty-three for military service within the Russian Empire had continued for two years, it had still not been fully completed. From this perspective, implementing a large-scale mobilization campaign within a short period under the conditions of Turkestan was an extremely difficult and almost impossible task. This observation constitutes one of the important evidentiary aspects of the source.

Results and discussion. Information presented by State Duma deputy Aleksandr Kerensky reveals the socio-economic essence of wartime policy in Turkestan. According to him, compulsory payments were regularly extracted from the local population during the First World War. These collections were imposed in various forms, including food supplies, fuel, equipment, and monetary contributions, while the population was repeatedly assured that “no further obligations would be imposed.” The source notes that the local population not only fulfilled these compulsory payments but also provided material and labor assistance to Russian families whose men had been mobilized for the war. For example, reports prepared by the local administration emphasized that large sums of money—approximately 100,000 rubles—had been collected from the population to support such families. This represents an important evidentiary aspect of the source, demonstrating the extensive economic burden imposed on the local population.

Deputy Jafarov likewise emphasized the humanitarian attitude of the Turkestan population toward Russians, noting that local inhabitants assisted the families of men sent to war and even worked free of charge in their households. However, the near absence of such information in other, especially official, sources requires critical source analysis from a historiographical perspective.

Source analysis demonstrates that the colonial administration not only relied on compulsory collections and aid but also exploited these processes for personal enrichment, leading to corruption, bribery, and plunder. According to Kerensky’s conclusions, the mobilization decree became a means of accumulating wealth for representatives of the administration. He symbolically described this process as a “new source of wealth,” sharply criticizing the plundering and exploitation of the population. In his speeches, Kerensky did not confine the problem solely to the activities of local officials; rather, he blamed the entire colonial administrative system. In his view, local representatives such as *ellikboshis* and village elders functioned as intermediaries of the imperial administration, through whom economic and administrative pressure was exerted on the population. Consequently, the situation should be evaluated not merely as local abuse of power but as the result of a systematic colonial policy.

The materials of G. I. Broydo, directly connected with events in the Semirechye region, are mentioned as an important source. His information was written eight years after the uprising, and the author recorded events as a witness. Therefore, the material should be evaluated not as a direct description of events but as the product of a certain degree of subjective observation. According to the source, Broydo described the socio-economic situation in Semirechye, the lifestyle of the population, and the causes of the uprising on the basis of his own observations. He portrayed the activities of the administration in a critical spirit, noting that the authorities had destabilized the situation by artificially intensifying interethnic conflicts, arming the Russian population, and spreading rumors among local inhabitants. He also devoted particular attention

to cases of mass killings and forced mobilization. However, from a source-critical perspective, certain aspects of Broydo's conclusions appear controversial. For example, his claim that "the government deliberately organized the uprising" lacks sufficient evidentiary support. The author ignores the fact that similar uprisings occurred in other regions and fails to adequately consider the broader socio-political processes unfolding throughout Turkestan. Furthermore, he demonstrates a tendency to deny the possibility that the local population independently struggled for its own rights and freedoms. According to the author, the uprising arose not from the internal needs of the population but under the influence of external factors. This indicates a certain one-sidedness in his position.

The events of 1916 also reflected attitudes toward women's participation in the uprising. The source records that Obid Usta Azizkhojaev, who expressed opposition to the active involvement of women, was subjected to physical violence and later died from the injuries he sustained. This circumstance illustrates the tense social environment of the period and the existence of internal contradictions. The prosecutor's indictment cited in the source serves as important documentary evidence in clarifying the event. Based on testimony provided by a close relative of the deceased, the source records Azizkhojaev's final statements before his death. According to this testimony, he considered women's participation in riots and violent acts such as stone-throwing to be unacceptable. As a result, he was forcibly taken into the streets by surrounding individuals, where violence was used against him.

The testimony given by N. E. Kolesnikov during the investigation constitutes another significant source. These witness materials serve as an important empirical basis for understanding the internal dynamics of the events and reconstructing the socio-political situation preceding the uprising. According to the source, the overall atmosphere in the region on the eve of the uprising had become extremely tense, indicating the growth of instability among different social strata. The author notes that local leaders connected with the urban administration system—particularly the *ellikboshis*—gathered in the old city to discuss the necessity of taking certain organizational measures. On the one hand, this meeting was aimed at restoring order; on the other hand, it reflected the increasing political tension and social pressure. According to the witness's subjective observations, the process unfolded amid a general sense of anxiety and instability. Another important aspect of the source is its indication that responsible figures within the provincial administrative apparatus were absent or inactive. This suggests the emergence of a power vacuum and demonstrates that the mechanisms of central control at the local level had weakened, thereby creating conditions for the escalation of events.

The detailed account provided by the Tashkent city chief S. O. Kochin is significant because it is based on the personal observations of an official who arrived directly at the scene, making it possible to clarify specific episodes of the uprising and the surrounding social environment. According to the witness, when he approached the police administration building, a large crowd of men and women had gathered in the surrounding area, numbering several thousand people. The presence of dead and wounded individuals among the crowd demonstrated the severity of the situation and the intensification of violent elements. The source notes that certain individuals moving toward the administration attempted to explain the causes of the unrest to the witness and voiced various grievances. This circumstance may be interpreted as a clear manifestation of social discontent and demonstrates that different segments of the population—including women—actively participated in the events. According to the witness's observations, the general psychological condition of the gathered population was characterized by feelings of humiliation and oppression.

The source also provides a detailed description of conditions inside the police administration building: guards of the old city stood armed, communication systems had broken down, and evidence of destruction—including shattered doors and windows, scattered bricks, and stones—was visible throughout the building. These facts indicate that the unrest inflicted serious damage upon institutional structures as well. At the time the events were unfolding, military forces had

not yet arrived, meaning that the situation remained uncontrolled for a certain period. The testimony further notes that calls to disperse the crowd proved ineffective and that the noise and confusion continued. However, efforts were later organized to remove the dead and wounded and to provide medical assistance, indicating attempts to partially stabilize the situation after the outbreak of disorder.

According to the source, officials such as General Yerofeev, who served as acting Governor-General of Turkestan, demonstrated not only negligence in implementing the "Supreme Decree" but also exploited it for personal enrichment. Instead of fulfilling the obligations stipulated by the decree, the introduction of the "otkup" (buyout) system revealed an era of widespread corruption and bribery within the administrative structure, symbolically described as a "golden fountain." These "commercial" practices provoked justified protests among the population and became one of the principal driving forces behind the uprisings. One of the most important scholarly conclusions is that the colonial government's attempt to place all responsibility for the uprisings solely upon lower-level local officials was unfounded. The document exposes the direct culpability of high-ranking Russian officials represented by figures such as Petrov, Ivanov, and Sidorov, who transformed the decree into an instrument of exploitation rather than implementing it properly. Consequently, the events of 1916 were interpreted not merely as demonstrations against labor conscription but as a large-scale social explosion caused by the economic greed and administrative crisis of the colonial regime.

Information provided in early August by the gendarme commander Krafechenko, who operated in the Karkara region, notes that the Kyrgyz population in the mountainous areas around Karakol was holding regular assemblies. In particular, after the decree of June 25, these gatherings assumed a more systematic character. Although officially organized under the pretext of registering laborers, their actual purpose appears to have been connected with political and military mobilization. The source also reflects the activities of representatives of the local elite. For example, it records that M. Shabdanov sought to restore the political influence that had been lost following his father's death. Under the leadership of Kanaat Abukin, Kyrgyz groups around Tokmok became militarily organized. The sources indicate that the population was divided into separate units, each assigned its own commander responsible for preparing the group for military operations. These details were later confirmed during court investigations, demonstrating that the movement possessed a certain organizational structure.

The suppression of the 1916 uprising continued over an extended period, lasting until February 8, 1917. Throughout this time, the peoples of Turkestan and other Turkic groups continued resisting under intense military and political pressure; however, due to limited resources and opportunities, resistance gradually weakened, and they were ultimately forced to surrender. This situation demonstrated the sharply repressive character of colonial policy. According to information contained in a report sent by Aleksey Kuropatkin to Nicholas II on February 22, the scale of military forces mobilized to suppress the uprising was described in detail. The report recorded the deployment of fourteen battalions, thirty-seven Cossack cavalry detachments, forty-two artillery guns, and sixty-nine machine guns. These figures confirm that the empire conducted extensive and systematic military operations in suppressing the uprising.

The statistical information contained in the source also presents a two-sided interpretation of the consequences of the uprising. During six months of military confrontation, 2,325 individuals on the Russian side were killed, while 1,384 persons were reported missing for various reasons. In addition, the migrant population resettled from Russia suffered considerable losses: for example, 2,325 settlers were killed, and nearly 9,000 households sustained damage. However, it is necessary to take into account that these figures and assessments are based on imperial administrative and military sources. Therefore, they may not reflect a complete and objective picture of events but rather one shaped from a colonial perspective.

In Bolshevik publications, authors such as Miklasevsky, Yevgeny Fedorov, Kuzmin, Menistsky, and Galuzo interpreted the events of 1916 as a manifestation of class struggle.

Opposing this interpretation, Mustafa Choqay argued that socio-economic conditions should serve as the primary criterion in evaluating the uprising. According to him, class struggle can emerge only in societies where a national bourgeoisie and proletariat with conflicting political, social, and economic interests have formed alongside a developed national industry. Since such a socio-economic structure did not exist in Turkestan during the period of Russian imperial rule, genuine class antagonisms had not developed among the local population.

Choqay interpreted the 1916 uprising not as a class movement but as a national liberation struggle. He further noted that even some Bolshevik authors who studied these events-despite operating under the influence of Bolshevik ideology and unlike figures such as Turar Ryskulov, who reflected the local spirit-could not deny the nationwide character of the uprising directed against Russian rule and domination. Consequently, source-based analysis led to the conclusion that the essence of the events of 1916 was more accurately manifested as a national liberation movement.

Conclusion. Research conducted on this subject demonstrates that the 1916 Turkestan uprising: was a multifactor historical phenomenon whose emergence was connected not only with the mobilization decree but also directly with the long-term colonial policies of the Russian Empire, economic exploitation, administrative pressure, and the crisis of the governing system; developed not as a purely spontaneous process but through preexisting organizational elements in certain regions, the activities of local leaders, and mechanisms of social mobilization; was interpreted by the colonial administration through a deliberate narrowing of the causes of the uprising, with responsibility shifted primarily onto lower-level local officials, whereas the real causes were rooted in systemic imperial policy; demonstrated that the local population not only resisted colonial pressure but also displayed humanitarianism, mutual assistance, and adaptive strategies under difficult social conditions, indicating the complex and multidimensional internal social dynamics of society; and that the class-based interpretation of the Soviet period cannot fully explain the essence of these events. On the contrary, the existing body of sources makes it possible to evaluate the events of 1916 as a nationwide movement possessing the character of a national liberation struggle.

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