

Uzbeks Rewrite History

Author: [Kamiljon Ashurov](#)

Academics fear Tashkent's historical revisionism may lead to anti-Russian feeling among Uzbek youth.

The Uzbek authorities are rewriting the history of their country's relations with the Russians to such an extent that independent scholars fear it may undermine ties between the two countries.

The Uzbek government is unashamed in its approach, arguing that erasing the Soviet past from the nation's collective memory is key to future prosperity.

Uzbek president Islam Karimov told parliament in August that "the shadow of the USSR", which continued to weigh down on parts of Uzbek society, was a major reason for its problems. He hailed the new generation growing up free of "the totalitarian heritage" of the Soviet Union.

"Having visited one of the schools, I asked adolescents, if they knew who was Brezhnev? They answered, 'No, we don't'. Then I asked them, 'Who is Gorbachev?' They again said that they didn't know. And I told them that they are doing great," Karimov told parliament.

The new history of the country, commissioned from local scholars, has three important ideological directions: total disapproval for the more than 70 year long period during which the republic was part of the USSR; unrestricted praise for the declaration of independence in 1991, which is regarded as the result of a lengthy Uzbek struggle and not the dissolution of the Soviet Union (every step taken by the government since then is also glorified); and a search for new heroes from the remote past, who are turned into symbols of an independent Uzbekistan.

Teachers forced to work with the new textbooks complain that the new interpretation may fuel animosity among young Uzbeks towards Russians, represented in the books as violent invaders who brought sorrow and pain to Uzbekistan.

At a recent meeting of history teachers in the region, one of the participants, Samira Tashmukhamedova, said that after each lesson she reminded her students "not to think badly of the Russian people". But she said that in rural provincial schools, teachers did not dare to offer explanations and simply told their pupils whatever was written in the books, pressing home the basic theme, "Russians are to blame for all the troubles of the Uzbek people, they killed our ancestors, robbed our natural resources and turned us into slaves".

The new history textbooks present the entire period from the Russian invasion of Turkestan in the 1870s to the disintegration of the USSR in 1991 as one of humiliation and fear, with Moscow focused on one goal - the enslavement of the Uzbek people on the country's boundless cotton plantations.

One of the new textbooks, written by Jumaboi Rakhimov, is heavily critical of the role of the Russian authorities in Central Asia, saying, for instance, that Russian-indigenous schools were only set up to encourage Asian children to learn about remote cities and stop loving their own motherland.

Significantly, Rakhimov re-evaluates an Uzbek rebellion against Czarist conscription during World War One. Soviet history played down the incident, in which 4,000 Russians were killed, in order to prevent divisions between the two nations. But Rakhimov has no such concerns, portraying it as the heroic action of the "courageous sons of the Uzbek people".

The rewriting of national history is not to the liking of all Uzbek scholars. "The events of the past and historic figures should be given objective evaluation," said Boyurkhon Valikhodjaev, a member of the Academy of Sciences.

Critics complain that the new textbooks ignore the merits and services of many Russian scientists who made huge contributions to the development of Uzbekistan.

Nodir Akramov, director of an observatory built by an early Uzbek hero and discovered by a Russian archeologist, said the new history of the country reflects the ambitions and desires of individual politicians.

"The ideology of independent Uzbekistan will lead to more and more frequent inaccuracies which in turn will bring about a loss of historic truth," he said.

Many ordinary people are confused and unhappy about the historical revisionism, which they see as being used to weaken Russia's still strong authority in Uzbekistan and eliminate the nostalgia people have for life in the USSR.

"Of course, life during the Soviet Union was much better, living standards were higher, social security was there as well as, free education and healthcare. People were confident about the future - that's not the case today, which is why the authorities want to erase the Soviet years from our memory," said Tashkent pensioner Mukaram Abdullaeva.

Artur Samari, Kamiljon Ashurov and Uktam Ibragimov are independent journalists

Location: [Central Asia](#)
[Uzbekistan](#)
[Turkmenistan](#)
[Tajikistan](#)

Focus: [Central Asia](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uzbeks-rewrite-history>