

SHAROF RASHIDOV'S ACTIVITIES AS CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDUM OF THE SUPREME SOVIET OF THE UZBEK SSR (1950–1959)

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Abstract

This article explores the activities of the supreme governing body of the Uzbek SSR the Supreme Soviet during the 1950s. The author analyzes the sociopolitical work of Sharof Rashidov, who served as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR from 1950 to 1959. Special attention is given to the tensions in “Center Republic” relations and to the transformations in the sphere of state governance during the period under study.

Keywords: governing body, Supreme Soviet, Communist Party, Council of Ministers, Presidium, collegial, president, Soviets, session, executive committees, citizen appeals.

Introduction

The development of any society or nation greatly depends on the effective functioning of its state governance bodies. Therefore, the structure and role of state power within the administrative system often serve as indicators for assessing the nature of that society's regime. During the Soviet era, under the slogan “All power to the Soviets” and in an “aspiration” toward the principles of democratic power division, the activities of the All-Union Congress of Soviets were initially established, later replaced by the Supreme Soviet.

It should be noted that although the organization of higher governing bodies in the Soviet Union was presented as adhering to “democratic principles,” the system did not allow for the existence of any institution that functioned independently of the Supreme Soviet. As a result, there was a recognized need for a permanent governing body accountable to the Supreme Soviet. This led to the creation of the Presidium, the Union's highest governing institution. A similar administrative model was implemented in all the union republics.

Accordingly, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR functioned as the highest state body that operated continuously between the sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR. The Presidium was collegial in nature and was composed of a chairperson, two Deputy Chairpersons, a secretary, and thirteen members, all elected from among the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR.

The activities of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR were closely linked to those of the Supreme Soviet itself. Certain responsibilities that fell within the authority of the Supreme Soviet were carried out by the Presidium between sessions. However, all actions taken by the Presidium required approval from the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR.

Although the powers of the Chairperson of the Presidium were not explicitly outlined in the Constitution of the Uzbek SSR, the position held significant status within the system of state governance. A review of the governance history of the Uzbek SSR reveals that several prominent political leaders of the republic A. Niyazov (1947–1950), Sh. Rashidov (1950–1959), I. Usmanhodzhayev (1978–1983), and R. Nishonov (1986–1988) at one point served as Chairpersons of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

In some studies, from this period, the title “President” was used interchangeably with the term “Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.” Russian scholar G. Petrov equated the powers of the Presidium Chairperson with those of a president [1,C.5–6]. When Amin Ermatovich Niyazov, Chairman of the Presidium of the Uzbek SSR Supreme Soviet, was nominated as a deputy to the Union Council in 1950, the title “President” was used in reference to him: “Our republic’s president, Comrade Niyazov, maintains close contact with the public and pays great attention to the demands of the working people” [2].

The appointment of Sharof Rashidov as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR in 1950 is also acknowledged as a form of presidency by the ethnic Uzbek Russian historian F. Razzakov [3, p.48]. Saidakbar Rizayev highlights that Rashidov became the youngest “president” at the age of 33 [4, p. 16].

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet held the authority, upon the recommendation of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Uzbekistan, to dismiss ministers from their positions and to appoint new ones. It also convened sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR twice a year. “The Presidium’s powers were especially broad in matters of state construction. It defined the competencies of central government bodies in areas of the national economy and socio-cultural development, and it established ministries and departments” [5, p. 207].

The candidate for the position of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet’s Presidium was typically recommended by the republic’s top political leader. The nomination of a legislative body leader by the Communist Party was politically motivated, ensuring that the individual would act in full alignment with the Party’s goals. At the April 1950 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, U. Yusupov, during his speech, proposed electing Sharof Rashidov as a member of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan and nominated him for the position of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR [6, p. 58].

At the session of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR on April 24, 1950, a resolution “On the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR” was discussed. Due to A. Niyazov’s transition to another post, Sharof Rashidov was assigned the role of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR [7, p.32]. Rashidov’s nine-year tenure as Chairman of the Presidium later served as a “springboard” for his appointment as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan [8, p. 84]. Professor Donald Carlisle commented on Rashidov’s assumption of the role of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet with the following observation: “Although the position did not carry significant prestige, it nevertheless marked Rashidov’s ascent up the career ladder” [9, p. 106].

As Sharof Rashidov assumed his new position, he began his work by critically analyzing the activities of local Soviets. His first meeting as Chairman of the Presidium was held on May 16, 1950, and was dedicated to this issue [10, folio 41]. Among the main shortcomings in the work of the Supreme Soviet was the low quality of sessions held by local councils in Uzbekistan and the lack of qualified personnel. The *Izvestiya* newspaper, published in Moscow at the Union level, criticized the work of local Soviets in the Uzbek SSR in its April 26, 1950 issue: "Of the 2,453 decisions adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR in 1949, only four concerned organizational matters related to local councils. Even so, sufficient attention was not given to implementing or overseeing those decisions."

During this first meeting chaired by Sh. Rashidov, the activities of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the leadership of the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR were analyzed, and several shortcomings were highlighted. Specifically, only 21 of the 36 scheduled sessions of regional councils were convened, while 379 of the 789 scheduled sessions of district councils, and 112 of the 324 scheduled sessions of city councils took place [11,41-p].

By 1955, 1,100 out of 1,680 local Soviets in the republic had violated the constitutional deadlines for convening sessions. However, by 1956, this number had improved significantly, dropping to just 80 councils [12, 247-p].

From the very beginning of his tenure as Chairman of the Presidium, Sharof Rashidov sought to address the socio-economic problems accumulated in the republic. As he worked with the various appeals from the citizens of the Uzbek SSR, his abilities as a skilled leader and organizer began to develop. On November 14, 1950, teachers and officials of the People's Education Department of G'allaorol district in Samarkand region sent a collective appeal to Rashidov.

The letter noted that in more than 30 schools across the district, five to six students were forced to share a single desk, and in many schools, only 10–15 desks were available for 280 students. They requested the allocation of 500 desks for district schools [13, 154-p].

Later, Rashidov consulted with the leadership of the Ministry of Education of the Uzbek SSR and ensured the procurement of 500 desks from Astrakhan and Tyumen [13, 152-p].

This situation illustrates several serious flaws typical of the Soviet administrative system. First, at the beginning of the 1950s, there was no domestic production of desks in Uzbekistan, or if desks were produced, it was insufficient to meet the republic's needs. Like in many other areas, Uzbekistan remained dependent on other republics or the central authorities even for basic educational supplies. Second, it created a paradox in governance where even a relatively minor need of the republic required the personal intervention or request of its leader. Rashidov made considerable efforts to address the many appeals submitted to him. He worked tirelessly to resolve the social and economic problems troubling the population. "Thousands of people appealed to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium. Whether they would receive long-awaited help or not depended solely on him (Sharof Rashidov) and his office. Although he did not always have the power to change people's fates, many left his reception satisfied" [5, p. 16].

In the financial sphere, as in all other areas, the republic's dependence on the center meant that it could not freely use its internal economic resources or funds. For example, on March 14, 1954, workers from a city reserve in Samarkand sent a collective appeal (signed by 41 individuals). In the letter, they stated that despite cultivating agricultural products on 70 hectares of land, they still used wooden plows. Therefore, they requested the allocation of a single tractor [14, 10-p]. Following this, at Rashidov's instruction, a letter was sent to the State Planning Committee on March 24, 1954, requesting the provision of one tractor. However, the response from the Committee on April 8, 1954, stated that all tractors for that year had already been allocated to ministries and organizations, and that it was not possible to provide one to the Samarkand workers [14, 8-p].

During Sharof Rashidov's tenure as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium of the Uzbek SSR from 1950 to 1959, the working methods of the Presidium began to change, and it gained a distinctive role within the republic's administrative system. He made efforts to significantly improve the Presidium's work with citizen appeals. As a leader, he demanded strict adherence to his administrative style from the Presidium staff and fought against negative practices like bureaucracy and red tape.

Thus, the work of the Uzbek SSR Presidium was revitalized and its operational procedures improved in quality. It is worth noting that Rashidov accepted criticism regarding shortcomings and deficiencies in the Presidium's work and took steps to rectify them. One illustrative example of this is the Republican Council of Executive Committee Leaders of Local Soviets of Workers' Deputies of the Uzbek SSR held in Tashkent on June 6, 1955. During this meeting, participants were given the opportunity to voice criticisms about the work of the Presidium. Council participants criticized the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR, the republican Council of Ministers, and several ministries for not providing sufficient support to local Soviets and executive committees, for failing to study, summarize, and disseminate positive experiences, and for sometimes failing to promptly address local issues [15, 192-p].

At the republican meeting, the shortcomings related to the activities of the Supreme Soviet Presidium were promptly addressed. At the session of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR held on April 23, 1956, under Sharof Rashidov's chairmanship, the agenda included the issue titled "On measures to improve the work of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR and its apparatus." Measures were outlined to enhance the efficiency of the Presidium's apparatus [16, 97-v].

These improvements in work style and positive changes in the Presidium's activities were directly linked to Sharof Rashidov's personality. As the chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium of the republic, he had to work tirelessly under great pressure, applying his full capacity and, if necessary, investing all his strength and nerves. "... Rashidov endeavored to do so, and it soon became clear that this was reflected in his personal qualities, his unique style of thinking and working, and in his respectful attitude toward people, unlike the typical behavior of officials" [5, p.15-16].

In summary, the activities of the Uzbek SSR Supreme Soviet in the 1950s were characterized by dynamic changes. During this period, positive shifts were observed in the work of the

Presidium of the Uzbek Supreme Soviet, which began to acquire a distinct status in state governance. This process was associated with Sharof Rashidov's leadership, organizational skills, guidance, and diplomatic activity, as well as his distinctive work style. His approach embodied qualities such as humanity, justice, diligence, sincerity, and other personal traits. On the other hand, Rashidov's nine-year tenure as chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium was crucial in shaping him into a mature political and state figure, keeping him informed of the republic's most pressing issues and gaining recognition in the central political circles. Later, this factor influenced his long-term service as the first political leader (First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan) and contributed to earning the people's rightful respect and attention.

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