

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL CONSEQUENCES AS A RESULT OF
THE DISTRIBUTION OF PRISONERS TO TURKESTAN**

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the socio-economic and geopolitical consequences of the transfer of prisoners of war to Turkestan. It also argues that the transfer of European prisoners of war to Turkestan during the First World War was a significant event that not only directly affected the military and material-technical situation of the Russian Empire but also had long-term consequences for the geopolitics of Central Asia.

Key words: Russian Empire, Central Asia, First World War, European prisoners.

During the First World War, the resettlement of European prisoners of war to Turkestan had profound social consequences, reshaping the region in complex and protracted forms. As the Russian Empire faced numerous prisoners, primarily from Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire, a decision was made to transport many of these prisoners to the distant and strategically important Central Asian region. This resettlement affected not only the prisoners themselves, but also significantly impacted the local population and broader social dynamics of Turkestan.

During the First World War, the deportation of European prisoners of war to Turkestan had important and long-term economic consequences both for the regions in which it took part and for the broader geopolitical and economic landscape of that time. This forced resettlement, carried out mainly at the initiative of the Russian Empire, had a serious impact on the economy of Central Asia, affected labor markets, transformed agricultural and industrial production, and contributed to the instability of the already weak imperial economy.

When World War I broke out in 1914, millions of soldiers were taken prisoner, including tens of thousands from the central powers, particularly the Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman, and Bulgarian armies. The Russian Empire, which seriously participated on the Eastern Front against Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman troops, took many prisoners. By the time of the Russian Revolution of 1917, approximately 2.5 million prisoners had been taken by Russian troops. In response to the enormous logistical problems of keeping such a large number of prisoners and partly with a policy of war aimed at mitigating potential security threats, the Russian government began mass deportations to the peripheral regions of the empire. One of the main destinations for these prisoners of war was Turkestan, a vast territory in Central Asia, which was then part of the Russian Empire.

The basis for sending prisoners to Turkestan was the combination of military, strategic, and economic factors. Firstly, Turkestan was located far from the front, which could have led to the escape of prisoners of war or hindered Russia's military actions. Secondly, the region's relatively low population density and underdeveloped infrastructure have made it a convenient but isolated place for sending large numbers of prisoners to the local population without serious obstacles. Moreover, the Russian Empire, which had long been engaged in the process of colonization and economic expansion in Central Asia, saw the deportation of prisoners of war as an opportunity to use cheap labor for various state-managed projects.

Economically, the deportation of prisoners had an immediate and profound impact on both the local economy of Central Asia and the broader economy of Russia. The most direct result was the use of prisoners of war as forced labor in agricultural, construction, and industrial activities.

At a time when the Russian Empire was at the height of the war and suffering from chronic labor shortages, prisoners of war were seen as a convenient source of labor, especially in such important industries as food production, infrastructure development, and ammunition production. Their mandatory participation in agricultural work, such as cotton cultivation, and the construction of important infrastructure, such as railways and military fortifications, in a short period of time increased the production volumes of these industries.

However, the influx of a large number of prisoners into the region created both a crisis and an opportunity for local economies. The economic environment of Turkestan was already fragile due to the war-induced decline and the region's reliance on a feudal agricultural system with little opportunity to assimilate a large, transient workforce. Although prisoners of war contributed to the expansion of cotton cultivation and the construction of infrastructure, they did so at great expense. Many prisoners were forced to work in harsh conditions, leading to significant mortality rates due to illness, malnutrition, and overwork. The presence of prisoners also led to inflationary pressures in the local economy, as the demand for food, shelter, and basic materials for such a large and foreign workforce increased prices.

In addition, the presence of prisoners of war disrupted the patterns of traditional agriculture. The territories where the local population previously engaged in peculiar agriculture were now subjected to the requirements of the mining policy of the Russian Empire. The focus on cash crops, in particular cotton, meant that the local population had to work even harder to meet the new demands set by the authorities. This caused tension between the local peasants and the Russian officials, who focused on maximizing the benefits for the empire's military actions.

The consequences of this were not limited to the local population of Turkestan. The wider Russian economy also felt the impact of deportations. Although forced labor temporarily solved the labor shortage in industry during the war, it did not contribute much to solving the weaknesses of the Russian economy. When the Bolshevik Revolution took place in 1917, Russia was deeply embedded in the war, and its economy was on the verge of collapse. The continued exploitation of prisoners of war labor in Central Asia did not stop the broader economic downturn. In fact, the exploitation of these workers intensified internal economic instability, which ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Russian Empire.

In addition to these rapid economic impacts, the deportation of European prisoners to Turkestan had long-term consequences for the development of the region. The infrastructure projects and agricultural labor of prisoners of war contributed to the gradual integration of Central Asia into the broad economic system of Russia. However, this also contributed to the strengthening of local resistance to Russian rule. As the region's economy became increasingly dependent on the interests of the Russian Empire, the indigenous population of Central Asia became increasingly dissatisfied with the exploitation of both themselves and foreign prisoners.

Moreover, after the end of the war in 1918 and the outbreak of the Civil War in Russia, the political landscape in Central Asia became even more unstable. The experience of European prisoners, many of whom came from territories under the control of the already emerging Soviet regime, aroused in them feelings of alienation and anger. These feelings were later manifested in the postwar years in uprisings against the Soviet Union. Conflicts between the Russian government, the local population of Central Asia, and former prisoners of war led to instability in the region throughout the early 20th century.

During the First World War, the resettlement of European prisoners of war to Turkestan, the Central Asian region under the control of the Russian Empire, played an important role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of both the Russian Empire and the Eurasian region. This resettlement, which occurred mainly between 1914 and 1917, had enormous consequences for

the socio-political dynamics of the region and the collapse of empires after the war. The relocation was associated with logistical, strategic and geopolitical considerations, the consequences of which were felt both during and after the war, contributing to the major changes that took place after the Russian Revolution and the collapse of the Russian Empire.

At the beginning of World War I, the Russian Empire, as part of the allied forces, faced serious difficulties in managing the central powers (German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empire) and the large number of prisoners captured by Russia. The large number of prisoners made it difficult for Russia to effectively manage them in European territories. With Russia's vast, sparse internal territory and underdeveloped infrastructure, the empire faced logistical challenges such as providing housing and food for tens of thousands of prisoners of war. In addition, the Russian authorities feared riots among the prisoners, many of whom were from countries with nationalist or revolutionary sentiments, such as Poland, Romania, and the Balkans. Thus, the Russian government decided to relocate a large number of prisoners of war to more distant parts of the empire, in particular, to Turkestan, which included part of what is now Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

The Turkestan Krai was chosen due to its isolation from European Russia, relatively low population density, and strategic importance as a region with large resources important for the Russian economy, in particular, cotton. From a logistical point of view, Turkestan was an ideal place for the placement of prisoners of war far from the industrial centers of European Russia, where men could be employed without creating a direct threat to hostilities or the political stability of Russia. In this sense, the transfer of prisoners of war to Turkestan was part of Russia's broader strategy of managing war resources and maintaining control over the increasingly turbulent empire.

The resettlement itself began in 1914, but from 1915 it intensified as the war continued to worsen Russia's internal infrastructure. By the end of the war in 1918, approximately 200,000 European prisoners of war were sent to Turkestan. Most of these prisoners came from the Russian front, particularly from Austro-Hungarian and German troops, but others were captured in battles with the Ottoman Empire, especially in the Caucasus region. These prisoners of war, many of whom were of different nationalities, including ethnic Germans, Austrians, Poles, and Hungarians, found themselves in a foreign land with an unfamiliar culture, language, and climate. The Russian government used prisoners of war for labor-intensive work, including the construction of railways, military fortifications, and projects for the development of agriculture in the region.

One of the most important geopolitical consequences of this resettlement was its contribution to the development of a multi-ethnic and politically dynamic environment in Turkestan. The presence of European prisoners of war in the region introduced new political and cultural elements to the predominantly Muslim and Turkic-speaking population of Central Asia. Many prisoners of war, especially the Germans, managed to form relatively independent communities in the Turkestan region. They established schools, churches, and social institutions, maintaining cultural and linguistic ties with their countries. This had a long-term impact on the social structure of the region, as it created a more heterogeneous population in an area traditionally distinguished by its ethnic and religious identity.

On the other hand, the presence of European prisoners of war also contributed to the emergence of new nationalist movements in the region. The Turkic-speaking population, many of whom had lived under the control of the Russian Empire for decades, began to express their dissatisfaction with Russian rule more openly. These nationalist movements, which emerged even before the war, grew stronger as the war continued, and the addition of European prisoners of war seemed

to strengthen the desire for self-determination among the local population. Many prisoners of war themselves, especially those from the Balkans and Poland, sympathized with the independence of Turkestan and its peoples. The interaction between prisoners and local nationalist leaders created a complex network of political alliances and ideologies that would later play an important role in the region's struggles for independence after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

The political instability caused by the presence of these foreign prisoners reached its peak in the post-Russian Revolution of 1917. In Russia, the overthrow of the Romanov monarchy and the fall of the central government created a power vacuum, which was filled by competing revolutionary factions. Including the Bolsheviks, who ultimately emerged victorious. The presence of foreign prisoners of war in Turkestan, many of whom were now seen as potential partners with these nationalist movements, complicated the Bolsheviks' efforts to consolidate power in the region. Turkestan itself became a center for both the White forces opposing the Bolsheviks, striving to restore the Russian Empire, and the Bolshevik revolutionaries aiming to implement socialist order throughout the former empire.

As the Russian Civil War spread to Central Asia, the remnants of European prisoners of war and the indigenous population, supported by the ideological support they received from the Russian and European socialist movements, became increasingly hostile to the idea of Russian domination. As a result of the Civil War and the consolidation of Soviet power, Turkestan was incorporated into the Soviet Union as part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, with several of its constituent parts later becoming the founding republics of the Soviet Union, including Kazakhstan.

The legacy of the resettlement of European prisoners of war to Turkestan was clearly reflected in the subsequent geopolitical transformations of the region. The diversity and multinationality of the region, formed as a result of interaction between European prisoners of war, the Russian imperial forces, and the local population, contributed to the complication of Soviet rule in Central Asia. Although Soviet collectivization and industrialization policies were often ruthless, they were influenced by the need to integrate the region into a broader Soviet system, which was shaped partly by the tension caused by war experience and the presence of foreign prisoners of war.

In conclusion, the resettlement of European prisoners of war to Turkestan during the First World War was an important event that not only directly affected the military and material-technical situation of the Russian Empire, but also had long-term consequences for the geopolitics of Central Asia. The interaction between European prisoners of war and the indigenous population contributed to the development of nationalist sentiments, changed the social structure of the region, and played an important role in the broader geopolitical changes following the collapse of the Russian Empire and the rise of the Soviet Union. The interaction of ethnic, national, and imperial histories of this resettlement legacy can still be observed in the modern political and cultural dynamics of Central Asia, which continues to shape the identity and political future of the region.

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