

SCTMG 2020**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the
Context of Modern Globalism»****MILITARY OPERATION ON MASS DISARMAMENT OF THE
POPULACE OF CHECHNYA IN 1925**

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Abstract

Following a decree from the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks, a military operation on mass disarmament of the populace and arresting counter-revolutionary elements was carried out in Chechen autonomous region from August 25 to September 12, 1925. According to the Bolshevik authorities, this had to help them destroy pockets of resistance against the Soviets, “pacify” the Chechens and create conditions for peaceful construction of socialism. The operation was prepared in extreme secrecy, and even the president of the Chechen Central Committee, Eldrakhonov was not informed by the central authorities about the operation. The disarmament was performed by the troops of the North Caucasus military command and the troops of the Joint State Political Directorate that amounted to over 6000 people and employed aviation and artillery. The transfer of troops to Chechnya was done under the excuse of forthcoming maneuvers. During this operation, the settlements that refused to turn in their arms by order of JSPD were bombarded by artillery and aviation which inevitably led to the deaths among the civilians and property losses. The analysis of the political situation in Chechnya at the moment of operation shows that the decision to carry out a mass disarmament of Chechnya taken by the central authorities of the party was unreasonable. Moreover, we claim that the use of military weapons against civilians was a crime against the nation. Our conclusions are based on the extensive analysis of the material from both research works and archives.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: North Caucasus, Chechen autonomous region, military operation, weapons, banditism.



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1. Introduction

The study of the relationships between the authorities and the people in the first years of the Soviet period in Russia promotes the understanding of the situation in the North Caucasus by the end of the XXth and the beginning of the XXIth century. It is especially so in relation to Chechnya, where the grudge and the humiliation of the past re-emerged when the central authority weakened and led to the largest military conflict in Russia in the second half of the XXth century.

There is quite a number of works dedicated to the military operation in Chechnya in 1925 by both Russian and foreign researchers, including Chentsov (2009) who studied the main reasons for the spate of banditism in the North Caucasus in the 1920es. Zhupikova (2016) studied the problems of the rebel movement; Chentsov (2009) studied the activities of JSPD during the preparation and the performance of the military operation in Chechnya. Such foreign experts, including Dunlop (2011), investigated the causes of the opposition between Russia and Chechnya. These works refer to a large scope of sources and statistics, but still, the works published by the date do not cover these problems in full fashion. Some aspects, including the controversies in Chechnya during the first years of the Soviet period, have not been studied properly yet.

2. Problem Statement

Delays in solving the social and economic problems led to an anti-government revolt in Chechnya and Dagestan that happened in August of 1920. It was led by a grandson of imam Shamil, Said Bek, and imam Nazhmudin Gotsinskiy, and it provoked Bolshevik activity in the North Caucasus. Thus, a Mountain Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (GASSR) was created in 1921, which began to collapse in a year, partially due to the actions of the central authorities. If this project succeeded, the North Caucasus could have become uncontrollable. By a decree of the panel of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of November 30th, 1922, Chechnya was withdrawn from the GASSR and made an autonomous region. T.E. Eldarkhanov was assigned as a chair of the local Revolutionary Committee. Flexible policies of Eldarkhanov who relied both on spiritual leaders and on the better-off locals that were influential in Chechnya allowed to pacify Chechnya. However, the Bolshevik authorities in the country required that the government shall rely on the poor notwithstanding the existing social and political situation in Chechnya where people traditionally possess weapons.

3. Research Questions

We deem it necessary to evaluate if the military operation on mass disarmament was reasonable given that by 1925 in Chechnya peace was brought about, and we aim to reconstruct main events of the operation and determine its methods.

4. Purpose of the Study

In this article, we aim to research the causes of the large military operation on the mass disarmament of people of Chechnya in 1925 by the troops of the North Caucasus military command and JSPD and recover the events.

5. Research Methods

The key principles for the investigation of the military operation on mass disarmament in Chechnya include historicism and academic objectiveness. The use of a large number of sources allowed to recover the events connected with the preparation and the implementation of the punitive operation aimed at the disarmament in Chechnya in 1925, as well as to study the facts impartially and taking into consideration all of the numerous historical conditions. Some specific methods that we used when analyzing the questionnaires from the settlements in Chechen autonomous region include the statistic analysis and the comparative method that allow solving this problem in the most objective fashion.

6. Findings

As noted by Avtorkhanov (1991), there was a period of padishah rule in Chechnya in the early 1920es characterized by political peace and popularity of the Soviet authorities. Mikoyan (1999), the secretary of the North Caucasian party committee, a member of the Revolutionary Military Council in the North Caucasus military command region between 1924 and 1926, also claimed that “by the end of 1924 – the beginning of 1925, there was peace in Chechnya”.

The pacification of Chechnya came as a result of the flexible policies of the chair of Chechen Central Executive Committee, T.E. Eldrakhanov who supported the consolidation of all progressive layers of the society, including the spiritual leaders who played a huge role in Chechen society and “mostly did not undermine the Soviet authorities”. Eldrakhanov attracted the support to the Soviet authorities from the better-off populace and the intellectuals loyal to the Soviet authorities due to the social and political situation in Chechnya. In his letter to A. I. Mikoyan, Eldarkhanov claimed that the role of the local intellectuals in the Republics and the regions of the North Caucasus is largely different from that of the central regions of the Soviet Union. There are so few intellectual workers in the outskirts that each of them has to be pulled to the Soviet side by all means.

From the memoirs of A. M. Mikoyan, it is obvious that in the spring of 1925, F.E. Dzerzhinskiy the chair of the Supreme Council of National Economy expressed his concern in a conversation about the threat of a new war in the USSR. Although Chechnya was peaceful at the time, he proposed to disarm its populace just to be on the safe side. The head of the Bolshevik Party in the North Caucasus deemed his concern reasonable and got the approval for the disarmament of Chechnya by Stalin, the secretary-general of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks, and A.I. Rykov, the chair of the Council of People's Commissars. A corresponding decree from the Politburo of the Central Committee followed (Mikoyan, 1999).

Upon his return from Moscow in the spring of 1925, A.I. Mikoyan started active implementation of the Politburo's decree on the disarmament of Chechnya. Taking into consideration the experience of previous military operations in Chechnya, a lot of preparations were done that involved the commander-in-chief of the North Caucasus military command region, I.P. Uborevich, the head of JSPD G.S. Yevdokimov, a member of the district Military council V.G. Volodin, the secretary of territorial party committee N. Gikalo, the head of JSPD in Chechnya.

The disarmament was prepared in strict secrecy. The central authorities did not deem it necessary to notify T.E. Eldarkhanov about it, and the concentration of troops in Grozny was excused by the military training. The secretary of the Chechen organization bureau of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks, M.A. Eneyev was the only person in the regional government who knew about the forthcoming operation on the disarmament of Chechnya.

The chief of North Caucasus Military Command, I.P. Uborevich and a member of the Revolutionary Military Council, V.G. Volodin enacted the Instruction on the disarmament of the populace of Chechen autonomous region for the commanders of the military units and JSPD representatives on August 4th, 1925. The instruction provided that the commanders shall disarm settlements in each of the districts simultaneously avoiding the division of troops, especially at night. The representatives of Chechen Central Executive Committee and JSPD along with military commanders shall enter settlements after encircling them. The local authorities shall call for a settlement meeting and demand handing in all of the weapon in possession of the locals. They shall set the terms for forfeiting the weapons and the number of weapons to be taken. If the populace does not fulfill the requirement to forfeit the weapons, the commanders shall begin artillery bombardment or machine-gun firing for 10 minutes as a warning. In case any resistance arises, the troops were allowed to shoot, and the commanders had to thoroughly study the profiles of each settlement obtained from the JSPD heads (Russian state military archive).

Profiles of 300 settlements, hamlets and farmsteads were prepared by the JSPD employees. They contained information on the population size, land allotment, local council chairs, party and Komsomol cells, Muslim spiritual leaders, relationships within the settlement and with other settlements, the predicted stock of weapons.

For example, the profile of Centoroy states that there are 559 households and 2680 people, including 1398 men, in the settlement; the chair of the executive committee is Israil Makhmudov, of medium welfare and popular; spiritual leaders (mullahs) are hostile towards the Soviets. In the section dedicated to Muslim spiritual leaders, there is some data on the public (settlement) mullah, Temi-Ali Ubayev (Ulubayev – author's note), born in Tsentroy, influential, belongs to the Kunta-Hajji sect, hostile to the authorities, proactive in this respect.

In the section dedicated to the family system, there are statistics for each family (more exactly, each gar, which is a branch of teips): number of households, number of men. Out of 9 families living in Centoroy, the most numerous is Albakanekovsky: 150 households, 270 men (Russian State Military Archive). It is worth noting that there is a remark in the settlement profile: «the numbers in the statistics are *exaggerated*». When counting the household, the numbers do not fit the family division, which is, in our opinion, due to the low level of education of the people who drew up the data or due to the hasty preparation of the profiles. The data on the amount of weapons in the settlement (400 rifles, 8000 cartridges., 100 revolvers) seem the most dubious because during the revolt in Chechnya and Dagestan lead by the grandson of Shamil, Said-Bek in 1920–1921, a commander of the Red Army A. Todorovskiy mentioned that the rebels were poorly armed: mostly with ancient rifles and swords (Ibragimov & Aliskhanova, 2011).

The section on topography describes the location of settlements and the paths leading to them.

“The instruction on the procedures for mass searching to seize weapons and eliminate counter-revolutionaries and bandits during the operation in Chechen autonomous region” required that the head of the special operations group of JSPD together with the military troop commander shall develop a plan for mass searching prior to the operation, divide the settlement in sectors and send military forces to each of the sectors. The soldiers of the Red Army, as well as the representatives from the Chechen Central Executive Committee and local authorities, shall be dragged to participate in mass searching. All those resisting the operation in any way shall be arrested.

The military force employed in the operation on the disarmament of Chechnya consisted of 6857 people, 130 pieces of heavy artillery, and the JSPD unit comprised 341 men. The operation also made use of aviation and artillery. The territory of the Chechen region was divided into 8 sectors. For instance, a troop of 2517 soldiers, 44 machine guns, 6 mountain guns and 2 light guns were sent to district 4 to disarm the Itum-Kala and Sharoy communities (Russian State Military Archive).

The operation was carried out under the command of the Revolutionary Military Council and the North Caucasus branch of JSPD. In order to solve the disarmament problems, a party commission was created that comprised the chair of Chechen Central Executive Committee T. Eldarkhanov, his deputy D. Arsanukayev, the secretary of Chechen organization bureau M. Eneyev, the secretary of the regional committee of the Leninist Komsomol of Russia D. Midayev.

The operation in the lowland began on August 25th, 1925 with the blockade of Achkhoy settlement by a military unit headed by general Korol. The profile of Achkhoy contains the following data: total population – 5502 people, including 3406 men; total household count – 1304; the chair of local council – Azis Masayev, well-off, inactive. The number of the Komsomol members in the settlement – 14, cell secretary – Azdayev. The spiritual leader of the settlement is mullah Genertuka of Chinnakhoy, aged 70, very popular, opposed to all things Soviet. The community is the residence of sheik Said Ibragimov, an Arabian emigrant and descendant of the prophet Mohammed. He has a large influence in the community where there is a large number of followers of the local reactionist spirituality. The number of quarter mullahs is 16, and all are illustrative of the anti-Soviet attitude in the settlement. The family system of the settlement: 7 families, the most influential include:

1. The Tumsyoy family: 146 households; headed by Amva Arsanukayev, of medium welfare; a murid of the Akhmatuk-Hajji sect (reactionist), at odds with the Chinnakhoy over the authority in the settlement.

2. The Chinnakhoy family: 300 people, headed by Dara Mezhidov, well-off; a former officer in the old army in the rank of lieutenant, hostile to the authorities. A part of the family – about 100 households – are reactionist, the family is at odds with the Tumsyoy over a land dispute.

3. The Antokoloy family: 120 households; headed by Khasa Beybulatov, of medium welfare, belongs to the Deni sect, reactionist (no conflicts with other families).

- 4 The Akki family: 100 households, headed by Gada Dachayev, of medium welfare, loyal to the authorities, no conflicts with other families.

5. The Etikaloy family: 100 households; headed by Kautkhanov, aged 35, well-off, influential, indifferent to the authorities, at odds with the Chinnakhoy family over land.

6. The Centoroy family: 100 households, headed by Shamilkha Khazhikhanov, aged 35, of Kunta Hajji sect, well-off, influential, has connections with the criminal world, well-developed, can read and write in Russian, the family is sympathetic to the Soviet authorities, at odds with the Chinnakhoy family over land.

7. The Edastay family: 100 households, headed by Khazhuyev, aged 32, of Kunta Hajji sect, influential, the family is sympathetic to the Soviet authorities, at odds with the Tumsoy family over land plots (Russian State Military Archive).

The aforesaid signifies that the people of one of the largest settlements in Chechnya at the time of operation were mostly involved in settling land issues and largely loyal or indifferent to the new authorities.

At the settlement meeting in Achkhoy, the residents were proposed to hand over 800 rifles, 1000 cartridges, and 175 revolvers within 2 hours (according to the settlement profile data – author’s note). (Russian State Military Archive). As this demand was not fulfilled in due time, the settlement was bombarded and two women were injured. After that, the residents began handing in the weapons, and the operative group of JSPD started searching. As a result, a total of 228 rifles and 32 revolvers were handed in which implies that the data in the settlement profile were exaggerated.

The residents of Urus-Martan refused to hand in 4000 rifles, 4800 revolvers (by order of JSPD) and extradite sheiks Belu-Hajji and Solsa Khadzhi, and they were bombarded by artillery and aviation for three days. As a result of the settlement bombardment. The Zumsoy community was bombarded for two days (Russian State Military Archive). In order to carry out the disarmament, two-thirds of all forces employed in the operation were sent to this district: four rifle regiments and four cavalry units, the reserve of the commander-in-chief – a cavalry brigade – was also located near this district. It was assumed that counter-revolutionary leaders, sheik Ansaltiyskiy and Nadzhmuddin Gotsinskiy were hiding in the settlements of the Zumsoy community. Trying to catch them faced fierce resistance. The residents of Khakmadoy where Gotsinskiy was hiding were required to extradite him, and some venerable settlement elders were taken hostages, but this had no effect. Then the army and the aviation bombarded the settlement by 22 poods of bombs. Only after that was Nadzhmuddin Gotsinskiy handed over to the authorities. Three days before, similar actions were taken to make sheik Amin Ansaltinskiy give in: the settlement where he was hiding was bombarded by artillery and aviation (Dunlop, 2001).

Overall, 117 settlements out of the total of 242 disarmed settlements underwent aviation and artillery bombardment as well as rifle and machine-gun fire. During the shooting, 6 civilians were killed and 30 were injured. In fighting against “bandits”, 119 homes were exploded, 12 “bandits” killed and 5 injured in shootings. A total of 309 “bandits” were “taken”. Of all arrested 105 people were executed. The authorities took 25.299 rifles, 4319 revolvers, 75.566 cartridges, 1 Lewis machine gun, a Morse device, and a telephone.

The losses of the army were as follows: 5 killed, 8 injured.

The military operation finished on September 12, 1925, and, according to Mikoyan (1999), it was a brilliant action without any bloodshed. A more rational evaluation of the results of the operation was given in the report on the elimination of banditism in Chechen autonomous region by the commander of the North Caucasus military command I. P. Uborevich. Particularly, he pointed out that the main cause of

banditism in Chechnya, especially its highland parts is the extreme poverty of the people. He claimed that in order to eliminate the conditions favoring the activity of counter-revolutionary forces, it was necessary to promptly improve the economic situation of the populace (Russian State Military Archive).

The liberal and democratic policies of T. Eldarkhanov were seen as an obstacle to the socialist changes. After the operation was completed, T. Eldarkhanov was removed from the position of the chair of Chechen Central Executive committee at the plenum session of the same body of September 27, 1925. This action was explained by the “absence of management skills in the Soviet authorities in the center and in the localities”.

7. Conclusion

Our research shows that the military operation on the disarmament of Chechnya was unreasonable. Traditionally, the Chechens are armed, and they use their weapons in extreme cases, and in the post-conflict situation, it guaranteed their security. Due to the operation, the overwhelming majority of the civilians were disarmed, which, provided the weakness of local police force, would make them defenseless against the criminals. During the military operation, punitive actions were taken that led to the deaths among the civilians which shall be seen as a crime against the nation. Moreover, the victorious reports on mass disarmament were soon made irrelevant because of the armed rebellion in Chechnya against forced collectivization.

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