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The Struggle of the Crimean Tatars

PETER J. POTICHNYJ

The Twentieth Party Congress, and especially Khrushchev's famous secret speech, are considered by many to be directly responsible for the vigour with which the non-Russian people of the Soviet Union have begun to voice their accumulated resentment against the injustices suffered at the hands of Great-Russian chauvinists. Of all the non-Russian groups, the Crimean Tatars have organized the most vigorous protest — a protest supported by the fact that other deported nationalities have been rehabilitated, permitted to return to their former territories and granted once again autonomous status within the Soviet federation.¹

Because of the publicity which surrounded both the deportation, partial rehabilitation and present condition of the Crimean Tatars, it is sometimes forgotten that the story of their suffering began long before Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev came on the scene. As Walter Kolarz observed, "the liquidation of the Crimean Tatars as an ethnic group and their removal from their Crimean homeland by the Soviet government was but the last act of a long process which had started when the Empress Catherine II established a Russian Protectorate over the Crimea in 1774 and annexed it in 1783."² Thus, in order to place the struggle of the Crimean Tatars in proper perspective, one must recall briefly the history of this unfortunate and persecuted nationality.

Russian-Tatar Relations

The tragedy of the Crimean Tatars began immediately with their conquest by the Russians. The country which these people had built and which had flourished from the fifteenth century onward began to decline rapidly because of the gradual exodus of the Tatars. Between 1784 and 1790, out of a total population of one million, about 300,000 Tatars left the peninsula for Turkey.³ This voluntary emigration was supplemented by forcible transfers instituted by the Russian government under the pretext of defense requirements. Thus, a large number of native inhabitants were transferred from the sea coast or strategically

¹ It should be pointed out that the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, situated on the Volga with its capital city of Kazan and representing one of the constituent units of the Russian Federation (RSFSR), is not the home of all Tatar peoples of the USSR.

² Walter Kolarz, *Russia and Her Colonies* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1955), p. 76.

³ See the article on the Crimean ASSR in *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, first edition, XXXV (1937), 279-324.

important positions where they lived to other areas in the interior of the Crimean peninsula where they could be better controlled. The years 1807 to 1811, the time of the Russo-Turkish war, witnessed a further outflow of the Crimean Tatar population. In the years 1859-1863, during and after the Crimean War, still another large emigration took place.⁴ This large exodus of Tatars from the Crimean peninsula reduced the native population to 34.1 per cent of the total by 1897.⁵

The Tatar migration was a direct result of the oppressive rule the Russian authorities had exercised over the Tatars from the time of the annexation of their peninsula to the period immediately preceding and following the Crimean War. It was at that time the idea arose of removing the Tatars altogether from the Crimea. Robert Conquest quotes an article from volume XXXV of the 1937 edition of the *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia* stating that "in the autumn of 1854 there followed a decree of the Minister of War to the effect that the Emperor has ordered all inhabitants of the Muslim faith living in the coastal area to be removed from the coast into inland provinces."⁶ This policy was suggested by Prince Menshikov, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian military. The government deemed it too difficult an undertaking, and so only the inhabitants of several villages were forcibly removed to the Kursk region.⁷

On the other hand, however, because of its mild climate and long-established horticultural traditions, it was easier for the tsarist administration to promote migration to the Crimea. The new settlers who came included Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Germans, as well as Bulgarians, Czechs and even Estonians. Although strongly supported by the government, this colonization effort did not have a serious impact until the end of the nineteenth century.

By 1917 only slightly over one-fourth of the total population of the peninsula were Crimean Tatars. Russians accounted for nearly 50 per cent, while Ukrainians and other nationalities made up the remaining 25 per cent.⁸ Between 1926 and 1936 the proportion of Tatars in the

⁴ Some scholars estimate that over 150,000 Tatars legally left the Crimea between 1859 and 1863, while a large number (at least several thousand more) departed illegally. See Edige Kirimal, *Der nationale Kampf der Krimturken* (Emsdetten: Lechte, 1952), pp. 1-2 and 7-8; Kolarz, pp. 76-77. Robert Conquest has convincingly shown that from 1860 to 1862 about 231,177 Tatars left the Crimea, *The Nation Killers* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 57.

⁵ V. Stanley Vardys, "The Case of Crimean Tatars," *Russian Review*, XXX, 2 (April 1971), 101.

⁶ Conquest, p. 56.

⁷ Kolarz, p. 77.

⁸ See "Iz istorii krymskikh tatar (Po materialam S. P. Pisareva)," *Politicheskii Dnevnik* (Samizdat publication) (April 1970), p. 30. Hereafter referred to as "Iz istorii. . . ." An important document entitled "Obrashchenie 60,000 krymskikh tatar Presidiumu 24 S'ezda KPSS i vsem delegatam s'ezda" (probably

Crimea was further reduced to 23.1 per cent.⁹ In 1936 Russians composed 43.5 per cent and Ukrainians 10 per cent of the population of the Crimean ASSR,¹⁰ while other large groups included the Jews (7.4 per cent) and the Germans (5.7 per cent). In short, according to the first edition of the *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia*, the Tatars comprised only 202,000 of the total 875,000 inhabitants of the autonomous republic.¹¹ More recent population changes are discussed below.

The Revolution of 1917 and the Struggle for Nationhood

The fall of the Russian Empire raised hopes among the Crimean Tatars of regaining a measure of self-government. This objective, however, was not easily achieved in the confused situation of World War I and the Revolution. The strategic position of the Crimea made it a battleground for nationalist Tatars, Germans, Bolsheviks, the Ukrainian governments in Kiev, and the White Russian armies. On 5 May 1917 a "National Assembly" at Simferopol proclaimed the autonomy of the Crimean Tatars. In October, a *Kurultai* (assembly) proclaimed a Crimean Democratic Republic. This creation however was rapidly suppressed by the Communists, and Chlebiev, its president, was shot in February 1918. Under the well-known Hungarian Communist, Bela Kun, a Crimean Revolutionary Committee instituted a reign of terror which was met by a determined partisan movement. Lenin opposed this policy and in 1921 an amnesty was proclaimed.¹² Between 1917 and 1920 it was uncertain whether the Crimea would be incorporated with the Ukraine or the Russian Republic. The various Ukrainian national governments asserted their claims to the Crimea, and even Communist Ukrainian leaders were loathe to relinquish Ukrainian demands, if only because of their concern with maintaining the overall territorial integrity of the Ukraine.¹³ From the standpoint of the Crimean Tatars, however, there were distinct advantages associated with not being subordinated to the Ukrainian Republic. Under the conditions existing at the time, more autonomy was to be enjoyed from a government located afar. At the same time, inclusion of the Crimea within the Russian Republic facilitated direct Russian control over the northern coast of the Black

of March 1971) lists thirty-two other documents bearing thousands of signatures of Crimean Tatars and addressed to various State and Party institutions and other Soviet mass organizations. Most of them, unfortunately, are not available in the West.

⁹ Kolarz, p. 79.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Vardys, 102.

¹² Kirimal, p. 28.

¹³ Majstrenko, "Natsional'no-vyzvol'nyi rukh kryms'kykh tatar i ikh vzaiemyny z Ukrainoiu," *Ukrains'kyi Samostiinyk*, Nos. 7-8 (1971), pp. 561-62.

Sea and thus over the Ukraine. Hence Lenin advanced both Tatar and Russian interests when he insisted, against the wishes of local Communists, on the establishment of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Russian Federation.¹⁴ There was reason, therefore, for the Crimean Tatars to consider Lenin a benefactor. "This administrative structure provided the Tatars especially in the twenties, with a good measure of cultural-linguistic autonomy."¹⁵

However, collectivization and the overall shift in the Soviet nationality policy that took place in the late 1920's destroyed the promising national renaissance of the Crimean Tatars (which grew out of an important pre-revolutionary Tatar modernizing nationalist movement). Waves of purges struck the Crimean national leaders. As early as 1928 Veli Ibrahim, the top Crimean leader, was executed for "bourgeois nationalism," and several thousand Crimean Tatars were also executed or deported.¹⁶ In the following years Soviet authorities continued a policy of repression and intimidation. As one eyewitness relates, during the forced collectivization of 1929-1930 some 30,000 to 40,000 Crimean Tatars were deported either to the Urals or Siberia, where many of them perished.¹⁷ Many thousands more died during the famine of 1931-34 which resulted from the collectivization of agriculture.¹⁸ Crimean political leaders protested, but in vain. Mehmed Kubay, who replaced Veli Ibrahim, openly stated that "Moscow destroys the Republic of Crimea, carries away all its natural riches without giving bread to the starving population of the peninsula."¹⁹ For this act he was removed, as was his successor Ilias Tarakhan; and the head of government, Ibrahim Samedin, fell to the Yezhov mass terror of 1936-1938.

Throughout the late thirties several campaigns were aimed at destroying "the roots of nationalism" among the Tatar's population, resulting in mass purges among scientists, educators and writers.²⁰ This destruction of native cultural and political leaders was followed, here as elsewhere in non-Russian areas, by a policy of radical Russification. In 1938 the Cyrillic alphabet was introduced and a large part of Crimean Tatar literature was declared non-proletarian and non-Soviet. All of these undertakings were accompanied by large numbers of victims among the Crimean Tatars. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that news of the outbreak of war with Germany and the arrival of German forces in the

¹⁴ Kirimal, p. 287.

¹⁵ Vardys, 102.

¹⁶ Kirimal, p. 292 and sources cited in his footnote 1229.

¹⁷ G. Aleksandrov, "Istreblenie Krymskikh Tatar," *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik* (Paris, March 1950), pp. 51-52.

¹⁸ Kirimal, p. 294.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

Crimea at the beginning of November 1941 was openly welcomed by many Tatars — although they were not alone in this respect.

Collaboration

As Walter Kolarz has correctly pointed out, it is indeed “quite difficult to say to what extent the Crimean Tatars remained loyal to the Soviet regime and to what extent they betrayed it when living under German occupation.”²¹ Because the deportation of Crimean Tatars from the peninsula and the liquidation of the Crimean Tatar ASSR was justified on the grounds of collective disloyalty, it is necessary to address this problem directly. As stated, grounds for collaboration existed from the outset.

Contemporary Crimean Tatar leaders admit that approximately 0.5 per cent of the population was involved in anti-Soviet activities.²² Edige Kirimal talks in his book about six battalions of guard units which were organized at the beginning of 1942 from volunteers and former Tatar Soviet soldiers who had been captured by the Germans and kept in prisoner-of-war camps in Simferopol, Kherson and Nikolaev.²³ In addition, there were small defense units organized by the inhabitants of Tatar villages whose number is not easily determined. Kirimal estimates that from 1942 to 1944 between 8,000 and 20,000 men were actively involved in the fight against Soviet partisans.²⁴

Where the truth lies is difficult to assess. It is possible that Soviet, German and Crimean Tatar émigré nationalist sources all exaggerate the number of disloyal Tatars — the Germans for propaganda reasons, the émigrés to show the strength of the nationalist movement, and the Soviets to justify their repressive measures against the Crimean Tatar population. The official Soviet statement on the matter offers no statistics. On 25 June 1946 the Secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, Bakhmurov, explained the repressive measures against the Tatars in the following way: many Crimean Tatars instigated by German agents, joined German volunteer detachments and waged armed struggle against Red Army units; they set up saboteur gangs to fight against the Soviet power in the rear; the bulk of the Crimean Tatar population did not offer opposition to the traitors.²⁵

What constitutes “many” Tatars is vague as far as precise figures are concerned. Certainly “many” Crimean Tatars formed partisan units to fight the invading Germans. Quite often, as Soviet Crimean Tatar

²¹ Kolarz, p. 80.

²² “Iz istorii . . .,” p. 32.

²³ Kirimal, p. 305.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Robert Conquest is inclined to agree with Kirimal. Conquest, p. 64.

²⁵ See Kolarz, footnote on p. 80, or Conquest, p. 47.

sources show, those who fought against the Germans were treated with suspicion by the Soviet partisan command in the Crimea and quite often were liquidated.²⁶ Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that just as “many” (probably even more) Russians worked hand in glove with the Germans, as testified to by many documentary sources.²⁷ But Russian collaboration was overshadowed by Russian heroism in the defense of Sevastopol, while the remnants of the once famous warriors of the Crimean khans, though contributing disproportionately to the anti-German struggle (according to Pisarev), had to pay the supreme penalty for the sins of some of their members. The decree of June 1946 also confirmed the abolition of the Crimean ASSR and legalized the change of the Autonomous Republic into an ordinary administrative *oblast* of the Russian Republic.²⁸ Later, in 1954, the *oblast* was transferred from the Russian to Ukrainian Republic as Russia’s “gift” to the Ukraine on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Pereiaslav between the Ukraine and Russia.

This act opened a new chapter in the triangular relations among the Tatars, Ukrainians and Russians. The Tatars had played an important role as allies of the Ukrainian Cossacks in the revolution of 1648-1654 and, at one time or another, supported Ukrainian interests *vis-à-vis* Poland and Russia. Yet they were also considered in Ukrainian historiography and popular lore to have engaged in plunder and destruction of Ukrainian communities. However, both Ukrainians and Tatars had suffered a common incorporation into the Russian Empire. Both nationalities thus shared certain common relationships with the Russians; but at the same time there always existed grounds for conflict between the two. By transferring the Crimea to Ukrainian jurisdiction, the Soviet leadership made Ukrainians responsible for the Crimean Tatar problem whether they liked it or not. Today this fact is clearly recognized by both the Crimean Tatars and the Ukrainian dissenters in the USSR.²⁹

²⁶ “Iz istorii . . . ,” p. 31. The most important source of the Crimean Tatar participation in the war against the Germans which is referred to in various Crimean Tatar protest documents “Dokumenty ob uchastii krymskotatarskogo naroda v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941-45gg” in six volumes and two photographic albums, unfortunately, is not available in the West. The letter of former partisans — the Crimean Tatars is also unavailable.

²⁷ Kirimal, footnote 1289 on p. 305 and footnote 1317 on p. 314.

²⁸ Conquest, p. 47.

²⁹ See especially the letters of Iu. B. Osmanov of 21 December 1967 to Brezhnev and the Politburo “Prodolzhenie Istorii” in which he attacks both Russian chauvinism and Ukrainian nationalism. The letter, “Krym-arena razgula velikoderzhavnogo shovinizma i ukrainskogo natsionalizma,” with 32,000 signatures, is not available in the West. Among Ukrainian dissenters, Viacheslav Chornovil, Sviatoslav Karavans’kyi and others expressed strong support of Tatar demands for return to the Crimea. See: V. Chornovil, *Lykho z Rozumu* (Paris, 1968), p. 146; S. Karavans’kyi, “Petition to Soviet of Nationalities,” *Ukrainian Quarterly*, 24 (Summer 1968) and *The New Leader*, 6, 15 January 1968. The *Chronicle of Current Events*, No. 11, tells of the arbitrary actions of the local

Deportation

In April 1944 the Red Army recaptured the Crimea from the Germans, and a month later the NKVD moved in. During the night of 18-19 May 1944 the Crimean Tatars were given only five to fifteen minutes to collect what belongings they could carry (in some cases not even food was allowed), and then loaded into freight cars and deported to special reservations in Central Asia (mainly Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) and Eastern Siberia.³⁰ No exceptions were allowed; even "members of the small pro-Soviet partisan movement, including its leader, Khaurullakh," and later, those Tatars who at the time were serving in the Soviet Army, were banished from the Crimea.³¹ Thus, a population of approximately 250,000 was made homeless and transferred great distances at a very high cost in human life. "This deportation, which seems to have been carried out with an accompaniment of much killing and brutality, was supervised by Marshal Voroshilov,"³² who in 1954, as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, stated that the Crimea was strategically important and that its transfer to the Ukrainian Republic showed Russia's trust in its Ukrainian partner.³³

Casualties

The casualties the Crimean Tatars suffered were indeed great. Crimean Tatar sources quote the figure of 46.3 per cent deaths in the deportations and eighteen months following. This figure generally is accepted by such prominent Russians as Academician Sakharov and defended by General Grigorenko and other dissenters.³⁴ Some Crimean Tatar documents refer to the deportation of the whole population as genocide. During the 1968 Crimean investigations and trials, these assertions were contrasted with official KGB reports which show a smaller number

authorities and police authorities on the homes of Crimean Tatar returnees. The reports also quote protests made by Russian and Ukrainian workers on collective farms in the Crimea against the inhuman persecutions of their Tatar neighbours.

³⁰ Conquest, pp. 105-107. Edige Kriminal claims that Stalin was planning to remove the Tatars from the Crimea in 1941 but that war with Germany interfered with these plans. Kirimal, p. 325.

³¹ A Crimean Tatar source puts the number serving in the Soviet Armed Forces at 20,000. "Iz istorii . . .," p. 32.

³² Conquest, p. 105.

³³ Vardys, 103.

³⁴ See P. G. Grigorenko's address in English translation in *Problems of Communism*, XVII, 4 (July-August 1968), 94. See also "Otkrytoe pismo Russkikh druzei krymskikh tatar," *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, 28 March 1969, pp. 3, 8. Also, A. E. Kosterin, "Uvazhaemye tovarishchi," a letter addressed probably to the Politburo. See also P. G. Grigorenko, ed., *Sbornik "Pamiati Alekseia Evgrafovicha Kosterina"* (Moscow, November 1968). The text of this document was smuggled out of the USSR and published by the Flammish Committee with Eastern Europe and reprinted by *Posev*, No. 4 (1969), pp. 47-61.

of deaths than those claimed by the Crimean Tatars. According to one of the two key KGB documents, "Of the people from the Crimea who were living under the 'special settlement' regime, 13,592 died between May 1944 and January 1945, to January 1st, 1946, 13,183 people died, of which 2,562 were men, 4,525 women, and 6,096 children under 16."³⁵

These figures are certainly an underestimate. Moreover, they do not take into account all those who died during the journey. Basing themselves on the mutual census and registration, Tatars speak of heavy casualties on the trains, in some of which no food was available on journeys lasting not less than eleven days, and often more. "Entire trains are reported as abandoning the journey after the death of all the deportees aboard."³⁶ Nevertheless, as one Crimean Tatar defendant at the Tashkent trial in 1969 stated, even the 10 per cent figure implied by the first KGB document is evidence of a terrible crime — proof of genocide.³⁷

Rehabilitation

On 5 September 1967 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR decreed that "the citizens of Tatar nationality who formerly lived in Crimea" were henceforth considered rehabilitated.³⁸ The decree was based on

³⁵ Conquest carefully analyzed the two documents as well as all of the available information on the subject and observed: "the first K.G.B. document states that the Crimean deportees started to reach Uzbekistan on 29 May 1944 and had in the main arrived by 8 June 1944. Figures at the beginning of July 1944 were: 35,750 families, with a total of 134,742 members comprising of 21,619 men, 47,537 women, and 65,568 children under 16. The document adds that from 1 January 1945 to 1 January 1946 death accounted to 13,183, comprising 2,562 men, 4,525 women, and 6,096 children." Conquest adds that "General Grigorenko, commenting on this document, notes that the 151,424 figure of July 1944 had lost 16,682 dead by January 1945 in spite of reinforcement of 818 families, and that if we subtract the estimated numbers of the latter from the January 1945 total alive, the deaths come out 3,468 higher — i.e., 20,150 for the first six months. Adding the 13,183 for the following year, we have a total of 33,333 deaths. This figure is thus an official one of around 22 per cent dead." Conquest further points out that a second document, "from the Deputy Head of the First Special Department of Uzbek K.G.B., dated 5 February 1968, states that no exact figures are available of deportees, but cites a report on the economy of the N.K.V.D. 'special settlements' giving deaths there from May-June 1944 to 1 January 1945 as 13,592, and saying that this is 9.1 per cent dead. That is, the figure is based on the 151,424 arrivals in Uzbekistan. The year 1945 is not covered, but if we add the 13,592 of Document II to the 1945 deaths of Document I we get 26,775 — a total of about 18 per cent — i.e., lower than the other 'official' figure, but in the same region." Conquest, pp. 161-62.

³⁶ Conquest, p. 162.

³⁷ Peter Reddaway, ed., *Uncensored Russia: Protest and Dissent in the Soviet Union* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972), p. 262.

³⁸ See *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, No. 37, 8 September 1967. Already in 1955 an unpublished decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet stated that the Crimean Tatars were "removed from the conditions of Special Settlement," and freed from the control of MVD but that they had no "right to the

the argument that the "groundless charges" that all Crimean Tatars had "collaborated with the Germans" must be withdrawn, especially inasmuch as "a new generation in the meantime has taken up working and political life."³⁹ The act of rehabilitation meant a lifting of all decisions which contained indiscriminate charges against the Tatars; reestablishment of all the rights and privileges of Soviet citizenship in public and political life; and the reestablishment of radio programs and newspapers in the Tatar national language. The decree, however, failed to provide for the return of the Tatars to the Crimea. Instead, it assured them that the councils of ministers of the union republics in which they had "taken root" were instructed to "continue rendering help and assistance" in their "economic and cultural construction, taking account of their national interests and peculiarities." Thus, of all deported peoples, only the Tatars and Volga Germans were denied the right to national autonomy. This decision did not discourage the Tatars. On the contrary, in a display of courage and determination unequalled by larger nationalities, the Tatars organized themselves for a long and difficult struggle aimed at resurrecting their national autonomy and returning to their Crimean homeland.

Prior to the act of rehabilitation the Tatars had started gathering signatures and petitioning various highly placed Soviet politicians in writing and through delegations. But their survival as a nationality was based as much upon their determination, courage and organization, as upon changes in the political climate in the Soviet Union. The death of Stalin and subsequent de-Stalinization did lift oppressive controls and individual harassment from the Tatars. For example, they no longer had to report every two weeks to the local militia.⁴⁰ Also, beginning in 1956 an attempt was made to revive their cultural life, first in Uzbekistan where they lived in a more or less compact mass, and then gradually in other areas of the USSR. In the same year, in Tashkent, Uzbek authorities began publishing *Lenin Baigary* (Leninist Banner), a newspaper in the literary Crimean Tatar language which, despite its politically orthodox line, played an important part in the Crimean Tatar revival.⁴¹ The establishment of the Crimean Tatar division in the Uzbek Gafur Guliam Publishing House in Tashkent was another important event in the life of Crimean Tatars. It was through the efforts of this division, managed by two poets, Cherkez Ali and Seitumer Emin, that a number of literary

return of the property confiscated at the deportation . . . [or] the right to return to the places from which they were deported." See translation of the decree in Conquest, p. 185.

³⁹ See *Vedomosti*. . . .

⁴⁰ "Iz istorii . . . ," p. 31.

⁴¹ Vardys, 104. As late as 1966 the Crimean Tatar language was described as an "unwritten language" in *Iazyki Narodov SSSR*, II (Moscow, 1966) cited in Conquest, footnote 5, chapter 12, p. 217.

works and children's books were published. Contemporary authors as well as known writers of the twenties and thirties are represented in published selections of this division. A third important cultural institution in Uzbekistan is the Department of Crimean Tatar Language and Literature at the Nizami Pedagogical Institute in Tashkent. This department prepares teachers of the Crimean Tatar language for secondary schools.

The importance of these establishments for the cultural and political renaissance of the Crimean Tatars cannot be overemphasized. The newspaper not only functions as a forum for cultural and social activities but also as a very potent tool in the struggle for Tatar national rights. In its pages information has been systematically published about Tatar contributions to the war against the Germans, in this way helping to clear the Crimean Tatars of the accusation of collaboration and treason.⁴² Thus, entirely within the permitted framework of the official line, the Crimean Tatars started receiving more balanced information about events in the Crimea during World War II and, at the same time, moral fortitude and determination to rectify once and for all the unjust punishment meted out to the entire population for the sins of some of its members. One can see in the *samizdat* documents how horribly unjust (in the light of the above facts) the policy of the Soviet government has appeared to a new generation of Crimean Tatars born in exile.

To strive for the future one must first remember the past. And here the publishing activities were of particular importance to Crimean Tatars. Their ability to organize themselves initially was also evident in the existence of numerous dance ensembles and choirs which preserved and perpetuated Crimean Tatar folklore both in live performances and on record. But it took the Crimean Tatars a decade to organize themselves for political action.

The Fight to Return Home

In 1964 came the beginnings of such an organization. Its aims were to gain political rehabilitation for the Tatars, regain their Crimean homeland and reestablish their "status of administrative autonomy." The visible organization was composed of Crimean Tatar representatives elected by Tatar settlements and maintained by them in Moscow for the purpose of lobbying with the government. This group, of course, was not official because the Soviet government does not recognize such special interest representation. Nevertheless, the group continues to exist to this day despite increasing harassment by the Soviet establishment. For a long time, this group published an unofficial information

⁴² For a different assessment see P. G. Grigorenko, p. 95.

bulletin, and in its activities with the government was able to rely on information from all the Tatar settlements including statistics dealing with casualties during deportation, and discrimination against the Crimean Tatars both in their present settlements and in the Crimea. The mode of electing and maintaining the representatives is the best indicator of the organic ties between the Crimean Tatar leadership and their population. It is quite difficult even for the Soviet leadership to deny legitimacy to Tatar representatives, especially as their demands are always strongly supported by written petitions and the personal signatures of thousands of people. In this way the Crimean Tatars were able to create enough pressure at home and publicity abroad to be taken seriously by the top Soviet leadership.

Georgadze, the Secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Andropov, Chairman of the KGB and member of the CPSU Politburo, Rudenko, the Prosecutor General, and Shchelokov, the Minister of Public Order, received the Crimean Tatar representatives on 21 July 1967 and promised them political rehabilitation while at the same time hinting at further concessions. It was at this meeting that Andropov supposedly stated that the Crimean Tatar movement could continue, but only if it did not overstep legal bounds. Most importantly, the Tatar delegates were told that their problem was being considered by the authorities and was still on the agenda of the Politburo. This news raised hopes among the Tatars that their demands to return to the Crimea would also be granted. This feeling was further reinforced when the Uzbek authorities evidently intimated in 1968 that the Tatars could return to the Crimea, but that resettlement would be conducted in a planned manner and arrangements would be made jointly by the authorities of Uzbekistan and the Crimean *Oblast*.

However, this turned out to be an empty promise. By the end of 1968 only 148 families had been allowed to return to the Crimea, and it then became clear to all concerned that "the legal and orderly way" of returning to the Crimea was nothing but a bureaucratic subterfuge to discourage, if not completely bar, the Tatars' return. Impatiently, the Tatars began to move to the Crimea without government permission. The Crimean authorities turned them back in a brutal and cruel fashion.⁴³ The Tatars claim that some 12,000 people were ejected from the Crimea in this manner. It is likely that the local administration, on its own authority would not undertake to persecute the returning Tatars in this manner, and complaints to higher powers did not help. In a peti-

⁴³ See *Khronika Tekushchikh Sobytiï . . . and Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, 5 October 1968. The struggle of the Crimean Tatars to return to Crimea is very well told by Borys Lewytzkyj in his excellent study *Politische Opposition in der Sowjetunion 1960-1972* (München: Deutschen Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH and Co. Kg, 1972).

tion addressed to the Central Committee and Supreme Soviet, the Crimean Tatar representatives bitterly complained about this continued repression, noted that those who tried to return were persecuted, and observed that *agents provocateurs* were being used to destroy Tatar solidarity and to suppress their movement.⁴⁴ They also complained that the rehabilitation decree of 5 September 1967 implicitly sanctioned their deportation to Uzbekistan and other republics. It was in this letter that the Tatar representatives rejected the argument of the Soviet authorities that the Crimea was overpopulated, pointing out that emigration from the Ukraine to the Crimea continued unabated and that, furthermore, it also made economic sense to have the Tatars back in their homeland. If their legitimate appeals were disregarded, they indicated, they would have no recourse but to appeal to world opinion.

At this point one must backtrack briefly to indicate what happened to the population of the Crimea following the removal of the Tatars. In 1945 and 1946 the exiled Tatars were replaced by Ukrainians who had been forcibly removed from that part of Galicia retained by Poland.⁴⁵ It should be noted that one of the key officials the Crimean Tatars were petitioning from 1967 on, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Nikolai Podgorny (a Ukrainian), was the very official responsible for the exchange of Polish and Ukrainian populations at the end of the war. It may be surmised that these Ukrainians, forcibly evacuated from their homes in Poland, may have been especially fearful of a second displacement following the return of the Tatars. As a group, these Ukrainians were especially aware of their national identity because of their historic struggle against the Poles and their resentment of the Russians. This factor, combined with the satisfaction given in 1954 to historic Ukrainian territorial claims to the Crimea, may well have provided grounds for charges by the Crimean Tatars of Ukrainian nationalist chauvinism.⁴⁶

It should be pointed out that according to the 1959 census, Russians constituted a large majority of the population of the Crimea (71.4 per

⁴⁴ *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, 5 October 1968.

⁴⁵ *Entsiklopediia Ukrainozhavstva*, II, 3 (Paris-New York: Shevchenko Scientific Society, 1959), 1179.

⁴⁶ For example the Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia praises the liquidation of the Crimean Khanate by Russia as a progressive event and praises the unification of the Crimea with the Ukraine as a "historical act" which "shows the limitless faith and love of Russian and Ukrainian people," and "the historic ties of the Crimea with the Ukraine." *Ukrains'ka Radians'ka Entsiklopediia*, VII (Kiev: Academy of Sciences, 1959-1965), 382 and 391. The volume on the Crimean *oblast* of the multi-volume *Istoriia Mist i Sil Ukrains'koi RSR* published by the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR echoes this analysis. The Ukrainian scholarly publications outside the USSR, on the contrary, do present a more objective treatment of the Crimean-Tatar question. See *Entsiklopediia Ukrainozhavstva* cited above and *Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopaedia*, I-II (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963-1971).

cent), although their relative strength declined to 67.3 per cent in 1970. This change was caused by a large emigration of Ukrainians to the Crimea in the 1960's, raising the number of Ukrainians from 268,000 to 481,000 (22.3 to 26.5 per cent of the total population).⁴⁷ However, the Russians inhabiting the Crimea have historically constituted the main threat to Tatar interests. The circumstances associated with their original settlement as a conquering force in the Crimea, and their oppression of the Tatars during the wars with Turkey, the Revolution and Civil War, and then during collectivization, impressed on them attitudes resembling those of the French *colons* in Algeria.⁴⁸ These attitudes remain to this day a potent influence on ethnic relations in the Crimea.

Overall population growth in the Crimea appears to be part of a broader process of southward migration in the USSR. Although Soviet and non-Soviet demographers alike argue that this movement is largely spontaneous and unplanned, it cannot be denied that the Soviet government has a practical as well as programmatic interest in promoting "correct" patterns of ethnic migration.⁴⁹ From the Tatar standpoint the migration of Russians and Ukrainians very definitely has been a deliberate act on the part of the Soviet government, indicating that a labour shortage has in fact existed in the Crimea, and rendering hypocritical the official assertion that no room is left for the Crimean Tatars in their homeland.

The Tatars' petition to the Central Committee and Supreme Soviet represented a new and more militant phase in their struggle to return to the Crimea. The prevarications of the authorities were one force propelling the Crimean Tatars in this direction. Another factor probably was the link between the Crimean Tatars and the other dissent movements in the USSR which appears to have come into being at this time. Among those who took on the task of fighting for Tatar rights was Alexei Kosterin, a Russian writer with a long and outstanding record as a defender of deported nationalities. Upon Kosterin's death in November 1968, the fight was taken up by a Ukrainian, Major General P. Grigo-

⁴⁷ Roman Szporluk, "The Nations of the U.S.S.R. in 1970," *Survey*, No. 4 (81) (Autumn 1971), p. 89.

⁴⁸ It was Ivan Dzyuba who first pointed out this resemblance. Ivan Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968).

⁴⁹ Szporluk has convincingly shown elsewhere that "Russian immigration to the Ukraine, Uzbekistan, etc., is officially encouraged, sponsored and organized." Roman Szporluk, "Dissent and the Non-Russian Nationalities," in P. J. Potichnyj, ed., *Dissent in the Soviet Union* (Hamilton: McMaster University, 1972). See also V. I. Naulko, "Heohrafichne rozmishchennia Narodiv v URSR," (Kiev: Academy of Sciences, 1966). For an excellent treatment of the Soviet nationality policy see Borys Lewytskyj, *Die sowjetische Nationalitäten politik nach Stalins Tod, 1953-1970* (München: Ukrainische Freie Universität, 1970), and his "Sovetskij Narod," *Osterreichische Osthefte*, XV, 2 (May 1973).

renko. Such prominent dissenters as A. D. Sakharov, P. Iakir, A. A. Volpin and many others also came to the support of Tatar demands. However, it was Grigorenko, more than anybody else, who stimulated a stronger expression of Tatar feelings when on 17 March 1968 he proclaimed in Moscow, on the occasion of A. Kosterin's birthday, that the Tatars should "stop begging" and "take back that which was taken from you unlawfully."⁵⁰

The Tatars, who felt that their more subdued efforts had failed, followed Grigorenko's advice and began to organize demonstrations in Tashkent, Andizhan, Bekabad and Fergana — the areas of Tatar concentration. But the largest of the demonstrations took place on 21 April 1968 in Chirchik, a small town not far from Tashkent. The Crimean Tatars gathered there in large numbers to celebrate the ninety-eighth birthday of Lenin, in this way underscoring once more the legitimacy of their demands to return to the Crimea and reestablish the Crimean Tatar Autonomous Republic (created originally upon Lenin's orders). The local authorities to whom the Tatars applied for permission to hold the meeting not only refused but called out the police and military forces in order to suppress it. When the Tatars persisted they were attacked again and again by police forces wielding high pressure hoses, poisonous liquid spray and truncheons. The Crimean Tatars hold the Russian Secretary of the *gorkom* *Iakubov*, Major-General Sharliev, the Uzbek commandant of the local troops, and the Russian Second Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party, Lomonosov directly responsible for the Chirchik repressions. About 300 Crimean Tatars were arrested, but most were released soon thereafter. In the end only twelve persons were charged with "breach of public order" and sentenced from six months to two-and-a-half years in labour camps. The majority of those prosecuted did not even take part in the demonstrations.⁵¹

It was clear that the demonstration was used as a pretext for proceeding against a select and potentially dangerous (from the Soviet point of view) group of individual Tatar leaders. At the same time the Soviet authorities, in a time-honoured method worthy of the "black hundreds," attempted to isolate the Tatars from potential supporters among other nationalities by spreading wild rumours about Crimean Tatar activities. It appears, for example, that the Samarkand local authorities were guilty of spreading rumours that the Crimean Tatars had desecrated an Armenian cemetery.⁵² The reaction of the Tatars to this repression was instantaneous. Ayder Bariev, a Tatar tractor driver, flew to Moscow to protest, but his telegram to Prosecutor General R. Rudenko went un-

⁵⁰ *Problems of Communism* (July-August 1968), pp. 93-95.

⁵¹ Conquest, p. 204.

⁵² *Ibid.*

answered.⁵³ A petition from the Tatar representatives in Moscow addressed to the Politbureau, Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and Prosecutor General demanding the release of people arrested in Chirchik also evoked no response. The government reacted in a different manner. Tatars living in Moscow were rounded up and deported by baggage train back to Central Asia. Some eight hundred were expelled from Moscow in this fashion.⁵⁴ The Moscow Assistant Prosecutor, Stasenkov, informed the Tatars that their question had been decided “fully and finally” and that there would be no more concessions.⁵⁵ In his letter to the Prosecutor, General Grigorenko accused him of failing to fulfill his constitutional duties not only by not checking on illegal policy actions in this case, but by not even receiving complaints in the first place.⁵⁶

It thus came to pass that the Crimean Tatars had to appeal to world public opinion sooner than they may have anticipated. Besieged from all sides, the 118 representatives of Tatar communities issued their appeal to “World Public Opinion” on 21 July 1968 calling again for help to bring about a return to their homeland.⁵⁷ More petitions and arrests followed. As Vardys rightly points out, “the Kremlin had apparently decided that the Tatars needed to be restrained by decapitating their leadership.”⁵⁸ Not only Crimean Tatar leaders but also their supporters among other dissenters were silenced. The most vociferous and articulate, Major General Grigorenko, was arrested, tried for “slandering the Soviet Union” and sent to an insane asylum — a procedure reserved for particularly troublesome political dissenters under both the tsarist and communist leadership. The appeal on 22 May 1969 by Grigorenko and fifty-five leading Moscow figures to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights fell on deaf ears. The decision to proceed with prosecution against the Tatars was not changed.

That the Kremlin tried to control the Tatar movement by removing their leaders is shown best by the trials held in 1969 and 1970. The most well known is the one staged in Tashkent from 1 July to 5 August 1969.⁵⁹ The trial of the “Tashkent Ten,” as it is also known, involved the leading Crimean Tatars accused of anti-Soviet propaganda (in their

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ General Volkov, head of the Moscow branch of MVD (MOOP at that time) was in charge of this operation.

⁵⁵ Conquest, p. 204.

⁵⁶ *Posev*, January 1969.

⁵⁷ The appeal revealed that since 1959 more than 200 Crimean Tatars had been sentenced to up to seven years imprisonment “although they have always acted within the framework of the Soviet Constitution.” Conquest, p. 205.

⁵⁸ Vardys, 107.

⁵⁹ Detailed information on the trial including extracts from documents, KGB archives, and a reconstructed transcript of the trial is contained in the *samizdat* publication known as *Tashkentskii protses* which is in possession of the Alexander Herzen Foundation, Amsterdam.

underground publications and petitions they had referred to Soviet policy toward the Tatars as “racist” and the forced deportation of the Tatars as “genocide”). The defendants pleaded not guilty to the charges of slander but all were convicted. One of the ten, Rollan K. Kadiev, a promising young nuclear physicist, was sentenced with three others to three years in a labour camp. The remainder received one-year sentences but were released because they had been in prison before the trial.

Thus, the Tatar’s struggle to regain their homeland has been unsuccessful. Although under severe pressure from the Soviet authorities, they have not given up the fight. Their plight is becoming increasingly known not only in the Soviet Union but also abroad. Within the USSR the Tatars succeeded in gaining support among dissenters of all nationalities, especially among Ukrainian dissidents who, although fighting for their own rights, recognize the suffering of the Crimean Tatars and their right to regain their homeland. This attitude of liberally-minded Ukrainians is of vital importance since the Crimea is administratively a part of the Ukraine. Russian dissidents, and particularly other Turkic people, are also aware of the struggle of the Crimean Tatars and watch it with interest and sympathy. The wave of purges in the national republics is strong evidence that the nationality problem in all its forms is very much alive, and that the Tatars are not an isolated case, even though they have gone further than all other non-Russian groups in giving mass expression to their national demands.

Conclusion

In studying something as rich in drama as the recent history of the Crimean Tatars, one is apt to lose sight of the enduring features of the plight of this small national group. Here the attempt has been made to show that the conflict between the Russians and Crimean Tatars goes back for centuries, and that the “ultimate solution” of the Crimean Tatar problem carried out by Stalin and tacitly continued by his successors was first proposed by the tsarist colonial officials. Russian distrust of the Crimean Tatars long predates the Second World War, as does the Russian concern with the strategic and security aspects of the Crimea and its population. Soviet policy toward the Crimean Tatars, especially during World War II and afterwards, must be understood within this broad historical framework.

The Soviet leaders have not simply been following historical precedents in some mechanical fashion, but have been dealing with a situation endowed with its own social and political dynamics. At the local level a triangular relationship has existed among Tatars, Ukrainians and Russians in which each group has experienced strife but also limited cooperation with each of the others. However, the fact that the Russian

majority of the population has dwelt predominantly in the towns, while Ukrainians have lived mainly in the countryside at present provides the basis for a potentially sharper conflict of interest between Tatars and Ukrainians than between Tatars and Russians.

While it is clear that the Soviet leaders have taken into consideration, and indeed have exploited these ethnic group cleavages in the Crimea, it is probable that they have based their actions upon their impressions of the Crimean Tatars as political dissidents. In fact, the Crimean Tatars represent a unique phenomenon in the dissident movement of the 1960's and early 1970's; their only counterpart has been another small nationality, the Meskhetians. The Crimean Tatar movement has enjoyed both a high degree of overt organization and manifest mass participation. No other dissident group has been able to mobilize as high a percentage of its natural constituency as the Crimean Tatars. Their petitions have repeatedly been signed by thousands of individuals, and it is probable that few Crimean Tatar families have not been touched by this struggle. The Soviet security police have always been worried by real or imagined links bridging different deviant groups, and the Crimean Tatar movement has provided some genuine grounds for concern on this score. The contacts which developed between the main Moscow-based dissident movement, represented by Major General Grigorenko and others like him, is well known and thus requires no further comment; but mention must be made of the less publicized interest of Ukrainian dissidents like Chornovil, Dzyuba, Karavans'kyi and others in the Crimean Tatar cause. In a sense, the sympathy of Ukrainians and other non-Russians for the Crimean Tatars may be potentially more serious than their tie with the liberal Russian intelligentsia, because it raises implicitly the prospect of a common opposition to the regime. And in this connection the Soviet leadership cannot help but fear that larger and politically more significant Muslim nationalities, above all the Uzbeks, Azerbaidzhanis and Volga Tatars, may be affected by the example of the Crimean Tatars. Although anticipation of possible contagion among the Soviet Muslim people tends to promote a policy of repression (which has in fact been the policy pursued by the Soviet leadership), it is conceivable that this may be moderated by considerations of Soviet foreign policy in the developing world in general and in Muslim countries in particular if the Crimean Tatar cause continues to receive sufficient publicity.

RÉSUMÉ/ABSTRACT

The Struggle of the Crimean Tatars

Cette étude examine les relations russes avec les Tatars de Crimée du dix-huitième siècle jusqu'à l'époque actuelle. Elle étudie l'impact de la révolution russe de 1917 sur la lutte des Tatars pour leur statut national et passe en revue les restrictions imposées sur le développement culturel et politique des Tatars durant les années 1930. L'étude analyse en détail la vie des Tatars de Crimée durant la seconde guerre mondiale, les accusations de "collaboration" avec les allemands et leur déportation en Asie centrale. La réhabilitation des Tatars de Crimée et leurs vains efforts pour regagner la Crimée terminent cette étude. Dans cette dernière partie une attention particulière a été accordé aux origines, développement et tactiques du mouvement des Tatars de Crimée tels qu'ils sont illustrés dans les publications du *samizdat*.

P. J. P.