

**SUPPRESSION OF UPRISINGS IN THE SEMIRECHYE REGION BY THE  
TURKESTAN MILITARY DISTRICT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20th  
CENTURY**

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**Abstract**

The article examines the protests, uprisings, and national liberation movements against the colonial regime in Turkestan in 1916, as well as the reasons for their emergence. The main object of research in the article is the uprising in the Semirechye region, which was one of the main centers of popular movements in Turkestan at the beginning of the 20th century. The origin of the uprising, the main armed resistance movements, and the difficulties in its suppression led the imperial administration in the region to rely on the troops of the Turkestan Military District. The brutal and chauvinistic attitude of the colonial armed forces toward the Turkestanis is revealed.

**Keywords:** Colonial regime, military district, regular army, rebellion, company, cossack, machine gun, soldier, squadron.

**Introduction**

**1. Relevance of the research**

In recent years, a number of leading scientific research centers worldwide have been increasingly studying issues such as the military actions carried out by the Russian Empire in Turkestan in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the establishment and strengthening of the colonial system in the region, including the participation of the Russian Empire's armed forces in socio-economic and political processes in Turkestan, and their essence and consequences. In this regard, the study of the history of the Turkestan Military District, which was one of the main participants in the establishment of the colonial system in the Turkestan region, its strengthening, and the suppression of national liberation movements, is becoming increasingly relevant. After all, the formation of the military district system in Turkestan by the Russian Empire, the organization of the regular army, and their role in the military and socio-political history of the region have not been studied as a separate object.

**2. Methods and literature analysis on the topic**

Literature dedicated to the study of the history of the period under study should be conventionally divided into the following groups: 1) sources and literature published during the Russian Empire; 2) literature, brochures and articles published during the Soviet period; 3) research conducted during the years of independence; 4) foreign literature. The works

created during the years of the rule of the Russian Empire and during the Soviet period, issues regarding the history of the Turkestan Military District were interpreted from the perspective of the interests of the existing system. Even in the studies created during the years of independence, the activities of the military district, its role in strengthening the colonial system in the Turkestan region, and its activities aimed at protecting the interests of the empire were not sufficiently covered. Therefore, the implementation of research in this direction is relevant and of scientific and practical importance. Research methods such as problem-based, quantitative, and comparative-historical analysis, historical-chronological, and systematic methods were used in the research.

### 3. Research results

As is well known, the First World War began in 1914 between the imperialist powers. The Russian Empire also became a participant in the war. Although the Turkestans were not drafted into the army, they also fell into a difficult situation as the economic difficulties of the war began to fall on the dependent countries. In 1914-1916, a large amount of cotton, cottonseed oil, meat, fish, horses and camels, and a large amount of food were taken from the country for the needs of the war. Prices and taxes have also increased sharply. During this period, there were interruptions in the grain supply from the center, and famines began to be observed in the country.

In such a difficult situation in the country, emperor Nicholas II issued a decree on June 25, 1916, for the male population aged 19-43 in the Caucasus, Astrakhan, Siberia, and Central Asia "On the involvement of the non-Russian male population of the Empire in the construction of defensive structures, military communication routes, and any other work necessary for the defense of the state within the territory of the active army", which led to an uprising against the colonial regime in Turkestan.

The beginning of uprisings in the country was also a big impetus for the widespread cases of bribery and familiarity during the formation of lists of those called up for labor mobilization. It was often observed that single breadwinners from poor families were excluded from mobilization by bribery. This situation further increased the anger of the common people. In the report of the assistant head of the Turkestan district security department dated July 20, it was noted that officials did not stop taking bribes, and the amount of bribes received by lower-level officials was measured in millions of rubles.

According to the imperial decree, it was planned to recruit 250,000 people from Turkestan (8% of the male population) for day labor. On June 30, the commander-in-chief of the district, General Yerofeev, sent a telegram to the regional governors to begin compiling the lists. It is emphasized that when compiling the list, it is necessary to focus primarily on men born between 1885 and 1897.

The first uprisings against serfdom in the country began on July 4, 1916, in the Samarkand region. The largest uprisings, the bloodiest events, and the greatest losses for both sides in the Turkestan Governorate occurred during the uprisings in the Semirechye region. It was planned to mobilize 60,000 people, or 18% of the region's population, for rear-line work in Semirechye[1]. The first clashes in the region occurred at the end of July between residents

and border guards who were trying to escape from Lepsinsk district to Chinese territory. The real uprising began in August. On August 3, armed resistance against representatives of the regional administration began in the Kyzylboruk volost of Verny district, and on August 6 in the Botpayev volost during the process of compiling lists of laborers. A squadron of Cossack cavalry and half a company of infantry were sent to Kyzylboruk, and a Cossack hundred, 1 company and units of local militia were sent to Botpayev[2].

On August 8, the uprising spread to all volosts of Pishpek and Przhevalsk counties. The main focus was on the extermination of the Russian population relocated to the region. The Kyrgyz in the Atekin and Sarybagish volosts of Pishpek counties proclaimed Makush Shabdanov as khan. On August 9, the Sarybagish people, led by Ibrahim Teleyev, captured 178 berdanka rifles and about 30,000 cartridges that were being sent to Russian villages[3]. On the same day, 1,500 rebels occupied the village of Beloe-Sarskoye, and on August 9-11, about 5,000 rebels occupied the village of Stolypino. On August 9, the rebels also occupied the village of Grigorevka in Przhevalsk district and besieged Sazanovka, the largest village north of Issyk-Kul. On August 15, about 8,000 rebels occupied Sazanovka after a 6-day siege[4].

On August 10, the rebels surrounded the village of Samsonovka. When a Cossack detachment was sent against them from Verny, the rebels retreated. On August 10, the rebels attacked and defeated the detachment of the chief of the police department, Menshikov[5]. The detachment of the assistant chief of the district, lieutenant colonel Kaichev, who was attacked by the rebels in the Przhevalsk district, was killed by 1 ensign, 9 cossacks, and 8 privates in the Naryn district, 24 privates in the Karkara district, 6 cossacks near Zhalanash[6], and 1 centurion, 1 ensign, and 5 privates from the penal detachment in Karakia[7].

From August 10 to 29, the large village of Preobrezhensky, from which many European residents had fled, was besieged in Przhevalsk district. On August 27, the number of besiegers reached 10,000. A well-armed punitive detachment from Przhevalsk was deployed against them. A fierce battle ensued. About 800 rebels were killed in the battle[8]. The surviving rebels fled to the mountains. On August 10-11, the rebels launched an attack on the city of Przhevalsk itself. The defense of the city was led by the district chief, Colonel Ivanov. At the beginning of the siege, there were only 80 soldiers in the city, armed with 42 berdankas. To strengthen the defense, 200-250 retired soldiers and officers were also recruited. A cavalry detachment was formed from retired Cossacks and volunteers[9]. They had very few firearms: 13 berdankas, 73 shotguns and 3 revolvers[10]. The last assault on Przhevalsk took place on August 27-29. However, due to the arrival of reinforcements, the rebels were defeated.

On August 11, in Zharkent district, the rebels surrounded the Zhalanash station. After the battles on August 13, the rebels captured and destroyed the villages of Tavricheskoe, Vladislavskoe, Meshcherskoe, Krasnoyarskoe and Novo-Kievskoe in the district. In the Semyreche, the popular movement was also strong around the city of Tokmok. On August 12, about 1,500 rebels defeated a punitive detachment of 100 Cossacks, 70 soldiers and a 350-man volunteer militia ("druzhina") sent from Verny near Tokmok, forcing them to retreat to Tokmok[11]. From August 13 to 22, more than 5,000 rebels besieged the city of Tokmok and the large settlement of Pokrovka, located between Tashkent and Verniy[12]. At this time, the detachment sent from Verniy in Tokmok and the 520-man druzhinin were forced to limit

themselves only to the defense of the city. On August 22, 4 infantry companies, 1 Cossack company, 0.5 platoon of sappers, 4 machine guns, and 1 artillery battery sent from Tashkent arrived in Tokmok[13]. As a result, the rebels, who were defeated on August 22, lost 300 people and retreated south of Issyk-Kul[14].

During the uprising in the Semirechye, the Russian population suffered heavy losses. In the Verny district, 16 people were killed; in the Zharkent district, 32 people were killed and 20 people went missing; in the Pishpak district, 98 people were killed and 65 people went missing; in Przhevalsk, 2,179 people were killed and 1,299 people went missing[15]. On September 30, the district commander, general Kuropatkin, informed the Minister of War that a total of 1,803 Russians had been killed and 1,212 were missing in the Seven Rivers[16]. The large number of Russian deaths in Turkestan was also due to the fact that 18,165 rifles were confiscated from the Russian population of the military district in 1915-1916 for the needs of the army at the front[17].

Unable to suppress the uprisings in Semirechye, the regional governor, general Folbaum requested military assistance from the command of the Turkestan Military District. On August 10, Folbaum informed Kuropatkin by telegram that each district in Semirechye needed cavalry and artillery units and 4 infantry companies. As a result, on August 11, Kuropatkin informed the General Staff that he was urgently sending 12 infantry companies, 3 Cossack companies, and 14 cannons to Semirechye. Kuropatkin had actually begun sending military assistance to Semirechye on August 9. On August 9, 2 companies, 2 batteries, 1 Cossack company, 4 machine guns, sappers, telegraph, and telephone teams were sent from Tashkent to Tokmok under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Geitsig. On August 15, lieutenant colonel Alatirsev was sent to Semirechye with 4 rifle companies, 1 centurion, sappers, and 160 cavalry scouts[18].

On August 15, Folbaum, noting that the available support was insufficient and that Heitzig would not be able to defend Tokmok and Pishpak for a long time, asked Kuropatkin to send 8 companies of artillery and cavalry from Andijan to Przhevalsk, and 8 companies of artillery and cavalry from Tashkent to Vernia[19]. On August 17, Skobelev sent 3 companies of riflemen, 4 machine guns, 80 cavalry scouts, 1 Cossack company, 2 mountain guns and a punitive detachment of sappers to the Naryn fortress via Andijan. At the same time, a Samara detachment of 243 people was sent from Samarkand to Semirechye, and a Saratov detachment of 734 people and 2 Cossack companies from Skobelev. On August 23, 2,000 rifles were also sent from Tashkent[20].

In total, 35 companies, 24 squadrons, 240 reconnaissance cavalry, 16 field guns, and 47 machine guns were sent to support the Semirechye[21]. In addition, new military units were formed in the region itself at the initiative of Kuropatkin. On August 7-18, 7 separate Semirechye volunteer militia companies, a 300-man infantry volunteer company, 2 half-Cossack companies (160 people) from the reserve of the Semirechye Cossack troops, and 2 volunteer cavalry detachments were formed. In August-September 1916, a total of 10 penal detachments operated in the Semirechye. They included about 20 infantry companies, about 10 Cossack companies, more than 1,500 volunteer druzhiners, and about 500 cavalry scouts[22].

After a large force was gathered in Semirechye, in the second half of August, the military initiative passed to the district troops. If in the Jizzakh uprising the district troops were limited to deporting the population, then in Semirechye a huge number of people were killed. Terror intensified to a terrible extent. Mass shootings of prisoners were also frequent. In the village of Belovodsk, 517 out of 700 prisoners captured in the Jaminsartov volost were shot[23], and in the Przhevalsk prison, all 59 Kyrgyz and 400 Dungans were shot[24]. During the suppression of the uprising in the Semirechye, about 16,000 Kazakhs and Kyrgyz were killed[25]. More than 160,000 people fled to China[26]. By the winter of 1916, the population of the region had decreased by more than 300,000 people (a quarter of the population) due to deaths and refugees to China[27].

The Turkestan Military District faced great difficulties in suppressing the uprisings of 1916. Due to the withdrawal of the troops of the Turkestan Military District to the fronts of World War I, very few military units remained in the district. To replace them, on October 14, 1914, the Ministry of War formed the 6th State militia corps from volunteers from the Simbirsk, Saratov, Penza and Samara regions under the command of General K.O. Kurganov (1914-1917) and sent it to the territory of the Turkestan Military District.

In total, 14.5 battalions, 33 Cossack companies, 42 cannons, and 69 machine guns were mobilized from the fronts of the World War in 1916 to suppress the uprisings in Turkestan. After additional military units were brought to the district from the center, the popular movements were suppressed, and by the end of 1916, 92,423 people were mobilized from Turkestan for the needs of the rear.

During the uprising, the district and the governor-general suffered significant losses. According to Kuropatkin, by January 25, 1917, 97 district soldiers had been killed, 86 wounded, and 76 missing. We should not forget the second side of the issue. In 1914-1917, the population of Turkestan decreased by 1,230,000 people. These losses were directly related to the harsh suppression of the uprisings of 1916.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, during the popular uprisings in Turkestan that began against forced labor and later turned into national liberation movements, it became clear that the existence of colonial rule in the country depended not on the military-popular government in the country, but on the troops of the Turkestan Military District. This is especially evident during the period of popular movements in the Jizzakh uyezd, Semirechye, and Transcaspian regions. Due to the mobilization of the troops of the Turkestan Military District to the front lines, the colonial administration in the region, which was left almost without armed forces, faced great difficulties in suppressing uprisings that had spread to all regions. As a result, it was no longer possible to suppress the uprisings as quickly as before. The national liberation movement of 1916 greatly alarmed the colonial authorities and proved to them that the struggle of the peoples of Turkestan for freedom and independence had not yet died down.

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