

National Units of the Red Army in the Steppe Region and Turkestan During the Civil War

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The article analyzes the process of formation of national military units of the Red Army among the indigenous Muslims of the Steppe Region and Turkestan during the Civil War of 1918–1922 on the basis of the following sources: legislative acts of the Soviet government, orders and reports of regional party authorities, and commanders of the Eastern and Turkestan fronts. In 1918 and during the first half of 1919, the Bolsheviks didn't achieve a considerable progress with regard to this question. The situation can be explained by a number of reasons. The positive dynamics of the process of forming national military units among the indigenous ethnic groups of the Steppe Region and Turkestan emerged in the first half of 1919 because of the success of the Red Army on the Eastern and Turkestan fronts. Among other important factors in the successful mobilization of Muslims into the Red Army were: large-scale political work and propaganda campaign of the Communist party of Turkestan among the Muslims, the creation of a Muslim faction within the party, defection of the leaders of the Alash party and the Basmachi movement to the Bolsheviks, the formation of the Turkestan and Kirghiz (Kazakh) Autonomous Soviet socialist republics. Therefore, the Bolsheviks opted for the ethnic, rather than confessional principle in creating military units. This tactic logically followed the process of nation building in the region. It took account of the interests of ethnic groups convinced that the presence of military units was a symbol of the national identity and liability for retaining public and cultural independence.

Keywords: the Civil War, the Red Army, the Steppe Krai, Turkestan, Muslim military units.

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Национальные подразделения Красной Армии в Степном крае и Туркестане во время Гражданской войны

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В статье анализируется процесс формирования национальных воинских частей Красной Армии среди коренных мусульманских народов Степного края и Туркестана в период Гражданской войны 1918–1922 гг. Источниками при подготовке статьи стали законодательные акты советского правительства, а также приказы, рапорты, отчеты и донесения региональных партийных органов власти и командования Восточным и Туркестанским фронтами. Выяснилось, что на начальном этапе войны — весной 1918 — в первой половине 1919 г. — большевикам не удалось добиться определенных успехов в вопросе формирования национальных воинских частей Красной Армии из числа коренных мусульманских народов Степного края и Туркестана. Ситуация объясняется ликвидацией советского режима на большей части территории региона, недоверием коренного населения к советской власти и большевикам, сочувственным отношением казахов, узбеков и других народов к лидерам национальных движений, перешедших на сторону белой армии. Положительная динамика процесса формирования национальных воинских подразделений среди коренных этносов Степного края и Туркестана появилась в первой половине 1919 г. из-за успеха Красной Армии на Восточном и Туркестанском фронтах. Не менее важным фактором успешной мобилизации мусульманского населения в ряды Красной Армии стали: широкомасштабная политическая и пропагандистская работа Туркестанской коммунистической партии среди мусульманского населения, создание мусульманской фракции этой партии, переход на сторону большевиков лидеров партии Алаш и басмаческого движения, образование Туркестанской и Киргизской (Казахской) автономных советских социалистических республик. В то же время большевики пошли по пути создания воинских частей на этнической, а не конфессиональной основе. Эта тактика была построена в логической последовательности процесса формирования нации в регионе. Она учитывала интересы этнических групп, убежденных в том, что присутствие воинских частей, представляющих их этническую группу, является символом национальной идентичности и обязательством сохранения государственной и культурной независимости.

Ключевые слова: Гражданская война, Красная Армия, Степной край, Туркестан, мусульманские воинские части.

It is known that the practice of forming national military units emerged in Russia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This trend was related to the socio-political situation in the country, which clearly demonstrated the crisis of the imperial national policy and the strengthening of the processes of ethnic mobilization of the peoples of Russia. After February 1917, the Provisional Government supported further nationalization of the military units of the Russian army¹.

Muslim servicemen were also involved in these processes. Following the results of the First All-Russian Muslim Congress in Kazan (July 17–25, 1917), the All-Russian Muslim Military Shuro (Council) was formed and legalized by a special decree of the Kerensky

¹ Vestnik Vremennogo pravitelstva. 1917. 11, 17 oct. P. 34.

government, and thus was able to have its commissioners in the Political Department of the Military Ministry, the General Directorate of the General Staff, headquarters of fronts and armies, in the headquarters of Muslim divisions and military districts². According to T.N. Shevikova, active Muslimization took place in the Russian army at the end of September 1917. As a consequence, Muslim units comprised approximately 16% of all nationalized infantry and rifle divisions and 20% of cavalry units³.

The researchers emphasize that the Tatars and Bashkirs mainly sought to form mono-ethnic Muslim military units within the Russian army, which indicated a higher stage of their ethnic integration. However, on the whole, the predominant tendencies of creating Muslim parts were based on ethnic, rather than on confessional principle. Representatives of various nationalities were often assembled in Muslim regiments, and their unification on the basis of a common religion was emphasized by the military leadership of the country as an important step towards creating “spiritually strong and disciplined military units”⁴.

A number of important decisions were made at the Turkestan Regional Congress of Muslim Warriors, which was held in Tashkent on 18 October, 1917 and was attended by 25 delegates. In particular, it was recognized as necessary that Muslim companies in the Turkestan Military District should be created, mullahs should be appointed there with the same rights as regimental priests; premises for mosques in each garrison should be designated etc. However, the Muslim battalion created in November 1917 was comprised mainly of the Tatars and Bashkirs from different military units of the Turkestan Military District.

The indigenous peoples of the Steppe Krai and Turkestan were exempted from military service even during the military reform in 1874. The long-standing discussion among the imperial military and civil officials on whether the Universal Military Service Act should apply to them had not been brought to an end by the beginning of World War I⁵. Thus, no Muslim division on a local ethnic basis had been formed either on the active fronts, or in the Steppe Krai and Turkestan before the October Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War.

The materials for the article were sourced from reports, orders, decrees and resolutions of the Turkestan regional Committee of the RCP(B), the Commissariat of the Turkestan front, the Muslim Bureau of the RCP(B), the Kyrgyz military Commissariat, the Kyrgyz revolutionary Committee and other military party structures responsible for the formation of national military units of the Turkestan and Kyrgyz ASSR. Most of these documents were published in a two-volume edition of “Inostrannaya voennaya interventsiiya i Grazhdanskaya vojna v Sredney Azii i Kazahstane. [Foreign military intervention and Civil war in Central Asia and Kazakhstan]”⁶. Methodologically, the article is based on

² *Iskhakov S.* Rossiiskie musulmane i revolyutsiia (vesna 1917 — leto 1918 g.). Moscow, 2004. P. 333–335.

³ *Shevyakov T.N.* “Natsionalizatsiia” russkoy armii v 1917 g. // *Vtorye peterburgskie voenno-istoricheskie chteniya molodykh uchenykh.* Iss. 2. St. Petersburg, 1998. P. 37.

⁴ *Iskhakov S.* Rossiiskie musulmane... P. 338.

⁵ *Lyisenko Yu. A.* Vopros o voinskoy povinnosti dlia kazahskogo naseleniia (70 gg. XIX — nachalo XX v.) // *Izvestiia Altayskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta.* 2012. N 4/2. P. 186–194.

⁶ *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsiiya i Grazhdanskaia vojna v Srednei Azii i Kazahstane. Dokumenty i materialy.* Vol. 1. Alma-Ata. 1963; *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsiiya i Grazhdanskaia vojna v Srednei Azii i Kazahstane. Dokumenty i materialy.* Vol. 2. Alma-Ata. 1964.

the principle of historicism, aimed at an objective analysis of historical sources and their objective interpretation.

The events of the Civil War in Russia in 1918–1920 were studied in detail in the works by Soviet scholars⁷. They presented in one way or another the stories of civil opposition on the national outskirts of the Kyrgyz and Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic: progress in the war on the Eastern and Turkestan fronts, the guerrilla and Basmachi movement, party work and propaganda campaign of the Bolsheviks in the region, their economic policy⁸. The establishment of the Red army and national military units was analyzed within the framework of the theory of class struggle, and therefore it could give an objective assessment of those events.

In fact, modern studies on the history of the Civil War in Russia in 1918–1920, have not focused on the regional aspect. This article is an attempt to fill out the existing gap.

In the first months of the Soviet power the Bolshevik leadership supported the policy of forming national units, including Muslim ones. On November 15, 1917, Stalin signed the Decree of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities (Narkomnats), which allowed "free grouping of soldiers on a national basis within a military unit"⁹. However, the process of creating Muslim units was carried out spontaneously and at a very slow pace. S. Iskhakov supposes that the reasons for this were the Tatar-Bashkir contradictions, the personnel problems and the refusal of the Muslim officers of the former tsarist army to participate in this process. Against the backdrop of political chaos during the first months of the Soviet power, the All-Russian Muslim Military Shuro tried to concentrate in its hands the top command over all newly created Muslim military units. Its members declared their support for the socialist government on a federative basis as well as readiness to put into effect all its decrees¹⁰.

The Bolsheviks perceived the fact that the Shuro presented itself as the leader in the process of building Muslim army units as a threat to their political influence on the country many-million-strong Muslim population. Therefore, on January 17, 1918, an alternative Central Commissariat for Muslims of Russia headed by M. Vakhitov was created under the People's Commissariat for Nationalities. The activity of the All-Russian Muslim military Shuro was recognized as counter-revolutionary, and the structure was dissolved.

One of the central tasks of the Central Commissariat for Muslims of Russia was the formation of Muslim military units in The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. A Military Department was established within the Commissariat with the view to developing the principles of forming and operating of Muslim units. Its role significantly increased after the outbreak of the Civil War and the signing of Stalin's Decree of the People's Commissariat for the Establishment of the Muslim Workers' and Peasants' Army on May 2, 1918. It was planned to integrate its military units into the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (RKKA) and used in military operations.

⁷ Polyakov Yu. A. *Oktyabr' i grazhdanskaia voina*. Moscow, 1966; Svetacheva M. I. *Imperialisticheskaia interventsia v Sibiri i na Dal'nem Vostoke (1918–1919)*. Novosibirsk, 1983.

⁸ Grigor'ev V. K. *Razgrom melkoburzhuznoi kontrevolyutsii v Kazahstane*. Alma-Ata, 1984; Zeevlev A. I., Polyakov Yu. A., Chugunov A. I. *Basmachestvo: vozniknovenie, sushchnost', krah*. Moscow, 1981; Inoiatov H. Sh. *Narody Srednei Azii v bor'be protiv interventov i vnutrennei kontrevolyutsii*. Moscow, 1984; Pokrovskii S. N. *Razgrom inostrannykh voennykh interventov i vnutrennei kontrevolyutsii v Kazahstane (1918–1920)*. Alma-Ata, 1967.

⁹ Iskhakov S. *Rossiiskie musulmane...* P. 431.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* P. 439.

In connection with the abovementioned Decree of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs the process of creating military formations from the indigenous population of the Steppe region and Turkestan began in May 1918. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the Central Commissariat for Muslims of internal Russia did not extend its authority to the Central Asian region of the country. The Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Russian: Sovnarkom; SNK RSFSR) issued a decree about the establishment of the Kyrgyz (Kazakh) department under the People's Commissariat in May 12, 1918. Broad competence related to the solution of socio-economic, administrative, cultural, educational, ethnic and interethnic problems was delegated to it.

The mobilization of the Kazakh population into the Red Army was entrusted to the Military sub-department of the Kirghiz (Kazakh) department under the People's Commissariat of the RSFSR. In addition to fulfilling the main function — the formation of military units, the Branch coordinated the work of local councils, dealt with issues of tax policy, food supply of the population, preparation for the convocation of the Congress of Soviets, and organization of the regional management body. On November 9, 1918, the chairman of the Department informed the central authorities that the Division had begun extensive agitation among the Kazakhs “to rally them in the struggle for Soviet power”¹¹. In Turkestan, the first steps towards the military mobilization of the indigenous population were made at the end of June 1918, when the People's Commissar for Military Affairs of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TurkASSR) issued an order to establish the 1st Tashkent Muslim Battalion¹². In general, as it was noted by the party's regional bodies, the process of mobilizing the Muslim population of the Steppe Krai and Turkestan was extremely slow.

What seems clear is that there were several reasons for this situation. Firstly, by the summer of 1918, Soviet power had been liquidated on most of the territory of the Urals, Turgai, Akmola and Semipalatinsk regions. The fighting in the Eastern, Semirechye and Trans-Caspian fronts in the autumn of 1918 resulted in the territories of the Steppe Krai and TurkASSR being cut off from the European part of the country and the political center of the Bolsheviks — Petrograd. In fact, the region found itself in a blockade by the White Guard and was deprived of material, technical and financial assistance. The “Askhabad probka” (the blockade) and the simultaneous fall of Soviet Baku deprived Turkestan of the opportunity to receive oil, which caused a decline in traffic all along the Orenburg-Tashkent railway.

Secondly, the reason for a low level of participation of the indigenous population in the process of building Muslim units of the Red Army was the extremely unpopular Bolshevik power. It is commonly known that the development of the ethno-political situation on the Central Asian outskirts of Russia at the turn of 1917–1918 led to the creation of national-territorial autonomy of Alash and Kokand autonomy in the region, which acted as alternative to the Soviet power. In the face of a threat of the collapse of the state, the Bolsheviks refused to recognize the legitimacy of their formation. This led to the military defeat of the Red Army of the Kokand Autonomy in February 1918 and the proclamation of the TurkASSR in April of the same year. In accordance with the “Regulations on the Turkestan Soviet Republic”, it was created as a state entity based exclusively on class

¹¹ Inostrannaia voennaia interventsia... Vol. 1. P. 154.

¹² Ibid. P. 48.

principles, with power functions at all levels of the management system belonging to the Soviets. This ruled out the possibility of interpreting its political structure as a national-territorial autonomy, which, combined with the actual exclusion of the councils of Muslim and dekhkan deputies from exercise of power, made the Bolshevik authorities extremely unpopular with the indigenous Muslim population.

The Kazakh nationals and the Alash government defect to the side of the “white movement”, actively cooperating with the armed forces of Kolchak and Denikin. The Kazakh population was sympathetic to the leaders of the national Alash movement, taking active part in the creation of the Alash armed groups.

Thirdly, the reasons for the distrust of the indigenous population of the Steppe Krai and Turkestan to the Soviet government and the Bolsheviks, its passive participation in the mobilization into the Red Army could be explained by the so-called “Armenian issue”. With limited forces in the early 1918, the Bolsheviks attracted members of the regional branch of the Armenian Dashnaksutyun party to defeat the Kokand Autonomy, having armed them and created combat units of the Red Army¹³. The crushing defeat of autonomy was accompanied by massacres of the indigenous Muslim population, atrocities, robbery and violence committed by Armenians. The military cooperation between the Bolsheviks and the “Dashnaksutyun” continued until the spring 1919. From 1918 until mid — 1919, the revolutionary dictatorship and the Soviets in Andijan were in fact controlled by the Dashnaks. Under the pretext of combating the basmachi, they carried out raids on the villages of the Muslim population and the cities of the region for the purpose of requisition or robbery¹⁴.

Given the situation, throughout the year of 1918, the regional Bolshevik authorities excluded the possibility of mass mobilization of the indigenous Muslim population into the Red Army. Resolution VI of the Extraordinary Congress of Soviets of the Republic of Turkestan, held on October 6, 1918, recognized the “impossibility of declaring mobilization” among the Muslim population. The only thing that was suggested was “intensification of agitation for the defense of the Socialist Motherland among the broad masses of the Muslim proletariat”¹⁵.

The situation began to change only by the early 1919, after several successful military operations of the Red Army on the Eastern Front. On July 10, 1919, the Kazakh Revolutionary Committee (Kazrevkom) with the center in Orenburg was established to exercise supreme military and civil power in the territory of the Urals, Turgai, Akmola and Semipalatinsk regions. With the organization of Kazrevkom, the Kyrgyz department under the Narkomnatz was abolished, and the management departments and subdepartments were created. Under Art. 6 of the Decree of the Council of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR “On the Revolutionary Committee for the Management of the Kyrgyz Krai” the issues of mobilization into the Red Army, of the Kazakh population, were delegated to the competence of the Kirghiz Military Commissariat¹⁶. Regional and county military commissariats were established in the lower administrative-territorial units of the region.

¹³ Akbieva Z. Rol’ musulmanskogo Byuro RKP(b) v dele zaschityi interesov mestnogo naseleniia Turkestanskogo kraia // Karadeniz. 2015. N 27. P. 57–73.

¹⁴ Buttino M. Revolyutsiia naoborot. Srednyaia Aziya mezhdru padeniem tsarskoy imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR. Moscow, 2007. P. 281.

¹⁵ Inostrannaia voennaia... Vol. 1. P. 75–78.

¹⁶ Sobranie zakononiy i rasporyazheniy pravitelstva za 1919 g. Upravlenie delami Sovnarkoma SSSR. Moscow, 1943. P. 533–536.

With the active participation of the Kirghiz Military Commissariat, the formation of the Kyrgyz exemplary cavalry regiment comprised of the Kazakhs of the Bukeyev Steppe with more than 1,700 people was completed by the summer of 1919¹⁷. On July 24, 1919, Commander of the Eastern Front M. Frunze signed an order under which the Astrakhan (Southern) group of the Eastern Front was formed. It included all the troops of the region, with the Kazakh horse formations of the Bukeyev steppe. Together with the Kyrgyz Mounted Brigade of the Fourth Army formed in Saratov they formed the Kirghiz Equestrian Division¹⁸.

The success of the Red Army on the Eastern Front gave rise to the process of creating Kazakh armed units in the Turgai region. By February 1, 1919, under the leadership of the military commissar of the Turgai district, A. Imanov, the First Turgai Revolutionary Regiment consisting of 175 members was formed, which as a separate combat unit joined the 3rd Brigade of the Orenburg Division. During 1919, it was proposed that two cavalry squadrons, a training team, a machine gun crew and an artillery battery were created in Turgai Uyezd¹⁹. However, Imanov failed to implement the plans. The offensive of Kolchak troops on the Eastern Front, which began in April 1919, the fighting units of the Alash-Orda organization. They raised a rebellion in Turgai and arrested, and later shot A. Imanov together with 18 of his Kazakh associates who supported the Bolsheviks.

During the spring of 1919, after the liberation of Orenburg and Uralsk from the formations of the White Guard, the process of creating Kazakh military units in the Urals region was speeded up. At the end of February 1919, the regional congress of Soviets was held in Uralsk, where it was decided to set up a special department for Kyrgyz affairs under the regional revolutionary committee. The head of the department, B. Karataev, was entrusted with carrying out mass political work and propaganda among the Kazakh population, and mobilizing into the Red Army units²⁰.

In April 1919, A. Dzhangildin was mandated by M. Frunze, the chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Group of the Eastern Front, to provide overall leadership "over the speedy formation of military Kazakh units in the areas of the Urals, Turgai and Transcaspien, and also the Bukeyev Horde". From September 1919 to January 1920, A. Dzhangildin succeeded in creating cavalry detachments comprising up to 700 horsemen²¹.

In the autumn of 1919, the formation of Kazakh combat units was significantly accelerated. In October 1919, the recruitment of five separate Kazakh squadrons began. They were deployed at The Kyrgyz Military Commissariat of Orenburg²². In the second half of 1919, in Omsk, the 1st Siberian Kazakh Volunteer Cavalry Regiment was formed from the youth of Akmola and Semipalatinsk provinces. In 1920, it was transferred to Biysk, Altai Province, where it remained until 1922.

It should be noted that at the expense of incredible efforts the Muslim Bureau managed to resolve the issue of the participation of Armenian armed formations within the Red Army. The problem was first identified at the 7th Extraordinary Congress of Turkestan

¹⁷ Inostrannaia voennaia interventsiiia...P.223–225.

¹⁸ Ibid. P.258.

¹⁹ Ibid. P.287–290.

²⁰ Ibid. P.196–197.

²¹ Ibid. P.299.

²² Prikaz Kirgizskogo kraevogo komissariata po voennym delam o formirovanii kazahskih kavaleriyskikh chastey // CSA RK. F.59. Op.2. D.19. L.8.

Soviets in March 1919 by Muslim delegates, who proposed a resolution “to disarm and disband the Dashnaksutyun detachment and to purge the Red Guard of the criminal element”. The resolution was not adopted, but the position of the communist Muslims of Turkestan was clearly formulated, and already on May 26, 1919, the commission of the Turkestan Central Executive Committee (TurkCEC) ordered the Armenian community of Fergana to surrender their weapons, and parts of the Red Army in the province were to discharge Armenian soldiers. In a few days it was announced that the disarmament was completed in Andijan, Kokand and Skobelev, where the Armenian Dashnak fighting squads were mainly concentrated. The next blow to the Dashnaksutyun was dealt by the decision to wind up its branches in Turkestan under the pressure of Muslim Communists supported by both the Russian Communists of Turkestan and Moscow. It must be noted that the Chairman of the Musbureau, T. Ryskulov, used the talks with one of the leaders of the Madamin-bey Basmachi movement for demoralization and intimidation. It resulted in the latter taking the side of the Soviet government. All these events objectively led to the growing popularity of the Red Army among the indigenous Muslim population of the region.

An enormous amount of propaganda in this regard was carried out by the Revolutionary Military Council (Revvoensovet) of the Turkestan Front. In fact, it issued monthly orders to strengthen ideological and combat work in the army, published leaflets and posters, held “rallies resorting to a wide range of all available campaign forces and means”, organized parades of troops “mainly in the regions, indigenous areas, involving all those recruited Muslims”²³.

By the decision of the VII Extraordinary Congress of Soviets of Turkestan (March 7–31, 1919), the Muslim Section was established within the Political Department of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Turkestan Republic. Its main task was to conduct political work and propaganda among the indigenous population of the region. Under its leadership there were organized “the weeks of the Muslim soldiers of the Red Army”, series of lectures in regions and districts of the Republic. The Muslim Section also made great efforts to launch the agitation train “Red Turkestan” and to create theatre and literary-publishing clubs²⁴.

It should be stressed that during the process of mobilization of the indigenous population of the Kirghiz (Kazakh) and Turkestan republics into the Red Army, the Bolsheviks chose to form military units on an ethnic rather than confessional basis. This tactic logically followed the process of nation building in the region implemented by the central Bolshevik leadership. Keeping the very space and name “Turkestan” in the system of national Soviet autonomies, as well as the concept of “Muslims of Turkestan” provided a basis for the reproduction of the local version of pan-Turkism and the idea of “Greater Turkestan”, which was extremely undesirable for the Bolsheviks.

In general, the idea of creating a republic of the Turkic peoples of Russia had supporters in all national branches of the RCP(b) of the Turkic-Muslim regions. It was a component of the prevalent ideas among the Turkic-speaking communists about the priority of the tasks of the national revolution over the socialist one. This situation remained a matter of concern for the leadership of the RCP(b), especially with the growth of structure in the Basmachi movement under the Pan-Turkist slogans. Since autumn 1920 Bukhara

²³ Inostrannaia voennaia interventsiiia... Vol. 2. P. 443.

²⁴ Ibid. P. 447.

had become the main center of the Basmachi movement led by prominent supporters of the pan-Turkic project, the former head of the revolutionary committee of Bashkiria A. Z. Validov and the Minister of War of the former Young Turk government, Enver Pasha. Young Bukharans, who came to power in the Bukhara People's Soviet Republic, began to demonstrate Turkic orientation in their policy: the system of records management was switched from Farsi (Tajik) to Turkic, the study of which was encouraged in every possible way. A new center lobbying pan-Turkism emerged in Bukhara²⁵.

Therefore, as a counter measure to communist pan-Turkism in 1920, it was decided to divide the TurkASSR into three national parts — “Uzbekistan, Kirghizia and Turkmenistan”. Ethnic based separation of the TurkASSR, Bukhara and Khiva was perceived by the Bolsheviks as a way of weakening Pan-Turkist sentiments and splitting the local elite on ethnic grounds. The formation of the military units of the Red Army on an ethnic basis was thus seen as another barrier to the Turkic-Muslim integration of Turkestan peoples²⁶.

This theory is backed up by the data on the formation of the Red Army among the indigenous population during 1919–1920 carried out exclusively on an ethnic basis²⁷. In the spring of 1919–1920 the Kyrgyz military registration and enlistment office formed 37 military units and subunits from the Kazakh population only in the territory of three regions — Bukeevskaya, Ural, Turgai. On November 18, 1919, Revolutionary Military Council of the Semirechensk Front formed the 3d Red Cavalry Eastern Regiment. The city of Kapal was chosen as the place of its deployment²⁸. On February 5, 1920, a separate Kazakh horse brigade was manned from the Kazakhs of the Semirechenskaya region by the order of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Turkestan Front. The formation center was the city Verny²⁹. The creation of a Muslim volunteer squadron from the Uzbeks began in the Ferghana region on July 3, 1919. The formation of the Karakirgizian special horse cavalry went on throughout the year of 1919. A separate Turkestan Dungan cavalry regiment was formed under the leadership of Masanchi in September 24, 1920, and a separate Uighur cavalry division — under the command of A. Rozybakiev in early 1921³⁰.

Of particular importance was the fact that the mobilization into the Red Army involved dekhkans — participants of the Basmachi movement. For example, the Kyrgyz Red Cavalry Brigade was established in the Fergana region in the summer of 1920 and comprised 400 people, including former members of Madaminbek's basmachi formations. A considerable part of them, led by one of the field commanders, Dzhanibek, took the side of the Soviet government and joined the Red Army. The latter was appointed assistant to the commander of the Kirghiz Cavalry Red Regiment³¹.

²⁵ *Abashin S.* *Natsionalizmy v Sredney Azii*. St. Petersburg, 2007. P. 184–185.

²⁶ *Lyisenko Yu. A., Anisimova I. V., Barmin V. A., Tarasova E. V., Bochkareva I. B.* *Etnopoliticheskie protsessy v tsentralnoaziatskikh okrainah Rossii v period revolyutsiy 1917 g.* Barnaul, 2017. P. 299–301.

²⁷ *Pashin V. P.* On the Sources of Establishment-selective Work of the Bolshevik Party // *Bylye Gody*. 2014. Vol. 31, iss. 1. P. 88.

²⁸ *Prikaz Revvoensoveta Semirechenskogo fronta o sformirovaniy Kazahskogo kavaleriyskogo polka // CSA RK. F. 180. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 222.* (Central'nyy gosudarstvennyy arhiv respubliki Kazahstan)

²⁹ *Iz prikaza Revvoensoveta Turkestantskogo fronta o formirovaniy otdelnoy Kazahskoy konnoy brigady // CSA RK. F. 109. Op. 1. D. 15. L. 55.*

³⁰ *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsia i Grazhdanskaia voina v Srednei Azii i Kazahstane. Dokumenty i materialy.* Vol. 2. P. 296.

³¹ *Ibid.* P. 371.

Some progress made by the Bolsheviks in the creation of Muslim military units enabled the commander of the Turkestan Front, M. V. Frunze to announce for the first time that “the workers of the local national population aged between 19 and 35” were subject to conscription to the Red Army by the order of May 11, 1920. It was carried out under the Decree of the Council of Labor and Defense “On calling up the Citizens of the Non-Russian Nationality from Siberia, Turkestan and Other Outskirts for Military Service in the Red Army” issued on May 10, 1920³². The mobilization of the Muslim population in Tashkent was to begin on June 25, 1920, and in the regions of the province — on July 10, 1920. Due to the difficult military situation, the recruitment in the Semirechenskaya region and Bukhara republic was temporarily postponed. The recruitment was successful, giving a replenishment of about 25 thousand people in the whole Turkestan³³.

However, it should be noted that the Muslim Bureau (Musbyuro), the Kirov military commissariat (Kirvoenkomat) and other party structures responsible for the formation of national military units in the Turkestan and Kirghiz ASSR faced a whole range of problems. The main one was the language barrier and ignorance of the Russian language among the majority of Muslims who joined the Red Army.

At the meetings of the residents in most villages (auls) of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic, which took place during the spring-summer of 1920, there was expressed willingness to send recruits and pre-recruits to serve in the Red Army. However, it was requested that “mobilized officers and teachers” should be assigned to “the recruits from the Kyrgyz population, because our Kyrgyzs are completely wild people and do not speak Russian”³⁴.

The problem of insufficient funding of both the process of mobilization process and the created military units was also a challenge. Thus, A. Dzhangildin in the report to the commander of the Turkestan front, M. Frunze, stressed that during the mobilization of the Kazakhs of the Turgai region he had to face the lack of uniforms and weapons. “I had to refuse, though, unwillingly, many people”, A. Dzhangildin noted, “promising to bring that information to the attention of the higher command. The formed military units on their horses, in Kyrgyz common clothes and providing for themselves, were armed with what they got mainly from the whites, and with various weapons, including the Berdan rifles”³⁵.

The problem of supply of commanders for national forces was also serious. The training of junior commanders was conducted in the regiments. As a matter of urgency, numerous military courses sprung up in the cities of the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkestan ASSR, propaganda of military knowledge among the population was promoted through the creation of various schools, clubs and societies, and the development of military-technical sports. By the end of 1920, as a result of the enormous work, there were infantry, artillery, cavalry, military topography and other courses successfully working in the region, where command and office staff were prepared for the national units of the Red Army.

³² *Bezugolnyi A. Yu. Prizyivnoe zakonodatelstvo i komplektovanie raboche-krestyanskoj Krasnoj armii predstaviteljami nerusskih natsionalnostey v 1920-e gg. // Vestnik of Kalmyk Institute for Humanities research of the Russian Academy of Sciences. 2013. N 3. P. 103.*

³³ *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsia... Vol. 2. P. 373.*

³⁴ *Postanovlenie obschego sobraniya zhiteley 1,2 i 3 aulov Dzhansarinskoy volosti Petropavlovskogo uezda o gotovnosti doprizyivnikov sluzhit v ryadah Krasnoj armii 22 iyulya 1920 g. // CSA RK. F. 1346. Op. 1. D. 2. L. 13–14.*

³⁵ *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsia... Vol. 2. P. 211.*

It should be noted that after the end of the Civil War in the USSR, the creation of national units within the Red Army was developed on a “voluntary and equal basis”. This principle was embodied in the decisions of the 12th Congress of the RCP(b), held in April 17–25, 1923. The main ideologue of the program of national construction in the Red Army in the mid-1920s was M. V. Frunze, who believed that the numerous non-Russian contingents were “a source of additional power” for the Red Army³⁶. At the same time, the Law “On Compulsory Military Service” of citizens of the Soviet state adopted on September 18, 1925, did not presuppose a mass military service call-up in the national republics and regions. In Article 16 of the Law a special procedure for compulsory military service by agreement with the national CEC was provided for a number of peoples, the list of which was not permanent. Therefore, according to A. Y. Bezugolnyi, the impact of mobilization on the population of national regions in the first half of the 1920s was not great and did not exceed 0.1–0.2 % of the total population. The total number of inhabitants of the Soviet republics where the national parts were formed (excluding Ukraine and Belarus) was estimated at 25,851 people³⁷. Thus, until the late 1920s, a significant part of the peoples of the USSR, including the Kazakh SSR and the Soviet republics of Central Asia, was not covered by general military conscription.

* * *

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that the Civil War in Russia, which started in the spring of 1918, and the threat of the collapse of the country caused the Bolshevik leadership to take urgent measures aimed at enlisting the representatives of national minorities into the Red Army. In the first months of the war, in the conditions of distrust of the indigenous population towards the Soviet government and its liquidation in most parts of the Steppe Krai and Turkestan, the Bolsheviks didn't achieve any success with regard to that question. The positive dynamics of the process began in early 1919, thanks to the success of the Red Army on the Eastern and Turkestan fronts. The beginning of cooperation between the Central Asian ethnic elites and the leaders of the Basmachi movement with the Soviet power contributed to the growth of confidence in the Soviet regime on the part of the indigenous population. One of the important factors in the successful mobilization of the Muslim population of the Central Asian region into the Red Army was the large-scale political-propaganda carried out among them by the Muslim Bureau of the Communist Party of Turkestan, the Revolutionary Military Council of the Turkestan Front and the Kazakh Revolutionary Committee (Kazrevkom). At the same time, the Bolsheviks opted for creating military units on an ethnic rather than confessional basis. This tactic logically followed the process of nation building in the region, which suppressed attempts to integrate the indigenous peoples on the basis of their common kinship — Turkism. In the Bolsheviks' view, the formation of military units on an ethnic basis was the key to shaping national identity and a stage in the forthcoming national-territorial division of Central Asia within the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination.

³⁶ *Bezugolnyi A. Yu. Prizyivnoe zakonodatelstvo...* P.107.

³⁷ *Ibid.* P.107.

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