

Karakalpak Lands in The System of The Russian Empire's Colonial Strategy

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Abstract: In this article, the author, using the historical literature of various periods - imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet times - sheds light on the history of the penetration of imperial Russia deep into Central Asia in general, and the territory of the Karakalpaks in particular. Based on the analysis of actual historical data, the position of different strata of Central Asian society in relation to the policy of the tsarist government is revealed, their characteristics are presented. The political and socio-economic situation of the local people is reflected in the context of the activities of the Russian military in Central Asia. The article contains interesting fragments that reinforce the content of a particular historical moment.

Keywords: Karakalpaks, imperial Russia, conquest, Central Asia, Khiva, politics, territory, land, people.

Introduction: To the southeast of Russia lay vast Central Asian territories. They extended from Tibet in the east to the Caspian Sea in the west, and from Central Asia in the south to the southern Urals and Siberia in the north. The population of this region was relatively small, amounting to approximately 5 million people.

In the nineteenth century, the peoples of Central Asia developed unevenly in economic, social, and political terms. Some groups were engaged exclusively in nomadic pastoralism, others in agriculture, while still others practiced mixed forms of хозяйственной activity. In a number of areas, crafts and trade flourished, whereas industrial production was virtually absent. The social structure of these societies represented a complex combination of patriarchal relations, slavery, and vassal-feudal dependence. Politically, the territory of Central Asia was divided into three distinct state entities-the Emirate of Bukhara, the Kokand Khanate, and the Khiva Khanate-as well as a number of independent tribes.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Russia, showing a certain interest in the neighboring Central Asian region, sought to establish economic ties with it and to explore the possibilities of its conquest and subsequent development. However, it did not pursue

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, the situation changed fundamentally due to Great Britain's efforts to penetrate these territories and transform them into its colony. Rivalry with Britain became the principal factor behind the intensification of Russian foreign policy in Central Asia.

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By the late 1850s, Russia took practical steps to extend its influence into Central Asia. Three Russian missions were organized: a scientific mission led by the Orientalist scholar N. V. Khanikov, a diplomatic mission under N. P. Ignatyev, and a trade mission headed by Ch. Ch. Valikhanov. Their objectives included studying the

political and economic conditions of the Central Asian states and establishing closer contacts with them.

Supporting Russia's offensive policy in Central Asia, one of the military officers directly involved in the operations, D. I. Romanovsky, warned the local administration against hasty and ill-considered decisions, advising them to "think more than act, and not rush into advancing inland."

As a result, in 1863, the Special Committee decided to commence active military operations.

At that time-more precisely, at the end of June 1863-the Karakalpak biy Rza arrived at the Syr Darya by boat, where the Russian administration was already established. In conversation with the Russians, he emphasized that the primary condition for the Karakalpaks' migration to the Syr Darya was the protection of their villages by Russian units; otherwise, any discussion of relocation was impossible. Regarding the impossibility of migration without protection and the difficult situation of the Karakalpaks under the khanate, he stated the following:

"The impossibility of survival and all hardships have reached their extreme limits... They would have moved to the Syr Darya long ago (toward the Russians – author's note); everyone desires this, but relocation is impossible. On one side are the Khivans, on the other the Turkmens and Kyrgyz, who will not allow it; at the first sign, they would inevitably be robbed by one group or another, so no Karakalpak dares even to think of leaving their camps until assured of complete safety. Migration in small groups of one or two yurts could still have been possible two or three years ago, but now even that is impossible, because the Karakalpaks watch one another to prevent anyone from leaving and thereby increasing the burdens on those who remain. If one Karakalpak cannot relocate, he will not allow another to do so. The strictness has reached the point that families leaving for the Syr Darya by boat are placed under supervision or given over to guardianship. The Karakalpaks have lost their unity; they dare not speak openly among themselves at gatherings, let alone hold consultations about leaving Khiva's territory, although everyone sincerely desires it, and discuss it only in private."

In the 1860s, the situation of the Karakalpaks was extremely difficult. On the one hand, internal wars within the khanate continued, devastating the population; on the other hand, the Khivan khan demanded an annual tax of 20,000 tilla from the people. For this reason, according to the Karakalpaks themselves, moving toward the Russians was perceived as a way to escape the wars and the khan's tyranny.

However, a detachment to protect the Karakalpaks

during their migration was refused. The imperial government consistently remained deeply indifferent to the fate of the peoples of Central Asia in general, and the Karakalpaks in particular, as the main objective of the empire was territorial expansion rather than the liberation of any particular people.

Regarding this, the imperial military officer M. Venyukov wrote: "Any mutual extermination among the Central Asians is a positive benefit for us, provided that their clashes do not occur on our lands."

After the tragic events in the Kokand and Bukhara Khanates, the Russian Empire directed its efforts toward the Khiva Khanate. The territory of the khanate covered 130,598 square kilometers. Following its conquest by Russia, 75,900 square kilometers of the territory were incorporated into the Turkestan General-Governorship. .

At the end of 1872, the ruling circles of Khiva, Khazarasp, Kungrad, and other cities split into two factions. One faction-the khan's entourage, headed by Matmurad Divanbegi-demanded decisive action against Russia. The opposing position was held by the merchant class and the trade and craft sectors of New Urgench and Khanki, who were interested in developing economic ties with Russia and resolving the Russo-Khivan conflict. On the side of the first faction, which consisted of members of the Karakalpak elite, was apparently the Karakalpak Ernazar-Atalyk from the Keneges clan (according to Russian archival sources, Atalyk Bala Ernazar Kabylov). .

The advance on the Khiva Khanate was thoroughly considered at a meeting of the Russian General Staff and the St. Petersburg Palace Council. The order specified the timing of the campaign-1873. The army, under the command of N. Stoletov, moved toward the khanate from Krasnovodsk, along the Caspian Sea. The overall commander was appointed as von Kaufman.

On May 18, 1873, Kaufman's detachment crossed the Amu Darya. On May 23, the fortress of Khazarasp was captured, and on May 27, the capital of the khanate, Khiva, fell. General Verevkin, having seized the fortresses of Kungrad, Khodzhayli, Mangit, and the Gurlen bekdome, struck the khanate from the north. The historian Muhammad Yusuf Bayoni wrote: "The advance was so brutal that neither people nor animals survived."

It is worth noting, however, that regarding the actions of the Russian troops, the American journalist Arthur MacGahan reported that instances of violence against women were extremely rare, and the behavior of the soldiers was far better than in other European countries: "Our troops did not disturb women and children, and assistance was provided to all who came.

Not a single child was killed. The Russians helped children as best they could."

Most researchers who wrote about the Khiva Khanate of that period were critical of its military capacity to offer serious resistance to the Russian army. In their view, a greater threat lay in the region's unknown and unpredictable nature.

There was also another aspect that could have played a favorable role for the Russian troops during the conquest of Khiva—the political factor, noted by M. Ivanin in his work *Khiva and the Amu Darya River*. He observed that the Khivans "would defend not the khan, but their own property, and the majority, taking their belongings, would flee, since the khan's policies had undermined the people's faith in him."

The ease of the Russian conquest of the Khiva Khanate can be explained by several factors. One of them was the population's reaction against Khivan rule, which had intensified by 1873. The civilian population actively assisted the Russians in their advance toward Khiva. For example, Karakalpak fishermen helped Captain Sitnikov of the Aral Flotilla during his movement in 1873 from Aral toward Kungrad. During the campaign, the Karakalpak *biy* Seyit-Gazy served as a liaison between Sitnikov and General Verevkin. Various orders from the Russian commandant of Kungrad were carried out by the Karakalpak *biy* Kadrberdi.

After the conquest of Khiva, the Karakalpaks sent their envoys to representatives of the imperial authorities, requesting that Russian regulations be immediately implemented in Karakalpak territories and that these lands not be incorporated into Khiva.

After the conquest of the Khiva Khanate, much of its territory, including the land of the Karakalpaks, was subordinated to the Turkestan General-Governorship. In the newly established Amu Darya Department (1874), the imperial government introduced a military-administrative system. The Khivan administration retained full authority over the Karakalpaks and, in fact, benefited from the arrangement, gaining a reliable support for its oppressive policies. State governance was concentrated in the hands of Russian officials, the Khivan khan, and his dignitaries.

The land was transformed into a true colony. The actions of the Tsarist authorities, aimed at keeping the population in servile obedience, were reflected in one of the documents: "It is necessary to compel this people to plant as much cotton as possible, to force them to labor constantly, so that they have no time to think of anything else, and neither the time nor the desire to engage with political events." The content of this document remained relevant in Central Asia for a very long time.

Thus, the penetration of Imperial Russia into the depths of Central Asia, including the territories of the Karakalpaks, can be assessed in different ways. On the one hand, these lands were largely conquered by Russia, and a colonial regime was established, imposed by the Tsarist administration. On the other hand, the incorporation of Central Asian peoples into Russia brought comparatively significant changes. For example, slavery and the most backward forms of patriarchal life and feudal internecine conflicts that devastated the population were partially abolished.

The peoples of Central Asia, while becoming part of Russia, did not lose their national, cultural, or religious characteristics. On the contrary, from the moment of conquest, a process began that fostered their consolidation and the formation of modern Central Asian nations.

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