

**“MILITARY CONSCRIPTION POLICY OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE IN  
TURKESTAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (1914–1917)”**

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**Abstract:**

This article analyzes the socio-economic and political processes that emerged in Turkestan during the years of the First World War. As the military needs of the Russian Empire increased during the war, the large-scale mobilization of resources from the population, the introduction of new taxes, and the issue of recruiting the local population for military service became matters of significant importance.

**Keywords:** Turkestan Region, World War I, military obligation, mobilization policy, Russian Empire, the 1916 uprising, socio-economic crisis, colonial policy, tax system, ethnic groups, Semirechye Province, local population, protest movements, requisition, historical processes.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Turkestan region experienced complex socio-political processes as one of the important strategic territories of the Russian Empire. Especially during the years of World War I, the economic crisis that emerged in the region, the sharp decline in the living standards of the population, and the intensification of colonial policies led to growing dissatisfaction among the local population. Due to wartime demands, the need arose for the large-scale mobilization of human and material resources, and this process directly affected the lives of the peoples of Turkestan. At the latest meeting held under the Turkestan Committee, the situation developing in Khiva was discussed. A report sent on June 21 by Lieutenant Colonel Trizna to the commander of the military district troops, as well as his telegram dated July 3, was read aloud. According to the information provided by Lieutenant Colonel Trizna, considering that the unrest in Khiva was intensifying, the meeting recommended that stricter measures be taken. It was deemed necessary not to hesitate, when required, to use weapons, carry out arrests, and exile harmful individuals regardless of their status. A detailed report by Tinishpaev, a member of the Turkestan Committee, regarding the situation in Semirechye Province was also heard. According to the opinion of the meeting, in order to restore normal relations more quickly between the Kyrgyz population and Russian settlers in Semirechye Province, the following measures were considered necessary: 1) the expulsion from Semirechye Province of “white ticket” holders (those exempted from military service) and individuals over forty years old who were not serving within the province; 2) strengthening the garrisons in the province with troops born in Russia; 3) providing material assistance to those affected by the unrest, not in the form of direct compensation, but for the restoration of destroyed farms and households; 4) establishing fair regulation of land use; 5) appointing liquidation commissions with the authority to requisition livestock and grain for the restoration of ruined households; 6) expressing the desire that all issues related to the

restoration of devastated households be resolved locally and later approved by the Turkestan Committee. The consequences of the Kyrgyz uprising in the Przhevalsk district left a severe impression. Many Russian villages were reduced to ruins, the population was barely surviving, and urgent assistance was needed. The general mood was alarming. On June 1, inspections were carried out in three settlements located in the upper reaches of the Djegalapa-Tyupa River together with representatives of the district committee and commission members, where Kyrgyz people returning from China had settled. The Kyrgyz were gathering in large groups from various volosts. Among the local Kara-Kyrgyz were also Kazakhs separated from the Jarkent district. The condition of the Kyrgyz population was extremely difficult: people were dressed in torn clothes, there were very few children, most of whom suffered from rickets due to malnutrition, and there were almost no young girls or women because they had been sold in Chinese Turkestan in exchange for bread. Instead of yurts, only scraps of cloth hanging on sticks remained, and livestock was extremely scarce, having been plundered in Chinese territory.

Worst of all, mass deaths among the Kyrgyz population began due to famine. On the road to Karkara, I saw up to twenty corpses, including the bodies of children. The attitude of the Russians toward the Kyrgyz was also horrifying: groups descended like black crows, seizing the remaining livestock. In Tyup, a gang of discharged soldiers took away three people together with their cattle, slaughtered sheep on the road and ate, then stole their money and killed them all. A seriously wounded woman survived and returned to her village, where she reported that half-dead children were crawling over the bodies of their parents. A search for the criminals was launched, and this was not an isolated incident. At the beginning of May, Consul Brodyansky reported from Kuldja that Kyrgyz groups were heading toward Russian territory for robbery and massacres, but in reality they had come to engage in poppy cultivation and the opium trade. Panic spread, peasants abandoned agricultural work and gathered in large villages, and massacres occurred in some places. Nearly one hundred Kyrgyz were killed, and only a few were saved by the masters who hid them. At the same time, opposite situations were also observed: when Kyrgyz workers were being taken away together with their families, Russian and Kyrgyz women recognized each other, embraced, and wept. Numerous facts indicate that if compensation for damages by the Russians and the struggle against marauding gangs were successfully carried out, the Kyrgyz could be resettled in their former places, including on vacant lands allocated for settlers. One of the causes of the uprising was also the resettlement policy that deprived the Kyrgyz of irrigated lands. In addition, the feudal system — manapism — played an important role, and it was considered necessary to wage a systematic struggle against it through meetings and propaganda conducted by speakers who knew the local language. On behalf of the government, amnesty, exemption from taxes, equality, and the abolition of manapism were proclaimed. Due to famine and mass deaths, exemption from taxes was essential for restoring the economy. In order to solve the food problem, it was necessary to introduce a bread monopoly in the territory of Semirechye Province and ensure the fair distribution of surplus products. To restore the Kyrgyz economy, livestock should be purchased in Chinese Turkestan and distributed among the population, while funds were also needed for the construction of yurts. In order to stop robberies and murders, a representative of the Provisional Government ordered the confiscation of weapons from peasants and discharged soldiers. It was considered necessary to organize rapid trials for arrested criminals, and for this purpose it was requested that a deputy prosecutor and a member of the court be sent to Przhevalsk. The movement of gangs was brutalizing people, while the court was regarded as an important instrument in the struggle against manapism. There was also a shortage of labor needed to organize the population. The local committee appealed to the government for

assistance to provide the Kyrgyz with food and support for restoring their economy, and also requested help and ideological leaders from Russian and Muslim communities. This beautiful region had lived for decades without such leaders, and now, during a severe tragedy, it was in desperate need of assistance. It was hoped that the Russian and Muslim peoples would help this territory, liberate the Kyrgyz people from manapism, and lead them onto the path of progress. The uprising occurred during the third year of World War I against the backdrop of a sharp deterioration in the socio-economic situation in Turkestan. The prolonged war increasingly demanded the mobilization of human and financial resources. In search of new sources of revenue, in October 1914 the Minister of Finance proposed to the Council of Ministers the introduction of a military tax on persons exempt from military service, as well as a special tax replacing military obligation in certain remote regions of the Russian Empire. As a result, a decision was made to introduce a military tax on persons who had not been conscripted during 1911–1914. During the war, this tax would be abolished when a person was called for active military service or reached the age of forty-three. The amount of the tax was determined according to the size of property and ranged from 6 to 200 rubles per year. In the Turkestan region, this tax was set at 21 percent of all direct taxes. This law was approved by the Tsar on April 19, 1915, and came into force on January 1, 1915, although in practice it was introduced because of the financial difficulties caused by the participation of the Russian Empire in World War I. During the war years, the activities of representatives engaged in the procurement of raw materials, food, fodder, and fuel intensified in the region. Workers, draft animals, carts, and yurts were forcibly confiscated from the population. In 1914 alone, one million sheep were taken from the Syr Darya and Semirechye Province provinces. Although the prices of grain, rice, sugar, and other products sharply increased in 1915–1916, low fixed prices were established for cotton. Rising prices caused protests and disturbances in many places. With the outbreak of the war, the region also began receiving refugees and prisoners of war. Secret reports noted that “poverty is increasing, and together with it the dissatisfaction of the population is also growing, which may turn into an open uprising.” Due to the prolongation of the war and heavy losses at the front, the need arose to constantly replenish the army with new soldiers. The Russian population of Turkestan was also urgently conscripted on a general basis, and during the very first days of the war 22,999 people were mobilized. Settler peasants resisted this mobilization and the requisitions. By the beginning of 1915, 70,000 of them had already been recruited into the army, with the highest figures recorded in Semirechye Province. In this region, 12.2 percent of the population, 22.9 percent of men, and 49.3 percent of able-bodied men were drafted into the army, which explains why the 1916 uprising was strongest there. Since men between the ages of nineteen and forty-three were mobilized, many families were left without labor during the harvest season. In July 1915, protest demonstrations took place in Pishpek, Andijan, and Samarkand. After Turkestan was annexed to the Russian Empire, the local population had been promised exemption from military service. The “Regulation on the Administration of the Turkestan Region” of 1886 also confirmed this privilege. There was even a legend that Konstantin Petrovich Kaufman had promised the local population exemption from military conscription for fifty years. The Tsarist decree of 1824 also emphasized that Kazakhs were exempt from military service, and this was reaffirmed in the regulation of 1868. This privilege was considered both a “gift from the Tsar” and a political necessity, since the population of the newly annexed territories was not yet regarded as fully reliable and prepared. Not all peoples in the empire performed military service, although this situation was not accepted equally everywhere. For example, in the Caucasus, some peoples instead demanded the abolition of restrictions on military service. With the outbreak of World War I in the Steppe

region, part of the Kazakh intelligentsia proposed the creation of national cavalry units similar to the Cossacks in order to grant the local population equal rights with settlers and Cossacks. There are also known cases in 1914–1915 when some representatives of the local population of Semirechye Province expressed their desire to добровuntarily go to the front. At the beginning of April 1916, the public representatives of the Karkaraly district of Semipalatinsk Province submitted a petition to the governor requesting the convening of a congress to discuss the issue of “choosing a type of service in the army from the point of view of usefulness to the state.” It was also proposed to send a delegation to conduct negotiations with the government and the State Duma, and consultations on this matter were held with the leadership of the Muslim faction of the Duma. In a complaint sent by the Kyrgyz (Kazakhs) to the State Duma on August 30, 1916, regarding the postponement of military conscription in 1916, it was emphasized that their recruitment into military service was not only fair, but also their “civic duty.” “We, the Kyrgyz,” they declared, “consider ourselves equal children of a united Russia and deeply hope that a victorious war will help establish legality in our homeland, implement necessary reforms, and promote brotherhood among different peoples.” The issue of military service had been discussed for several decades within military institutions, the government, and the State Duma. A corresponding draft law had even been prepared, but with the outbreak of World War I in 1914, it was set aside and never implemented. Nevertheless, the Ministry of War continued gathering information on this issue through the Asian Department of the General Staff. A year later, the military administration once again returned to this draft law. On June 14, 1915, a meeting of the Council of Ministers chaired by the Emperor took place at Stavka, where plans were discussed to selectively involve certain categories previously exempted from military service in the fulfillment of universal military obligation.

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