

The “Red Army in Turkestan” 1917-1920

In the last few years a large number of works devoted to the October Revolution and civil war in Central Asia and Kazakhstan have been published in the Soviet Union. They include histories, the recollections of participants and collections of contemporary documents. The most noticeable feature of all these books has been the effort to prove that the Muslim population of Central Asia and Kazakhstan took an active part in the Revolution and civil war on the Soviet side and that, although some representatives of the Tashkent Soviet Government and local soviets may have committed errors in their conduct towards the indigenous nationalities, from the first days of Soviet rule in Turkestan the Bolshevik Party had the interests of the Muslim population at heart. The depredations which the latter suffered at the hands of the Russian immigrants are virtually passed over in silence. Even these tendentious works cannot, however, entirely conceal the truth. Earlier Soviet books on the period, particularly those written in the 1920s, were much more honest about the part played by the Muslim peoples and the undisguisedly "colonialist" nature of the Tashkent Soviet Government which ruled Turkestan for the first two years after the Revolution. The new version of events is no doubt a reaction to the anti-colonialist climate of recent years. It seems designed not only to refute charges of colonialism made against the Soviet Union but also, and perhaps even more, to convince the increasingly educated and politically literate peoples of Central Asia and Kazakhstan that the Revolution in Turkestan, if not entirely of their own making, was at least one that they welcomed and enthusiastically helped to defend. This view is disproved not only by the attempts of the local Bolsheviks to exclude Muslims from all political power, but also by the nature and conduct of the Red Army in Turkestan in the early days of Soviet rule.

The following brief account of the Red Army in Turkestan at this time is based on two early Soviet works as well as some Soviet books published in the last few years, and Western sources. The two early Soviet works are G. Safarov's *Kolonial'naya revolyutsiya (Opyt Turkestana)* (Moscow, 1921) and Ye. Kozlovskiy's *Krasnaya armiya v Sredney Azii* (Tashkent, 1928). The former, written by a man who was a member of the new Turkestan Commission which was appointed in August 1920, contains a particularly fierce indictment of the incompetence of the early Tashkent Soviet Government and its scandalous treatment of the Muslim population based to a considerable extent on contemporary local newspapers. Kozlovskiy's book is in quite a different vein and gives the impression in both contents and style of having been written by a professional soldier who participated in some of the campaigns he describes. It is remarkable for its factuality and comparative honesty, and provides the backbone of the article. The more recent Soviet works consulted represent only a small but typical sample of what is now being produced. In contrast to Kozlovskiy, they abound with tales of imperialist machinations which have little or no basis in



fact. They also contain a mass of tendentiously selected and undigested information from archive sources. They are not, however, totally without value, and behind the latest Party interpretation of history can be discerned the same broad outline of what happened as given in the earlier works. The most truthful and interesting of the recent Soviet works used is S. B. Zhantuarov's *Grazhdanskaya voyna v Kirgizii* (Frunze, 1963), covering the civil war in Semirech'ye and the Fergana Basmachis. The account of the Transcaspian front is mostly based on *The Transcaspian Episode 1918-1919* (London, 1963) by C. H. Ellis who was a member of the British forces involved. Some information has also been drawn from *Mission to Tashkent* (London, 1946) by F. M. Bailey who was in Tashkent in 1918-20 and had first-hand knowledge of the events he describes. Another work which has been consulted is Alexander G. Park's *Bolshevism in Turkestan 1917-1927* (New York, 1957), which is based largely on Soviet books and articles published in the 1920s.

The Red Guards

On 13 November 1917, a few days after the Bolsheviks had triumphed in Petrograd, the Tashkent soviet, dominated by left Socialist Revolutionaries and Bolsheviks and drawing its support from the local railway workshops and the soldiers of the Tashkent garrison, seized power. There were at the time few Bolsheviks and no Bolshevik Party organizations in Turkestan and the proletariat itself was very small and consisted mainly of railwaymen. The Tashkent Soviet Government held nominal suzerainty over the whole of Turkestan, but its effective authority did not immediately extend even to all the main towns and railway settlements in the area. It was very soon faced with armed threats to its existence on many sides, and in the next two years, cut off for long periods from Central Russia, it had to rely largely on its own resources to repulse them.

At first, as in Central Russia, the defence of the Soviet regime rested on the Red Guards or armed workers' militia. The first Red Guards, consisting mainly of workers in the Tashkent railway workshops, fought on the streets at the time of the successful revolutionary coup. Later their numbers increased, and during November and December 1917 they were swelled by some of the Hungarian, Austrian and other foreign prisoners of war who had been interned in Turkestan. In December 1917 instructions were issued to the soviets in the other towns of Turkestan to enrol all workers between the ages of 18 and 45 in local Red Guard units. This resulted in the emergence of a number of ill-organized, ill-disciplined and insufficiently trained armed detachments subordinate to the local soviets in the main towns and railway settlements.¹

¹ Kozlovskiy, Ye., *Krasnaya armiya v Sredney Azii* (Tashkent, 1928), p. 13; Sologubov, I. S., *Inostrannyye kommunisty v Turkestane* (Tashkent, 1961), pp. 26, 102



Early military engagements

In November 1917 White Cossack forces under Dutov had seized Orenburg, thus cutting Turkestan off from Central Russia and its vital grain supplies. In January 1918 detachments of the hastily recruited Tashkent Red Guards were sent north to assist in its recapture, and on 31 January 1918 the link with Central Russia was re-established when the Tashkent forces joined up with Red forces from the north in Orenburg. At the same time danger threatened from another quarter. Cossacks from the Tsarist army returning along the Transcaspian railway from Persia, Khiva and the Caucasian front to their homes in the steppes were arresting the members of soviets in their path. They had already fought their way into Samarkand in the teeth of resistance from units of local railwaymen, when Red Guards arrived from Tashkent and succeeded in defeating them on 4 February 1918 and disarming them.²

Meanwhile, in December 1917 representatives of the Muslim population, excluded from the Tashkent Government, had met in Kokand and set up the Kokand Autonomous Government which appealed unsuccessfully to Petrograd for recognition as the only government of Turkestan and for the dissolution of the unrepresentative Tashkent Soviet. When the Kokand Government began to recruit its own militia, Tashkent decided that it could no longer ignore the challenge to its authority from a body clearly enjoying greater popular support. On 19 February 1918, local units reinforced by Red Guards from Tashkent, among whom there were many foreign prisoners of war, stormed the Old City of Kokand, the seat of the Autonomous Government. With such weak forces as the Kokand Government had been able to muster put to flight, the Red forces indulged in an orgy of pillage and massacre, in which it has been estimated that more than 14,000 people perished.³ The worst atrocities were committed by the local Armenian militia units (*druzhiny*) which had been armed by the Soviet authorities.⁴

Fresh from its military victory in Kokand, the Tashkent Soviet then embarked on an attempt to overthrow the Emir of Bukhara at the invitation of the Young Bukharan Party. In March 1918 Kolesov, with a detachment of Red Guards, advanced on Bukhara. However "the old hatred of the Russians, fanned by the outrages committed in the seizure of Fergana", helped the Emir to rouse the population against the Soviet forces and Kolesov found himself cut off. He only extricated himself with great difficulty after reinforcements had arrived from Tashkent.⁵ Several hundred Russians living in the emirate had their throats cut by the Bukharans, while the Russian soldiers and Red Guards "plundered everything and everyone without distinction, behaved outrageously, got drunk and committed endless acts of violence".⁶ The result

² Kozlovskiy, op. cit., pp. 15-16; Safarov, G., *Kolonial'naya revolyutsiya (Opyt Turkestana)* (Moscow, 1421), p. 79

³ Park, Alexander G., *Bolshevism in Turkestan 1917-1927* (New York, 1957), p. 21.

⁴ Shamagdiyev, Sh. A., *Ocherki istorii grazhdanskoy voyny v Ferganskoy doline* (Tashkent, 1961), pp. 54-56.

⁵ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., p. 17.

⁶ Safarov, op. cit., p. 83.



of Kolesov's expedition was to make the Emir and his people even more hostile to the Soviet regime.

The formation of the Red Army

On 28 January 1918, after Lenin had realized that the Red Guards were not adequate to defend the Revolution, it was announced that a volunteer Red Army was to be formed in which, in keeping with its revolutionary origins, the commanders would be elected by the men themselves. By April 1918, however, it was clear that not enough men were volunteering and the system of electing commanders was unsatisfactory. Universal liability for military service was, therefore, announced, and the elective principle abolished as regards senior commanders. Recruitment for the Red Army started in Turkestan on 1 February 1918 and during the ensuing months Red Army detachments were formed in many towns in the area. The Red Guard units continued to exist separately, but gradually came to be employed only on the internal fronts and as a reserve. In May 1918 Osipov, a young man in his early twenties, put up by the Red Army organization in the Fergana Valley, was appointed Commissar of War and a statute laying down the principles on which the army was to be organized was promulgated.

By the spring of 1918 there were 7,600 men in the armed forces of Turkestan including 1,430 in the Red Guards.⁷ Later the number increased to some 16,000.⁸ The Turkestan Red Army had difficulty in finding recruits since the proletariat was small and the local Russian population showed little enthusiasm for enlisting. Some of the continual mobilizations of different age groups in the second half of 1918 had to be postponed because of opposition.⁹ In these circumstances the Tashkent Soviet Government was quite ruthless about using the foreign prisoners of war and it has been estimated that they constituted about half the Red Army in Turkestan during the period when it was cut off from Central Russia.¹⁰ Although it was against all accepted international usage, and in defiance of orders from Lenin himself, these unfortunates were more or less impressed into the army. Many "internationalists", as they came to be known, enlisted as the only alternative to starvation. In addition, they were led to believe that it was only the White forces encircling Turkestan that were preventing their repatriation and that it was therefore in their interests to fight them. There were also a number of internationalists who wholeheartedly supported the Bolshevik cause. The internationalists fought on all the fronts of Turkestan, and, as former soldiers with experience of fighting, rendered invaluable service to the Tashkent Soviet regime. Most of them were, however, far from satisfied with their lot. In the spring of 1919, for instance, there were demands for immediate repatriation and an end to their

⁷ Sologubov, op. cit., p. 103.

⁸ Bailey, F. M., *Mission to Tashkent* (London, 1946), p. 51.

⁹ Zhantuarov, S. B., *Grazhdanskaya vojna v Kirgizii* (Frunze, 1963), pp. 80, 87

¹⁰ Bailey, op. cit., p. 52. For fuller information about the plight of the foreign prisoners of war in Turkestan see CAR, Vol. IX, 1961, No. 3, pp. 240-249.



enlistment in the army. The dissatisfaction of the former prisoners of war was apparently so great that on 30 April 1919 their mobilization was halted and only resumed later after "extensive explanatory work"¹¹

As during Tsarist times, the Muslim population of Turkestan was not liable to mobilization. Some Muslims served in Red Army units but their number was not very great. They also served in various *druzhiny*. Several times during 1918 and 1919 resolutions were passed at Party and other conferences on the need to induce more of the Muslim population to enlist, but these amounted to little more than lip-service to Moscow's demands for greater participation by the natives. There was considerable opposition among the Russians to having Muslims in the army. One Soviet source states that there were hundreds of cases where a Muslim soldier was given a document stating that he was an excellent soldier but was being "dismissed from service forever as a Sart".¹² Cases also occurred of native Party *druzhiny* being disarmed, while gangs of Russian soldiers were allowed to kill and rob with impunity.¹³

In addition to the Red Guards and the locally recruited Red Army, the Turkestan forces included various *druzhiny*. Among these were the Armenians, who "under the flag of fighting the Basmachi plundered the peaceful population and organized national carnage", according to a recent Soviet work.¹⁴ Another recent Soviet work gives a figure of nearly 20,000 tortured and killed by Armenian units in fifteen months in Margelan, Andizhan, Namagan and kishlaks in the eastern Fergana Valley alone.¹⁵ In mid-1918, when the Red forces retreated from Orenburg to Aktyubinsk, a number of military units from Central Russia were sent down to Turkestan. They included the Moscow, Kazan and Zhlobinskiy corps.¹⁶ The latter was described by Col. Bailey as "a purely Russian corps . . . formed of released convicts and the scum of the Russian towns. They were a terror wherever they passed".¹⁷ And according to an early Soviet account "the Zhlobinskiy regiment extorted tribute money not only from the 'recalcitrant' population but also . . . from the soviets".¹⁸

The early Turkestan Red Army suffered from a number of major shortcomings. There was a lack of adequate leadership and insufficient control over the individual units. The latter often acted quite independently and were given to holding mass meetings to decide whether or not they would carry out orders. In the ranks of the army there were "adventurers who, having got a weapon in their hands, often used it for

¹¹ Sologubov, op. cit., p. 117.

¹² Safarov, op. cit., p. 97.

¹³ Park, op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁴ Zevelev, A. 1., and Tashliyev, Sh. T., *Ocherki istorii Kommunisticheskoy partii Turkestana III* (Tashkent, 1964), p. 116

¹⁵ Shamagdiyev, op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁶ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., p. 19

¹⁷ Bailey op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁸ Safarov, op. cit., p. 107.



personal gain".¹⁹ Drunkenness and indiscipline were grave problems. Political work among the troops was virtually non-existent, which was hardly surprising when even the Bolshevik leaders in Tashkent displayed no clear understanding of Party policy. The army was desperately short of all military supplies, though better off in this respect than most of its adversaries. Here, too, the railwaymen played a big part in helping to organize the production of munitions and repair of weapons in their workshops and elsewhere. As the civil war continued, shortages of food, warm clothing and fuel became more and more acute and extraordinary measures were resorted to overcome them. It has been calculated that about a third of the population died of famine during this period.²⁰ The lack of supplies and an adequate supply system forced the troops to live off the country, leading to widescale pillage of the Muslim population.

Turkestan encircled

After a brief lull following the abortive attempt to capture Bukhara, in April 1918 a White Cossack revolt broke out in Semirech'ye. Soviets had been established in Pishpek (now Frunze [and now Bishkek]) in January 1918 and in Vernyy (now Alma-Ata [and now Almaty]) in March 1918. In the absence of a railway and an industrial proletariat, the soviets were composed largely of the poorer Russian peasants and demobilized Tsarist soldiers who started to divide up the lands of the longer established Cossack and Russian settlers. This was the beginning of the civil war in Semirech'ye. According to Kozlovskiy, the Kirgiz and Kazakhs, who found nothing to choose between the warring sides, remained aside from the struggle, with a few who had lost their last property during the redivision of land joining the Whites.²¹ With the aid of a Red Guard detachment from Tashkent, the Cossacks were routed in May 1918 and fled to China. But Soviet rule in the area remained patchy and towards the end of the year was threatened by Annenkov's forces in the north. At the beginning of December 1918, Left Socialist Revolutionaries expelled from the Pishpek soviet raised a revolt in the nearby village of Belovodskoye and advanced on Pishpek. Some of the Red reinforcements sent to Pishpek wavered in their sympathies, but the uprising was put down on 1 January 1919.²²

Meanwhile Orenburg had again fallen to Dutov's forces on 3 July 1918, cutting Turkestan off once more from Central Russia and possible military and food supplies. A few days later there was a revolt among the railway workers of Ashkhabad and Kizil-Arvat against the Tashkent Soviet Government when their general dissatisfaction was sparked off by the suspicion that an order for a census was nothing but another disguised call-up. An anti-Bolshevik Menshevik and Socialist

¹⁹ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., p. 14.

²⁰ Park, op. cit., p. 39.

²¹ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., p. 26.

²² Zhantuarov, S. B., op. cit., pp. 78-86.



Revolutionary government was set up and in a short time Soviet rule was overthrown throughout Transcaspia. The Transcaspian forces advanced as far as Chardzhou, where they were defeated and forced to retreat to Merv. In August 1918 a British military mission in Mashhad, concerned to prevent a German–Turkish advance on India and also lest Baku oil and Turkestan cotton should fall into the hands of the enemy, agreed to supply limited help to the Transcaspian Government in return for certain promises and facilities. This eventually led to a very small number of British and Indian troops being involved in military operations against the Bolshevik forces in which their superior fighting qualities struck terror in the minds of the ill-disciplined, ill-trained and ill-equipped Red troops. Because of the nature of their mission, however, and much to the disappointment of the Transcaspian Government, the British were not allowed to advance beyond the Merv oasis, and the position on the Ashkhabad front remained stationary during the winter of 1918-19.²³ The uprising in Ashkhabad caused alarm in Tashkent, and orders were immediately given that all Communists and members of soviets and trade unions in Turkestan were to be armed and given regular military training. At this time the Tashkent Government regarded the Ashkhabad front as the most vital and therefore concentrated its main forces there.²⁴ The number of internationalists among them was very high – nearly 8,000 altogether during the fighting on the front.²⁵

In the Fergana Valley the Basmachi movement had grown rapidly since the sack of Kokand in February 1918.²⁶ The news of the carnage and looting coming on top of the widespread unemployment, famine and epidemics in the area, had evoked an elemental response in the native population against the Russians and Bolsheviks, and numerous armed bands had appeared, the two most important being those under the conservative Irgash in the Kokand area, and under Madamin in the eastern part of the valley. The Basmachi operated exclusively in small partisan units "able to count completely on the assistance of the local population or, at the very least, its benevolent neutrality",²⁷ and Soviet rule was reduced to a tenuous hold on the railway line. The Tashkent Government was at first inclined to underestimate the Basmachi threat and in the summer of 1918 was preoccupied with the Transcaspian front and dangers from other quarters. In July 1918 there were only 400 Red Army men in the Fergana Valley, but this was brought up to 1,500 by September. In addition, there were workers' detachments protecting the railways and mines.²⁸

²³ This account is based on C. H. Ellis's *The Transcaspian Episode 1918-1919* (London, 1963).

²⁴ Zevelev, A. I., and Tashliyev, Sh. T., op. cit., pp. 22-28.

²⁵ Sologubov, op. cit., p. 110.

²⁶ For a detailed account of the Basmachi movement see CAR, Vol. VII, 1959, No. 3, pp. 236-250.

²⁷ Safarov, op. cit., p. 91.

²⁸ Zhantuarov, op. cit., pp. 67-68.



The Osipov revolt and efforts to improve the army

At the beginning of 1919 a major threat to the existence of the Tashkent Soviet Government appeared from within its own ranks. On 19 January 1919 the Commissar of War, Osipov, staged a revolt in Tashkent itself with the support of some of the railwaymen and the best Bolshevik regiment under Koluzayev, who wanted a milder form of Socialism. Fourteen leading members of the Government were shot and most of the city occupied. Osipov issued an appeal to the workers saying that the Bolsheviks had seized power for their own selfish purposes and were shooting the workers with the aid of the extraordinary courts. He demanded a new soviet elected on a free vote with no distinction of Party membership or occupation.²⁹ The revolt was put down largely thanks to a detachment of Hungarian internationalists stationed in Tashkent fort. Osipov was also deserted by Koluzayev when the latter took exception to Osipov's dictatorial manner. Osipov fled with a few supporters and large sums of money on 21 January, and, in keeping with the ruthless Bolshevik methods, terrible vengeance was wreaked on the rest, about 4,000 being shot in the most brutal fashion.³⁰ A purge of Socialist Revolutionaries from the army followed and the leadership passed wholly to the Bolsheviks.³¹ On the same day that Osipov's revolt was put down Red forces reoccupied Orenburg. The Central Government in Russia took the occasion to appoint a special commission for Turkestan to try to persuade the Tashkent Soviet Government to adopt a more enlightened policy towards the Muslim population. Owing to renewed fighting only one member of the commission, Kobozev, arrived. He succeeded to a certain extent in his task by establishing a Muslim Bureau of the Party, but the real power of the latter was limited and the local non-Asian Bolsheviks continued to treat the Muslims in much the same high-handed way as before. The Muslim Bolsheviks did, however, manage to get the notorious Armenian units in the Red Army disbanded in mid 1919.³² Repeated efforts were made to raise the standard of the Turkestan Red Army, but with little effect. Particular emphasis was placed on improving political work among the troops and establishing Party cells in all units. At the end of April 1919, 25 per cent of all the Communists in the kray were called up, and there was a further mobilization of Communists later.³³

Military operations January-September 1919

Fighting was resumed on the Transcaspian front in the spring of 1919, and following the withdrawal of the British mission in April, the Red Army were able to advance against the weak forces of the demoralized Transcaspian Government. The Russian workers, who had originally raised the revolt, had quickly become disenchanted with

²⁹ Ibid., p. 88.

³⁰ Bailey, op. cit., pp. 119-121.

³¹ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., p. 69.

³² Safarov, op. cit., p. 96.

³³ Zhantuarov, op. cit., p. 106.



the inevitable rigours of the situation and become an easy prey for under-ground Bolshevik agitators. By July 1919 Ashkhabad was again in Soviet hands.

In Semirech'ye the Red Army was suffering heavy losses and in the spring of 1919 was on the defensive. There were not enough troops, many had no uniforms and there were shortages of all supplies. In July 1919 all able-bodied men were called up. The Red Army in Semirech'ye suffered particularly from the existence of small undisciplined units acting independently, over which the Tashkent Government had little control because of poor communications. In June 1919 a Communist airman, A. A. Shavrov, was sent to Semirech'ye to try to improve matters. His efforts to reorganize local units, improve propaganda work and do something about the long engrained habits of *partizanshchina* (small units acting independently), and the evils of elected commanders and commissars were greeted with unconcealed hostility. He was accused of being a counter-revolutionary and trying to implant the discipline of the old regime, and shortly after his arrival tried in a church by a large gathering of Red Army men and shot.³⁴ Fierce fighting continued in Semirech'ye in the summer of 1919 with victories and defeats on both sides.

On the Orenburg front the outlook was also bad in the spring of 1919. The link between Orenburg and Turkestan was again cut by the White Cossacks, and the Turkestan Red forces were continually on the retreat. In spite of the mobilization of workers' detachments from a number of towns in the area, Aktyubinsk [now Astana] was surrendered and the remnants of the Red units continued the retreat hampered by the hostile attitude of the local population. The arrival of Koluzayev's unit from Tashkent in June and a regiment from Kustanay under Zhilyayev brought no change of fortune. The series of defeats combined with an absence of political work, tiredness, insufficient discipline and the spirit of *partizanshchina* led to ferment in the ranks of the Red Army. Koluzayev's unit abandoned its position and, disobeying orders, decided to return to Tashkent and had to be disarmed on the way. A tactical retreat was made to the Aral Sea and every effort made to improve the battle-worthiness of the troops by introducing political instructors into all units, sending reinforcements from Tashkent, including Party and workers' *druzhiny*, and also supplies and ammunition. This good work was nearly ruined when Zhilyayev, the commander of the Kustanay regiment, refused to submit to general orders, and on 18 August 1919 arrested members of the military council of the front and declared himself commander. His revolt was quickly put down and the leaders shot. By this time relief from central Russia was not far off. The pressure on the White forces from the north-east was increasing and, sensing imminent defeat, they were giving themselves up in large numbers. The Turkestan Red Army began to advance at last

³⁴ Zhantuarov, op. cit., p. 110; Safarov, op. cit., p. 107.



and linked up with Frunze's forces from the north at the halt of Mugodzharskaya on 13 September 1919.³⁵

In the second half of 1919 the Basmachi movement in Fergana took on a particularly threatening character when Madamin entered into an alliance with the Russian "Peasant Army" led by Monstrov. In 1918 the Russian peasant settlers in Fergana had formed armed units to defend their villages from Basmachi attacks. These later grew into the well-organized Peasant Army. The Red Army naturally welcomed this ally which was put on the same footing as itself in October 1918 and supplied with arms and money. The Russian settlers had, however, never been pro-Bolshevik and they were very insistent on the independence of their army and refused to allow Bolshevik propaganda in its ranks. Gradually they became more and more disillusioned with the harsh realities of Soviet rule and began to feel sympathy for the Basmachis, thanks to the clever policy of Madamin who did his utmost to prevent Basmachi attacks on the Russian villages. In August 1919 the Red Army command decided to disarm the Peasant Army which had its headquarters in Dzhahalal-Abad. In this they were unsuccessful and shortly afterwards Monstrov entered into a formal alliance with Madamin. Their first target was Osh whose Red Army garrison surrendered without fighting. The Gul'cha garrison also went over to the rebels. Red forces moving up as reinforcements were heavily defeated, and Monstrov and Madamin moved on with their main forces to attack Andizhan. Here the heavily outnumbered garrison held out until the Kazan regiment arrived from the Transcaspian front on 22 September 1919 and the Peasant Army was routed. The Red units then went into the attack. The Peasant Army unit left in Osh fled when it heard of the defeat at Andizhan, and Dzhahalal-Abad was recaptured by the Red Army on 30 September 1919.

Frunze reorganizes the Turkestan Red Army

Now that Turkestan's isolation had finally come to an end, the Soviet Government in Moscow appointed a commission of six, including Frunze and Kuybyshev, to go to Turkestan to try to undo the damage done by the Tashkent Bolsheviks and rally the Muslim population to the Soviet regime.³⁶ At the same time, Frunze, although he did not arrive in Tashkent to assume direct command until 22 February 1920, set about reorganizing the Turkestan military units and bringing in reinforcements and supplies from outside. At about this time the Turkestan forces comprised about 18,000 on active service and 7,000 stationed in the rear,³⁷ organized in numerous small units. Towards the end of 1919 these were reorganized into three infantry divisions (one each on the Transcaspian, Fergana and Semirech'ye fronts), cavalry divisions, support units, etc. New commanders were appointed to a number of units. Efforts were made to tighten up discipline, and at the end of 1919, 250 Party members were mobilized to

³⁵ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., pp. 20-22; Zevelev and Tashliyev, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

³⁶ For an account of the work of the Turkestan Commission see CAR, Vol. XII, 1964, No. 1, pp. 5-15.

³⁷ Zhantuarov, op. cit., p. 145.



raise the political consciousness of the troops. A special section was opened in the Tashkent military college for training Red Army political workers.³⁸ The importance of a correct attitude towards the Muslim population was emphasized in an order to the troops of the Turkestan front issued by Frunze and Kuybyshev on 23 October 1919 in which they stressed that both commanders and men were responsible for seeing that no excesses occurred in their treatment of the native population.³⁹ Frunze also set about organizing national Muslim units, e.g. the 1st Uzbek Cavalry Brigade, and the First Kirgiz Territorial Regiment.⁴⁰ For the first time mobilization of the Muslim population was introduced, and in May 1920, 30,000 Muslims between the ages of 19 and 30 were called up, from among whom a number were selected for training as commanders.⁴¹ In the spring of 1920 the Turkestan troops were ordered to form labour battalions to help restore the shattered economy by repairing railways, bridges, factories and so on.⁴²

The civil war ends in Transcaspia and Semirech'ye

The military outlook brightened considerably on all fronts after Turkestan's isolation was ended and capable military leaders took over. On the Transcaspian front Kazandzhik fell on 6 December 1919 and Krasnovodsk was taken on 6 February 1920. In Semirech'ye the most urgent problem was to try and normalize the local units. Although these efforts continued to meet with great resistance, the front was put in comparative order by introducing Communist units and political workers from Tashkent and putting tried leaders at the head of the partisan detachments. On the secondary Dzharkent (now Panfilov [and back to Zharkent]) front the White forces were driven over the Chinese frontier at the beginning of 1920; while on the Kopal front, after initial reverses, victory was achieved at the end of March 1920. Semirech'ye was now cleared, but serious problems still remained. The Russian settlers were not at all sympathetic to the new policy of a fair deal for the Kazakhs and Kirgiz. It was decided that, in order to carry out this policy, it was necessary to demobilize some of the older locally-recruited Russian soldiers and transfer others to the Fergana Valley to fight the Basmachi. At the same time military units were formed from the local Muslim population to serve in Semirech'ye. This news alarmed the Russian settlers, who feared that the armed natives would take away their land. Those liable for demobilization, who included many partisans who had performed great services in the civil war, refused to give up their arms and had to be disarmed by force. Dissatisfaction increased and finally on 12 June 1920 a revolt broke out in Vernyy among the Semirech'ye units which were to be transferred to Fergana. They demanded the abolition of the grain monopoly, the abandonment of the creation of

³⁸ Zevelev, A. I., and Tashliyev, Sh. T., *op. cit.*, p. 146.

³⁹ Zhantuarov, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁴⁰ Kozlovskiy, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁴¹ Zhantuarov, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

⁴² Sologubov, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.



Muslim units, the disbanding of the revolutionary tribunals, and the rescinding of the order transferring them to Fergana. The revolt threatened to take a serious turn, but collapsed when the more reliable 4th Cavalry Regiment entered the town. In November 1920 there was a minor revolt in the frontier units in Naryn which was put down in a fortnight.⁴³

The new Soviet policy in Fergana

Madamin continued to have some successes in eastern Fergana at the end of 1919, but early in 1920 he was abandoned by Monstrov and his forces, who made their peace with the Soviet Government on 17 January. At the same time the reinforcement of the Red Army in Fergana with well-trained disciplined troops as well as political and economic measures began to take effect. There was a merciless purge of the soviet and Party organizations to eliminate those who had displayed a colonialist attitude to the natives. At the beginning of 1920 a Tatar Infantry Brigade was posted to Fergana to inspire confidence in the regime among the Muslims. Taxes were reduced, food supplies improved, irrigation networks were repaired and economic assistance was offered to those who had suffered at the hands of the Basmachis. Muslims were encouraged to join the soviets and the Party, and new national militia units were created. As these measures began to take effect, the Basmachis lost some of their support among the war-weary native peasants and began to surrender. With Frunze's approval some of them then fought on the Soviet side, but disliking military discipline they reverted to their former raiding.⁴⁴ Madamin capitulated on 6 March 1920, and with the surrender of several other Basmachi leaders, the movement died down for a short time. But this did not last long. By the summer there was a recrudescence of the Basmachi movement throughout Fergana. Among the reasons for this were the universal labour conscription introduced in April 1920, the surplus-appropriation system and the banning of private trade. The hasty call-up of the native population in May 1920 revived bitter memories of the 1916 uprisings. As a result there were wholesale desertions to the Basmachis, the deserters taking their weapons with them. The withdrawal of troops for the operation against Bukhara also encouraged the Basmachi to rear their heads again."⁴⁵

The capture of Khiva and Bukhara

Until 1920 the principalities of Khiva and Bukhara managed to retain their independence, but now that the Soviet Government's hold on Turkestan was firmly established their days were numbered. In November 1919 the Uzbek Young Khivan Party, a progressive group, appealed to the Soviet Government for help against Dzhunaid-khan, the Turkmen leader who had displaced the ruling khan two years earlier. A Red Army force advanced on Khiva in January 1920, and by the end of

⁴³ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., pp. 27-29; Zhantuarov, op. cit., pp. 166-169.

⁴⁴ Zhantuarov, op. cit., pp. 185-189.

⁴⁵ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., p. 36.



February Dzhunaid was defeated.⁴⁶ (Kozlovskiy maintains that Red Army forces were sent to the area at the end of 1919 to put down a revolt by local Cossacks and that they became involved with Dzhunaid only after he attacked them.⁴⁷) The Young Khivans, brought to power by the Red Army, were later replaced by a more orthodox soviet regime.

Preparations for the capture of Bukhara began in the spring of 1920. These were completed towards the end of August, when a revolutionary outbreak was staged in Chardzhou by Bukharan Communists, who then formally appealed for Soviet assistance. Frunze had 10,000 troops at his disposal for the operation, against the Emir's 40,000-odd, but the latter were much less well-trained and well-equipped, and also less reliable. The advance on the city of Bukhara began on 29 August 1920, and after a three-day battle the city was taken. The Emir fled with some of his followers to Eastern Bukhara, whither he was pursued by the Soviet forces. Frunze left Turkestan immediately after the fall of Bukhara to fight in south Russia.

Subsequent fighting

The Red Army was still faced with many years of fighting against the Basmachi, who now operated not only in the Fergana Valley but also throughout Eastern Bukhara. In the end, a combination of over-whelming military strength and political measures brought victory to the Soviet Government by the end of 1923 in Fergana and the end of the 1920s in Eastern Bukhara. The difficult terrain and material shortages which forced the troops once again to live off the land revived some of the unhealthy tendencies in the Red Army, but gradually these were overcome and the necessity of behaving correctly towards the indigenous population was brought home to the soldiers.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Park, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

⁴⁷ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., p. 63.

⁴⁸ Kozlovskiy, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

