COLLABORATIONISM OF CENTRAL ASIAN MUSLIMS WITH NAZI GERMANY DURING WWII

Undergraduate Capstone Project

By Nargiz Kapasheva

Advisers

Professor Mikhail Akulov

Professor Halit Akarca

Department of History, Philosophy and Religious Studies

Nazarbayev University

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The Central Asian population was one of the most mobilized groups in the Red Army. Around 3,4 million Turkestanis (Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Turkmens, Kirghiz, and Tajiks) were drafted into the Red Army during the war, thousands of whom died, and many were captured. [1] Taking advantage of the failures of the Soviet soldiers, the German Nazi's *Ostministerium* or *Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete* (The Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories) tried to recruit Muslim Central Asian prisoners of war. The Germans' attempts at drawing support from the Soviet Union's Central Asian citizens reflected the heavy losses they suffered after 1942-43 due to the lack of support of people in the occupied areas and inability to fulfil the Blitzkrieg plan as well as their intention to disrupt the stability of the Soviet regime in the Central Asian region. De Cordier estimates that the number of Soviet Muslims ranged from 280,000 to 297,000 soldiers in the Wehrmacht and 8,000 soldiers in the *Waffen-SS*, where the Turkestani battalions had the biggest number (between 110,000 to 178,000 soldiers in the Wehrmacht and 3,000 soldiers in the *Waffen-SS).* [2] While the number of people recruited to these battalions was much lower than the number of Muslims fighting in the Red Army, the topic of war-time collaboration among Central Asian soldiers remains underexplored. The paper will examine soldiers' motivations for collaboration and ask whether these were exclusively survival-driven. I will argue that Nazi Germany changed its racial policies and created a possibility of collaboration due to the war-time practical necessities, such as advancing on the front and promoting propaganda against the Soviet Union. The motivation of Central Asian soldiers, on the other hand, was based on

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[1] Adeeb Khalid, "The Crucible of War," in *Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021), 270.
[2] Bruno de Cordier, "The Fedayeen of The Reich: Muslims, Islam and Collaborationism During World War II," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (2010): 28.
Rolf-Dieter Müller and David L. Burnett, *The Unknown Eastern Front: The Wehrmacht and Hitler's Foreign Soldiers* (I. B. Tauris, 2013), 237.

survival in the harsh conditions of war and concentration camps, distrust of the Soviet policies, and desire to gain potential independence of their homeland.

The issue of collaborationism is a complicated one. In order to navigate this topic, this paper will consider the factors which made this cooperation possible in the first place. It is known that the German administration had a racially defined vision of the word. How did Central Asian people fit this discriminative and radical racial narrative if they were often considered similar to the Jews and "Asiatic" *Untermensch* (sub-humans)? When the Nazi administration finally decided to create these divisions for racial minorities, what did it take to be recruited as a "*Hilfswillig*" (volunteer) in the Legion? Being a person of Central Asian origin, it was very often the case that there was not enough time to prepare for the war, gain proper military education and equipment to fight effectively on one of the most brutal battlefields in history – the Eastern front. One of the Turkestani Uzbek soldiers, Hurram Ashurov, recalls that "the Turkestan [Soviet] military were given one real weapon for three soldiers, and the other two were given weapons made of wood; they were given 15 rounds of ammunition for three soldiers".[3] The chances of becoming a POW were high in this case. Considering the extreme and inhumane conditions of Nazi war camps and the Soviet administration's complete disregard towards POWs and captured soldiers, the collaboration allowed individuals to survive. Islam played an important role in uniting Central Asian Muslims under the Nazi guidance, promoting the idea of a Pan-Turkic and Pan-Islamic state after the potential conquest of the Soviet Union, and overall motivating people to fight in the hard war-time conditions. As the war came to an end, many of these soldiers became stranded and captured by the Allied powers to be later sent into Gulags. Some of them managed to escape this fate but were always denied an opportunity to return to their homelands.

[3] Шодмон Хайитов, "Историческая Судьба Туркестанких Военнопленных Второй Мировой Войны," *Метаморфозы Истории* 6 (2015): 53.

Before starting the analysis, it is crucial to consider sources for this project. Some of the documents from the German side are publicly available in *Bundesarchiv* (Federal Archive) and *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts* (Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office). They remain digitalized and mainly display official decrees, pamphlets, and pictures from the front. It was hard, on the other hand, to find information from the Turkestani soldiers themselves. Firstly, the issue of collaborationism with Nazis remains sensitive. Many of the participants had families in the Soviet Union after the war. There was a fear that publishing such details could result in various problems with the Soviet intelligence organs, such as KGB. Some of the participants decided to flee once again to the Soviet partisans or were captured by the Allied Forces after the war, resulting in long sentences in Gulag camps. Even after the fall of the Soviet Union, associations with Nazis and their war-time crimes could leave families of the Turkestani soldiers discriminated against, out of a job, and socially and politically vulnerable.

To base my findings, I was able to find two memoirs that covered the experience of soldiers in the Legion. Stephen L. Crane got personally acquainted with Isakjan Nazrikul, an Uzbek soldier from Jizzakh who enrolled into the Tashkent Military Academy at the age of 16 in 1939. He got urgently drafted the next year and captured by Germans in Latvia just at the beginning of the war. Isakjan then made a successful carrier in the German military ranks, emigrated to the US in the late 1940s, and opened a successful manufacturing business by 1957, generating an income of 500 thousand dollars. Stephen's uncle examined Isakjan when he was working only as a janitor in one of the car manufacturing factories in Philadelphia.[4] The author then got interested in his story, producing a verified memoir of Nazrikul's commentary on the events. Another important source is Abduakap Kara's summary and

[4] Stephen Lee Crane, *Survivor from an Unknown War: The Life of Isakjan Narzikul* (Upland, PA: Diane Publ., 1999), 1.

commentary of Cengiz Dagdji's literary works, interviews, and autobiography about the war and his participation in the Legion.[5] Dagdji was a Crimean Tatar but served in the Central Asian battalion. As Dagdji had almost finished a degree in the pedagogy of history, he was educated and later participated in the broadcasting and editing of propaganda material for the "Milli Turkestan" magazine and the Liberation Front of the Turkestani Unity Committee. Dagdji emigrated to London after the end of the war and continued to publish his semi-fictional novels in Turkish based on his experience in the German army.

The Nazi Vision of the East

The identity of Central Asians of the Soviet Union consisted of many different parts: being a Soviet citizen while trying to preserve Turkic and Muslim origin. One such part of identity was being "Eastern" or "Asiatic." It is evident that the Nazi administration never truly set up the limit to this Oriental narrative or defined it in any specific terms, such as geographic borders, ethnic content or culture. Firstly, the idea of the East might be traced directly to East Asia. As Japan joined the Axis powers, the Japanese colonies could fall under the concept, such as the territories of Manchuria, China, Taiwan, Singapore, etc. The East Asian explanation does not suit the case of Central Asia, as the Japanese authorities did not open the second front in the Far East of the Soviet Union. Secondly, the discussion of the "East" was often applied to Eastern Europe. Vejas Liulevicius describes the evolution of German nationalism and its pursuit of the establishment of colonial legacy in these territories and the radicalization of the deeply rooted and always changing 'Eastern myth'.[6] Some of the Eastern ideas could be attributed to the Slavic population of Europe, including those of the

[5] Абдуакап Кара, *Истина Туркестанского Легиона – Между Свастикой И Красной Звездой*. (Астана, Казахстан: Исследовательский институт «Общественное мнение», 2015), 5.
[6] Vejas G Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Soviet Union. Sakal, in the Master's Thesis about Germany and Turkestanis During the Course of World War II, stated that Germans addressed Slavic collaborationists, such as Ukrainians, Russians, and Belorussians, by calling them 'Eastern.'[7] Central Asian soldiers were specifically called "Turkestani," referring mainly to an indigenous population of the five republics of the Soviet Union (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan).

It is crucial to remember that the German administration never occupied Central Asian territories during the war, unlike Crimea or Caucasus.[8] The contact became almost nonexistent after the inclusion of Turkestani republics in the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities cancelled the NEP (New Economic Policy), reducing the possibility of foreign investors negotiating projects.[9] Turkestan, the largest colony of Russia, always piqued the interest of German officials. Turkestan held a unique place in Russian state policy since it functioned as a basis for raw commodities. Turkestan-related information was gathered by German embassies and consulates and reported to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in June 1918, proposing the prospect of using the food and cotton production in Turkestan for war purposes. The German authorities tried to obtain permission from the Soviet authorities to enter the cotton industry in 1923, but the attempt was unsuccessful. [10] Despite the failure to integrate into the Central Asian market, the German authorities continued to gather information about the region. The German Foreign Ministry received analytical reports on the Soviet Union's socioeconomic policies in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, as well as the results

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[7] Halil Burak Sakal, "Germany and Turkestanis During the Course of The World War II" (thesis, Bilkent University, 2010), 95.
[8] David Motadel, "Islam and the War on the Eastern Front," in *Islam and Nazi Germany's War,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 133-34.
[9] Gulzhaukhar Kokebayeva, "The Place of Turkestan in the Foreign Political Strategy of Germany in the First Half of the 20th Century," *Bilig,* 2016, 124.
[10] Kokebayeva, "The Place of Turkestan in the Foreign Political Strategy of Germany," 121-23.

of collectivization and repressions in 1937, from the German embassies in Moscow and Novosibirsk.[11]

The Turkestani people also tried to maintain contact with Germany before the 1920s, especially when it came to the independence and establishment of the Turkestan (Kokand) autonomy. The representatives of the newly emerging state considered Germany as an ally due to their connection with Turkey in WWI. Turkestani people turned to Woodrow Wilson for support in their fight for independence because they saw these changes as the realization of the principles of self-determination outlined in his "14 Points." Some Turkestan immigrants who were living in Europe requested that the German government write the President of the United States a letter following Soviet Russia's withdrawal from the war and the signing of a separate peace treaty with the nations of the Tripartite Alliance.[12] However, the Turkestan autonomy was ultimately destroyed by Bolsheviks after Mustafa Shokai, an elected president of the state, refused to acknowledge their legitimacy, leading to the creation of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in April-May 1918.

In this case, it is crucial to consider Turkestanis from the Soviet perspective. Nazi Germany despised the Soviet Union. Hitler referred to the Bolshevik revolution in fatalistic terms. In the excerpt from *Mein Kampf*, the Nazi leader highlight the especially cruel nature of the political crisis in the former Russian empire. "[Bolsheviks] overran a great state in a tragic hour, slaughtered out thousands of her leading intelligentsia in wild bloodlust, and now for almost ten years have been carrying on the cruellest and tyrannical regime of all time" (1924).[13] The new Jewish and Asian government then was only capable of destroying the

[11] Ibid., 124.
[12] Ibid., 121.

[13] "Hitler on Russia and Bolshevism (1924)," *Alpha History*, (2018), https://alphahistory.com/nazigermany/hitler-on-russia-and-bolshevism-1924-2/.

state, especially considering the remnants of the communist movement after the November Revolution in Germany in 1918.

> Germany is today the next great war aim of Bolshevism. It requires all the force of a young missionary idea to raise our people up again, to free them from the snares of this international serpent, and to stop the inner contamination of our blood, in order that the forces of the nation thus set free can be thrown in to safeguard our nationality, and thus can prevent a repetition of the recent catastrophes down to the most distant future.[14]

According to Hitler's logic, Bolshevism, with its Jewish "Asiatic" nature, was like a poison that could easily penetrate internationally, leading to worldwide chaos and destruction. The threat of Bolshevism existed before Hitler's agitations.[15] The news of Bolshevik atrocities, especially during the Civil War, spread quickly across Western Europe, such as the terror that was brought with it, the economic crisis after the collectivization and wealth distribution. The regime then became synonymous with *Unkultur*, an unordered society.[16] "The Russians are at the mercy of the revenge of the Jews, who are allied with all the Jews of the world," said German Kaiser Wilhelm II in February 1918.[17] Such claims sounded credible, even to viewers further west, given that a sizable number of Jews participated prominently in the later Central European revolutions—Rosa Luxemburg in Berlin, Kurt Eisner in Bavaria, and Béla Kun in Hungary. Germany, in this sense, had this special role in stopping the Jewish evil, protecting its Aryan character, and ultimately freeing nations from this evil sin.

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[14] "Hitler on Russia and Bolshevism (1924)"

[15] Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (eds), "Bolshevism as Fantasy: Fear of Revolution and Counter-Revolutionary Violence, 1917–1923", in Robert Gerwarth, and John Horne (eds), *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, The Greater War (Oxford, 2012; online edn, Oxford Academic, 24 Jan. 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199654918.003.0003

[16] Gerwarth and Horne, "Bolshevism as Fantasy: Fear of Revolution and Counter-Revolutionary Violence," 42; 47.

[17] Ibid., 50.

Bolschewismus ohne Maske (Bolshevism without Mask or Bolshevism Unmasked). 1939, Vienna. The soldier has a Soviet star on its helmet, while the conquered world underneath him is marked with the Soviet hammer and sickle, a typical symbol, combined with a yellow Jewish star.[18]

This narrative of 'East' was not new, having deep roots in the past. One of the major points of its development was WWI and the German occupation of the Eastern Europe territories. The government promoted an idea of *Kultur* and order that could be brought to newly conquered lands. This imperial language was powered by growing political ambitions and desires to redraw the political borders. [19] However, the occupation was not "civilized and in order" as the German soldiers met the population in the degraded state. For example, memoirs and diaries described it as *Unkultur*, which is a lack of any recognizable culture (in

[18] "Bolschewismus Ohne Maske," Bolschewismus ohne Maske - UWDC - UW-Madison Libraries, accessed April 16, 2023, https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AFEMLOIYBU6FPX9A.
[19] Vejas G Liulevicius, "The First World War and Its Aftermath," in *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 128.

this case, German).[20] In this regard, the East was associated with diseases and infections, '*shmutziggrau*' (dirty gray) color, and swamps, referring to the growing typhus pandemic and fear of venereal diseases.[21] In addition, the whole Eastern territories were generalized as half-Asian and barbaric, despite the diversity of nations. Then 'Asian nations' or 'undeveloped nations' were exoticized, seen as more backward, and less capable of ruling independently.

> Overall, native populations of the East were often seen as dirty, undisciplined, lazy, and undeveloped. One German commander stated that the Lithuanian, for example, 'can rule himself independently exactly as well as for example my daughter Ilse could raise herself independently' (133).[22]

The depiction of Eastern territories in the feminine nature was the most prominent one due to the lack of working males after the mobilization to the front, additionally justifying the need for domination. In this regard, Germany would be 'a strong masculine figure' that was able to rule and transform the weak uncivilized Eastern states.[23]

The defeat in WWI led to the revision of the German identity through ethnic discourses. Partially, this trend could be attributed to Adolf Hitler himself, as he often emphasized his origin in his speeches and publication. Hitler was born on the border of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, gaining in his assertion an ability to understand both the West and the East. During his imprisonment after the Munich Putsch in 1923, the politician declared in *Mein Kampf* that *Lebensraum* – the "living space" - was the only way to progress for the German nation. The idea of *Lebensraum* was first proposed by Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), an established Leipzig University geographer. He coined the phrase in the 1890s and presented its most persuasive definition in an essay in 1901. Ratzel advocated Darwinian evolutionary theory by presenting *Lebensraum* as a unifying force underpinning biological

[20] Liulevicius, "The First World War," 128.
[21] Ibid., 130.
[22] Ibid., 133.
[23] Ibid., 134.

change and the interaction between living species and their environment. The dual scientific and ideological roots of *Lebensraum* were consequently essential to its limited political success. [24] This political and economic course proposed the expansion in the Eastern direction by eliminating undesiring elements from the territories instead of the focus on Europe and overseas colonization, which was already established for centuries by the Western European powers.[25]

While, at first, there was a discussion of freeing and bringing order to uncivilized Eastern territories, there was a radicalization of colonial ambitions and discourses. According to Heinrich Himmler, the *Reichsführer* of *SS*, "Our duty in the East is not germanization in the former sense of the term, that is, imposing German language and laws upon the population, but to ensure that only people of pure German blood inhabit the East".[26] He put this ideology into the *Generalplan Ost*. Its main goal was ethnic cleansing and repopulation of the territories with various German diasporas. The Hitler-approved memorandum from May 1940 called 'Some Thoughts on the Treatment of Ethnic Aliens in the East' proposes that any national character should be exterminated. The worthiest elements would be taken to Germany. "The 'remaining inferior population' was to be combined with expelled inferior elements from Germany like the Sorbs and Wends, to form a 'leaderless worker-people (*Arbeitsvolk*)".[27] The upcoming ideological war between the West and East in the Soviet Union was supposed to help execute this plan as Hitler's 'Eastern Campaign' (*Ostfeldzug*)

[24] Woodruff D Smith, "Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum," *German Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1980): 52; 67-68. https://doi.org/10.2307/1429483.
[25] Vejas G Liulevicius, "Nazi Visions of the East," in *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160.
[26] Vejas G Liulevicius, "Nazi Visions of the East," in *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 182.
[27] Liulevicius, "Nazi Visions of the East," 171.

focused on total extermination of the enemy, making the Soviet Union 'populatable' as well.[28]

Despite the loss of momentum after the surrender of the German army at Stalingrad in 1943, the idea of 'East' did not lose relevance. Although the propaganda leaders tried to hide the vast proportion of losses, other Nazi politicians used it to 'unify' the German nation. For example, "Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels instead argued that the dimensions of the loss needed to be instrumentalized, to create a new propaganda of anxiety".[29] Likewise, the officials caused fear in the local citizens as they emphasized the immense consequences of the coming Soviet army. "A report warned: 'everyone must throw themselves into the last defence with the conviction of what will happen to wife, child and family members if they fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks'".[30] It was exactly the time when the German side needed resources to fulfil the army's ranks.

While the Turkic population did not play a big role in long-term plans, this group was considered racially higher than Slavs, such as Russian, Ukrainian or Belorussian.[31] Jews and Bolshevism were Hitler's main enemies. He, therefore, wanted to exterminate the Slavic masses before founding colonies in the various regions of the Soviet Union. Himmler went on to say that he wanted to utilize the Soviet POWs as slave labor in Auschwitz and other concentration camps.[32] Germans did not declare any such desire or policy with regard to Central Asia. Instead, the Nazi official used the potential of using Turkic people as "keen enemies" of Bolshevism for propaganda purposes. On December 12, 1942, Hitler said in a

[28] Ibid., 175.
[29] Ibid., 184-85.
[30] Vejas G Liulevicius, "Nightmare of the Advancing East, 1943-55," in *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 186.
[31] Motadel, "Islam and the War on the Eastern Front," 137-38.
[32] Sakal, "Germany and Turkestanis," 42.

speech that the only people he trusted were the "pure Muslims," the "real Turkic people (*wirkliche Turkvölker*)."[33]

Another reason for this racial concession towards "Asiatic" people could be the growing political relationship between Germany and Turkey during the war. In a document entitled "Pan-Turanism," the German embassy in Turkey pointed out the growing interest of Turkish officials in the fate of groups ethnically close to the Turks, who were referred to in the memorandum as "brothers by race" and lived on the other side of the Soviet-Turkish border. The document recommended that the German government should nurture the Turkic elements of the Soviet population against the Russians in every possible way due to "the lack of common history with Slavs."[34] As a result, the Nazi administration created a 'Turkestan Legion,' whose mission was to recruit other minorities of Muslim origin. Besides that, the foundation of the first volunteer soldiers from Soviet POWs (Osttruppen) was reportedly greatly influenced by the arrival of the Turkish generals, Ali Fuat Erden and Hüseyin Hüsnü Emir Erkilet, to the meeting with the first Turkestani troop in October 1941, according to Gerhard von Mende. Von Mende, a founder of the *Ostlegionen* and official from the *Ostministerium*, also recounts that the guests suggested that Germans create a "Turco-Islamic Legion," as they had done in Wünsdorf during World War I. Since the Nazis were creating separate regiments for each Caucasian and Turkic nation, their request was not granted.[35]

Even though the German officials regarded Turkestani people higher racially than the typical *Untermensch*, cases of mistreatment were still common. Central Asians were often compared to Jews due to the Muslims often being circumcised. Both Isakjan Nazrikulov and

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[33] Ibid., 44.
[34] Феферман Кирилл Маркович, & Ковалев Борис Николаевич, "Турция и Пантюркизм как Факторы Нацистской Стратегии Борьбы против Советского Союза. Между Политикой и Пропагандой," *Новейшая история России* 12, no. 3 (2022): 550.
[35] Sakal, "Germany and Turkestanis," 78.

Cengiz Dagdji confirm this occurrence during their incarceration in the camp.[36] Isakjan was able to explain in Russian to the German officer that he was Muslim, stating, "I am Muslim, as most Uzbeks are. Muslims are circumcised. It is done in my town in a building next to the mosque."[37] Isakjan later advised the incoming Jews to state during the interrogations that they were Jews as well by proclaiming that they believed in the prophet Muhammed.[38] It is hard to state whether all soldiers were able to prove and claim their Muslim origin, as not all Turkestani people could speak Russian, especially at the beginning of the war. Florin reports that there were many cases of communication issues among soldiers in the multinational units.[39] The chances of being wrongly accused of being a Jew and then murdered could be high. One such case happened when Schutzstaffel (SS) squads executed numerous Muslim prisoners of war during the summer and fall of 1941 because they had undergone circumcision, which the Nazis believed proved they were Jews.[40] Another incident involved the deportation of Central Asian detainees to a concentration camp in the Netherlands so they could be shown to Dutch communists who were sceptics as instances of the *Untermenschen* that could be found in the Soviet Union. Many did not survive the abuse and the winter, and of the 77 who did, they were led into the woods and killed in April 1942.[41]

Besides that, the Nazi officials regarded Soviet Central Asia in colonial terms. Alfred Rosenberg, a high-ranking Nazi official responsible for ideology and the head of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, proposed to establish the following regions within the Soviet Union after the successful occupation: *Reichskomissariat Ostland (RKO),*

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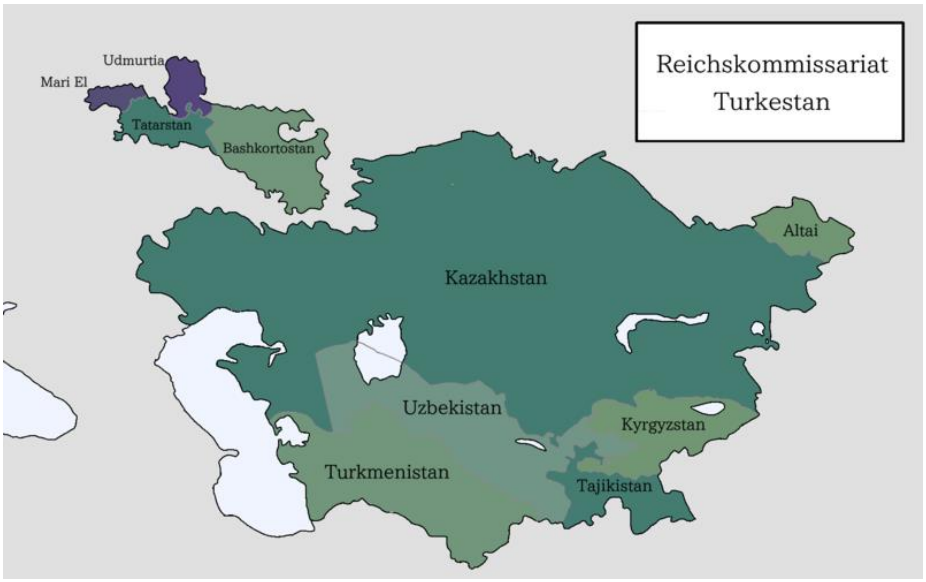
[36] Crane, *Survivor from an Unknown War,* 87-8.
Kapa, *Истина Туркестанского Легиона,* 34.
[37] Crane, *Survivor from an Unknown War,* 75.
[38] Ibid., 88-9.
[39] Moritz Florin, "Becoming Soviet through War: The Kyrgyz and the Great Fatherland War," *Kritika* 17, no. 3 (2016): 516.
[40] Khalid, "The Crucible of War," 274.
[41] Ibid., 274.

Ukraine (UKO), Moskau (MKO), Kaukasus (RKK).[42] All of these administrative units existed and played a crucial bureaucratic role during their occupation and siege. Rosenberg also shared the need to create another governing body called *Reichskomissariat Turkestan (TKO),* yet this idea never came into existence (refer to Map 1). According to De Cordier, the Reichskomissariat was supposed to include Turkic nationalities, such as Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek, Tatars, and Uighurs. At the same time, Tajiks were also added to the plan, despite not having relations with the Turkic ethnic group.[43] In addition, the plan accounted for Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, likely due to their speaking a Turkic language and sharing cultural similarities. Finally, Reichskomissariat was supposed to include Mari El, Udmurtia, and Altai.



Map 1. Potential composition of Reichskomissariat Turkestan

Hitler rejected the creation of the Turkestani region, stating that all forces should be focused on European parts of the Soviet Union. Perhaps he thought that after the successful invasion,

[42] Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies*. (England: Palgrave, 1981), 53.
[43] de Cordier, "The Fedayeen of The Reich," 32-3.

other republics within the country would fall into the German occupation accordingly and then split the territory of the USSR for their republics.

The Turkestan Legion

1941-42 were decisive years for the fortunes on the Eastern front. Before the creation of the Turkestan Legion in May 1942, Nazis experienced major failures in advancing towards the Soviet Union. Martin van Creveld, David Glantz, and David Stahel are three historians who have emphasized the inadequate logistical planning and logistical nightmares of the battle against the Soviet Union. [44] The expanse of Russia, the poor roads, the fatigue of the soldiers who had to march long distances while facing ferocious opposition, and the damage done to Germany's motorized divisions were all grossly overestimated. "The Wehrmacht's main striking force, its vaunted panzer divisions, made up only a small fraction of the army. In fact, the German army was composed of two armies: a small, modern, and motorized one and a far larger one that still depended on horses and railroads."[45] Although it is hard to say whether Germany lost the war from the beginning, December 1941 already showed the promises that the Allies might advance. This particular period reflects the Soviet victory in the battle of Moscow and the failure of the *Barbarossa* plan.

At the same time, the conditions of the Soviet army were weak as well, resulting in many casualties on the front. In general, the Soviet troops experienced shortages in cadres, equipment, and basic military training. Even if Stalin created national units in November 1941, such as Azerbaijan, Latvian, and Kazakh, Russians were in charge of the most

[44] Martijn Lak, "Contemporary Historiography on the Eastern Front in World War II," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 28, no. 3 (March 2015): 576, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2015.1061828, 576.
[45] Lak, "Contemporary Historiography on the Eastern Front," 577.

administrative positions.[46] In addition, the indigenous soldiers were often distrusted with the modern equipment and discriminated against on the basis of nationality and language barrier. "One Tatar officer interviewed in the early 1950s for the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System claimed that officers provided "dummy guns" to an Uzbek national division stationed in Tashkent—apparently the Uzbeks were provided with functional rifles only after they arrived in the Moscow region."[47] Central Asian soldiers were then often denied the opportunity to hone their skills in the training school, viewed as constantly reliant on Slavic soldiers, forced to engage with more menial and physically tiring tasks, like digging trenches, and even put in lethal situations based on their nationality.[48] For example, a certain commander Ol'shanskii permitted the enemy to slaughter the non-Russian soldiers because he thought Slavic soldiers were more valued than "Easterners." Additionally, Ol'shanskii was charged with placing a Cossack unit behind his regiment with instructions to lay mines across potential escape routes and shoot any Caucasians or Central Asians who turned around.[49]

Due to the inefficiencies in the Soviet army, the chances of being a prisoner of war (POW) were quite high. There are different data suggesting what the exact numbers of captive soldiers were. Aldzhumanov states that there were 3 million 800 thousand Soviet soldiers under German captivity by 1943.[50] Haiitov provides additional statistics from various authors and points out that the sum could be much higher. According to a study by American researcher Alexander Dolin, 3 million 355 thousand Soviet nationals had been taken prisoner

[46] Roberto J Carmack, "All to the Front? Nationality And Military Mobilization In Wartime Kazakhstan," in *Kazakhstan in World War II: Mobilization and Ethnicity in the Soviet Empire*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2019), 26.

[47] Carmack, "All to the Front?," 28-29.
[48] Ibid., 31-2.
[49] Ibid., 34.
[50] Kaidar Aldzhumanov, "Who, How and Why Created the 'Turkestan Legion'? Part 1. The Road of People." YouTube video, posted January 22, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2utIEas6YaQ.

by the Nazis by the end of 1941. Sakal provides a similar number of 3,461,338 captured Red Army soldiers between June 22, 1941, to March 20, 1942, referring to *Operations-Abteilung des GenStdH* (Operation Battalion of the General Staff of the Army).[51] German physicist Christian Streit noted 5,163,381 inmates by May 1, 1944. He claimed that 2 million 420,000 Soviet citizens perished in detention camps or went missing. The number of Soviet prisoners reported as the highest in the literature is 5,734,528; it was revealed in February 1945, prior to the start of the meeting in Yalta.[52] Overall, the number of Turkestani soldiers from the Red Army under German captivity could be up to 1 million in the first two years of the war (1941-42).[53]

The German war camps provided worse conditions for the Soviet soldiers. Shmyrov described the situation in the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp located in Poland.

> In Auschwitz, the ration for Soviet prisoners of war was worse and less than for the rest — during the day, Soviet prisoners of war were given 0.5 liters of rotten rutabaga [*брюквы*] soup, 300-350 grams of bread ration with a minimum addition of margarine… Very soon, the physical and psychological condition of Soviet prisoners of war, who had already arrived at Auschwitz in a state of exhaustion, became catastrophic.[54]

As Germany was experiencing hardships in progressing towards the Soviet Union and because of the rising number of Soviet POWs, in November and December 1941, recruiters appeared on the territories of occupied Poland aimed to invoke soldiers to the newly formed *Ostlegionen* (the Eastern Legions).[55] There were different legions inside the common one, including Caucasian, Georgian, Armenian, and Turkestan as well. Shmyrov reports that those

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[51] Sakal, "Germany and Turkestanis," 67.
[52] Хайитов, "Историческая Судьба Туркестанких Военнопленных," 54.
[53] Ibid., 54.
[54] Борис Шмыров, "Советские Военнопленные в Германском Концентрационном Лагере Аушвиц," *Историк (Муаррих)* 1, no.5 (2016): 37.
[55] Борис, "Советские Военнопленные," 37.

who denied joining the Nazi Legions were likely to be sent to Auschwitz. For instance, in February 1942, the Central Asian and Caucasian POWs from the city of Jaroslaw (Poland) were sent to the concentration camps and exterminated within just two months of being there.[56]

Mustafa Shokai, a member of the "Shura-i-Islam" anti-communist and nationalist movement, visited the camps with Turkestani soldiers, helping to establish the Turkestan National Committee and Legion. As the war struck on June 22, 1941, 300 Soviet emigrants, including Shokai, were arrested in Compiegne, near Paris, and they were given three weeks to about speaking to the Uzbek population from June 22 to July 13, 1941, on the radio. He denies the Germans' request, saying that he is unaware of the circumstances in the region due to the psychological state of the population and their protracted absence from their native country. After six months, he was moved to Berlin. He declared that before taking any action, he must personally visit Turkestan captives being imprisoned in labor camps.[57]In the letter to his wife, Maryia Yakovlevna, he described the utter shock and disappointment after the visit to Jaroslaw, a concentration camp in Poland. "From the stories of our people, as well as prisoners of war of Tatars, Caucasians, it is clear that out of about 400 thousand people who arrived here, 25 thousand remained alive. The rest died. There is no medical help"[58]. When it comes to the treatment of Central Asians in the camps, Shokai pointed out in this letter to Veli Kayum-khan, a founder of the Legion, that the German government "incorrectly" portrayed Turkestani people. They would be called Jews because of the connection with Bolshevism in the Soviet Union and certain cultural resemblances, such as males being

[56] Ibid., 38.
[57] Ойдина Сатимова, "О Судьбах Военнопленных Во Второй Мировой Войне," *Проблемы Современной Науки и Образования,* 10, no. 167 (2021): 36.
[58]Садыкова, Бахыт, "Мустафа Чокай в Эмиграции*,"* (2006), 240.

circumcised. Shokai personally fell victim to this stereotype as one German soldier physically assaulted him on the street.[59]

Shokai then offered to create the Turkestan Legion for military purposes, "saving the life of Central Asian soldiers." Instead of simply killing these people or sending them to camps, he came up with the following solutions:

> "- training of qualified specialists in German educational institutions for further use in the new Turkestan state;
>
> - organizing military formations of prisoners, but with the condition that they will not be sent to the front, as this will not give the desired result; they can be used when military operations reach the borders of their homeland, that is, to liberate Turkestan from Soviet power."[60]

Mustafa Shokai died from typhoid fever in December 1941 and was buried in a cemetery in Berlin. Yet the idea of the Legion persisted. By 1942-43, there were 14 Turkestan, 8 Azerbaijani, 7 North Caucasian, 8 Georgian, 9 Armenian and 7 Tatar Nazi battalions. Müller reports that the overall number of *Hiwis* ("volunteers") in the *Ostlegionen* was around 250 thousand.[61] In August 1942, Rosenberg headed and likewise created the Turkestan National Unity Committee located in Berlin, where the main advisory position was in the hands of Uzbek nationalist Veli Kayum-khan. Kayum-khan was an Uzbek by nationality, originated from Tashkent, and was a former student of the Berlin Agricultural University, which enabled him to communicate with German officials and Central Asian soldiers. The National Committees were used to control the activities of Legions and create propaganda materials, such as journals "*Milli Turkestan*" ("National Turkestan") for Central

[59] Садыкова, "Мустафа Чокай в Эмиграции*,"* 241-2.
[60] Сатимова, "О Судьбах Военнопленных," 35.
[61] Müller, *The Unknown Eastern Front*, 214.

Asian soldiers and "*Yash Turkestan*" ("Young Turkestan") for the people living in the Soviet republics.

Veli Kayum-khan confirms the mistreatment of soldiers and claims that the Committee's main goal was the rescue of Central Asian (or Turkic/Turkestani) soldiers. In an interview for BBC Uzbekistan in 1990, the leader of the Legion and Committee shared that he was responsible only for the region's political development and support of soldiers. When the newspaper in Moscow published a propaganda article claiming that he murdered and tortured people on the front, he completely denied it. He maintained his innocence and blamed war atrocities on the German officers. "Through the massacre by the Gestapo, our people were killed. I told the military allies about the mechanism of murder in the tribunal formed by America, England, and France". [62] The primary goal was to protect soldiers from hunger and mistreatment and later gain independence with all Turkestani people under the Committee. According to Kayum's estimates, "After our Turkestani people were rescued from the hell of death, the total number of warriors reached 700-800 thousand. Of these, 250 thousand-300 thousand are the Turkestan army. Moreover, 150 thousand people were ready to fight in the future near the Baltic Sea"[63].

Veli Kayum-khan's reports have to be evaluated critically and not be taken for granted. Firstly, the commander stated that the number of active soldiers was around 250 to 300 thousand. Some historians indeed confirm these numbers, pointing out that there were 266,994 soldiers between 1944-45.[64] De Cordier states that the number might be closer to 180

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[62] Abilkhan Abilasanuly, "Қаюмхан Түркістан Легионы Және Мұстафа Шоқай Туралы-4 Kayumkhan Turkestan Legion Mustafa Chokay-4," YouTube video, posted November 14, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLa2QJUYi7c.

[63] Abilkhan Abilasanuly, "Қаюмхан Түркістан Легионы Және Мұстафа Шоқай Туралы-3 Kayumkhan Turkestan Legion Mustafa Chokay-3," YouTube video, posted November 14, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJ-sCdODmaI.

[64] Сатимова, "О Судьбах Военнопленных," 36. / Хайитов, "Историческая Судьба Туркестанких Военнопленных," 63.

thousand.[65] Müller then states that the total number of *Hiwis* was around 110 thousand.[66] *Hiwis* could be involved both in the service work, such as cooking, driving, and doing physical tasks. If the soldier was educated or was an officer in the Soviet army, he was likely to be sent for the propaganda duties, such as working in the National Turkistan Unity Committee or educating the newly recruited soldiers.[67] They were not involved in the usual duties of "volunteers," so Müller's number is closer. Both estimates are possible, as it is likely that most of the records about collaboration with Nazis were burned, especially closer to the end of the war. It is hard to verify these numbers, and it might not be possible in any way. This information is highly sensitive even in the current day. However, in the case of Veli Kayum-khan, he could have specifically overestimated the statistics to appear as a bigger hero by "saving the lives of Turkestanis." In addition, he clearly distanced himself from the Nazi government, claiming that he mainly engaged in the political and ideological development of the organization and never caused any harm directly by administrating the troops on battlefields.[68] By advocating from this position, Kayum-khan was able to stay in Germany after the war, avoid punishment on the basis of collaboration with Nazis, and live up to 89 years with his family. He was buried in Dusseldorf in 1993 and had a chance to visit independent Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

In order to join the Legion, there was a certain ritual to it. Firstly, the candidate had to be physically healthy and resistant to field and combat conditions. The selection committee also checked his ability to sabotage, as well as his attitude to the Soviet Union. In addition, a soldier had to give an oath. It contained the following:

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[65] de Cordier, "The Fedayeen of The Reich," 28.
[66] Müller, *The Unknown Eastern Front*, 237.
[67] Sakal, "Germany and Turkestanis," 84.
[68] Abilasanuly, "Kayumkhan Turkestan-4," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLa2QJUYi7c.

> I, a faithful son of my homeland, voluntarily join the Army of Freedom of Russia. I swear in good faith that I will fight against Bolshevism on the path of the well-being of my people. I swear to be loyal, to obey the commander of the Army of Freedom and leader Adolf Hitler, joining the ranks of the army of Germans and allies. I am ready to sacrifice my life at any moment for this oath.[69]

The Soviet soldiers called these collaborators "black fascists," perhaps meaning that they were worse than a typical Nazi soldier due to the state treason.[70]

The Turkestan Legion itself was likely created and used for propaganda purposes instead of actual military effectiveness. Combat operations involving the Turkestan legions took place in Italy, Yugoslavia, Poland, France, and Germany. They fought in Belarus, Ukraine, the Orel and Bryansk districts, and Crimea, all on the boundaries of the Soviet Union. It should be underlined that the German command moved the military forces of the Turkestan Legion from the Eastern Front to the Western Front, France, and Italy in 1943 due to their "unreliability."[71] Some parts of it could be attributed to the frequent escapes to the Soviet troop and partisans. However, it is also worth noting that the Western Front was less intense than the Eastern, with its high mortality rates. "From the beginning of the invasion of Soviet Russia to May 1944, the German army lost approximately 60,000 soldiers per month, and hundreds of thousands more were lost because of captivity, being wounded in action, and disease...On a 'normal' day, around 800 Germans died on the Eastern Front; in the West, this was 'only' 60."[72]

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[69] Хайитов, "Историческая Судьба Туркестанких Военнопленных," 60.
[70] Ibid., 63-4.
[71] Ibid., 63-4.
[72] Lak, "Contemporary Historiography on the Eastern Front," 573.

Motivation for Joining the Nazis

When it comes to the motivation to join the Legion, there are several of them. The most common was likely to be survival in extreme war and camp conditions. The Soviet citizens and soldiers often thought that the German army would treat them better. When analyzing the primary documents of participants in the Legion, Zhanbossinova et al. confirm this survival narrative.[73] Cengiz Dagji, a writer of Crimean origin, spent the rest of his life writing about the experience of fighting on both the Soviet and German sides, including the "Turkestan legion." The camps of legionnaires were in much better conditions. "Ibrahim T. reported that on arrival at the station Pomoshnaya, they [legionnaires] were placed in a general camp for prisoners of war… They were fed much better than other prisoners of war".[74] Legionnaires were regularly given food, allowed to rest, and created comfortable living conditions. They learned to keep their clothes clean and walk, and they were even paid salaries for it.[75]

At the same time, the Soviet Union completely disregarded people that were captured by Germans. The Soviet leadership has viewed prisoners of war negatively since the start of the conflict. The inmates were barred from Soviet society by Order No. 270, which was issued on August 16, 1941. The infamous order "Not a step back" ("Ни шагу назад") was issued under No. 227 a year later, on July 28, 1942.

> "Alarmists and cowards should be exterminated on the spot...The commanders of a company, battalion, regiment, division, the relevant commissars and political workers retreating from a combat position without an order from above are traitors to the

[73] Albina Zhanbossinova et al., "Fragments of Oral History Based on the Materials of Filtration and Investigation," *Opción* 1012-1587, 35, no. 89 (2019): 171.
[74] Zhanbossinova et al., "Fragments of Oral History Based," 164.
[75] Сатимова, "О Судьбах Военнопленных," 36.

> Motherland. It is necessary to deal with such commanders and political workers as with traitors to the Motherland." [76]

The order seems counterintuitive, considering inefficiencies in the Soviet army. Even though the Soviet authorities did not provide enough resources for soldiers to advance in combat, the guilt would be put on them, as they were "cowards." In a situation when a soldier did not have a chance to resist the German attack fully, he still could be called a traitor. Then it might make sense to collaborate with Nazis, as these Soviet fighters were left at their own devices to survive, knowing that the Motherland would not accept them back.

Бойцы Красной армии!

Все дальше и дальше продвигаются победоносно наступающие Германские войска в их союзники. Немецкие солдаты стоят уже у дверей Кавказа! Что поможет Сталину его отчаянный вопль „Ни шагу назад!"?

Всякое дальнейшее сопротивление — нелепое самоубийство!

Вы должны жить, если хотите служить своей Родине!

Штыки в землю! И скорее к немцам или домой!

ПРОПУСК

Эта листовка действительна до конца войны, как пропуск для неограниченного числа бойцов, командиров и политработников Красной армии. С пленными немцы обращаются хорошо. С перебежавшими добровольно на нашу сторону обращение особенно хорошее.

Если вам дорога ваша жизнь, решайтесь скорее!

PASSIERSCHEIN

Dieses Flugblatt gilt als Passierschein für eine unbegrenzte Anzahl von Soldaten, Offizieren und Politarbeitern der Roten Armee. Es ist bis zum Ende des Krieges gültig. Die Deutschen behandeln ihre Gefangenen gut. Wer aber freiwillig übergeht, der wird bevorzugt behandelt.

Wenn Euch Euer Leben lieb ist, handelt schnell!

A5 019

German pamphlet in Russian, calling Stalin's order "Not a step back" "a desperate scream." In the second half of the card, there is a guarantee up until the end of the war that

[76] А. И. Барсуков, "*Русский Архив: Великая Отечественная. Т. 13(2-2). Приказы Народного Комиссара Обороны СССР, 22 Июня 1941 г.-1942 г,"* (Москва, Россия: Терра, 1997), 276-79.

the Soviet POWs, fighters, and commanders would be treated nicely. "If your life is dear to you, make up your mind soon!"[77]

The Turkestan Legion members playing chess (Bundesarchiv, 1943). The image is clearly staged and portrays close cooperation between Nazis and Central Asians. The crowd is viewing the game while a German officer with an emblem of the troop seems to give advice.

[77] Владимир Иванов, "Приказ №227: 'Ни Шагу Назад,'" История.РФ, July 21, 2021, https://histrf.ru/read/articles/prikaz-227-ni-shagu-nazad.

The Turkestan Legion soldiers praying in the field (Bundesarchiv, n.d.). Two men on the front could be field imams or regular soldiers with religious knowledge.

Milli Turkistan newspaper (Bundesarchiv, 1943). It was distributed to soldiers of the Legion and the Soviet frontline. This page has two symbols of the battalion: a mosque and a flag with an arrow.

Embroidery from the uniform of a Legion soldier (right) and picture of two soldiers holding a flag with an arrow (n.d.). Both of them were considered symbols of the Legion. The embroidery has a mosque and a signature "Biz Alla Bilen" ("God with Us" from Arabic). The colour of the flag was red on top and blue on the bottom, which could refer to the Turkestan autonomy (1917-18) with the same colour scheme and placement.

Another reason for collaboration could be the antagonism produced by the Soviet policies and, consequently, the disaffection caused by a growing Russian influence. Harvard Project on the Soviet Social Systems contains an interview with an Uzbek soldier. This person's origin is described as that of a Jadid and basmachi. Starting from the 1930s, he served in the Red Army. According to him, the Soviet regime brought discrimination in both cultural, political, and social regard. He provided many examples of the cultural and religious censorship of Islamic heritage, including the rise of Russophilia and Slav-dominated discourse in the media of Turkestan. Due to the difficulties with language, racism and prejudices, as well as pre-Revolutionary Imperial beliefs about Kazakhs and Central Asian colonial subjects more generally, military leaders mistrusted recruits' military effectiveness.[78] These issues likely manifested in the growing tension between indigenous and Russian soldiers on the front. "There was a terrible animosity in the prisoner-of-war camps between the Russians and the Turkestanis, and it was the Russians who told the Germans that we were Jews".[79]

Lastly, there were many instances when the legionnaires returned to the Soviet troops and joined the partisan movement. It might have happened partially due to the mismanagement of the units. The Waffen-SS units of the Legion remain more documented and show that there were troubles with equipment. "Unfortunately, the equipment and weaponry [of about 3,000 trained soldiers that survived Stalingrad] hadn't changed, and the Turk Legion still battled with old Maxim machineguns on wooden chariots, the old FM

[78] Carmack, "All to the Front?," 30.
[79] "Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 8, Case 221 (Interviewer J.R.). Widener Library, Harvard University," Harvard Library, https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/drs:5466385.

Degtyarev, the Mosin Nagant rifle…."[80] In addition, the morale of the unit could be low as there was an abrupt change to the commanders. More successful captain Meyer Maden was killed in combat and replaced by a certain commander SS Billig, who was a heavy drinker. It took at least two months to fix the situation by placing Captain SS Herrmann in May 1944.[81] In these two months, Asankulov, with his entire platoon of 48 men, fled to the partisans. In response to the regimental commander, it is documented that on March 28, 1944, he [Captain SS Billig] had 78 volunteers shot as "unreliable elements."[82] There was another instance when the troop under Waffen-Unterscharführer Alimov fled to partisan due to the fear of the Vlasov army, "which for the Oriental peoples seemed to be tantamount to the loss of their painstakingly won autonomy rights."[83]

Muslim Identity as a Propaganda Tool

The Turkestan Legion and Committee advocated for the Pan-Turkic cultural heritage. When speaking about the Turkestan National Committee, Veli Kayum-khan stressed how soldiers could more easily interact with each other due to the shared culture and similar languages. This led leaders of the Committee to broadcast messages on the radio station and publish all the material in the "Milli Turkestan" magazine in Uzbek, as all Turkestanis could practically understand it. The idea then transformed into the development of one common language for all Turkic people, which was never fulfilled. In addition, another goal of the organization was the establishment of an independent Turkic state. Kayum specifically highlights Mustafa Shokai's contribution to the journal "Yash Turkestan," who wrote articles

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[80] J. Borsarello and Werner Palinckx, *Wehrmacht&SS: Caucasian, Muslim, Asian Troops* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Casemate Publishers, 2007), 47.
[81] Borsarello and Palinckx, *Wehrmacht&SS*, 47.
[82] Roland Pfeiffer, "Der Osttürkische Waffen-Verband Der SS," Lexikon der Wehrmacht, 2007, https://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Zusatz/SS/SSOsttuerkei-R.htm.
[83] Pfeiffer, "Der Osttürkische Waffen-Verband Der SS," https://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Zusatz/SS/SSOsttuerkei-R.htm.

during his emigration across Europe and secretly distributed it in the Turkestan city itself. The "Milli Turkestan" magazine published letters and leaflets for soldiers as well, stating that they should serve their Fatherland instead of the Russian interests and strive for future independence after the war. Lenk confirms that the Committee indeed received its independence, although symbolically. "Shortly before the end of the war, on 18.03.1945, in a pure propaganda act, the Nazi regime recognized an independent Turkestan and six days later accepted the NTEK (*Nationalturkestanische Einheitskomitee or* the National Turkestan Committee) as a government".[84]

The idea of mutual understanding has issues, as there were pieces of evidence pointing to the tensions inside the Legion. Uzbeks, Kazaks, and Kirgiz POWs were included when Veli Kayyum Han founded the National Turkestan Union Committee upon the passing of Mustafa Shokai. After some time passed, ethnic divisions started to appear within the Committee. Being an Uzbek himself, Veli Kayyum Han helped Uzbeks obtain crucial positions. In response, Kirgizs and Kazaks aspired to create their own commissions. Veli Kayyum Han's most active opponent was a Kazakh named Haris Kanatbay.[85] It is possible to observe this pattern in Isakjan Naztikul's account. The soldier, originating from the village of Jizzakh in Uzbekistan, gravitated towards other Uzbeks in the Legion and mentioned only them. For example, he grew close with Nuriddin Qari, an Uzbek mullah, who experienced political pressure in the Soviet Union prior to the war, Sattarow, a Jew from Samarkand, Professor Shermat from Tashkent, who engaged in anti-government publications, and Kayum-khan himself.[86] The appeal towards ethnicities might have happened naturally.

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[84] Titus Lenk, "Die SS-Mullah-Schule Und Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft Turkestan in Dresden," Zukunft braucht Erinnerung, November 12, 2006, https://www.zukunft-braucht-erinnerung.de/die-ss-mullah-schule-und-die-arbeitsgemeinschaft-turkestan-in-dresden/.
[85] Sakal, "Germany and Turkestanis," 152.
[86] Crane, *Survivor from an Unknown War*.

Although Turkic languages, such as Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Turkmen, are close to each other, there are differences between them. "The similarity of the Turkic languages enabled them to communicate freely, except with the Tajik Persian dialect."[87] In addition, the Soviet Union started to engage in nationality-driven reforms in the 1920s, like *korenizatsia*, which could weaken the discourse about the common Pan-Turkic origin.

Overall, it could be stated that the differences among Turkestanis were not emphasized. When it came to Islams, "those who did practice had different interpretations of the prophet but it never led to disruption; few of Turkestanis were Shiite, but the vast majority were usually Sunni. Differences were set aside so that all possible energy could be used to gain the coming liberation."[88] In addition, whenever students gained education in the political classes during their preparation for the Legion, the teachers emphasized the rich history of their homeland. Isakjan states that they were encouraged to once again triumph over Russians, like the soldiers of the Golden Horde in the 14th century. Arthur de Gobineau, the main proponent of the Master race theory, in the Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races (1855), stated that the Aryan race was the best representation of the Germanic people. He drew on quotes from the Roman historian Tacitus, who claimed that the 'pure' German people were responsible for regenerating Europe following the fall of the Roman Empire.[89] Although Tajiks were part of the original Pamir "Aryans," they were probably unlikely to be compared to this group or even to the Turkic people of the ancient Golden Horde. Tajiks were not historically part of this state. In addition, Germans believed that the true Aryans were Germans themselves. "As they [Aryans] spread across Asia, the weaker kind of Aryan

[87] Ibid., 112.
[88] Ibid., 112.
[89] David A. Barrowclough, *Digging for Hitler: The Nazi Archaeologists Search for an Aryan Past* (Oxford, UK: Fonthill, 2016), 102.

began to lust after lesser races and poison their inheritance. The great Nordic empire collapsed and its people retreated back to their ancestral heartland in the north."[90]

At the same time, Germans provided some tolerance and a place to practice culture and religion. "Despite the atheistic upbringing received in the Soviet Union, the Turkestan soldiers did not lose their religious faith. While some of them were walking in the fresh air, the vast majority performed prayer in their rooms or in the shade of acacias. Everyone gathered for juma namaz [Friday namaz], reading a joint prayer on the site."[91] Isakjan recounts that whenever there were distinguished students, they were either promoted to be officers, such as lieutenants or imams.[92] There have been several schools for mullahs and imams in Germany. In addition to an imam school established in Guben on April 21, 1944, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler ordered the establishment of an SS Mullah school in Dresden in November 1944. This school was created specifically for the so-called "Russian Turks," or Muslims from the territory of the USSR who served in the SS.[93] Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, the Grand mufti of Jerusalem, who advocated antisemitic legislation, personally thanked Himmler in a telegram. "On the occasion of the opening of the Imam Institute of the Eastern Turks in Dresden, which is to be regarded as another sign of their great interest in Islamic-German cooperation. I convey to you the sincere thanks and best regards of the Muslims"[94]. Some of these trained scholars would be used to help and perform rituals in the front. For example, it was mentioned in the soldiers' memoirs that they would be given copies of the Quran. "Baskarayev [a head of one of the troops engaged in the intelligence

[90] Barrowclough, *Digging for Hitler*, 140.
[91] Kapa, *Истина Туркестанского Легиона*, 50.
[92] Crane, *Survivor from an Unknown War*, 139.
[93] Lenk, "Die SS-Mullah-Schule," https://www.zukunft-braucht-erinnerung.de/die-ss-mullah-schule-und-die-arbeitsgemeinschaft-turkestan-in-dresden/.
[94] Ibid., https://www.zukunft-braucht-erinnerung.de/die-ss-mullah-schule-und-die-arbeitsgemeinschaft-turkestan-in-dresden/.

service] reported on Fenner [Hauptsturmführer] that it was he who selected forty people, gave each one a copy of the Quran, saying that they had already completed the first stage of training".[95] Moreover, the schooling of Muslim military chaplains aimed to influence the religious leaders in the homelands of the Muslim units that supported Germany. Lenk suspected some of these incoming individuals to come from Turkestan and Crimea. [96]

It is crucial to consider here the Soviet approach to Islam, as the Soviet officials began to suspect the Pan-Islamic threat, which was stirred by Nazis in the Central Asian region. In a letter written to Georgii Malenkov, Andrey Vladimirovich Stanishevsky, a renowned researcher in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, who also became counterintelligence for the Soviet forces in 1942, provides a description of the situation in Central Asia in connection with the work of German intelligence in the East and the counterintelligence measures of NKGB. One of the biggest threats was the German "economic and cultural cooperation" with Afghanistan.[97] "After the conclusion of an agreement with Nazi Germany in 1937 on economic and cultural cooperation, a large number of Germans came to Afghanistan (about 300 people). There are German instructors in the army, a lyceum has been opened in Kabul, where teaching is conducted in German".[98] This cooperation then provoked the anti-communist Basmachi movement that could spread to the neighboring Soviet republics. The officer specifically analyzed nationalist tendencies in party cadres in Uzbek and Kyrgyz

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[95] Zhanbossinova et al., "Fragments of Oral History Based," 170.
[96] Lenk, "Die SS-Mullah-Schule," https://www.zukunft-braucht-erinnerung.de/die-ss-mullah-schule-und-die-arbeitsgemeinschaft-turkestan-in-dresden/.
[97] Andrey Stanishevskiy, "A.V. Stanishevsky's Letter to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) G.M. Malenkov about the Situation in Central Asia in Connection with the Strengthening of the Work of German Intelligence in the East and Measures to Counteract the NKGB of the USSR," Electronic Library of Historical Documents, 1941, 647, http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/123998#mode/inspect/page/9/zoom/5.
[98] Andrey Stanishevskiy, "Letter to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) G.M. Malenkov," 648, http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/123998#mode/inspect/page/9/zoom/5.

USSR and the strengthening of NKGB narkomats in Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.[99] Turkestan was also considered dangerous to the basmachi influence due to the German and British support to the Turkestan in 1917-18 and their Muslim heritage. "The city of Turkestan is the largest center of the most reactionary wing of the Uzbek clergy, concentrated there near the grave of the Muslim saint Ahmad Yassavi".[100]

Historians come to the conclusion that the war-time finally provided Soviet citizens with an opportunity to practice religion, including Islam, thus enabling them to fulfil both Soviet and Muslim duties. According to Tasar, "World War II created an opening in the region for Muslims to make sense of their place in Soviet society on Islamic terms by articulating an Islamically informed Soviet patriotism".[101] It might have been possible due to several reasons. "A plausible explanation, however, is that the war-time years featured virtually no official monitoring of religion...Another explanation for religion's speedy "revival" during and after the war is that it plummeted to the bottom of the Soviet state's priority list during the 1940s".[102] To study how religious practices changed during the war and after its initial years, Tasar explored postwar Kyrgyzstan.[103] One of those Islamically informed patriotic behaviours was donations from mosques to rebuild the communities. Tasar informs that, in some cases, party officials even expected this contribution from the Muslim population. "*Gosobespechenie*'s office in Chüy district, Frunze province approached the mosque in Tokmuk with a list of 20 *frontovniki* and their families, asking them to distribute charitable contributions directly to the latter".[104] Florin also agrees with the importance of the

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[99] Ibid., 649.
[100] Ibid., 651.
[101] Eren Tasar, "Islamically Informed Soviet Patriotism in Postwar Kyrgyzstan," *Cahiers du monde russe* 52, no. 2-3 (2011): 387. https://doi.org/10.4000/monderusse.9340.
[102] Eren Tasar, "World War II and Islamically Informed Soviet Patriotism," in *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 45.
[103] Tasar, "Islamically Informed Soviet Patriotism," 390.
[104] Ibid., 402.

Muslim contribution to Soviet nation-building in an article about the participation of the Kyrgyz population in WWII. "First, there was a growing awareness of belonging to a Soviet community which was about to win a war; and second, people living in rural areas, both wealthy and poor, hoped that this new Soviet community would open up a new space for Islam".[105]

The Soviet authorities recognized Islam on the government level. The establishment of SADUM (Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan) in 1943 was greatly influenced by the creation of a similar organization called "CAROC" ("Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church" or "*Совет по делам Русской православной церкви*"). Both of these bureaucratic organs were under the strict control of NKVD. Ishan Babakhanov, a leader of the organization, was even personally invited to speak with Stalin in Moscow. Tasar argues that the need to reform religion came after the potential collaboration with the ally powers.

> After initially absorbing colossal losses to the Nazis after Hitler's invasion of the USSR in June 1941, and facing the need to somehow rationalize the Soviet alliance with the capitalist United States and Great Britain, Stalin forever turned away from the anti-religious repression of earlier decades, seeking to utilize the Russian Orthodox Church to mobilize Russian patriotism for the war effort, and to alleviate American and British public outrage over past persecution of Christians.[106]

Despite this close attention from the state, SADUM's faced various issues, especially in terms of legitimacy from the perspective of the local population. The first one came when the Soviet administration had to choose a proper mufti. Ishan Babakhanov came from a long line of saints within the Naqshbandi Sufism and whose tombs were located in the Hast Imom

[105] Florin, "Becoming Soviet through War," 507.
[106] Tasar, "World War II and Islamically Informed Soviet Patriotism," 46.

complex in Tashkent's old city.[107] In addition, Babakhanov was around 85 years old when he received the title, which likely added to his image as a religious scholar and leader. Besides choosing a competent and respectable mufti, SADUM had issues with centralization. In order to function properly, the organization had to establish a continuous flow of charitable donations. It was challenging as local Islamic authorities were unwilling to lose authority over religious affairs.[108]

The idea of using Islam for war-time patriotic purposes significantly helped SADUM to gain legitimacy and power. Eden argues that Islamic propaganda coincided with the general secular narrative of the Party.[109] For example, the administration would usually emphasize the Nazis' betrayal, war-time atrocities against civilians, toilers, the friendship of all people, etc.[110] Nevertheless, Islamic leaders, specifically Gabdrakhman Rasulev, Ishan Babakhanov, and Khizri Gebekov, managed to go beyond the frames of the state's approach to war-time religious agitations. Rasulev, for instance, a son of the famous Sufi Shaykh, promoted Muslim struggle in the Pan-Islamic and international sense. On the other hand, Babakhanov took a more localized approach and called specifically to protect the local Sufi shrines and saint sights from Nazis, pointing to "the shared inheritance of all Muslims in the region".[111] Gebekov's argumentation, who ruled the newly founded Central Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of the North Caucasus (DUMSK) and was a Shi'i shaykh, was also special due to the rising Pan-Islamic suspicion of Ismailis and previous British rule in the Badakhshan region. In general, each of these leaders tried to connect with the Muslim

[107] Ibid., 49.
[108] Ibid., 50.
[109] Jeff Eden, "Praying with Stalin: Soviet Islamic Propaganda of the Second World War," in *God Save the USSR. Soviet Muslims and the Second World War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
[110] Jeff Eden, "Praying with Stalin," 67.
[111] Ibid., 87.

community to legitimize SADUM and Islam in the previously religiously oppressive state, such as presenting Islam as a tool to support citizens and progress in the war.

While some of the Pan-Islamic threats might be real, the Soviet anxieties should be evaluated critically. One of the arguments that Rasulev and Babakhanov used in their Islamically informed patriotic agitations was the destruction of the Islamic legacy and institutions in Germany-occupied Crimea and Caucasus.[112] In fact, it was the opposite, as Nazis aimed to use religion for political and military reasons. For example, religious celebrations in both regions, like Kurban Bairam, were used as a propaganda tool to promote the image of Nazis being "liberators" from the Soviet oppressive regime.[113] While these celebrations were the main tool in the Caucasus, the Crimean occupation was much longer and had a more structured approach to using Islam. Likewise, there were attempts to establish a muftiat that could connect to the rest of the Islamic world. In addition, the Nazi officials engaged in the creation of committees across Crimea to fulfill two main goals: "to rule and control [the region] and as an instrument of propaganda and military mobilization".[114]

The reason why Nazis put so much attention on promoting religion, such as reopening maktaps and madrasas, reconstructing mosques, and celebrating religious events, lay in the lack of resources to establish their legitimacy in the occupied areas and the inability to fulfil the political wants of the local population. It was likely much easier to spend time and money to develop religious projects. For example, the German administration never abolished kolkhozes and collectivization to keep the food resources coming to the front.[115] In addition, it never granted the Crimean Tatar nationalists desired autonomy. "As a consequence, the Germans found it easiest to make inexpensive religious concessions, which could often be

[112] Jeff Eden, "Praying with Stalin," 72.
[113] Motadel, "Islam and the War on the Eastern Front," 140.
[114] Ibid., 154.
[115] Ibid., 134.

granted on the spot. Nazi propaganda promoted religion as part of local tradition, suppressed by Soviet rule while avoiding the delicate question of national independence".[116] On the contrary, any hint of the opposition or partisan movements created violent suppression on the German behalf. For instance, more than a hundred mountain villages in the southern and inner Crimea were attacked by the Luftwaffe to prevent the disorder from the local partisan groups.[117]

Conclusion

The German Nazis developed their racial visions of the Central Asian East over time. The loss in WWI played a significant role in the development of the colonial discourse. If, at first, the German officials imagined the potential of reforming and bringing order to the newly emerged Bolshevik and Jewish Soviet Union, the 1930s-40s propaganda was filled with ideas of racial eradication. The failures of war by 1941-42 forced the German officials to reimage what role could the racially inferior indigenous groups play in the further advancements to the front. It led to the creation of the Turkestan Legion and the subsequent Turkestan National Committee. Individuals like Mustafa Shokai and Veli Kayum-khan influenced the trajectory of the Legion, making the future independence of Central Asian republics the main goal.

The German and Soviet sides had their own interests in keeping the Muslim population of Central Asia loyal. Each of them used Islam for propaganda purposes. The Soviet authorities did that to prevent possible Pan-Islamic activities orchestrated by Nazis. It allowed ordinary people and soldiers to reconcile their duties as Soviet citizens and Muslims. Regarding Nazi Islamic propaganda, restoration of religion seemed to be one of the easiest and most effective ways to maintain control in the newly occupied territories. By promoting

[116] Ibid., 138.
[117] Ibid., 173.

religion, the German authorities could present themselves as "liberators" from the oppressive Soviet regime. In some sense, the Turkestani Legion and National Committee allowed Central Asian soldiers to "liberate" themselves as well. It was possible to practice Islam openly. The main motivation for soldiers to join was survival in conditions of uncertainty, destruction, and hunger. It could also be the want to fight against the Soviet Union or the temporary necessity, which allowed soldiers to join partisans or Soviet troops later.

The fate of Turkestani soldiers remains one of the unluckiest ones. Some soldiers were able to stay in Western Europe after the war, like Veli Kayum-khan himself. It could be possible due to the onset of the Cold War, making accusations towards the Soviet government more relevant during the Nuremberg trials.[118] When these individuals tried to visit or come back to their historic homelands during the Soviet time, access was denied. For example, Isakjan Nazrikulov built a successful manufacturing factory in the US called "Tura" and, in the 1970s, repeatedly tried to come to Uzbekistan but was unsuccessful.[119] In addition, there were many Turkestani soldiers that asked for political protection in Turkey, where they managed to create their own community.[120] However, it was not the reality for the majority of Central Asian soldiers in German captivity or the Turkestani legionnaires. Ashur Haydarov, an artist from Samarkand, was "unwillingly compelled to join the Legion as a POW, and escaped at the first opportunity by joining partisans in Poland during the last months of the war, fighting Ukrainian separatists with a detachment from the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD)."[121] Then, in 1949, he was unexpectedly detained and given a fifteen-year prison term for conspiring with the enemy—a usual outcome for people who had

[118] Хайитов, "Историческая Судьба Туркестанких Военнопленных," 55.
[119] Ibid., 64.
[120] Ibid., 65.
[121] Artemy M. Kalynovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Itacha, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 48.

been prisoners of war before managing to escape. In other cases, the trials and imprisonment happened directly after the end of the war. Most of the POWs were forcibly returned to the Soviet Union thanks to the commitment made by the allied states (USSR, USA, England, France) during the Yalta Conference on the return of former prisoners. 1,5 million former prisoners of war who returned to the USSR after the war were declared "traitors to the Motherland" and sent to the GULAG. Only about 180-200 thousand former prisoners did not return to the USSR and joined the ranks of emigrants.[122] Some of these emigrants continued to promote the idea of independence. Veli Kayum-khan stayed in Germany and continued to publish the "Milli Turkestan" journal in multiple languages up to his death in 1993. Baymirza Hayit received a PhD in History and produced works about the Legion and Turkestan. He died in 2006 in Cologne, Germany.

[122] Хайитов, "Историческая Судьба Туркестанких Военнопленных," 54.

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