

# The situation in the North-Eastern Caucasus republics at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War

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**Abstract.** This article is an attempt to analyse the military and political situation during the considered period as a prerequisite for a proper understanding of the socio-political processes that took place in Chechnya-Ingushetia and Dagestan. It notes the complete interconnectedness in the work of the military commissariats and the repressive bodies, fitting logically into the context of Stalinist nationality policy. On the basis of the incriminating accusations against the peoples of the republics, it is concluded that there was a deliberate accentuation of criminality in order to justify and justify Stalin's policy towards entire peoples.

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## Relevance

The national policy of the USSR is one of the most debated issues in Russian historiography. It is not so much a matter of biases and approaches to source analysis, as of the nature of the system of state power, which builds political relations depending on the prevailing situation in the country and externally. This trend is clearly illustrated by the peoples of the Northern Caucasus in the initial period of the Great Patriotic War (1941–1942). This aspect constitutes the main relevance of this study.

The aim of the article is to reveal the military and political situation in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan during the initial period of the Great Patriotic War. The methodological basis of the study was the principles of historicism and objectivity.

The outbreak of war and the threat of loss of national sovereignty sent the Soviet leadership into a state of shock. Only on June 29, 1941 a directive of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) was sent to the party and Soviet organs of the front-line regions to mobilise all forces for the defeat of the invaders. "The Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (b) declare that in the war imposed on us with Germany the life and death of the Soviet state is decided, whether the peoples of the Soviet Union shall be free or fall into enslavement..." [1].

From the first days of the war, the workers of Chechnya-Ingushetia also rose up to fight the aggressors. The researchers noted that not only adults, but even "13 and 14 year old Chechen boys besieged the doors of military enlistment offices and asked to be enlisted as volunteers to the front. When asked about their age, they added a few years to reach recruitment age" [2].

On June, 25 1941 there was a report of the military committee of CHIASSR about the political and moral state of the population of the republic in connection with the mobilization. "The Bureau noted that recruitment into the Red Army in all districts and towns was taking place in an organised manner, with great patriotic and labour enthusiasm on the part of the population" [2].

Within days more than 17,000 Chechen-Ingush toilers enlisted in the people's militia [3].

There was also active recording in other regions of the North Caucasus. For example, the number of volunteers in Dagestan exceeded 3,500 by the end of the 5th day [4].

Gakayev notes: "In 1941, the 16th Engineer Brigade was formed, trained and equipped by wage-earners from Chechnya-Ingushetia and joined the troops of the Southern Front. Workers of our republic divided it into the Airborne Brigade, an automobile battalion, a rifle marching division, and several reserve units" [5].

However, mobilisers are already encountering serious cases of mass violations of statutory regulations by the military commissariats during recruitment campaigns. The case reached the Regional Committee of

the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, but as further developments show, no administrative disciplinary punishment was imposed on them.

The Mountaineer youth, brought up in the spirit of national traditions, perceived the notions of "Motherland", "patriotism", "equality and brotherhood" through the prism of national mentality. In the army, faced with overt manifestations of chauvinism, they found themselves disoriented by attitudes for some command and political staff, depriving them of the desire and motivation to serve.

In this context an extract from Zemskov's report to the meeting of the Regional Party Committee on 26 June 1941 said: "By decision of the chief of staff of the 526th regiment Rebrov, some conscripts were sent to the military enlistment office. With his decision, he returned the conscripts because they were untrained. When the question arose that the untrained had the right to be in the units, Rebrov said that they were Chechens by nationality, and this squad was not needed for the simple reason that it would be difficult to ask them, as they hardly understood Russian" [6].

When sending recruits home, the military characterised the latter in personnel registers as "deserters".

The study also organically integrates the critical speech of Aksenov, head of the military department of the regional party committee, on 9 August 1941: "The district party and Soviet organs made serious mistakes in the organisation of conscription into the Red Army... They served summonses on those who had left earlier for the Red Army (for example, Cheberloevsky and other districts), on those who had long ago resettled in other regions. There was no record of who was fit for conscription... There was no organisation to take the conscripts to the assembly point. Poorly organised medical examinations ... Relatives of executives were exempted from conscription ...". The bureau also noted "that summonses were handed out to the relatives of those drafted, not to them themselves... The military committees have for the dead, arrested drop-outs, even those drafted into the Red Army" [7].

On 11 August the bureau of the provincial committee once again considered the question "Mobilisation in the republic": "On the part of the district military committees of the Galanchozhsky, Itum-Kalinsky, Shatoevsky and Galashkinsky districts, with the aim of reassurance, excessive issuing of summonses to persons liable for military service was permitted, which exceeded the order by 100–250%" [2].

This neglect of the conscript registration system can be explained by the permissiveness of the military commissars and heads of military registration and enlistment offices.

"Mass bribes from the highlanders became so widespread among them," states M.N. Muzayev, "that in the CHIASSR there was a saying 'his cow fights for him', i.e. a man sold his cow and with the proceeds of the sale he paid off the military committees from mobilisation... [8].

It is no coincidence that it was in these areas that the trend towards discrediting the mountaineers was clearly expressed in the "recruitment" of people for military-construction work.

"At the beginning of September 1941, military commissars suddenly organised round-ups of people in the districts. Many, including the elderly and pregnant women, were grabbed right on the streets. Teenagers and people who were sick were taken from their homes. Panic broke out in some places.

It turned out that the military commander of the CHIASSR had received an order to allocate 8,000 people from the civilian population to be sent to build defensive fortifications in the Kharkov military district. The military commissars decided to over-fulfill the plan and put 13,000 people into the echelons. Even seriously ill people were carried into the wagons on stretchers. Up to 60% of the mobilised had no proper clothing, were not informed of where they were going and why, and were often given no hot food on the way, and often none at all. Naturally, the number of sick people began to grow.

Nevertheless, after a halt, all the Chechens were driven to their destination, which was no less than 80 km. Those who were completely exhausted were abandoned to the wilderness without any help. Many died on the way.

The settlement of Akimovka, where work was to begin, suffered a massive enemy air raid. How many died is unknown. Some military officer arrived and demanded that they leave, as they were being targeted by German planes.

And this unorganised, for the most part unacquainted with the Russian language, confused mass of people rushed back.

Only 1,200 of the 13,000 made it to Rostov. Here they were met with hostility, called deserters, did not provide them with medical care, were left out in the open, and on top of that were going to be shot.

This was the picture seen by M. Gayrbekov, Secretary of the Chechen Republic of Ingushetia, and Yu. Tambiev. The remnants of the people were saved" [8].

As can be seen from this excerpt, the district military commissars, taking no moral or other considerations into account, were forcibly taking people away to fulfil the orders issued. And as a result of this zeal: 11,800 people died of starvation, disease and bombing while on the road, adding to the sad statistics of the military registration and enlistment office as "draft evaders".

The mobilisation, criminally botched by the district military committees, was the subject of discussion at a meeting of the CHIASSR Regional Committee Bureau on 3 October 1941.

The tragic deaths of innocent people probably sparked protests in a number of mountainous areas from 28 October to 6 November 1941.

"The uprising was suppressed by the soldiers of the 141st Rifle Regiment. Khalukhaev's victory speech states that "in the period from October 30 to November 15, 1941, the 141st Rifle Regiment, together with other units, defeated the revolutionary uprising and established

the normal activities of the Soviet organisations in heavy fighting for many days". The total was as follows: 36 killed; 251 detained, including insurgents-127, bandits-7, bandits-13, defectors-104. However, there is a discrepancy in the ratio of seized weapons to the number of those killed/ detained: 287 bandits and only 59 weapons (rifles-47, handguns-1, pistols, revolvers-11) [9].

So the 228 people killed and detained were unarmed, but were treated as bandits by the military to enhance the regiment's performance. Here we see a typical example of the deliberate discrediting of the mountaineers in order to justify repression as an appropriate response to the actions of the bandits. But there was another peculiarity, and that was the acute shortage of fighters. Gakayev writes: "To solve this problem as early as "September 18, 1941 the GKO of the USSR adopted a decree on general compulsory training of citizens in military affairs. According to this decree, from 1 October 1941 all the male population of the country aged 16 to 50 were to undergo compulsory military training according to a 110-hour programme..." [5].

For the military, the decisions of the higher authorities apparently had no effect. Otherwise, how can one explain the text of the instruction that was sent down: "To the Secretary of the Chechen-Ingush Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). According to directive No. 80/06 of 27 October 1941 of the department of universal military training of the North Caucasian Military District, citizens of pre-conscription age born in 1922, 1923 and 1924, and reservists of Chechen and Ingush nationality, who are not subject to call-up to the Red Army must not be given military training. Citizens of other nationalities should be involved in general education, but the selection should be carried out on a strictly individual basis... People's Commissar of the CHIASSR, Colonel Reshetnyak" [7].

Obviously, the headquarters of the North Caucasus Military District, without having agreed its decision with the GKO, could not independently issue a directive to the Chechen-Ingush Regional Committee of the Party. This proves that the fate of the Chechens and Ingush was already all but sealed.

Given the aggravation of the military situation, the GKO adopted decree No. 894 ss "On the formation of national army formations" on 13 November 1941. The autonomous republics were to form 20 cavalry divisions and 15 separate rifle brigades no earlier than January 1942. To execute this order, at the end of 1941 the leadership of the CHIASSR recruited volunteers for the 114th Cavalry Division, the personnel of which was 80 % Chechens. The ranks numbered 614 more fighters than the planned 3,347.

On 1 February 1942, the division was transferred to wartime staff, but was never incorporated into the structure of the War Department. On top of that, it found itself without supplies, food, adequate sanitation and insufficient horses, although there were 20,000 horses registered with the Republican Military Registration and Enlistment Office [10].

These circumstances caused an exodus of fighters home, who were immediately listed as "deserters" by the military authorities.

On 3 March 1942 the 114th Cavalry Division was disbanded. The political background to this phenomenon can be seen in the documents cited. In view of importance for our study we give the text in full: "At the beginning of April 1942 the order of the commissar of the 1st rank A.E. Shchadenko, the chief of Glavupraforma (Transmitted from the headquarters of North Caucasian Military District: Directive No. OMU/01275 of April 2, 1942) was issued. According to this directive all soldiers of rank and file of the commanding staff of Chechen and Ingush nationality were to be transferred to the reserve and sent back to their place of residence with a note in their military ID: "Transferred to the reserve until further notice," Bezugolny notes. – In the consolidated 'Information on residual resources of persons liable for military duty and conscription in the North Caucasus Military District' as of June 1, 1942, Chechens and Ingush were shown in the column 'not drafted' as having been cut off for political and moral reasons (there were no other categories cut off in the standard form).

On July 26, 1942, the decree of GKO No. 2100 ss announced a nationwide campaign for the draft of all citizens born in 1924 ... A few days later, on July 30, the order of NKO № 0585 was added: "conscription is not subject to mountain nationalities ... of Chechen-Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan and nationalities that are not called up in Transcaucasia ...

The source said that "on July 28, 1942, the formation of eight rifle divisions in the North Caucasus Military District was announced by Decree of the GKO No. 2114. The highlanders of Chechnya-Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria were excluded from the list of human resources suitable for manning the new formations" [11].

The situation in the summer of 1942 became considerably more difficult as the enemy advanced. On 7 August 1942 the Military Council of the Transcaucasian Front introduced martial law on the territory of Chechnya-Ingushetia and the adjoining republics.

On 13 August 1942, an anti-fascist rally was held in Ordzhonikidze. On behalf of the workers, chairman of the Dagestan SNC A. Daniyalov, poet A. Gafurov, artist R. Gadzhieva spoke," V. Magomayev. – Delegate of Chechnya-Ingushetia A. Tsomaev noted in his speech, calling "...all peoples of the Caucasus – to arms! We shall die, but we shall not give up our land to desecration and looting..." [12].

Military expediency appears to have prevailed over the political leanings of the members of the USSR GKO. In 1942 a volunteer cavalry squadron was formed in Dagestan... In Grozny the 242nd, 317th sepdet, 255th Chechen-Ingush cavalry regiment and a cavalry squadron were deployed [12, pp. 518–519].

However, "in accordance with order No. 0974 of the NKR of December 21, 1942, on the draft of persons born in 1925 (the beginning of the draft was scheduled for January 15, 1943) the provision on the suspension of conscription "until special instructions" of

representatives of ... indigenous nationalities of Chechen-Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan was repeated. There is another important detail: "From November 1942, on the eve of conscription, the republican military committees of the North Caucasus submitted information only on Slavic contingents". [11].

At the front, the zigzags of the national policy of the Soviet state were particularly keenly felt. And as a consequence, as a number of researchers have aptly noted: "individual commanders tried to 'use up' non-Russian contingents quickly, throwing them into battle without preparation and appropriate fire support..." [11].

All this shows the profound contradictions of the social in content and national in form policies of the ruling party of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). The proclaimed slogans of "brotherhood and equality", in practice, collided with the harsh realities veiled by the country's top party leadership. This feature of the regime was rightly pointed out by VakhaAliyev. The brave officer, who was at the front from the very first days of the war, writes an angry letter to Stalin: "...We served our country faithfully, not sparing our lives in the name of victory. Thousands of my fellow countrymen were left lying on the battlefields from Brest to Stalingrad, and you called us traitors. My people will never forgive you for this! While we were dying for our homeland, you massacred our mothers and sisters, you did not even spare the elderly and children" [13].

The front man's words are corroborated by sources. During the war more than 50,000 people were mobilised from the CHIASSR to the front", a number of researchers say. – More than 30,000 of them were Chechens. There would have been many more if, on Beria's orders, the conscription of Chechens to the front had not been halted in June 1943. By this time the decision to deport the Chechens had already been taken by Stalin" [14].

An analysis of the literature used shows that the deportation of undesirable ethnic groups from their historical places of residence had been nurtured in the upper echelons of power since the beginning of the war. Numerous directives suspending and cancelling the mobilisation of mountaineer conscripts are indisputable evidence of the action being prepared.

However, the rapidly changing political and military situation on the fronts was making adjustments. It was not until 1943, with the changed military and strategic situation, that it became possible to revisit the issue of the relocation of peoples.

And however one may today evaluate the events preceding the deportation of the Chechen-Ingush people, the essence of the conflict between the mountain community and the Party and Chekist authorities was deeper than the tragic February 1944 events. Strictly speaking, it was the apotheosis of Bolshevik rule in the 1920s and 1940s. At the same time, the ideologeme used, which has been purposefully fixed in the public consciousness about mass banditry since the 1920s, was an expression of a political doctrine that whitewashed unprecedented violence against the people of its own

country. The mountain mentality becomes a stumbling block for the political course of the Soviet-party elite of those years. Freedom-loving peoples, who put honour and dignity above all else, did not lend themselves well to atomisation. Under the prevailing conditions, the preservation of national identity and traditional values became an important factor in ethnic consolidation, making it possible to avoid a point of no return. This is seen as the main cause of the conflict between Chechen society and the authorities.

It is also pertinent to stress that to accuse the highlanders of cowardice or cowardice is to publicly confess ignorance of their history and heroic past. Accusations based on falsified sources are insulting as they have no scientific basis.

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