

# THE DEPORTATION OF THE CRIMEAN TATARS IN THE CONTEXT OF SETTLER COLONIALISM

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**Abstract:** *The Soviet ethnic cleansing of the Crimean Tatars, the subsequent settlement of their lands with Russians and Ukrainians, and the de-Tatarization of the peninsula's place names has a number of similarities with various cases of settler colonialism in the Americas, Africa, Australia, and Palestine. The treatment of the exiled Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan, the Urals, and other regions also had a number of similarities with how settler colonies treated their indigenous populations. These similarities, however, have not been thoroughly explored by historians and other scholars. Instead the USSR has been considered as being completely outside of the framework of colonial and ethno-racial relations that developed between Europeans and indigenous peoples in other parts of the world. This article seeks to make a first attempt at suggesting ways in which Soviet policies towards various indigenous peoples in the USSR can be compared to the better studied cases of settler colonialism in places like South Africa and Palestine. In particular it uses the Soviet deportation of the Crimean Tatars and their prolonged exile in Uzbekistan under various legal restrictions as a case study comparable in a number of important ways to settler colonialism. It is hoped that this article will inspire further inquiries and research in a comparative manner regarding this topic.*

**Keywords:** *Crimean Tatars, Deportation, NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs), Settler Colonialism, Special Settlement*

## YERLEŐİMCİ SÖMÜRGEÇİLİĐİ BAĐLAMINDA KIRIM TATAR SÜRGÜNÜ

**Öz:** *Kırım Tatarlarının, Sovyetler BirliĐi tarafından etnik temizliĐe uğratılmaları, bunu takiben Rus ve Ukraynalıların Kırım Tatarlarının*

topraklarına yerleştirilmeleri ve Kırım yarımadasındaki Tatarca yer adlarının değiştirilmesi, Amerika kıtası, Afrika, Avusturalya ve Filistin'de yaşanan yerleşimci sömürgecilik ile bir takım benzerlikler taşımaktadır. Buna ek olarak, Kırım Tatarlarının Özbekistan, Urallar ve sürgün edildikleri diğer yerlerde maruz kaldıkları muamelenin de yerli halkların yerleşimci sömürgeciler tarafından maruz bırakıldıkları muamele ile benzerlikleri olduğu görülmektedir. Ne var ki, bu benzerlikler tarihçiler ve diğer sosyal bilimciler tarafından hakıyla incelenmemiştir. Aksine, Sovyetler Birliği'nde yaşanan olaylar, Avrupalılar ve yerli halklar arasında farklı coğrafyalarda gelişen sömürgeci ve etno-ırksal ilişkilerin tamamen dışında ele alınmıştır. Bu makale, Sovyetler Birliği'ndeki çeşitli yerli halklara karşı yürütülen politikaların, şimdiye kadar daha derinlemesine çalışılmış olan Güney Afrika ve Filistin'deki gibi yerleşimci sömürgecilikle nasıl kıyaslanabileceğine dair bir ilk deneme olmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu çerçevede bu makale, özel olarak, Kırım Tatar tehciri ve çeşitli yasal düzenlemeler çerçevesinde yaşanan Özbekistan'daki uzun sürgün döneminin yerleşimci sömürgeciliği ile bazı noktalarda önemli benzerlikler taşıyan bir örnek olarak ele almaktadır. Bu makalenin, bu konu hakkında gelecekte yapılacak araştırmalar için bir esin kaynağı olması ümit edilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kırım Tatarları, Sürgün, NKVD (İç İşleri Halk Komiserliği), Yerleşimci sömürgeciliği, özel yerleşim

## Introduction

The mass deportation of the Crimean Tatars from their ancestral homeland to Uzbekistan and the Urals where they lived under special settlement restrictions has generally not been examined in the context of the larger historical phenomenon of forcible displacement and racial discrimination against indigenous peoples. In so far as their history has been comparatively examined it has been in the context of other deported peoples in the USSR such as ethnic Germans, Chechens, Ingush, Karachais, Balkars, Kalmyks, and Meskhetian Turks.<sup>1</sup> It has with very few exceptions not been compared to cases outside the Soviet Union such as the treatment of Native Americans, blacks in South Africa, and Arabs in Palestine.<sup>2</sup> This is despite the fact that all of these cases also involved the forcible resettlement of indigenous populations and the imposition of severe legal restrictions upon their freedom of residency and movement on the basis of their ethno-racial classification. This article will examine the deportation and exile of the Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan and Urals as a case study of systematic racial discrimination against an indigenous people with many similarities to settler colonialism.

European colonialism in Asia and Africa can be divided into two main types. These were the establishment of settler colonies and colonies of extraction. Settler colonies like the earlier conquest of the Americas involved transplanting a significant and permanent European population from the ruling colonial power to the colony. These settlers then displaced the indigenous populations from much of their land in addition to depriving them of political control over the colonized territory. The US, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Algeria, Kenya, and Rhodesia were at one time all settler colonies. The substitution of a European majority for an indigenous one in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel also occurred in Crimea. In all the above cases the newly dominant European populations placed significant legal restrictions upon the indigenous population that discriminated against their well being.

1 See N.F. Bugai, *L. Beria – I. Stalimu: 'Soglasno vashemu ukazaniiu..'* Moscow: AIRO XX, 1995; J. Otto Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR, 1937-1949* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999); Pavel Polian, *Against their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004).

2 For two of those exceptions see J. Otto Pohl, 'Soviet Apartheid: Stalin's Ethnic Deportations, Special Settlement Restrictions, and the Labor Army: The Case of the Ethnic Germans in the USSR,' *Human Rights Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2012 and J. Otto Pohl, 'Socialist Racism: Ethnic Cleansing and Racial Exclusion in the USSR and Israel,' *Human Rights Review*, vol. 7, no. 3, April-June 2006.

The Soviet deportation of the Crimean Tatars from May 18-20, 1944 completed the demographic de-Tatarization of the Crimean peninsula, a process that started under Tsarist rule following the annexation of the Crimean Khanate by the Russian Empire in 1783. Between 1856 and 1860 over 100,000 Crimean Tatars emigrated from the peninsula to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup> The 1944 deportations cannot be viewed correctly without reference to earlier bouts of Russian chauvinism against the Crimean Tatars.

The Soviet policy towards the Crimean Tatars can be divided into several phases. The first phase during the Russian Civil War 1918-1921 involved the use of violence to suppress the attempt by *Mili Firka* (People's Party) to create an independent Crimean Tatar state. The second phase from 1921 to 1928 represented the NEP (New Economic Policy) and the high point of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) including the creation of the Crimean ASSR as a Crimean Tatar national territory within the USSR. The third phase from 1928 to 1941 involved the massive violence of collectivization and the Great Terror of 1937-1938. From 1941 to 1944 Crimea was under German rule. After the recovery of the peninsula by the Soviet military in May 1944, the Stalin regime forcibly deported virtually the entire Crimean Tatar population to Uzbekistan and the Urals in the fifth phase of its evolving policy towards the Crimean Tatars. From 1944 to 1956 the Crimean Tatars remained under the strict legal restrictions of the special settlement regime. The penultimate phase from 1956 until 1989 near the end of the Soviet Union's existence involved the continued exile of the vast majority of the population in Uzbekistan and an active repression of Crimean Tatar national movement to return their ancestral homeland. From 1989 to 1991 the Soviet government allowed the Crimean Tatars to return from Uzbekistan and other places to Crimea although it did not restore the Crimean ASSR or provide them any compensation for lost property.<sup>4</sup>

It is the deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944 and the subsequent five and a half decades that they spent exiled in Central Asia suffering under various forms of official discrimination that has the most interesting parallels to settler colonialism. These practices have similarities with the treatment of indigenous populations by European settlers in the Americas, Australia, South Africa, and Palestine. The exemption of the USSR from such critical comparative scholarship in

3 Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1978), p. 89.

4 Pavel Polian, *Against their Will*, pp. 215-216.

the West has largely been a result of the USSR distinguishing itself from these other cases by virtue of its espousal of a socialist ideology and opposition to capitalist economics. The imperialism, colonialism, and racism of Soviet policy towards the Crimean Tatars and other peoples, however, did not require any adherence to capitalism

This article will examine Soviet policy towards the Crimean Tatars from 1944 to 1989 in comparison to a number of cases of more traditional settler colonialism including the US treatment of Native Americans, the Zionist conquest of Palestine, and South African apartheid. It will specifically analyze the similarities in practice between these different regimes despite their very different ideological and economic systems.

### The Deportation

The Stalin regime forcibly deported virtually the entire Crimean Tatar population from their ancestral homeland to Uzbekistan and the Urals from 18-20 May 1944. The NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) rounded up and loaded 180,014 Crimean Tatars onto 67 echelons headed east during these three days. The Soviet authorities also mobilized another 11,000 Crimean Tatar men during this time for forced labor detachments for a total of 191,044 Crimean Tatars violently removed from their national territory.<sup>5</sup> This action clearly targeted the indigenous population of Crimea on the basis of their ethno-racial classification. The first operative clause of State Defense Committee resolution 5859ss 'On Crimean Tatars' of 11 May 1944 signed by Joseph Stalin state 'All Tatars are to be exiled from the territory of Crimea and settled permanently with the status of special settlers in regions of the Uzbek SSR.'<sup>6</sup> This ethnic cleansing had clear parallels with similar forced resettlements in settler colonies including the Trail of Tears and Long Walk in the US, the South African removal of 'black spots', and the Palestinian Nakba.<sup>7</sup> The internal dispersal of these groups within a

5 N.F. Bugai, ed., *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* (Moscow: Insan, 2002), doc. 66, p. 89.

6 N. Pobol and P. Polian, eds., *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928-1953: Dokumenty* (Moscow: MFD, Materik, 2005), doc. 3.148, p. 497.

7 The Trail of Tears is the name given to the US military's forcible resettlement of the Cherokee during 1838 in what is now Oklahoma. The Long Walk is the name given to the US military's forcible resettlement of the Navajo into Bosque Redondo in 1864. The South African removal of 'black spots' was the practice of the apartheid government of forcibly relocating blacks living in areas allocated to whites to Bantustans or 'homelands' set up as reservations for various indigenous peoples. The Nakba or Catastrophe is the mass expulsion and flight of Palestinian Arabs that accompanied the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.

single state has often been referred to as internal colonialism.<sup>8</sup> In all these cases the perpetrators rounded up the victim population on the basis of their ethno-racial category and forcibly evicted them from their ancestral homelands at gun point and relocated them to areas with considerably worse living conditions.

The mass deportation of the Crimean Tatars from their ancestral homeland took three days. On the first day of the deportations, May 18, 1944, the NKVD took 90,000 Crimean Tatars to train stations and loaded 48,000 of them onto 25 train echelons.<sup>9</sup> The following day the number of Crimean Tatars taken to train stations by the NKVD had increased to 165,515 of which 136,412 had been loaded on to train echelons bound for the east.<sup>10</sup> Finally on May 20, 1944 Kobulov and Serov<sup>11</sup> reported to Beria that the NKVD had loaded 180,014 Crimean Tatars onto 67 echelons by four in the afternoon that day and that 63 echelons with 173,287 deportees were already on their way to Uzbekistan.<sup>12</sup> This rapid round up and deportation from Crimea of the vast majority of the Crimean Tatar population completed the removal of the indigenous population started under the Tsars. During Tsarist rule particularly after the Crimean War a very large number of Crimean Tatars emigrated to the Ottoman Empire. Estimates of the number of such emigrants run as high as 200,000.<sup>13</sup> The Crimean War had left the lands, property, and animals of the indigenous population devastated and the Russian government made no effort to provide them with restitution to support themselves. Indeed the Russian government encouraged the impoverished Crimean Tatars to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire viewing them as politically unreliable and seeking to make the peninsula a strong hold of Orthodox Christianity.<sup>14</sup> By 1867 the Russian government had documented 192,360 Crimean Tatars emigrating and leaving behind 784 empty villages.<sup>15</sup> The deportation of 1944 completely removed the remaining Crimean Tatar population.

8 See J. Otto Pohl, 'Colonialism in one Country: The Deported Peoples of the USSR as an Example of Internal Colonialism,' *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion*, vol. 5, no. 7, May 2014 and Robert J. Hind, 'The Internal Colonial Concept,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 26, no. 3.

9 Pobol and Polian, *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928-1953*, doc. 3.149, p. 500.

10 Pobol and Polian, *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928-1953*, doc. 3.151, p. 501.

11 Kobulov and Serov were Deputy Chiefs of the NKVD under Beria

12 Pobol and Polian, *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928-1953*, doc. 3.152, pp. 501-502.

13 Mara Kozelsky, "Causalities of Conflict: Crimean Tatars during the Crimean War," *Slavic Review*, vol. 67, no. 4 (Winter 2008), p. 866.

14 Kozelsky, pp. 885-888.

15 Kozelsky, pp. 888-889.

The Stalin regime's ethnic cleansing of the Crimean Tatars using modern rail technology was much more thorough than most cases of settler colonialism. The NKVD managed to physically remove virtually the entire Crimean Tatar population from the Crimean peninsula. In the cases of various Native American nations relocated by the US army during the 19th Century, the placement of black South Africans onto reservations and later Bantustans, and the forced expulsion of the indigenous Palestinians from their homeland sizeable minorities managed to escape from being evicted. Even in the case of Palestine where unlike South Africa the desire was to completely remove the indigenous population rather than subjugate them as a menial labor force the Zionists were unable to remove the entire population. Perhaps as many as 150,000 Palestinians managed to avoid expulsion in 1948 from the territory that became the State of Israel out of an initial population of around 900,000-950,000.<sup>16</sup> The superior organization and execution of the Soviet ethnic cleansing operations set them apart from the less thorough forced migrations elsewhere. This remained true even of those cases such as in South Africa and Palestine that took place after the deportation of the Crimean Tatars.

Already material conditions on the trains transporting the Crimean Tatars eastward were insufficient. The box cars were overcrowded, unclean, and unheated. The Soviet authorities did not provide the Crimean Tatars with sufficient food or other supplies during the trip. The daily rations for Crimean Tatar deportees on the train echelons was only 500 grams of bread, 70 grams of meat or fish, 60 grams of cereal, and 10 grams of fat per day.<sup>17</sup> This early lack of food foreshadowed a much larger problem of food shortages in exile in Uzbekistan and the Urals. There real hunger would lead to mass malnutrition and greatly contribute to the excess mortality suffered by the Crimean Tatars.

### Exile

The vast majority of Crimean Tatars ended up in Uzbekistan. The climatic and soil conditions of Uzbekistan varied greatly from the much less arid Crimean peninsula. This made adapting to their new settlements difficult. Culturally the Uzbeks and Crimean Tatars are both Muslims and speak Turkic languages. In the secularized and highly ethnically

16 Hussein Abu Hussein and Fiona McKay, *Access Denied: Palestinian Land Rights in Israel* (London: Zed Books, 2003), p. 1.

17 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 42, p. 73.

differentiated USSR these similarities were overwhelmed by the distinctiveness of the two peoples. This was especially true in the early period of the Crimean Tatar exile. Thus they were generally met with a hostile reception that even included physical attacks with thrown stones.<sup>18</sup> The NKVD counted a total of 151,604 out of 183,155 deported Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan on July 1, 1944. They sent the remaining 31,551 Crimean Tatar deportees to the Urals and other areas of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic). They were distributed among the Mari ASSR, and Molotov, Gorky, Sverdlovsk, Ivanovo, and Yaroslav oblasts.<sup>19</sup> In Uzbekistan they were dispersed across the Tashkent, Samarkand, Andijan, Fergana, Namagan, Kashka-Dar', and Bukhara oblasts.<sup>20</sup> Both Uzbekistan and the Urals were many times larger geographically than Crimea and the special settlers found themselves dispersed among alien populations and separated from other Crimean Tatar communities.

#### Crimean Tatar Special Settlers sent to the Uzbek SSR<sup>21</sup>

Territory	Number
Tashkent Oblast	56,362
Samarkand Oblast	31,540
Andijan Oblast	19,630
Fergana Oblast	19,630
Namangan Oblast	13,804
Kashka-Dar' Oblast	10,171
Bukhara Oblast	3,983
<b>Total</b>	<b>151,604</b>

18 Greta Uehling, *Having a Homeland: Recalling the Deportation, Exile, and Repatriation of Crimean Tatars to their Historic Homeland* (Ph.D. diss. University of Michigan, 2000), p. 232 and Brian Williams, 'Hidden Ethnocide in the Soviet Borderlands: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Crimean Tatars,' *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Septmeber 2002), pp. 361-362.

19 T.V. Tsarevskaia-Diakana, ed., *Spetspereselentsy v SSSR* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004), doc. 125, p. 423.

20 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 134, p. 145.

21 Khamzin, 'Krymskie Tatory v Uzbekistane,' p. 12.



**Crimean Tatar Special Settlers sent to the Urals and other areas of the RSFSR<sup>22</sup>**

<b>Territory</b>	<b>Number</b>
Mari ASSR	8597
Molotov Oblast	10,002
Gorky Oblast	5514
Sverdlovsk Oblast	3591
Ivanovo Oblast	2800
Yaroslav Oblast	1047
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,551</b>

Like other forcibly displaced people the Crimean Tatars initially lived in extreme poverty and suffered excessively high rates of mortality and morbidity due to material deprivation in their places of exile in Uzbekistan and the Urals. This is because in all of these cases the ruling power relocated the victimized groups to areas totally unprepared for their arrival. These areas also tended to have less fertile land and sometimes as in the case of the Crimean Tatars more extreme climates. Those cases of internal displacement within a single state such as Native Americans and Crimean Tatars also had higher mortality rates than expulsions outside state borders such as the Palestinians. This difference was due almost entirely to the ability of states and organizations outside of Israel to provide material aid to assist the expellees.<sup>23</sup> In Uzbekistan and the Urals no such outside assistance was available to the deported Crimean Tatars. They were totally dependent upon the resources they could find locally and the meager amounts of food and other goods provided by the same Soviet government that deported them from their homeland as a collective punishment for trumped up charges of treason.<sup>24</sup> Needless to say the level of provisions received by Crimean Tatars from the Soviet government proved completely inadequate to prevent a large minority from perishing from hunger, disease, and exposure during the first few years of exile.

22 Tsarevskaia-Diakana, *Spetspereselentsy v SSSR*, doc. 125, p. 423.

23 J. Otto Pohl, "Socialist Racism," pp. 72-73.

24 J. Otto Pohl, "Kırım Tatarlına Karşı Düzmece Vatana İhanet Suçlaamari [The False Charges of Treason against the Crimean Tatars] trans. Selami Kaçamak, *Emel*, no. 230, (January-March 2010).

The rations provided the Crimean Tatars in exile in Uzbekistan were far worse than even the meager provisions they received on the train echelons. The initial rations for the deported Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan were set at eight kilograms of flour, eight kilograms of vegetables, and two kilograms of cereal per person per month.<sup>25</sup> This works out to be only 600 grams of food a day. Conditions continued to be dire into the second year of exile and the Crimean Tatar special settlers in Uzbekistan continued to need food aid. For the months of June and July 1945 alone the SNK (Council of People's Commissariats) allocated them 500 tons flour, 15 tons of cereal, 50 tons of salt, and 25 tons of sugar.<sup>26</sup> According to the NKVD as of June 10, 1945 3,660 families out of 30,510 (12%) still lived in unsatisfactory conditions.<sup>27</sup> On the "Narpay" state farm conditions were so bad that the Soviet government transferred 2,639 people (329 families) from it to cotton state farms in Tajikistan in order to prevent them from perishing. The NKVD ordered this transfer on October 18, 1945.<sup>28</sup> This was the first contingent of Crimean Tatars sent to Tajikistan.

Material conditions for the Crimean Tatars sent to the Urals and other parts of the RSFSR were if anything worse than those endured by the deportees in Uzbekistan. On October 10, 1944 the NKVD reported on the material conditions of the 6,387 Crimean Tatars living in Kostroma Oblast. They noted that there were 'extremely unsatisfactory conditions for supporting special settlers' employed in the lumber and paper industries in Kologriv and Manturov districts. The first of these districts was home to 1,893 Crimean Tatars and the second 776. In Kologriv the preparation of barracks moved slowly and a lack of glass meant that windows could not be repaired. Clothes and shoes were not supplied to the special settlers and many worked in the forest barefoot. Food supplies were irregular and sometimes special settlers would go as long as two or three days without receiving any bread. When they did receive their bread rations it was a mere 150 grams per a person. Medical service was also unsatisfactory and there were outbreaks of dysentery, scabies and eczema. Crimean Tatar children here were not provided with any schooling.<sup>29</sup> The literature on this aspect of the Crimean Tatar historical experience still remains limited.

25 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* , doc. 42, p. 73.

26 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* , doc. 135, p. 146.

27 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* , doc. 136, p. 146.

28 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* , doc. 135, p. 146.

29 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* , doc. 130, p. 142.

The initial years of exile of the Crimean Tatars were extremely difficult due to starvation and exposure to malaria. During this time both food and anti-malarial drugs were in extremely short supply among the Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan.<sup>30</sup> As a result many tens of thousands perished prematurely. The exact number of deaths is still debated. Crimean Tatar activists often claim a figure of 46%.<sup>31</sup> The official NKVD figures from May 1944 to 1 January 1946 is 26,966 or 17.8% of the Crimean Tatar special settlers in Uzbekistan.<sup>32</sup> Most of these deaths occurred due to a combination of malaria and malnutrition.<sup>33</sup>

### The Special Settlement Regime

The NKVD confined the deported Crimean Tatars to restricted settlements upon their arrival in Uzbekistan and elsewhere. The Soviet government classified the Crimean Tatars as special settlers and imposed an unequal legal and administrative system upon them. In particular the freedom of movement and freedom to choose their place of residence was severely limited. They needed special NKVD and later MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) permission to leave their assigned settlements even for short periods of time and the authorities punished the failure to get this permission with administrative detention and fines.

The Soviet government codified the various ad hoc regulations regarding the legal status of the special settlers into a single document on January 8, 1945. The Council of People's Commissariats promulgated a short one page resolution with five points clarifying the legal rights and disabilities of the Crimean Tatars and other special settlers. The document is reproduced below in its entirety.

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30 Pohl, *Shallow Roots*, pp. 233-234.

31 Khamzin, 'Krymskie Tatory v Uzbekistane,' 13.

32 Ayder Ibragimov, ed., *Krimski studii: Informatsiinii biuletin*, no. 5-6, (September-November 2000), doc. 26, p. 68 and Khamzin, 'Krymskie Tatory v Uzbekistane,' p. 14.

33 Khamzin, 'Krymskie Tatory v Uzbekistane,' 13.

Council of People's Commissariats Union of SSRs

Resolution No. 35

From 8 January 1945

Moscow, Kremlin

On the legal situation of special settlers

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs RESOLVES:

1. Special settlers enjoy all rights of citizens of the USSR, with the exception of restrictions, provided for in the present Resolution.
2. All able bodied special settlers are obliged to be engaged in socially useful labor.

Towards this goal local Soviets of workers deputies in coordination with organs of the NKVD are to organize labor arrangements of the special settlers in agriculture, industrial enterprises, construction, and economic cooperative organizations and institutions.

The violation of labor discipline by special settlers is subject to punishment according to existing laws.

5. Special settlers do not have the right without the authorization of the NKVD special commandant to be absent from the boundaries of the region of settlement served by their special commandant.

Voluntary absence from the boundaries of the region of settlement, served by the special commandant, will be viewed as flight and treated as a criminal matter.

4. Special settlers – heads of families or people substituting for them are required within a three day period to report to the special commandant of the NKVD all events that change the composition of the family (birth of a child, death of a family member, flight, etc.).

5. Special settlers are obliged to strictly observe the established regime and social order of the places of settlement and obey all orders of the special commandant of the NKVD.

## The Deportation of the Crimean Tatars in the Context of Settler Colonialism

The violation of the regime and social order in the places of settlement by special settlers is subject to administrative sanction in the form of a fine up to 100 rubles or arrest up to five days.

Deputy Chairman

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs V. Molotov

Administrative Affairs

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs Ia. Chadaev<sup>34</sup>

The NKVD and later MVD still had difficulties with special settlers escaping from their assigned areas of internal exile in the USSR and illegally returning to their former places of residence as late as 1948. The number of special settler fugitives caught by the Soviet authorities and returned to their assigned places of internal exile were relatively few. By 1947 a recorded total of 24,524 deportees had fled from their assigned places of settlement. The Soviet authorities had recaptured and detained less than half of these fugitives, only 9,917. This trend accelerated in 1947 with an additional 10,897 escapes and 13,585 refugees detained. In 1948 there were another 15,424 escapes and 13,761 fugitives detained. On September 1, 1948 there were still 12,496 special settler fugitives still at large.<sup>35</sup> The Stalin regime thus decided to introduce draconian punishments for such escapes to serve as a deterrent. On November 26, 1948 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet made the exile of the nationalities deported in their entirety as special settlers during World War II permanent. It also imposed a 20 year sentence of hard labor for attempted escapes and five years imprisonment for free citizens assisting special settler fugitives. The text of the decree is reproduced in English translation below.

34 V.N. Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy, 1930-1960* (Moscow: Nauk, 2005), 120-121.

35 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 154, pp. 159-160.

UKAZ

PRESIDIUM of the SUPREME SOVIET of the USSR

On the criminal responsibilities for flight from places of obligatory and decreed settlement of people exiled to distant regions of the Soviet Union in the period of the Fatherland War.

With the goal of strengthening the regime of settlement for those exiled by Supreme organs of the USSR in the period of the Fatherland War Chechens, Karachais, Ingush, Balkars, Kalmyks, Germans, Crimean Tatars and others, that at the time of their resettlement there was not a specified length of their exile, establishes that those resettled to distant regions of the Soviet Union by decrees of people in the high leadership are exiled forever, without the right to return to their previous places of residence.

For the voluntary leaving (flight) from places of obligatory settlement those exiles that are guilty will be subject to being prosecuted for criminal acts. It is determined that the punishment for this crime is 20 years of hard labor.

Cases related to the flight of exiles will be reviewed by Special Boards of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR.

People, guilty of harboring exiles, fleeing from places of obligatory settlement, or assisting their flight, giving permission for exiles to return to their places of previous residence, and rendering them help in accommodations in their places of previous residence, are subject to criminal penalties. It is determined that the sentence for this crime is deprivation of freedom for a period of five years

Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR

N. SHVERNIK

Secretary of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR

A. Gorkin

Moscow, Kremlin

26 November 1948<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Zemskov, *Spetsposeleltsy*, p. 160.

The special settlement restrictions enforced against the Crimean Tatars and other deported peoples bear a number of similarities to other systems of discrimination against displaced indigenous peoples such as the reservation system in the US and Canada, South African apartheid, and Israeli military rule over the Palestinians. These similarities, however, have generally been overlooked. Soviet treatment of the Crimean Tatars and other indigenous peoples condemned to special settlement restrictions like the historical examples above involved making them legally inferior to other citizens in order to control their movement and labor.

In particular the special settlement regime resembles the Group Areas Act in South Africa and the military control enforced against Palestinians in Israel from 1948 to 1966.<sup>37</sup> In all three cases the regime sought to control the movement and residency of stigmatized ethno-racial groups using legislation, identification documents, and armed police.

Like blacks in South Africa the deported Crimean Tatars were also used as a source of menial labor. The Soviet government used the Crimean Tatar special settlers and labor army conscripts for undesirable jobs in Uzbekistan, the Urals, and Moscow coal basin. They filled many of the industrial jobs in Uzbekistan that the native Uzbeks did not want to take.

### Economic Integration

Initially the Soviet government settled the majority of Crimean Tatars deported to Uzbekistan on either collective farms or state farms. An NKVD report from May 26, 1945 on the labor accommodation of Crimean Tatars in the republic notes that there were 131,690 deportees from Crimea in 36,415 families spread across 59 districts in the oblasts of Tashkent, Samarkand, Ferghana, Andijan, Namangan, Kashkadara, and Bukhara. The Soviet authorities assigned 54,243 (14,712 families) of these special settlers to collective farms, 26,994 (7,633 families) to state farms, and 50,447 (14,050 families) to industrial enterprises.<sup>38</sup> Thus almost 62% of the resettled Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan were

37 See J. Otto Pohl, 'Soviet Apartheid: Stalin's Ethnic Deportations, Special Settlement Restrictions, and the Labor Army: The Case of the Ethnic Germans in the USSR,' *Human Rights Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2012 and J. Otto Pohl, 'Socialist Racism: Ethnic Cleansing and Racial Exclusion in the USSR and Israel,' *Human Rights Review*, vol. 7, no. 3, April-June 2006.

38 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 134, pp. 145-146.

attached to either collective or state farms by spring 1945, a year after their deportation.

During the late 1940s the Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan shifted from agricultural to industrial labor. Much of this shift was due to the delays in assigning private kitchen plots to Crimean Tatars assigned to collective farms. These plots of land were incredibly important in providing food for the Soviet population, especially during the 1940s. Already over a year after the deportations only 7,094 Crimean Tatar families out of 14,712 in Uzbekistan on collective farms with 20,108 out of 52,243 (38.5%) people had been assigned these plots of land to supplement their meager payment in kind from the collective farms and the small amount of food aid provided by the Soviet government.<sup>39</sup> In the next month the Soviet government greatly improved this situation by bringing up the number of Crimean Tatar families on collective farms with kitchen gardens from 48% to 84%. However, 3,665 families still lived in unsatisfactory conditions and many Crimean Tatars migrated to the cities and industrial towns to find wage labor in order to buy food.<sup>40</sup> Crimean Tatars worked in mining including the Lyangar uranium mine in Navoi Oblast, the construction of hydro-electric stations, and various factories.<sup>41</sup> By July 1, 1948 the number of Crimean deportees working in agriculture had been reduced to only 30,704 people or 30% of the adult population capable of physical labor.<sup>42</sup>

The second area in the USSR that used the labor of deported Crimean Tatars was the Urals where they worked in lumber, cellulose, and paper industries. Already on May 21, 1944 the day after the completion of the ethnic cleansing of the Crimean peninsula, Stalin at the behest of Beria ordered the diversion of 10,000 Crimean Tatar families bound for Uzbekistan to the Urals. These Crimean Tatars were to be settled in Molotov, Gorky, and Sverdlovsk oblasts and also the Mari ASSR. These special settlers were to work in the lumber, cellulose, and paper industries in these territories.<sup>43</sup> In total a little over 30,000 Crimean Tatars ended up in the Urals and other regions of the RSFSR.<sup>44</sup> Most of these men and women ended up working in wood related industries.

39 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 134, pp. 145-146.

40 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 136, p. 146.

41 Khamazin, 'Krymskie Tatory v Uzbekistane,' p. 13.

42 N.F. Bugai, ed., *Iosif Stalin – Lavrentiiu Berii: 'Ikh nado deportirovat'': Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, (Moscow: 'Druzhba narodov', 1992), doc. 48, pp. 264-265.

43 Pobol and Polian, *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928-1953*, doc. 3.156, p. 508.

44 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 74, p. 93.



The 5,000 Crimean Tatars mobilized for work in the Tula and Moscow oblasts mining coal during the deportation represented the final labor front on which the Stalin regime deployed them. The Crimean Tatars working in the Moscow coal basin were all able bodied men selected by the draft boards. They worked mining coal, building new mine shafts, and industrial-residential construction. By January 24, 1945 there were 2,280 working in the ‘Moscow Coal’ kombinat and 602 in the ‘Moscow Mine Construction’ trust.<sup>45</sup> On July 18, 1945 State Defense Committee Order No. 9526s attached all mobilized Germans (Soviet citizens) and Crimean Tatars in the coal industry to their enterprises as permanent cadres.<sup>46</sup> At the same time the Soviet government eliminated the restricted ‘zone’ imposed by armed guards against the Crimean Tatars and Germans working at these coal mines.<sup>47</sup> The Crimean Tatars and Germans mobilized to work in some coal mines could have their families come live with them at their places at work after this time. This right did not apply to those working in Moscow, Leningrad, and Tula oblasts in the RSFSR or anywhere in the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>48</sup> Those working in Moscow and Tula oblasts did not receive the right to be reunited with their families until almost a year later, but even then could only leave to join their families or be lifted from the special settlement restrictions after three years of labor. On March 8, 1947 Beria received a proposal to grant them the right to reunify with their family members without any further waiting.<sup>49</sup> Beria in turn suggested that 2,017 Crimean Tatars working in the Moscow coal basin be allowed to leave the mines and join their families and take up work in their specializations on June 18, 1947.<sup>50</sup> Finally, on August 17, 1947 the Council of Ministers passed resolution No. 2890-931 signed by Stalin allowing the formerly mobilized Germans and Crimean Tatars in the Moscow coal basin, Magnitogorsk, and Cheliabinsk to be joined with their families.<sup>51</sup> The war time mobilization thus lasted more than two years after the war ended.

45 Tsarevskaja-Diakina, *Spetspereselentsy v SSSR*, doc. 131, pp. 445-446.

46 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 141, pp. 151-152.

47 Diakina, *Spetspereselentsy v SSSR*, doc. 139, p. 471.

48 Diakina, *Spetspereselentsy v SSSR*, doc. 138, p. 470.

49 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 145, p. 155.

50 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 146, pp. 155-156.

51 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 147, p. 156.

## Education

The children of the exiled Crimean Tatars lost the right to receive their education in their native language. The right to receive education in one's mother tongue was one of the most trumpeted rights in the USSR during the 1920s and 1930s. It was a right the Crimean Tatars had in the Crimean ASSR.<sup>52</sup> During the 1940s all of the deported peoples were systematically deprived of this right in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. On June 19, 1944 Beria wrote to Molotov on the need to organize Russian language primary schools in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan for the deported Chechens, Ingush, Karachais, Balkars, and Crimean Tatars. This was part of an overall strategy to permanently attach the special settlers to their new places of residence. The letter claimed that the switch from native language schooling in their homelands to Russian language instruction in Central Asia was due to the lack of trained teachers in these languages.<sup>53</sup> But, this excuse ignored the teachers existing among the deported peoples themselves, especially the relatively highly literate and educated Crimean Tatars.<sup>54</sup> Like Native Americans in the US sent to English language boarding schools, the Soviet government subjected the deported Crimean Tatars to an educational regime aimed at eliminating their indigenous language in favor of Russian.<sup>55</sup> This was one of the primary pillars of the Soviet assault on the indigenous culture of the Crimean Tatars exiled to Uzbekistan.

The Council of People's Commissariats of the USSR passed resolution No. 13287 on the following day establishing the official Soviet education policy towards the Crimean Tatars and deported North Caucasians in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Passed under the signature of Molotov this resolution established Russian as the language of instruction for these children. They were to be educated in Russian in already existing primary schools in the district they had been assigned to live by the NKVD. The special settlers were to attend those schools that already existed in these districts. The resolution further stipulated that these children could move within and between these republics to

52 Mustafa Dzhemilev, ed., *Shest' desiat shestaia godovshchina Krymskoi ASSR: Demonstratsii i mitingi krymskikh tatar* (London: Society for Central Asian Studies, 1987), pp. 18-21 and Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question 1917-1923* (London: MacMillan Press, 1999), table 6.5, pp. 159-160.

53 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 125, p. 139.

54 Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy*, pp. 177-179.

55 Margaret Ziolkowski, *Alien Visions: The Chechens and Navajos in Russian and American Literature* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), pp. 116-118.

receive middle and higher education at existing institutions if they had NKVD permission, but they could not move outside of them. Special settlers moving from one of the Central Asian republics another one to attend middle and higher educational institutions could not leave their new republic either during their period of study or after completing their education.<sup>56</sup> Thus the Crimean Tatars could only attend educational institutions in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan and only in Russian, Uzbek, Kazakh, or Kyrgyz. The vast majority of those that managed to receive middle and higher education in exile received it in Uzbekistan.

### Resettlement of the Crimean Peninsula

After the deportation of the Crimean Tatars the Soviet government sought to resettle the peninsula with Russian and Ukrainian settlers just as colonists descended of Europeans settled the lands of displaced Native Americans, Black South Africans, and Palestinians. In all these cases the ruling power sought to permanently replace the indigenous populations with settlers from the politically dominant ethno-racial groups. On August 12, 1944 the State Defense Committee ordered the settlement of 14,000 households from the RSFSR and 3,000 from the Ukrainian SSR into the Crimea to partially replace the deported Crimean Tatars.<sup>57</sup> The Soviet government settled 17,040 families in Crimea during 1944-1945 following the deportation of the Crimean Tatars. Between 1945 and 1950 they settled another 6,055 families with 26,728 people in Crimea to replace the labor force deported eastward. By 1951 a full 25% of the collective farms households in Crimea were occupied by settlers that had arrived since 1945.<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that the Crimean Tatars were already a minority in their homeland by 1944 before the deportations due to earlier expulsions by Tsarist authorities to the Ottoman Empire and settlement of the peninsula with colonists after the annexation of the Crimean Khanate in 1783. The 1939 Soviet census showed that 19.4% of the population of the Crimean ASSR were Crimean Tatars versus 49.6% Russians and remainder divided among Ukrainians, Jews, Germans, Greeks, Bulgarians and others.<sup>59</sup> The literal replacement of the Crimean Tatars in Crimea through a combination of

56 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 126, pp. 139-140.

57 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 120, p. 135.

58 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 124, p. 138.

59 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 14, p. 55.

ethnic cleansing and settlement closely resembled a number of colonial enterprises in the Americas, Africa, and Palestine. This colonial replacement was most successful in the Americas and least successful in Africa. The key to such success has been the ratio of colonizers to indigenous inhabitants.

In addition to resettling Crimea with colonists from other regions of the USSR to replace the deported Crimean Tatars the Soviet government also erased the Crimean Tatar place names from the peninsula. This de-Tatarization was quite thorough and eliminated centuries of Tatar influence on the topographic naming in Crimea. Such topographic erasure has been common to settler colonialism. The wholesale removal of indigenous place names by the new ruling powers has occurred in the Americas, South Africa, and most recently Palestine as well.

Following the deportation of the ethnic cleansing of Crimea of Germans, Crimean Tatars, Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgarians the Soviet government systematically eliminated the influence of these groups on the peninsula's place names. In particular they proceeded to eliminate all Crimean Tatar, Greek, and German names of population centers, rivers, and mountains and replace them with Russian ones. On October 20, 1944 the Oblast Committee of the Communist Party Soviet Union in Crimea resolved to change all of the names in the peninsula of non-Slavic origin to Russian ones and attached a list of places to be effected.<sup>60</sup> The Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR issued a decree 'On renaming the district and district centers of the Crimean ASSR' on December 14, 1944. This decree renamed 11 district and district centers in Crimea. Most of these raions like Ak-Mechet and Karasubazar had Crimean Tatar names. But, a few like Larindorf and Freidorf had German names.<sup>61</sup> On July 30, 1945 the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR renaming all the village Soviets and populations points with German, Crimean Tatar, or Greek names in all 26 districts in the territory.<sup>62</sup> In total this decree renamed 327 village soviet centers.<sup>63</sup> The entire map of Crimea was altered to reflect the demographic changes imposed by the Soviet government through ethnic cleansing.

The Crimean Tatars themselves remained under special settlement restrictions and dispersed throughout Uzbekistan and to a lesser extent

60 Pobol and Polian, *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928-1953*, doc. 3.167, p. 519.

61 Pobol and Polian, *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928-1953: Dokumenty*, doc. 3.168, p. 520.

62 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 118, pp. 122-133.

63 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 119, p. 134.

other regions of the USSR until 1956, three years after the death of Stalin. The Soviet government released the Crimean Tatars from the special settlement restrictions on April 28, 1956.<sup>64</sup> It did not, however, ever restore the Crimean ASSR or allow large scale resettlement of the peninsula by the Crimean Tatars.

### The Crimean Tatar Movement to Return

The Soviet deportation and continued exile of the Crimean Tatars provoked a strong national resistance aimed at returning to their ancestral homeland after their release from the special settlement restrictions. This movement had particularly close parallels with that of the Palestinians in this regard. The horror of being forcibly exiled from their homeland created a strong movement for return. Unlike a number of Palestinian factions including Fatah and the PFLP<sup>65</sup>, the Crimean Tatar national movement always adhered to purely peaceful tactics, the most widespread such tactic early on was the petition.<sup>66</sup> In the twelve years between July 1957 and May 1969 the Crimean Tatar national movement organized 32 petitions which it sent to Moscow. The number of signatures on these petitions ranged from a low of only 350 to a high of 131,000.<sup>67</sup> This latter number represented the vast majority of the Crimean Tatar adult population. In the mid-1960s the Crimean Tatars added demonstrations to their methods of protesting Soviet policy. At this time the Soviet government began to crack down on the movement by arresting and incarcerating its leaders.

The first such large demonstration took place in Bekabad on August 27, 1965. The police violently broke up the demonstration and arrested the three leaders of the demonstration. The two men Eskender Jemilev and Refat Seydametov received a year in prison each for 'hooliganism' on September 11, 1965. The one woman, Khatidzhe Khayreinova received a six month sentence.<sup>68</sup> The following year demonstrations throughout Uzbekistan during October led to the incarceration of 11 Crimean Tatar activists, some of them for as long as two years.<sup>69</sup> From 1966 to 1972

64 Bugai, *Deportatsiia narodov kryma: Dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*, doc. 185, pp. 192-193.

65 Fatah was the main faction of the PLO under Yassar Arafat. The PFLP stands for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and was led for many years by George Habbash.

66 J. Otto Pohl, 'Socialist Racism,' pp. 73-75.

67 Radio Liberty, *Sobranie dokumentov samizdata (Materialy perepechatay iz Arkhiv Samizdata*, 630, vol. 12, pp. 2-5.

68 *Tashkentsii protsess* (Amsterdam, Herzen Fund, 1976), pp. 60-62.

69 *Tashkentsii protsess*, 69-77.

alone the Soviet government sentenced over 200 Crimean Tatar activists to prison.<sup>70</sup> Such tactics throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s reduced the scope of Crimean Tatar activism by incarcerating its leadership. It did not, however, end the movement. The Crimean Tatar national movement was effectively able to reanimate itself after 1989 and lead a large scale return to the Crimean peninsula. Between 1989 and 1994 over 200,000 Crimean Tatars successfully returned from Uzbekistan to their ancestral homeland.<sup>71</sup> This reverse exodus marked the return of a significant Crimean Tatar presence on the peninsula for the first time in over 40 years.

### Conclusion

The Stalinist ethnic cleansing of the Crimean peninsula of its indigenous Tatar population in May 1944 had a number of significant similarities with examples of settler colonialism from the Americas, Africa, Palestine, and Australia. The removal of indigenous peoples from their native territories and their replacement with settlers had a long pedigree in the history of colonial relations between Europeans and people elsewhere. This can be seen as recently as the Israeli expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 and 1967 and the South African removal of blacks to Bantustans. The use of displaced indigenous people as a labor force as was done by the Soviets to the Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan and the Urals also has some parallels with settlement colonies. Most notably it resembles the labor policies of South Africa of using the labor of Africans living on Bantustans for menial jobs. Finally, the Soviet policies like the settlement colonies provoked a strong indigenous resistance. In the case of the Crimean Tatars it took a form with key similarities to the resistance which manifested itself among the Palestinians, South Africans, and others. Comparative history exploring these similarities, however, still remains greatly underdeveloped. For the most part the former Soviet Union has not been integrated into studies of other parts of the world, particularly those areas of Asia and Africa formerly colonized by Europe.

70 Ibragimov, *Krimski studii: Informatsiinii biuletin*, pp. 62-63.

71 Andrew Wilson 'Politics in and around Crimea: A Difficult Homecoming', *The Tatars of Crimea: Return to the Homeland*, ed. Edward Allworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 282-283.

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