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Express Yourself: Investigating Wartime Deportations in the Context of Changing Soviet National Policy

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Express Yourself:

Investigating Wartime Deportations in the Context of Changing Soviet National Policy

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by

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Introduction

In November 1944 the Soviet government deported 94,955 Meskhetian Turks, Kurds and Khemshils to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kirghizia. This group was the last of 11 major ethnic deportations completed between 1937-1944, starting with Koreans in the Soviet East, and continuing with Finns, Germans, Kalmyks, Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and Crimean Greeks. These groups were loaded onto trains and sent to Siberia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Molotov, and Mari ASSR—with populations ranging from approximately 750,00 Germans to approximately 15,000 Crimean Tatars. The deportations of the Koreans, Finns, and Germans were completed soon after the Soviet Union was invaded in 1941. These three diaspora communities were all from countries that were then considered Soviet enemies. They were not given the opportunity to fight for their home. It was an agreed upon fact within the government that these communities would act traitorously, and they were quickly rounded up and deported. The other seven groups, who are often called ‘the punished peoples’ and who will be the focus of this paper, were deported later during the second wave, which began in late 1943.

Away from their native land and stripped of the civil rights guaranteed by the Soviet constitution, the punished groups were moved into special settlements. In all cases the special settlements lacked sufficient housing, food, and supplies for the groups to survive. Since the majority of adult men from these seven groups were drafted into the Red Army, and were either, fighting, dead, or in a POW camp, over fifty percent of those deported in each ethnic group were children. To reach the special settlements entire populations were packed into freight trains with little food, water, or shelter from extreme elements. Great numbers of people, mostly children and elderly, died on the weeks long journeys to the new settlements. Those who did survive to

their destination watched as their relatives and neighbors died in mass during the first year. The mortality rate among the Crimean Tatars for the first year and a half of deportation was 17.7%, as starvation and disease forced them to bury thousands of their fellow tribesmen.¹

The Soviet government maintained that these ethnic groups colluded with the Nazis during the German invasion of the Soviet Union, and therefore these groups were officially charged as traitors and were exiled as punishment. Accepting this explanation for the deportations is difficult. Entire ethnic populations were deported, under the charge of the groups' collective guilt. The idea of mass punishment for the crimes of individuals is irrational. In addition, many other Soviet ethnic groups, including Russians and Georgians, were also invaded by the Germans in the early 1940s. Yet while these other groups too lived under Nazi occupation, they were not punished with deportation. In 1956, Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev himself declared to the 20th Party Congress that the actions of individuals within an ethnic group were not the determinant of their republic's punishment. He stated that:

“The Ukrainians avoided meeting the fate [of the Kalmyks, Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars] only because there were too many of them and there was no place to deport them. Otherwise [Stalin] would have deported them too. *(laughter and animation in the hall)*”²

Lavrenti Beria and the NKVD carried out the deportation, but Khrushchev was an active member of the Politburo as of 1934 and would certainly have known about and been involved in conversations about the deportations.

If the official explanation for the deportation of the ethnic minorities is questionable, then how does one account for the actions of the Soviet government? Many scholars have attempted to answer this question. The party tried to keep secret their deportation of over a million people during this period by not announcing the action until years later. However, residents of the

¹ Nekrich, 112.

² Khrushchev, Secret Speech.

former national republics noticed the full trains leaving, and the residents of the Siberian and Central Asian republics noticed the slightly less full trains arriving. In this period observant citizens also noticed the removal of certain national republics from official maps and encyclopedias. These indications along with word of mouth accounts from those who encountered the deported peoples became the basis for investigations on why these ethnic groups were punished.

Research into this subject can be broken into two groups. On one side is early scholarship from the mid-1960s, assembled without much official information. On the other side is post-USSR work, aided by access to various party archives. I use both sources in my paper, but point out the difference to highlight the more creative way in which the early author *had* to think and work. Otto Pohl's book is full of helpful and specific statistics he found in the Soviet archives. His work clearly tracks the days and weeks during which the populations were deported, as well as the suspiciously exact numbers of those deported. However when Pohl explains the reasoning behind the population transfer, he offers no new theses. Pohl writes that the regime exiled these groups "in order to remove rebellious ethnicities from strategic areas" and therefore "pursued ethnic cleansing as part of [an] overall security policy"³ during the war. This explanation parallels the party's official explanation, which cites fear of unreliable elements. Yet the Nazis had already retreated from Soviet territory at this point in the war and other neighboring republics were not deported. Conclusively Khrushchev states to the 20th Party Congress that "deportation was not dictated by any military considerations."⁴

Robert Conquest focuses much of his research in *Nation Killers* on the historical relationship these ethnic groups had with the Russian Empire. He details how each area was

³ Pohl, 137.

⁴ Khrushchev, Secret Speech.

conquered and when they were integrated. This framing, which is used by other scholars as well, is problematic. Though Conquest writes that the deportations were not due to the actions of the victims, when he includes their past resistance to Russian imperialism he is implying equal agency. Lengthy attention to the situation, past or present, in these republics ignores the true actor during the deportations: the Soviet government. It is helpful to understand how the Ingush lived during the war, but not in relation to a thesis on *why* they were eventually deported. Many areas and ethnic groups resisted Russian conquest, yet only a few of those groups were deported by the Soviets. Resistance to Russian imperialism, and additionally resistance to the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 or to collectivization in 1929-30 is not a workable thesis for action against the North Caucasian groups. Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians, Karelians, Daghestanis, and many others all opposed the same incursion into their societies. Perhaps these incidents could be evidence for why some of these smaller groups were *chosen* to be deported. But the choice to deport belongs to Joseph Stalin's regime, whose circumstances and motivations are unexplored in many of these works.

Others authors claim that as a Georgian/Ossetian, Stalin carried within him a hate for other transcaucasian nations. This is, of course, unprovable. Perhaps he did. Ossetia did gain land from the Ingush Republic, but Stalin could have rearranged republics without deporting the entire populations. Putting forth a thesis reliant on Stalin's personal feeling towards specific groups again focuses too much on the *who*, which groups were chosen to deport, instead of the *why*, why did the regime want to deport. No matter how strong Stalin's allegedly private resentful feelings were towards Chechens or Crimean Tatars, the thought that his revenge would be taken in the middle of WWII is nonsensical.

Kolarz and others put forth the views that the deportations occurred “for the purpose of acquiring land for agricultural production”⁵ or to create a workforce in the depopulated lands of Central Asia and Siberia. Again, the timing for such an endeavor seems strange. Moreover the actions of the Soviet government after the deportations do not reflect such intentions. In Crimea the hilly and carefully cultivated land, especially vineyards, suffered for generations after the Tatars and Greeks were expelled. The Soviet government, in fact, had difficulties repopulating Crimea. The arid steppe in Kalmykia supported little agricultural production before the deportations, and this was not improved after 1943. The conditions the deported groups encountered at the end of their journey also do not give the impression that the regime had made any plans for the new residents. Kalmyks were sent to the freezing tundra and Karachays were sent to a flat desert. Traditional production techniques could not be used. These groups were in the most insidious way: out of their element. In Kolyma, there was a large group of Chechens. Populations sent to labor camps weren’t part of a workforce intent on improving Far East infrastructure; they were literally constructing buildings for no one.

Life in the Soviet Union was changing after the Great Terror in 1937. An erosion of traditional socialist ideology was occurring within the country. Focus shifted away from self-abnegation and towards individual gratification, as centralized economic planning finally stabilized. Stalin writes in 1939 that “progress in industry and agriculture could not *but* lead to new rise in the material and cultural standards of the people,” indicating that life for ordinary Soviet citizens was again undergoing a great shift. In Stalin’s speeches and in various party controlled newspapers, radio broadcasts, and books, socialist rhetoric was vastly different than it was in the 1920s or even five years earlier.

⁵ Kolarz, 36.

To fill the void of socialism, which was the ideological foundation of the entire government, Stalin's regime increasingly focused on nationalism and statism. To create this new identity, there needed to be new terms to describe the relationship between the peoples of the Soviet Union. Instead of workers, they were a family and they made up a 'Family of Nations'. The idea of a 'Family of Nations' is at its core a weak metaphor. Socialism had a huge number of theoretical writings and years of debate to solidify itself as an identity, but the metaphor of family did not come from that type of rigorous critic. It rests on undefinable and traditional platitudes about love and friendship. At the end of the war, Stalin's victory speech labels the Russians as the "senior brother" in this family. This makes explicit what had always been implicit in the shaky family metaphor: that there was a hierarchy and the Russians were at the top.

The increase in Russian nationalism, encouraged by the 1940s government but condemned by Lenin, did not completely fill the absence of socialist ideology. And the paradoxical nature of the party's message about nationalism was dangerous. Since the Soviet Union was founded on ideas, as opposed to ethnic or religious distinctions, what held the Soviet Union together if not socialism? Not enough attention has been paid to the major changes of the pre-war period by the scholars of deportations. If there is no connection between these groups' actions during the war, then we must look instead to Soviet society before and during the war for clues to why the government acted in such a way. Even before the war, when the Soviets faced the most serious threat to their existence, the Soviet Union was in the midst of an 'identity crisis'. This essential confusion and feeling of instability about what constituted the country led to fear of the unknown and the future. Fear leads people to react, often violently, and the deportations are certainly a violent act. When the Soviet government deported these minority

ethnic groups, they were not reacting to the behaviors or histories of a small group of their citizens and then responding with a logical and legal counteraction, they were projecting their fear onto an 'other'. The deportations were not born from the government's feelings of control or victory. I argue that it is exactly this fundamental instability about the future of communism and the identity of the USSR that drove the Stalin regime to deport entire populations of harmless and innocent ethnic groups in 1943 and 1944.

In this paper I will begin by investigating the unsettled nature of the Soviet government's policy towards ethnic groups and nationalism from the very onset of the state's formation. In the confusion of where the government stood, I will also show the contrasting ways in which national policy was applied in the 1920s and 1930s due to the lack of a clear message from the central committee. After analyzing actual implementation of national policy pre-WWII, I will move towards tracking the changes in the Soviet message on nationalism in the late 1930s and during WWII in the early 1940s. By showing the Stalin regime's conflicting messages, I posit that this created confusion about the of nature Soviet identity and Soviet future. I will describe specifically how and to whom these deportations were carried out. In conjunction with the onset of war with Germany, I seek to show that the deportations in 1943 and 1944 were not a result of what these groups did or did not do during WWII or earlier, but were instead the culmination of a larger narrative about the uncertain place of national identity within the Soviet State. I hope by analyzing the interaction between the Soviet government and the national question through the years I can add an alternative thesis to the current scholarship as to why the Soviet government violently stole over a million people from their homelands in the middle of WWII.

Chapter 1: The Compromise Between Doctrine and Reality

Soviet national policy, much like Soviet economic and political policy, began to take shape before the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia. While in exile, Vladimir Lenin and many other early, or 'old,' Bolsheviks debated and crafted their positions on many issues. The Bolsheviks based these positions on Marxism but they also, especially Lenin, outlined new theoretical approaches and moved to their own innovative conceptions of a socialist ideology. Like the other issues, or questions, the Bolshevik response to the national question was guided by Lenin's strong opinions and then honed through debate within the party and with other social democrats. Yet, the consideration given to the national question was not thorough enough to confront the reality of national dissatisfaction after the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks were shocked at how strident national resistance was to their regime, and this ignorance of the periphery could explain why their nationalities policy was so underdeveloped before the Revolution. The conditions in 1917 may have been right for a revolution in Russia, but were the Bolsheviks ready to lead it?

This chapter will discuss the origins of the nationalities policy from Karl Marx to Lenin, and how the Bolsheviks tried to hold together the territory of the former Russian Empire. The deeply conflicted opinions about what Bolshevik national policy should be, eventually came up against real world rebellions in 1917. Using Marx's theoretical legacy, the Bolsheviks tried to craft a nationalities position ad hoc. While Lenin and Stalin used Marxism to justify the eventual incorporation of national territories, the fact remains that the Bolsheviks had created their 'war national policy' out of necessity.

This ad hoc policy became law in 1924 when the constitution codified the messy truce the Bolsheviks and national opposition groups. Tenuous policy in place and territory secured, the

Bolsheviks again met an impasse: the countries wouldn't separate, but how were they to be governed?

According to Richard Pipes, "Marx and Engels left their followers little guidance in the matters of nationality and nationalism."¹ This theoretical gap and the explosion of nationalism in early 20th century Europe created circumstances that were not envisioned by Marx. Marx and Engels theorized mostly about economic and political issues that were relevant to Europe, especially a Western Europe that was relatively nationally homogeneous. The national question was therefore not pressing. Though Marx and Engels did not seriously engage the national question, they did understand that nationalism was a force in Europe that competed with Marxism. They viewed nationalism not as an actual impediment, but as a possible distraction from socialism. In their view, the proletarian future was inevitable. Nationalism would swiftly crumble under the extreme stress of growing class divisions.

From Marx and Engels' ambivalence comes Rosa Luxemburg. Placing herself as an orthodox Marxist on the national question, Luxemburg developed her thesis while living in Poland from 1900 to 1910. She concluded that Poland should not be independent, as it was currently too closely tied with the Russian Empire economically. Mid-19th century Polish nationalism, which Marx himself approved of, would have been acceptable to Luxemburg, as it would have occurred under different economic circumstances than those in early 20th century Poland. In socialist circles and writing of this period, "Luxemburgism" became shorthand for "uncompromising hostility towards all national movements in general."²

Luxemburgism was not particularly helpful to the larger group of post-Marxian socialists. Marxism had moved east and entered into more diverse and therefore nationally complex states

¹ Pipes, 21

² Pipes, 23.

such as the Russian, Austrian, and Ottoman Empires. In these areas nationality issues had to be addressed proactively, not ignored in favor of rigid Marxist doctrine. For these groups to bow to their “inescapable destinies...was impractical as well as politically inexpedient.”³ In addition, Marx and Engels' assumptions were failing: nationalism was not fading away in time as they had predicted. Instead, most prominently in the cases of the Austrian Socialists and the Bund, national agendas merged with socialist movements.

In Austria the national problem had to be faced head on. The Habsburg Empire incorporated marginalized Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians, Italians, Slovaks, Croats, Romanians and other nationals, who demanded recognition. In 1899, the Austrian communists tried to find a common ground between territorial political-cultural autonomy and extraterritorial political-cultural autonomy. The former envisioned an Austria-Hungary divided into national provinces and the latter viewed Austria-Hungary as a federation of nation-states. The conference failed to formulate a concrete position.

In the next few years Karl Renner and Otto Bauer, both Austrian socialist theoreticians, progressed both ideas on territorial autonomy. They wanted the nation “to be recognized as a valuable and enduring form of social organization.”⁴ The nation was an organizational form that was rising in the lower classes. The European upper classes were internationalists, and had been for a long time. In contrast, the lower class minority groups had little contact with strangers outside their regions and therefore placed a greater value on their national identity.

Renner and Bauer’s work became the ‘Austrian project’, which sought to recognize the cultural and linguistic rights of a nation, while neutralizing the need for political nationalism. In 1907 Bauer posited that, “The advance of the classes shall no longer be hampered by national

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pipes, 25.

struggles...the field shall be free for the class struggle.”⁵ With complete cultural-linguistic autonomy and equality there would be no reason to seek independent statehood. This theory was a significant advance in traditional social democratic nationalities policy. It was also a different way of approaching the solution to the problem, because it was “a compromise between theories of socialism and the realities of nationalism.”⁶

The Bund took quickly to the “Austrian project’. Formed in 1897 in the pale residence, the Bund was a Jewish socialist party created out of various Jewish workers organizations. Originally allied with Russian workers’ groups and directed towards international class interests, the Bund recognized the parallels between the Jewish diaspora in Russia and that of the South Slavs in the Balkans examined by the Austrians. The Bund demanded to be recognized as the representative of the *Jewish* worker in Russia, but the request was denied at the Second Congress of Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1903.⁷ Bundists theoreticians continued to translate Austrian socialist pamphlets into Russian. Through this project, the Austrian idea of extraterritorial autonomy was able to spread to Armenian, Belarusian, and Georgian socialists and beyond.

Lenin’s own thinking on the national question evolved over time. Pipes separates Lenin’s opinions into three periods: 1897-1913, 1913-1917, and 1917-1923; “In the first, he formulates his basic views; in the second, he develops a plan for the utilization of national minority movements in Russia and abroad; and in the third... abandon[ing] this plan, he adopts a new scheme derived from his practical experience as ruler of Russia.”⁸ Of course the change was more nuanced than that neat description, but schematically Pipes is correct.

⁵ Pipes, 27.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pipes, 28.

⁸ Pipes, 35.

Lenin believed in conditional self-determination, which was not necessarily in opposition to Marxist principles. He too, like most social democrats, loathed federalism and the idea of cultural autonomy. These claims would lead to demands for “an autonomous class state”⁹ he wrote, which was, in his opinion, completely anti-Marxist.

The Bolsheviks had no statement of their own on the national question until 1913, when Lenin asked Stalin to write an article that would contradict the increasingly popular Austrian project. When Lenin was in Krakow, he observed the influence of nationalism on socialist progress and concluded the Bolsheviks needed to make a statement. Stalin’s article *Marxism and the National Question* was the first formulation of a Bolshevik position on nationalities. Scholars found the article to be full of logical fallacies and factual errors. Based on content, Pipes argues that the work “would long ago been relegated to total oblivion, were it not for its author’s subsequent career.”¹⁰ This assessment highlights a very important fact: content aside, this pamphlet gave Stalin a theoretical niche within the Bolshevik party, which leads to many future projects dealing with national policy. Stalin himself writes in the preface to the 1920 edition of *Marxism and the National Question* that “subsequent events, particularly in imperialist war and the disintegration of the Austria-Hungary into several national states, clearly demonstrated which side was right. Now when [Rudolph] Springer¹¹ and Bauer are standing over the spilt milk pail of their national program, there can hardly be doubt that history condemned the ‘Austrian school.’”¹² This statement exemplifies the Bolshevik theoretical perspective prior to the Civil War. Yet, due to practical considerations, they adopted many of the ‘Austrian school’s’ policies in the years to come.

⁹ Pipes, 37.

¹⁰ Pipes, 41.

¹¹ pseudonym of Karl Renner

¹² Stalin, 289.

Before the Revolution, Lenin's personal views attempted to find middle ground between the rightist Austrian school and leftist Luxemburgism. This attempt "created a program, which as a solution of the national problem was neither consistent nor practical."¹³ In 1913 Lenin attaches himself to the idea of national self-determination, a phrase open to conflicting interpretations. Lenin took it to mean that each nation possessed the right to separate and create an independent state. Aside from Poland and Finland, few nations wanted political independence at that time. Thus, Lenin saw self-determination as a gesture of goodwill toward national groups. He neither condoned nor believed that nations would actually separate, but he did believe that giving them the nominal right to self-determination eased their 'skittish oppressed' psyches.

In contrast, not all fellow Bolsheviks agreed with how Lenin planned to address the national question. In 1915 the opposition to Lenin's national solution was led by Georgy Piatakov, Nikolai Bukharin, and Karl Radek. They were strongly influenced by Luxemburg, and Bukharin specifically saw self-determination as "harmfully utopian."¹⁴ In 1916 Bukharin and Piatakov demanded the removal of Article 9 of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party Platform of 1903, which stated "The right of all nations in the state to self determine."¹⁵ Lenin personally advocated for this article in 1903. The request was not granted, but the idea did gain widespread support among high level and rank and file Bolsheviks. While this position was reached theoretically by Bukharin and others, it also gained adherents who had the prejudices of Great Russian Chauvinists. Jeremy Smith summarizes that "the emergence of a contemptuous attitude to minority nationalities by many officials of the post 1917 Soviet State had many causes, among which serious theoretical beliefs cannot be dismissed."¹⁶

¹³ Pipes, 41.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Pipes, 33.

¹⁶ Smith, 16.

Along with Bukharin and Piatakov, many other Bolsheviks simply could not understand Lenin's position. The Bolshevik newspaper Kommunist was suspended for attacking self-determination in 1915. Mikhail Pokrovsky, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Felix Dzerzhinsky, and Alexandra Kollontai all argued with Lenin about the national position of the party. In fact, after the Revolution, Piatakov blamed Lenin's slogan of self-determination for the breakup of the Russian Empire.¹⁷ Of course, Lenin did not yield and instead became more vocal about his support for self-determination. Lenin likened national oppression to imperialism. The Marxian struggle of backwards nations would first take national form, he explained. Imperialism is not only economic oppression but also ethnic oppression, the latter of which, Lenin believed, was more easily understood by colonized peoples. Self-determination was therefore a slogan that could be used as a "weapon of socialist agitation."¹⁸ Yet Pipes sees Lenin's claim that self-determination was the solution to the national problem as "...entirely inadequate. By offering the minorities virtually no choice between assimilation and complete independence, it ignored the fact that they desired neither."¹⁹ Lenin and the Bolshevik party as a whole misunderstood the desires of national minorities. Minority groups wanted equal rights. By ignoring national identity altogether, the left-wing Bolsheviks were denying that ethnic hierarchies had long been imposed upon these people. The minority groups' fear that such a system could continue was viable.

Although the first priority for the Bolsheviks in October 1917 was the redistribution of land in the countryside, they did make a statement on the "free people of Russia" and their right to self-determination a few weeks later.²⁰ Lenin's ideological stance on self-determination met with the people of the former Russian Empire's actual desire to separate. The reality of the

¹⁷ Smith, 19.

¹⁸ Pipes, 48.

¹⁹ Pipes, 49.

²⁰ Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, November 2, 1917

collapsing Russian Empire shocked the Bolsheviks. Besides White and Green Russians who fought against the Bolsheviks, Basmachi in Central Asia, Tatars in Samara, and Chechens in the Caucasus rebelled. The Bolsheviks found the rebellion by Ukrainians most confounding, as they saw no important difference between Ukrainians and Russians. The Bolsheviks' focus on class imbalance blinded them to the inequality faced specifically by minorities in the Russian Empire, and the solidarity these groups felt. Despite their eventual victory, the Bolsheviks had remained, "largely...out of touch with the broad masses of the population, inexperienced in the affairs of the state, and unaffected by the practical business of politics, such had forced Austrians to modify," their position on the national question.²¹ This ignorance allowed for minority resentment to grow after October 1917. The party used short sighted methods after the Revolution to spread Bolshevism and Pipes judges that:

[The Soviet government] was inclined to utilize social forces hostile to minority interests. In the Ukraine, it favored that part of the industrial proletariat which was by ethnic origin and sympathy, oriented towards Russia and inimical to the striving local peasantry; in the Muslim areas, the colonizing elements and the urban population composed largely of Russian newcomers; in Transcaucasia and Belorussia, the deserting Russian troops. The Triumph of Bolshevism was interpreted in many borderland areas as the victory of the city over the village, the worker over the peasant, the Russian colonist over the native.²²

Though to qualify Pipes' statement, the Bolshevik party was 72% Russian in 1922 and therefore the people that instigated in the borderlands were usually Russian.²³ This fact does not however explain away the discriminatory policies in the Russian Empire that allowed Russians to engage in industrial urban work more easily than other groups.

Once the Civil War did break out, the Bolsheviks began to truly interact with the national question as it became the national problem. Directly after the October Revolution, "discussion on the national question was focused on Poland, Ukraine, the Baltic States, and Finland, and to a

²¹ Pipes, 30.

²² Pipes, 58.

²³ Pipes, 278.

lesser extent Transcaucasia. Once in power however the Bolsheviks were confronted with the reality not only of the major non-Russian areas of Central Asia and the Caucasus but also with the smaller national groups of the Volga region, Siberia, and elsewhere.”²⁴ The situation in Ukraine may be the most well-known case of national resistance to Bolshevik authority, but many other areas fought long and fierce campaigns against the Red Army. In Central Asia, the Bolsheviks did not fully gain control until the 1930s. The Basmachi revolt in Bukhara inspired a resistance movement that sustained itself for a decade. Neither military suppression nor political concession accomplished anything for the Bolsheviks from 1917 to 1921.²⁵ By 1921 most of the other combatants had been subdued, but the Basmachi movement continued to successfully organize and operate.

The Red Army did not put down the other rebellions easily. Stalin writes that without the eventual support of national groups, the Red Army would not have defeated the Whites. “It scarcely needs proof,” Stalin asserts, “that had [we] not won this confidence, the Russian proletariat could not have defeated Kolchak and Denikin, Yudenich and Wrangel.”²⁶ Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland however were lost and became sovereign states. The reassessment of national policy and new decisions on territorial administration were not made because minority groups simply declared independence. Fully realized battles were fought for almost five years in Western and Far Eastern Russia and the Caucasus, during which many citizens of the former Russian Empire perished. Organized rejection of Bolshevik authority, the horrors and difficulties of the Civil War, and the actions of Bolsheviks after the victories of the Red Army, compelled Lenin to change his views on nationalism.

²⁴ Smith, 20.

²⁵ Pipes, 259.

²⁶ Stalin, *National Factors*.

Lenin's deconstruction of nationalism became very important as the Civil War ended. Nationalism is split into two separate groups, Lenin explains. Local nationalism is formerly oppressed groups who needed to band together against a stronger and aggressive empire. According to him, Great Power Chauvinism, which is also sometimes referred to as Great Russian Chauvinism specifically, is the reverse and the more damaging nationalism. With this view, the oppressor people alienate minority groups and undermine progress. Local nationalism would fade Lenin argues, once equality is achieved. Then the proletarian and bourgeois elements of each national group will make themselves known, such as Lenin saw in Finland. Great Power Chauvinism is the enemy of the Soviet State, and Lenin worried that the chauvinism displayed by many of the Bolsheviks would undermine any credibility they had with the large amount of non-Russians. In 1897, a census taken by the Russian Empire showed that in its territory only 44.3% of the population was ethnically Russian (though Pipes argues that the percentage was actually lower since 'Russian-ness' was determined by whether or not the person spoke Russian, which many non-Russians did).²⁷ The Russians were still the largest national groups, but the territory was 'majority minority' and the Bolsheviks risked the unity of the Soviet State if their chauvinistic perception wasn't changed. Oddly, Lenin believed that the greatest Russian Chauvinists were not even Russian, but Russified Ossetians, Poles, and Georgians like Stalin, Dzerzhinsky, and Ordzhonikidze, whose violent treatment of peoples in the Caucasus during the Georgian Affair in 1923 set Lenin on notice. To combat discrimination in the Soviet State and reassure the minority groups, the Bolsheviks implemented a new strategy.

Until 1922, Lenin and Stalin worked together to create the Soviet national policy. However, they differed when the time came to specify the national aspects of the constitution. In August 1922, Stalin suggested that the independent Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belorussia,

²⁷ Pipes, 2.

Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bukhara, Khiva, and the Far East should enter the Russian Union of Federated Socialist Republics (RSFSR) and become autonomous republics. Stalin's plan was accepted in September 1922.²⁸

Lenin immediately fought against Stalin's plan, which Lenin saw as undermining the status of the new republics. Lenin proposed the 'Union of Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia' which would be above the RSFSR and therefore the "RSFSR and the independent republics would enter as equal members."²⁹ Terry Martin argues that neither plan was more or less favorable to the independent nations, though Lenin framed his argument against Stalin as a battle against Great Russian Chauvinism. This conflict fostered lasting consequences. Lenin's form denied Russians equal footing with the independent nations, as the Russian nation would share the RSFSR with many other national groups. Stalin believed that without "recognizing the Russians as the USSR's state-bearing nationality,"³⁰ they would break off and split Moscow into the seat of power for both Russian and Soviet power. Later in 1925 Stalin returns to this thought when the possibility of an Ossetian ASSR appeared. He writes:

"Now, living in the North Caucasus and looking closer at the real conditions here, I see that this policy, if taken to extremes will unavoidably produce a number of serious minus, capable of worsening our political position in the Russian and non-Russian regions...the Cossacks already talk of autonomy and the creation of a Cossack Republic, declaring that they "are not worse than Ossetians and Dagestani", that they "also have their own interests," then why insult the Russians, denying them what is given to the non-Russian." These are sprouts of Russian nationalism, and that is the most dangerous form of nationalism...The collapse of the RSFSR--this is where we are going if we do not change our policy now."³¹

²⁸ Martin, 395.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Martin, 396.

³¹ Martin, 398.

Stalin's statement, "Why insult the Russians, denying them what is given to non-Russians"³² is such a crucial articulation of his thoughts even in 1922. In Lenin's haste to satisfy the independent nations, an understandable action after the Civil War, he rushed past the sensitive feelings of Russians who may also have desired more formal recognition (regardless of the chauvinistic origins of that desire). Regardless, Stalin retreated from his stance in the summer of 1922 and Lenin's proposal was accepted.

By late 1922, Lenin was incapacitated by a series of strokes. He wrote his "Testament" in late December of 1922 and went on to write additional letters on the national question titled *Question of Nationalities or "Automisation"* before the New Year. He withdrew from active politics in December 1922 after his right side became partly paralyzed; in March 1923 his career ended and Lenin was bedridden. The creation of the Soviet Constitution, led by Stalin, continued without him. Lenin was only lucid for the December 1922 Treaty of the Creation of the USSR. This treaty created the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, USSR, from the RSFSR, Transcaucasian SFSR, Ukrainian SFSR, and Belorussian SFSR. This treaty became the bulk of the material of the 1924 Soviet constitution, which was approved in July 1923 and ratified in January 1924. This form solidified Stalin's desire for a centralized state above all else, but Martin finds that Stalin's implemented proposal was "actually more in keeping with the ideology of the Affirmative Action Empire"³³.³⁴ The matching outcome of centralized power and the ability to control both Russian and local nationalism is amazing if intentioned and not coincidental.

In June 1923, after the large Soviet nationalities were assured of their existence, the Soviets shifted focus towards small nationalities living within the RSFSR. Martin writes that,

³² Ibid.

³³ Affirmative Action Empire is the title of Terry Martin's book and theory, in which Martin explains the various ways that the Soviet government institutionally favored non-Russian nationalities in the 1920s and 1930s

³⁴ Ibid.

“Soviet policy opposed assimilation... [and] extraterritorial national-cultural autonomy,”³⁵ so they created a policy radically different from their previous stance: korenizatsiia. Though Lenin pushed for linguistic autonomy even before the Revolution, in 1923 the Soviets introduced the idea of Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) and Autonomous Oblasts (AOs). These new territories would exist inside SSRs like the RSFSR. While all of the people inside the USSR were Soviet citizens, the language and culture of the titular nation of each territory was to be maximized. This was how the Soviets planned to successfully govern the people within the USSR. Though the Civil War was over and large independent nations had signed the 1922 unification treaty, future conflicts were to be preemptively combated with korenizatsiia

Korenizatsiia is a Bolshevik policy, which promoted national minority culture. In June 1923, the public debate over national policy ended and the result was that the Soviet state would “maximally support” forms of national life that did not interfere with central state authority. Therefore the Bolsheviks supported national territory, national culture, national language, and national elites. These categories mirror Stalin’s characteristics of a nation, outlined in *Marxism and the National Question*, but they exclude “community of autonomous economic life”, which Stalin originally included. Intentionally, the Bolsheviks excluded political independence and economic ‘maximization’, as those aspects were crucial to their monopoly on power and therefore would be controlled by the center in Moscow.

Ronald Grigor Suny translates korenizatsiia as “indigenization” coming from the Russian phrase ‘korennyi narod’ or indigenous people.³⁶ This policy allowed for an explosion in the creation of national schools, songs, theatres and literature, which was formerly impossible under the Tsarist government. Suny too posits that exponential freedom of national culture simply

³⁵ Martin, 10.

³⁶ Suny, 103.

couched the Bolshevik's desire to seem less Russian. While this is certainly true, as Lenin did not want to be seen as the "heirs to Tsardom" (an attitude which he accused other Bolsheviks of harboring), the need to appease the national groups could be ignored. Whether nationalism was a natural phase of Marxist evolution or not, the idea that Soviet power was a "Russian imposition" was not a hypothetical feeling for minority groups but an active and violent belief. Therefore after June 1923, the Bolsheviks aggressively pushed the policy of korenizatsiia throughout their controlled territory. They continued to strongly support the korenizatsiia policy throughout the 1920s even in the face of post-Civil War national disputes.

However support for korenizatsiia did not last. In the provinces korenizatsiia was always implemented sporadically, based on the preferences of the local party elites, who often did not agree with the program. In the mid-1930s, the central Soviet government began to selectively disassemble the program. The main target under the greater umbrella of korenizatsiia was linguistic autonomy. Though Lenin advocated for the freedom to use minority languages before the Revolution, by 1935 the Stalin regime had almost completely reversed its support. In 1933 the decade long process of creating alphabets for small ethnic groups was turned upside-down. Formerly, new alphabets were freely permitted to use Latin or Cyrillic letters, depending on the linguist and the nuances of the spoken language. Yet, in 1933 this freedom was revoked, and all future efforts would have to use only the Cyrillic alphabet.

One of the most frequently used arguments for increased Cyrillic alphabets and expanded Russian language in schools revolves around Marxist-Leninist theoretical works. Though Marx of course wrote in German, Party members argued that Lenin and Stalin wrote all of the core documents of the Revolution in Russian, and translating them diluted the accuracy and purity of

these new ‘classics’.³⁷ In 1937 the Politburo issued a decree abolishing 4,598 national minority schools within the RSFSR. Within a year all non-Russian schools in Russian regions of the RSFSR were abolished.³⁸ Linguistic freedoms were driven out of non-ASSRs and non-AOs, but territorial autonomy was not secure. The Soviet government reduced and consolidated many AOs before the 1936 constitution and completely eradicated national districts, national village soviets, and national kolkhozes.³⁹ The end of korenizatsiia is a part of the process of Russian rehabilitation that Nicholas Timasheff named “the Great Retreat.” The concept is defined as “the gradual abandoning of revolutionary and utopian social and cultural practices in favor of traditional, often prerevolutionary, values.”⁴⁰ Martin calls it ‘unfortunate term’ but it does accurately point out that a large shift away from the current path occurred.

To be clear about the level of Stalin’s active participation with this specific issue, as Stalin’s name or regime is very often referenced: Stalin’s personal involvement with all aspects of national policy was strong. In this paper references to Stalin do not simply indicate the Stalinist period or submit to the assumption that Stalin personally controlled everything. Top down or bottom up, Stalin’s role in creating national policy is clear. Stalin was the Bolshevik’s acknowledged “master of the nationalities question,”⁴¹ Martin plainly states. Stalin wrote *Marxism and the Nationalities Question*, which is the first text on this subject by the Bolsheviks, in 1913. He was Commissar of Nationalities from 1917 to 1924 and was the official spokesperson at the Party Congress on the national question. It was in this early period that Stalin worked closely with Lenin to articulate what would become the codified national policy in the Soviet constitution. After leaving his post as Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin continued to

³⁷ Martin, 417.

³⁸ Martin, 416.

³⁹ Martin, 412.

⁴⁰ Martin, 414.

⁴¹ Martin, 3.

be deeply involved with national policy until his death. Later actions by the government in the Stalin era involving national problems would certainly have been handled directly by him.

Therefore, with this knowledge of his pre and post Revolution work as well as later comments on the subject, Stalin's personal involvement and orchestration of the deportations of nationalities from 1937 to 1944 is highly likely.

Once in power the Soviets struggled to create the state they envisioned. For many years prior to the Bolshevik take over and the formation of the Soviet Union, the importance of national self-identity proved difficult for many Bolsheviks to understand and therefore integrate into their program. The party moved from non-acceptance of nationalities to self-determination to korenizatsiia and then conflict between Lenin and Stalin's conceptions of these ideas. The Bolshevik's stance on national policy is difficult to track. The path desired by Lenin was contentious within the party, and then any compromise reached was uprooted by the Civil War and the violent response to the Bolsheviks government from many future SSRs.

As the Soviets gained military control over the area they believed to be their patrimony, new problems arose. Centrally governing this vast territory was something the Tsarist regime had never accomplished, despite trying both aggressive Russification and autonomous government. Driven by the core desire to centralize the important aspects of a state, politics and economics, korenizatsiia is developed. The cultural explosion allowed by korenizatsiia is crucial in the history of many national minorities and cannot be discounted. Yet, its successes are not as important as the brevity of the program. Depending on the area, korenizatsiia lasted only between 10 and 15 years before the Soviet government began to retake cultural-linguistic autonomy. This program was the base of minority relations and a supposed building block for the future of national cultural expansion. Instead, less than a generation later, a top-down and

therefore Russian cultural mandate was instated. From 1917 to the 1930s nothing about national policy was decided. There were no five year plans or goals about how many native language schools or newspapers should be established. At the end of korenizatsiia, after the Great Terror had the population of every nationality living in traumatized alertness, a new stage of national relations was created by the Soviet government.

Chapter 2: Let's Open the Floodgates

It is impossible to posit how Russian nationalism would have developed in the Soviet Union without the catalyst of WWII. The early progress of Russian nationalism at the very end of the 1930s was not wide in scope or rapid in implementation; it was pointed and the privileges it gave were difficult to discern without the information we have now. National policy changes were traditionally slow to work. With the continued and vocal support of the government, korenizatsiia slowly built upon itself each year for a decade. Yet, WWII did occur and with it came a sharp increase of aggressive Russian nationalism, completely unseen before in the Soviet Union. Each reference to Russian past as common past or Slav nationalism as Soviet patriotism reveals the hierarchy of nations that defined the Soviet Union and its policies from this period onwards.

Some scholars posit that Stalin's regime didn't believe that socialism could fully inspire the people of the Soviet Union to fight the Nazis. Other question whether or not the regime took cues from German rhetoric, which focused on the Russian ethnic character of the Soviet Union in their propaganda. Regardless of these ideas, Russian nationalism grew and displaced Soviet communism in official rhetoric. The Family of Nations and Friendship of the Peoples were introduced as new conceptions of how people should relate to each other, aside from their common identity of comrades and members of the proletariat. Unlike the program of korenizatsiia before it, the policy of Family of Nations created destructive situations for other groups. The Russians, whose developed culture was not in doubt, did not suffer during korenizatsiia; while the 'minor brothers' on the family tree lost freedoms under the unstable doctrine of Friendship of the Peoples. Russian nationalistic rhetoric and existential and

ideological threats from the Nazis fostered a violent escalation in minority-majority and center-periphery relations.

Terry Martin describes korenizatsiia as “a highly indirect strategy for achieving Soviet unity.”¹ Though his book *An Affirmative Action Empire* is a thorough study of the rise and fall of korenizatsiia, Martin understands that the Soviets did intend for an eventual cultural unity. The Soviet Union wanted to be viewed as a multiethnic state, not just a state made up of multiple ethnic territories. Before, national expression was limited to within separate autonomous territories, large and small. The unity was not yet achieved in the 1930s. Stalin explains in 1929 that to achieve this unity, “we want to prepare the elements of an international socialist culture by means of maximum development of national culture,...we want to unify the nations of various countries by dividing them,...Whoever doesn’t understand this vital formulation of the question doesn’t understand that we are conducting a policy of maximum development of national culture so that it can exhaust itself completely and then a base can be created for organizing an international socialist culture.”² This successor culture Stalin references would *be* the elusive Soviet culture, which was inherently multiethnic.

In Martin’s study of korenizatsiia, he notes that Russian culture was considered so damaging in the 1920s by Party leadership that it took a decree from the Politburo in 1932 to even legally rehabilitate Russian national identity in the public sphere. Again the reason why these checks on Russian nationalism were instituted in the 1920s involved the contrast made between the concepts of local nationalism and Great Power Chauvinism (which was frequently changed to Great Russian Chauvinism. Lenin usually used the more abstract version of the term, even when discussing it in a specific Russian context. He very rarely used the word Russian or

¹ Martin, 433.

² Clark and Dobrenko, 62.

Russia in his work towards the end of his life). Local nationalism should be expected, while Great Power Chauvinism should be prevented.

The end of korenizatsiia and the changes made about the legality of Russian nationalism, Russian self-expression, and Russian status in the RSFSR built a framework for the explosion of Russian nationalism from about 1938 through WWII. The signals sent by the Soviet government when overturned korenizatsiia were not only received by the confused Soviet minorities but also by Russians all over the Soviet Union. The reversal came about not to find a voice for Russians because they were marginalized or because Russians mounted an armed rebellion a la some minorities during the Civil War. The extent to which Russian culture was promoted as the main Soviet nationality before the war shows an intentional policy shift from above, unconnected to any major pro-Russian movement. Though the war gave a platform to Stalin's overt Russian nationalist rhetoric and symbols, the idea that he only employed them to inspire the country holds little water. The Russians were the largest ethnic group in the Soviet population, and therefore they had the greatest number of soldiers in the Red Army and suffered the greatest number of casualties. To an outsider it makes little sense to appeal to a Soviet citizen's ethnic background in 1941 because communist doctrine advocates class identity. Yet the Soviet government pushed an ethnic definition of self.

As the Soviet government sanctioned greater Russian self-expression within the RSFSR, Stalin began to introduce new conceptions of the relationship between the various ethnic groups that made up the citizenry of the Soviet Union. In 1935 Stalin first used the metaphor Friendship of the Peoples. This metaphor enables Stalin to assert Russian linguistic and cultural dominance within the RSFSR and beyond, while not explicitly calling for Russification. By 1938 Friendship

of the Peoples, as well as Family of Nations, “was the official sanctioned metaphor of an imaged multinational community.”³

The Great Retreat intersects with many important periods in Soviet history. In the late 1930s Stalin gained complete political control due to the Great Terror. Under his leadership the Soviet Union reached stability in their planned economy, and culturally the peoples of the Soviet Union allegedly defeated Tsarist inequality under his watch. Stalin claims in a 1935 speech to a conference of the foremost collective farmers of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, that after 18 years of Soviet rule the Tsarist policy of trying “to make one people--the Russian people-- the ruling class and all other peoples--subordinated” was finished. He continued to say that:

“The former distrust between the peoples of the USSR has already come to an end. That distrust has been replaced with a complete mutual trust. The friendship between the people of the USSR is growing and strengthening. That, comrades, is the most precious thing that the Bolshevik national policy has given us... For while this friendship lives and blossom we are afraid of no one, either internal or external enemies.”⁴

This is an important statement by Stalin because it almost closes the theoretical loop on the national question from the 1920s. Here Stalin claims that Great Russian Chauvinism is over; the people have reconciled under the Soviet system and overcome any past mistrust towards Russians (this mutual trust unfortunately does not spread to other nationalities with blackened reputations such as the Crimean Tatars or Chechens). With this speech Stalin is negating both conceptions of nationalism discussed in the previously chapter: Great Power Chauvinism and local nationalism. Therefore whenever there is an ‘instance’ of nationalism it will be unwarranted and the perception will be negative since “mutual trust has been victorious.” Since Great Power Chauvinism had disappeared according to Stalin, any ‘local nationalism’ is no longer a considered a natural opposition to imperialism, but a separate and traitorous deed. From

³ Martin, 432.

⁴ Stalin, Works 1934-1940, 125.

1935 forward Stalin only speaks on the existence of local nationalism and his critiques of general nationalism refer strictly to minority nationalism.

Martin notes that as Russian nationalism grows, the definition of a nation changes in Stalin's writings and speeches. Stalin's first high profile foray into minority policy was his 1913 pamphlet, *Marxism and the National Question*. As stated earlier, the pamphlet was not a theoretical success and delivered few new ideas to greater socialist thought on the subject. As was typical of the period and early Bolshevik thinking, Stalin describes a nation as "not racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people."⁵ In the late 1930s, the Stalin regime put forth a new primordial conception of a nation, which was a shift away from the former modern construct. The primordial view asserted that ethnicity was natural and unchangeable. New emphasis was placed on folkloric elements of cultures in an attempt to stress the depth and historicity of national culture.⁶ The heightened promotion of national culture came at the expense of national language autonomy, which was the cornerstone of the privileges of *korenizatsiia*. As minority *cultural* autonomy expanded, Russian language instruction spread. In 1937 Russian language became a required subject in all non-Russian schools in the Soviet Union.⁷

The mid-1930 period of cultural escalation, at what was clearly the end of the important linguistic aspects of *korenizatsiia*, coincides with ratification of the second Soviet constitution. The passage of the 1936 constitution created five new SSRs and five new ASSRs. This was propagated as another victory of the mutual trust between nationalities, that new territorial formations could be created for the good of the state without any misunderstandings or distrust.

⁵ Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, 4.

⁶ Martin, 443.

⁷ Martin, 414.

Ethnicities were separated and catalogued into nation-territories or petty nation-states under a larger Russian authority.⁸

At this time, Stalin abandons the greatest danger principle, when he proclaims the end of Great Russian Chauvinism--which was the great danger to peaceful minority integration into the Soviet Union in early 1920s. Only to quietly shift the meaning of greatest danger. Stalin's regime does a great deal to seemingly pacify the Russian ethnic group in the late 1930s, though there is no evidence that it was politically necessary. Stalin himself wishes to change Soviet identity away from class distinction to an individual, be they Russian or a minority. Korenizatsiia was seen as necessary to create a proletariat within the suppressed and 'backwards' nations, but since the Russian nation had already achieved class consciousness during the Revolution there is no theoretical explanation for a shift back to Russian ethnic identity. A return to Russian nationalism does not fit in the Soviet framework, as it contrasts class identity.⁹

It is also around this period of increasing Russian nationalism and national primordialism that passport identification becomes rigid. In early 1932 when Soviet passports were introduced, one could choose the nationality given on a passport. In 1938 passport nationality was based on inherited ethnic background in an effort to catalogue diaspora communities, Germans, Poles, etc., who were Soviet Citizens. The creation of a historical and identified 'other' again moved away from the Soviet class ideology and towards ethnic distrust and hate.

In the late 1930s the idea that Russians were the First among Equals was pushed by the Stalin regime. Accomplished Russian figures in music, art, literature, science, etc., were always recognized by the Soviet government, but from 1937 and beyond their Russianness and the

⁸ Martin, 447.

⁹ Martin, 450.

national character of their genius was emphasized.¹⁰ Privately Stalin had made statements about the greatness of the Russian worker and Russians as the revolutionary vanguard nation, but only in this period was this idea articulated publicly by the Stalin regime. Even the superlative ‘great’ is added to the Russian ethnic group, changing the negative phrase Great Russian Chauvinism to Great Russian People in a generation.

Additionally, the Soviet government put out propaganda thanking the Great Russians for their “brotherly help”¹¹ in gaining the trust of the minorities, and therefore facilitation the Friendship of the Peoples. Non-Russians were to be grateful to the Russians for their accomplishment of not acting in an imperialistic and chauvinistic manner. At the same time in Europe, anti-Russian fascist rhetoric was rising in German and Poland. While the Soviet Union then had the veneer of a multiethnic modern state, anti-Russian and anti-Slav sentiment from external enemies encouraged Russian national pride and public expression within the Soviet Union.¹²

The best evidence of how Stalin wished to articulate the Soviet Union to its citizens during the WWII is found in his speeches. His personal vision for the Soviet Union could be seen in Pravda articles and speeches by other Politburo members, both of which would likely be approved by Stalin beforehand if possible. His own speeches carried much more influence and plainly articulated what Stalin was thinking, instead of grasping a hint of what he wanted to imply. The speeches made by Stalin were designed to project and insert into the minds of his audience a glimpse, though edited, of his own thinking on various issues.

There are few documents from the war period that address internal social issues such as the deportations, aside from direct and brief orders to organize the said transfers. Therefore

¹⁰ Martin,

¹¹ Martin, 454.

¹² Martin, 455.

Stalin's speeches are invaluable to understanding the atmosphere in which the deportations were approved. The signs that Stalin puts in these speeches point to prominent and aggressive Russian and Slav nationalism, which grows from 1941 to 1945. Throughout the war Stalin gives troops and civilians Orders of the Day, but these are short messages filled usually with military jargon and division locations, and don't give much information about deeper cultural issues. In addition to dozens of Orders of the Day messages, during the war Stalin provided a steady schedule of longer speeches. He spoke on the day Germany invaded the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941 and a week later on July 3, 1941 to announce the mobilization of the Soviet people and the Red Army. After that he made speeches every November 6 and 7 in honor of the October Revolution; every February 23rd in honor of the Founding of the Red Army; and every May 1st for May Day. This pattern continued uninterrupted until Victory Day in 1945.

In each of his speeches, Stalin signs off with a few lines such as "long live the Red Army and Navy" or "long live our glorious country."¹³ These parting phrases change over time. At the beginning of the war he praises "the country," "the inviolable friendship of the people," "glorious Lenin" etc. Quickly the "great country" became the "motherland" and "homeland." This in itself is not suspect to any preference, as Stalin sometimes thanks the "Soviet motherland."¹⁴ But the content of the speeches implies specifically that the motherland and homeland of Russians and Slavs is being defended. Modern German aggression is compared to the Russian Empire's victory over Napoleon and the First Patriotic War (though patriotic has a different meaning in this period) and more explicitly as part of a centuries long conflict with anti-

¹³ Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, 34.

¹⁴ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 126.

Slav Germans, who last attacked in 1914. Stalin claimed in 1941 that the enemy is out to “destroy national culture”¹⁵ and emphasizes the Russians as targets.

When quoting Hitler in his speeches, Stalin focused on Hitler’s anti-Slavic views before contrasting their communist-fascist positions. “We must exterminate the Slav peoples,” Hitler is quoted in Stalin’s speech. Stalin makes Russians the vanguard nation of the Slavs and then explains the fight; these “people with morals of beasts, have the audacity to call for the annihilation of the great Russian nation, the nation of Plekhanov and Lenin, Belinsky and Chernyshevsky, Pushkin and Tolstoy, Glinka and Tchaikovsky, Gorky and Chekov, Sechenov and Pavlov, Repin and Surikov, Suvorov and Kutuzov.”¹⁶ Stalin claims that the Germans want a war of annihilation against the peoples of the Soviet Union, but he almost always refers to Slavic peoples and only seems to care about Russians and their culture. When he mentions his desire to liberate enslaved peoples, Stalin always specifies Slavs and then joins all the rest as ‘and others’.

Stalin made further claims when speaking to a multicultural audience of Soviet citizens in 1941. He refers to Alexander Nevsky, Dmitri Donskoi, Kuzma Minin, Dmitry Pozharsky, Alexander Suvorov, and Mikhail Kutuzov as “our great ancestors.”¹⁷ This statement is made a few lines above a reference to the motherland, which can only be understood as a connected narrative.

In 1942 Stalin continues to emphasize national primordialism by beginning to use the phrase “our native land,”¹⁸ a conception that has no bearing on members of the international quality of the proletariat or of communists. In the speeches Stalin only quotes Russian writers¹⁹

¹⁵ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 34.

¹⁶ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 29.

¹⁷ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 38.

¹⁸ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 39.

¹⁹ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 46.

and Russian sayings²⁰ and continually quotes Hitler and other Axis leaders who specifically want to “destroy Russia.”²¹

These quotes and many like them culminate in a climax of praise for Russians that Stalin truly lets loose after the Nazi surrender. In the famous Victory Day speech broadcast on the radio, Stalin continues with references to the motherland while admitting that his high command is all Russian.²² He frames this victory as a “centuries old struggle of the Slav peoples... [against] German invaders”²³ and mocks Hitler’s claims that German “shall destroy Russia so that she will never be able to rise again.” If one focuses on Stalin’s words, this is not a “victory of the people” as he mentions, but a victory of the Russians. This implication is made fact in Stalin’s famous Toast to the Russian People speech:

Comrades, permit me to propose another toast, the last one.
I would like to propose that we drink to the health of the Soviet people, and primarily of the Russian people. (*Loud and prolonged applause and cheers.*)

I drink primarily to the health of the Russian people because it is the most outstanding of all the nations that constitute the Soviet Union.

I drink to the health of the Russian people, because, during this war, it has earned universal recognition as the guiding force of the Soviet Union among all the peoples of our country.

I drink to the health of the Russian people, not only because it is the leading people, but also because it is gifted with a clear mind, a staunch character and patience.

Our government committed no few mistakes; at times our position was desperate, as in 1941-42, when our army was retreating...Another people might have said to the government: You have not come up to our expectations. Get out. We shall appoint another government, which will conclude peace with Germany and ensure tranquility for us. But the Russian people did not do that, for they were confident that the policy their government was pursuing was correct; and they made sacrifices in order to ensure the defeat of Germany. And this confidence which the Russian people displayed in the Soviet Government proved to be the decisive factor

²⁰ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 54.

²¹ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 69.

²² Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 160.

²³ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 161.

which ensured our historic victory over the enemy of mankind, over fascism.

I thank the Russian people for this confidence!

To the health of the Russian people! (*Loud and prolonged applause*)²⁴

The views of almost the only man that mattered in the Soviet Union could not be more explicit. Again in a position of power at the end of the war, Stalin chose to say these words, chose to inflame Russian nationalism. He seemed very comfortable expressing these sentiments. This solidifies the supposition that it was Stalin himself who encouraged Russian nationalism in the late 1930s. To qualify, this last speech was made in the Kremlin at a reception in honor of Red Army commanders and therefore was not as public as the radio speech he made on Victory Day.

In addition to overt Russian nationalism in Stalin's speeches there is great evidence of hypocrisy in reference to the deportations. Stalin criticized German racial theory in 1942 and seeks to separate the people from the actors or the government. The Red Army does not exterminate "German soldiers just because they are German...because it hates everything German...The Red Army is free of feelings of racial hatred... because it has been brought up in the spirit of racial equality and respect for the rights of other people."²⁵ Policies such as First Among Equals and the Great Retreat assure us that soldiers of the Red Army were not raised in racial equality. At this point the rights of Soviet Germans, Finns, and Koreans were not respected but violated and soon the punished people would be deported as well. Even though Stalin chides that "one should not forget that in our country any manifestation of racial hatred is punished by law,"²⁶ there is no reassurance that those who *are* the law will not pervert it. One could not sue the Soviet government so there was no legal recourse to defend oneself against a predatory state.

²⁴ Stalin, Toast to the Russian People

²⁵ Stalin, Great Patriotic War, 45.

²⁶ *ibid.*

Later in Stalin's speeches he describes the Italo-German coalition as possessing characteristics of "race hatred; domination of the chosen nation...; economic enslavement of the subjugated nations."²⁷ Yet in his own country, the government acts in those ways towards the soon to be deported populations and minorities in general. Stalin's regime does not practice "the equality of nations and integrity of their territory,"²⁸ which he claims defines the program of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition. In truth, Russian nationalism and ethnic hierarchies remain and autonomous oblasts and republics are destroyed and reconfigured at a whim.

Stalin joyfully claims victory when the German army is expelled from "Chechen-Ingush, North Ossetian, Kabardino-Balkarian, and Kalmyk ASSR and Cherkess, Karachi, and Adygei [AOs]"²⁹ but this is a tactical joy. The people of these places are already suspected and a few months away from violent removal, their liberation is not celebrated. In November 1944 after all the deportations have taken place, Stalin makes a speech in honor of the 27th Anniversary of the October Revolution. In it he claims that "Soviet patriotism blends harmoniously with the national traditions of the peoples...Far from dividing them, Soviet patriotism held all nations and peoples of our country in a single fraternal family. This should be regarded as the foundation of the inviolable and ever stronger friendship among the people of the USSR."³⁰ There is no respect for national traditions such as language, only specific folkloric exoticism. Soviet patriotism, a jumble of Russian nationalism and Soviet statism, had been used to sanction violence by extralegally deporting ethnic minorities in secrecy, which most certainly violated the Friendship of the People. There is no such foundation in the Soviet Union based on friendship of family. It was weak even before the war when Russian nationalism illuminated the non-egalitarian

²⁷ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 65.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 77.

³⁰ Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, 135.

structure of the new hierarchies. The inviolable was violated as almost a million people were deported. The new conceptions of Soviet identity are obviously fraudulent. They cannot hold the people together any more than being part of the Russian Empire could in 1917.

Yet these metaphors were the foundation of the Soviet Union from around 1938, as Stalin's own words confirm. As proved before, it was Stalin's choice to rehabilitate Russians in the Soviet Union. In 1938 he had already "brought about a full guarantee"³¹ for himself. There is perhaps no person or circumstance that can compel Stalin to act in a way which he doesn't want. So he rehabilitates the Russians. But this is not done out of any great love for Russian people. As with many of Stalin's decisions, this was done in service of greater centralization of power. Allowing the Russians to be the "state-bearing people"³² tied the largest national population tightly to the Soviet state. This unification would give Stalin's regime greater control over the peripheries, where many Russian 'colonists' lived, and the western-center population, where the highest concentration of people lived. Purchasing the Russians loyalty with praise was blunder.

Stalin's plan backfired when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. Before this, the weakness of the family metaphor was not rigorously tested. From 1935 to 1938 korenizatsiia was very slowly disassembled and most of people were focused on their personal safety during the Great Terror. As Stalin started to lean into Russian nationalism, much to the confusion of citizens who were used to claiming a proletarian class identity, Germany attacked. The Soviet Union faced its greatest threat in its history and its leader had just recently pulled out the foundation of the country.

What Stalin must not have fully understood, or believed, was how fundamental peaceful ethnic relations and fair national policy was to the existence of the Soviet Union. In the 1920s

³¹ Getty and Naumov, 557.

³² Martin, 20.

Stalin himself spoke passionately about the “inseparable connection [of] the national question...with the question of the victory of the Revolution.”³³ The memories of the Civil War would have been fresh in Stalin’s mind in 1925, reminding him of the chaos of the pre-constitutional years. Therefore unless his early work was political pandering, Stalin no longer considered minority equality to be politically necessary in 1938.

Freed from national considerations in favor of the full support of Russians, Stalin dives into nationalism to hopefully power the Soviet Union through WWII. Despite building up its material capacity in 1930 and 1940, from 1941 to 1942 the Red Army lost often and on multiple fronts. The future of the Soviet Union was uncertain; their ability to defeat the Nazis was truly unknown. Fear grew in Soviet society and in the Kremlin as well. Though the deportations occurred in 1943, after the military position of the Red Army was not so dire, instability still controlled the country. The deported groups, or punished people, are easy targets. They are small, they have low levels of industry, and they are isolated by their landscape. Punishing them was easy. Engaging with the German army required complicated and intricate plans, with no guarantee of success. Acting against the minority groups in the Caucasus and the Black Sea region was secured victory in a whirlwind of chaos. Yes, this operation would also by default punish Nazi collaborators. But there must have been a more efficient way to do that. The deportations must have benefitted the Stalin regime in some way.

Looking further than his notorious paranoia and obsession with ‘the fifth column,’ the deportations were similar to earlier purges. While they must be carefully organized, purges are not difficult to carry out since each one often came as a surprise to the groups it targeted. The newly liberated minorities’ shock unquestionably allowed the NKVD and other security forces to frequently complete their operations ahead of schedule. With every successful deportation,

³³ Stalin, *The National Question Again*.

feelings of control and power must have flooded party leaders who sat impotently in Moscow. The Soviet government continued to execute major purges on minority groups up until the war was almost decided, and the status quo was on its way to being restored.

The rise of Russian nationalism had a great effect on the all peoples of the Soviet Union. For policy makers and serious Bolsheviks, the growth of nationalism meant that other practices had to be pushed aside. Long term absolute power had blinded top party members as to why the Soviet Union was structured in such a way. Even when they knew that national culture had not yet “exhausted itself” they moved to dismember the truce of 1925. In the end weak metaphors could not sustain a wartime population, who craved consistency and strong foundations. And they couldn’t make the Stalin regime feel invulnerable either. To feel powerful again, the Stalin regime threw itself onto insignificant and tiny minority groups and virtually destroyed them.

Chapter 3: "Stop Playing Internationalism"¹

In the midst of WWII the Stalin regime diverted a huge amount of human and material resources to deport almost a million Soviet citizens from their homelands thousands of miles away to Central Asia and Siberia. The Russian nationalism that rose during the war reached its zenith in these actions against groups that were exclusively small non-Christian ethnic minorities. The swift escalation in discrimination belies something in the character of the Soviet government of that time. The Stalin regime feared Nazi Germany and feared their own ability to withstand the German invasion. Those are all logical fears. What becomes illogical is how the Stalin regime reacted to that fear internally. Externally the Red Army continued to fight the German army and proceeded along military norms. Internally they put forth the conception that the Soviet Union was a Russian centric communist state and acted aggressively toward non-Russians. The Soviets had not successfully integrated ethnic identity into Soviet identity during the 1920s, and did it no more successfully in the 1940s. By artificially uniting Russian identity to Soviet identity starkly highlighted the fact that the Stalin regime created its own outsiders, others, and enemies by marginalizing minority ethnic groups.

Much has been analyzed in Soviet Studies around the Soviet construction of an ‘other’ and the belief in the political necessity of an enemy. Yet in this period, there was an enemy: Nazi Germany. A real military, political, cultural enemy, more perfectly constructed than anything the Soviets had themselves conceived of in the 1920s or during the Great Terror in the 1930s. Why act against small minority groups when Nazi Germany was a perfect foil? The cases are certainly different. Of course the outcome of the war was then unknown as the Stalin regime pursued the deportations. Also, importantly, the deportations were not publicized, especially not in the way

¹ quote from a Krasnoyarsk NKVD Chief Sobolov on the villainy of diaspora nations, he recommended that they be “forced to their knees, and exterminated like mad dogs.” Jensen and Petrov, 98.

Germany was vilified in the Soviet press. The deportations concerned small groups, and as many other scholars before me have shown, who were unfairly judged on the crimes of a small number of individuals. This is an example of extreme internalized violence; it was done in secret, to small groups, at a non-advantageous time. It was an act of a zealous regime, which compulsively purged itself to its own detriment.

The various ethnic groups deported by Stalin's regime between 1943 and 1945 have unique histories, traditions, religions, and relationships with the former Russian Empire. They each had their own path after the October Revolution and during the Civil War and each eventually reconciled with Soviet power in their own way. Despite drawn out campaigns against Tsarist armies, working with Mensheviks or Whites, or colluding with the German army, these relationships do not define or include all members of these minority groups. For over a century these ethnic minorities were subject to centralized power in Saint Petersburg or Moscow. The actions taken against them in the mid-1940s by the Soviet government sprung from no other source than the whims of Stalin's regime. These groups did not cause their deportations. There is no cause and effect mechanism in Soviet law or common logic that would predetermine such actions. All agency rests with the Stalin regime.

Below is a brief description of the deported groups in order of the date of their deportation. I have excluded long explanations about their conflict with Tsarist Russia or the early Soviet State as I believe them to be immaterial to the regime's decision making and therefore dangerous to an argument. The Soviet government accused these groups of being disloyal to the Soviet State, and many authors cite historical conflicts separate from World War II in their work on the 'punished people'. (Though of course the former actions of minority groups does give them a certain stigma in the minds of many people of the former Russian

Empire.) Yet there were many, minorities and Russians, who were hostile to the Russian Empire and the Soviet State. Further, of those there were many who were also occupied by and partially colluded with the German army. Acknowledging the specific histories of the seven deported groups discussed in this paper shifts the focus from the fact that the Soviet government chose these groups with apparent prejudice.

In addition to the brief descriptions, I have also included each group's interaction, if there was one, with the German army. Finally, and most importantly, I trace the story of each group's deportation. How the security forces collected these groups and the circumstance of the places in which they groups were left have been documented by many scholars in the last 50 years. Here I mainly use Otto Pohl's short but concise and data driven book, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR, 1937-1949*. Besides Pohl's own work in the archives, it is the best English language integration of the early works on this subject by Alexander Nekrich and Robert Conquest as well as the more recent Russian language work by Svetlana Alieva and especially Nikolai Bugai.

The first deported group is the Karachays, who are a Turkic people from the North Caucasus. They are ethnically related to the Balkars and nominally converted to Islam under pressure from the neighboring Kabardians. The Karachay people became part of the Russian Empire in 1828 during the invasion of the Caucasus.

In 1920's the Karachays were granted territorial autonomy by the Soviet government. First in 1921 as the Karachay National Oblast as part of the Mountain Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR), then as part of the Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast (AO) in 1922, and finally as the Karachay AO in 1926.² According to the Soviet census 75,736 Karachays lived in the Soviet Union, with between 90-95% living in the Karachay AO.

² Pohl, 74.

Trying to move towards Caspian Sea oil fields and Baku, the German army drove into the Caucasus. From August 1942 to January 1943 the Germans occupied the Karachay AO. In those six months, the Soviet government found 300 Nazi collaborators out of 37,249 adult Karachays.³ Regardless, on October 12, 1943 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet decreed the “liquidation” of the Karachays from their territory. On the morning of November 6, 1943 NKVD and NKGB operatives gave Karachay families one hour to pack 100 kilograms of possession before they were taken by truck and then by train to Kazakhstan and Kirgizia.⁴

In total, 69,267 Karachays were deported from the area, and five months later all Karachay soldiers were demobilized from the Red Army. The Soviet government also placed a 10,000 ruble bounty on the few ‘outlaw’ Karachays who escaped deportation, showing the regime’s intent to collect and control the entire group. The territory of the Karachay AO was split between Krasnodar Kray and Georgia. While in exile from November 1943 to November 1948 the Karachays lost 12,398 people, about 18% of the total deported population. The population was in severe decline until 1949.⁵

The Kalmyks are a nomadic Mongol Buddhist people. In the early 17th-century they migrated from Western Mongolia to the area between the southwest of the Volga River and the Western shore of the Caspian Sea. They are ethnically and religiously tied to Tibetans and Buriats, who also worship the Dalai Lama. In 1887 the Kalmyk population of the Russian Empire was 190,600⁶. On November 4, 1920 the Soviet government established the Kalmyk AO and on October 20, 1935 the territory was raised to the status of ASSR. Kalmyks clashed with the Soviets during collectivization, which disrupted their nomadic lifestyle, and during Soviet

³ Pohl, 76.

⁴ Pohl, 77.

⁵ Pohl, 97.

⁶ Pohl, 62.

religious suppression of Buddhist lamas and monks. Kalmyk culture was allowed to expand under korenizatsiia, especially in education. Between 1917 and 1940, the number of schools increased 10 times while the number of students increased from 674 to 44,000.

The Kalmyk ASSR was briefly occupied by the German army during WWII. The Germans reached the capital city, Elista, on August 12, 1942. By December 1942 the Red Army retook the republic. Less than a year later the Stalin regime began the process of Kalmyk deportation. On October 28, 1943 the Council of People's Commissars (SNK) issued a resolution “instructing the executive committee of Krasnoyarsk Kray, Omsk Oblast, and Novosibirsk Oblast to prepare for an influx of Kalmyk exiles.”⁷ The next day the Politburo of the Central Committee and Presidium of the Supreme Soviet ordered the deportation of all Kalmyks from the Kalmyk ASSR.

On December 26, 1943 Deputy Chief of the NKVD, Ivan Serov, arrived in Elista and between December 28 and December 29 2,985 NKVD and NKGB officers loaded 93,139 Kalmyks on to 46 train echelons. In this two-day period almost the entire nation of Kalmyks, not accounting for those still in the Red Army or in neighboring regions, was “uprooted and relocated thousands of miles away.”⁸

The Kalmyk ASSR territory was added mostly to the Astrakhan Oblast to the east while the rest was given to the Stalingrad or Rostov Oblasts to the west and north. From 1944 to 1948 the NKVD continued to deport Kalmyks from neighboring territories and demobilized Kalmyk soldiers. “The Stalin regime even deported the eight Kalmyks living in Moscow”⁹; Pohl

⁷ Pohl, 64.

⁸ Pohl, 65.

⁹ Pohl, 66.

succinctly concludes that “the Soviet security forces successfully exiled almost every Kalmyk living in Soviet territory to Siberia.”¹⁰

The Moscow incident shows the true nature of the deportations. They were insidious, highly specific, and completely reliant on ethnicity as a demarcator. While the problems with nationalism were tied to socialism and politics as seen in the previous chapters, these actions are a step beyond. Targeting ethnic groups is not the objective political act the Soviet government claimed. Their actions were fueled by something else.

The Kalmyk population was about evenly divided into five special settlement areas in Omsk Oblast, Novosibirsk Oblast, Altai Krai, Krasnoyarsk Kray, and Kazakhstan. The Kalmyks arrived about February 10, 1944 to their settlement kolkhozes. Enroute 1,200 Kalmyks died, and between 1944 and 1948 the NKVD reported that 18% of the populations had perished. According to Pohl’s calculations “22.58% of the total Kalmyk population died as a direct result of the conditions in the special settlements,”¹¹ mostly from disease, malnutrition, exposure, and exhaustion.

The Chechen and Ingush are two closely linked ethnic groups of the North Caucasus region. They practice a form of Sunni Islam and generally live in the Mountains south of the Terek River. Chechens and Ingush fought a long war against the colonizing forces of the Russian Empire, beginning in the late 18th century and ending, according to the Russians, in 1864. Under the Soviets, the Chechen AO was created in November 30, 1922 and the Ingush AO a few years later on July 7, 1924. On January 15, 1934 the two were combined to create the Chechen-Ingush AO, which soon after was changed to Chechen-Ingush ASSR on December 5, 1936.

¹⁰ Pohl, 66.

¹¹ Pohl, 68.

The German army reached the Chechen-Ingush ASSR on August 8, 1942 and captured the large cities of Mozdok and Malgobek soon after. They never reached the capital Grozny. The Red Army liberated the territory from the Germans in January 1943, though in the six month long occupation the Germans failed to occupy much of the republic. Pohl posits that this was due to “difficult terrain and Soviet resistance,”¹² despite claims that many Chechens and Ingush solely worked with the Germans. Almost exactly a year after the Red Army expelled the Germans from the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, in January 1944, Stalin authorized the NKVD to deport the Chechens and the Ingush from their territory.

Chechens were the largest minority group deported by the Soviet government during WWII. Eventually the NKVD displaced 387,229 Chechens and 91,250 Ingush. Beria prepared for a month and a half after Stalin’s decree, in order to arrange the transfer of so many unwilling people. Beria and his NKVD deputies Serov, Bogdon Kobulov, and Stepan Mamulov arrived in Grozny February 20, 1944 to supervise deportations, which they believed would take eight days. 19,000 members of the NKVD, NKGB, and Smersh and 100,000 soldiers of the NKVD internal troops assisted. From February 23 to February 29 almost half a million Chechens and Ingush were forced at gunpoint into American land-lease Studebaker trucks and then onto trains bound for Kirgizia and Kazakhstan.¹³ Earlier in the month, the NKVD had confiscated thousands of weapons, so the six-day operation was executed with relative ease.

The Chechen-Ingush ASSR territory was split between Dagestan ASSR, North Ossetian ASSR, and Georgia with the remaining area added to the Stavropol Kray under the name ‘Grozny Okrug’. The Soviet government then relocated thousands of Russians to the former Chechen-Ingush ASSR in an attempt to stabilize the economy after the loss of the majority of the

¹² Pohl, 81.

¹³ Pohl, 84.

labor force. Pohl claims that the Stalin regime did this to “prevent exiles from ever returning to the Caucasus” successfully.¹⁴ From February 1944 to November 1948 the group lost 114,259 people, about 24% of their population, while in exile.¹⁵

The Balkars are also a northern Caucasian ethnic group, and are closely linked to the Karachays. They too are Sunni Muslims who speak a minor Turkic language.¹⁶ The Balkars became part of the Russian Empire around 1825 during the Caucasian invasion, with the Balkars’ main occupation being animal husbandry. After the Civil War, the Soviets territorially joined the Balkars with the Kabards and not the Karachays. The Kabard-Balkar AO was created in September 1921. The territory gained ASSR status on December 5, 1936. The Balkars were a minority within their own ASSR, as they only made up about 11% of the republic’s population in 1939.¹⁷

The German army occupied the Kabard-Balkar ASSR for five months, from August 1942 to January 1943. Despite the German’s brutal treatment of civilians in Kabard-Balkar territory, Beria urged Stalin to include the Balkars in the deportations of northern Caucasian minorities. The NKVD began preparations to deport the Balkars two days after Beria made his suggestion to Stalin. On Feb 26, 1949 Beria issued a NKVD decree on the resettlement operation of the Balkars. On March 8 and March 9, 1944 the NKVD deported 37,713 Balkars to Kazakhstan and Kirgizia. This was carried out by 17,000 NKVD troops and 4,000 NKVD-NKGB operation workers.¹⁸

While this operation was certainly approved by Stalin, the deportation of the Balkars was urged by Beria and the NKVD. As opposed to the other minorities, the Presidium of the Supreme

¹⁴ Pohl, 86.

¹⁵ Pohl, 97.

¹⁶ Pohl, 87.

¹⁷ Pohl, 88.

¹⁸ Pohl, 89.

Soviet gave their approval for the deportation of the Balkars after the fact, a month later after on April 8, 1944. As the Balkars were living in horrible conditions in special settlements, the Soviet government wiped their names from the maps. The Kabard-Balkar ASSR became the Kabard ASSR, and a small portion of the southwest mountains were given to Georgia. From March 1944 to November 1948 6,015 Balkars, or 16% of the population perished, One third of those died during transport.¹⁹

Crimean Tatars are a Turkic ethnic groups which practices Sunni Islam. They speak a Turkic language similar to that spoken by the Karachays and the Balkars. The Crimean peninsula became directly controlled by the Russian Empire in 1783 after 75 years of conflict as the Russians tried to gain access to the Black Sea.

After the Soviets established the USSR, the SNK created the Crimean ASSR in October 1921. Though Crimean Tatars only represented about a quarter of the population of the republic, they were given “considerable cultural autonomy”²⁰ In 1938 the Crimean Tatar population was only 19.36%, whereas the Russian population was 49.6%. In addition, collectivization and the end of korenizatsiia in the late 1930s deeply affected the Crimean Tatar economic and cultural lifestyle.

The Crimean peninsula was invaded by German and Romanian troops in September 1941. From this time until April 1944 the entire Crimean peninsula was occupied by the German army. Many Russians viewed Crimean Tatars negatively prior to WWII, and out of all the deported groups, the Crimean Tatars had the largest number of collaborators. However their territory was occupied by the Germans for years as opposed to months. Pohl states that, “As many Crimean Tatars actively fought against the Nazis as participated in German sponsored

¹⁹ Pohl, 98.

²⁰ Pohl, 110.

military units.”²¹ Yet, the NKVD and Beria began preparations for their deportations almost immediately after the Soviets retook Crimea. Days after Beria sent Stalin a telegram detailing the exaggerated number of Crimean Tatar army deserters and weapons stockpiles, Stalin signed a GKO resolution to deport Crimean Tatars. The Crimean Tatars were accused of assisting the Nazis in “mass destruction of the Soviet people.”²² The NKVD, directed by Serov and Kobulov, used 23,000 officers of the NKVD and 9,000 operatives of the NKVD-NKGB to load 183,155 Crimean Tatars on to trains bound for Uzbekistan. Between May 18 and May 20, 1944 almost all Crimean Tatars were exiled from Crimea. After they arrived to the same barely habitable special settlements of the other ‘punished people,’ the MVD reported that between May 1944 and January 1946, 14% of the Crimean Tatar population had perished.²³

Living on the Crimean peninsula was also a sizeable population of Greeks and Bulgarians, who at that point were called Soviet Greeks and Soviet Bulgarians. A Greek population had lived in the area, and the area sounding the Black Sea in Southern Russia and Georgia, since the 7th century BC. During the reign of Catherine the Great, Greeks were invited to colonize the Crimea and a century later many Pontic Greeks settled in the area²⁴ after fleeing the Ottomans in Asia Minor. In 1938 there were 20,653 Soviet Greeks living in Crimea.²⁵

After the Red Army expelled the Germans from Crimea and a month after the deportation of the Crimean Tatars, Stalin ordered Beria to expel the Soviet Greeks from Crimea. This operation took place from June 27 to July 3 1944 and the population was sent to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kenarov, Molotov, Sverdlovsk, and Bashkir ASSR.²⁶ The Stalin regime also

²¹ Pohl, 113.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Pohl, 97.

²⁴ Pohl, 119.

²⁵ Pohl, 120.

²⁶ Pohl, 126.

deported many Soviet Greeks from Black Sea area in Southern Russia and Georgia. In Ukraine, in the area around the Crimean peninsula, there were three Greek national raions,²⁷ from which the Stalin regime also expelled Soviet Greeks. In 1942 a small number of Soviet Greeks were deported from the Black Sea area. But in the summer 1944, a large scale deportation occurred with Soviet Greeks, Crimean Armenians, and Soviet Bulgarians. Under advisement from Beria, “Stalin personally issued the order to deport the Crimean Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgarians.”²⁸ The NKVD deported 15,040 Crimean Greeks, 8,200 Soviet Greeks from Rostov and Krasnodar, and 16,376 Soviet Greeks from Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Greek Red Army soldiers were moved to work battalions until the end of the war when they were exiled with their ‘ethnic compatriots’.

Unlike the earlier deportations, the Soviet government did not collect the Soviet Greek population in one raid. Perhaps because the Soviet Greek diaspora was spread widely across the Soviet Union. Greek deportations continued until 1949 when the NKVD sent 57,680 Greeks and Armenians from the Black Sea coast and the Southern Caucasus to Kazakhstan on June 14 and June 15, 1949. From 1942 to 1950 the Soviet government issued six decrees about the deportations of Soviet Greeks, showing the dedication of the Stalin regime to a full ethnic exile.

In exile the Soviet Greek population of Greek speakers declined by 25%. Their death rate is hard to quantify because many documents refer to all deported ethnics groups from the Black Sea area as ‘Crimeans’. Though the experience and mortality rate of the Soviet Greeks who lived in the poorly assembled special settlements is likely very similar to that of the other groups.

Lastly, and seemingly most confusing when compared to the narrative told by the Soviet government in which deportations denote collusion with the Nazis during WWII, are the

²⁷ Pohl, 120.

²⁸ *ibid.*

Meskhethian Turks, Soviet Kurds, and Khemshils. Meskhethian Turks are descendants of Georgian Muslim converts who adopted the Turkish language during Ottoman rule in the Caucasus in the 17th and 18th centuries.²⁹ Pohl describes them as “culturally almost indistinguishable from the majority population of Turkey.”³⁰ Soviet Kurds were simply Kurds who lived in Georgia, and who had been in Transcaucasia since the 10th century. The Khemshils are ethnic Armenians who converted to Islam and live on the border of Turkey and Georgia. All of the populations became Soviet citizens and part of the Georgian SSR in 1924.

Prior to Soviet military and diplomatic pressures on the Turkish government after WWII, in July 1944 Beria recommended to Stalin that the Meskhethian Turks, Soviet Kurds, and Khemshils should be deported. Stalin agreed and signed a GKO resolution “On the resettling from the Border Belt of the Georgian SSR...The Turks, Kurds, and Khemshil.”³¹ Rapidly and using 20,000 NKVD internal troops and 4,000 NKVD-NKGB operations workers, Beria assigned NKVD deputy commissioner Kobulov to deport 94,955 people from Georgia between November 15 and November 28, 1944.

The Meskhethian Turks, Soviet Kurds, and Khemshils were settled in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kirgizia. Due to inhospitable conditions, 19,047 or 20% of the deported population died within 5 years. And because of frequent escape attempts the three populations were kept under notably strict control of the NKVD and MVD.

Simultaneous as these groups lost their rights as Soviet citizens, their ancestral homelands, and their lives, many famous and much examined events were occurring in Europe and in the Pacific. To hopefully clarify all the data and mortality statistics presented, here is a brief timeline of the deportations within the context of the Red Army and Ally operations. The

²⁹ Pohl, 129.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ 131, Pohl

German army invaded the USSR on June 22, 1941; in September 1941 the Crimean peninsula was invaded, just as the siege of Leningrad began and the USS Green was fired on by a German U-boat. The Germans reached Karachay, Kalmyk, Chechen-Ingush, and Balkar territories throughout August 1942. At this time, August 23, the German army begins its advance into Stalingrad and Georgy Zhukov is appointed to defend the city. About a month before this pivotal battle was won, in January 1943 the Red Army retook Karachay, Kalmyk, Chechen-Ingush, and Balkar territories. In the same week the residents of the Warsaw Ghetto first rose up against the Germans.

In November 1943, while Karachays were being deported, the Red Army liberated Kiev, the Italians bombed the Vatican, and the US landed on the Solomon Islands. As the NKVD deported the Kalmyks, Eisenhower was named head of Normandy operations and the Red Army was fighting Manstein's army to the bank of the Dnieper line. As the half a million Chechen-Ingush were being deported, the Red Army initiated their Narva offensive, the Allies bombed Leipzig, and the US took the Admiralty Islands. In early March 1944 as the Balkars were forced to Kazakhstan, the Red Army forced the German army into major retreat in the western front of the Dnieper and Tallinn and Narva were bombed by the Soviet Air Force. Two days after Crimea was liberated and almost 200,000 Crimean Tatars were deported, the Allies bombed Paris and Romanian oil fields. As Soviet Greeks, Bulgarians, and Armenians were exiled from Crimea in June 1944, the Red Army expelled the Nazis from Belarus and began to take back the Karelian Isthmus. Finally in late November 1944 as Strasburg was liberated, Hitler fled to Berlin from Rustenburg, and Himmler ordered the destruction of Auschwitz II-Birkenau gas chambers and crematoriums, about 95,000 Soviet Turks, Kurds, and Khemshils were deported by the Soviet government.

Deportations are not simply a violent act in the moment, but a thought out, long term act of destruction of a group. These groups were deported from their homes quickly and aggressively. At gunpoint they were taken from their homes with very little or no warning. They could take with them very few or no possessions. Apart from the material possessions, land that had been cultivated for generations, with certain specific techniques, was abandoned. Large and complex family networks were broken up, as the NKVD usually separated these ethnic minorities into four or five smaller groups, which were then sent to various special settlements. Immediate family was kept somewhat together, but extended family clans were broken up. In addition, when the Red Army demobilized soldiers from these deported groups, there was no guarantee that families would be reunited.

Apart from the psychological and emotional toll of the deportations, these groups were physically punished. Though the Soviet government did not shoot these minorities or kill them directly, there is no reason to view their deaths in special settlements as any less violent. The Soviet government designed and built these special settlements and certainly knew the limitation of the surrounding area, as well as the limited supplies the residents would be given. The Soviet government had years of experience building and maintaining the camps in the GULAG system and therefore had an actual idea of how the deported would live. With knowledge of their GULAG system, and its reluctant ability to keep people alive, the Soviet government knew that the deported groups would die en masse from neglect. During the month, and sometimes two month, long journey in train cars, tens of thousands of people perished. The best data for the amount of deceased deportees is reported for the period between the initial deportation, which took place from fall 1943 to winter 1944, and 1949-1950. This data taken by the NKVD shows that for all deported groups there was negative population growth and between a 15-20%

mortality rate for the initial deported population (this included deaths en route to camps and in settlement deaths).³²

During the decade between the deportations and Stalin's death there were no indications from the Soviet government that these groups would ever be released and cleared of their charges. In this period the punished people carried on as best as they could. Even Stalin's death in 1953 would not have signaled change. Now Stalin's tight control of the government and especially his involvement with the deportation is known. In 1953 the high echelons of power in the Soviet Union were closed and any future plan Khrushchev may have had for the punished people perhaps seemed impossible. Yet in 1956, Khrushchev included a critique of the deportations in his greater condemnation of Stalin and his cult of personality. He refuted all previously public statements about the validity of the deportations and stated that, "no man of common sense can grasp how it is possible to make whole nations responsible for inimical activity."³³ Unfortunately Khrushchev did not publicly absolve all of the deported groups of their guilt. Khrushchev only apologized to the Karachay, Kalmyk, Chechen-Ingush, and Balkar populations in his speech. Khrushchev's semi-public statement on the innocence, or lack thereof, of certain groups was directly responsible for the last period of violence caused by the deportation: the groups' return to their homelands.

After the Soviet government deported these ethnic minorities in the early 1940s, they repopulated their homes with other Soviet citizens, most often Russians. Many of the territories from which the groups were deported had significant Russian populations already, but more still were used to settle the empty houses and farms. New residents to these renamed areas took possession of everything that was left behind by the deported peoples. Life moved on in the

³² Pohl, 97.

³³ Khrushchev, Secret Speech.

places the punished people once lived. Due to this, and to the fact that the Soviet government gave no support to the groups that wished to move back, when the deported minorities were finally released and allowed to return to their homes there was nothing left for them. The conflict and discrimination experienced by the returning minority groups is the final and ongoing legacy of the deportations.

For those who chose to stay in places like Kazakhstan, after leaving the isolated special settlements, there were clashes with local populations. For those who choose to return to the RSFSR there were also clashes with the 'new' local populations. Reintegration into normal, legal Soviet society was not smooth or welcome. Interestingly, the clashes between formally deported groups and colonizer Russian were hot spots, especially in the Caucasus and in Crimea. They pointed out the fraudulent structure and inconsistent government of the Soviet Union and lead to its breakup. The aftermath of the deportations showed clearly and publicly the prejudice fostered by the Soviet government since the late 1930s. The hate that drove Stalin and Beria to execute these violent acts was the same feeling that extended the isolation and misery of the deported groups well after they were 'released'. A lack of rehabilitation and strong Russian nationalism in the Russian Federation shows that while the fervor and instability of the Stalin regime during WWII is long past, the framework that allowed for such actions is still in place. Simply waiting for another catalyst.

Conclusion

From 1943 to 1944 the world was in chaos in many places, from Europe to the South Pacific. In the midst of this chaos it was not difficult for the Soviet government to deport almost a million people from the Caucasus and the Black Sea region in relative secrecy. The violence of modern warfare and the violence of racial hatred outside the Soviet Union overshadowed the deportations and unfortunately long concealed Soviet internal warfare. It was very difficult to find information about why these deportations occurred, as at first they seemed so sudden and out of place in the timeline of the Soviet Union during WWII. The culture of the Soviet Union during the war, the culture that seemingly must have fostered the deportations, is largely uninvestigated. We know of how Soviet civilians and soldiers suffered, but there is little about how the war influenced society as it was happening. I did not find that society during the war was truly suspended. More accurately, Soviet society in the early 1940s was still dominated by, and grappling with, the major upheavals in national, economic, and political policy from the late 1930s.

Our ability to investigate the deportations is greater than ever before. Each year brings new scholarship and new documents that shed light on how the Soviet Union operated. In 1953 an article was written titled, *The Fall of Beria and Nationalities Question in the USSR*. In the article the author states the, “cult of the Russian people”¹ was inaugurated with Stalin’s famous 1945 speech: A Toast to the Russian People. The author goes on to claim that the war brought “a new and vigorous uprising of Russian nationalism.”² He writes that there was “lull [for] several years due to the war”³ in the struggle against national deviation and that, “between 1939 and

¹ F.F., 484.

² F.F., 483.

³ *ibid.*

1946 ‘ideological vigilance’ had relaxed.”⁴ This type of early reporting on the activities within the Soviet Union is mostly worthless. Due to a lack of accurate information, most of those previous ‘facts’ are incorrect. In a footnote, the author wonders if maybe “the large-scale deportations of...the Chechens and Ingushi”⁵ can be considered a lull, but even that point cannot be judged honestly because the author is unaware of the extent of the deportations. Nonetheless, soon dissident academics brought their knowledge of the deportations and Soviet national policy to the West. And ultimately archives opened in Moscow, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Siberia, which revealed huge amounts of information synthesized in this paper.

Even so, much scholarship on the deportations has either focused on the lives of the minority groups too far in the past (i.e. on minority clashes with the Tsars, with the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, or with the Soviets during collectivization) or too close to the deportations (i.e. the number Crimean partisans, tanks bought for the Red Army by the Karachays, or Kalmyk cavalry riders). The background and war actions of the deported groups are important only when inserted into the framework in which the Soviet government operated. Knowledge of the reversals and re-reversals of national policy and understanding that monopoly on power and centralization were the primary aims of the Stalin regime is essential to further work on ethnic violence. The deportations do not follow objective logic, but it is possible to understand them in terms of the specific mindset and goals of the Stalin regime.

While the Bolsheviks found the national problem difficult to cleanly solve, they were aware of issues facing multiethnic socialist states from the very beginning of the 20th century. Reconciliation between colonizer and colonized of the former Russian Empire would have been a difficult task without the added introduction of Marxist ideology. Though Lenin believed his

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

policy of self-determination to be well developed, it failed to gain supporters during the Civil War when the liberation movements spread from Central Asia to Ukraine to the Caucasus. To create trust where Lenin, and at the time Stalin, realized there was none, the new Soviet state implemented *korenizatsiia* to govern the territories they had recently conquered. Within the RSFSR many, but certainly not the majority, territorial units were claimed as autonomous oblasts or republics for a local ethnic group. The autonomous regions may not have been politically or economically autonomous but other freedoms were assured. The early Soviet government assured minority rights with various articles in the 1924 constitution, with the policy of *korenizatsiia*, and with territorial autonomy (though national territories often had a majority Russian population). The concession to nominally shared power sprang from the distrust, which Lenin refers to as “skittishness,” that the minorities felt towards the Bolsheviks. In general, it is easy to see the many ways in which the Soviets differed from the Russian Tsars. But the Soviets would eventually validate the fears of the minority groups by reinstating the traditional ethnic hierarchy.

The Tsarist regime practiced large scale population transfer as well, and in some ways the Soviet deportations are a continuation of this historical trend. Though both authorities were ethnically motivated, the actions of the Soviet government have a malicious and hateful quality, which is not mirrored in the apathetic moving of the insignificant done by the Russian Tsars. The communications between Stalin and Beria as they plan the deportations use formal and bland prose,⁶ and show little feeling. Yet the emotions Stalin enflamed with his nationalist rhetoric and the extralegal actions taken by Beria during the physical deportations speak. The words and actions of these two men show, more than any lost private admission of specific enmity, how much they hated these groups. A desire to collect every member of an ethnic group from all

⁶ Suny, *The Structure of Soviet History*, 353.

corners of a vast country in order to send them to substandard internment camps is not the act of an indifferent regime. The huge amount of effort and meticulous planning show how deeply the Stalin regime wanted the deportations to be carried out. Their methods can only indicate that the regime saw these deportations as necessary. While the justification for such misandry is almost immaterial, how the Stalin regime came to persecute these unsuspecting groups can be partially explained.

The reasons why the Stalin regime believed the deportations to be so essential can be traced back to the fundamental instability of Soviet national policy and the recent changes in Soviet society before WWII, both of which were exacerbated due to the war. Before the Revolution, Stalin paraphrases Marx and concludes, “that the life of society is the foundation on which social consciousness is built.”⁷ From his beginnings, Stalin internalizes the ideal that the way in which the people of a socialist country interact and live is intrinsic to how social consciousness is built. After revolution and class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat brings democracy by way of all people being the same, each a member of the proletarian class. Fixation on class identity leaves no room for ethnic identity, and therefore privileges based on ethnicity would be non-existent. In the early 20th century, Austrian and Jewish socialists posit that ethnic identity and Marxist ideas could unite, since ethnic hierarchies are always constructed by the upper-class in capitalist societies. Lenin moves towards the Austrian collaboration in his own work, and makes the distinction between the ethnic communities that lived under imperialism and those that were the imperial powers. He views ethnic identity as an important designator of community and social life to some because it was suppressed (this perspective may itself be condescending, but Lenin reaches an egalitarian conclusion). After allowing certain ethnic communities to freely express themselves class consciousness would eventually manifest

⁷ Stalin, Disagreements in the Party.

and the people would be able to focus on their more destructive class differences. This is an idealistic and almost untested inversion of ethnic ranks. There are very few multiethnic societies free of racial hierarchies for Lenin to use as a model for this plan. Nonetheless, drastic changes needed to be implemented to peacefully move forward.

Lenin's distinction between minority nationalism and majority nationalism was his greatest contribution to Soviet ethnic relations and national policy. His earlier ideas about self-determination were insulting to both left-wing Bolsheviks and minority groups, and the concept disappeared quickly during the Civil War. By endorsing local, or minority, nationalism Lenin tries to move towards a functional egalitarian society, because, to reiterate Stalin's words from the previous paragraph: that is how "social consciousness is built."

Yet by the mid-1930s, Lenin and most of the old Bolsheviks were dead. Stalin, who fully believed in the importance "of maximum development of national culture"⁸ when he made a 1929 speech to Ukrainian writers, seemed to be unable to wait for "national culture...to exhaust itself completely."⁹ Stalin claimed that "we want to unify the nations of various countries by dividing them,"¹⁰ but by 1935 the Stalin regime wasn't dividing nations into dozens of unique groups. There were only two groups: Russians and non-Russians.

Russian nationalism certainly existed in the Soviet Union but it was greatly encouraged by Stalin. Vlasov's army is one of the most flagrant examples of Russian nationalism, but far earlier intelligent people began reading the signs coming from Stalin's regime, which indicated that the regime itself was encouraging this new policy. In an attempt to use Russian nationalism as a political tool to generate greater centralized authority Stalin drove fully into the perceived advantages of articulated ethnic hierarchies. To validate his political goals, Stalin conceived of a

⁸ Clark and Dobrenko, 62.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

new theoretical way of asserting the ‘correctness’ of the Russian redemption. Metaphors such as Friendship of the Peoples and Family of Nations, which took the place of decades long national positions, were weak and could not sustain the identity of the Soviet Union. Wartime fears and uncertainty merged with the fear that the new conception of unity was too vague or too disputable. Reacting to this dual vortex of fear, the Soviet government did what it did best: deflected its anxiety to an ‘other’ and purged an imaginary internal enemy.

There are many documents and eyewitness accounts which clearly show that not only were the deportations not solely driven by minority wartime actions, but Stalin and Beria discussed deporting certain ‘punished people’ even before the Germans invaded. In 1940, Beria recommended to Stalin that the North Caucasus area needed “special measures”¹¹ to combat deviation. Incidents such as this show how the timeline for the deportations, conventionally 1943-1944, actually expands out to before the war. The lies told by the Soviet government, who for example claimed that Crimean Tatars aided the Nazi retreat from the peninsula, even though they had already been deported to Central Asia¹², emphasize the regime’s perhaps subconscious recognition that their actions were a breach of core Soviet ideology.

In his 1970 book *Nation Killers*, Robert Conquest writes that as a historian of the Stalin era, “the story of [Stalin’s] treatment of these small minority peoples may seem no more than an episode,”¹³ when compared to the Great Terror; “Yet it is an episode so startling, and so symptomatic, that it deserves the attention of all who wish a complete grasp of the systems and attitudes then established in the USSR.”¹⁴ I have found Conquest’s quote to be extremely accurate. When I choose to investigate the deportations, I had no inkling that the act would be so

¹¹ Nekrich, 103.

¹² Critchlow, 3.

¹³ Conquest, *Nation Killers*, 12.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

intertwined with the core problems in the Soviet Union. The inability to mediate the relationship between national and ideological identity not only caused tragic deportations, but also the eventual breakup of the Soviet Union.

Acronyms

AO---Autonomous Oblast, an autonomous administrative unit below AO created for a certain ethnic group within the republics of the Soviet Union.

ASSR---Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, autonomous administrative unit above AO and below SSR created for a certain ethnic group.

GKO---State Defense Committee, highest organ of power during WWII; created June 30, 1941 by SNK, Tsk, and the Supreme Soviet of USSR with Stalin as chairman.

MVD---Ministry of Internal Affairs, new name as of 1946 for the NKVD.

NKGB---People's Commissariat for State Security, secret police and counter-espionage service during various periods from 1941 to 1946.

NKVD---People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, all-union law enforcement agency that oversaw operations from police officers to the GULAG system.

Smersh---Death to Spies, counter-intelligence organ broken into three independent departments each under the authority of the NKVD, the Red Navy, or the NKO (Peoples Commissariat for Defense).

SNK---Council of People's Commissars (sometimes Sovnarkom), the highest governmental authority and responsible for administration of the state.

SSR---Soviet Socialist Republic, ethnically based administrative units whose union made up the USSR

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