

Genocide of the National Minorities of Russia in the War with Ukraine

As Russia is increasingly losing its military in the war with Ukraine, the Kremlin is trying to make up for these losses in every possible way, despite the fact that the Russian dictator is afraid to openly conduct highly unpopular full-scale military mobilization. Under these circumstances, instead of full-scale mobilization the country is conducting covert partial mobilization, particularly engaging the male population from remote depressive regions with compact residence of national minorities, e.g. from Russia's Far East, North Caucasus, Buryatia, Khakassia, etc. as well as from the occupied areas of Georgia, Ukrainian Donbas and Crimea, mercenaries from Syria, and tens of thousands of convicts as representatives of "Wagner" private military company. Conscription is much less common in Russia's large, economically and socially developed cities, where the majority of the population is ethnic Russian and is aimed at "washing out" the national minorities from remote poor regions. The war covertly serves to carry out ethnic segregation and genocide (effectively, elimination) of Russia's ethnic minorities. Although rather meager, public information classified by the Russian authorities during the war testifies the number of representatives of the poorest national minorities from remote regions of Russia who were injured or killed during the war disproportionately exceeds the respective share of ethnic Russians who suffered the same fate. A similar situation is observed in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia, in particular in Crimea, where the Russian occupation administration violates the fundamental norms of international humanitarian law.

The genocide of Ukrainians. In their legal report, leading world experts accuse Russia of genocide in Ukraine and the intention to destroy the people of Ukraine, particularly of violating articles of the UN Convention on Prevention and Punishment for the Crime of Genocide [1]. The accusation [2] is underpinned by a long list of evidence, including examples of mass murder, violence, inhuman treatment and other indicators of genocide against Ukrainians.

In fact, Russia has been accused by the international community of committing atrocities in Ukraine. Ireland, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the USA and Ukraine have gone further and called it genocide on Parliamentary levels. In the middle of July 2022, the European Union and 43 world states have issued a joint statement [3] in support of Ukraine's intention to condemn Russia under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment for the Crime of Genocide. There are also testimonies from dozens of international experts and genocide researchers testifying to Russia's perpetration of genocide in Ukraine.

US Helsinki Commission experts say Russia is committing genocide [4] against the Ukrainian people. According to experts, the proven actions of Russia in Ukraine meet all five criteria of genocide described in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, although one of them would be enough to qualify an act of genocide. Timothy Snyder, Richard C. Levin Professor of History, Yale University also provided indisputable evidence of the genocide

committed by Russia, which according to the 1948 Convention, implies all five specific types of genocidal crimes, as well as the presence of intent [5].

Another egregious manifestation of Russia's genocidal policy against Ukrainians is the forced deportation [6] of Ukrainian children to Russia. According to the Russian opposition television resource "Rain", as of today, about 15,000 Ukrainian children have been stolen from the occupied regions of Ukraine and taken to Russia. In orphanages and correctional colonies of Russia, the Russian authorities intend to erase [7] the memory of such children from their past and raise them as impenetrable instruments of Russia's imperial expansion.

All such actions of Russia towards Ukrainians became a historical continuation of the genocide of the Ukrainian people [8 – 10], which was carried out by the totalitarian predecessor of the current Russia's imperial authorities - the Soviet communist power in Moscow in the early 1930s.

The genocide of ethnic minorities in Russia. At the same time Russia's current aggressive war in Ukraine has revealed obvious manifestations of very similar behavior in Russia itself, where we can see discriminatory attitude and manifestations of genocide [11, 12] to Russia's own ethnic minorities residing in the poorest areas of the "one-seventh of the world's land." We are talking about the policy and results of military draft during the intense phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war which started on February 24, 2022.

Russia is increasingly losing its military in the war with Ukraine while the Kremlin is trying to make up for these terrible losses in every possible way, despite the fact that the Russian dictator Vladimir Putin is afraid to openly conduct a full-scale military mobilization. According to British military intelligence, as of the end of May of last (2022) year the Russian army had lost one third of the ground forces it had before the start of the hot phase of war in Ukraine. According to the official data of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, in a year of hostilities in Ukraine the Russian Army KIA losses approximate the amount of manpower they had in the invasion group at the end of February 2022, around 150,000-180,000 personnel.

In the situation of acute shortage of the so called "cannon fodder" for the war, instead of full-scale mobilization, highly unpopular in Russia, the Putin's regime is conducting **covert partial** mobilization [13], targeting the male population **from remote depressive regions with compact residence of national minorities**, particularly **from Russia's Far East, North Caucasus, Buryatia, Khakassia, Yakutia**, as well as from the occupied areas of Georgia and the Ukrainian Donbas [14], and the occupied Crimea [15]. Syrian mercenaries, convicted criminal offenders, and representatives of private military companies, including the Wagner PMC, are actively engaged in the campaign.

Russia sends forcibly mobilized Ukrainians from occupied Donbas to die as 'live bait' at the frontline, feeling no obligation to keep records of those Ukrainians killed in action and avoiding compensation payments to the men's families. These men are viewed not just as cannon fodder by the Russians, they are actively sent onto the frontline "as bait, to calculate where the fire from the Ukrainian Armed Forces is coming from." Anybody is sent, regardless of their age or state of health. The aggressor state is forcibly sending men from occupied territories to fight against their own fellow citizens, and probably be killed, as they are sent without any

training. Russia's use of fake 'republics' in the so called "new territories" is enabling it to gain men whose deaths effectively nobody accounts for, or even tries to record.

The Russians themselves don't want to go into open battle, so they continue to collect men on occupied territories who are then thrown into hell. The same is true of the methods used to persuade convicted prisoners to go to fight in Ukraine, with large amounts of money and the waiving of their sentence offered, if they survive. In fact, just like the Ukrainians forcibly mobilized from occupied territories, such convicted prisoners are reported [14] to be sent to the worst frontline positions and are most unlikely to return alive.

Conscription is much less common in Russia's large, economically and socially developed cities, where the majority of the population is ethnic Russian. This is not only because low-paid representatives of national minorities are more willing than others to participate in the war as a way to make better money than anywhere they could do it in their depressive regions, as opposed to the population in big industrial centers with prevailing ethnic Russian population. Another apparent reason is the **conscription policy aimed at "washing out" the minorities.** Thus, the war covertly serves to carry out **ethnic segregation and genocide (effectively, elimination) of Russia's ethnic minorities.** The number of representatives of the poorest national minorities from remote regions of Russia who were injured or killed during the war disproportionately exceeds the respective share of ethnic Russians who suffered the same fate. What the Russian authorities are doing falls under Art. II (c) of the aforementioned Convention ("Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part"). Perhaps, from a purely scientific point of view, this statement may raise an objection due to insufficient data to support it. However, in the conditions of tough authoritarianism, which has lately turned into totalitarianism in Russia, such information is strictly classified and is not subject to disclosure under pain of prosecution.

The opposition Russian publication Mediazona (forced to leave Russia and working from abroad) published a report in mid-April, analyzing the available data on the Russian military in Ukraine. Using open Russian sources, which, however, are far from complete, the journalists found 1,744 reports of Russian military casualties, which is much less than the official number reported by the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine at the time, which exceeded 22,000. The figures provided by Mediazona are also significantly lower than the statistics provided by independent Western sources — about 17,000 Russians killed at the time. It is emphasized that most of those KIA are servicemen from poor regions. **Dagestan and Buryatia suffered the greatest losses.**[16], being among the poorest regions in Russia with national minorities of Buryats, Dagestanis, Tuvans, Khakass and others. Meanwhile, **there are almost no residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg (where 12% of the Russia's population reside) in the reports on soldiers killed at the war.**

According to fresh report of the Mediazona, there are at least 5801 confirmed Russian military deaths from February 24 to August 24 (at the moment, 45,700 dead Russian military troops have been recorded by the MoD of Ukraine). Most of those killed in action come from the so-called 'ethnic republics', with Dagestan and Buryatia leading the way. In Buryatia, the dead are buried almost every day.

Most reports about soldier deaths are coming from the poorer regions: the

average wage there is lower than the Russian median wage. Again, Moscow and Saint Petersburg are almost never mentioned in those reports [17].

By May 18, Buryatia, second only to Dagestan in the number of Russian troops killed since the Russian invasion, had lost 117 soldiers, according to Mediazona, while Moscow, with a population about 15 times larger than Buryatia, had lost only three. **As percentage of the population, the incidence of death at war among the population of Buryatia was the highest in Russia.** If we check the lists of Russian losses in this war, the prevalence of Muslim names is rather impressive, with soldiers primarily coming from units assembled in Dagestan and other republics of North Caucasus. Citizens of Russia (or mercenaries) of **Central Asian ethnicities** [18], most of them **Tajiks**, are also dying disproportionately.

This is partly caused by poverty. For many young men in Buryatia, Tuva or Dagestan, signing a contract with the military is one of the few options for a regular income and an attractive career. The Russian army is disproportionately composed of poor, ethnic non-Russians. But unlike the US military, who are recruited among the national minorities as well for purely voluntary military service, **few representatives of Russian minorities have any illusions regarding their equality, both in the army and beyond** — in a country where the Slavic majority accounts for 80% of the population and with **deep roots of the ethnic Russian cultural dominance and racism** [19], which still remains the norm in this enormous country.

Even European non-Slavic minorities in Russia, such as the Finno-Ugric Udmurts, Komi or Erzya [20], complain that their cultures and languages are oppressed or marginalized.

As Russia's losses in Ukraine increase day by day and, according to the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, were about 177,000 KIA at the beginning of April 2023 [21], **such ethnic discrimination has become strikingly obvious.** People in remote areas of Russia are increasingly concerned about the prospect of sending their sons and husbands to die in the war waged for the imperial idea of "Slavic unity." It is no coincidence that one of the significant anti-war movements in Russia is not one of those led by intimidated Moscow liberals, but the national movement **Buryats Against War.** In Buryatia and other peripheral Russian minority regions, some local activists are trying to oppose the Kremlin's harsh censorship by creating anti-war posters in their native languages (Buryat, Kalmyk, Chuvash). Since the Russian state machine focuses on ethnic Russians, these slogans go almost unnoticed on the radars of federal censors, repressive authorities, and the police.

Mediazona – the Russian opposition media, working with BBC News Russian Service and a team of volunteers, continues to collect data about the casualties sustained by the Russian military in Ukraine. These numbers do not represent the actual death toll since they can only review publicly available and confirmed reports including social media posts by relatives, reports in local media, and statements by the local authorities. The real death toll is much higher, since this information is strictly classified in Russia and rarely appears in public media reports. Besides, the high number of soldiers missing in action or taken prisoners of war is not known. However, according to these far from complete data, **most of those killed in action come from Dagestan, Buryatia, Sverdlovsk region, and Bashkiria.** Unusually high

number of casualty reports from Krasnodar Krai can be attributed to local volunteers' frequent visits to the cemeteries to photograph new graves, so a greater number of casualties becomes public knowledge. This is how the casualties are distributed [17] across the Russian regions.

More and more residents of Buryatia refuse to fight in Ukraine. The servicemen write reports, but they are not considered, and the soldiers are locked up in the detention quarters or sent again to the front line. The head of the Free Buryatia Foundation, A. Garmazhapova [22], spoke about this on the air of the Freedom TV channel back in June 2022. She stated that despite the fact that, according to the contract, the fighters can break it, they are convinced of the opposite, threatened with court, locked up, their phones are taken away, officers refuse to accept and consider reports. Commanders pretend not to see the reports, put tags "prone to lies and betrayal". All sorts of tricks are being used to prevent the Buryat servicemen from going home. At the same time, servicemen from Buryatia refuse to fight in Ukraine not only because of the fear of death, but also because they do not want to be occupiers and do not understand why they should "denazify" Ukraine if in Moscow they are constantly faced with racism, great power chauvinism, imperialist discrimination, xenophobia and ethnic insults. "Are you sure that Ukraine needs 'denazification'? Are you saying that you want to protect the Russian language in Ukraine? Remember what happens to the indigenous languages of Russia in Russia? And that it was Vladimir Putin who demoted your language into the category of an elective and optional to study".

Even liberal Russians belonging to the titular nation do not believe or do not want to believe in the high level of domestic racism and xenophobia that exists in Russia. Blinded by their racial privilege, most ethnic Russians, including the liberal intelligentsia, systemic opposition and other mostly educated people having to live in exile abroad fail to realize the unquestionable fact of centuries-long imperialism and colonialism [23, 24] that Russia weaponizes against the previously conquered neighboring peoples.

National minorities in Russia on a regular basis suffer from both common and state chauvinism. One of the groups of Buryat activists published a photo in social media, demonstrating a slogan on the entrance doors of a restaurant in Irkutsk (Eastern Siberia) with the demand of speaking only Russian. Although Buryats, Tuvans, Dagestanis and Chechens died by the hundreds in the aggressive and senseless war in Ukraine, they are still not considered human in Russia, writes the Telegram channel "Sower of the Wind". Representatives of indigenous peoples are even forbidden to communicate in their native language. Nevertheless, they are sent to die in Ukraine, thousands of kilometers from their homes.

What can Russia's disadvantaged national minorities do to avoid becoming the so called "cannon fodder" of the empire's expansionist policies? The only thing they can do is remember their ancestors' traditions and engage in shamanism. On May 26, Rossiya-1, the main propaganda channel on Russian TV, showed a story from the Ust-Abakan district of Khakassia, where **a large group of local shamans offered a ritual sacrifice** [25], feeding the spirits of war, darkness, and fire, urging them to take mercy on Khakassia guys fighting in Ukraine. According to the chief shaman of Khakassia, the ceremony was successful, the spirits heard them,

so the Khakass boys should come back home alive. It is not only Khakass shamans who are using such «effective» anti-war strategies: the shamans of Buryatia, Tuva, and Yakutia stand right there with them. Notably, the old sorcerers are not asking the spirits to end the war, just to save their soldiers.

The 300-year imperial history of Russia, beginning with Tsar Peter's proclamation of the Moscow kingdom as the Russian empire in 1721, **was a history of its expansion, accompanied by mass repression, bloody wars and the genocide of dozens of local peoples** who stood in the way of the militant empire. Today, Russia as a descendant and successor of that empire, led by dictator Putin, is trying to continue the imperial, aggressive policy of genocide aimed at independent and sovereign Ukraine, the population of its occupied territories, as well as at its minority peoples living in various regions of the empire. However, modern international law, democratic values, standards and rules which the world follows in the 21st century are fundamentally different from the values and norms of the past. That's why Russia's imperial policy of aggression and genocide is now encountering strong collective resistance of Ukraine and all the democratic countries of the world.

On July 17, the Free Nations League (FNL), which united representatives of the "peoples enslaved by the Kremlin," appealed to US President Joe Biden as part of Captive Nations Week. This is an annual complex of mass events, originally aimed at drawing public attention to the problem of "enslaved peoples". The League of Free Nations is an alliance of the Bashkir, Buryat, Ingrian, Kalmyk, Tatar and Erzya and other national movements, openly declaring the goal of creating new national states and secession from the Russian Federation.

In their open letter, activists of national movements ask for support for their peoples in exercising the right to self-determination: "We do not see the future of our peoples as part of Russia and do not want to be responsible for the war crimes of the Kremlin," say representatives of the Finno-Ugric people of Erzya. We, the autochthonous peoples living in the Russian Federation, are in fact hostages of the Putin regime. We were left with a choice: either fight or go to jail if we do not support Russian aggression." Tatars, Bashkirs, Buryats, Ingrians, Kalmyks, Erzyans talk about the goals and objectives of the League: "Today we are in the same position as Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania or Latvia 40 years ago. We will strive for decolonization, and in this struggle, we need the support of developed democracies." [26].

The ex-president of Mongolia, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj (2009-2017), called on the Buryats and representatives of other national minorities living in Russia not to participate in the war against Ukraine and seek refuge from partial mobilization in his country. According to him, [27] "From the very beginning of this bloody war, the ethnic minorities that live in Russia suffered the most. The Buryats, Tuvans and Kalmyks suffered the most. They were used as cannon fodder. Hundreds were injured. Thousands were killed."

He pointed out the following statistics of Russian losses in the war in Ukraine: "If one soldier dies from the Moscow region, then 625 soldiers die from Buryatia, which is a genocide of the national minorities of Russia." [28]. According to some data [29], at least at the first stage of war, for one killed Muscovite there were 87 Dagestanis, 275 Buryats and 350 Tuvans.

Discrimination of religious and national minorities in the temporally occupied Crimea. There is a disturbing situation regarding ethnic and religious affairs in the temporary occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) which degraded and intensified after the outset of the full-fledged Russian invasion of Ukraine in 24 February 2022.

The situation with the Crimean Diocese of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) remains tense. Since 2019, the Crimean Diocese has been under permanent risk of eviction from the St. Prince Volodymyr and St. Princess Olga Cathedral of Sacred Equal Apostles (the main OCU cathedral in Crimea) in Simferopol due to unlawful decision of the Russian occupation administration. This eviction is equivalent to the total destruction of the religious minority group of the OCU in Crimea. On October 28, 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted Resolution № 1213 regarding the transfer of this cathedral from the property of the ARC to the state property of Ukraine. It is assumed that the cathedral will be transferred to the free use of the Crimean Diocese of the OCU, and after the de-occupation of the peninsula it will return to the property of the OCU. Russia continues the practice of persecution for alleged “unlawful missionary activity” those religious communities that refuse to obey to centralised organisations loyal to or controlled by occupation administration.

In 2022, the Russian occupation authorities announced their intention to create a recreation area on the territory of the Sauskan Muslim cemetery in the town of Bakhchisaray, which is located near the Khan's palace and is considered one of the oldest Muslim cemeteries in the region. Such a decision caused indignation on the part of representatives of the Crimean Tatar community and poses a threat to the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatar people on the territory of the Peninsula. Russia continues the arbitrary destruction of the Khan's Palace in Bakhchisaray – the most significant object of the architectural heritage of the indigenous Crimean Tatar people, which is a component of the memorial object “The historical surroundings of Crimean Khans’ capital in Bakhchisaray”, included in the UNESCO Tentative List. It is known that the Russian authorities destroyed the Golden Cabinet of Kirim Gerai Khan, dismantling the roof and stained-glass windows, and turning this monument into a newly constructed object with elements of historicity. These construction works are taking place as part of the so-called “restoration works” that began in 2017. In 2021, UNESCO published a report in which it was noted that Russian restoration of the Bakhchisaray Palace of the Crimean Khans is distortive.

The Russian occupation authorities continue to persecute Jehovah's Witnesses, banned in Russia as an extremist organisation in 2017 without any convincing legal reasons. Since then, followers of this belief, including those residing in occupied Crimea, have been criminally persecuted for their beliefs. In 2022, at least 12 believers of Jehovah's Witnesses were searched. In April, the so called “Armiansk City Court” and “Yalta City Court” started trials for “organization and financing of extremist activities” against 7 believers of Jehovah's Witnesses. In February 2022, the so called “Kerch City Court” sentenced Mr. A. Shablyi to 2 years of conditional imprisonment with a probationary period of 3 years on the charge of participation in the religious organization "Jehovah's Witnesses". On October 6, 2022, the so called

“Nakhimov District Court of Sevastopol” sent Mr. Ye. Zhukov, Mr. V. Maladyk, and Mr. V. Sakada, parishioners of the religious organization “Jehovah's Witnesses”, to the general regime penal colony. All three were sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment, with restriction of movement for a period of 1 year after completing the sentence, and a 7-year ban on publications in the mass media and on the Internet.

Residents of the occupied Crimea, in particular those belonging to national minorities and indigenous peoples of Ukraine, continue to be drafted into the Russian army in the process of military conscription and partial mobilization. As part of the Russian army, they are used in hostilities against Ukraine. It is known that in the Crimea, following V. Putin's announcement of partial mobilization in Russia, Crimean Tatar people were handed at least 1,500 draft notices. Such actions are a direct violation of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and other norms of international humanitarian law.

Crimean Tatars continue to be systematically persecuted and oppressed by the Russian occupation authorities. According to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, during the first 9 months of 2022 there were recorded 108 detentions (83 of which involved Crimean Tatars), 25 searches (involved 20 Crimean Tatars), 124 interrogations (involved 84 Crimean Tatars), 138 arrests (involved 104 Crimean Tatars), 35 fines (involved 16 Crimean Tatars); 11 persons were detained on the grounds of their alleged association with Muslim religious organizations, mainly “Hizb ut-Tahrir Al Islami”. The punishment prescribes up to 20 years in prison while, in most cases, the only “evidence” in alleged terrorist activities is Muslim literature or records of talks on religious or social topics; 13 persons were detained on the grounds of their alleged association with “Crimean Tatar Noman Çelebicihan Battalion”, organization banned by the Russian Supreme Court and recognized as a “terrorist” on June 1, 2022.

In 2016, the Russian Supreme Court recognized the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people as an extremist organization, while Russia is obliged to cancel the ban on the activities of the Mejlis and its recognition as an extremist organization in accordance with the Decision of the UN International Court of Justice dated April 19, 2017. Its leaders, Mr. Refat Chubarov and Mr. Mustafa Dzhemilev, are banned from entering Crimea, and court cases have been initiated against them. R. Chubarov was convicted in absentia and sentenced to 6 years in prison and a fine of 200,000 rubles for “organizing mass disturbances” near the building of the Supreme Council of the ARC in February 2014. On April 22, 2022, the so-called “Armiansk City Court” announced the verdict in the case against M. Dzhemilev, finding him guilty under Art. 224, Part 1 of Art. 222 and Part 3 of Art. 322 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. On May 26, 2022, the appellate instance of the so-called “Supreme Court of Crimea” changed the verdict against M. Dzhemilev in absentia, sentencing him to 3 years of imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 rubles.

All this testifies to the use by the occupying Russian regime of various forms of discrimination, racism, chauvinism and intolerance towards ethnic and religious minorities living in the temporarily occupied Crimea. At the same time, this is a malicious violation of international humanitarian law.

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