

The Deportation and Fate of the Crimean Tatars

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The mass expulsion of populations based upon ethnicity has marked much of the 20th century. Most recently the ethnic cleansing of Kosova by Yugoslavia captured headlines around the world. For much of the previous decade the plight of the Bosnian Muslims, subjected to similar measures, held the world's attention. These recent events are only the most recent manifestations of an old phenomenon. The Muslim nationalities of Eastern Europe have been victims of numerous ethnic cleansing campaigns since the late 18th century. Among those nationalities expelled en masse during the 19th century from their homelands were the Bulgarian Muslims, Circassians, and Abkhazians. The Imperial Russian government was involved in all these mass expulsions.^[1] In the 20th century, the government of the Soviet Union perfected the crime of ethnic cleansing. During World War II, the Stalin regime used the resources of a highly organized state with a modern rail system to rapidly exile entire nations from their ancestral homelands. The Soviet government targeted the Muslim nationalities of the Caucasus and Crimea for deportation in their entirety. The Soviet political police, NKVD (Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs) exiled the Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks to Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Siberia, and other remote areas of the USSR in 1943 and 1944. These brutal forced relocations to desolate areas with poor material conditions resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths.^[2]

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Most of the 20,000 Crimean Tatars in German military units, however, retreated to Germany in May 1944. The majority of Crimean Tatar young men remaining in the USSR were Red Army soldiers fighting against the Germans. Most of the Crimean Tatar population remaining in the Crimea in May 1944 were women and children.^[19] The Soviet government did not merely send suspected German collaborators and their families into exile. Instead it deported innocent women, children, invalids, Red Army veterans, Communist Party members and Komsomolists without exception. In March 1949 the special settlements contained 8,995 former Red Army soldiers of Crimean Tatar nationality.^[20] These veterans included 534 officers, 1,392 sergeants, and 7,079 rank and file soldiers.^[21] Also among the Crimean Tatar special settlers were 742 Communist Party members and 1,225 Komsomolists.^[22] The charges of treason against the Crimean Tatar nation were thus spurious. A fact recognized by the Soviet government in 1967.

The real reason for the deportation of the Crimean Tatars appears to be related to Soviet foreign policy objectives in the Middle East.^[23] The Stalin regime had designs on Turkish

territory after WWII. Moscow desired to obtain the Turkish provinces of Kars and Adharan. It also wanted to establish military bases in the Dardenelle Straits. In March 1945, Molotov informed the Turkish ambassador to Moscow that the Soviet Union was not going to renew the 1925 Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Neutrality. On 7 July 1945, Molotov formally requested that Turkey allow Soviet naval bases in the Straits and cede Kars and Ardahan.[24] Stalin reiterated this request at both the Yalta and Potsdam summits.[25] On 20 May 1945, the USSR demanded that Turkey acquiesce to Soviet desires on these matters.[26] At this time the USSR began to put military and diplomatic pressure on Turkey to meet its demands. Part of this campaign involved a massive anti-Turkish propaganda effort among Armenians and Georgians in the Caucasus. Soviet actions aimed at forcing Turkey to meet its demands continued until September 1946. They ended when President Truman returned the body of the recently deceased Turkish ambassador to the US back to Turkey. Truman sent the ambassador's body back on board the Battleship *Missouri* escorted by the Aircraft Carrier *Franklin D. Roosevelt* and several destroyers.[27] Moscow understood this not so subtle message and ceased its bullying of Ankara.

The Stalin regime deported the Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks in preparation for this anti-Turkish campaign.[28] All of these Muslim nationalities had historical and cultural ties to Turkey. They also all occupied strategic areas of the Soviet Union in relation to Turkey. The Meskhetian Turks inhabited the Georgian-Turkish border, the Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, and Balkars lived near the main highways through the Caucasus, and the Crimean Tatars made their homes near the naval bases and facilities of the Black Sea Fleet. The Stalin regime feared that these nationalities would not be completely loyal to the USSR in the event of a conflict with Turkey. In the minds of Stalin and Beria these ethnic groups represented a potential pro-Turkish fifth column living close to vulnerable Soviet military assets. Thus one of the main reason for the deportation of these groups was to prevent any espionage, sabotage, diversion, or other assistance to Ankara by their members in the event of a Soviet-Turkish conflict. The importance of the Crimean peninsula in such a conflict had already been demonstrated in the Crimean War in the last century. The Soviet leadership believed that military control of the Black Sea depended upon a solidly loyal population in the Crimea. Hence the Stalin regime deemed it necessary to deport the Crimean Tatars with their linguistic, cultural and historical ties to Turkey far away from the region to Uzbekistan and the Urals.

On 18 May 1944, the NKVD began the actual deportation of the Crimean Tatars. Two of the deputy Chiefs of the NKVD, Bogdan Kobulov and Ivan Serov personally oversaw the roundup and entrainment of the condemned nation. The entire operation involved 23,000 officers and soldiers of the NKVD internal troops and 9,000 NKVD-NKGB operatives, 100 "Willey Jeeps," 250 trucks, and 67 train echelons. [29] The NKVD informed each individual household that they were to be deported for betraying the Motherland and made them quickly gather up their personal possessions. The Crimean Tatar families had only 15 to 20 minutes to attempt to gather up the 500 kg allowed by GKO resolution N5859ss. Most did not take anything near 500 kg of belongings with them into exile. The NKVD did not allow some Crimean Tatar families to bring anything with them during the deportation. Many others managed to collect only a few

possessions during this time. The NKVD then drove the Crimean Tatars to the nearest train station and loaded them into box cars. It took three days to load the vast majority of the Crimean Tatar population onto trains and send them east enroute to Uzbekistan. By 8:00 Am 18 May 1944, the NKVD had loaded 90,000 Crimean Tatars onto 25 train echelons.[30] A total of 48,400 of these exiles on 17 echelons had already departed for Uzbekistan.[31] The next day, the NKVD completed transporting 165,515 Crimean Tatars to train stations and sent 136,412 enroute to Uzbekistan.[32] On 20 May 1944, the NKVD completed the exile of the Crimean Tatars. According to their initial count, the NKVD exiled a total of 180,014 Crimean Tatars to special settlements between 18 and 20 May 1944.[33] On 4 July 1944, they revised this figure to 183,155.[34] In addition to these exiles, the NKVD also separated 11,000 young Crimean Tatar men from their families and sent them to perform forced labor.[35] The Red Army conscripted 6,000 of these Crimean Tatars into construction battalions.[36] The remaining 5,000 became part of an 8,000 man special contingent of the labor army requested by the Moscow Coal Trust.[37] In a mere three days, the Soviet government forcibly removed 194,155 Crimean Tatars from the Crimea. The NKVD successfully expelled virtually the entire Crimean Tatar population from its ancestral homeland. To this day it remains one of the most rapid and thorough cases of ethnic cleansing in world history.

Day	Taken to Train Stations	Sent Enroute to Uzbekistan
18 May 1944	90,000	48,400
19 May 1944	165,515	136,412
20 May 1944	183,155	183,155

The 5,000 Crimean Tatars sent to work in the Moscow Coal Trust found themselves condemned to hard labor. On 29 May 1944, Deputy Chief of the NKVD, Chernyshov reported to Beria that the Crimean Tatars sent to the Mocsow coal basin had been organized into labor brigades in the labor army.[39] The Soviet government originally created the labor army ostensibly as an alternative to military service for ethnic Germans. In reality the labor army was a collection of work camps and brigades differing little from the Gulag camps. The Stalinregime forcibly mobilized Soviet Germans and other national minorities into these militarized labor detachments during the course of World War II. The Soviet leadership condemned the workers in the labor army to strictly supervised forced labor without any charges or trials. The labor army worked under strict NKVD discipline and surveillance.[40] Special boards of the NKVD reviewed all

cases involving discipline violations.[41] The punishment for refusal to work was 10 years in a corrective labor camp.[42] Desertion was punishable by death. [43] The Crimean Tatars in the labor army working in the Moscow coal basin endured long hours of hard work under difficult conditions. The NKVD also organized the Crimean Tatars later sent to the Tula coal basin into labor army detachments.[44] By October 1945, there remained only 1,188 of the original 5,000 Crimean Tatars sent to the Moscow coal basin.[45] Another 1,650 Crimean Tatars in the labor army worked in the Tula coal basin on this date.[46] On 20 June 1946, there were 1,334 Crimean Tatars in labor army detachments in the Moscow coal basin and 2,532 in the Tula coal basin.[47] During 1947 and 1948, the Soviet government disbanded the labor army and reclassified its members as special settlers.[48] Because of the paucity of published archival data is impossible to say exactly how many Crimean Tatars perished in the labor army. The anecdotal evidence suggest that these losses ranged in the thousands.

The NKVD herded the Crimean Tatars bound for special settlements into box cars at an average of 50 people per car along with their possessions.[49] These train carriages were not designed for carrying human passengers. With the exception of a hole to serve as a primitive toilet, the carriages were identical to the freight cars used to transport cattle. The crowded and unsanitary conditions of these cars led to many cases of typhus. Often these cases proved fatal. The train echelons periodically stopped at train stations to remove the sick and dead. Most of the dead were children and the elderly. In Chkalov Oblast 59 train echelons with 3,252 wagons and 163,632 Crimean Tatar deportees passed through the Iletsk train station between 23 May and 4 June 1944.[50] At this station alone, the NKVD removed 4 sick and 14 dead Crimean Tatars during this eleven day period.[51] The NKVD recorded a total of 191 Crimean Tatars dying enroute to Uzbekistan.[52] This number is certainly an undercount. On 6 June 1944, the NKVD reported that 176,746 of the 183,155 exiled Crimean Tatars had arrived in special settlements.[53] Thus 6,409 Crimean Tatars were missing. By the end of July the NKVD records showed 341 more Crimean Tatar arrivals in Uzbekistan for a loss of 6,068.[54] The NKVD also recorded the arrival of 9,177 Crimean Tatars in the Mari ASSR in July 1944.[55] It is clear from the numbers involved that these arrivals had already been counted in the 6 June 1944 tally. If they are added to it the total number of arrivals reaches 185,923 a number greater than the total number of deportees. The Crimean Tatars in the Mari ASSR thus had to be transported from

one of the other exile destinations. Between 18 May and 6 June 1944, more than 6,000 Crimean Tatars permanently disappeared. Some of these can be attributed to escapes, but the vast majority of them must be assumed to have perished. Other scholars give even higher estimates of the deaths in transit. Brian Williams places the number of deaths of Crimean Tatars enroute to the special settlements at 7,000.[56] Michael Rywkin places it at 7,900.[57] The long weeks spent on the slow moving trains were only the beginning of a long nightmare for the Crimean Tatars.

The Stalin regime deported the Crimean Tatars to special settlements. The Soviet government created the special settlement regime during the collectivization of agriculture during 1929-1931. Gulag chief Matvei Berman conceived the special settlements as an economical way to confine the massive waves of deported kulaks and exploit their labor.[58] The OGPU (Unified State Political Administration, predecessor to the NKVD) established the special settlements as isolated villages surrounded by guard posts, check points, road blocks, and even barbed wire.[59] The Soviet security organs kept the special settlements under close surveillance and maintained a strict regimen over the settlers. They enforced their control over the special settlements through draconian means. They required a representative of each household to register with them every ten days.[60] Every month each individual exile also had to register separately with the security organs. [61] During World War II, the Soviet government deported numerous nationalities to the special settlements. In 1941 the NKVD deported the Soviet Germans and Finns, in 1943 the Karachays and Kalmyks, and in 1944 the Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks. The Soviet government imposed a series of repressive legislative restrictions upon the special settlers during the 1940s.

The Stalin regime deprived the special settlers of their constitutional right to native language education and publications. The SNK passed resolution no. 13287 rs on 20 June 1944 mandating that Karachay, Chechen, Ingush, Balkar, and Crimean Tatar children receive their primary education in Russian.[62] This resolution allowed Crimean Tatars to receive middle and higher education in Uzbek or Russian, but not their mother tongue. The Soviet government also allowed no official Crimean Tatar language publications between 1944 and 1957. Despite this loss of Crimean Tatar language schools and media, the deported nation managed to maintain its distinct cultural identity in exile.

The Soviet government also imposed strict restrictions on the mobility and activities of the special settlers. The SNK passed resolution 35 on "The Rights of Those Settled in Special Settlements" on 8 January 1945.[63] This resolution required the settlers to engage in useful labor and instructed the NKVD and local authorities to organize them to work in agriculture, industry and construction. This resolution also prohibited the special settlers from leaving the

boundaries of the settlements without NKVD permission. Failure to obtain this permission was punishable as a criminal act. The resolution stipulated that each family head to report all births, deaths, escapes, and treasonous acts within their family to the NKVD within three days. It also required all special settlers to obey all NKVD orders. Finally, it gave the NKVD the power to administer punishments up to five days in jail and a fine of a 100 rubles for violations of the special settlement regime. This regime became increasingly oppressive throughout the late 1940s. On 24 November 1948, the Council of Ministers issued resolution N436-1726ss.[64] This decree made refusal to work by a special settler punishable by eight years in a corrective labor camp. On 26 November 1948, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet issued an even harsher decree regarding the special settlements.[65] This decree declared that the exile of the Crimean Tatars and other deported nationalities was permanent. In order to enforce this eternal exile, the decree established a 20 year sentence in a hard labor camp for leaving the settlement without MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs, the successor of the NKVD) permission. The decree mandated that special boards of the MVD investigate all unauthorized absences and refusals to work by special settlers within 10 days. It also subjected free citizens to five years imprisonment for assisting fugitives from the special settlements. The Stalin regime administered the special settlements as open air labor camps. These penal settlements combined internal exile, confinement to restricted areas, and forced labor.

The day after completing the deportation of the Crimean Tatars (21 May 1944), the GKO passed resolution 5937ss.[66] This resolution diverted 31,551 of the 183,155 Crimean Tatars destined for special settlements in Uzbekistan to the Mari ASSR and Gorky, Ivanovo, Kostroma, Molotov, and Sverdlovsk oblasts in the RSFSR.[67] Originally 8,597 of these exiles were to be sent to the Mari and Udmurt ASSRs.[68] On 21 May 1944, Beria's deputy Chernyshov informed him that the UNKVD of Gorky Oblast had finished preparations to accept 5,000 Crimean Tatar exiles.[69] The UNKVD of the Mari ASSR was prepared to receive 5,500, Ivanovo Oblast 3,000, and Yaroslavl Oblast 1,000. [70] Stalin issued a GKO resolution in May 1944 to resettle 10,000 Crimean Tatar families to the Mari ASSR, Molotov, Gorky, and Sverdlovsk oblasts.[71] This resolution was based upon a decision by Beria to use Crimean Tatars special settlers in the paper and cellulose industries and lumber preparation in these territories. By 6 June 1944, there were 15,969 Crimean Tatar special settlers in Molotov, Gorky, and Sverdlovsk oblasts.[72] Not until July, however, did Crimean Tatars arrive in the Mari ASSR. A report by Deputy Chief of the Mari ASSR NKVD Svintsov to Chief of the Special Settlements Kuzetsov on 24 August 1944 notes the number of these new arrivals.[73] The influx of Crimean Tatars into the Mari ASSR during July 1944 totaled 9,177 people (2,201 families). More than 80% of these arrivals were

women and children. Only 1,481 were adult men while 3,329 were women and 4,367 were children under 16. The Soviet government employed most of the Crimean Tatar special settlers sent to the Urals in the lumber and paper industries. The conditions for the Crimean Tatars in the Urals were far from ideal.

The conditions for Crimean Tatar in special settlements attached to the lumber industry in Kostroma Oblast proved to be especially difficult. On 10 October 1944, 6,387 Crimean Tatar special settlers lived in Kostroma Oblast. Those capable of labor worked in the lumber and paper industries.[74] In Manturov raion (776 Crimean Tatar exiles) and Kologriv raion (1,893 Crimean Tatar exiles) conditions were extremely substandard.[75] Material conditions for the Crimean Tatars in Kologriv raion were especially unhealthy. A report from Deputy Chief of the Special Settlements NKVD, Col. G. B. Malkov to Deputy Chief of the NKVD USSR V.V. Chernyshov of 10 October 1944 describes these conditions.

In Kologriv raion preparations for winter barracks move slowly. Due to an absence of glass window frames can not be repaired. Clothes and shoes for resettlers have not been provisioned. Special settlers work in the forest bare foot. The supplies to special settlers of bread are interrupted for two to three days at a time. From 16 to 20 August we gave absolutely no bread to the Fonfonova section of the Pongov lumber enterprise. Families of special settlers receive food irregularly, the quality of this food is unsatisfactory, the bread given is rationed at 150 grams a person. Wages were not paid for July this year. Medical service is unsatisfactory. Among the special settlers in the lumber sections of Fofanova, Markovlug and Shirokii Luga have spread diseases like dysentery, mange, and eczema. [76]

Malnutrition, disease, and exposure took a high toll among the Crimean Tatars in the Urals. By 1953, the number of Crimean Tatars in Kostroma Oblast had declined to 2,243.[77] Much of this loss was due to an unnaturally high mortality rate.

The vast majority of exiled Crimean Tatars ended up in special settlements in Uzbekistan. On 6 June 1944, the NKVD counted a total of 151,083 Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan. [78] By the end of July, a total of 151,424 Crimean Tatars (35,750 families) had arrived in Uzbekistan.[79] Most of these arrivals were women and children (see table). The majority of adult Crimean Tatar men had not yet been discharged from the Red Army. They continued to fight for the USSR against Germany while the Soviet government sent their families into exile. The NKVD organized the special settlements in Uzbekistan prior to the arrival of the Crimean Tatar exiles. Kobulov presented Beria with a plan to settle the deported Crimean Tatars in special settlements throughout Uzbekistan on 20 May 1944.[80] This plan called for confining the exiled Crimean Tatars to 350 settlements guarded by 97 special commands. Originally the Soviet government assigned 94,500 Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan to kolхозes, 36,300 to sovхозes, and 23,200 to

industrial enterprises. The Crimean Tatars provided an influx of cheap labor into Uzbekistan. These exiles worked in the vast cotton fields of Uzbekistan as well as in mines, industrial construction projects, and factories. The Crimean Tatars contributed significantly to the economic development of Uzbekistan.

Year	Families	Men	Women	Children	Total
1944	37,750	---	---	---	151,424
1945	36,564	21,619	47,537	65,586	137,742
1946	34,946	21,332	42,071	56,726	120,129

The Crimean Tatars found the first years of exile in Uzbekistan extremely difficult. The Uzbeks met the exiled Crimean Tatars with hostility. NKVD agitators publicly slandered the Crimean Tatars as traitors and Nazi collaborators in Uzbekistan prior to their arrival.[82] This NKVD propaganda stressed Crimean Tatar collaboration with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union while Uzbeks fought in the Red Army. Not only did the Uzbeks refuse to assist the dislocated Crimean Tatars, but in some cases they stoned them. The hostility of the Uzbeks dissipated after they learned the Crimean Tatars were fellow Muslims.[83] Far from being Nazi collaborators who believed Central Asians were *untermenschen* (subhumans), the Crimean Tatars shared the same religious beliefs and traditions as the Uzbeks. The initial hostility of the Uzbeks, however, meant that the Crimean Tatars had to face the burdens of exile without any local assistance during 1944 and 1945.

The NKVD assigned the Crimean Tatar special settlers in Uzbekistan to work in factories, mines, cotton fields, and industrial construction. Often they worked 12 hour days under dangerous and unhealthy conditions.[84] Life was especially difficult for the Crimean Tatar workers and their families assigned to the construction of the Farkhad and Nizhnebossi hydroelectric stations.[85] Other places with difficult living conditions for the Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan included the Koitash mine, Haryn and Dal'verzin sovhozes, and Shakhrizyb and Kharvat kholhozes.[86] The local authorities were unable to provide sufficient food and clothing to the exiled Crimean Tatars assigned to these areas. The Soviet government also provided little in the way of adequate housing for the Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan. The majority of the exiles were forced to live in hastily constructed barracks, mud huts, and earthen dugout. By September 1944, conditions at the Farkhad construction site were intolerable to even the local authorities. On 30 September 1944, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan and the Uzbek NKVD passed resolution No. 1228-1593 to improve the conditions of the Crimean Tatars at Farkhad.[87] The Uzbek leadership relocated 2,472 Crimean Tatars (772 families) working and living at Farkhad to cotton kolhozes in Tadzhikistan in accordance with

this decree.[88] The difficult work, strange climate, and lack of proper clothing, housing and food in Uzbekistan had a horrible effect upon the Crimean Tatars. It weakened their physical constitutions and made them susceptible to a host of infectious diseases common to Central Asia.

The poor material and climatic conditions of Uzbekistan took a heavy toll on the health of the Crimean Tatar exiles. Lack of clean water and other unhygienic conditions resulted in mass outbreaks of diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, and dysentery. The Crimean Tatars had little immunity to these diseases. Absence of proper medical care and widespread malnutrition greatly exacerbated the death toll from these diseases. In late July 1944, Chernyshov informed Beria that malaria and yellow fever epidemics had broken out among the Crimean Tatar special settlers in Uzbekistan.[89] Namagan, Samarkand, and Bukhara oblasts suffered especially high rates of infection.[90] Around 40% of the 13,097 Crimean Tatars in Namagan Oblast had either malaria or yellow fever in July 1944.[91] In addition to infectious diseases, the Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan also suffered from dystrophy and other ailments stemming from malnutrition. Exile to Uzbekistan meant hunger, disease, and death for the Crimean Tatars.

The death toll of the Crimean Tatars in special settlements in Uzbekistan was extremely high. According to the NKVD archives between May 1944 and 1 January 1945, 13,592 Crimean Tatars died in Uzbekistan.[92] This figure represents 9.1% of the Crimean Tatars exiled to Uzbekistan and 7.4% of all Crimean Tatars sent to special settlements. Between 1 January 1945 and 1 January 1946, NKVD figures record another 13,183 Crimean Tatars perishing in Uzbek special settlements.[93] This represents another 8.7% of the Crimean Tatars originally sent to Uzbekistan and 7.1% of all Crimean Tatars deported to special settlements. In a year and a half, 17.8% of the Crimean Tatars exiled to Uzbekistan perished. These deaths constituted 14.5% of all Crimean Tatars initially sent to special settlements. Almost half of these deaths occurred among children under 16 and less than a quarter were among adult men. Out of 13,183 recorded deaths in 1945, 6,096 were children, 4,525 women, and only 2,562 men.[94] The deserts of Uzbekistan decimated the Crimean Tatar population during the first year of exile.

Attempting to establish the total number of Crimean Tatar deaths as a result of the exile (*Surgun*) is difficult. The available figures are both incomplete and often count Crimean Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgarians along with the Crimean Tatars. A report from Col. V. Shain on the work of the MVD Section on Special Settlers dated April 1953 provides some important figures on special settler mortality.[95] This report states that between arriving in the special settlements and 1 July 1948, the recorded number of Crimean Tatar, Greek, Armenian and Bulgarian deaths is 44,887, 19.6% of those deported. This document provides no national division of this number into Crimean Tatars, Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgarians. Another report

gives the total number of Crimean exiles to perish in special settlements from 1945 to 1950 as 32,107.[96] Again this document provides no national break down of these deaths.

Year	Deaths	Births
1945	15,997	1,099
1946	4,997	961
1947	2,937	1,753
1948	3,918	1,753
1949	2,120	3,586
1950	2,138	4,671
Total	32,107	13,823

The year 1945, however, allows a comparison of this information with that reports on the deaths of Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan. A total of 15,997 special settlers deported from the Crimea perished in 1945 of which 13,183 (82.4%) were Crimean Tatars in Uzbekistan. Based upon this information it can safely be assumed that more than 40,000 Crimean Tatars died in special settlements before 1951. This number does not include the Crimean Tatars that perished enroute to the settlements or those who died in the labor army. Adjusting for natural deaths, Michael Rywkin calculates that 42,000 Crimean Tatars perished as a result of the deportations by May 1949[98] . Others place the number considerably higher. Many Crimean Tatar activists cite 100,000 or 46% of the 1939 Crimean Tatar population.[99] At a bare minimum, Stalin's deportations, exile, and forced labor mobilization killed more than 20% of the Crimean Tatar population in less than five years. On this basis alone it qualifies as one of the worst cases of ethnically motivated mass murder in the 20th century.

The huge loss of lives among the Crimean Tatars due to the deportations inevitably raises the question of genocide. The United Nations Treaty on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide defines genocide in Article II. This article reads "In the present convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent it to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group".[100] These acts include "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part." [101] It is clear that Stalin's deportation of the Crimean Tatars qualifies as genocide under this definition. The Soviet government deliberately deported the Crimean Tatars to areas with inadequate housing, food, clothing, and medicine. It is thus not surprising that a large percentage of the Crimean Tatars perished in exile from causes directly related to these deficiencies.

Not only does the deportation and fate of the Crimean Tatars meet the UN's definition of genocide, but the Russian government has recognized it as such. On 14 November 1989, the Supreme Soviet issued " On Recognizing the Illegal and Criminal Repressive Acts against Peoples Subjected to Forcible Resettlement and Ensuring their Rights." This decree officially recognized 11 "Repressed Peoples" including the Crimean Tatars.

The exile in the years of the Second World War from their homelands of the Balkars, Ingush, Kalmyks, Karachays, Crimean Tatars, Germans, Meskhetian Turks, and Chechens present themselves as barbaric acts of the Stalin regime. Political forced resettlement affected the fate of Koreans, Greeks, Kurds, and other peoples. [102]

On 26 April 1991, the RSFSR promulgated a law entitled "On Rehabilitating the Repressed Peoples." This act admitted that Stalin's deportation of the "Repressed Peoples" to special settlements constituted genocide.

Repressed peoples are regarded as those (nations, nationalities or ethnic groups and other historically formed cultural-ethnic communities of people, for example, Cossacks) against whom was conducted at a state level a policy of slander and genocide, accompanied by forced resettlement, abolition of national-state formations, redrawing of national-territorial borders and establishment of a regime of terror and violence in special settlements. [103]

Signed by Boris Yeltsin, this law was the first official recognition by the Russian government that Stalin's actions towards the Crimean Tatars and others was genocide.

The Crimean Tatars remained confined to the special settlements until Khrushchev's destalinization campaign. Part of this campaign entailed the dismantlement of the special settlement regime. On 5 July 1954, the SNK released all children under 16 from the settlements.[104] Almost two years later, on 20 April 1956, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet freed all Crimean Tatars remaining in the special settlements.[105] This decree freed the Crimean Tatars from MVD discipline and surveillance. It also forbade them from returning to the Crimea or receiving compensation for property lost due to the deportations. Despite removing the special settlement restrictions from the Crimean Tatars, the Soviet government still considered them guilty of treason. The Crimean Tatars actively petitioned and lobbied Moscow for rehabilitation from 1957 on.[106] This campaign included mass petitions, letters, and appeals to the Soviet leadership. Finally, on 21 July 1967, a delegation of Crimean Tatars met with key members of the Soviet politburo and received a favorable hearing of their grievances.[107] In response to this meeting the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet officially rescinded the charges of treason against the Crimean Tatars on 5 September 1967[108]. This resolution, however, reiterated the prohibition on returning to the Crimea. Indeed it referred to "citizens of Tatar nationality who had been living in the Crimea" rather than Crimean Tatars. Officially from this time forward, the Soviet government did not distinguish between Crimean Tatars and the much larger Volga Tatar population. Despite the similarity in the names of these two groups, they are distinct and separate nationalities. This official merger of the Crimean and Volga Tatars aimed at denying the existence of a Crimean Tatar nationality with the right to live in the Crimea. The limited rehabilitation of the 50s and 60s did not satisfy the exiled Crimean Tatars. During the late 1960s, 70s, and 80s they continued to struggle to return to their homeland.

This struggle intensified after the 1967 decree. It took the forms of attempts to illegally return to the Crimea, lobbying the Soviet leadership, and public demonstrations. On 21 April 1968, Crimean Tatars in Chirchik, Uzbekistan staged a major demonstration to celebrate Lenin's birthday and demand repatriation to the Crimea. Soviet authorities responded violently and dispersed this gathering.[109] In the wake of this demonstration, the Crimean Tatars began to address their appeals not only to Moscow, but abroad. Crimean Tatar leaders like other human and national rights activists in the USSR based their appeals on Soviet and international law. Their letters and petitions highlighted the violation of Leninist nationality policies and socialist legality entailed by their continued exile. Rather than oppose the Soviet system, the Crimean Tatars insisted that its leadership obey its own laws.[110] Despite this valiant struggle for repatriation, the Crimean Tatars made little progress towards their primary goal prior to 1989.

After 14 November 1989 Supreme Soviet decree, "On Recognizing the Illegal and Criminal Repressive Acts against Peoples Subjected to Forcible Resettlement and Ensuring their Rights" became known to the Crimean Tatars, they began to return to the Crimea in large numbers.[111] Thousands upon thousands of Crimean Tatar families left Uzbekistan to live in the land of their ancestors. In a little over four years nearly 250,000 or almost half of all Crimean Tatars in the former Soviet Union managed to return to the Crimea.[112] The repatriation and reintegration of the Crimean Tatars is still an ongoing process. Their struggle for a full restoration of their national rights and restitution is far from over. They have, however, succeeded far beyond the expectations of almost all outside observers.

End Notes

[1] See Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922*, (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1995).

[2] See Svetlana Alieva ed., *Tak eto bylo: Natsional'nye repressii v SSSR, 1919-1952 gody* (Moscow: Russian International Cultural Fund, 1993) and N.F. Bugai ed., *Iosif Stalin - Lavrentiiu Berii: "Ikh nado deportirovat": dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* (hereafter *Ikh nado deportirovat'*) (Moscow: Druzhba narodov, 1992) for most of the relevant documents on these deportations from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Council of Peoples Commissars, NKVD, and MVD.

[3] Open Society Institute, "Repatriation of the Crimean Tatars," *Forced Migration Monitor*, no. 13, September 1996 reproduced on the Crimean Tatar Home Page.
<http://www.euronet.nl/users/sota/krimtatar.html>

[4] N.F. Bugai, *L. Beria - I. Stalinu: "Soglasno vashemu ukazaniiu..."*, (hereafter *Soglasno*) (Moscow: "AIRO XX," 1995), p. 142.

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