

MIKHAIL CHERNYAEV'S ROLE IN THE CONQUEST OF CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract:

This article discusses General Mikhail Chernyaev's activities during the Russian Empire's conquest of the Central Asian khanates, his military achievements, and their impact on the region's political landscape. In particular, the analysis focuses on his capture of Tashkent in 1865, his campaigns against the Khanate of Kokand, and his role in the establishment of the Turkestan Governor-Generalship. Additionally, the reasons and outcomes of Russia's expansion into Central Asia, the khanates' inability to resist, and the oppression and economic pressure on the local population are highlighted.

Keywords: Mikhail Chernyaev, the conquest of Tashkent, the Russian Empire, Central Asian khanates, the Khanate of Kokand, Turkestan Governor-Generalship, colonialism, oppression, local population.

The second half of the 19th century marked a period of significant change in Central Asia, as this era was crucial for the geopolitical interests of the Russian Empire. The strategy for Russia's conquest of Central Asia was implemented in several stages. General Mikhail Chernyaev was one of the key figures leading these efforts. Chernyaev was not only a military leader but also played a pivotal role in carrying out Russia's southern and eastern policies during this period. His military activities and colonial campaigns in Central Asia played an important role in both the history of Central Asia and the expansion of the Russian Empire. Mikhail Grigoryevich Chernyaev was born on October 24, 1828, in a noble family in the Vladimir region of the Russian Empire.¹ From a young age, he showed an interest in military service and successfully graduated from the Military Academy in St. Petersburg in 1847. Chernyaev's military career and strategic potential became evident during the Crimean War (1853-1856), where

¹ Сергеевкова, В. В. (2013). Белорусская составляющая биографии российского генерала Михаила Григорьевича Черняева.



he actively participated in successful Russian army offensives and was awarded for several acts of bravery.²

In 1858, he received the rank of major general and soon became a key figure in achieving Russia's geopolitical goals.³ His activity in Central Asia began in 1864 when he was assigned the task of leading military operations in the Turkestan region. In 1865, Chernyaev achieved his greatest military victory — the capture of Tashkent.⁴ This military campaign marked a significant turning point in the history of Central Asia and initiated the process of transforming the region into a colony of the Russian Empire. Chernyaev's capture of Tashkent demonstrated his military prowess and determination. Despite having a relatively small force, he strategically planned and launched an attack on the city. Tashkent's population exceeded 200,000, and its defenses were strong.⁵ Chernyaev captured the city with an army of about 2,000 soldiers, which is considered an extraordinary event in military history. Chernyaev's personality was known for being firm and resolute, earning him a reputation for strictness in the military sphere. However, he was not only a military strategist but also became known for his sometimes-ruthless tactics. After capturing Tashkent, he encountered disagreements with the Russian government. His bold and independent decisions regarding the annexation of Tashkent to the Russian Empire were criticized by government officials. As a result of these disagreements, Chernyaev was dismissed from his position in 1866.

Chernyaev also played an important role in Russia's domestic politics. He continued to serve in the Russian army and later held military administrative positions in various regions of Belarus and Ukraine.⁶ In 1875, he supported Slavophile policies and led efforts to support Slavs in the Balkan Peninsula, particularly assisting the Serbs in the Serbian-Turkish War. Chernyaev is remembered not only as a military figure but also as someone who actively contributed to the colonial policies of the Russian Empire. He is recognized as

² Кирияк, А. А., & Благодатских, И. М. (2021). ГЕНЕРАЛ МГ ЧЕРНЯЕВ В В ВОЕННОЙ И ОБЩЕСТВЕННОЙ ИСТОРИИ РОССИИ ВТОРОЙ ПОЛОВИНЫ XIX В. In Материалы Итоговой (ежегодной) научной студенческой конференции Приднестровского государственного университета им. ТГ Шевченко по итогам НИР в 2020 году.—Тирасполь (р. 148).

³ Брежнева, С. Н. (2018). Непримиимые генералы-НА Крыжановский и МГ Черняев: история конфликта. In Девятые Большаковские чтения. Оренбургский край как историко-культурный феномен (pp. 204-207).

⁴ Симакова, Н. В. (2020). «Ташкентский лев», «Ермак XIX века»—Михаил Григорьевич Черняев.

⁵ Сигалов, С. А. (2016). Черняевы-казачий род из Кособродки. In Гороховские чтения (pp. 587-591).

⁶ Shemyakin, A. L. (2006). Генерал МГ Черняев и Сербская война. Tokovi istorije, (1-2), 7-28.



one of the generals who worked to strengthen Russia's southern borders and expand its influence in Central Asia.

Tsar Alexander II and the Reasons for the Conquest of Central Asia: In the second half of the 19th century, the Russian Empire embarked on a geopolitical expansion. During this period, Alexander II (1855-1881) was on the throne, known as a ruler who implemented numerous political and social reforms in the country. Alexander II aimed to strengthen Russia's international standing by annexing dependent states and neighboring territories into the empire. Central Asia, especially the region known as Turkestan, was one of the areas he considered economically, militarily, and strategically significant. Therefore, the process of conquering Central Asia was intensified during his reign.

Geopolitical Reasons: Russia's interest in Central Asia was primarily based on geopolitical factors. In the 19th century, competition with the British Empire intensified, and a geopolitical struggle, known as "The Great Game," began for control over India and South Asia.⁷ The Russian Empire aimed to approach British India and take control of trade routes through Central Asia. The region's strategic location, close to India and the Persian Gulf, provided Russia with opportunities to expand southward and eastward. Alexander II and his advisors viewed this expansion as part of strengthening Russia's international political status. At the same time, securing Russia's southern borders was also essential.⁸ The Central Asian khanates (Kokand, Bukhara, and Khiva) were weak and mired in internal conflicts, but concerns about their connections with Britain were strong.⁹ By conquering these territories, Russia sought to expand its borderlands and ensure security.

Economic Reasons: The expansion of the Russian Empire into Central Asia was not only linked to military and political interests but also to economic ones. Central Asia was located at the crossroads of trade routes, with international trade in silk, cotton, carpets, and other goods thriving in the region. Cotton was

⁷ Алымкулов, М. С., & Наматов, Н. А. (2021). «БОЛЬШАЯ ИГРА» РОССИЙСКОЙ И БРИТАНСКОЙ ИМПЕРИИ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ. Большая Евразия: развитие, безопасность, сотрудничество, (4-1), 15-17.

⁸ Mavlonov, A., & Mirzohidov, S. (2024). USE OF INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN HISTORY TEACHING METHODOLOGY. Science and innovation, 3(B8), 26-28.

⁹ Фурсов, К. А. (2016). Большая игра: взгляд из Британии. Обзор работ Питера Хоп-кирка.



of great importance to the Russian Empire, especially after disruptions in the supply of American cotton following the American Civil War (1861-1865). Russia sought to diversify its sources of cotton, and Central Asia's territories were vital for cotton cultivation, making this one of the key economic reasons. Additionally, raw material sources were essential for Russia's industrial development, and the natural resources in Central Asia offered economic opportunities for the empire. The region was not only seen as a supplier of raw materials to Russia's industrial centers but also as a new market.

Military Reasons and Russia's Defense Strategy: The expansion of the Russian Empire into Central Asia can also be explained by military reasons. Russia sought to establish solid defense lines along its southern borders. In the mid-19th century, the Russian army and diplomacy aimed to assert control over the Central Asian khanates. Generals like Chernyaev played a key role as chief commanders in the conquest of these khanates, implementing this policy. During the reign of Alexander II, Russia focused heavily on modernizing its army. The battles in Central Asia served as a testing ground for the new methods of the Russian military and as a means to carry out its colonial policy. Additionally, by conquering Central Asia, the Russian Empire aimed to gain strategic advantages in its border regions with other major rivals, including the Ottoman Empire and Persia.

Diplomatic Reasons: During the reign of Alexander II, Russia also sought to strengthen its political influence in Central Asia through diplomatic means. Russian diplomacy aimed to gradually subjugate the Central Asian khanates and neighboring states by establishing trade and diplomatic relations. However, in many cases, agreements with the khanates were insufficient, leading Russia to resort to military force.

The Internal Weakness of Central Asian Khanates: Another crucial factor in the Russian Empire's strategy to conquer Central Asia was the internal weakness of the khanates. There were constant conflicts between the Khanate of Kokand, the Emirate of Bukhara, and the Khanate of Khiva, which prevented them from uniting their internal and external forces. Each khanate was preoccupied with protecting its territorial interests, and their lack of unity hindered effective



resistance against Russia. As a result, Russia was able to defeat these khanates one by one.

Conclusion:

General Mikhail Chernyaev's conquest of the Central Asian khanates dealt a significant blow to the region's independence. The capture of Tashkent and the campaigns against the Khanate of Kokand further strengthened the Russian Empire's colonial policies, making the local population economically and politically dependent. Under Russian rule, the local people faced severe oppression: taxes were increased, land was confiscated, and their rights were restricted. In particular, the transfer of agricultural lands to Russian nobles, the forced cultivation of cotton, and military pressures inflicted great harm on the social and economic life of the local population.

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