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**THE STEPPE'S INFLUENCE: HOW RUSSIAN EMPIRE WAS DRIVEN
TO SEEK KAZAKH ALLIES**

Abstract

This article examines the role of the Kazakh steppe in shaping the Russian Empire's military strategy during its 19th-century expansion into Central Asia. The steppe, with its vast distances, harsh climate, and limited infrastructure, posed unique challenges that forced Russian military theorists and planners to rethink traditional European doctrines of warfare.

Faced with these obstacles, the Russian Empire increasingly relied on collaboration with loyal Kazakh elites, who provided indispensable logistical support, including transportation, guidance, and intelligence. Archival evidence highlights the extent of Kazakh involvement in Russian campaigns, underscoring their active contributions to the imperial war effort. This reliance on local allies was not merely pragmatic but essential for overcoming the geographic and climatic barriers of the steppe and maintaining a sustained imperial presence.

The article argues that the steppe's environmental challenges compelled the Russian Empire to develop innovative logistical strategies and forge critical alliances with Kazakh elites. These partnerships were instrumental in facilitating Russia's advance into Central Asia, reshaping the empire's approach to conquest and administration. The research reinterprets Russian expansion, challenging traditional narratives of unilateral dominance and aligning with critiques of the Military Revolution Thesis. This perspective reveals the adaptive and collaborative dimensions of imperialism, emphasizing that Russia's success in Central Asia depended as much on local cooperation as on military strength.

Keywords: Steppe warfare, Russian Empire, Central Asia, Kazakh elites, military logistics.

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ВЛИЯНИЕ СТЕПИ: КАК РОССИЙСКАЯ ИМПЕРИЯ БЫЛА ВЫНУЖДЕНА ИСКАТЬ СОЮЗНИКОВ СРЕДИ КАЗАХОВ

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается роль казахской степи в формировании военной стратегии Российской империи в период её экспансии в Среднюю Азию в XIX веке. Степь с её огромными расстояниями, суровым климатом и ограниченной инфраструктурой представляла собой уникальные вызовы, которые заставляли российских военных теоретиков пересматривать традиционные европейские доктрины ведения войны.

Перед лицом этих трудностей Российская империя всё больше полагалась на сотрудничество с лояльными казахскими элитами, которые предоставляли незаменимую логистическую поддержку, включая транспорт, проводников и разведывательные данные. Архивные данные подчеркивают степень участия казахов в российских походах, свидетельствуя об их активном вкладе в имперские военные усилия. Эта зависимость от местных союзников была не просто прагматичной, но и жизненно необходимой для преодоления географических и климатических барьеров степи и поддержания постоянного имперского присутствия.

В статье утверждается, что экологические вызовы степи вынудили Российскую империю разрабатывать инновационные логистические стратегии и формировать альянсы с казахскими элитами. Эти сотрудничества сыграли решающую роль в содействии продвижению России в Среднюю Азию, переосмыслив подход империи к завоеванию и управлению. Исследование переосмысливает российскую экспансию, бросая вызов традиционным представлениям о одно-стороннем господстве и соглашаясь с критикой теории военной революции. Данный подход выявляет адаптивные и кооперативные аспекты империализма, подчеркивая, что успех России в Средней Азии зависел как от местного сотрудничества, так и от военной мощи.

Ключевые слова: Степная война, Российская империя, Средняя Азия, казахские элиты, военная логистика.

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ДАЛАНЫҢ ӘСЕРІ: РЕСЕЙ ИМПЕРИЯСЫНЫҢ ҚАЗАҚТАРДАН ОДАҚТАС ІЗДЕУГЕ МӘЖБҮРЛІГІ

Аңдатпа

Мақалада XIX ғасырдағы Орталық Азияға бағытталған экспансия кезеңінде Ресей империя-сының әскери стратегиясын қалыптастыруда қазақ даласының ықпалы талданады. Ұшы-қиыры жоқ кең дала мен қатал климат жағдайлары ресейлік әскери теоретиктерді дәстүрлі еуропалық соғыс жүргізу доктриналарын қайта қарауға мәжбүрледі.

Осындай күрделі жағдайларда Ресей империясы қазақтың лоялды ақсүйек топтарының қолдауына тәуелді бола бастады. Олар логистикалық қамтамасыз етуде маңызды рөл атқарып, жүк жануарларын ұсыну, жол көрсету және барлау қызметін ұйымдастыру сияқты міндеттерді атқарды. Мұрағаттық деректер қазақтардың Ресейдің әскери жорықтарына айтарлықтай үлес қосқанын, олардың империялық соғыс әрекеттеріне айтарлықтай жәрдем бергенін айқын көрсетеді. Бұл жергілікті қазақ руларына арқа сүйеу прагматикалық шешімнен ғана емес, сонымен бірге қазақ даласының географиялық және климаттық кедергілерін еңсеру мен тұрақты империялық ықпалды сақтауға бағытталған стратегиялық қажеттіліктен туындады.

Мақалада даланың экологиялық қиындықтары Ресей империясын инновациялық логистика-лық стратегияларды әзірлеуге және қазақ элиталарымен берік одақ құруға итермелегені көрсетіледі. Бұл өзара әректесу Ресейдің Орталық Азияға ілгерілеуінде шешуші рөл атқарып, империя-ның жаулап алу мен басқару тәсілдерін қайта қарауға негіз болды. Зерттеу дәстүрлі біржақты үстемдік ұғымдарын жоққа шығарып, әскери революция теориясын сын тұрғысынан қайта қарастыруға негізделген. Яғни Ресейдің Орталық Азиядағы жетістігі тек әскери қуатқа ғана емес, жергілікті ынтымақтастыққа да байланысты болғанын көрсетеді. Империализмнің бейімделгіш және кооперативтік қырларын айқындай отырып, мақала Ресей империясының далалық кеңістіктегі жетістіктерінің көпқырлы сипатын ашады.

Кілт сөздер: Далалық соғыс, Ресей империясы, Орталық Азия, қазақ элиталары, әскери логистика.

Алғыс айту. «Зерттеу Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің Ғылым комитеті арқылы қаржыландырған. (грант № AP19676769)» «Ресей империясының қазақ даласы мен Түркістан өлкесіне әскери жорықтарының логистикасы: қазақ қоғамына әсері мен салдары».

Introduction. The military history of 19th-century Imperial Russia is characterized by significant achievements in Europe and notable campaigns in Central Asia. While Russian forces demonstrated technological superiority, advanced tactics, and commendable valor in Europe, their operations in the Central Asian steppes encountered distinctive and formidable challenges. The vast, open expanses of the steppes, combined with harsh climatic conditions and resistance from local Kazakh leaders, created substantial obstacles to both suppressing uprisings and conquering regional powers like the khanates of Khiva and Khoqand. These challenges did not reflect the weakness of the Russian army but rather underscored the complexities of adapting to the steppe's unique environment. Factors such as immense distances, extreme weather, and insufficient infrastructure significantly hindered military expeditions. One example is General V.A. Perovskii's ill-fated 1839 Khiva campaign, which culminated in a retreat due to severe winter conditions and insurmountable logistical difficulties along the vast route from Orenburg to Khiva [1].

The adaptation to steppe warfare emerged as a central concern for Russian military theorists in the 19th century, reflecting the unique challenges posed by the vast, open landscapes of the steppe. Even in mid-19th century, A.I. Maksheev emphasized the lack of a systematic framework for conducting military operations in the steppe, highlighting the inadequacies of both Russian and European military

literature in addressing this specialized form of warfare. He stressed the need for a theory rooted in empirical knowledge derived from practical campaigns rather than abstract theorization. To bridge this gap, Makshev proposed a pragmatic approach, sharing detailed observations and guidelines drawn from firsthand experiences in Central Asian military expeditions. This effort aimed to lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive understanding of steppe warfare, tailored to the region's distinct geographic and operational demands [2, p. 2].

The region's vast geography and extreme climate required a departure from traditional European doctrines, which proved insufficient. Even by 1880, Russian military literature remained deficient in addressing these challenges comprehensively. Existing works on steppe campaigns were often fragmented and incomplete, failing to provide a holistic understanding of the operational demands in such environments. This persistent gap in military scholarship highlights the enduring struggle to formulate practical, region-specific strategies capable of navigating the unique difficulties posed by steppe warfare [3, p. 69].

To overcome these obstacles and conduct successful military campaigns, the Russian forces recognized the vital importance of forging alliances with local populations. Archival evidence reveals that the effectiveness of Russian campaigns in the 19th century often hinged on these partnerships. Confronted with the steppe's geographic and climatic barriers, Russian forces depended heavily on collaboration with Kazakh tribal elites. These leaders provided essential resources, including camels for transportation, and acted as guides with intimate knowledge of the terrain. Moreover, Kazakhs frequently played active roles in military expeditions, further integrating local expertise into the imperial war effort.

In this case, this article argues that the unique geography of the Eurasian steppe compelled the Russian Empire to develop innovative logistical strategies to sustain its military and administrative expansion. Central to these efforts was the collaboration with Kazakh elites, whose strategic cooperation provided essential local resources, geographic knowledge, and logistical support. This partnership enabled the Empire to mitigate the challenges posed by the vast and inhospitable steppe environment, facilitating the establishment of a permanent military presence. The study contends that without the active involvement of the Kazakh elites, Russia's ability to assert control over the steppe and project its influence further into Central Asia would have been significantly limited.

The importance of these alliances invites a reevaluation of Russian campaigns in the steppe. While their military accomplishments are undeniable, they were not solely the result of superior tactics or technology. Instead, they rested on a foundation of logistical ingenuity and the strategic use of local partnerships. Recognizing these, it shifts our understanding of the Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia. It reveals the interplay between military power and socio-political alliances as a defining characteristic of the empire's ability to adapt to the steppe's unique demands.

By framing these campaigns within a broader context, we gain a deeper appreciation for the distinctive factors that shaped Russian imperialism in the 19th century. This perspective underscores that success in the steppe was not a matter of unilateral dominance but the result of collaboration, adaptation, and shared interests between the Russian state and its Kazakh allies. This interpretation aligns with critiques of the Military Revolution Thesis, such as those by William R. Thompson and J.C. Sharman. The thesis, as formulated by Geoffrey Parker, attributes Western imperial success to technological advancements, disciplined standing armies, and robust fiscal-military systems [4]. However, Thompson and Sharman argue for a more comprehensive framework that incorporates local alliances. Thompson critiques the thesis by highlighting its limitations, stating that an exclusive focus on military technology oversimplifies conquest mechanisms. He argues that success often depended on "the interaction among local allies, weaknesses in political structure, and military superiority," providing a more nuanced understanding of imperial expansion [5]. Similarly, Sharman asserts that European imperial ventures succeeded not through overwhelming force but through strategic accommodations with local powers. He writes: "The essentially modest European early modern successes rest on the importance of local allies, deference to non-Western great powers, and the fit between what Europeans wanted and what locals were prepared to give" [6, p. 51].

These critiques resonate with Russia's campaigns in the steppe, emphasizing collaboration and

adaptability. Russian forces, like their Western counterparts, did not operate in isolation. Their successes relied on their ability to navigate the steppe's harsh terrain, secure partnerships with local elites, and exploit vulnerabilities within indigenous political structures. This integrated approach challenges traditional conquest narratives, shifting the focus from unilateral military dominance to the broader socio-political ecosystems that underpinned imperial expansion.

Materials and methods. This study is grounded in an extensive examination of archival materials and primary sources, which include official records, military writings, and memoirs of contemporaries involved in Russian military campaigns in Central Asia. The archival research was conducted in both Russian and Kazakh repositories, chosen for their relevance to the study's focus on Kazakh collaboration in these campaigns.

Key archival sources from Russia include the records of the Imperial War Ministry and the archives of the Orenburg Governorate General, which document the strategic planning, military operations, and logistical arrangements of Russian campaigns. These records contain communications between senior military officials and the tsarist government, as well as detailed accounts of expeditions, supply chains, and the integration of local resources. Equally significant are the materials housed in the Central State Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan. These archives provide complementary insights from a Kazakh perspective, such as administrative records, correspondence between Kazakh leaders and Russian authorities, and reports documenting Kazakh participation in military operations. These sources highlight the cooperative relationship between Kazakh elites and the Russian Empire, offering a perspective often overlooked in Russian-centric historiography. Additionally, contemporary writings by participants in Central Asian military campaigns were analyzed. These include theoretical discussions on steppe warfare and tactical considerations, as well as memoirs and articles published in 19th-century Russian journals.

The data were analyzed using qualitative and contextual methods to identify patterns, themes, and relationships, with a focus on three key areas: logistical support, military operations, and the broader dynamics of Kazakh collaboration. The study examines the role of Kazakh communities in providing transportation, supplies, and intelligence, drawing on archival records and contemporary writings to reconstruct supply chain networks and logistical challenges faced by Russian forces. Military correspondence and reports were analyzed to explore tactical strategies and the integration of Kazakh elites into Russian campaigns, emphasizing the critical influence of local knowledge on military outcomes. By combining diverse archival sources with contemporary accounts, the study offers a comprehensive and multi-perspective analysis of Russian campaigns in Central Asia, highlighting the pivotal contributions of Kazakh communities.

Discussion. Research on the role of the Kazakh steppe in shaping the military campaigns of the Russian Empire in Central Asia remains underexplored, with limited attention paid to the Empire's strategies of engaging local populations. A significant portion of the existing scholarship stems from 19th-century Russian military writers, many of whom participated in or closely observed the campaigns. Pre-revolutionary authors generally adhere to a standardized narrative framework, beginning with a justification of the campaign through historical and geopolitical context, followed by a detailed account of the expedition's route, logistical complexities, and military engagements, and concluding with an assessment of the outcomes.

General Alexei Maksheev, a Russian military historian, offers an extensive analysis of the 1853 campaign against Aq Masjid. Maksheev examines the strategic motivations behind the campaign and the military tactics employed as Russian forces advanced toward the Syr Darya [7]. His work provides a detailed account of the logistical challenges encountered by the Russian troops, underscoring the intricacies of supply and coordination. In contrast, Colonel Ivan Blaramberg's memoirs present a vivid and detailed narrative of the Aq Masjid campaign, with particular emphasis on the active participation of the Kazakhs. Published posthumously in 1978, Blaramberg's account highlights the role of Kazakh labor in construction and fortifications, as well as their indispensable contributions to the logistical support network [8].

Mikhail Ivanin's documentation of the 1839–1840 Khiva expedition provides a quintessential example of this narrative structure. His work focuses on the logistical and climatic hardships

encountered during the campaign, particularly the challenges posed by severe winter conditions. Ivanin's accounts are enriched by precise chronological details and illustrations, offering a comprehensive view of the operational difficulties faced by the Russian military during this period [9].

Mikhail Venyukov, a military geographer and graduate of the General Staff Academy, published one of the earliest studies on steppe warfare in 1860. His analysis synthesized existing sources to propose strategies for operating in the Kazakh steppe and Central Asia. Venyukov emphasized the establishment of small forts with mobile garrisons, the employment of Kazakh scouts for reconnaissance, and the importance of avoiding winter campaigns [10]. His recommendations, which included practical measures such as proper care of camels and dispersing livestock during halts, largely reflected practices already in place by the time of publication.

In his lecture, later published in an 1873 journal, Vasily Potto offers a distinctive perspective on the Russian Empire's steppe campaigns [11]. He provides a broad discourse on the military expeditions in Central Asia, delving into the tactics employed by steppe warriors and the meticulous logistical preparations that underpinned Russian operations. Potto's fragmented but insightful notes highlight the pivotal role played by Kazakh communities, particularly in supplying transport resources and intelligence.

Alexei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin, a general, historian, and veteran of the Central Asian military expeditions, presented a book of Russia's campaigns in Central Asia, *The Conquest of Turkmenistan: The Akhal-Teke Campaign of 1880–81* [12]. While the primary focus of the book is on the campaigns in Turkmenistan, Kuropatkin also offers a broader survey of military operations in the region between 1839 and 1876. Drawing on his firsthand experiences and strategic insights, he provides a detailed examination of the tactical and logistical challenges faced by Russian forces, particularly in navigating the harsh conditions of the steppe. His work stands as a comprehensive study of the military strategies and operational difficulties encountered during Russia's imperial expansion in Central Asia.

Mikhail Terentyev's three-volume study, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia* stands as one of the most exhaustive works on the subject [13]. Terentyev provides detailed accounts of Russian campaigns, supported by extensive statistical data on the use of transport animals and logistical arrangements. Terentyev's work remains an essential reference for understanding the tactical and logistical complexities of Russian military operations in Central Asia.

In Soviet historiography, the works of Naftulla Khalfin stand out as foundational contributions [14]. Khalfin's research offers an in-depth exploration of the political dimensions of Russian expansion in Central Asia, situating it within broader contexts of international relations, economic development, and interactions with local khanates. His analysis covers key milestones, from the preparatory phases of expansion in 1857 to the subjugation of the Khoqand and Bukhara khanates in 1868. Khalfin emphasizes the interplay between political strategy, economic imperatives, and military factors, though his focus remains largely on overarching geopolitical motivations rather than the specific tactics employed in the steppe campaigns.

Building on these earlier analyses, recent English-language scholarship has shifted attention to previously underexplored dimensions of Russian imperial expansion, particularly the logistical challenges of military campaigns. Among these contributions, Alexander Morrison's 2020 monograph, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia: A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814–1914*, represents a pioneering effort [15]. Morrison examines the motives behind Russian expansion and delves into the operational difficulties of steppe warfare, with a particular focus on the role of fortresses as logistical hubs. By addressing the critical yet often overlooked topic of military logistics, he provides a nuanced understanding of how supply lines, transportation systems, and Kazakh cooperation underpinned the success of Russian campaigns. Morrison's work significantly enhances the study of Russian imperialism, highlighting logistics as a decisive factor in sustaining expansion across the formidable terrain of Central Asia.

A synthesis of the existing literature reveals a significant gap in how scholars have addressed the interplay between geography and Russian policies of collaboration with the Kazakhs. Pre-revolutionary authors, many of whom participated in or were closely connected to the steppe campaigns, consistently highlighted the challenges posed by the steppe's vast geography. However,

their works remain fragmented, often focusing on the geographic and logistical difficulties without examining how these shaped Russia's strategy of fostering collaboration with loyal Kazakhs. Specifically, these authors fail to explore how the challenges of steppe warfare necessitated the integration of Kazakh allies into military logistics and operations.

Subsequent scholarship has similarly overlooked this critical aspect. While many studies describe the military campaigns and their logistical challenges, few focus on the role of Kazakh collaboration. Morrison's work stands out as a significant contribution, emphasizing the logistical reliance of Russian forces on Kazakh resources and expertise. However, Morrison's focus remains predominantly on the campaigns themselves and broader military operations, without delving into how the unique geography of the steppe directly influenced Russian policies of collaboration. Thus, a major gap remains in understanding how geography compelled the Russian Empire to adopt strategies of cooperation with Kazakh elites to sustain its military and administrative expansion in Central Asia.

Results. *The Specificity of Steppe Warfare or Geography as the Primary Adversary.*

The analysis of 19th-century Russian official sources on imperial military history, particularly those addressing campaigns in the steppes and conflicts with Central Asian khanates, underscores the centrality of logistical challenges. These difficulties arose largely from the harsh natural conditions of the region, including its unforgiving terrain and extreme climate, which were often regarded as more formidable adversaries than the khanate forces themselves. In military-historical accounts, the adversaries' perceived lack of discipline and inadequate armament compounded their disadvantages against the technologically and tactically superior Russian forces.

Russian accounts frequently emphasized the primitive nature of their opponents' equipment, portraying it as a key factor in the khanate armies' inability to effectively resist. Nikolai Gavrilovich Zalesov, a Russian officer and military writer who accompanied Ignatiev's diplomatic mission to Khiva and Bukhara in 1858, provided vivid observations of Khivan forces' armament. He described their attire as simple and functional, consisting of cotton robes, striped trousers, high boots, and woolen hats. Their weaponry, however, was notably outdated, including old sabers, lances, and matchlock rifles capable of firing no more than three shots a day. Many troops lacked firearms altogether, relying instead on rudimentary tools such as whips as their primary weapons [16, p. 493].

A. Makshev, who authored several works on the military history of the Russian Empire in Central Asia, devoted the majority of his studies to the tactics employed in steppe warfare. He emphasized that the success of Russian expeditions was determined not only by the size of the forces but by the thoroughness of their preparation and tactical organization. Makshev argued that smaller detachments were often better suited to navigate the harsh environmental conditions and execute effective maneuvers in battle. He also noted that the armies of Central Asian states typically comprised poorly trained and ill-equipped cavalry, largely conscripted from the local populace. Despite being outnumbered, Russian forces consistently secured victories in engagements against these "masses" [3, p. 80]. Other Russian authors frequently emphasized the lack of regular, professional armies among the Central Asian khanates, whose military forces largely consisted of temporary militias hastily assembled for the duration of specific campaigns. These militias were not only poorly armed but also lacked the discipline and training necessary for sustained or coordinated operations [17, p. 275]. While such forces had the potential to pose localized threats, their effectiveness in decisive engagements was minimal compared to the superior organization, discipline, and technological advantages of the Russian military. This disparity was evident in numerous engagements that underscored Russian dominance. For instance, during the defense of Aq-Masjid in 1853, Cossack Captain Borodin successfully repelled an assault by 8,000 Khoqand troops with a mere 275 men. Similarly, Lieutenant Colonel Ogaryov defeated a force of 12,000 Khoqandi soldiers near Fort Perovskii with only 700 troops. General Chernyaev's victory at Tashkent in 1865 further illustrated this imbalance, as he overcame 7,000 Kokand troops with a comparatively smaller and better-organized force. These outcomes reflect how the discipline, training, and advanced weaponry of the Russian army decisively outweighed the numerical strength of the Central Asian militias, securing Russian military success across the region [3, p. 70].

A critical aspect of military campaigns in the steppe was the Russian officers' recognition of the

unique challenges posed by steppe warfare, which differed significantly from traditional battles on European battlefields. In Europe, tactical leadership and battlefield management were prioritized. In the steppe, however, the key factors were the mobilization of significant resources and overcoming environmental and geographical obstacles, such as vast distances, a lack of roads, water shortages, and extreme climate conditions. These factors reduced the importance of direct engagements and shifted the focus to logistics. The lack of experience and preparation for the logistical demands of steppe warfare posed significant risks to the success of Russian military expeditions. The unique conditions of steppe campaigns – open terrain, the absence of fortified bases, and the considerable distances between supply points – created severe difficulties in projecting power and maintaining sustained control over conquered territories. These challenges exposed strategic gaps in the planning and organization of Russian military operations in the region.

A comparative analysis of these issues with the British experience in counterinsurgency campaigns reveals notable parallels. For instance, Charles Edward Callwell, a 19th-century British military theorist, observed in his work that such campaigns often involved simultaneous struggles against nature and local enemies. Callwell emphasized that in desert or steppe regions, armies frequently faced difficulties related to vast distances, water scarcity, and limited local resources: “In the steppes, Russian forces also vanished, falling victim to the immense distances they had to traverse to achieve military objectives” [18, p. 216].

One of the critical challenges of Russian steppe campaigns was the inability to utilize local resources for replenishing supplies. In the steppes of Central Asia, sources of quality water and suitable grazing lands were often absent [3, p. 69]. In oasis regions, traditional European methods of resupply, such as requisition or purchase, proved ineffective. This meant that Russian forces needed to be entirely self-sufficient from the outset of a campaign, which, in turn, necessitated the expansion of supply convoys. These convoys, often larger than the combat units themselves, carried food, forage, medical supplies, tents, mobile forges, firewood, ferrying equipment, and spare horses. The logistical caravans' sheer size and complexity constrained the mobility and operational effectiveness of Russian troops. The duration of a campaign was directly tied to the availability of supplies, further underscoring the critical importance of efficient logistical planning.

To address these challenges, Russian military theoreticians occasionally turned to historical examples of steppe warfare, such as the campaigns of Genghis Khan and Timur (Tamerlane), to understand how medieval steppe armies managed logistics across vast distances [19]. Central Asian forces under Timur, for instance, effectively adapted to the harsh conditions of the region by minimizing logistical needs and employing highly mobile tactics. Imperial military writer Vasily Potto contrasted the experiences of these steppe warriors with those of Russian troops, noting that for Central Asian armies, campaigns resembled routine migrations, while for Russian forces, they represented grueling trials [11, p. 59]. This adaptability enabled Central Asian armies to maintain mobility and combat effectiveness, a stark contrast to the logistical struggles that often hampered Russian operations in the unforgiving steppe environment.

The inexperience of Russian troops in steppe warfare was most evident during the Khivan Expedition of 1839, led by General Vasily Perovskii. This campaign encountered massive logistical challenges, ultimately leading to its failure. The initial plan called for a spring campaign to avoid the extreme summer heat of the arid steppes. However, accelerated preparations limited the ability to secure adequate supplies, resulting in a shift to a winter operation. This approach prioritized delivering a combat-ready force to the objective rather than increasing the overall troop count [11, p. 148]. A pivotal component of the expedition's logistics was a vast caravan of 12,000 transport camels, primarily sourced from Kazakhs, to carry equipment and supplies. However, the harsh winter conditions of the Kazakh steppe caused widespread loss of livestock. Over six months, the expedition lost 1,054 men out of 5,000, with the primary causes of death being severe weather and scurvy. These tragic outcomes underscored the insufficient preparation of Russian troops to overcome the extreme conditions of the steppe [20, p. 160].

The severe losses sustained by Russian forces during campaigns in the Central Asian steppe highlighted the profound challenges posed by the region's harsh environment and the army's

insufficient preparation for such conditions. Vasily Potto highlighted the scale of these losses, noting that Prince Bekovich-Cherkassky lost a quarter of his detachment during a summer expedition to Khiva in 1717, while General Perovskii's winter campaign of 1839 resulted in the loss of a third of his force [11, p. 60]. These heavy casualties underscored the army's lack of preparedness for the extreme conditions of the steppe. Three decades after the failed winter campaign to Khiva, one of its participants, Mikhail Ignatievich Ivanin, published a detailed book of the expedition's shortcomings. He provides the data about the high mortality among the Orenburg contingent, caused by harsh climatic conditions and the soldiers' lack of endurance. Ivanin argued that the absence of young and battle-hardened troops was a key factor in the campaign's failure. He suggested, "The best solution would have been the integration of several battalions from the active army, especially those stationed in the Caucasus. These troops, hardened by combat and marches, would have been better suited to the harsh conditions of the steppe and could have provided a significant advantage" [9, p. 170].

Even smaller diplomatic and reconnaissance missions required meticulous preparation to ensure self-sufficiency. Ivan Blaramberg documented the logistical challenges of Butenev's diplomatic mission to Bukhara in 1841, illustrating the extensive efforts required to cross the Kazakh steppe [8, p. 223]. The mission relied on a contingent of 1,000 camels to carry a five-month supply of provisions, including wagons and personal effects. Supplies ranged from black bread stored in durable containers, oats, grain, and flour in sturdy sacks, to large barrels of vodka, vinegar, tobacco, salt, and spices. To navigate the vast steppe, self-reliance was critical, requiring items such as wooden troughs for watering horses and camels at desert wells, felt blankets for tents, tools like shovels and axes, metal buckets, ropes, and a portable forge complete with charcoal.

This comprehensive understanding of steppe campaigns underscores a fundamental principle: the success of military operations in the challenging environment of the steppes characterized by vast deserts and limited local resources – depended on the preparation and supply of expeditionary forces. Such preparation needed to be tailored to the campaign's objectives, geographic terrain, seasonal conditions, and expected duration. The size and composition of supply caravans were intrinsically tied to the operational dynamics, including troop movements and actions, thereby directly influencing the tactical execution of steppe campaigns.

Another Russia's confrontation with the geographic challenges of the Kazakh steppe was starkly evident during Sultan Kenesary Kasymov's rebellion in the 1830s and 1840s. Kenesary's use of guerrilla tactics, leveraging the steppe's vastness for surprise attacks and evasive maneuvers, showcased the ingenuity and resilience of the Kazakhs in resisting external domination. Russian attempts to suppress the uprising through brute force met with limited success, highlighting the constraints of imperial military strategy and the difficulties of subjugating nomadic populations. The rebellion compelled Russian authorities to deploy mobile flying detachments and allocate significant resources, placing additional strain on efforts to consolidate control in the steppe. The 19th century Russian military theorist Mikhail Ivanovich Venyukov observed that wars with the Kazakhs in the steppe environment were "premature for their time" [21, p. 28].

General-Governor of Orenburg, Vladimir Afanasyevich Obruchev, in his reports to Mikhail Ladyzhenskii, the head of the Orenburg Frontier Commission, highlighted the key reasons for the limited effectiveness of Russian military campaigns against Kenesary. Among these, he particularly emphasized the role of geographic and climatic factors. The vast open spaces of the steppe provided the insurgents with a high degree of mobility, making their pursuit extremely difficult. Additionally, the harsh winter conditions required considerable resources to maintain the combat readiness of troops during prolonged operations, which complicated wintering and strategic planning for expeditions [22, L. 8].

A contemporary of these events, Maksheev, also acknowledged these challenges. He pointed out that small military expeditions and search operations against the Kazakh rebels were of limited effectiveness. The high mobility of the nomads allowed them to evade pursuit along with their herds, forcing Russian detachments into exhausting and often fruitless campaigns. The difficulty lay not only in locating the insurgents but also in avoiding mistakes that could result in the punishment of innocent Kazakhs, which, in turn, fueled discontent and tension in the steppe. Maksheev also emphasized the

importance of operational mobility. He noted that the success of such operations depended on minimizing the material burdens on the troops and their ability to move swiftly across the steppe. Artillery and heavily armed units, while useful in combat, were less effective than light cavalry, which could provide the necessary maneuverability and speed. Under these conditions, operations were generally short-term, to avoid over-exhaustion of the troops and ensure their combat readiness for subsequent tasks [2, p. 5]. Consequently, the uprising of Kenesary served as a catalyst for the construction of fortifications in the Orenburg Kazakh Steppe. The establishment of forts such as Turgay and Irgiz in 1845 was a direct response to the need for a year-round military presence in the steppe [21, p. 13]. These measures allowed for more effective pursuit of Kazakh tribes, yet they required substantial financial investment and a reorganization of logistics.

Perdue's analysis of the Qing dynasty's interactions with the Dzungars offers a valuable comparative perspective. Similar to how the Dzungars leveraged the vast expanses of the steppe to evade superior Chinese forces and set up ambushes, the Kazakhs adapted to the tactical advantages provided by the geography of the steppe [23, p. 522]. The resistance of Kazakh clans underscores the characteristic adaptability and mobility of nomadic societies. The Russian Empire, like other sedentary powers, faced fundamental challenges in governing extensive and sparsely populated territories. The Eurasian steppe, with its harsh natural environment and unique geographical features, necessitated innovative approaches to power and control, resulting in significant costs of expansion. The rebellion led by Kenesary was not only a pivotal chapter in Kazakh resistance but also a profound lesson for the Russian Empire, revealing the limits of its capabilities in the steppe environment. This episode highlighted the necessity of adapting imperial strategies to the particularities of the region's nomadic culture and geography.

Despite the fortifications constructed in the steppe, full control over the Kazakhs remained elusive for the Russians. As noted by Russian officer A. Gren, despite the number of fortifications scattered across the extensive steppe, the region was far from peaceful. From time to time, Kazakhs, led by Kazakh batyrs, would attack Russian merchant caravans or carry out devastating raids (*baranta*) on Kazakh auls under Russian control [24, p. 449]. Although punitive flying detachments were dispatched from nearby fortifications after each such incident, the culprits often managed to hide and escape, only to return to their raiding activities shortly thereafter.

The dilemma of conquering the steppe and controlling nomadic peoples remained a subject of intense debate within Russian military and administrative circles throughout the 19th century. Upon returning to his post as Governor-General in 1851, Perovskii criticized the strategy of constructing steppe fortifications proposed by Obruchev. He pointed out the insufficient effectiveness of these outposts in preventing raids and plunder among Kazakh tribes, arguing that mobile units would be better suited to maintaining order. In his report, Perovskii insisted that a dynamic strategy was better aligned with the demands of controlling the steppe [25, L.1-2].

However, despite his critique, Perovskii continued to employ large military expeditions, adapting them to the harsh geographical and climatic conditions. The most illustrative example of this was the 1853 expedition to Aq Masjid. Led by Perovskii, the campaign showcased an increased focus on logistical preparation, reflecting lessons learned from the failed Khiva campaign of 1839. Key elements of the preparation included: comprehensive transportation support, with a convoy of 500 wagons drawn by paired oxen and horse-drawn carts, as well as 1,700 camels managed by 300 Kazakh guides [7, p. 184]. In his works, Maksheev provides a detailed account of the development of Russian military campaigns in Central Asia. The foundation for these campaigns was laid with the construction of military fortifications at the mouths of the Syr Darya, begun in 1847. These steppe fortifications demanded significant effort to ensure supply lines and acclimatize troops to the steppe environment. By 1853, the accumulated experience allowed the Russians to cover the route of 1,100 to 1,350 versts from Orenburg to Aq Masjid with minimal obstacles [7, p. 288].

After the capture of Aq Masjid, the advance of Russian troops became noticeably easier. The southern steppe was characterized by a denser population and the proximity of settlements, simplifying logistics. These geographical features facilitated the effective movement of troops, paving the way for further conquests of Central Asian khanates and expansion into the Turkestan region. It is no surprise

that this experience laid the foundation for the successful campaigns of the 1860s by the Russian Empire in Central Asia.

Russian Military Expeditions and the Role of Loyal Kazakhs.

The geographical and climatic conditions of the Kazakh steppe presented formidable challenges for the Russian military in its efforts to consolidate control over Central Asian territories. The vast, arid expanse of the steppe, characterized by a scarcity of reliable water sources and limited forage, rendered military campaigns exceedingly arduous. A critical aspect of Russia's strategic adaptation to these environmental challenges was the cooperation with local Kazakh populations, whose contributions played a crucial role in overcoming these obstacles. By providing transport animals and offering valuable local knowledge, the Kazakhs facilitated the successful execution of military expeditions in the steppe.

For Russian military operations, the logistical transportation of provisions, armaments, and other equipment was a fundamental concern. In the absence of sufficient fodder and water for traditional draft animals such as horses and oxen, camels emerged as an optimal solution. These animals, with their ability to bear substantial loads, remarkable endurance in arid climates, and minimal dietary requirements, substantially alleviated the Russian forces' reliance on conventional forage supplies. Maksheev argues that use of camels provided a distinct advantage in the steppe: "Camels are more tolerant of thirst than horses and oxen, and can find sustenance in almost any environment. They can traverse terrain where even a wagon would struggle, such as through shifting sands" [2, p. 79].

The procurement of the necessary number of transport animals, particularly camels, was one of the key logistical challenges in ensuring the success of Russian military campaigns in the steppe. This task was virtually unfeasible without the active collaboration of local Kazakh elites, who were entrusted with mobilizing the resources of the Kazakh population. Kazakh sultans and influential biys not only provided the required number of transport animals but also organized the care of caravans and the escort of expeditions. One of the most notable examples of successful cooperation occurred during the preparation for the Khiva Expedition of 1839. As part of this campaign, efforts by sultans, including Baimuhammed Aichuvakov, led to the collection of over 12,600 camels. Of these, 1,000 were donated free of charge by the tribe of Khan Djanger, while more than 2,000 Kazakhs participated in the expedition as camel drivers. According to sources, each camel was compensated with a payment of 10 rubles in silver [20, p. 149].

Later, this practice was further developed during the construction of the Turgay and Irgiz fortifications in 1845. Kazakh sultans played a vital role in providing transport animals, mobilizing approximately 1,000 camels for the transportation of construction materials and military supplies. Additionally, elite representatives actively promoted the importance of the fortifications to the local population, presenting them as a crucial means of protection against external threats. As noted by A. Morrison, this policy helped establish the notion of mutual benefit in cooperation and strengthened the loyalty of Kazakh leaders to the imperial authority [15, p. 107].

However, the provision of transport animals was only one aspect of the complex system of interaction between the Russian administration and the Kazakh elite. One of the key factors in the successful movement of Russian troops across the steppe was the role of Kazakh guides. These guides not only identified optimal routes but also assisted in avoiding geographical pitfalls, such as impassable areas or regions with water scarcity. Without the guides, the troops could have lost their way, which frequently led to prolonged deprivation due to the lack of water [26, p. 226]. The role of the guides was also crucial because of the insufficient cartographic accuracy of the region, rendering their knowledge indispensable.

This was particularly significant in light of the mobile insurgent groups, such as those led by Kenesary Kasymov, who skillfully exploited the region's geographical features to evade pursuit. A notable example of such cooperation occurred in the 1843 operation against Kenesary. According to confidential instructions from the Orenburg Frontier Commission, Sultans Baymuhammed, Arslan, and Akhmet Djanturyins mobilized and led Kazakh detachments to support the Russian forces. These units joined an expedition under Colonel Bizyanov, whose goal was to suppress Kenesary's rebellion and capture the leader himself. The Russian administration offered significant monetary rewards for Kenesary's capture, underscoring the importance of the operation [27, L. 8]. To strengthen

collaboration, the Russian administration resorted not only to material incentives but also to the conferral of titles and medals upon the Kazakh elite. A document from 1844 records that Emperor Nicholas I bestowed several honors upon Kazakh leaders for their participation in the suppression of the 1843 revolt. For instance, Sultan Arslan Djantyurin was granted the rank of military senior, and many other sultans and biys received gold and silver medals with the inscription “For Diligence” on the Anninsky ribbon [27, L. 118].

The inclusion of Kazakh auxiliaries in Russian military expeditions against insurgents proved highly effective, enabling Russian forces to better locate and pursue rebellious groups. Military theorist M. Venyukov emphasized the utility of this approach, noting that the involvement of Kazakh detachments consistently benefited steppe campaigns, provided their leadership consisted of loyal sultans, biys, and batyrs, and their ranks were filled with resourceful and skilled horsemen. This collaboration demonstrated the importance of leveraging local expertise to navigate the logistical and operational complexities of the steppe [10, p. 287].

The value of Kazakh contributions was formally acknowledged by Russian authorities. In 1845, Orenburg Governor-General Obruchev conferred various distinctions on Kazakh leaders for their role in the campaign against Kenesary Kasymov. Archival records from August and September of that year detail these awards. For example, Sultan Davlet-Gali Baymuhammedov of the Western Horde received silver pocket watches in recognition of his effective coordination of Kazakh messengers and broader contributions to the expedition. Junior officer Chulak Burgangulov was awarded a silver tobacco horn for his diligence in supervising camel drivers and ensuring the efficient loading of supplies. Biy Aykyn Kantaev of the Chumekeev clan received both a silver medal on the Anninsky ribbon and a silver tobacco horn. His commendations were for promptly delivering critical information between the Ural and Orenburg forts, supplying sheep during meat shortages, and consistently executing the orders of the Ural fort commander [28, L. 7-7ob.]

As noted earlier, the uprising of Kenesary Kasymov prompted the construction of fortifications in the Kazakh steppe. The establishment of forts such as those at Turgai and Irgiz in 1845 was necessitated by the need to maintain a constant military presence in the region. However, the construction of these fortifications and the placement of Russian military units in the heart of the steppe could not be carried out without the assistance of loyal Kazakh clan elites, who provided logistical support and helped equip military detachments for their campaigns. In 1845, following the completion of the fortifications at Turgai and Irgiz, Obruchev, tasked Ladyzhenskii, with ensuring effective coordination between the Russian military and the local Kazakhs. This initiative was a response to the ongoing challenges of controlling the steppe and the increasing instability caused by the uprisings in the region. A key aspect of the strategy was the recruitment of reliable local leaders to facilitate military operations. Ladyzhenskii was instructed to identify capable individuals who could guide Russian forces and track the movements of rebellious Kazakh groups. These leaders were expected to provide crucial intelligence on the movements of insurgent forces and offer logistical support to Russian detachments. Given the sensitive nature of these operations, it was specified that no public announcements regarding the deployment of troops or the recruitment of local leaders should be made before the actual mobilization. Furthermore, Ladyzhenskii was tasked with ensuring the establishment of an effective communication network between the newly constructed fortifications and the Russian military in the region, particularly with the forces stationed in Ulu Tau. The use of Kazakh intermediaries for the transportation of information was deemed essential, and Ladyzhenskii was advised to implement measures to facilitate the regular transmission of intelligence between fortifications and military units [22, L. 14-15].

Logistical support from the Kazakhs became particularly significant in the construction of Fort Raim in 1847, located at the mouth of the Syr Darya River. This fort had strategic importance for preparing military actions against the Khiva Khanate and for exploring navigation on the Aral Sea. By the order of Obruchev, local Kazakh communities mobilized 3,500 camels, which formed the backbone of the successful construction of the steppe fortifications [29, L. 1-2]. The Russian administration actively incentivized the Kazakh elites for their logistical contributions. After the completion of Fort Raim, the involvement of Kazakh aristocrats was officially recognized. Many influential Kazakh leaders were awarded imperial medals and titles for their provision of transport

animals and equipment. This practice not only rewarded the Kazakh leaders for their direct involvement but also bolstered their status within their communities, further integrating them into the empire's administrative and military systems. As noted by Zavalishin, Kazakhs greatly valued state honors, such as orders and medals, as symbols of their privileged status. They frequently received honorary titles, including those of staff and senior officers, which signified their contributions and loyalty [30, p. 120].

A detailed examination of archival documents, such as the service records of Kazakh sultans, confirms the crucial role played by Kazakh elites in executing Russian directives. For example, after the capture of the Khoqand fortress Aq-Masjid in 1853, the Russian administration rewarded Kazakh leaders who assisted in the mobilization of camels and participated in Perovskii's military expeditions. They were not only compensated with monetary rewards but also received military ranks [31, L. 1-40].

The logistical and military support of the Kazakh elites was critical to the success of Russian campaigns in Central Asia. As noted by Kylian Janet, without their cooperation, the empire would have faced significant difficulties in suppressing local uprisings and organizing operations against khanates such as Khiva and Khoqand. The support of the Kazakh aristocracy played an important role in Russia's achievements, including the construction of Fort Raim in 1847, the capture of Aq-Mesjid in 1853, and the maintenance of Russian presence along the lower reaches of the Syr Darya [32, p. 234].

Conclusion. The military campaigns of the Russian Empire in the Kazakh steppe and Central Asia were marked by a dynamic interplay between logistical adaptation, imperial strategy, and the cooperation of local elites. The vastness and harshness of the steppe terrain posed profound challenges for Russian forces, necessitating innovative solutions in both strategy and resource management. The reliance on camels as transport animals, the vital role of Kazakh guides, and the logistical support provided by local elites were critical factors in overcoming the environmental and logistical difficulties. The empire's success in securing supply lines, constructing fortifications, and executing long-distance military expeditions was deeply intertwined with the contributions of loyal Kazakh aristocrats, who were integrated into the imperial system through material rewards and symbolic honors. This intricate collaboration underscores the adaptive capacity of the Russian administration in addressing the unique challenges of the steppe, while also highlighting the central role of local agency in the imperial conquest.

Sources

CSA RK – Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

RSMHA – Russian State Military Historical Archive.

SAOO – State Archive of the Orenburg Oblast

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