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Chechen Refugees: A Forgotten History of Caucasus; Who Remembers & Who Cares?

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Abstract

Refugees; a term of fears, tensions, worries, crisis, fairy tales, stereotypes, and lots of fearful things. But if we observe the background history of refugees, a rich and wealthy history drifted in front of us. Chechen refugees are one of them. Right now, Chechnya is Russian federal territory and located in the eastern part of northern Caucasus region. If there would be a statistic of deportation from the homeland; Chechnya might be got the first rank over the world. They have exiled several times and replaced again and again exiled. This study will analyse Chechen refugees' situation from a historical background to the present time with references. After a momentary description this study focuses on Chechens failed state formation process followed by the recent scattered situation of Chechens in different countries and finally discusses a recommendation on them.

Keywords: Chechens, Refugee, History, Caucasus

Introduction

The recent decades have observed a massive influx of refugees from different parts around the world at different times. Different war, invasion and ethnic conflicts cause the displacement of Chechens from their motherland. Thanks to the recent scientific invention which labelled Chechen region as a full of natural resources. These also increase the importance of this region. But only due to this speciality of this region; it's suffering different invasions from different regimes and become one of the war-torn areas in 19th century. From the last of 17-century Chechen peoples observed the first formal annexation from Tsar Peter I ('the Great') which is

finally accomplished during this century. Time flies and the way invasion occurred were changed but furtherance was in the same frequency. Chechens were respectively urging for their independence and erstwhile state actor were increasing their annexation policies. But both Chechens and Kremlin have to pay a high rate price for that. The Daily Independent; famous newspaper of the UK stated that officially Russian loses 5000 troops during this bloodshed. On the other hand the Independent mentioned that; a private organization of soldiers' mothers have figured around 11,000 death and 30,000 wounded during this massacre which started from October 1999 (The Independent, 2003). But the main problem is the formation of regional terrorism. Different terror groups were raised in the name of Islamic Militants and they started to engage in different illegal activities such as beheaded hostages, slaughtered children, and the misguided the Chechen females. That was one of major causes to deploy Russian army to Chechen region though no one knows who has the secret hand to help the formation of that Islamic militia. But after a decade-long war in Chechnya; Russia lifted the region as a "zone of counter-terrorist operations" in 2009. Last but not the least, this mountainous region yet not cleaned from different militia groups. Though the war formally finished by appointing Akhmat Kadyrov as the president of the republic; but separatists still hiding in the mountains and Chechnya still a dangerous and violent place. The greatest Russian nationalist of the 20th century, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his book "The Gulag Archipelago"; stated that "There was one nation that would not give in, would not acquire the mental habits of submission - and not just individuals among them, but the whole nation to a man. These were the Chechens" (TheTelegraph, 2001).

Historical Background

Chechnya is essential for the gateway of Russia to enter Central Asia. From the time immemorial, Chechnya was invaded by a different imperialist power. The formation of Chechen civilization was formed earlier than the 1st century BC (Jaimoukha, 2005). Georgian historian G.A. Melikishvili also stated the same. Chechens refer themselves as 'Nokhchii' which comes from large Chechen tribe 'Nokhchmekhkakhoi' and its domicile in most south Chechnya which also called 'Ichkeria'. Daghestan, another federal republic under Russia also hosting a massive number of Chechen peoples. According to history, this whole region holds different ethnicity and cultures who came and invade Chechnya over time. Iranians, Hurrians, Mitanni, Urartians,

Roman, Byzantine, Sarir's, Khazars, Arabs, Turkic Seljuks, Mongols, Tamerlane's, Ottomans, Persians and then Cossacks appeared in this region by the time. Finally, Muscovy (later Russia) set out as an expansionist for this region. In 1556, Russia occupied Astrakhan and destruction of the "Tatar Khanate" initiates Chechens exile from their land. From then, Chechnya and Dagestan have faced different turmoil and finally "Tsar Emperor" successfully separated Ingush state from Chechnya.

In 1696, Tsar Peter I ('the Great') planned to expand his territory and marched his once part of forces towards Ottomans and another part of forces towards Crimean Tatars. Due to the intense fight back, Tsar Peter signed the Russian-Ottoman Treaty in 1700. But in 1706, he again revived his plan to conquer Eastern Caucasus but thanks to Cossack old believers they joined with Chechens and not only defeated but also destroyed the Tsar's fort at Tarki in 1707 (Dunlop, 1998). But soon Chechens and Cossack's relation had soured and Tsar takes the opportunity and The Cossacks (north Chechen Region) submitted to Peter I in 1712 and in 1718 large Cossack force attacked on Chechen villages. The remaining time of that century, Tsar didn't abandon the region. After accessioning the throne, Empress Catherine II planned to 'save' the region from Turkish influence and annex it to her empire. In the 1770s, Chechens joined with the Ottoman side to fight against the Russian emperor. But after the losing the battle, the Ottomans signed the "Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarji" where Russia gained control over Kabarda, Ossetia and the Crimea which was the gateway for Russia towards the Trans-Caucasus. After that time, history observed the rise and fall of Chechen Sufism where Sufi's tried to prevent Chechnya from Russian Aggression. Sheikh Mansur Usharma was one of those Sufi's who dreamed a reformation and renaissance in Chechnya, but state-run terrorism didn't allow those Sufi's to do something.

Till Empress Catherine II, Tsar's was aimed to conquer Chechnya only for expansion. But in 1893 oil discovered in Grozny and thus changed all the calculations not only for the Russia but also for all of the imperialist powers. Though at that time it didn't appear in media but researchers bring the truth to light and in a statement of Ramazan Kadyrov, Head of the Chechen Republic; Chechnya has a large oil reserve as much oil as Saudi Arabia (Bodner, 2015). Though till April'2018 Chechnya produced 21.3 million tons of crude oil which is 7% of Russia's total oil production.

The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria

Let's return to history once again where Chechens become refugees. After long aggression of USSR and Russia, Chechen peoples have become united for the right to liberty. But they were searching for Pathfinder and Dzhokhar Dudayev appeared at that time. When communism was fading out because of Glastnost and Perestroika, Dudayev was assigned in Estonia as the General of the Soviet Air Force and commander of a strategic air command based in Tartu (Alexe, 2018). During his service life in Estonia, he closely observed the nationalism movement of Estonian peoples and come to realize the importance of a nation's independence movement. In autumn 1990, he got an order to shut down Estonian Television and the Parliament and he avoided the decision (Dunlop, Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict, 1998). To save from a bloodshed situation; still now Estonia people express their gratefulness to Dzhokhar Dudayev. Ants Veetousme; former mayor of Tartu stated that "Estonia can't forget what Dudayev did" (Bridge, 1996). Not only Estonia, by the time; Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Turkey and Ukraine inaugurated and erected the different plaque and change street names on behalf of the honour of Dzhokhar Dudayev as "Džohara Dudajeva Gatve". Even in Estonia Dudayev is regarded as the national hero for refusing to execution order from Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to put down pro-independence demonstrations whilst regarded Dzhokhar Dudayev as a criminal and traitor in Russia (Alexe, 2018). But before this situation, Dzhokhar Dudayev was recognised as a brave and obedient Russian Air officer who bombing raids in Afghanistan, Serbia & Ukraine (Hunter, 2004). However, Dudayev was motivated by the way in which the Baltic states regained their independence and as a punishment of avoiding bombing decision in Estonian Television and the parliament; he resigned from Soviet Air Force and returned to Chechnya in 1990. He declared the independence of Chechnya and announced the general election. In 1991, Dzhokhar Dudayev wins the general election and delighted the position of first elected president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, a breakaway region in the North Caucasus, from 1991 to his death 1996. After his death, Chechnya lost its independence and after an escarp journey now it's a federal territory or Russia by a referendum approved in March'2003.

History of Deportation

Till today as much as I have studied, yet find another nation like Chechens who have deported several times from their homelands. Actually, it expresses the brutal autocratic tendency of Russian emperors. Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army in the Caucasus from 1816 to 1827, General Ermolov, was known for his bloody evil deeds against the Chechen nation. Event in his bronze monument in Grozny, it's written that, "I will never rest until one Chechen is left alive" (Saieva, 2009) & (TheEconomist, 2010). General Ermolov also had famous quotes about the Chechens which also express his as well as Russian brutal mentality on Chechens and it was "There are no other people under the sun more perfidious and knave" (SHNIRELMAN, 2006). This illustrates the mentality and tendency of the Russian army on the Chechen nation.

However, according to the history; in 1785 Sheik Mansur organized Chechens and establishes a protest movement against Russian invasion in their land. But it was not too easy to fight against the state terrorism. As a result, Russia strongly subdues the movement and started to deport Chechens. This was the first deportation which was held in 1792. The second Chechen deportation was held in 1831's when Tsar Emperor decided to expand their empire to the Caucasus. At that time Tsar Emperor instigating numerous bloody and taxing warfare in order to overpower the peoples of the region. Chechens stand against those decisions and once again suffered from deportation. This time Tsar deports Chechens to Serbia. At that time, Sufism was spreading up in Caucasus region especially in Chechens region. Imam Tashu-Haji; one of the renowned religious person stands against Tsar government in 1836 and Tsar emperor put down his movement strongly and for the third time, Chechens deported and again their destination was Serbia. In 1859, Russia formally annexed Chechnya and for the fourth time, Chechens are deported to the Ottoman Emperor. Officially 39,000 Chechens were deported at that time, but unofficially the number was more than that (UNHCR, 2004).

The fifth, sixth and seventh deportation takes place consecutively in 1865, 1878 & 1913. These were the last deportations of Tsar Administration. The eighth deportation held on after the Bolshevik takeover and Russian Civil War. The Chechen territory was alternately ruled by both Red & White forces. The Chechen nationalists led by Sheik Uzun Haji fight against the Bolsheviks. After that, they have suffered a massive exile to Siberia carried out by the Stalin regime. The most notorious deportation held on 23 February 1944 when all Chechens are forcibly displaced to central Asia, Siberia and another place. With this deportation, Chechnya lost its own territory as well. It's being divided into the Stavropol Territory, Georgia, Dagestan

and North Ossetia (Saieva, 2009). This operation conducted under the participation of 200,000 of soldiers, officers from the People's Committee of Internal Affairs and it continued till three days. Soviets used "Special Settlers" terms to indicate Chechens who scattered throughout the entire Soviet Union territory at that time (Aurélie, 2007). At that time Stalin alleged to the Chechens that they have cooperated with German Nazi forces and fight against Russia. It was proven by the history that Chechens were always against Russian authoritarianism but the allegation was not true (Aurélie, 2007). The surprising thing is what official document discloses is totally against the allegation. As Aleksandr Nekrich mentioned in his impeccable work "Punished Peoples: The Deportation and Fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War"; that the local peoples were taken active part to protect German advance and resistance to the invaders and in some other sources mentioned that many Chechens were served in the Red army (Aurélie, 2007). Notwithstanding these statements, the Soviets deported more than 400,000 Chechens as non-official sources say it would be more than 500,000. Deportees were allowed more or less half an hour to leave their home at once. Some of them were fled to North Caucasus Mountain but they got caught by Red army and killed brutally.

After the deportation, regional government had taken a notorious step which is described by Aleksandr Nekrich in his book that; local authorities started propaganda against Chechen-Ingush communities. They changed their nature of declaration. Through the fabrication of evidence, local authorities accused Chechen-Ingush communities as they cooperated with invaders. This was another state terrorism which aimed not to return Chechens in their homeland. Because as it is mentioned earlier that, at that time Oil rigging already started in Grozny and it became an important regional issue for the Soviet administration. Those documents showed Chechens as conspirators to the motherland. The official Soviet history was re-drafted to propagate that the Chechens were horrible, outlaws and significantly insubordinate to the Soviet state power. Suffering starvation, cold, fear, death and passing lots of lives Chechens have knocked in different central Asian, European and African countries.

Recent Situations

It is very tough to get present information about Chechens from different countries because of the Russian fear of Chechens. According to different news agencies, Chechens who living outside of Chechnya and Russia; are engaging with different suspicious activities and they are

continuously being assassinated by anonymous persons but after detaining them, some of them are proven Russian by nationalities. These assassinations occurred in Austria, Qatar, Turkey, Ukraine and some other countries also (BBC, 2016), (RefWorld, 2015), (EuroMaidanPress, 2017). But relevancy with the Russian government is strengthening when M15 denied a suspected Russian assassin from entering the UK in last March'2019 (Harper & Das, 2019).

As it is tough to get recent information about Chechen diaspora, but it is estimated that Turkey hosted the largest number of Chechen refugees. But giving refugee status is still now an indecisive problem in Turkey. After Turkey, most of the Chechens fled to the EU member countries. According to the unconfirmed report, more than 60,000 people entered different EU member countries from 2010 to 2012 (RefWorld, 2013). But before that, 100,000 Chechens are already living in different western European countries. But nowadays the EU accepting less asylum seeker application from the Chechen nationals. Even in 2016, Poland freeze accepting Chechen refugees to his country (DW, 2016). Like EU countries, central Asian countries are not accepting Chechens in the asylum process. Kazakhstan, also hosting a good number of Chechens but with a temporary resident permit. Having the support of UNHCR, those peoples are living from hand to mouth. In 2015, Poland also changes a lot in their migration system when Populist Party Law and Justice came into power. In 2017 Poland received more than 5,000 asylum applications, of which 2,164 were filed by Russian citizens, and 93.7% of those were rejected (Rudak, 2018).

The only exception noticed in Jordan and Georgia. In Georgia, there also have well-numbered refugees and UNHCR also supporting them. Some of Chechens are already got Georgian citizenship as well (Nikuradze, 2014). In Jordan, Chechens are trying to be close with the ruling Hashemite family and Hashemite Dynasty was too tolerant to socialize Chechens with Jordan populations (BelferCenter, 2002).

But no matter where they are living; the main problem remaining in social integration. Nowadays we have seen Syrian refugees in a bitter situation of integration but Chechens are more than acrimonious situations because they don't want to be Russian and the world is not accepting them as they are not Russian!

But those two countries are should be the exception; not be an example to us. Due to having a diversified relation with Russia, not any country standing beside Chechens. The Post Ramazan Kadyrov era trying to make a stable place for Chechens but it also raises a lot of questions.

Russian state oil company didn't take his last bargaining about Oil Company ownership so far. So, international communities should take care of the lost generation of the world. Except for some events, most of the time refugees are just wants to live from hand to mouth. Because they have left their motherland and now, they just hope for their future generations and of course, Chechens are not exceptions.

Conclusion

The Chechen Republic's special environmental and geographic climate is crucial to the success of its agricultural enterprises. The region is establishing a distinct production profile, aiming to take advantage of both its natural environment and climate as competitive advantages, as well as its centuries-old agricultural traditions. Large quantities of high-quality raw materials make it possible to manufacture a wide variety of building materials. In the area, eighteen construction companies operate, including the largest cement mill in the North Caucasus, which is located in Chiri-Yurt. The Chechen Republic has a one-of-a-kind opportunity to grow tourism. From a desert to snow-capped mountain peaks rising over 4,000 meters above sea level, the area encompasses five distinct climate zones. The absence of massive, environmentally damaging industrial enterprises is one of the factors leading to the growth of tourism in the republic. Chechens would be beneficial from these assets but it requests an equal distribution. Also, Chechens need equal rights for employments and education sectors. Only these activities can normalise the situation.

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