

# Turkfront Military Newspapers Are A Tool of The Fight Against National Liberation

Alijon Itolmasovich Safarov

PhD, associate professor, Head of the Department of military and sports journalism, University of Journalism and Mass Communications of Uzbekistan

**Received:** 14 February 2025; **Accepted:** 13 March 2025; **Published:** 11 April 2025

**Abstract:** The essence, purpose and historical significance of the struggle of the Turkestan peoples against the Soviet government in 1918-1924 have been distorted for many decades. The ideologists of the existing regime effectively used the power of the press to falsify historical truth: the press became an important tool of the ideology of Soviet power in Turkestan. In this study, the main attention is paid to the problem of the emphasis of the Soviet power system on publishing military press in the languages of the peoples of Turkestan, as well as in the languages of prisoners of war from Germany, Austria and other countries held in Turkestan during the First World War in order to promote the communist idea and suppress national identity.

**Keywords:** Turkestan; military; newspaper; ideology; newspaper; council; army; front; national liberation.

**Introduction:** The struggle for national liberation of the Turkestan peoples was a period of our history that was deliberately distorted, falsified, and misinterpreted through the media. In particular, the essence, purpose, and historical significance of the struggles against Soviet power from 1918 to 1924 were distorted. The ideologues of the authoritarian regime effectively used the power of the press to try to falsify historical truth. During the years of independence, many studies have been conducted in Uzbekistan on this issue. Dedicated scholars such as Qahramon Rajabov and Dono Ziyoeva, through their innovative methodological and scientific approaches, have restored historical truth regarding the history of the Turkestan national liberation movement.

One of the key aspects for our research during the period in question is the issue related to military journalism. Scholar P. Agapov studied military press in Turkestan during the Civil War. Historian N. Khamaev, in his research, calls it "Armed Movement and Military Press Against Soviet Power in Uzbekistan" (Хамаев, 2019). In Turkestan, the press played a significant role, along with other means, in suppressing the people's resistance against Soviet power and extinguishing the flames of dissent. From this perspective, we agree with Khamaev's opinion. We will attempt to prove this based on the analysis of the information we have.

## METHODS

To address the research question and substantiate the proposed hypothesis, the study employs a comparative analysis method, drawing on materials published in the media and presented in fundamental literature.

The author of the research utilizes a comparative analysis approach, specifically focusing on newspapers published by Turkfront, such as "Набат революции", "Клич трудового казачества", "Красноармейская газета", "Пролетарская мысль", "Красный фронт", "Борец за коммунизм", "Коммунар", "Наша фронтовая жизнь", "Всемирная революция", "Свобода народов" (Арапов, 1967), and journals like "O'zbekistonda ijtimoiy fanlar" (Арапов, 1967) and "O'tmishga nazar" (Хамаев, 2019).

Furthermore, in seeking solutions to the research objectives, the study draws attention to fundamental works such as M. Annakurdov's "Истории коммунистической печати в Туркменистане" (Аннакурдов, 1958), D. Ziyoeva's "Turkiston milliy ozodlik harakati. (Mustabid tuzumga qarshi 1916 yil va 1918—1924 yillardagi xalq kurashlari tarixshunosligi)" (Зиёева, 2000), K. Radjabov's "Вооруженное движение в Туркестане против советского режима (1918-1924)" (Раджабов, 2018), and P. Agapov's dissertation abstract titled "Военная печать

Туркестана в годы гражданской войны (1918-1920 гг.)” (Агапов, 1967).

## DISCUSSIONS

An article titled “К истории военной печати в советском Туркестане” (On the History of Military Press in Soviet Turkestan) by P. Agapov was published in the second issue of the “O‘zbekistonda ijtimoiy fanlar” journal in 1967 (Агапов, 1967).

In the article, the author informs us that on July 25, 1919, the national department under the political department of the Caspian Front published a military newspaper called “Шефор” (“Горнист”) in Armenian in Poltorask (present-day Ashgabat). He also mentions that around the same time, the department published a military newspaper called “Sadoi fuqaro” in turkmen and azerbaijani languages. The scholar cites the work of Turkmenistani researcher M. Annaqurdov in this regard (Аннакурдов, 1958).

This clearly shows that the Soviet regime in Turkestan not only focused on publishing military newspapers but also on doing so in local languages. This raises the question of why. We attempted to find answers in P. Agapov's article and dissertation abstract. The article provides the following reasons:

formation and strengthening of Red Army units in Turkestan;

strengthening the political education of Turkestan fighters;

mobilizing Turkestan fighters to crush counter-revolutionary armed forces.

Interestingly, the military newspapers published in Turkestan, which reached approximately 30, all belong to one specific period. This period encompasses the years 1918-1924. In his dissertation abstract, candidate of historical sciences P. Agapov, reflecting the ideological demands of the time, refers to this period as “the crushing of the main counter-revolutionary forces in Turkestan” (Агапов, 1967). However, doctor of historical sciences, professor Qahramon Rajabov, calls it “the armed movement against the Soviet regime in Turkestan” and restores historical truth (Раджабов, 2018).

What was the typology of military press during the peak of the struggle for national liberation? By observing the research, particularly P. Agapov's work, we gain clarity on the typology of military publications in Turkestan during this period. It can be categorized as follows:

central newspapers;

front newspapers;

national (international) newspapers.

## Central Newspapers

These publications are considered central due to their establishment by the political departments of the Turkfront revolutionary council and their wide distribution. One such publication is the “Набат революции” newspaper. Starting from January 15, 1920, it replaced the “Горнист” newspaper and became known as “Набат революции”. It was published as the press organ of the political department of the first Army. From May 6, 1920, issue No. 83 onwards, the Caspian region revkom and the obkom party also became its sponsors (Агапов, 1967).

“Клич трудового казачества” is another newspaper classified as a central publication. It was the organ of the cozak department of the Central executive committee of the Turkestan republic council and was established as a result of the Turkestan bolsheviks' policy in 1919-1920 aimed at developing mass media for the Red Army.

“Красноармейская газета” also holds a significant position among central publications. It was published in Turkestan from 1921 onwards. This bi-weekly publication was sponsored by the delegation of the military council of the red army and red guard of the Turkestan republic.

“Красная звезда” newspaper holds a prominent position among the central military publications in Turkestan. It was established by the Turkfront political directorate and started publishing on June 12, 1921.

From January 1920, “Пролетарская мысл” newspaper began publication as the political organ of the 2nd Turkestan rifle division. Party activist and journalist A. Savin, followed by party official Yuliy Kirsh (from October 15, 1920), served as the editor-in-chief. The publication was also the organ of the Ferghana obkom party. The newspaper was mobilized by the party to fight against “basmachism” in Ferghana.

The “Красный фронт” newspaper was published from 1919 onwards and served as the press organ of the political department under the Military revolutionary council of the Turkestan republic. Edited by D. Stratulenko, the military newspaper was distributed free of charge along the front lines. The issue published on October 19, 1919, featured articles titled “Red Banner”, “On the red fronts”, “Revolution and Culture” while the issue of May 30, 1919, included articles titled “In Kolchak”, “In Poland” and “Bukhara”. Notably, the article titled “Bukhara” criticized local administration (Сафаров, 2022).

## Front Newspapers

This category of newspapers was published by the political departments of the Turkfront's revolutionary fronts in various locations.

“Борец за коммунизм” is one such publication. From May 11, 1920, the Turkestan front political directorate published the front newspaper “Борец за коммунизм” Boris Lavrenev actively participated in its creation and contributed numerous caricatures, adding to the newspaper's appeal (Арапов, 1967).

“Бой за коммунизм” was a popular front newspaper. It was the press organ of the political department of the Lepsin direction of the Turkestan's seven rivers front revolutionary council and was published around 1919-1920.

The next publication, the “Горнист” front newspaper, also provided information about the intense processes taking place. It was published in 1919 by the organ of the political department under the Military revolutionary council of the Turkestan republic.

“Коммунар” was the front newspaper of the Oqtyuba north-eastern front organ and was published around 1919-1920. Another publication of the Oqtyuba north-eastern front organ, the “Наша фронтовая жизнь” front newspaper, was published and distributed around 1919-1920. P. Agapov's research mentions the “Путеводный огонёк” front newspaper. It was the front newspaper of the Oqtyuba north-eastern front organ and was published around 1919-1920 (Арапов, 1967).

The Alisher Navoiy National Library's rare publications department holds a copy of a leaflet titled “Раненый Красноармеец” specifically, the library's G-16 (sb) collection contains issue No. 2 of the publication, dated September 16, 1920. “Раненый Красноармеец” was published as a literary-political leaflet (Сафаров, 2022). This publication can also be categorized as a front newspaper.

### **National (International) Newspapers**

The national sections of the Turkfront's political departments in various locations began publishing national newspapers. The Turkkomissiya, members of the Revvoensovet front, and local leaders collaborated to create and strengthen national military press, both ideologically and organizationally, and to publish newspapers for international soldiers. The party congress focused on strengthening national and local press for propaganda purposes. The three aspects mentioned above highlight the urgency of the issue:

establishing a national military press;

providing ideological and organizational support;

increasing publications in the languages of various nationalities within the red army.

This raises the question of who is meant by “various nationalities”. Based on information found online, over 2,500 prisoners of war from World War I, or

international soldiers, joined the red army in Turkestan at the end of 1918 and participated in the fight against the national liberation movement (armeniasputnik, 2024). This is further evidenced by the serious efforts made to publish international newspapers in Turkestan. P. Agapov's research provides information on this. For example, in April 1919, the “Всемирная революция” newspaper was published for foreign communists in the region by the organ of the south slavyan group of Turkestan Communists (Арапов, 1967). According to I. Sologubov's book “Иностранные коммунисты в Туркестане, 1918-1921 гг” by the end of 1919, there were approximately 4,000 internationals serving in the Red Army units in Turkestan and 22,000 working in the regional economy (Сологубов, 1961.). We compared these figures with another source. The collection “Rossiya v pervoy mirovoy voyne 1914—1918 gg. (v sifrax)” compiled by the Military statistics department of the Central statistical administration of the USSR contains information on this. We focused on the information related to Turkestan in table 31 titled “Number of foreign prisoners of war in military districts in Russia's interior” (Рос). It states that 1,764 officers and 39,521 ordinary soldiers were brought to Turkestan as prisoners of war, totaling 41,285. Among the prisoners of war, 1,714 officers were Austrian, 50 were German, 36,006 soldiers were Austrian, and 3,515 were German. This means that the prisoners of war brought to Turkestan were predominantly Austrian and German military personnel. The table also notes that 23,587 Austrian and German prisoner of war soldiers were involved in agricultural work. Comparing this with I. Sologubov's data, we see a slight decrease in the number of prisoners of war by 1919. This can be attributed to various factors, such as relocation to other regions in 1917-1918, unauthorized departures to Russia, and deaths from injuries and illness. As a result, by mid-1918, there were approximately 32,000 prisoners of war left in Turkestan, including 11,000 in Tashkent (ЦГА).

After the October Revolution, prisoners of war were released from camp regime and gained freedom. Some even moved into homes. Despite budgetary constraints, the Soviet government in Turkestan continued to allocate funds for the living and sustenance of prisoners of war (ЦГА, 1931). Was there a specific goal behind this? Why did a regime built on betrayal, deceit, oppression, and tyranny decide to appease prisoners of war in the face of financial difficulties?

The historical realities behind these questions are quite revealing. For example, the Soviets used prisoners of war to carry out numerous bloody terrors in Turkestan. As stated in the book “New History of Uzbekistan” the

Soviets used Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war alongside the Dashnaks to drown the Turkestan autonomy in blood (Ўзбекистоннинг, 2000). In late October 1917, Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war were used against the troops of the Provisional government's Turkestan committee in Tashkent. Therefore, to suppress the national liberation movement, the communist party relied on propaganda, including the press, to encourage more prisoners of war to join the red army and actively mobilize them for war. The underlying motive behind the international publications mentioned in our research was the Soviet ideology's insidious goal. The Soviet government, established after the October revolution, granted a semblance of freedom to prisoners of war, which fostered a sense of goodwill towards its policies. As a result, some prisoners of war, having gained their freedom, welcomed the Soviet regime with enthusiasm. While some of them gravitated towards local counter-revolutionary forces, others held hope in the Soviet system (Willfort., 1930). For instance, Hans Sebrowsk, a German prisoner of war in Chimkent, declared, "Our fate is inextricably linked to the fate of the working people in Central Asia. Only their victory can bring us freedom" (Поворот, 1964). Such prisoners of war, poisoned by Soviet propaganda, engaged in the struggle to establish Soviet power in Turkestan. According to the book "Интернационалисты. Трудящиеся зарубежных стран – участники борьбы за власть советов" in late 1917 and early 1918, despite opposition from the Swedish red cross and local organizations, dozens of volunteers, including prisoners of war, joined the red guard detachments in cities and settlements like Samarkand, New Bukhara (Kogon), Skobelev (Ferghana), Kokand, Chorjuy, Petro-Aleksandrovsk (То'rtko'l), Vernogo (Almaty), Pishpek (Frunze), and others (Интернационалисты, 1967).

On August 25, 1919, the political department of the Turkestan republic revolutionary military council's international division published the newspaper "Свобода народов" simultaneously in German, Hungarian, Slovak, and Romanian languages. This weekly publication primarily appeared in German and Hungarian, with supplements in Slovak and Romanian. The first issue included an appeal to readers, stating: "Comrades! The foreign worker and peasant communist organization in Tashkent congratulates its comrades on the publication of the first issue of its international newspaper and wishes it victory in the arduous struggle against the bourgeoisie for the liberation of all working people... Our newspaper's goal is to help and encourage all working people to unite in achieving universal freedom" (Аранов, 1967). This very call demonstrates the significant task before the party

to mobilize prisoners of war for the war effort.

Later, separate newspapers in various languages emerged in place of this publication. "Rote fane" (Red banner) is one such example. From March 1920 onwards, German communists in Turkestan published a military newspaper in German called "Rote fane" (Аранов, 1967). Starting from May 1, 1920, the Yugoslav communists published their newspaper "Srveni baryan" ("Red Star") (Аранов, 1967). In March 1920, Hungarian communists in Turkestan began publishing the military newspaper "Vyoresch uyshag" (Krasnaya gazeta) (Аранов, 1967). The magazine "Shulai inqilob" and the newspaper "Najot" were published for Persian communists (Аранов, 1967).

"Djanga urs" (New war) was one of the publications printed in the language of the Turkestanis. It was a military newspaper published in Kazakh by the Turkfront political directorate from June 1920 onwards (Аранов, 1967).

"Uchqun" (Iskra) Newspaper. The "Uchqun" (Iskra) newspaper, published in Seven Rivers in 1920, was the organ of the political department of the Third Turk Division. It was initiated by D. Furmanov.

Ziyo Said's book "Selected Works" mentions a military newspaper called "Qizil yulduz" (Red star) published in Uzbek (Саид, 1974). According to the book, the newspaper was published by the Turkestan front headquarters in 1925. What was the purpose of the "Qizil yulduz" newspaper? Based on Z. Said's opinion, the objectives of the publication can be divided into two:

Firstly: to conduct extensive propaganda and agitation among the soldiers of the newly formed and forming national units within the red army;

to familiarize soldiers with government affairs;

to acquaint Uzbek soldiers in national units with the life of the republic and the international situation.

Secondly, to influence public opinion by spreading the idea of forming national units for the Red Army among the local population, especially the working class; to improve relations between the local population and the red army.

Ziyo Said writes that 11 issues of the newspaper were published in 1925. The main reason for this is attributed to financial factors.

The information presented suggests that during the suppression of the national liberation movement in Turkestan, the bolsheviks paid great attention to organizing and developing the red army press. This formation of military publication typology demonstrates the bolsheviks' effective use of various methods of information dissemination and

manipulative influence, their ability to utilize the press as a powerful ideological weapon, and their timely mobilization of mass media.

P. Agapov notes that during the most complex and challenging period against internal and external counter-revolutionary forces, red army publications began to be established on a mass scale. The following main tasks were set for central, front, and national newspapers, which were common to all:

to exert a strong ideological influence within the army;

to be a reliable assistant to military unit commanders;

to assist the military commissars in their ideological work;

to be an active helper in the ideological work of party organizations (Арапов, 1967).

Focusing on the information in P. Agapov's dissertation abstract on propaganda and agitation (Арапов, 1967), the answer seems even clearer. For example, the researcher states that the red army's "Красный фронт" newspaper published an appeal from the Turkestan central executive committee (Turksik) titled "Red Soviet Turkestan in Danger!" (Красный Советский Туркестан в опасности!) in its May 26, 1919 issue. This document, imbued with the spirit of Soviet ideology, concluded with an appeal and a red slogan: "To the defense of all Soviet power, to the workers of power, to the poor peasants and farmers!". The material was prepared in fulfillment of the thesis adopted by the Communist party of bolsheviks (SK RKP (b)) regarding the situation with the Eastern front. A high-flown appeal was made to the Red soldiers through the publication in a party spirit.

Another publication published by Turkfront, "Gornist" in its June 29, 1919 issue, called on the local population in the Caspian region to join the ranks of the red army and support it in every way (Арапов, 1967).

As these examples show, during the peak of the national liberation movement, the ruling ideology mainly used military publications published in Turkestan as a propaganda tool.

## CONCLUSIONS

P. Agapov's research highlights the "mobilization and organizational role of the red army's mass publications during the period of the suppression of counter-revolutionary forces in Turkestan". This research proves that the Soviets used the press as a powerful ideological weapon. One example is sufficient to illustrate this point. For instance, military publications that served as the organ of the Turkfront political administration played a significant role in shaping our understanding of the terms "basmachi" and "basmachi movement" essentially branding them onto our

consciousness. Regular articles were published in sections like "Dob'em basmachestvo" (We will defeat basmachi), "Protiv basmachey" (Against the basmachi) and "Borba s basmachestvom" (The Struggle against basmachi), through which the Soviet historical narrative of the "basmachi movement" was constructed. Publications like "Красноармеец" (Red Army Soldier), "Красная звезда" (Red Star), "Красный фронт" (Red Front), "Красноармейская газета" (Red Army Newspaper), "Набат революции" (The Alarm bell of the revolution), "Горнист" (The Horn), and other military publications mentioned in the article became instrumental in this process. They exerted immense effort to instill false perceptions like "the Red Army is the savior of the working class" and "basmachism is a class enemy" into public opinion.

Why did the Soviets strive to distort the essence of the struggle for national liberation in Turkestan through media? What prompted them to mobilize such significant resources? What could this struggle have exposed?

First and foremost, the flames of this struggle in Turkestan were ignited against the rule and oppression of Soviet power. The people's uprising demonstrated their rejection of Soviet authority and ideology. As Cho'lpon said, a sea, a wave, and a force had emerged. The Soviets attempted to suppress this great storm through violence, force, threats, intrigue, and other tried and untried methods. They leveraged the power of the press to poison public consciousness, distort reality, misinterpret events, and create a false history.

By publishing military publications in the local languages and the languages of the international peoples, the Soviets sought to suppress the burgeoning struggle for freedom and liberation in Turkestan. They aimed to recruit more prisoners of war and local representatives into the red army, convincing them of the righteousness of their sinister policies.

The Soviets actively used propaganda and agitation through military publications to completely transform the events that the people of Turkestan had witnessed and experienced firsthand, twisting them in the opposite direction and distorting the national liberation struggle. This blatant manipulation further reveals the repulsive nature of the totalitarian regime and the proponents of communist ideology.

Based on the above, we can draw the following conclusions about the true goals and functions of military publications:

to misrepresent the struggle for national liberation of the people of Turkestan as a "basmachi movement";

to falsify historical truth;

to bolster the ranks of the Red Army through local populations and prisoners of war using the false narrative of Soviet ideology;

to create a positive public opinion towards the Red Army;

to instill a spirit of ruthless struggle against Soviet enemies;

to intensify ideological propaganda.

## REFERENCES

Ziyoeva, D. 2000. Turkiston milliy ozodlik harakati. (Mustabid tuzumga qarshi 1916 yil va 1918—1924 yillardagi xalq kurashlari tarixshunosligi) G'afur Gulom nomidagi Adabiyot va san'at nashriyoti. Toshkent. - B.81.

Said, Z. 1974. Tanlangan asarlar. (To'plovchi Sh.Turdiyev). T., Adabiyot va san'at nashriyoti, 1974. - B.280.

Safarov A. Harbiy jurnalistika asoslari: o'quv qo'llanma. –Toshkent: “Muhir-press” nashriyoti, 2022. -B. 272.

Xamaev N. O'zbekistonda Sovet hokimiyatiga qarshi qurolli harakat va harbiy matbuot // O'tmishga nazar. - Toshkent, 2019. - № 10. -B. 69-77. <https://tadqiqot.uz/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/tarix-2019-10/69-78.pdf>.

O'zbekistonning yangi tarixi, K.2. O'zbekiston sovet mustamlakachilik davrida. T., “Sharq”, 2000. - B.688.

“O'zbekistonda ijtimoiy fanlar” jurnali, 1967 yil 2 soni, - B.40.

Аннакурдов. М К истории коммунистической печати в Туркменистане, Ашхабад, Госиздат ТуркмССР, 1958, –С.205.

Агапов П.В. Военная печать Туркестана в годы гражданской войны (1918-1920 гг.). Автореферат диссертации на соискание ученой степени кандидата исторических наук. Т., 1967. –С. 27.

Востмой съезд РКП(б). Март 1919. Протоколы. Москва. Государственное издательство политической литературы. 1959. –С.436-437. [https://istmat.org/files/uploads/51514/8\\_sezd.pdf](https://istmat.org/files/uploads/51514/8_sezd.pdf).

Интернационалисты. Трудящиеся зарубежных стран - участники борьбы за власть советов. Том 1,2. М., “Наука”, 1967.

<https://internasionalisty.blogspot.com/2014/06/7-2.html>. “Povorot mirovogo znacheniya”. М., 1964, –S. 157.

Раджабов К. Вооруженное движение в Туркестане против советского режима (1918-1924). ЛАМБЕРТ Академик Паблишинг. 2018.

“Россия в первой мировой войне 1914—1918 гг. (в цифрах)”. М., 1925, –С. 40.

Сологубов И.С. Иностранцы коммунисты в Туркестане, 1918-1921 гг. Ташкент. Госиздат Узбекской ССР, 1961.-С. 177.

СГА УзССР, ф. Р-25, он. 1, д. 18, л. 38, 39; ГАТО, ф. 10, оп. 13, д. 37. лл. 122, 123; Центральный государственный архив Советской Армии (далее — СГАСА), ф. 25859, оп. 3, д. 33, лл. 229, 272, 351.

СГА УзССР, ф. Р-25, он. 1, д. 51, лл. 63, 66, 79; д. 182, лл. 16, 17, 19; А. Brun. Troublesomes Times. London, 1931, p. 169

“Горнист”, 1919 йил, 17 октябр.

F. Willfort. Turkestanisches Tagebuch Sechs Jahre in Russischen Zentralasien. Wien, 1930, S. 116—119; А. Brun. Ukaz. soch., str. 180 i dr.; <3a Sovetskiy Turkestan, –P. 333.

Армянский город Ашхабад.

<https://ru.armeniasputnik.am/20170211/armyanskiy-gorod-ashkhabad-6370809.html>.