



THE GENDARMERIE, SECRET POLICE, AND POLITICAL SURVEILLANCE IN THE FERGANA OBLAST UNDER RUSSIAN IMPERIAL RULE

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Annotation. This article examines the formation and operational structure of the imperial Russian security apparatus in the Turkestan Region, with particular focus on the Fergana Oblast, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on archival materials from the Uzbekistan National Archives (UzNA), the study traces the institutional evolution from the early gendarmerie railway directorates established in 1901 and 1905 through to the founding of the Turkestan District Security Department (TDSD) in 1907.

Key words: Russian Empire, Turkestan, Fergana Oblast, gendarmerie, Turkestan District Security Department (TDSD), Okhranka, covert surveillance, secret police.

Within the system of special supervisory bodies of the Russian Empire, the gendarmerie directorates and the Turkestan District Security Department (hereinafter — TDSD) occupied a distinct place. Although the Central Asian and Tashkent Railway gendarmerie directorates were established in 1901 and 1905 respectively, these organizations gradually became unable to meet the growing demands of investigative activity. Documents pertaining to the Turkestan Regional Gendarmerie Directorate indicate that there was a recognized need to strengthen the oversight system in the Fergana Oblast. It was noted therein that the existing forces were insufficient to fully cover the situation across the territory. For this reason, the directorate's leadership raised the question of increasing the number of assistants, and it was deemed necessary to introduce at least two assistant positions. It was emphasized that one of them should be stationed in the city of Kokand, which was explained by its proximity to Skobelev, the growing population, and the expansion of the working class. The document further stressed that, given the vast size of the oblast's territory, a single officer could not effectively carry out investigative and supervisory work across all points. In particular, the districts of Andijan and Osh were singled out as areas requiring constant surveillance, and they remained under persistent administrative attention. The regulatory documents of the Turkestan Regional Gendarmerie Directorate also outlined the procedure for stationing non-commissioned officers. For instance, it was envisaged that two would be placed in the city of Skobelev, two in Namangan — designated as an area with a high concentration of workers — and likewise two each in Chust and Osh. It was also noted that a dedicated staff member was necessary at border posts such as Irkeshtam to ensure oversight. Furthermore, information was provided regarding the division of Gendarmerie Corps personnel across the Fergana Oblast into two groups. A separate group was assigned to the Kokand and Skobelev districts, with its headquarters located in the city of Kokand. Another group was formed for the Andijan, Namangan, and Osh districts, with its center in



Andijan. It is recorded that both groups included assistants, a vakhmistr, non-commissioned officers, and interpreters³⁹.

In 1901, the Main Directorate of the Separate Gendarmerie Corps addressed the Turkestan Governor-General with a proposal to establish permanent gendarmerie oversight in the region. The necessity of creating this body was explained by reference to the Andijan Uprising of 1898, which, in the directorate's view, had in fact developed and occurred precisely because the local administration lacked a covert agent network. From that period onward, the conduct of preliminary investigations into state crimes was assigned to the chiefs of gendarmerie divisions and to the heads of the Orenburg–Tashkent and Central Asian Railway gendarmerie directorates. This process was given legal consolidation in 1904. From 1906 onward, a separate order came into force authorizing the gendarmerie to conduct investigations into crimes of a political character⁴⁰.

The colonial administration, as throughout Turkestan, set about organizing in the Fergana Oblast an extensive clandestine network of permanent and temporary agents (filery) operating in secret. The activities of filery were regulated by the "Statute on Covert Police Surveillance," introduced in the Russian Empire in 1882 and supplemented in 1889. This document clarified the distinction between the concepts of "covert (secret) surveillance" and "covert observation," though in practice the two were frequently conflated by numerous gendarmerie directorates. Covert observation was itself essentially external in character; it was organized by the Police Department through local institutions and was directed at verifying the accuracy of information obtained, establishing the activities of persons under surveillance, their contacts, and the addresses at which individuals under suspicion might be encountered. The gendarmerie directorates reported the results of surveillance operations to the Police Department. From 1889 onward, covert surveillance was set to be carried out for a period of two years and could be discontinued upon instruction from the Police Department⁴¹.

The Police Department's instructions emphasized to the heads of gendarmerie directorates the necessity of systematically and thoroughly collecting information on the lifestyle and conduct of persons under suspicion. From the spring of 1907 in particular, the activities of Socialist-Revolutionaries, Dashnaks, and anarchists intensified in the central oblasts of the Turkestan Region, including the Fergana Oblast. According to reports, it was during this same period that Jadidist and progressive ideas — branded as "Pan-Turkism" and "Pan-Islamism" — began to spread to a considerable degree. These processes unfolded under the influence of revolutionary movements taking place in the territories of Turkey and Iran. Within the Fergana Oblast as well, a certain level of latent discontent began to grow. The principal causes cited for this were the restrictions imposed by the imperial administration on the local population regarding land tenure, as well as the

³⁹ UzNA, Fund I-1, List 28, File 502, Folio 1

⁴⁰ UzNA, Fund I-461, List 1, File 1788, Folios 20–21.

⁴¹ UzNA, Fund I-1, List 27, File 11, Folio 3.



reduction of land available to local inhabitants resulting from the intensified influx of settlers relocated from various parts of Russia.

In August 1907, a Special Section for investigative affairs was established under the Chancellery of the Turkestan Governor-General, with the purpose of combating "persons engaged in anti-government activity." This section was responsible for conveying intelligence-type information concerning revolutionary movements in the territories and significant developments in the life of the local population. By order of imperial Minister of Internal Affairs P. A. Stolypin, Lieutenant Colonel Vasilyev of the Separate Gendarmerie Corps was appointed head of the Special Section and assumed leadership of political investigative operations in Turkestan.

The activities of the Special Section covered primarily the city of Tashkent and its adjacent territories, a situation that did not fully satisfy the tsarist administration. Accordingly, in compliance with the circular of the Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated 15 December 1907 concerning the Special Section, a dedicated organization — the Turkestan District Security Department (TDSD) — was established under the Chancellery of the Turkestan Governor-General. Although the department was formally part of the Governor-General's chancellery, in practice it functioned as an independent organ of the Police Department.

The Turkestan District Security Department commenced its operations in June 1907 and existed for nearly ten years, until 7 March 1917. By the end of that first year, 48 case files had been opened; over the following two years — 1908–1909 and into 1910 — the number of cases grew to an average of approximately 300. In total, by March 1917, nearly 2,600 case files had been compiled⁴².

The establishment of the Turkestan District Security Department (hereinafter — TDSD) was closely bound up with the political and social imperatives directed at maintaining political stability in the Turkestan Region of the Russian Empire, consolidating colonial governance, and centralizing the security apparatus. The complex political processes unfolding in the region at the turn of the twentieth century — and in particular the mounting revolutionary mood — compelled the imperial administration to reconsider its existing mechanisms of control. First and foremost, the activation of various political groupings in the region — Socialist-Revolutionaries, Social-Democrats, and anarchists among them — constituted one of the principal factors. These forces made effective use of the gaps in the existing surveillance system, specifically the inadequate organization of the gendarmerie bodies and the numerical weakness and organizational deficiencies of the local police. As a result, they succeeded in conducting active propaganda among railway workers, military units, and the local population, thereby intensifying sentiments of discontent toward the empire — a development that was, in

⁴² UzNA, Fund I-461, List 1, File 164a, Folios 1–4.



turn, assessed as a serious threat by the central authorities. The second significant factor was the growing influx of foreign nationals into the region, linked to the increasing geopolitical importance of Turkestan. This process was frequently intertwined with military intelligence activities and was perceived by the imperial administration as a potential danger. Accordingly, monitoring the activities of persons arriving from abroad, and determining their aims and objectives, became an urgent task from the standpoint of state security. The third factor was the growing influence of Jadidist ideas in the region. The administration of the Russian Empire regarded these movements as politically dangerous and deemed it necessary to systematically monitor their influence on the socio-political consciousness of the population. The prospect of the Muslim population becoming politically activated and consolidating on the basis of ideological unity was considered particularly contrary to imperial interests⁴³.

REFERENCES

1. UzNA, Fund I-461, List 1, File 962, Folio 1.
2. UzNA, Fund I-461, List 1, File 164a, Folios 1–4.
3. UzNA, Fund I-1, List 27, File 11, Folio 3.
4. UzNA, Fund I-1, List 28, File 502, Folio 1
5. UzNA, Fund I-461, List 1, File 1788, Folios 20–21.

⁴³ UzNA, Fund I-461, List 1, File 962, Folio 1.