

Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program Final Research Report

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Title of the Research Proposal:

Integration or Autonomy? The Dynamics of Crimean Tatar Repatriation and Its Impact on Regional Security in Central Eurasia

Topic of Research: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, conflicts in post-Soviet Eurasia remain to be a challenge for the U.S. and international foreign policy makers in terms of regional and international security. These conflicts mostly escalate in regions where diverse ethno-religious groups with mutually incompatible [political] goals co-exist in close proximity. The consequent inter-ethnic dynamics often generate structural conditions that can set off grievances, especially if one or more of the [minority] groups experience relative deprivation vis-à-vis other group(s). Objective scarcities fuse with subjective factors to eventually widen the cleavages and generate incentives for manifest conflict. Crimea is one of these widely-disputed territories where simmering ethnic hostilities between three central actors, the Crimean Russians, [returning] Islamic Crimean Tatars, and [Russified] Ukrainians, bear all the incentives for ethno-political action. To capture the complexity of Crimean Tatar return and its impact on inter-ethnic relations in Crimea, this study focused on the post-return situational dynamics of Crimean Tatars against the background of relative deprivation.

Crimean Tatars, who emphasize that they are the indigenous people of Crimea, were deported *en masse* from their peninsular homeland under Stalin's orders on May 18, 1944. They were not the *only* deported group of the Stalin era, but they were one of the few who were not allowed to return to their homeland during Khrushchev's *thaw*.¹ Crimean Tatars were allowed to return to Crimea only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Upon arrival, they faced ethnically based overt and covert discrimination, grim socio-economic conditions,² and lack of political

¹After 1956, although the majority of the deported groups (Chechens, Ingush, Karachais, Balkars, Kalmyks, Koreans) were granted permission to return to their homelands, the Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, and Meshketian Turks were forbidden to repatriate.

²Land deficiencies, land allocation problems, housing crisis, lack of electricity, gas, sewage system, roads, social services, and educational opportunities in their native language.

representation.³ As years passed by, their situation did not improve. The unemployment and underemployment is still high among the Crimean Tatars. According to the Crimean Republican Committee on Nationalities' 2002 report that was published in Simferopol, more than 128 thousand returnees still do not have permanent housing in Crimea. Regardless of these stagnant conditions, they remain committed to nonviolence, as their leadership, i.e., *de-facto Mejlis* (People's Parliament) persistently advocates peaceful means to improve their situation in their peninsular homeland.

Although approximately 90 percent of the ethnic Russians settled in Crimea following the Crimean Tatar deportation in 1944, they perceive the peninsula as a historically Russian territory. The majority of them believe that Crimea belongs to Russia and it should never have been transferred to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954. They continuously opt for re-unification of the peninsula with the Russian Federation and often bring up the issue in the Crimean Parliament. These separatist tendencies are further exacerbated by the unresolved issue of famous Russian Black Sea Fleet which is located in the Crimean port city Sevastopol. Ukrainian Russophones often act in sync with the pro-Russian actors in defense of Russian language, culture, and Orthodoxy vis-à-vis Crimean Tatars.

Relevance to the Contribution to the Field: Currently, there are two history and one anthropology book on Crimean Tatars (in English). However, there is no detailed, contemporary field research that analyzes the dynamics of Crimean Tatar return and its implications on regional security in post-Soviet Eurasia through multi-method data collection. Accordingly, this interdisciplinary research provides a unique contribution to several academic fields, including sociology, security studies, and area studies. The research is also unique from a theoretical angle. It integrates the theories of Relative Deprivation, Social Identity, and Basic Human Needs and Conflict Resolution in an effort to explain choices of conflict strategies (violent vs. nonviolent) vis-à-vis shifting external conditions. Consequently, this time-sensitive analysis also makes significant contribution to the field of social psychology.

³ Currently, there is only one Crimean Tatar deputy in Ukrainian Upper Parliament (*Verhovna Rada*) that has a total of 450 deputies (national level). There are six Crimean Tatar deputies in the Crimean Upper Parliament that has total of 100 deputies. Since the majority in the Crimean Parliament is the members of the Party of Regions, the Communists, and other pro-Russian political actors, the six deputies cannot implement any political change in regards to Crimean Tatars (local level).

A Concise Summary of the Research Methodology including a List of Research Sites: For

the multi-method data collection of this case study, I drew on three main sources:

1. A survey design that entailed: a) self-administered survey questionnaires with closed and open ended questions, and b) Semi-structured, face-to-face in-depth interviews;
2. Participant observation;
3. Newspaper/archival research of Crimean newspapers (in Russian and Crimean Tatar languages).

At the end of the field administration, a total of 752 completed questionnaires were gathered and 164 face-to-face interviews with diverse group of Crimean Tatar returnees were conducted. The survey participants were between the ages of 18-80 and Ukrainian citizens.

Self-administered survey questionnaires were disseminated through 30 gatekeepers in widely dispersed research sites throughout Crimea. The research sites included 13 cities, 15 villages, 21 micro-districts (*mikroraioni* are located at the outskirts of the cities), and ten field-protest squatter camps.⁴ The research sites included the following,

Cities: Simferopol, Evpatoria, Bahcesaray, Feodosia, Stariy Qirim, Belogorsk, Gurzuf, Sudak, Alushta, Djankoy, Krasnogvardeiskoe, Armyansk, Sakhi.

Villages:

In Bahcesaray Region: Uppa/Rodnoe; Golubinka/Kokgoz; Pochtavoya; Nova Palovka; Livadki; Glubokoi Yar; Kudrino; Sinopnaya.

In Simferopol region: Mirnoe; Beloglinka; Kolchugino.

In Sudak region: Dochnoe/Taraktash; Sovetskii/Ichki.

In Belagorsk region: Muchurino, Ablej Prudi.

⁴ A self-seizing (*sama-zaxvat*) movement was initiated by Crimean Tatar returnees during and after their return to Crimea. The returnees who arrived in Crimea after the declaration of independence of Ukraine (December 1, 1991) were only allowed to apply for citizenship *after* five years of residency in Ukraine. Moreover, since dual citizenship was not in the constitution, first they needed to renounce their [exile] citizenship, which was a lengthy and costly process. As a result, until the adoption of new Ukrainian citizenship law of Ukraine in 2001, the majority of the returnees remained non-citizens, and were ineligible for employment, social services, and Ukrainian internal passports (*propiska*), i.e., eligibility for land or housing. Consequently, they started squatting on unused empty lands and living in shantytowns they built with their own hands. In 1999 a series of presidential decrees were able to break up the collective agricultural farm system (*kolhozes*) and bring in the privatization law, which allowed land from the farms to be distributed among all former collective farm (*kolhoz*) members. Since the deported Crimean Tatars did not live in Crimea before the demise of the Soviet Union, they were not able to receive land under the new law and could not participate in the state property privatization on equal terms with the rest of the Crimean population. Consequently, landless Crimean Tatars continued squatting. Since these movements were declared illegal in 2003, the self-seizing movement changed its name to field protests (*polyana protesta*), where homeless Crimean Tatars continued to squat on empty fields with a dream of owning a piece of that land for their future houses.

Simferopol Micro-districts: Novonikolayevka I, Novonikolayevka II, Fontan I, Fontan II, Fontan III; Zaleska, AqMeschit; Kamenka; Belaya I, Belaya II, Belaya III, Marino I; Marino II; Marino III; Molodejnoe; Urajaynoe; Dubkih.

Other Micro-districts: Ismail Bey (Evpatoria); Bahcesaray micro-district 5; Bahcesaray micro-district 6; Bahcesaray micro-district 7

Squatter Camps Field Protest (*polyana protesta*) Areas:

Simferopol Squatter Camps: Lugavoi; Lugavoi-Komsomolskii; Lugavoi-Stroganovka; Chistinkaya; Ukromnaya Field 1; Ukromnaya Field 2; Ukromnaya Field 3; Malodojniye; Gurzuf Squatter Camps: Gurzuf Field 2; Gurzuf Field 5.

The face-to-face interviews, that were solely conducted by the researcher, in Russian and in Crimean Tatar, took place in 13 cities (Simferopol, Evpatoria, Bahcesaray, Feodosia, Stariy Qirim, Belogorsk, Gurzuf, Yalta, Sudak, Alushta, Djankoy, Armyansk, and Sakhi); 12 villages (in Bahcesaray Region: Uppa, Golubinka, Pochtavoya, Nova Palovka, Livadki, Glubokoi Yar, Kudrino; in Simferopol region: Mirnoe, Beloglinka, Kolchugino; in Sudak region: Dochnoe, Sovetskii); 20 micro-districts (Novonikolayevka I, Novonikolayevka II, Fontan I, Fontan II, Fontan III; Zaleska, AqMeschit; Kamenka; Belaya I, Belaya II, Marino I; Marino II; Molodejnoe; Urajaynoe; Dubkih (Simferopol); Ismail Bey (Evpatoria), Limanli (Evpatoria); Bahcesaray micro-district 5; Bahcesaray micro-district 6; Bahcesaray micro-district 7); and 10 field-protest squatter camps (Lugavoi; Lugavoi-Komsomolskii; Lugavoi-Stroganovka; Chistinkaya; Ukromnaya Field 1; Ukromnaya Field 2; Ukromnaya Field 3; Malodojniye (Simferopol), Gurzuf Field 2; Gurzuf Field 5 (Gurzuf).

Due to certain infrastructural shortcomings, such as the absence of telephone lines in rural as well as in certain urban areas, where Crimean Tatars live in compact settlements, picking names from a phone book for random sampling is impossible in Crimea. Moreover, in the majority of the micro-districts, there are no paved roads, and consequently no street names. Often, Crimean Tatar houses are scattered between the Russians' and the Ukrainians', thus it becomes impossible to utilize any kind of systematic or random sampling strategy. Accordingly, snowball sampling was utilized for both the questionnaire distribution and the face-to-face interviews. For the interviews, in an effort to keep the distribution error to a minimum and to get close to the representative cross-section of Crimean Tatars, diverse actors from all walks of life were targeted. Among the interviewees, there were 15 *de-facto* Mejlis leaders (out of 33), 10 opposition leaders, in addition to 16 members of different Crimean Tatar NGOs (including

Maarifci (Educator), “Research and Support of Indigenous Peoples of Crimea Foundation,” “Azamat,” “Crimean Tatar Initiative All-Crimean Youth Association,” that are located in Simferopol, and the “Yashlik” (the Youth), that is located in Evpatoria). Moreover, I was able to conduct several interviews with the journalists of three Crimean Tatar newspapers, and leaders/members of the Simferopol *Muftiyat* (the Central Crimean Tatar Muslim Community Office), *Kadiyat Mahalle* Islamic Community Center, a Muslim organization that is not registered and recognized by Crimean Tatar *Muftiyat*, and *Beloglinka* Islamic Community, which is a village Islamic community center near Simferopol. The other interview subjects included bazaar dwellers, former Crimean Tatar Soviet army veterans, farmers, teachers, and protestors who were squatting on a field in different locations.

A Summary of Research Findings and Preliminary Conclusions: The basic research questions for this study were:

a) How do post-return structural conditions in Crimea impact the current -individual and collective- *perceptions* of Crimean Tatars against the background of relative deprivation? What are the effects of these (cognitive) *perceptions*⁵ on the adoption of [shifting] conflict strategies?

b) How do the post-return structural conditions in Crimea impact the current -individual and collective- *emotions* of Crimean Tatars against the background of relative deprivation? What are the effects of these *emotions* on the adoption of [shifting] conflict strategies?

c) Will nonviolence remain as a *chosen conflict style* for the repatriates as a collective? Or will it shift in other directions under the changing external circumstances?

d) How willing are the Crimean Tatars to participate in permitted/not-permitted political protests in Crimea through a spectrum that ranges from nonviolent to violent?

e) Do Crimean Tatars view religion as a tool for socio-political change? Will states or fundamentalist groups utilize it, and what are the Crimean Tatar attitudes about radical (religious or otherwise) actions in general?

The first part of the study (research questions a and b), aimed to measure the differential effects of cognitive (perceptions) and affective (emotions)⁶ relative deprivation through a series of questions about economic, social, and political group comparisons vis-à-vis other groups in the peninsula. These questions were divided into two sections. The first section asked the survey

⁵ In terms of social, economic, and political situation of Crimean Tatars vis-à-vis “others” on the peninsula.

⁶ To assess the affective component of relative deprivation, the respondents were asked to rate their feelings about perceived intergroup differences using a list of emotions adapted from the studies of Taylor, Moghaddam, and Bellerose (1989) as well as De La Rey and Raju (1996). This new (modified) list of emotions adapted from both studies included ten emotions appropriate for the Crimean Tatar situation: satisfaction, pride, happiness, anger, frustration, hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety, “other feelings” (the respondents were to specify this if they chose this particular emotion), and “I feel nothing.”

participants about the Russians and the Ukrainians specifically (Slavs), and the second section focused on the other ethno-national groups in the peninsula, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Germans, Karaims, Krimchaks, and so on. The responses to both sections indicated that the Crimean Tatars perceived their situation [cognitively] to be worse off than all the others in the peninsula. The consequent top emotions they felt vis-à-vis *others* depended on who the *other* was. Towards the Russians and the Ukrainians, the top three emotions were anger, anxiety, and frustration. Towards other ethnic groups the top three emotions were anxiety, frustration, and no feeling at all. Preliminary interviews also yield similar results.

The next research question (question c and d) entailed the examination of chosen conflict styles (violent/nonviolent) among the Crimean Tatars. The survey responses displayed that almost all (99.8 percent) Crimean Tatars chose nonviolence over violence, not only in Crimea, but throughout the world, including in deep-rooted conflicts in Chechnya, Palestine/Israel, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Almost in unison, they asserted that they did not approve violence under any circumstances.

When the respondents were asked about the protest meetings in Crimea, the responses were similar. The majority of the survey participants stated that they approved most of the non-violent sit-ins and protests the returnees organize for more housing, return of property and such. They also asserted that they did not approve violent protests no matter what. Especially the middle-aged and the elderly interviewees maintained their belief in the effectiveness of nonviolent protests in Crimea in bringing the needed social change in political, economic and social spheres. On the other hand, the younger interviewees were more skeptical. They stated that these protests were just a show without any benefits for the Crimean Tatars, and that they would not participate in such useless actions.

The analysis of questions a, b, c, and d indicated that although Crimean Tatars clearly experience cognitive and affective [group] relative deprivation vis-à-vis “others,” they did not support *violent actions of civil disobedience of any kind*.

Here one major shift needs to be noticed. During my grant tenure in Crimea, there were a couple of attacks on Crimean Tatars. After these attacks, interview tones somewhat changed. These two unprovoked attacks on Crimean Tatars took place on July 8, 2006 and on August 12, 2006. The perpetrators of these attacks were the members of the Russian Block (RB), Russian Community of Crimea (ROK), Skinheads, and the so-called Cossack Union. Both attacks took

place at the Azizler (Saints)⁷ holy site in Bahcesaray, where Crimean Tatars were participating in a nonviolent sit-in for the relocation of the bazaar to another location. Crimean Tatars referred to this market as the market “built on bones.” The returnees were trying to resolve this sensitive issue for the several years using the appropriate state channels. At the At the end of June 2006, when the court decided not to relocate the market, they organized a non-violent sit-in protest in front of the market. The majority of these protestors were women, young adults (school age), and older men.

Both on July 8, 2006, and August 12, 2006, the pro-Russian forces attacked on the unsuspecting protestors from all sides with sticks, clubs, bullwhips, hand grenades, and Molotov cocktails. After the first attack 15 and after the second attack 60 Crimean Tatars were hospitalized with severe injuries. As the videotapes of these attacks indicated, among the perpetrators there were young men with Afghanistan or Chechnya tattoos on their arms and their blood types on their chests, i.e., former military officers who served in those wars. Other pro-Russian paramilitary groups included the members of the so-called Crimean Cossack Union.⁸ Historically, Crimea never had Cossacks. Claiming they are making Crimea safe for the Russian majority, these artificial “Cossacks” that mainly consists of retired Soviet army/navy officials in Cossack uniforms have been keeping “the order and security” in the peninsula parallel to the existing legal law-enforcement agencies. With their bullwhips, large peaked Russian-style caps, tunic and trousers tucked in their boots; they are the main actors in every protest that is anti-NATO,⁹ anti-US, anti-Yushchenko, and anti-Tatar.

These particular attacks and other continuous provocations on the Tatars shifted the tone of the interviews. The middle-aged returnees and even some younger ones expressed intense anger and frustration. They started to talk about getting ready by physically training themselves against future attacks. Although they were not talking about violence involving weapons, the increasing shame and anger and eagerness to get even was apparent. This is a significant shift vis-à-vis conflict strategies. If these attacks are allowed to continue, and the perpetrators are

⁷ This Muslim holy site includes the mosque of Aziz Malik Ashter, and three historical grave sites (turbes) of the former Crimean Khans of Giray Mehmet II (1584); Giray Saadet II (1590); and Giray Mehmet III (1629).

⁸ These “Cossacks” have nothing to do with the descendents of the Ukrainian Cossacks that settled along Dnieper in 1400-1500s.

⁹ Although the two events at first glance seemed unrelated, these pro-Russian perpetrators of this attack were also the same actors who organized month-long protests against the American warship “Advantage” that led to the first ever cancelation of joint military exercises of Ukraine (Sea Breeze 2006) with the US and other NATO countries through its Partnership for Peace Program that was signed in Madrid in July 1997.

never punished, Crimean Tatars may eventually choose violent strategies to protect their continuous existence in the peninsula. Since the pro-Russians would also choose more violent ways as a response, this can result in security dilemma and eventually would shift the present latent conflict into a manifest one.

The last question (question e) was about Islam and Crimean Tatars, who are Sunni Muslims. Although a large majority of the survey participants indicated that they were fairly religious, it turned out that 48.1 percent of them never visit a mosque. Others denoted that they visit mosques only in religious holidays and funerals. Among them only 9.5 percent indicated that they went to mosque regularly. Interviews and participant observation displayed that the religious identity is still a developing entity among the majority of the secular Crimean Tatars who are currently defining themselves as Muslims, but drink alcohol, eat pork, and yet keep the religious traditions such as visiting graves during the religious holidays, and so on.

The *de-facto* Crimean Tatar leadership supports Turkish style secular Islam and vehemently opposes certain radical Islamic denominations,¹⁰ such as Hizb-Ut-Tahrir (HUT) and the Wahhabis. The majority of the returnees I interviewed thought these groups were fanatics. On the other hand, the participant observation revealed that pockets of Crimean Tatars who are losing hope in resolution of their issues by the state are drawn to these groups that see the opportunity to expand among the frustrated returnees. Due to the limited time of the grant tenure, only two members of HUT were interviewed. These limited interviews revealed that members of these groups (altogether around 3000 members) opted for the restoration of global Islamic *Caliphate* (that was abolished in 1924 by the founder and the first president of the Republic of Turkey, M. Kemal Ataturk). HUT members did not go to the Crimean Tatar Mosques, and prayed in the fields or private houses, and published an underground monthly newspaper *Vozrojdenie* (Rebirth). They did not identify themselves with their ethnicity as all the other Tatars do (as Crimean Tatars), but with Islamic identity. Moreover, they did not care for the establishment of Crimean Tatar schools in Crimea as all the other Tatars do, but continued to speak Russian with one another and with their families.

These particular findings indicated that although they were ethnically Crimean Tatars, they were quiet different from the general population. Accordingly, these highly inaccessible

¹⁰ As of August 2007, there are 377 registered and 612 unregistered Muslim organizations in Crimea. While all the registered organizations work with Crimean Tatar *Muftiyat* (official Islamic Religious Authority), the unregistered ones, such as HUT and the Wahhabis, work independently from the *Muftiyat*.

groups in Crimea need to be further investigated by a scholar who can penetrate these groups through strong connections. It is crucial to understand their complete goals and ideological connections with other Muslim organizations (radical or otherwise) globally. This ties in perfectly with the next section.

Suggestions for Future Research: As indicated in the previous section, Islamic groups such as HUT that is legal in Ukraine, but illegal in Germany (since 2003), the Russian Federation, and the US, needs to be studied closely. This is not an easy task. The members of these groups do not like to be interviewed, especially by a US scholar. Accordingly, the scholar needs to speak Russian (they prefer speaking in Russian) fluently so that no translators would be involved, have a deep knowledge of their religious culture and dress up properly for the interviews.

For a field research in Crimea, Russian language skill is a must. Although a scholar can use a translator, Hawthorne effect can prevail, where the participants might choose to give socially desirable answers by understating attitudes/behaviors they do not want to admit or overstating the ones that are praiseworthy in front of another Ukrainian citizen. Hawthorne effect can impact the interviews even when a translator is not present, but with the existence of another person in the room for people who grew up under the watchful eyes of the Soviet Secret Service is a definite no-no, especially when inquired about politically sensitive issues.

Recommendations for the US Policy Community: As the 2006 ethnic clashes indicated, the inter-ethnic relations in Crimea is deteriorating. In other words, Crimea has all the incentives for a manifest ethnic conflict. Currently, the Ukrainian central authorities do not have a clear strategy for the resolution of this crisis at the periphery for they are dealing with their ineffective government at the center in Kiev. When they pay attention to Crimea, Kiev continuously links the Crimean crisis directly to the land allocation issues of the Crimean Tatars and ignores all the other conflict instigating factors in the peninsula, including the different strokes for different [ethnic] folks mentality in implementation of law and the ongoing attacks on Crimean Tatars by pro-Russian groups (these groups include certain deputies from the Crimean Upper Parliament that has been videotaped and documented on television news programs). This situation is deeply affecting the psyches of the Crimean Tatar returnees. Under the circumstances, if certain preventive measures are not taken, pockets of frustrated Tatars who think “enough is enough” may shift their conflict strategies from nonviolence to violence.

There is an information vacuum in the US vis-à-vis Ukraine, specifically Crimea. Accordingly, the US policy community needs to learn more about the situation in the peninsula through consultation with experts and implement some new policies so that they can bring to a table with the newly democratizing Ukraine for the defense of human rights for all in Ukraine. These new policies should definitely include the resolution of land and housing issues for the Crimean Tatars who returned to Crimea after 47 years of exile.

Although conflictual events in Crimea do not take precedence in the US media, the post-September 11 era has made it clear that American policy-makers need to be better informed about potential conflict zones that can be detrimental for the US foreign policy interests in general. Currently, Crimea exhibits similar characteristics of the pre-civil war in Bosnia/Herzegovina and/or Kosovo between Orthodox Christian Serbs, Muslims (Bosnians and Albanians respectively in aforementioned conflict), and the Catholic minority Croats. Accordingly, the peninsula needs to be carefully monitored. A stable Ukraine have a direct bearing on regional security that is closely linked to US interests in Eastern/Central Europe (specifically the Czech republic and Poland, which has a border with Ukraine). Moreover, democratic Ukraine can help to decline the expansionist tendencies of the Russian Federation in post-Soviet Eurasia and maintain its direct control of the strategic Black Sea between Crimea and neighboring NATO ally Turkey. Accordingly, a peaceful Crimea is crucial not only for Ukraine, but also for Europe, and for the US interests and foreign policy in post-Soviet Eurasia.