

CAUCASUS HISTORY – Military

Overview

A country's military is concerned with the nation's security and is organized to keep enemies out of the nation's territory. The history of the Caucasus encompasses many incursions of nomadic tribes and invasions of foreign powers. In response, people built large walls, fortresses, outposts, and watch towers to prevent incursions and protect themselves and their land.

None of the Caucasus states emerged as a major military power in the region. Military formations and forms of warfare varied from one state to another. In the early stage, the military infrastructures were mostly based on heavy infantry, spears, shield and armor etc. Due to technological advances, the military structure underwent significant changes both in tactics and weaponry. The quantity and quality of the weapons changed and heavy armed units were built. The irregular military units were transformed into highly developed military forces to challenge more advanced enemy forces. Under the Soviets regional military forces were incorporated into the Red Army and trained in accordance with Soviet military doctrine.

ANCIENT PERIOD

SOUTH CAUCASUS:

GEORGIA: The Iberians used heavy cavalry and light infantry commanded by a king. They were heavily under the military influence of the Persians through their cultural and military contacts. Shida Kartli as a special region ruled by a *spaspet* (army commander). The Georgian army comprised of *Tavadi* (Prince), *Monaspa Guard* (Royal Guard), *Aznavari* (nobles), *Batoni* (lords), *Amirspasalar* (commander-in-chief), *Aznavari cavalry* (nobles heavy cavalry), *Tadzreuli* (heavy infantry), *Qarma* (light infantry), *Metsikhovne* (spearman) and *Monapire* (borderman).

ARMENIA: The Urartian King commanded the army in the name of the god Haldi. His military consisted of infantry, heavy armored cavalry (Ayruzdi), and chariot warriors. The military was organized into units of 3000 fighters each that, in turn, were divided into groups of 50–man battalions. The entire male population had an obligation to serve in the military. Each local *nakharar* (nobility) provided 25,000 to 40,000 men for the army. There were also *Levies* (soldiers) who were drafted from the commoners. During Tigranes II, the majority of the army were the foot soldiers. The Armenians used cavalry forces similar to *Savaran* in the Persian army.

AZERBAIJAN: The Albanian military consisted of heavy cavalry (22,000) and infantry (60,000) in the 1st century BCE. Under the influence of Parthian cultural and military, the iron armor included into the Albanian cavalry.

NORTH CAUCASUS:

CHECHNYA: The Nakh people were mountain dwellers, remained at the tribal level and had a military organization comprised of small bands of warriors *gheri* and their leaders *byachi*. They ambushed and plundered villages, captured people and their livestock.

Discussion/Questions

1. How did the South Caucasus people organize their military forces?

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POST-CLASSICAL PERIOD

SOUTH CAUCASUS:

GEORGIA: Under the Seljuks, there was a regular army and peasant militia formed to stop their colonization. The Georgian Royal army also invited mercenaries from Germany, Italy, and as from Kievan



Rus as well. King David IV established a regular army which included the *aznours* (the gentry) and 40,000 peasants, and created a royal guard detachment of 5000 horsemen. He implemented a major military reform in 1118–1120. He also invited 40,000 Kipchak mercenaries from the north Caucasian steppes to Kartli to join his army and to settle in Georgia with their families. He brought these

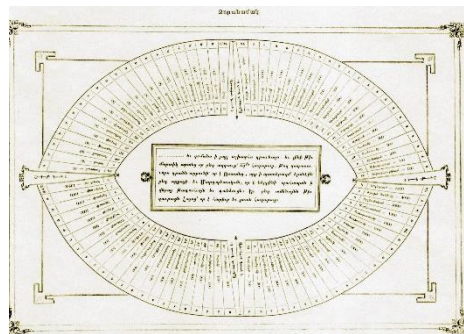
mercenaries to use against the Seljuks, and David IV personally trained the army.

For the Georgian rulers, it was the vital to gain the trust and to make alliance with the Northern Caucasus mountaineers who controlled the Caucasus passes and provided the Georgian army with auxiliary detachments.

In the 13th century, during Mongol rule, the Georgians were required to participate in the military expeditions of the khans. Each *tuman* had to provide 10,000 soldiers.

The Georgian *Spasalar* or *Amirspasalar* (commander-in-chief) were the highest officials in the Persian army and in the Kingdom of Georgia that lasted till the late 15th century.

In the 16th century, during Shah Abbas, the *ghulams* (slave military corps) were created which were composed of Circassians, Georgians, and Armenians. The Georgian *ghulams* (slave corps) held key military positions and prominent status at the royal Persian court.



ARMENIA:

The Armenian kings had a regular army and the military included the Royal Guard and the Armed Forces. These soldiers were raised and trained by *Nakharars* for royal orders and the *Zoranamak* (Military Register) kept the records of the list of all feudal landowners and determined the terms of their vassal military service. The size of the army was around 100,000. The commander-in-chief was referred to as *sparapet*.

The nakharars had armies of their own of thousands or ten thousands (lords of legions and flags), and together with the azats (free people) they formed the royal army (azatagound banak or azatazorq).

The Armed Forces were divided into 4 divisions and they were commanded by *bdeshkh*. The Royal Guard was under the control of a military commander, a *maghkhaz*.



AZERBAIJAN:

The military aristocracy (emirs) and military commanders played an important role in the system of urban administration.

Under the Safavids, the regular army troops included: the ghulams (slave military corps), cavalry which consisted of Georgians, Armenians, Circassians and other North Caucasus nationalities to reduce the influence of the Qizilbash aristocracy in Persian Azerbaijan), the musketeers-tufengchies, the artillery- gunners, feudal militia kurchies and militias of the provinces.

In the 16th-17th centuries, the army was composed of military forces commanded by the provincial beylerbey. The military forces included several thousand soldiers for each beylerbey.

NORTH CAUCASUS:

CHECHNYA: Like their society, the Vainakh army was also organized by clan. They used the guerrilla tactics that they were familiar with from fighting in mountains and forests.

During the Mongol invasion, they built strategically located military defense towers and fortification and developed a system of coordinated defense. Senior clan elders ran the clans and a military clan elder took over in time of war.

Discussion/Questions

Readings

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EARLY MODERN PERIOD

SOUTH CAUCASUS:

GEORGIA: Georgian military organization was rather loose and informal. The Georgian king had armed forces and his power depended on their loyalty. The Georgian royal armies were composed of feudal

recruits. The recruits were armed with muskets, spears, and swords, and were mostly cavalry. The Georgian commander-in-chief carried the title of *sardar* (Persian), or general.

King Vakhtang VI created a *mtsvelta jari* (standing army) to deal with rebellious lords.

There were also troops of mercenaries called *banners* grouped in each kingdoms. The soldiers of each banner were selected from the domains of the nobles. Each banner was commanded by either the noble himself or by a member of the Georgian royal family and they were composed of nine to ten thousand men.

There were also *qurchis* commanded by the *qurchi-bashi* (royal bodyguard). They were recruited from the Qizilbash tribes.

ARMENIA: Under the Safavids, the administrative units were called *khanates*. The khan held the highest military authority. The Armenian kings had a regular army and the military. Armenians were in the service of Persian shah and had ties with the *ghulams* (slave soldiers). The 18th century commander Mkhitar Sparapet led an Armenian army in their struggle for independence in Syunik region.

In Ottoman-ruled Armenia, the country was divided into provinces, *vilayets*, that were governed by *pashas* who had the highest military authority.

AZERBAIJAN: During the Ottoman rule, the country was divided into military-administrative units, *provinces* and *beylerbeyis*. Provinces were made up of sanjaks (district). The sanjaks were also divided into smaller military-administrative units, mahal and nahiyas. The Sultan appointed the *Sarasgar* (head soldier) to govern the provinces during the military operations.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: The Chechen army consisted of detached forces of mountaineers who united their forces to defend themselves against their enemy. They used guerrilla tactics against invaders, launching unexpected attacks followed by a fast retreat. Their villages (auls) were well fortified. Sometimes villages would join together into larger villages in order to defend the land, property, and lives of their community members. All the boys in villages were considered future *jiggits* (soldiers) who would defend their clan and village.

Questions

1- Despite being occupied by various foreign powers over the centuries, how were the peoples of the Caucasus able to preserve their traditional forms of government and military organization?

Readings

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19TH CENTURY

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: During the early 19th century, Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire. The Russian authorities attempted to establish a regular military service in Georgia by taking advantage of Georgian military potential. They even forced the Kartli-Kakheti population to join in the Russian army, but the Georgians fought fiercely to resist the Russians.

ARMENIA: After the Russians established their rule in the South Caucasus, the Armenian population provided all kinds of support to the Russian armies during their military activities. Units of Armenian volunteers fought in all battles side by side with Russians and provided intelligence.

AZERBAIJAN: During Russian rule, Russian military officers played an important role in the administration in the territory. The provinces were administered by military commandants who reported to higher ranking officers who, in turn, reported to chief commander of the Caucasus. During the Russian Empire, ordinary people deprived from military service, and they had to pay various taxes instead. Only high nobles and intellectuals were allowed to send their children to military schools in Russia.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: Russian authorities formulated a policy to split the remote mountain tribes and help the weakest of them since the mountainous part of Chechnya was practically inaccessible for the Russian army. The Chechen mountaineers developed a hit and run strategy to protect their land and their community. The Russian government appointed general Ermolov as the commander-in-chief of the Russian forces in the Caucasus in 1816 to change the course of events in favour of the Russian Empire.

The Imamate had a permanent army of five thousand and also had a volunteer corps of 48 thousand. The Imams also had private Guards of a thousand select soldiers. There were also the *murtazeks* (guardians). Each family had to send one armed warrior to the Imamate. In several villages, people producing firearms and ammunition were exempted from military service.

20TH CENTURY

GEORGIA:

Georgian Legion: The *Georgian Legion* was established in 1915 during the World War I by a former German vice-consul in Tbilisi, Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg who received support by the German Empire-based Committee of Independent Georgia to restore Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union. The enlisted soldiers were Georgian émigrés and prisoners of war.



Tetri Giorgi: *Tetri Giorgi* was an anti-Soviet military organization that was formed in the mid-1930s in France commanded by Georgian emigres.

National Guard: Defence Forces was created on December 20, 1990 by order of the President Zviad

Gamsakhurdia. In January 1991, the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev ordered Gamsakhurdia to stop the formation of the *National Guard*.

When the Soviet Union collapse, Georgia did not have military forces. National Guard and Land Forces were created on the basis of old Soviet formations. Military was composed of volunteers and Georgian officers served in the Soviet army.

The Soviet Army's 31st Army Corps stationed in Georgia left Kutaisi by the end of July 1993. The transferring of Transcaucasian Military District facilities, weapons and artillery began in 1992 and lasted till 1997.

The ground forces were comprised of five brigades: the 1st brigade (National Guard), the 2nd brigade stationed in Senaki, the 11th brigade stationed in Tbilisi, the 21st brigade stationed in Kutaisi, and the 25th brigade stationed in Adjara. There was also an artillery brigade, formed in November 1993.

ARMENIA: The Armenian Red Army was created in 1920 and provided the Soviet Red Army's 7th Guards Combined Arms Army of Transcaucasian Military District. It was composed of three ground brigades with three regiments and three battalions in each regiment, three cavalry regiments, three artillery regiments, five separate batteries, one plane, 3 motor rifle divisions, 10 cars, 20 trucks and two armored vehicles. Only six special military divisions were created in 1941–1942 in Soviet Armenia, and many of the draftees did not speak Russian. Soviet Armenian state provided weapons and repaired broken airplanes.

David Sasun Regiment: David Sasun regiment was a separate tank army unit established during the Second World War. It was mostly consisted of Armenian people. The regiment was formed in Echmiatsin, in 1943 and was funded by public subscription and the donations from the diaspora lived outside the country. The regiment had the T-34-85 tanks, armed with the new D-5T 85mm cannons.



Fedayee (Armenian Militia): Fedayi consisted of volunteered Armenian civilians united to form self-defense units and irregular armed bands to defend Armenians. For example, *Smbat Boroyan* (Makhluto) became fedayee commander in the Caucasus Campaign. He assisted a revolt in 1921 against the Communist regime when the government began to hunt Dashnak nationalists, politicians, and military personnel and executed them.

AZERBAIJAN:



Caucasian Native Cavalry Division: Savage Division of the Imperial Army formed in 1914 was transformed into Caucasian Native Cavalry Division in 1917. It included Muslim volunteers of the Caucasus people.

Azerbaijani Special Corps: It was the first military unit of the Transcaucasian Commissariat created after Caucasian Native Cavalry Division in 1917 as part of. It comprised of 5,000 men who served in the old Russian Imperial Army.

Red Army of Azerbaijan: In 1920, the Azerbaijani Red Army was created based on the Azerbaijan National Army of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

Special Forces of Azerbaijan: Special forces were established in April 1999 under the Ministry of Defense. This unit was consisted of officers and warrant officers who served in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War of 1991–1994.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA:

Kadyrovtsy: It is a personal paramilitary security force in Chechnya, loyal to the head of the Chechen Republic Akhmad Kadyrov and established in 1994. The Kadyrovtsy fought against the Russian Armed Forces in the First Chechen War, and in the Second Chechen War in 1999. After Akhmad Kadyrov was assassinated, his son Ramzan Kadyrov became the head of the Kadyrovtsy.

After Akhmad Kadyrov assassinated in 2004, Ramzan Kadyrov became the leader of Moscow-backed militia known as the Kadyrovtsy.



the regular Russian Army.

In Chechnya, the Kadyrovtsy were three thousand man under the command of Ramzan. They were responsible for many kidnapping and killing from 2001 to the present. The Kadyrovtsy were a key element of Russia's Counterinsurgency Strategy. Ramzan Kadyrov's approach of using brutal methods against fighters and their relatives has been an effective instrument for demoralizing and containing the insurgency. The Kadyrovtsy are under Putin's protection. At the beginning of 2006, Russia introduced new policies for Chechnya to weaken the influence of Kadyrov and to integrate the Kadyrovtsy into

Questions:

- 1- Why did the *Special Transcaucasian Committee* (Ozakom) last short?
- 2- When there were that many tribes in Chechnya that were under the control of regional major *teips* how would the Russian state establish control over the territory and exercise their policies?

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