

Documents Related to the Kenesary Revolt

Introduction:

Kenesary Kasymov's Revolt (1837-1847) was the largest and most prolonged uprising among the Qazaqs against Russian rule. The roots of the revolt lay in the abolition of the Middle Horde khanate, the implementation of the Statute on Siberian Kirgizes, and the creation of the okrug prikazes. Marginalized within this new system, Kasym, son of Abylay Khan and his sons, first protested to the imperial government and called for the elimination of the prikaz system, then abandoned their assigned pasture land as a form of protest, and, finally, retreated deeper into the steppe, from which point they turned to armed rebellion against the Russian state and those Qazaqs who supported it.

After the death of Kasym, Kenesary assumed his father's mantle, declaring himself Khan of the Qazaqs. Among his followers, Kenesary tried to set up an alternative to Russian imperial rule. He created an advisory council of sultans and biis, organized his troops according to the decimal system (a practice that had been used in the steppe since the time of Chinggis Khan), attempted to use the Muslim zakat as a form of taxation for running his state, and encouraged some of his nomadic supporters to turn to farming to feed his army after the Russians tried to cut off his grain supply. He also tried to recast the position Khan as an absolute ruler in the style of the Russian Tsar.

At various times during his rebellion, Kenesary was supported by Qazaqs from various hordes and various lineages, though at no time did the majority of the Qazaqs actively support him. To the contrary, many auls that aligned themselves with the Russian government were victimized by Kenesary's followers. His rebellion came to an end in 1847, when he was killed by the Kirghiz (known then in Russian sources under the name Kara Kirgizes).

Texts:

1. Kasym Abylaikhanov's Protest to Governor-General Kaptsyovich (1824)

Possessing a permanent pasture together with my son, Sultan Sarzhan Batyr, between the Younger, Middle and Elder Hordes, where the Atagais, the Karauls, the Kireis and the Uaks have their grazing lands, and in these same places my father, Khan Abylai, pastured his sheep, when I now look around my lands, which are occupied by the newly-formed volosts, I see everywhere construction: traps in the rivers and in the volosts, the establishment of councils, in which the Kirgiz have been made into subjects. But in the time of the Empress [Catherine II] and my father, Abylai Khan, things were not this way. In that time, beyond the four borders of the lands of this horde and, likewise, in the time of our ancestors, such construction projects did not take place. And that is why the people here and my son, Sultan Sarzhan-batyr, are absolutely enraged. But I, having other feelings with which I can hold my rage in check, having sent to you this letter, in answer to it please explain to me the

following: 1) Why are your people oppressing ours? 2) Why are construction projects being carried out on our territory? 3) Why have you put traps in our waterways? 4) Why have they forbidden Kirgiz from gathering salt from the lakes where the Russians themselves gather it? And in what decree has all of this been established?

Moreover, in relation to the inheritance of my father Abylai and my brother Wali, Gabaidulla was confirmed as Khan, a post that was stolen by force from him by Toruaigyr. For what reason was this done and why were his volost and his grazing land taken away? If he, Gabaidulla, committed some sort of misdeed against Russia, then that should be made known to me; if he did something that was harmful to the Qazaq people, then that should have been presented to us for investigation. If you do not inform me of the actions of my kinsman, then we will find occasion to request it and, in that case, do not be angry with us.

Living in our lands, doing no harm to the Kirgiz who are not Russian subjects, that is, in peace-loving accord, Her Majesty the Empress and my father Abylai upheld the border marked by the line. If the new buildings here are not demolished, and the harm done to the Kirgiz does not come to an end, in that case, do not be angry at us. As far as the Russian borders are concerned, we have no intention of causing harm. If war should break out on your side [of the border], we, as far as is possible, will not pay attention and we are not in a condition to tolerate Russia bringing about harm, oppression and trickery in our people's land. Inform me immediately concerning all of the above points. Concerning the mood of those who came before me toward you and all of this, first of all, I carry this out with God's assent, and secondly, at the advice of our elder fellow-believers, who lived in different countries. And do not propose that this mood comes from my petition alone. That is, although we have in the space of twelve years been in conflicts with individual on various sides, we have since made a final peace with everyone. Although the mischief-makers of the Akdisalov lineage have robbed a caravan that was being escorted by Kirgiz belonging to my son, these, having sent to my son Sarzhan-batyr their deputies with an invitation to investigate, promised to give as compensation 600 camels, 500 horses and 800 sheep, because of that, we have decided to send several prominent people there.

For the protection from any offenses that may be inflicted by you, several batyrs have remained there.

Trusting in that, Sultan Kasym Abylaikhanov affixes his seal.

2. Report of the Guberniia secretary Prince Chanyshchev to the Akmolinsk Okrug' Prikaz concerning the activity of a division of rebels under the leadership of Kenesary Kasymov (18 September 1837)

The Okrug Prikaz ordered me to pass on the announcement sent from the governor administering Omsk Oblast to the volosts of Akmolinsk Okrug, including also Taminsk, where, with the arrival of Tauka Utebayev of the Alipov lineage and Konratov, Kirgizes Masak and Aikymbai brought news to the Karakalinsk Okrug, appearing before me and

announcing that the traitor Sultan Sarjan, his brother Kenesary, and his son Irdzhan with a band consisting of three hundred people, on the first of this month at midday, attacked their auls, which were situated near Boz-Kul (not far from the Lake Boz-Gul), drove off all of their livestock and, in the process, killed nine people and wounded four others who tried to defend their property. The stolen livestock belonging to the Tamins includes: 725 horses, 113 camels, 77 cattle, and 4099 sheep. Seven rifles were stolen. From 17 people, clothing, valued at the same number of horses, was taken, number of horses, two headdresses, each worth 25 mares, set party with silver and partly with gold, worth ten mares. From the Konrats [stolen goods include]: 1500 horses, 5000 sheep, 250 camels, and 150 cattle. They asked me to pass on news of these circumstances to the Prikaz in relation to the subject of giving them legal compensation [for their losses], adding that slain were buried at the site of the incident.

3. Letter of Sultan Kenesary Kasymov to Emperor Nikolai I with the particular demands of the rebels (December 1838)

I have the good fortune to explain to Your Majesty the following, that in the time when Your ancestors reigned, and when my grandfather Abylai Khan [reigned] over us, there was peace and calm among the people and no one broke that peace. Each domain had bilateral trade, which did not disrupt the peace and no tax was levied against our people. In later times, the following happened: they [the Russians] began to collect yasak from our people and to inflict various forms of oppression. Breaking the former peace, junior administrators, your subjects, falsely demonstrated that all of the Kirgiz people had submitted to Russia. And through this, in the places belonging to my late grandfather Abylai, eight regional councils were convened. This was a most grievous development for our people, particularly considering the [new] yasak that was demanded from them. But even if not all of our Kirgiz people were oppressed and enjoyed a calm life, I have the good fortune to ask You, Great Lord, to leave them in their previous condition, to destroy the eight regional councils and other administrative bodies located in our steppe.

4. Kenesary's Letter to V. A. Perovskii, Military Governor of Orenburg (22 February 1841)

In 1841, From Karabai Sultan sent a petition and by this means, we made known the business of every tore of along the Siberian Line. In 1838, we made this necessary for the tores of the Siberian Line. I called upon Suyindik's son and banished him, and then, I sent away Karauly. In that same year, we caught and turned over Gubaidolla Khan. After that, at the wish of the tribes and people who sent us petitions, we returned him to his home. The court of the diwan of Kokshtau tried him through slander or with false witnesses, saying that he took counsel with Kenesary Sultan, they apparently sent him into exile or to hard labor. Gubaidolla Khan, son of Wali did not take counsel with me. We brought him back by force. After that, Sarts from Kokand stole our people who had been captured, and took them away. Before that, they

captured and killed our elder brothers Sarjan Sultan, Esengeldi Sultan, and Aljan Sultan. And then, they killed our father, Kasym. In 1841, Kokand was conquered, and our people were exiled, and we went to seek service with his Majesty the Emperor. Of our people [el], six thousand six hundred sixty-six households remained. After our people were driven out, we hoped to take service with the emperor.

Your Merciful, Kind Excellency the Governor, please make a request of His Excellency the Emperor, King of Kings, that he may grant us a thirty-five-year term of service. Then, please ask this: Let him not send soldiers from the Siberian Line or from Ulytau or from Kishitau. If soldiers are sent to Ulytau, our women and children will flee and we will not be able to serve the Emperor. Then, ask of him this: we hear that four people went as emissaries, and slandered us or lied about us. They say that a caravan was attacked and the people were killed.

If we attacked the caravan, let our heads be cut off. We did not capture that caravan. After we escorted it out [of our territory], we returned [home]. We did it no harm and neither did our people. Our gathering place is in Ulytau and our pastures are in Kishitau, Torgai and Jayiq. We have nothing in our hearts, but the desire to serve the emperor. It has become known that your judicial commission is coming and that Ertan son of Tursyn has come. He came to read the Emperor's manifesto. We, of course, with all of our hearts, will accept it and serve.

5. Communication from V. A. Perovskii (1 December 1841)

Dear Prince Piotr Dmitrievich,

Having received Your Excellency's communication from 10 November, no. 465, in which you, dear Prince, having informed of the testimony of the starshina Kozhebergenev, entrusted to me some measure of responsibility concerning the activities of Sultan Kenesary Kasymov, I consider it necessary to offer an explanation on this subject, which has seemed to me to be thus far superfluous.

Many years of experience have proven the uselessness of the military forces of the Siberian Corps in the Kirgiz Steppe against the rebel Kenesary. On the one hand, there is the difficulty of conducting searches on the steppe, while on the other hand, there is the apparent ease with which the Kazakhs free from the pursuing forces, which is sufficient to justify the failure of such undertakings. Nonetheless, a gang of rebellious sultans appears anew every year, sometimes exceeding the previous in numbers, and in the future there appears little hope of endings these disturbances. The expedition against Kenesary, not having caused any significant damage to him, gave grounds for the punishment of entire Kazakh tribes, which only intensified the hatred of the people towards Russia.

In these circumstances, I received from Kenesary a promise to permanently cease his own raids and attacks, and a request for his pardon from His Majesty. I had no reason to doubt the sincerity of his repentance, especially considering that the indications were entirely

voluntary. However, by accepting this petition, it goes without saying that I could not offer any guarantees regarding the future actions and ideas of Kenesary. I submitted his request to the consideration of the War Minister and I received from Prince Chernyshev the news that the Emperor had graciously deigned to pardon the sultan and deigns to consider it necessary to replace the scheme of execution with measures of kindness. Absolute forgiveness was declared for Kenesary and since then, over the course of this summer he has not given any cause for grievances against him.

The previous outrageous actions of Kenesary not only caused difficulties for the Siberian authorities, but also had a particularly dangerous influence on the Kirgiz under the authority of Orenburg. So, naturally, it was essential that I obtain a favorable opportunity to restrain the Sultan. However, in forgiving the illegal actions taken by him in the past, it is not intended that he be granted impunity for future incursions. To the contrary, I suggest that if Kenesary decided to violate the current promise and, in particular, to transgress the Siberian boundaries, then his punishment will become a necessity and will obtain, even in the eyes of the Kirgiz people, the full significance of legal retribution.

Along with this, I reiterated to Sultan Kenesary the urgency of halting raiding activities against Kokand and demanded from him an explanation for all of the other accusations given in the testimony of starshina Kozhebergenev. I confess, however, your Excellency, that I do not find these accusations to be sufficiently assertive and I do not see within them an evident violation of the Sultan's submission. On the raids against caravans, Kozhebergenev could say nothing certain. Meanwhile, here it is known for certain that last winter, Russian clerks, who previously had engaged in trade with the auls of Kenesary, were received by him in a friendly manner and departed from there entirely satisfied. As for the Sultan's attack on Tashkent, while it would be desirable to see the cessation of such events, nonetheless Your Excellency would be willing to agree that, so long as we do not protect the Kazakhs from the arbitrariness and raids of the Kokandis, it is difficult to demand that they refrain from avenging the destruction of their auls and the deaths of their kinsmen.

6. Kenesary Sultan's Words to the Biis (1843)

To you, Baitore Bii, Bashok Bii, Kyzyl Bii, Aishundy Bii, Suleimen Bii, Karakushik Bii and to the people under their care and to the biis and the mirzas:

It was God's will that a little of our people's blood end up on your hand in this way. It was our wish that you would repent for what you did and acknowledge us as Khan, and support us. You, being god-fearing, did not play host to spirits. You, being unmoved, trampled upon your kinsman's wish. If you repent of your past works and return, then be good and come before us. We have much mercy for you. If you do not come, we will come after you for thirty years; for thirty years I will go to war with you, God willing! I have sent our servant Baubek to you. Take heed of every word.

7. General Zhemchuzhnikov on the advantages enjoyed by Kenesary over Russian troops (1844)

A note on the actions of the Siberian troops in the steppe, during the summer of 1844, with an explanation of the factors that prevented the achievement of better successes and the proposed actions to be undertaken in the future:

The superiority of Kenesary over our troops in relation to the speed of movements is for us the most serious disadvantage. This must be considered as the primary cause of the indecisiveness of our successes in the steppe extending over so many years. Our troops, traversing enormous distances on one and the same horse, typically are completely exhausted before the engagement with Kenesary. Moreover, it is impossible to detach search parties on exhausted horses. Consequently, the commander of the troops usually is aware only of what takes place a short distance away from their herds. By contrast, Kenesary, having at his disposal up to twenty thousand horses, is able to proceed, without halting, on fresh horses, especially given that all of the Kirgiz volosts supply him with such horses, willingly or not. This means of reinforcement is not provided to our troop commanders.

The only time of the year in which our forces can have an advantage over Kenesary in regards to the speed of movement is the early spring. At that time, after meager winter pasturing, the Kirgiz horses will be in a weakened condition; their herds will be in an emaciated state and subsequently they will not be able to drive them from one place to another. But the horses of the [Russian] troops, being supplied with oats, can be kept in good condition, even before the new forage appears in spring.

8. Kenesary Kasimov's Letter to Arslan Sultan (8th day of Ramadan 1844)

To the Mighty and Revered Ruler Arslan Sultan, Kasym's son sends you his greetings. Our words are as follows: if you ask after us, we are in good health and prospering. We will also say the following: by attacking defenseless people, you are making yourself an enemy of Muslims. Listen! Why are you waging war against God? If you persist in this enmity, we will banish you from our heart forever. And, God-willing, all civility between us will end. Take these words to heart. And we will repeat to you: We will write a letter to the general and sent an emissary to him. If you take us into your heart, you will treat this emissary well and let him continue on his way. We have sent you Mulla Baimukhammad. Take each of his words to heart.

9. Letter from Sultan Ahmad Jan Tura to the Orenburg Frontier Commission (4 January 1844)

According to some reports, Kenesary managed, at the beginning of the winter, to recruit a sufficient number of Kirgiz of different lineages, who have nomadized since ancient times

along the Syr Darya River in the vicinity of the Ak Mechet fortress of Tashkent and the city of Turkestan.

It is my duty to issue a report regarding these issues to the Border Commission, very respectfully, that the Kirgiz of the horde that has been entrusted to me, towards whom Kenesary has great animosity, are fearful of his atrocities, especially in the late winter and early spring. This is because the Kirgiz at that time have already settled into their winter pastures in different areas, occupying a wide area of territory for pasturing, and every Kirgiz is burdened by the difficulties of winter in caring for their herds. Therefore, one cannot be certain that, in the event of an attack by Kenesary, they would be able to repel the raiding party or be able to defend their aul and livestock from plunder.

10. Letter from Kenesary to a group of Qazaq leaders, intercepted by the Russians (1844)

I, the triumphant Kenesary Khan, wish good health for Babur Batyr, Bekturgan Bii, Kosbul Bii, Jangul Bii and Jamal Murza.¹ As for me, I am happily residing in good health. If you recognize me as your Khan, then render to us your taxes and tribute, and declare your loyalty. I have sent this message to you, along with Penchebashe Yesaul Baitulek and others, in order to convey these words to you in person verbally. Please accept them as credible.

11. Letter from Kenesary to P. D. Gorchakov, Governor of Western Siberia (1845)

We moreover inform you that, since the times of our grandfathers and fathers, we have never been disinclined from the mercy of the Emperor of the Realm, and did not create unrest. However, having seen afterwards that there were plans to build a fortress on our summer pasturelands, we therefore became anxious and were not able to remain upon them. For this reason, we were compelled to send a petition to the local authorities. But if you now allow us the mercy of having the territory of Ulu-tau, Sary-su and from Chekengur (Kara-Kengir) to Elanchi Torga (Uly Zhylanshyk), then we are ready to take the oath of promise and keep it, in whatever manner that was suggested, and to never again take up arms against the people under the Emperor's sovereignty.

¹ These were a group of local Qazaq rulers of the Akmolinsk and Karakaratinsk okrugs.