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ISSN 0004-9522 (Print)  ISSN 1467-3497 (Online)

Australian Journal of Politics and History

Volume 53, Number 1, March 2007

SPECIAL ISSUE

Terror, Total War and Genocide in the Twentieth Century

GUEST EDITORS: Stephen G. Wheatcroft and Steven R. Welch

CONTENTS

Articles

Introduction  STEPHEN G. WHEATCROFT AND STEVEN R. WELCH

Russian Terrorism and Revisionist Historiography  RONALD GRIGOR SUNY

Agency and Terror: Evdokimov and Mass Killing in Stalin's Great Terror  STEPHEN G. WHEATCROFT

Securing the German Domestic Front in the Second World War: Prosecution of Subversion before the People's Court  STEVEN R. WELCH

The Economics of the "Final Solution"  GERALD D. FELDMAN

Total War and Genocide: Reflections on the Second World War

Genocide yet again: Scenes of Rwanda and Ethical Witness in the Human Rights Memoir  SIMONE GIGLIOTTI

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Agency and Terror:
Evdokimov and Mass Killing in Stalin’s Great Terror

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This article presents an account of the history of Soviet repression, which integrates our current understanding of the scale and nature of repression with a history of the agents responsible for carrying out these operations. It notes that the major shifts in the nature of repression were accompanied by shifts in the organizational leadership within the security forces, and that it was largely the same groups of individuals who were responsible for the mass killing operations during the civil war, collectivization and the Great Terror. These were the groups associated with Efim Georgievich Evdokimov, which operated in Ukraine during the Civil War, in the North Caucasus in the 1920s, and in the Secret Operations Division within GPU in 1929-1931. Evdokimov transferred into party administration in 1934 when he became party secretary for North Caucasus Krai. But he appears to have continued advising Stalin and Yezhov on Security matters, and the latter relied upon Evdokimov’s former colleagues to carry out the mass killing operations that are known as “The Great Terror” in 1937-1938.

Szlzhensitsyn, who is one of the members of the editorial board of the recent History of Stalin’s Gulag, regretted that this account started with Dekulakization and not with the Revolution and the Civil War. He has a point. There is a tendency in both the classic work of Robert Conquest and in the recent works of Naumov and Getty, Oleg Khlevniuk, as well as in the Hoover collection, to ignore the Civil War period and to act as though its history had little to do with the history of Stalin’s Repression. This largely arises out of the previous lack of information on this matter. Earlier we had no clear picture of the scale or chronology of repression. We had a very poor understanding of the agents or mechanisms that carried out the repression. We were highly dependent upon official records that were consciously involved in misinformation, or on survivor records, which were obviously incomplete. Now for the first time we can provide an account which is based on a good understanding of the scale and nature of repression, the mechanisms through which it was carried out and the agencies who carried it out. In this article I will concentrate on the latter two factors, and will argue that Solzhenitsyn was right in his emphasis on the importance of the early Civil War period.

The periodization that will be used here to describe the level of repression highlights periods of struggle over legality and extra-judicial processes. This periodization is based on the recorded patterns of arrests and sentences in cases handled by the investigative organs of the Soviet Security forces. They exclude most cases handled by the procuracy, and those cases handled by the security forces on a mass basis without the involvement of the investigative organs. This latter category includes category 3 kulaks exiled in 1930-31, the exile of ethnic groups removed from border or newly occupied areas, and the imprisonment and execution of some of these, including the victims of Katyn. They do however include the victims of the mass Anti-Soviet Element (00447 operations) and the Polish and other ethnic campaigns of 1937-38, i.e. the bulk of what is generally known as the “Great Terror”.

The periods that are used in this study are: a) Revolutionary terror and counter terror in a time of Civil War, 1918-19: Mass killings in the capital; b) Terror and counter terror in a time of Polish Invasion, Rebellion and Civil War: mass killings in newly liberated pacified areas, 1920-22; c) Attempts to restrain the scale of extra-judicial repression, 1923-1929; d) The sharp rise in extra-judicial repression associated with de-kulakization, January 1930- June 1931; e) Attempts to restrain and regularize the scale of extra-judicial repression, July 1931-June 1937; f) The period of mass repression, July 1937- November 1938; g) the end of the Terror, November 1938.

1 “So far — let us hope temporarily — these documentaries omit the early Soviet period, starting with the October coup [...]” A. Solzhenitsyn, [Introduction] Mostovoe repressii v SSSR, Istoriya Stalinskoego Gulya (Moscow, 2004). Vol. 1, p. 25.
3 I. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939 (Newhaven, 1999). The starting point here is the Ryutin Affair and Stalin’s claim in September 1936 that GPU were four years behind with their work.
4 Oleg V. Khlevniuk, The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror (New Haven, 2004). As the title indicates, Khlevniuk is interested in tracing the history of Soviet repression back to Collectivization.

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This account of the history of the terror differs from that given by Conquest, Getty and Naumov, Khlevniuk and Werth. It begins with Revolutionary and Counter-revolutionary Terror in the Civil war. Like Khlevniuk and Werth, this account emphasizes the importance of the upturn in repression with collectivization and dekulakization, but unlike them it dates this surge to the eighteenth-month period from January 1930 to July 1931 when the extra-judicial activities of the troiki were most important. According to my account subsequent events including the May 1932 law on the defence of socialist property were part of a move towards judicial process, and so belong to the period of the regularization of the terror process. Nicolas Werth dates the regularization of the terror process from the May 1933 decree to “normalize” arrests and reduce the overloading of prisons, while Oleg Khlevniuk dates it from 1934.10 I do not deny the importance of the establishment of the NKVD (USSR) in July 1934, and of the May 1933 decree, but as I argue below, on the basis of the statistics of repression (especially mass killing) and the history of agents and mechanisms of repression, the process should be dated back to the middle of 1931.

The final and ultimate stage of The Great Terror is undoubtedly associated with Yezhov. But again there are different types of periodicizations and it depends on whether we are interested in the political developments of the show trials, like the final Zinoviev-Kamenev trial 19-24 August 1936, the Pyatnitskii trial 23-30 January 1937 or the mass shift to extra-judicial operations of July 1937. Getty and Naumov, who are primarily interested in the “destruction of the Bolshevik party”, pay great attention to the trials, Khlevniuk and Werth, who are more interested in the mass operations, see it differently. Khlevniuk sees the period from August 1936 to July 1937 as “a broadening of the purge campaigns” which “prepared the ground for the Great Terror”. But he adds, significantly, that “it did not make it inevitable”.11 The Hoover volumes begin the section on “The Great Terror” with the NKVD operational order of 25 July 1937. Since, in this article, I am also concerned with the shift from judicial to extra-judicial sentences, I too will date the commencement of the Great Terror to July 1937.

My account of the history of repression has much in common with different elements of several of these other accounts, however, unlike all previous accounts, my account of the history of Repression integrates a history of the scale and nature of repression with a history of the agents responsible for carrying out these operations, and a history of the mechanisms of repression. Significantly, this history of agency coincides with major shifts in the data on the level of repression. The most important of these shifts in mechanism was the expansion and restriction on the use of extra-judicial bodies for sentencing and execution. And the agent who played the most significant role in the history of the extra-judicial killings was a man who is scarcely mentioned in most recent works on the history of the Gulag, and who formally left the security services in January 1934—Efim Georgievich Evdokimov.

Who was Evdokimov?

The Evdokimov who is the main object of this article is the secret police agent Efim Georgievich Evdokimov, (1894-1939). He should not be confused with the more famous but totally unrelated Trotskyist Grigorii Eremeevich Evdokimov, (1884-1936) who was shot together with Zinov'ev and Kamenev after their trial in August 1936. The only reference to E.G. Evdokimov in Medvedev's Let History Judge correctly points out that he was the first Chekist to receive four orders of the Red Banner, but incorrectly claims that he was arrested and shot in 1937.12 Conquest, in the first edition of The Great Terror, has four references to Evdokimov and describes him in 1934 as Stalin's "own croony [...]", the old Secret Policeman of Shakhtry, who was on good terms with the rest of the NKVD officers.13 Later in the book Evdokimov appears both as a protagonist and a victim of the terror in 1937.14 In Appendix F, Conquest gives Evdokimov credit for forcing the Shakhtry trial on his reluctant leaders (Menzhinskii and Yugoda), and in constructing "a pilot model which was to serve as a basis for the later trials".15 But Conquest goes no further than this, and he sees Evdokimov as an early victim of Yezhov, and not, as I claim, as his ally and adviser. In the 1990 edition The Great Terror: Reconsidered, Conquest wisely drops all reference to Evdokimov complaining that the purge was going too far, and Evdokimov's name only appears twice in the index.

More recent scholars have tried to lose sight of this Evdokimov. He does not appear in the index of Getty's The Road to Terror, or in the 110 brief biographical sketches included in Khlevniuk's History is the Gulag. There were just three references to him in the documents section of the first volume of the Hoover Institute volume on Mass Repression in the USSR, Volume 1 of Istoriya Statinskogo Gulaga [The History of Stalin's Gulag], but no references to him in the narrative section.

This current article will add to Medvedev's and Conquest's earlier appreciations of Evdokimov, as the most highly decorated Chekist of the early period and the architect of the Shakhtry trials and will argue that he and his group were responsible for keeping alive into the 1930s the worst aspects of the civil war operations - mass extra-judicial processes.

Evdokimov was a terrorist who became a Communist out of expediency. In his youth he was an anarchist and an SR Terrorist, who was ruthless in his terrorist activities. He carried forward into his work as a Chekist this ruthless lack of humanity, and there was something in his manner of operation that commanded the respect and loyalty of the large number of fanatical Chekists and party functionaries that he trained and inspired. Throughout his career Evdokimov formed strong links with people and built a series of teams that continued to work together. As we will see below there were attempts in 1931 to split up his team, but in a sense it continued to operate, even when Evdokimov had himself formally left the security forces for party work. Evdokimov and his team were probably responsible for more executions than anyone else in the

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10 Khlevniuk, The History of the Gulag, p. 82.
11 Ibid., p. 140.
12 This incidentally explains why his biography was not included in N.G. Okhotin and A.B. Roginskii, Kto Bakovodit NKVD: Sereznochnik (Moscow, 1999).
14 Evdokimov is described as someone who complained "that the purge was going too far" before himself disappearing. Conquest, The Great Terror, p. 336. However, later on page 389 he is described as organizing a large operation in North Caucasus at the end of July 1937.
15 Ibid., pp. 731-33.
16 R. Conquest, The Great Terror: A Reassessment (New York, Oxford, 1990). In fact Conquest only removed that one reference to Evdokimov, so his name should have appeared three times. Faulty indexing failed to include the earlier reference to Evdokimov, which occurs on page 39.
Civil War. They were demonstrably responsible for more extra-judicial executions than anyone else in the 1920s. Evdokimov was the architect of the Shakhity trial, and of the mass operations of Dekulakization. Several members of his team worked with him on all of these projects. Evdokimov had a demonstrable influence on Stalin in guiding him to adopt certain policies at certain times. He had a less clearly demonstrable influence on Yezhov, but appears to have been Yezhov’s mentor and guide regarding security issues. It was Evdokimov’s personality, using Evdokimov’s methods and his rhetoric to attack those who lie and they thought to be their enemies that created the Yazhovchechina. These excesses have conventionally been associated with the name of Evdokimov’s protégé Yezhov, but in a sense I will argue that they could be considered the Evdokimovchechina. When Yezhov fell from favour Beriya’s investigators appear to have been keen to paint a picture of Evdokimov as the driving force behind Yezhov. This may have been one of the very few times when they got something right.

So who was Evdokimov?

Efim Georgievich Evdokimov was born in 1891 in the town of Kapala in Semirechenskiy oblast of Kazakhstan into the family of a soldier. The family soon moved to China and during the 1905 Revolution the fifteen year old Evdokimov, then a Socialist Revolutionary, played a minor role in an armed uprising in Chita. During the uprising Evdokimov was wounded in the foot and developed a lifelong limp. For his teenage revolutionary activity Evdokimov spent many years in prison. He was released in 1911 and joined the Anarchosyndicalists to work on terroristic projects in the Far East. He clearly believed in the importance of individual will power and this would show clearly in the kind of cases that he would later invent. Evdokimov returned to Moscow prior to the February Revolution and spent much of 1917 in the Caucasus and Siberia. He was back in Moscow again at the time of the October Revolution and was a member of a Red Guards unit. After the October Revolution, the hardened twenty-seven-year-old revolutionary began gravitating towards the Bolsheviks and he joined the Bolshevik Party in 1918, when he joined the Red Army.

a) Evdokimov and his Colleagues in the Civil War: Years of Terror in Moscow, 1919

With his experience of prisons and of Anarchist groups Evdokimov would have been of great service to the military security organs, and he quickly moved into that area. By June 1919 he had become head of the Special Department (OK) of the Moscow Cheka, where he worked until December 1919.

By the beginning of 1920 the war seemed to be going well for the Bolsheviks and it looked as though it would soon be over. Yudenich, Kolchak and Denikin were in retreat, Rostov, Novocherkassk and Krasnovsk had been captured by the Reds and large numbers of White soldiers and their officers had been captured. But there was also an atmosphere of demoralization and exhaustion within the country, the Red Army was itself suffering from large-scale desertion, and parts of Soviet-occupied territory were on the point of rebellion.

In these circumstances there were two possible ways to proceed — via more or less repression. The Moscow Cheka, where Evdokimov and his colleagues were working, decided to shoot more people. They began stepping up pressure on those people who were hiding deserters and on the deserters themselves. According to the Cheka weekly svodki for the last two weeks of October over 73,000 deserters had been captured, as well as another 120,000 who had tried to evade capture. In response to this, the Security officials in Moscow (presumably Evdokimov and colleagues in OO-MChK) had sentenced 183 people to death or conditional death sentences.

In January 1920 Dzerzhinsky took the opposite approach and called for a halt in the application of the death penalty. There was a halt to the execution of deserters and Evdokimov and his colleagues were sent away from Moscow to the Southern Front. Evdokimov was appointed deputy head of OO for the South Western and Southern Front under Mstiev, who had previously been head of investigations in Moscow ChK.

b) Evdokimov and Terror against Rebels in Newly Liberated Areas of Ukraine, 1920-22

The peaceful interlude did not last long. Peasant rebellion broke out in Tambov, Samara, Voronezh and Tula in March 1920. Then the Poles invaded at the end of April and penetrated as far as Kiev. In these critical circumstances the peasant war intensified and spread to Ukraine, where Maklino, the peasant anarchist, was particularly active. The experience of increased internal rebellion at a time of foreign invasion became a nightmare that would haunt Evdokimov, and the Soviet leadership, right through the 1930s.

It was this combination of internal rebellion and foreign invasion which allowed Denikin to evacuate the Kuban and regroup in the Crimea. Whatever the attitude of Dzerzhinsky may have been concerning reducing death sentences in January 1920, in Ukraine and North Caucasus Evdokimov and the Chekists were now facing a desperate situation which they argued required the reimposition of the death penalty. The Centre

V.D. Menzhinskiy, K.I. Lander, A. Kh. Amuraz, Ya.S. Agranov and V.D. Fel’dman. By November this growing organization had a Manager (Upravlyashchik del) G.G. Yagoda. See Khaustov, et al., Lobzinsky Stolik, pp. 17-18, and for the decree defining its activities see the Polzhezdriv in ibid., pp. 330-1.

A. Berelech, V.Danilov, eda, Sovetskaya sotsialisticheskaya gazeta VChK-OGPU, Vol. 1, 1918-1922 (Moscow, 1990), p. 216, citing a weekly VChK svodki for 12-15 November 1919. Conditional death sentences were death sentences with a temporary reprieve that was conditional upon good behaviour and could revert back to full death sentences depending upon the behaviour of the prisoner.

Dzerzhinsky’s telegraphic order about this is reproduced in Khaustov, et al., Lobzinsky Stolik, p. 348.


See also Vladimir N. Brovkin, Behind the Iron Fist of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918-1922 (Princeton, N.J. 1994), especially Ch. 10.

18 See the forced deportations of Evdokimov, Frinovskii and Yezhov cited (rather uncritically) in Marc Janzen, Nikita Petrov, Stalin’s Legal Executions: People’s Commisar Nikolai Yezhov, 1985-1949 (Stanford, 2002).

19 The most detailed available biography of Evdokimov is in Ukrainian in Y. Shapoval, V.Pysariova and V. Zolotaren, Cheka-GPU-NKVD v Ukraini (Kiev, 1997), pp. 469-70. (I am grateful to Robert Conquest for drawing my attention to this source and providing me with a copy.) A much briefer account is available in Russian in several recent publications e.g. V.N. Khaustov, V.P. Naumov, N.S. Piatnikova, eds, Lobzinsky Stolik v VChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD (Moscow, 1990), pp. 332-3. Because Evdokimov had "left" the security services in 1924 he was not included in the most detailed Russian series of biographies: Kto Russkoyu NNKh (Moscow, 2002).

20 M.S. Kedrov, who was in charge of the military department of VChK from 1918-19, resumed the Military Department the Special Department, Osobyi Odell, in February 1919. The tasks of Osobyi Odell were greatly expanded in June 1919 at the time that Evdokimov is listed as heading the Moscow Department of OO. In August 1919 Kedrov was replaced by Dzerzhinskiy, who was assisted by two deputies: I.P. Pavlushovskii and V.A. Avanasev, and a number of special plenipotentiaries:
agreed and by August 1920 Lenin was proposing the public execution of kulaks, priests and landlords who were presumed to be supporting the enemy and the rebels.24

Evdokimov played a central role in the new wave of repressions. He was described by one of his deputies Dukelskii as leading part of the fight against Makino25 in August. In November 1920 Evdokimov was appointed Head of TsUPChezKom (the Central Administration of Cheka for Ukraine) with Frinovskii as another of his Deputies. According to Papechinski and Tumul'sh Evdokimov's association with Stalin, Voroshilov, Budenny and Egorov dates from this period.26

This was a time when the Evdokimov team were particularly active in executing White Army Officers trapped in the Crimea after Vrangel fled Russia. An official report of the work of the Crimean Oblast Committee of the RKP for November 22 to December 13, 1920 stated:

The shock group of the Special Department led by Komrad Evdokimov carried out a decisive struggle with counter-revolutionaries. By way of registering them, rounding them up, etc., a large number of soldiers and officers were taken. A large number of Vrangelyans and bourgeoisie were shot, for instance in Sevastopol 6,000 were captured, 700 were released. 2,000 were shot and the rest sent to concentration camps.27

By May 1921 Evdokimov was appointed head of the Special Department OO of the All Ukrainian ChK, where his work on mopping-up operations against former Whites and Anarchists continued.28 In July 1921 he received the first of his four orders of the Red Banner for the work that he was carrying out in Ukraine at this time.29

c) Keeping Extra-Judicial Operations Alive during NEP, 1923-29

The development of extra martial law justice, in which the Evdokimov team excelled, was a natural consequence of the Civil War. The end of the civil war was marked by another attempt to reduce the level of arbitrary (non-judicial) executions, and with it the power of men like Evdokimov in the regions.

The central investigative agencies in VChK were first strengthened by concentrating the work of the separate operational investigative departments into a single division:

24 Ibid., pp. 345-1
28 Although we do not have precise figures for the scale of executions in Ukraine organized by Evdokimov at this time, the recently released FSB data indicates that in the following year (1922) 1,421 executions were carried out by local organizations in Ukraine. The 1921 level is likely to have been significantly higher.
29 Evdokimov was one of seven Chekists (with Antonov, Kozhevnikov, Levin, Masiev, Pavlovskii and Samsonov) who were given the order of the Red Banner by VTSKh on July 16, for their services against counter-revolutionaries during the Civil War. On 10 October 1921 to celebrate their role in the defeat of Vrangel, the Deputy Commander of Military Forces in Ukraine and Crimea, and the Chief of Staff ordered that Evdokimov, the head of the Special Department for the Southern Front, his deputy Dukelskii, and the head of the Operational Department Frinovskii be given three of Vrangel's ceremonial horses. See documents in Papechinski and Tumul'sh, Shchit, raskol'nikii nechum, pp. 280-281. Note by contrast that Yagoda received his first Order of the Red Banner in December 1927. By this time Evdokimov reedy had three.

the Secret Operational Division (SOU) on 14 January 1921.30 This new powerful body was placed under the charge of Dzerzhinsky's deputy Menzhinski and his deputy Yagoda.31 Then the right to carry out extra-judicial executions was greatly reduced, especially in the localities. This shift in power was strengthened by the abolition of the Extraordinary Commission and its replacement by first GPU (6 February 1922) and then OGPU (November 1923). The new instructions for the security bodies emphasised that their work was to be primarily in carrying out investigations, and far less with sentencing and executing. Once the investigators had completed their investigations the cases were to be transferred to the judicial organs for trial and sentencing. GPU and OGPU were also required to notify the procuracy of the charges laid against all of those arrested within fourteen days of arrest and to send cases to court after two months investigation, unless extensions were granted.32

There were, however, a number of important exceptions where the right to sentence and execute sentences remained with the collegium of OGPU, or with groups to which it delegated its authority.33 At the centre this included a special conference (OSO) of three members of the Collegium of OGPU, which normally included Yagoda. These were charged with trying cases of espionage and other matters which were not to be handed over to the courts. In the localities plenipotentiary rights of the Collegium of OGPU were transferred to a number of Permanent Plenipotentiaries of OGPU (PP-OGPU) for certain areas. Within the most dangerous rebel areas, such as the North Caucasus, the special permanent plenipotentiaries of OGPU were to be given special martial law authority which even went as far as to cover death sentences.34

During this time many of the Chekists who had taken most actively to extra-judicial executions during the Civil War, and who could not easily adapt to the new more judicial ways, were attracted to the wilder areas and took up the post of local PP OGPU or became attached to them. Following this pattern Evdokimov stayed in the Ukraine to 1922 and in 1923 was appointed PP OGPU for South East Russia. From 1924 to 1929 he held the post of PP OGPU for North Caucasus. The available data on OGPU executions for the 1920s show that a very high proportion of OGPU executions were carried out by these regional PP, and especially the PP OGPU North Caucasus Krai.

30 It contained: the Special Department (OO) that was concerned with espionage and military matters; the Secret Department (SO) that was concerned with investigating other political parties; the Operational Department (Opetro) that was concerned with general and administrative measures. Later other Operational Departments would be added. See A.I. Kokurin, N.V. Petrov, Lubrandsky: Orgamy VChK-OGPU-KVND-NKGB-MGB-MGO (1917-1941) Spravochnik (Moscow: 2003), pp. 20, 289-1, 89-91.
31 The main components of SOU in January 1921 were the Operational Department under Futorny, the Special Operational Department for Mattress men under Menzhinski himself with Yagoda as his deputy, and the Special Secret Department SO for investigation of other parties under Samsonov. See Kokurin and Petrov, Lubrandsky (…) Spravochnik, pp. 20-2. Ten weeks later Yagoda became Menzhinski's deputy as head of SOU and he would soon take charge of OGPU at the centre, ibid., pp. 22, 29.
32 The 30 January 1922 draft by Kurkurski proposed that charges had to be laid within two weeks of arrest, and that cases needed to be sent to court after two months from arrest or a request made to VTSKh for more time. See Khmanov, et al., Lubrandsky […] 1922-35, pp. 12-13. These limitations were included in the draft polozhenie passed by VTSKh 6 February 1922.
33 One of the first lists of exceptions was ordered by the Politburo as early as 28 September 1922. See ibid., pp. 64-65.
34 Ibid., pp. 38-40.
In 1922, when Evdokimov was PP OGPU Ukraine SSR, 1,421 of the 1,691 executions registered for this year were carried out in Ukraine. In 1924 and 1925 when Evdokimov was transferred to North Caucasus, this region became the site of most executions — 852 of 1,900 for all the USSR in 1924 and 1,076 of 1,755 for all the USSR in 1925. When Evdokimov had his sabatical in 1926, the North Caucasus figure fell to fifty-one of 473, and when he returned to the North Caucasus in 1927 they rose again to 597 of 1,620. They fell again in 1928 to forty-two, when Evdokimov was preoccupied with the Shakhtry trial, but rose again in 1929 to 476 out of 716. There is a clear pattern of increases and decreases in executions that follows Evdokimov’s movements.

Evdokimov attracted around him a large number of ruthless Chekists. His deputy at this time was M.P. Frinovskii who would later go on to be Yezhov’s first deputy in 1937-38 with personal responsibility for the mass operations of 1937-38. Nikolai Nikolaev-Zhurid was the head of Evdokimov’s Counter-intelligence department (KRO) in the 1920s, he would follow Evdokimov to the centre in 1930 where he played a major role in the dekulakization campaign, and after returning to the North Caucasus, he would again return to Moscow under Yezhov and play important roles there in the terror.

Alexander Minaev Tsakanovskii was the head of Evdokimov’s Economic Department (EKO) in the 1920s, but would be brought to Moscow by Yezhov in April 1937 to head a number of important central offices. Izrael Yakovlevich Dagin served with Evdokimov in Ukraine and North Caucasus in the 1920s and 1930s and would be brought to Moscow under Yezhov to be head of the First Department of OGPU/NKVD for the entire period of mass operations.

Vladimir Mikhailovich Kuraskii was the deputy head of the counter intelligence department under Evdokimov in the 1920s. He continued to work in North Caucasus and would be promoted by Evdokimov on his return there in the 1930s. He too would return to play a key role at the centre, until he shot himself in July 1937.

All of these, and many others who had served with Evdokimov and Frinovskii in Ukraine and the North Caucasus would form a special team, and would play an important role in the future history of extra-judicial killings in the USSR.

By 1926 most of the rebel groups in the North Caucasus had been disarmed and both Evdokimov and his Deputy Frinovskii decided to spend some time in Moscow to renew relations and engage in some extra training. As noted above, the level of execution in North Caucasus fell sharply in this year. During this year Evdokimov registered to attend the Communist Academy, where he met and befriended N.I. Yezhov a young careerist who had just returned from a spell as Provincial Party Secretary in Evdokimov’s native Kazakhstan, and who was on his way to getting an important job in the Central Party Apparatus.

The young thirty-one-year-old Yezhov must have been in awe of the legendary Chekist who was four years his senior. They would form a friendship that would be mutually beneficial as they rose in their party and state security careers, but would ultimately lead to them sharing the same fate.

1926 was also a year of change in the OGPU leadership. Dzerzhinskii died in July and was succeeded by his deputy Menzhinskii. As Menzhinskii moved up the chain so did his supporters and assistants including Yagoda. Menzhinskii had been head of SOU from 1921 and before that head of OO. These positions were considered compatible with his job as the first deputy head of OGPU. However, they were thought to be too great a load for the head of OGPU, especially as he was in poor health. Therefore Menzhinskii had to hand over some of these jobs and Yagoda who had been Menzhinskii’s deputy in OO, and in SOU, picked them up, as well as fulfilling his own tasks as a deputy head of OGPU. Yagoda had become head of OO in 1922, head of OGPU in 1924, and was to become head of SOU in 1927.

It was not long before the new leadership of OGPU had a clash with Evdokimov. Late in 1926, when Evdokimov was still in Moscow his colleagues, back in the North Caucasus, were claiming to have uncovered a Cossack attempt to carry out a rebellion, and had allegedly foiled it and were prosecuting a number of prominent Cossacks.

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35 See O.B. Mozokhin, "Statistika repressivnogo deyatel’nosti organov VChK-OGPU (1921-1934)."


37 Nikolai Nikolaev-Zhurid, 1889-6-February 1940 had served with Frinovskii in Ukraine from 1920-23, before transferring to PP OGPU, North Caucasian Krai in 1923 and heading its Counter Intelligence Department from 4 July 1923 to 1 January 1930. He was then given a leadership role in the operational group that was set up within the central apparatus of OGPU to carry out dekulakization in February 1930 and at the same time was made assistant head of KRO OGPU USSR from 1 January 1930 to 15 September 1930, when he was transferred to assistant head OO OGPU USSR from 21 September 1930 to 21 November 1932. He was made head of oper otdel GUBG NKVD USSR from 28 November 1936 to 25 December 1936, and then Head of the 3rd otdel 25 December 1936 to 14 June 1937, head of the 3rd otdel 14 June 1937 to 28 March 1938, and head of the 3rd otdel of the 1st division of NKVD from 28 March 1938-29 September 1938. See Petrov and Skorkin, Kto Rabochoi, pp. 318-9.

38 Alexander Minaev Tsakanovskii, 1888-25 February 1939 had served with Frinovskii in Ukraine, before moving to the North Caucasus in October 1934 to head the Economic Department of the PP OGPU. See ibid., p. 298-99.

39 Izrael Yakovlevich Dagin, 1895-22 January 1940. See ibid., pp. 165.

40 Vladimir Mikhailovich Kuraskii, 1897-8 July 1937 was from the Ukraine and served under Frinovskii in Ukraine, before transferring to the North Caucasus to work in Nikolai Zhurid’s deputy in the PP OGPU North Caucasian Counter-Intelligence Department from May 1933 until 28 November 1929, when he took over as head of KRO until March 1931 and Head of OO PP OGPU North Caucasus until January 1934. In August 1933 Evdokimov also made him his assistant as assistant head of PP OGPU in the North Caucasus. Kuraskii was promoted to deputy Head of the PP when Evdokimov moved into Party administration in January 1934 and subsequently became deputy head UNKVD North Caucasian Krai from July 1934 to July 1936. See ibid., pp. 259-60.

41 Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov, 1895-6 February 1940.

42 Yezhov was appointed Secretary of the Party Committee of Semipalatinsk province in the Kirgiz (later Kazakh Republic) on 1 March 1923. In April 1925 he became Secretary of the Regional Party Committee in Kryl-Orda. Following the Fourteenth Party Congress that he attended in Moscow in December 1925, he was elected to the Central Committee Secretariat to take him to Moscow for a year to attend a one year course in Marxism-Leninism at the Communist Academy. Apart from E.G. Evdokimov, other students included I.Z. Mekhlis, see Jansen and Petrov, Stalin’s Loyal Executioners, pp. 11-12.

43 It should be noted that Yezhov, Evdokimov, Frinovskii, Nikolaev-Zhurid were all shot within two days of each other in February 1940.
Menchinskii apparently doubted the veracity of this report and ordered Evdokimov to punish his colleagues for inventing such stories.\footnote{Pepinshnik and Tumskii, Shehit, ruchiatniy vruchenn, pp. 207. Evdokimov was reportedly very reluctant to punish his colleagues for following his instructions, and he only did it under pressure. According to Pepinshnik and Tumskii, this incident added greatly to the animosity that Evdokimov felt to Yagoda and Menchinskii.}

In 1927 following the War scare (the Arcos raid and the assassination of the Soviet Diplomat Voikov in Poland), Evdokimov responded to the state of heightened political tension by increasing the level of extra-judicial executions in the North Caucasus, and by streamlining the process by introducing the so-called album method. By these means seventy-nine Whiteguardians in the Shakhit-Donets Okrug had their photographs and charges against them pasted into an album, which was sent to the Party KraiKom on 8 October 1927. The album was characteristically accompanied by a note from Evdokimov requesting that the death penalty be imposed and not moderated because these Cossacks would be "a real force against us, in the event of an international conflict" and that it was therefore "very important to destroy them."\footnote{See Appendix on Nikolaevich on Trilisser and Yagoda in Yu.G. Fediotshkin, VOK-KGPU: Dokumenti i Materialy (Moscow, 1995), p. 271.} This approach was to be symptomatic of an attitude and an argument which were to re-emerge in 1937-38.

Later the same year Evdokimov tried to convince Menchinskii and Yagoda that the large spate of accidents that had been reported in the Donbass was really the result of widespread sabotage. Again Menchinskii and Yagoda told Evdokimov that they did not believe it and that he should stop inventing stories. But this time Evdokimov was able to talk to Stalin, then on his holiday trip to Sochi. Stalin countermanded Menchinskii and Yagoda and ordered Evdokimov to continue investigating and to bring his accusations to the secretariat where he (Stalin) would ensure that they were followed up appropriately. Evdokimov did this and Stalin gave great publicity to what became the Shakhity Affair.\footnote{See TASS RF 2/5/29, II, cited here from Plehkonov, VOK-KGPU v gody novoi ekonomicheskoi politiki, 1921-1928, p. 130.} To the dismay of Menchinskii and Yagoda, Evdokimov was brought to Moscow to help with the prosecution and expansion of this case.

The Shakhity Case which was prosecuted in March 1928 led to the arrest of hundreds of specialists and engineers who were all accused of wrecking, though there was no evidence to support such charges. As Conquest pointed out, the Shakhity trial was to become a model for other show trials, and the campaign against the technical intelligentsia would also become a model for other campaigns. If Yagoda's reluctance to act on Evdokimov's "evidence" was not enough to discredit Yagoda, in Stalin's eyes, there was soon to be much more trouble when the emigre journal Sotsialisticheski Vestnik published a story about Bukharin's secret meetings with Kamenev. In this story Bukharin was reported to have told Kamenev that leading figures in OGPU were on the side of the Right deviation, and that they could rely on Menchinskii's deputies Trilisser and Yagoda. This may well have been a provocation and an attempt by Nikolaevich the editor of Sotsialisticheski Vestnik to cause upset in Moscow.\footnote{See TASS RF 2/5/29, II, cited here from Plehkonov, VOK-KGPU v gody novoi ekonomicheskoi politiki, 1921-1928, p. 130.}

Menchinskii, Trilisser and Yagoda argued in a letter to Stalin in February 1929 that this was a provocation and that it should be ignored.\footnote{See the declaration of Menchinskii, Yagoda and Trilisser to Stalin and Otdzhekmidze about this on 6 February 1929. See Khaustov et al., Lobynsky Stal, pp. 180.} But Stalin was hyper-suspicious, especially when Trilisser drew attention to himself by excessively denouncing the Rightists at the Sokolniki raion party conference, and by calling for self-criticism within OGPU.\footnote{See Khaustov et al., Lobynsky Stal, pp. 180.} Stalin insisted on sacking Trilisser and he remained very suspicious and hostile to Yagoda. It is about this time that Stalin appears to have begun supporting Evdokimov as a rival to Yagoda.

d) Evdokimov and his Colleagues Reinvent Mass Use of Extra-Judicial Operations in October 1930 to June 1931

In September 1929 Stalin wrote a short note to Menchinskii, enquiring about his health and warning him against carrying out any widespread self-criticism campaign within OGPU, which, he claimed, could only weaken its military discipline. In a post-script he added: "I have heard that Evdokimov is being transferred to Moscow on Secret Operational work (apparently to replace Deribas). Wouldn't it be useful to make him a member of the Collegium at the same time? I think that it would be useful."\footnote{See Khaustov et al., Lobynsky Stal, pp. 180.} Evdokimov was duly appointed to the Collegium of OGPU on 10 October 1929\footnote{See Khaustov et al., Lobynsky Stal, pp. 180.} and on 26 October he was also appointed head of SOU in place of Yagoda, who also lost charge of OTO to Ya. K. Olshki.\footnote{See Khaustov et al., Lobynsky Stal, pp. 180.} The rationale for Yagoda losing operational control of this key Department and the whole Division was that he was about to be appointed Menchinskii's first deputy the following day (27 October) and this would stop him gaining too much power. However, it is difficult not to see this loss of operational control as being related to Stalin's distrust of Yagoda.

Evdokimov, with a certain reputation and experience, thus took over the key operational position within OGPU just as the planning for collectivization and denazification, which would need his expertise, was about to take place. Evdokimov was to play a central role, if not the central role in the planning for the denazification operations. The first two directives to PP OGPU ordering them to set up a special operations group and prepare for the denazification operations were signed by Yagoda and Evdokimov on 19 January 1930\footnote{See Khaustov et al., Lobynsky Stal, pp. 180.} twenty-two days before the Politburo instructions. Subsequent instructions on 23 and 25 January were signed by MEssing and Evdokimov.\footnote{See Khaustov et al., Lobynsky Stal, pp. 180.} On the day of the Politburo instruction OGPU held a work group meeting of the heads and assistant heads of OGPU and regional PP OGPU. On the first day, 30 January 1930, they discussed the detailed implementation of the Politburo instructions and set up a number of commissions to report back the next day. Evdokimov was put in charge of a commission of Bukharin, El'shin, Vorontsov, Apetro, Alekseev, Kisharin, Bak, Rapport, Ol'kski and Kishkin to work out detailed proposals on the arrest of Kulak counter-revolutionaries. The other commissions on
they were often poorly prepared for exile.66 The following day Stalin publicly warned about “Dizziness with Success” and excesses in Collectivization.67 On 7 March Stalin circulated to the Politburo materials from Evdokimov that argued that the lower state apparatus and local brigades were responsible for the excesses and deviations, which were being carried out.68 There was no criticism of the Party leadership, or of the security forces or the policy of mass operations that Evdokimov was carrying out at this time.

Dekulaksizm would continue with increased ferocity in response to the wave of peasant protests, which were themselves a response to Stalin’s letter “Dizzy with Success.” Evdokimov and his colleagues in the operational departments of OGPU were not going to become scape-goats over this change in policy. Stalin appears to have decided that this was not the time to ease-up on extra-ordinary extra-judicial methods, even though his “Dizziness” speech appeared to be saying the opposite.

The scale of Dekulaksizm that was carried out by the local troiki under the overall control of Evdokimov, and under him Puzitskii, Shtarkenfel’d and Nikolayev-Zhinidrin was very great with over 380,000 kulak households exiled (probably 1.5 million people) and about 30,000 individuals executed. See the tables and figure below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of households exiled by sub period 1930-31</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>112,828</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January - April 1931</td>
<td>32,467</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May - July 1931</td>
<td>160,836</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July - 31 December 1931</td>
<td>72,042</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>381,173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The level of extra-judicial killing at this time rose from 2,000 in 1929 to over 20,000 in 1930 and over 10,000 in 1931 (mainly the first half of the year).

For sources, see Wheare, Challenging Traditional Views of Russian History, pp. 118, 125.

On 13 February 1931 the Presidium of TsIK USSR issued a decree which created a special troika under the local PP OGPU. These had the power to review cases which otherwise would have been handled by the collegium of OGPU or its special Conference OSO. These troiki had a much broader remit than those established in February 1930 for the dekulaksizm campaign. They could try all cases of counter-revolutionary crime apart from wrecking (article 58-7), sabotage (article 58-14), “historical” counter-revolution (article 58-13), and cases including service crimes by...

66 See Protocols of session on 31 January 1930 where it only looks as though the results of the Evdokimov commission were discussed. See TSD, vol. 2, pp. 132-5.
67 Vert and Mironenko, Massovye Repressii v SSSR, vol. 1, Istoriya Stalinishchego Gulag, pp. 94-104 from GARF. 9/44/1/9/44, II.17-64. This source strongly claims that these were all previously published in TSD. Vol. 2, pp. 162-7. In fact only Yagoda’s order were previously published, without the 5 appendices from Evdokimov.
68 Kozlov and Petrov, Lubyanka (f... spravochnik, p. 47-48.
69 This probably dated back to the military operations on the South West Front in 1920. It was reinforced by Stalin’s many holidays in North Caucasus, by their collaboration over the Shakhly Affair and by Stalin’s pressing for Evdokimov’s promotion. Note also Orlov’s claim that he was one of Stalin’s own cronies. See above.
66 See Messing and Evdokimov to all PP OGPU directives to take measures to liquidate excesses in dekulaksizm. TsA FSB RF 2/8-840, l.109, cited in TSD vol. 2, p. 270-1.
68 Kozlov et al., Lubyanka Stalin, pp. 226-8.
OGPU employees, which still had to be tried by the collegium or OSO. This would appear to indicate a change that promised to develop into a much broader campaign of repression reaching urban and industrial areas.

These new troiki were to contain representatives of FP OGPU, and of the Kraikom of the party, but in addition they were expected to involve the participation of the local Procuracy. These troiki had the right to review cases but were required to present their decisions to the collegium of OGPU for confirmation. Once they had received this confirmation they could carry out the sentence, right up to the level of execution.

In the first half of 1931 these troiki sentenced 56,458 individuals from fifteen krai, oblasts and Republicans, and 4,017 of these received death sentences. The December 1931 Procuracy report (which is our main source on these developments) explains that some cases of excesses were experienced and that in May, just three months after the new troiki had been established, the competence of these new troiki was reduced and limited to reviewing Kulak counter-revolution. Moreover, the power to confirm death sentences was revoked and reserved for the collegium of OGPU.

Somehow, before this promise of broader repression could be fulfilled, a decision had been made to limit the powers of these new extra-judicial agencies. It is difficult to imagine Evdokimov and his colleagues giving up without a fight. But the circumstances as to how this decision was made and how they responded remain somewhat unclear. We do know that they had begun interpreting “kulak” rather broadly and they appear to have been appealing to Stalin and the Politburo to support them to expand the area of repression. On 16 June 1931 at a time when Evdokimov’s activities on the Kulak front were approaching a climax a proposal was brought before the Politburo aimed at removing socially alien elements from industrial enterprises. This would appear to be indicative of a desire to expand the scale of repression from the countryside into the towns and industry. Elsewhere I have argued that these proposals caused some concern in the Politburo at this time from Kukishev, Ordzhonikidze, Voroshilov, Rudzutak and possibly Molotov and I have suggested that this might explain why the resolution of this proposal was deferred, and why Evdokimov and his allies were dumped at this time.

e) Evdokimov and some of his Team are Removed from the Centre as Akulov Attempts to Reintroduce Legality into Security Operations, June 1931

At the next meeting of the Politburo on 20 June, instead of proceeding to discuss the proposal to expand the area of OGPU operations, Stalin raised the problem of OGPU procedures for arrest and sentencing. Mengezhinskii was ordered to report on this. But within three days Stalin gave a clear indication that he was abandoning his support for Evdokimov-Shokity-type spets-buitting. In his “Six conditions” lecture he called for a halt to indiscriminate attacks on the old Industrial and Technical Intelligentsia.

As I have written elsewhere: “In the following weeks, the Politburo took several steps along a reconciliation line. Stalin and Andreyev raised the question of the restitution of civil rights to certain kulak groups on 30 June. Voroshilov was successful in securing the OGPU’s release of ten sailors on 10 July. On 29 July Kukishev convinced the Politburo to agree to his proposals on cadres in Gosplan, and Ordzhonikidze finally succeeded in obtaining Politburo approval for Pyatakov’s appointment as his first deputy.”

This would seem to indicate that Stalin and the whole Politburo was swinging sharply against the kind of extremist policies that Evdokimov had been so closely associated with in the past. On 10 July 1931 the Politburo issued further orders restricting arrests. These orders required that no party members or specialists were to be arrested, without the permission of the People’s Commissar who employed them. It repeated the earlier OGPU requirements that “citizens arrested for political crimes, should not be held without questioning for more than two weeks, and that investigations should not last for longer than three months following which cases were to be closed, transferred to the courts or decided by the collegium of OGPU”. It was further emphasised that all sentences to death handed down by the collegium of OGPU needed to be affirmed by the Central Committee of the Party.

This would appear to be a sharp rejection of the Evdokimov line, and on 25 July a further Politburo decree ordered a whole range of changes in the OGPU leadership group, which included the removal of Evdokimov from the key position of SOU and the transfer of other hard-liners Beshkii, Messing and Olshii out of the security service altogether.

While on the face of it, this all looks very clean, an official explanation was given, which does more to confuse the issue than clarify it. According to the official explanation given to local security chiefs at the time, the change was needed not because of a change in policy against the extremest unsubstantiated extra-judicial policy of Evdokimov, but because of his plotting against the leadership of OGPU, and because of his undermining investigations into sabotage in the military and armaments industry, and his accusation that these charges were groundless.

While it is quite likely that Evdokimov and the others were continuing to plot against Yagoda as alleged in the first part of this charge, the second part is very difficult to believe. It effectively charges Evdokimov of behaving in a way that would have been very unusual for him. Pachnik and Tumshii have a fairly complex Byzantine explanation of what they think was happening. On the other hand Viktor

64 Wheatcroft, Challenging Traditional Views of Russian History, p. 122.
66 This was probably the intent.
67 They claim that Yagoda, fearing for his own safety, and envious of the success of his rival Evdokimov, had decided to fabricate a case of Military sabotage. Evdokimov, Belski and others got wind of what was happening and thought that this was an opportunity for them to discredit Yagoda by indicating how artificial his claims were. Unfortunately for them Stalin was more gullible than they
Danilov and Michael Ellman appear to take it at face value that Evdokimov had suddenly become a great humanitarian.28

Evdokimov was to be demoted and transferred to Leningrad. He was being treated more gently than his colleagues, and the decree specifically stated that his move was "in agreement with comrade Munchinski's proposal." Other hardened Chekists were more harshly treated. Belotski, the former PP OGPU for the Far East, Central Asia, and more recently Moscow Oblast, was sent to the People's Commissariat of Food Industries to work on mineral water production. After having been left out in the wet for a while he would eventually make his way back to be another of Yezhov's deputies.29

Messing, who was Deputy Chair of OGPU, and Evdokimov's deputy Olski were both to be transferred out of the security services.

The removal of Evdokimov and many of his team from Moscow would appear to be a victory for Yagoda, but Stalin was not prepared to leave it at that. It seems that he had still not forgotten the claims that Yagoda was soft on the Right Deviation, and so Yagoda was also demoted from First Deputy Chair of OGPU to Second Deputy Chair. He was replaced by Ivan Alekseevich Akulov,30 a complete outsider to the security forces. Akulov emerged as the new First Deputy Chair of OGPU, and given Munchinski's increasingly poor health the lead figure.

Most commentators assume that Akulov was given an impossible task and was bound to fail,31 because he lacked inside information, or a team to support him. But when we look at the data, it is far less clear that he did totally fail. He appears to have greatly reduced the level of extra-judicial sentencing carried out by the troiki or PP, and he was successful in insisting that more cases be tried by the courts.

In practice this meant that the large level of secret executions, were replaced by a much smaller number of highly publicized cases, and this seems to have confused most observers. Yes indeed there was more discussion of terror, but in reality the level of repression was greatly reduced. This is particularly clear when we consider the death penalty and perceptions around the notorious law of August 1932 "In defense of socialist property" that introduced the death penalty even for the theft of grain left standing in the fields after harvest. This has often been presented as a sign of increased repression and terror. We need to be careful in separating out the reality from the rhetoric. It was more a sign of a shift in policy to publicise the use of the law courts to ensure the fulfilment of the law. In reality ten times as many people were shot secretly in 1930 and 1931, than were executed after publicly publicised trials in 1932 or 1933.

We can also see a conscious attempt to reduce the power of the large security chiefs and to make them more accountable to the law. An attempt was made to stop them building their own gangs of followers. A Politburo decree of 5 August 1931 forbade Evdokimov, Redin, Balitskii, and other responsible OGPU workers, from taking with them their own people as they were transferred from place to place.32

This same Politburo decree also announced that Evdokimov would not be going to Leningrad, as had earlier been announced, but that he would become the new PP OGPU in Central Asia, where he had special orders to disarm groups of rebels in Tadzhikistan and especially in Turkmenia. Evdokimov would stay in Central Asia a year, before being transferred back to the North Caucasus, and eventually joining the party apparatus there as First Party Secretary.

Akulov did not stay in OGPU for long. He left after a year to return to Ukraine during the famine. He never took operational charge of OGPU and perhaps that was the intention. SOU remained without a head, and was eventually abolished. Perhaps the intention was to weaken their ability to carry out massive campaigns.

For the rest of the OGPU period, Evdokimov's death Yagoda remained second deputy, even though there was no first deputy.

In May 1933, Stalin and Molotov issued their famous instruction33 to regularize the terror, reduce the number of arrest and reduce the number of prisoners. For many recent interpretations, it has been seen as the start of a new period of attempted legalization. As I have argued above, I think that this shift in policy came earlier. By May 1933, as the famine began to bite, there were some obvious practical problems about keeping and feeding large numbers of unproductive prisoners. Consequently I see this as being more of a practical response to a temporary difficulty, than as a major policy shift.

Akulov was to return to the question of ensuring that the Security forces acted legally, as soon as the famine was over in August 1933, but this time he approached it from a different direction. He had been First Deputy Chair of OGPU, but became the first All Union Procurator General. Again the "quiet" Akulov appears to have continued in his attempts to keep the repressive extra-judicial urge of the old Chekists under control.

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28 Khaustov et al., Ljudnaya Stalin, p. 276.
29 This instruction was first publicized by Merle Fainado, when it was discovered in the Smolensk Archives. See M. Fainado, Smolensk under Soviet Rule (London, 1953), pp. 185-188
In the same month of August 1933 there were signs that Evdokimov had restored himself to Stalin's favour. He was again giving Stalin advice on security matters, and Stalin was accepting his advice. On 25 August 1933 Stalin sent Molotov, Kaganovich and Yagoda a telegram from Sochi warning them that Evdokimov had told him that he thought that White Guards would attempt to attack the French Prime Minister Herriot on his upcoming trip to the USSR. Stalin ordered them to take Evdokimov's warning seriously.79

Very soon after this, and no doubt related to a desire to keep independent of Yagoda, Evdokimov began taking a bigger interest in Party matters. In January 1934 he was transferred to the Party organization and became Party secretary for the North Caucasus Krai. No doubt his friends in the Party Secretariat and especially Yezhov in ORPO would have been able to assist this move.

By this time Stalin was finally becoming more supportive of Yagoda and when Menzhinskii died in July 1934 and the Security forces were incorporated as GUGB into the NKVD USSR, Yagoda was finally installed as Security chief, albeit in charge of a body whose many extra-judicial bodies and local PPs had lost many of their more extreme powers.

Kirov's assassination in December 1934 was undoubtedly a landmark event. But it did not immediately indicate a move towards increased repression. It was associated with a great upsurge in anti-terroristic rhetoric. Standard counter-terror measures were taken including expediting the judicial process for those accused of terrorism against the state, and there was the threat of the resort to more extra-judicial measures. But again we need to separate the rhetoric from the reality. The assassination did lead to an increase in counter-terror rhetoric, and it resulted in some policy changes, which would assist the terror later. However, while it can be seen as preparing the ground for the Great Terror it did not itself lead to a growth in repression or death sentences. That was to come later when Yezhov had taken charge of the service.

f) Evdokimov's team take over GUGB and reintroduce mass extra-judicial operations, September 1936-July 1937

Yezhov's serious involvement in security matters appears to have started with Kirov's murder. Yezhov accompanied Stalin to Leningrad, and attended Stalin's interrogation of Nikolaev the murderer. Stalin charged Yezhov with supervising the investigations into the case, together with the Komsomol leaders Kosarev, and Yagoda's deputy Agranov.80 Yezhov began acting as Stalin's representative in NKVD, often by-passing Yagoda and going directly to the key operatives. It is tempting to see the hand of Evdokimov in this.

Yezhov and Evdokimov certainly had a shared dislike for Yagoda, and their approaches to investing conspiracies were very similar. Yezhov undoubtedly relied on Evdokimov and his network to get him the contacts, and the local inside information that he needed. The kind of reports that Yezhov began writing for Stalin about the mass of conspiracies amongst the former party leaders, and many of the security chiefs, read very much as though they were guided by the hand that produced the Shukhty list. But now Evdokimov was also presumably giving some support and advice to Yezhov, especially as he was making a new career for himself in the party.

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80 Jansen and Petrov, Stalin's Loyal Executioner, p. 23.
happened under Olkki in 1931 after he had become head of both KRO and OO. The combination (known as OO) was maintained through the tenure of Leplevskii (1932-33) and Gni (1934-36). But on 28 November 1936 the two Departments were split again. Leplevskii came back to head OO, and Mironov, who from 1931 had been in charge of the Economic Department (Eku) took over KRO. Mironov still stayed in charge of KRO until June 1937 when he was replaced briefly by Evdokimov associate Kurskii (15 April 1937-8 July 1937) and then by Evdokimovite Mineev-Tsikanovskii.

The Secret Political Department (SpO) had been headed by Molchanov since November 1931. He was to be briefly transferred to BSSR as NKVD for a couple of months before he was arrested on 2 March 1937. Molchanov was replaced by Evdokimovite Kurskii for five months. On 15 April 1937, when Agronov lost the first Deputy Chairmanship and the Chair of GUGB to Evdokimov’s former deputy Frinovskii, he was temporarily given SpO to head, but within a month he was replaced by Litvin and later Tsesarskii, who were both new men brought in by Yezhov from the Party Apparatus. They were to be replaced by Zhurbenko, whose career had begun in the Crimean in the years that Evdokimov was in charge of OO there.

We can consequently see that it is Frinovskii, Evdokimov’s former deputy and several of his former operational chiefs, Kurskii, Degin, Nikolaev-Zhurbin and Mineev-Tsikanovskii who dominate the operational leadership at the time of the launch of the mass extra-judicial operations of the great terror in July 1937. Team Yezhov was in effect Team Evdokimov when it came to operational work.14

In July 1937 Frinovskii, (Evdokimov’s former deputy), worked out the operational instructions for the first mass operations (Order 00447 The Anti-Soviet Element campaign). Again a network of troiki were established, who were given extra-judicial rights down to imposing death sentences for the identified victims. A curious feature of this and the other mass campaigns of the time, was the emphasis on individual investigative procedures, even when no individual investigative work was actually taking place. It involved a particularly efficient team to individually process the 350,000 death sentences that were carried out in the second half of 1937, and the 328,000 carried out in 1938, before November. When the pace grew particularly rapid in the ethnic campaigns report was made of the “album method” which had been pioneered earlier by Evdokimov.

There was however one problem with this team that nearly scuttled its work right at the beginning. The problem was Kurskii, who for reasons that remain unclear suddenly decided to leave the team. He did this in the only way that was possible by shooting himself on 8 July 1937.

Kurskii had served in the North Caucasus from 1923 to July 1936 and was brought into the centre by Yezhov on 28 November 1936 to head SPO-GUGB. He became deputy head of GUGB and deputy NKVD on 15 April 1937, and at the same time took over Palenker’s position in charge of security for the leadership (First Department). On 14 June 1937 he also took over KRO from Mironov, was awarded an Order of Lenin on 2 July 1937 and was rumoured to have been offered the People’s Commissar position before ending his career in suicide.


14 Team Yezhov did contain a number of former party apparatchik figures like Litvin, Shapiro and Tsesarskii, but they tended to dominate the secretarial and statistical sections rather than the operational ones. The one exception to this was the Secret Political Department (SpO) where Litvin and Tsesarskii were temporarily in charge from May 1937 to April 1938.

Was this a protest against the launch of the mass operations that were about to begin and in which Kurskii would be expected to play an important role? His death may be presented as an act of desperation as the arrests of his colleagues mounted. But by July 1937 very few of the Evdokimov team had been touched by the purge.

Whatever the reason for his suicide, it did not in the end affect the implementation of the mass operations. Mineev-Tsikanovskii, Nikolaev Zhurbin and Izrail Daigin (all old North Caucasus hands) were brought in to fill the gap caused by Kurskii’s suicide. Mineev-Tsikanovskii, took over KRO from Kurskii, and in March 1938 handed it over to Nikolaev Zhurbin and devoted himself to the Industrial Department of NKVD (Eight Department of the First Division). Daigin was brought in to replace Kurskii as head of the 17th Department of GUGB, that provided security for the leaders on 14 June 1937 and will remain there until replaced by Vlasik on 5 November 1938.

g) Evdokimov and his team fall as legality is reintroduced under Beria, November 1938.

There had been some contradictory indicators of the standing of Evdokimov at this time. When Evdokimov was transferred from the Chernomorski Okhom to become First Secretary of Rostov Okhom in September 1937, he was reportedly disturbed to discover an outsider Genrik Samoilovich Lyushkov, who had been Molchanov’s assistant in SPO in the 1930s, to be the local NKVD official in Rostov. Lyushkov failed to acknowledge Evdokimov’s authority and was arresting and questioning some of Evdokimov’s men. It took Evdokimov several months before he could get Frinovskii and Yezhov to transfer Lyushkov to Far East. When Lyushkov defected to the Japanese on 13 June 1938, it relieved Evdokimov from the threat of what Lyushkov had been preparing. But it was damaging against Yezhov, and anyone who could be seen as responsible for sending Lyushkov to the Far East in the first case.

On 8 May 1938 Yezhov took on the task of People’s Commissar of Water Transport, whilst remaining in charge of NKVD. Although it may appear that this appointment could have indicated that Yezhov was on his way out, this is not necessarily the case. Dzerzhinsky had established a pattern of the Security chief being in charge of other Commissariats, and so this would not necessarily have appeared threatening. There were however other moves associated with this one. In particular we need to note that Yezhov’s arrival in the People’s Commissariat of Water Transport was preceded by three days by the transfer of Evdokimov to the same Commissariat as Deputy Commissar. On the face of it the transfer from a party obliv first secretary position to deputy People’s Commissar for Water Transport would be seen as a demotion, but it may have seemed different if it gave Evdokimov more access to Yezhov and NKVD matters.

In June 1938 there was another split in responsibilities as Mineev-Tsikanovskii was moved to combine his job in the Industrial Department of NKVD with that of Deputy People’s Commissar for Heavy Industry. Again it is unclear whether this should be seen as a sign of the decline in authority within NKVD of these individuals.

There was no ambiguity however when on 22 August 1938 Beriya replaced Frinovskii as Yezhov’s first deputy.

Beriya had been one of the young regional PP OGPU representatives who had met with Evdokimov in January 1930 to plan the Kulak operations. In August 1931 after
the purge of the Evdokimovites, Beria had become a member of the collegium of
OGPU. This would have set him up as a rival to the other security chiefs, but he only
held this position for a few months until December 1931 when he transferred to
the party apparatus and became Party Secretary for Georgia and ZSFSR. It may have been
the sudden promotion of Akulov over all of the Chekists that gave these senior
Chekists the idea that the successful route to the top was through the party structures.
But the role of party chief in the Transcaucasus was suddenly reduced with the
break-up of the ZSFSR following the 1936 constitution. In December 1936, as the
position disappeared, Beria ceased being the First Secretary of the Transcaucasian
Khakim, but remained the First Secretary of the much smaller Georgian Communist
Party. In May 1937 he added the first secretarieship of the Tbilissi Gorkom, to that of
the Georgian party, but this was still a relatively minor load for the former ZSFSR
party secretary.
On 28 August 1938 Beria returned to the Security forces as Yezhov's first Deputy.
Just over two weeks later on 8 September Beria also replaced Frunovskii in the
operational role as head of UGB. The next day Frunovskii was transferred out of
NKVD and became People’s Commissar for the Navy.
According to Frunovskii’s forced statements taken after his arrest, Yezhov went to
pieces at this time. According to Frunovskii’s deposition it was Evdokimov who took
charge and instructed Frunovskii on 27-28 August.
Check to see whether Zakowski and all Yagoda’s people have been executed, because after
Beria’s arrival the investigation of these cases may be renewed and they may turn against us.94
According to the archival record Frunovskii lied to Evdokimov and claimed that they
had been executed the previous day. Frunovskii then had Zakowski and Mirnov
executed the next day.
Of course there are grave doubts as to how we should treat these forced depositions,
but they are interesting. Either they were what really happened, or if not, then they
were something that Beria’s investigators were imagining could have happened. In one
case they indicate that the influence of Evdokimov in the Yezhov team was immense,
right through to the end. In the other case they indicate that the Beria team wanted for
some reason to present this as the case. It is possible that in this one instance they may
be telling us something that really happened.
Evdokimov was to be arrested on 9 November just over a week before the Party and
State leadership began attacking NKVD for its errors in arrests, and stating the need for
greater procuratorial oversight95. On 25 November 1938 Beria finally replaced
Yezhov as People’s Commissar. Yezhov held out as NKVD until 9 March 1939, by
which time most of the Evdokimov team had been arrested.96 Most of this team were to
be investigated together and shot together in February 1940.97

Georgia USSR. See Ochitina and Roginskii, Kto Radovush? NKVD: Spravochnik, pp. 166-7. For his
presence in the planning session in January 1930 see TSD vol 2.
97 Cited in Jansen and Putin, Stalin’s Local Executioner, p. 151.
98 See SNK/TK decree “On arrests, procuratorial oversight and investigative procedures”, 17
November 1938.
99 Nikolayev-Zhirid, Dogin and Minaev-Tutakurveski were all arrested before Evdokimov, Nikolayev-
Zhirid on 25 October, and the others on 6 November. Frunovskii was arrested on 6 April 1939 just a
few days before Yezhov.
90 Evdokimov was sentenced on 2 February 1940, Yezhov, Frunovskii and Nikolayev-Zhirid were all
sentenced and shot two days later on 4 February.

91 I have argued elsewhere that in his early period, even in the early 1930s Stalin was a team player,
who ultimately would listen to people like Ordzhonikidze and Kukhshov, as to what policy should be
applied. He clearly was unhappy with his team in the mid 1930s, and appeared to want Kirov to play a
more active role. Following Kirov’s assassination it was Yezhov who moved more centrally into the
team as Stalin adviser. See S.G. Wheatcroft, “From Team-Stalin to Degenerate Tyranny”, in P.A.
Rees, The Nature of Stalin’s Dictatorship: The Politburo, p. 124-125 (Roundmill and New York,
2004), pp. 79-107. It was only later after the Second World War that Stalin moved from being a team
player to become a despotic tyrant.