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Roman Romanov

*Candidate of Sciences (History), Senior Researcher, Institute of History of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Novosibirsk, Russia, e-mail: rromanov1981@mail.ru
ORCID: 0000-0001-9527-8037*

**A REVIEW OF THE BOOKS “KYRGYZSTAN:
THE MILESTONES OF THE STATEHOOD. YEARS SCARRED
BY THE WAR. A TRIBUTE TO THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE SOVIET PEOPLE’S VICTORY IN THE GREAT PATRIOTIC
WAR”. BISHKEK: MAXPRINT, 2025. 624 P.;
“THE DEFENSE INDUSTRY OF KYRGYZSTAN: 1941–1945.
A COLLECTION OF DOCUMENTS”. BISHKEK: DEMI, 2025. 180 P.***

Abstract. This article provides a review of the multi-authored popular science monograph “Kyrgyzstan: the Milestones of the Statehood. Years Scarred by the War. A Tribute to the 80th Anniversary of the Soviet People’s Victory in the Great Patriotic War” and the collection of documents “The Defense Industry of Kyrgyzstan: 1941-1945.” The monograph reflects the history of the many-sided development of the Kirghiz SSR before and during the Great Patriotic War. The book mainly depicts military, ideological, political, economic, and labor mobilizations, as well as the deeds of Kyrgyz soldiers. The collection includes 94 documents, extracted from eight depositories of the Central State Archives of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Central State Archives of Political Documentation of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Central State Archives of Film and Photo Documents of the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Issyk-Kul Regional Archives. The archival materials include Communist Party and government directives as well as administrative records, which enable a preliminary reconstruction of the creation and activities of the defense enterprises in the Kirghiz SSR between 1941 and 1945.

Keywords: Great Patriotic War, USSR, the rear, Kyrgyzstan, defense industry, mobilization.

The 80th anniversary of Victory has been a milestone in preserving the memory of the Great Patriotic War over the post-Soviet space in the first quarter of the 21st century. One of the ways of constructing historical memory is presenting popular science publications timed to coincide with the upcoming Victory Day. This tradition originated in the late Soviet Union and has continued in those CIS countries where Victory Day is celebrated annually. Among the latter are the states of Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan. In 2025, the book “Kyrgyzstan: the Milestones of the Statehood. Years Scarred by the War. A tribute to the 80th Anniversary of the Soviet People’s Victory in the Great Patriotic War” was published in Bishkek. The anniversary reference in the title in-

dicates that the country is purposefully implementing commemorative practices aimed at preserving cultural continuity regarding the Soviet past. This policy brings together the perspectives of the state elites of the Russian Federation and Kyrgyzstan in the face of external ideological challenges. Mutual recognition of the fact that there is a common denominator in both national histories is one of the tools for strengthening good-neighborly relations. With regard to mass consciousness, it blocks the temptations of ethnic nationalism and hinders the mechanisms of mental division and confrontation between the two peoples, who are united by a shared historical destiny.

In this context, the concept of Kyrgyzstan as an integral part of the USSR during the Great Patriot-

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ic War reflects the methodological approach applied by the researchers of the entire Soviet period in the republic's history, according to which Soviet Kyrgyz statehood played a beneficial role in the fate of the Kyrgyz people. The key constituents of the authors' conceptual position appear to be the desire to establish historical continuity between the Kyrgyz SSR and post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan along with the inclusion of war-time memories in the national identity of Kyrgyz people.

The publication under review consists of seven units, which are quite logically organized around both the problems addressed and chronology. The first unit looks at the early stages of the Kyrgyz SSR on the eve of the Great Patriotic War. It considers various aspects of the administrative and political structure as well as the large-scale socio-economic and cultural transformation of the Soviet republic. The unit describes the processes of intensive industrialization and modernization that contributed to the progress made in industry and agriculture. The authors discuss the major advances in the elimination of illiteracy, the development of education, science, and culture, the improvement of welfare, and the formation of a new Soviet identity for the Kyrgyz people.

The following five units (II–VI) contain extensive factual and statistical data about the Kyrgyz SSR during the Great Patriotic War. They consistently reveal the challenges of the early wartime days, the role of Kyrgyzstan as a reliable rear area, the achievements made and challenges faced in the country's way to economic transformation, changes in its social and cultural life, and the human dimension of the Victory. The pressures of the early days of the war are shown through the prism of military mobilization; the military volunteer movement; the accumulation of reserves for the active army; the mobilization of material resources for the needs of the front; ideological, informational and propagandistic practices. The book discusses the evacuation of factories, research and educational institutions, orphanages, and the population, as well as the relocation and resettlement of deported peoples, which illustrates the significance of the Kirghiz SSR as a rear area.

When explaining the economic transformation of Kyrgyzstan, the authors consider the processes involved in the launch of relocated factories, the adjustment of military production, the extraction

of valuable raw materials for the defense industry, the functioning of railways, energy infrastructure, agriculture, household plots, and the taxation system.

An analysis of labor mobilization practices; the use of adolescent, pensioner, and female labor; supply rationing; social support for vulnerable groups; universal military training; the development of healthcare, sports and fitness, school and university education, culture and arts, ranging from literature to cinema, allowed the authors to reconstruct the transformations in the social and cultural life of Kyrgyz people during the war years. The human dimension of victory is also demonstrated through the dynamics of population size and natural population change; frontline casualty statistics; emergency migrations (evacuation, re-evacuation, and deportation). Overall, the main units of the book paint the picture of the comprehensive development of the Kirghiz SSR amidst a combination of large-scale military, labor, economic, ideological, and political mobilizations.

The last unit commemorates Kyrgyzstan's heroes in the Great Patriotic War. It includes 75 biographical profiles of Kyrgyzstan soldiers. Each entry contains information about their lives and military careers, heroic deeds, military ranks and titles, awards, deaths on the battlefield or post-war lives, and memorial symbols honoring the heroes. This part of the book allows us to personalize the Kyrgyz people's contribution to the Victory. The most fascinating pieces are the personal histories of famous Kyrgyzstanis: Zuurkan Kainazarova, who became Hero of Socialist Labor twice; Rafy Aidarbekova, the first female doctor in Kyrgyzstan; Toktogon Altibasarova, the village council chairperson who fostered 150 children, and others. These biographies evidence civic loyalty towards both the great Soviet homeland and the small Kyrgyz homeland.

Notably, the same degree of informativeness can not be attributed to the coverage of everyday life in the Kirghiz SSR during wartime, which is rather fragmentary. Without a separate section on the living conditions and cultural leisure activities of Kyrgyzstanis in the rear areas, the human dimension of victory reconstructed in the book remains incomplete.

Another significant contribution into the preservation of historical memory of the role played

by Soviet Kyrgyzstan during the Great Patriotic War is the publication of archival documents on the establishment and operations of the republic's defense industry in the first half of the 1940s. A pivotal moment in modern Kyrgyz historiography was the publication of the document collection "The Defense Industry of Kyrgyzstan. 1941–1945" (Bishkek, 2025), prepared by employees of the Central State Archives of the Kyrgyz Republic. In total, this edition contains 94 documents stored in eight collections of the Central State Archives of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Central State Archives of Political Documentation of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Central State Archives of Film and Photo Documents of the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Issyk-Kul Regional Archives. Included are Communist Party and government directives and administrative documents that allow to tentatively reconstruct the history of the establishment and activities of Kyrgyzstan's defense enterprises.

The structure of the collection is traditional for documentary publications. The array of documents is preceded by an introduction, conveying the following characteristic concept of Kyrgyz historiography: the Soviet Union "used to be our great Motherland," and the republic was its integral part. The contribution of the Kyrgyz SSR to the victory in the Great Patriotic War is revealed through the documented facts and figures on the mobilization of Kyrgyzstanis to the frontline, the formation of national military units, the collection of warm clothing for Red Army soldiers, raising funds for producing arms and munitions, training production workers in the state labor reserve system, the reception and settlement of evacuees, and the construction of new factories. Overall, the introductory part of the publication offers a comprehensive account of the mobilization development of the Soviet Kirghiz republic during wartime.

The core of the collection consists of declassified documents from the archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Kirghiz Republic, the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union and the Kirghiz SSR, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Kirghiz Republic, as well as archives of defense enterprises. The totality of documents included falls into two qualitatively distinct categories. The first one

comprises directives from state and Communist Party bodies that exercised administrative, political, and economic leadership on the scale of the republic. They contain mobilization decisions on organizing the production of tools, weapons, and ammunition, evacuating and relocating factories, adjusting power supply, installing equipment at production facilities, constructing factory buildings, operating defense enterprises, repairing vehicles for the Red Army, preparing industrial labor reserves, mobilizing the unemployed working-age population, accounting for and distributing the workforce, and organizing socialist competition. Overall, the policy documents allow readers of the collection to see the range of issues that fell within the competence of the Soviet Union and Kirghiz authorities regarding the organization and development of the military economy in the republic.

The second category embraces administrative documents from various levels of hierarchy, from the highest state and Communist Party authorities to factory directors. Among the documents are reports of several types, explanatory statements, letters, messages, petitions, certificates, lists, and plans. The unit also includes correspondence between various officials on issues such as evacuation; construction; production; material and technical supply; personnel recruitment and training; community amenities; socialist competition; employee awards.

Departmental and factory records provide a concrete picture of the conditions for locating and commissioning evacuated enterprises, establishing electric power systems and supplying military factories with electricity, fulfilling plans and orders for the production of defense supplies, and the overall development of industry in the Kirghiz SSR between 1941 and 1945. The collection is significantly less informative about the mobilization of employees for production, workforce required for construction and installation work, establishment of factory and plant training schools, housing conditions of factory workers, assistance from the authorities in improving families' living conditions, the procedure for redeeming food ration cards, results of socialist competition, and awarding top performers. On the whole, industrial issues naturally predominate in the publication under review.

With regard to the internal situation at Kyrgyzstan's military factories, the most thought-provoking source of information is the official correspondence between their directors and the respective People's Commissariats on establishing and increasing the production of defense supplies. That helps identify the challenges faced while creating and developing defense industry enterprises in the republic in the first half of the 1940s. During the organization of weapons and ammunition production in late 1941 and early 1942, there was interdepartmental confusion in the planning of the quantity and nomenclature of products manufactured for the front. For example, the 1942 production plan for the Frunze Mechanical Plant was issued in seven versions, compiled by Glavselmash, the People's Commissariat of Mortar Armament of the USSR, and the Council of People's Commissars of the Kirghiz SSR. This case, demonstrated by the materials of the collection, reveals how the systematic coordination of the Soviet military economy implied by papers actually turned into anarchy of uncoordinated orders, which perplexed local shop floor management. Sources of this kind provide documentary grounds for confirming the following macro-theoretical assumption favored by modern economists: the socialist planning system was essentially contradictory.

Ultimately, the point made above is fundamental in terms of how objective the authors' vision of the Soviet period of the Kyrgyz state and society is. The publication under review features profound reverence for the goals and practices of building socialism in Kyrgyzstan as well as in the entire USSR. This, in turn, brings the language of contemporary national historiography closer to the late Soviet historical narrative. This convergence lies in the exclusively positive characterization of socialist modernization in Kyrgyzstan, which, according to advocates of this approach, was only marked by outstanding achievements. Undoubtedly, the state-building, economic, and socio-cultural development of the republic prior to and during the Great Patriotic War brought many advantages to the population. However, we should bear in mind the obvious traumas of the shared historical past in the post-Soviet space, some of which this documentary collection reflects. The books under review demonstrate the subtle borderline between the deeply emotional memories of the multinational Soviet homeland, on the one hand, and the rational, scientific concept of "the real socialism" with its macro-regional specifics in Central Asia, on the other.