



THE CAUCASUS UNDER SOVIET RULE

Alex Marshall

ROUTLEDGE



The Caucasus Under Soviet Rule

The Caucasus is a strategically and economically important region in contemporary global affairs. Western interest in the Caucasus has grown rapidly since 1991, fuelled by the admixture of oil politics, great power rivalry, ethnic separatism and terrorism that characterizes the region. However, until now there has been little understanding of how these issues came to assume the importance they have today.

This book argues that understanding the Soviet legacy in the region is critical to analysing both the new states of the Transcaucasus and the autonomous territories of the North Caucasus. It examines the impact of Soviet rule on the Caucasus, focusing in particular on the period from 1917 to 1955. Important questions covered include how the Soviet Union created 'nations' out of the diverse peoples of the North Caucasus; the true nature of the 1917 revolution; the role and effects of forced migration in the region; how over time the constituent nationalities of the region came to redefine themselves; and how Islamic radicalism came to assume the importance it continues to hold today.

A cauldron of war, revolution and foreign interventions – from the British and Ottoman Turks to the oil-hungry armies of Hitler's Third Reich – the Caucasus and the policies and actors it produced (not least Stalin, 'Sergo' Ordzhonikidze and Anastas Mikoian) both shaped the Soviet experiment in the twentieth century and appear set to continue to shape the geopolitics of the twenty-first. Making unprecedented use of memoirs, archives and published sources, this book is an invaluable aid for scholars, political analysts and journalists alike to understanding one of the most important borderlands of the modern world.

Alex Marshall is currently Convenor of the Scottish Centre for War Studies, University of Glasgow, UK. His other publications include *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800–1917* (also published by Routledge).

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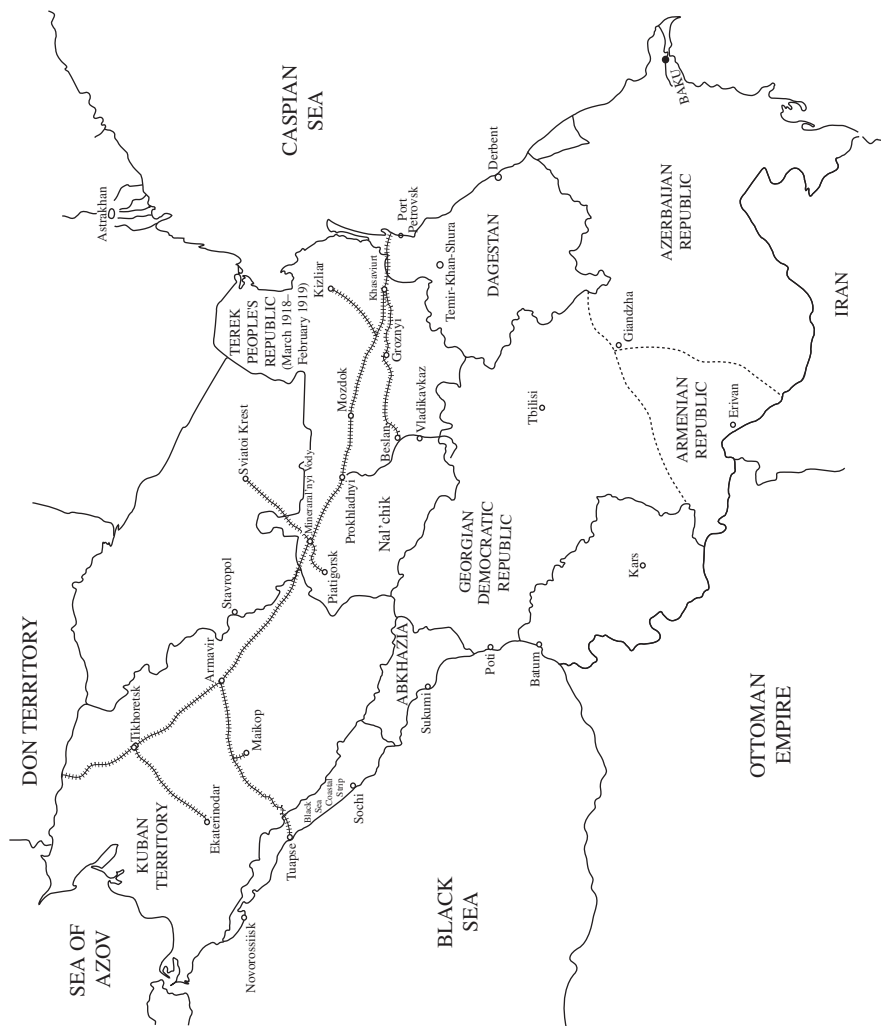
**Dedicated to Agafia Trifonofna Ivanova and
her granddaughter**

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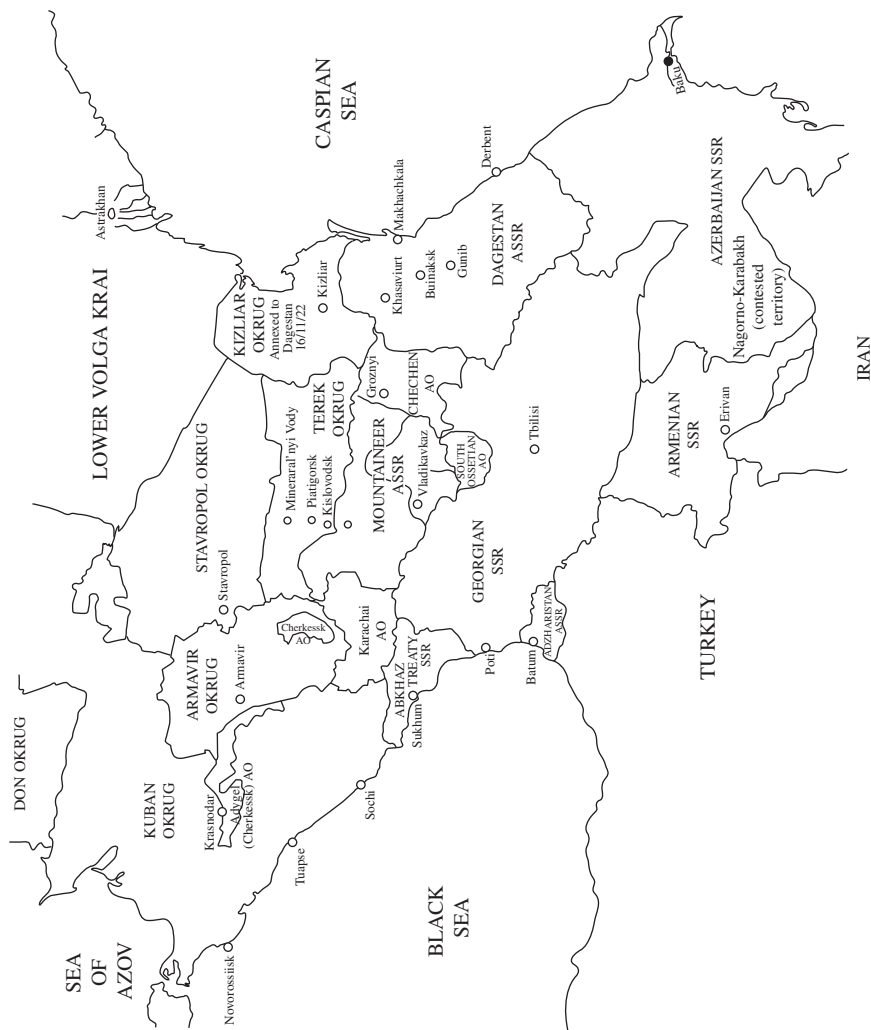
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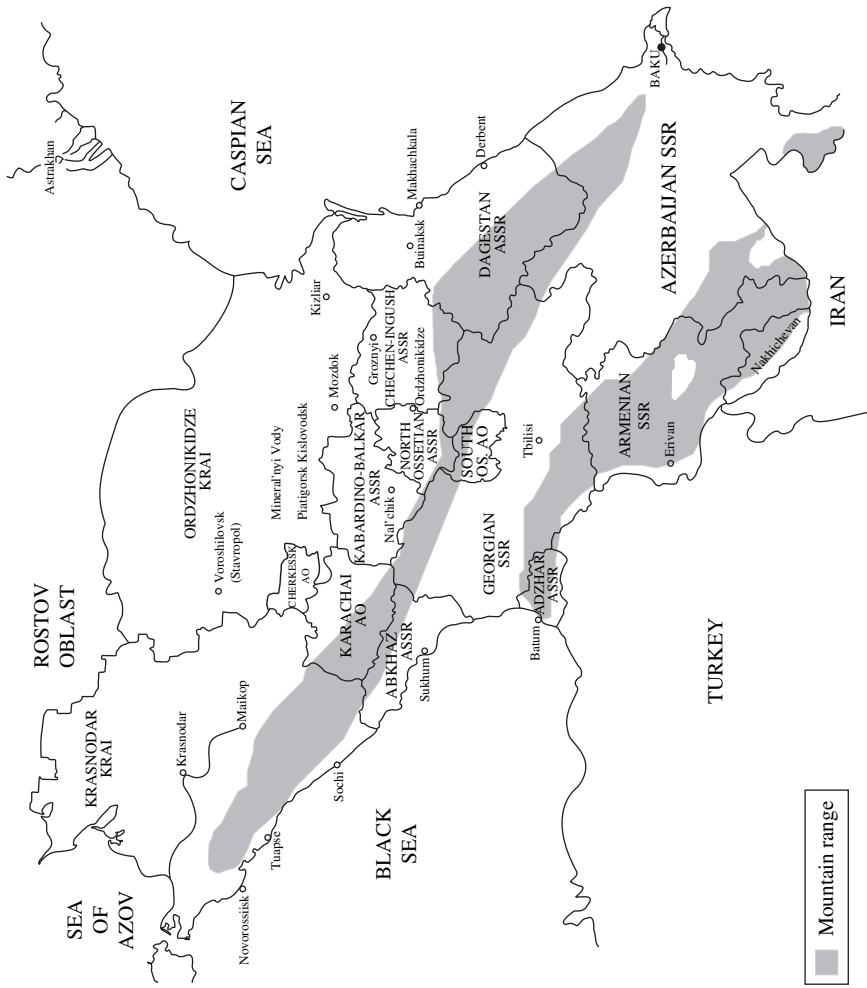
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Map 1 The Caucasus, 1917-18



Map 2 The Caucasus, 1922-28



Map 3 The Caucasus in the Second World War

Introduction

This book is concerned with the formation and development of the North Caucasus between approximately 1800 and the present, with a particular focus on the Soviet period between 1917 and 1944. The final chapters also detail the causes and background to both the First and Second Chechen conflicts, both of which have their roots in the Soviet period, as well as territorial conflicts in the Transcaucasus. In terms of pure military history alone, therefore, the text spans what are in effect already three distinct generations of warfare, opening with the rattle of horse-drawn machine-gun carts across the steppe during the Russian Civil War, and ending with cyberspace conflict and the roar of Russian Su-25 jets over Georgian airspace in 2008.¹ Broad generalizations are therefore a necessity throughout, but I have aspired to a certain analytical logic by both consistently interrogating previous assumptions in the literature, and offering my own assessments.

As a whole, the book seeks to be neither a paean for every aspect of Soviet policy in the region, nor at the other extreme a political tract condemning Russia's 'hidden hand' in the region, or campaigning for Chechen independence (the latter approach having so far characterized much Western writing on the subject).² Rather, it seeks to analyse, in as objective a way as is possible at present, the manner that Soviet policy in the Caucasus, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s, interacted with regional trends to largely 'create' modern national identities that have continued to exist in that region right down to the present. For this reason, much emphasis is put on the revolution, civil war, and inter-war period, since it was during this time that key events and processes that continue to have contemporary relevance took place. Later events from the 1950s to the 1980s retain an importance and significance all of their own, but they were also in many ways only a natural playing out of patterns and phenomena already initiated in that earlier period. In adopting this approach, incidentally, I also wish to explicitly bypass the ethnic romanticism (and specifically the myth of Chechen exceptionalism) which has characterized most Western accounts, and which usually draw a single straight narrative line between the 'wild, warlike, united and freedom loving' tribal mountaineers of *Imam* Shamil's day, and a degenerate modern terrorist like Shamil Basaev. The book's starting point instead is that the contemporary problems of the Caucasus are pre-eminently ones of modernization, which makes late nineteenth- and twentieth-century statistics regarding industrialization, urbanization,

2 Introduction

education and unemployment, as well as an accurate understanding of the Soviet project, a far more reliable guide to understanding present-day problems than the imagery of the 'noble savage' or Sufi fanatic conveyed by the likes of Alexandre Bennisen or Lesley Blanch's *Sabres of Paradise*.³

In terms of contemporary relevance, meanwhile, certain regional trends which occurred later, during the late 1980s and 1990s, in fact also represented an often disastrous attempted replay of the 1917–20 era covered in such detail here. On becoming fully independent in 1991, for example, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan each adopted, with self-conscious symbolism, the same flags that the Bolsheviks had pulled down some seventy years earlier, when these briefly independent states had first been absorbed into the Soviet Union. Azerbaijan under Elçibay in 1992–93 flirted with Pan-Turkism, just as the first Azeri Democratic Republic had in 1918–19, while in 1990 the Georgian dissident movement also refused to recognize any treaty signed after 7 May 1920, the date of the last treaty between the Georgian Democratic Republic and Soviet Russia.⁴ Poland since 1991, meanwhile, this time in alliance with the United States, has also intermittently pursued a policy of forging alliances with, or attempting to politically penetrate, the Baltic States, Ukraine and Georgia, in a pattern which, to Russian eyes at least, appears to mimic the hostile 1920s borderland strategy of Polish Marshal Piłsudski's old 'Prometheus' project. Such suspicions can only have been furthered in November 2007 by Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and Polish President Lech Kaczyński jointly unveiling and dedicating a statue of Prometheus, whilst in the process rhetorically celebrating the historical 'joint efforts' of Poles and Georgians to 'achieve the independence of Georgia and of other peoples from the Russian Empire and its successor state, the Soviet Union'.⁵

Most striking of all, however, has been the desire to date amongst many both to romanticize the nineteenth century and to dismiss Soviet history, even whilst also utilizing the latter as a relentless source of contention – over recognition of the 'genocide' in the Ukraine in 1932–33, or over the alleged Russian reluctance to sufficiently confront or publicly repent the more recent past (this despite the publication of literally thousands of Soviet-era archival documents in Russian language editions since 1991). The default position of nationalist politicians in many parts of the region today in fact has become that the only use for Soviet history is as a tool for mudslinging or anti-Russian polemics; in such a context, it was therefore perhaps unsurprising to hear Saakashvili in 2008 dismiss the whole Soviet period (in reality far more critical for understanding Georgia today than the neo-medievalist romantic nationalism espoused by Saakashvili and Gamsakhurdia before him) as merely 'seventy years of subjugation by barbarians'.⁶

If a new study nonetheless proceeds from the premise that the Soviet period *is* of tremendous importance, and is also not reducible to neat sound-bites about the purges or the Gulag (whilst of course never denying the importance of either of those phenomena), such a study would still remain overshadowed by two enormous intellectual debates, uninvited dinner guests if you like, which, whether acknowledged or not, constitute a powerful unspoken presence at the banquet. The first is the fact that the Soviet Union itself collapsed. Currently there exists a danger that

this one fact becomes the *only* one by which that state is remembered. Currently as well, as alluded to above, most explanations for its collapse still form part of a 'proxy war' through which historians, politicians and economists contest their own ideas against one another; future accounts will undoubtedly be more nuanced.⁷ The overriding implication of much analysis has frequently been the notion that the Soviet Union itself represented nothing more than one long, continuous disastrous mistake or aberration. The denial of history's own complexity, however, and an absence of imaginative understanding, will only doom us to repeat the mistakes of the past. Fascism and Communism may each have terrible crimes on their record, for example, but they also remained very far from being wholly indistinguishable.⁸

The simplest illustration of this thesis is to consider Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policies and to ask whether the Nazi regime, had it survived the Second World War, would ever have treated Hitler's cult of personality in a similar manner. In short, one belief system, though outwardly monolithic, was capable of incorporating reform, dissent, competing explanatory discourses and even internal political evolution, all of which led eventually (for better or worse) to Gorbachev, and all of which derived in large part from the egalitarian ideals which remained a central conundrum at its heart. The other system – fascism or totalitarian-style extreme nationalism – just as clearly constituted the nearest thing possible to a true historical dead-end, albeit one still in danger of being revived in many countries today. Perhaps even more importantly, however, in regards to this first unspoken 'shadow' over any book covering this period, humanity in general – and Europeans in particular – will someday also have to reject the disorientating 'end of history' thesis, and regain the courage to again try to contemplate and imagine alternatives to hegemonic global capitalism. Such a process will be impossible, however, without an accompanying reacquisition of true historical perspective, and a more objective, non-ideological understanding of the achievements and failings of the Soviet experiment.⁹

The second great conceptual obstacle, or uninvited dinner guest if you will, remains the fact that, during most of the Soviet Union's own existence, the relationship between the Moscow 'centre' and the Soviet periphery, which forms such a large part of this present study, was unfailingly presented in most Western political discourse as a straightforward purely colonial, wholly subservient one, an argument only now being bravely unpicked by some scholars through greater access to the regional archives.¹⁰ This perception has had a particular and peculiarly powerful grip on Western studies of the Caucasus and Central Asia. It would scarcely be unfair to remark that most Western English-language histories of the North Caucasus, even down to the present day, remain locked in the framework and intellectual analysis of the Cold War – a fact that holds particularly true of Western treatments of Russia and Chechnia.

The roots of this discourse had one particularly striking feature. During the Cold War, Western scholars necessarily relied heavily upon the account of émigrés and dissidents, and, in the case of Chechnia, for example, upon the account of just one dissident in particular – Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov (1908–97). During his emergence to prominence in the West in the 1950s, with his involvement with the

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US Army Russian Institute and Radio Free Europe, Avtorkhanov, an ethnic Chechen and ex-apparatchik now turned heretic, appeared blessed with impeccable anti-Soviet credentials – often the only thing that mattered during that period. His narration, in his memoirs and other writings, of both the Soviet deportations of the Chechens and Ingush in 1944, and of the scale of the political purges in Chechnia-Ingushetia during the 1930s, thereafter became *the* standard English-language source for Western scholars right up to the present.¹¹ As late as 1998 and 2006, scholars of the eminence of John B. Dunlop and Moshe Gammer quoted Avtorkhanov's version of events practically paragraph by paragraph when summarizing Soviet political repression in Chechnia-Ingushetia during the 1930s.¹²

That Avtorkhanov's account should have survived the opening of the archives is nonetheless in many ways surprising, given the obviously problematic nature of his account, and clear political agenda – up until the very end of his life, for example, he remained wholly unrepentant about his own grim political record as a leading Nazi collaborator during the Second World War. If Avtorkhanov himself remained of value to the West, rather than politically 'damaged goods' after 1945, it was surely largely due to the fact that, in all of his writings, he reliably followed the well-recognized Cold War principle of portraying the Soviet regime's crimes 'the worse the better' – something which requires his works to be treated with considerably greater caution than they have been to date. For example, Avtorkhanov cited in his memoirs as entirely credible the proposition that, between 1935 and 1940, across the whole of the USSR, Stalin *executed* around 7 million of his own citizens.¹³ Since 1991, however, Western scholars have gained access to detailed and extensive statistical studies of the scale of repression and political executions in the Soviet state across the whole of this period. Consequently it has now become clear that, between 1918 and 1953, the Soviet authorities shot by judicial and extrajudicial means some 835,197 people – less than a million, and moreover with the vast majority – 681,692 of them – executed between October 1936 and November 1938 alone.¹⁴ When placed against a background of undeniable post-war demographic recovery (the USSR's total population was calculated at 147 million in the 1926 census, and at 162 million in the now-infamous 1937 census),¹⁵ such figures remain horrifying and immoral, but scarcely constitute democide.¹⁶ The data available now, moreover, also underlines the events of 1936–38 as a key aberration demanding individual examination, rather than the everyday norm.

The difference between these figures by themselves, in both absolute and relative terms, and Avtorkhanov's, is almost too stark to require any further comment regarding the latter's continued reliability as a textual source, and I shall go on later in this book to interrogate his account of the scale of political repressions in Chechnia-Ingushetia during the 1930s. The question is nonetheless obviously also raised in passing as to why Avtorkhanov, for example, should therefore still have remained such a touchstone of Western studies of Russian-Chechen relations post-1991, and here I think the answer is, alas, also remarkably clear and relevant. Avtorkhanov's account remains attractive, and retains continued validity for many Western scholars in this particular field mainly because, in addition to being anti-Soviet, he was also passionately anti-Russian.

Both these aforementioned dominant paradigms, or uninvited guests at the historical banquet – regarding both what the Soviet Union *was*, and how the centre-periphery relationship worked in practice, and with what corresponding demographic impact – highlight the central problem for any scholar of choosing an appropriate perspective. The approach of this book has been to examine Soviet policies in the Caucasus in particular as an attempted alternative route to modernity, in which ideology was often critical, and one then marked by both hideous distortions and great achievements. This requires a more catholic vision of modernity than appears to exist in many quarters at present; during the late twentieth century the tide of world opinion in the West shifted against the whole concept of state socialism, with the Thatcher and Reagan revolutions in the UK and USA in particular making monetarism a new political mantra. Such shifts in world history and political fashion frequently occur, and require pause before becoming accepted as unerring laws; the \$55 trillion current account deficit (13 per cent of GDP) that helped destroy the Soviet Union in 1990–91 after all now looks to soon be matched by many avowedly free-market capitalist states. Though inevitably portrayed by their supporters as the product of ineluctable historical progress, or as some form of Darwinian ‘wave of the future’, suitable for all human societies, such moments in reality are often fleeting, and should be read neither as evidence of inevitable further developments, nor as a prism through which to view the past.¹⁷

The achievements of the Bolshevik alternative route to modernity were in fact also far from minor or wholly negative. The centralized command economy effectively recreated and rebuilt the state not just once, but twice – first after the Russian Civil War, and then again, even more remarkably, after the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45. Without the Soviet Union and its own war effort, moreover, Europe during the 1940s would undoubtedly have fallen wholly and for a very prolonged period under the fascist yoke. It was only the shift to a more variegated world economic system by the 1960s – the process some have termed ‘globalization’ – that ultimately undermined the continued legitimacy of Soviet economic methods, and led to the famous stagnation and ultimate collapse of the system itself.¹⁸ From the late 1950s onwards, numbing bureaucratization became a constant factor. Escalating consumer expectations, meanwhile, combined with a sharp decline in real domestic productivity (itself the outcome of what one scholar has recently and insightfully labelled the ‘advanced Proletarianization’ of the system), created what ultimately became a fatal level of stasis and internal strain.¹⁹ Arguably, if controlled economic reform, including even limited sectoral privatization, had been introduced at a much earlier period – say during the late 1950s or early 1960s – the entire system itself would have stood a much greater chance of survival.

The literature on ‘the path not taken’ within the Soviet Union is now relatively well developed and understood, and even has its own minor pantheon of lost reformers – Beria, Malenkov, Kosygin, Andropov – whose efforts were rejected, only partially implemented, or stalemated, creating a crisis situation by the time of Gorbachev’s own assumption of power. Yet the system itself nonetheless also simultaneously produced its own peculiar parallel strata of cultural modernization, in which national ethnic identities were repeatedly ‘reconstructed’ (in the case of

Ukraine, effectively ‘creating’ a nation during the 1920s), and within which contested visions of both past and present also existed in permanent interplay. The traditional tribal and regional divisions which became translated into hierarchies within the Soviet *nomenklatura* class form perhaps a classic example of this pattern.²⁰ Stalin’s own enormous crimes undoubtedly further complicated this picture, particularly in the Caucasus, where the forced migration of whole ethnic communities in 1944 created a savage social, political and territorial disjuncture, one which has still not been fully healed today. As I shall argue at greater length later in this book, the de-territorialization of the Chechens between 1944 and 1958 both undid at a stroke much of the limited bureaucratization and normalization of the Chechen nation which had occurred during the 1920s, and also placed the Chechens themselves at a sharply different stage of historical development from (for example) their Dagestani neighbours, following their final return to their native soil.

Against this background, therefore, ideology was not peripheral to reality, but rather central to the Bolshevik party-state. Violent methods in particular were justified amongst the ruling Bolshevik elite by an absolute belief in their own ideology. In a complete contrast to postmodernist thinking, ideology was not simply a ‘discourse’ used to conceal more underlying power struggles – for most Bolsheviks, the ideological debate *was* the core of political life. Beyond its centrality to the whole period, however, ideology was also important for the purposes of this study, because it was the glue that held together an ethnically very diverse group of people. The Bolshevik revolutionary cadres, far from being the covert Russian imperialists of now-popular stereotype, were rather an extremely heterogeneous group. To take just eight of the main characters in the story I will attempt to unfold here – Iosif Stalin, Anastas Mikoian, Nikolai Baibakov, ‘Sergo’ Ordzhonikidze, Sergei Kirov, Said Gabiev, Dzhalalutdin Korkmasov, and Nazhmutdin Samurskii – only two, Kirov and Baibakov, were in fact of Great Russian descent. Baibakov, moreover, the son of Russian settlers in Azerbaijan, always considered that territory, rather than Russia proper, to be his true home. To then turn to the example of only the best known of this group – Stalin – we confront the case of a man who wrote and published exclusively in Georgian up until he was twenty-eight years old. These ‘men of the borderlands’ were destined to play a key role in shaping the very nature of the Soviet state.²¹ Much of this work therefore is of necessity also an exploration of how revolutionary Marxist ideas of European origin came to be adopted and implemented by non-Slavic non-Europeans within, in the case of the Caucasus, a predominantly Islamic context.

Many people have assisted in the writing of this work. I would like to give special mention to Dr. Jonathan Hill, a man with a truly unique mind, who, on innumerable occasions, tolerated my agitated ramblings on subjects ranging from developmental politics or contemporary Afghanistan, to reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the recent Iraq war. I wish to express the same gratitude to Dr. Simon Rofe, my roommate at the Defence Studies Department for some three years, and Dr. Tim Bird, another inestimable colleague. Dr. Alexander Morrison also provided intermittent but always stimulating intellectual insights. This book was

finally completed in 2008–9 amidst my moving to another university, never necessarily the easiest of transitions: my deepest thanks without exception therefore go to all my colleagues at the History Department of Glasgow University for making my own transition there so remarkably problem-free. Special mention must be given meanwhile to Professors Evan Mawdsley and Geoffrey Swain for providing invaluable guidance and commentary on my interpretation of the Russian Civil War, and to my parents for endless and unfailing emotional support. The views, judgements, mistakes and political prognostications expressed herein nonetheless remain entirely my own.

A note on spelling and dates

A particularly problematic area in terms of consistency has been in the observance of correct spellings, since the geographical area covered comprises a complex blend of the Russian, Turkic, Georgian, Armenian and Arabic languages in much of its source literature. Names of essentially Arabic origin are here rendered in their strict Russian transliteration throughout – thus ‘Mukhammad’ rather than ‘Mohammad’. This often results in very significant differentiations from those scholars who have sought to render a closer English approximation of Arabic-origin names – thus, in adopting Russian transliteration I refer, for example, to a certain individual as ‘Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii’ rather than ‘Najm al-Din al-Hutsi’. This is further complicated by the fact that Russian transliterations over time have also not always been entirely consistent in their transliteration of Arabic, but in the main I have transliterated the versions used in the most modern texts. English transliterations from Russian over the years have also introduced some distortions and inconsistencies of their own, usually when transliterating the Russian -я or -ия ending, which I have striven mostly, but not necessarily always, to avoid. Thus, strictly speaking inconsistently, I employ ‘Chechnia’ rather than the perhaps more commonly employed ‘Chechnya’, but have retained ‘Ossetia’ and ‘Ingushetia’ rather than the never employed (but, in strict transliteration terms, much more correct) ‘Osetiia’ or ‘Ingushetiia’. Russian names and titles that have become particularly well known in the West are in all cases rendered in their most popular rather than strictly accurate transliteration – thus ‘Trotsky’ rather than ‘Trotskii’, ‘Beria’ not ‘Beriiia’, and ‘Azerbaijan’ rather than ‘Azerbaidzhan’. I have, in short, followed the historian E. H. Carr’s principle of being ‘consistently inconsistent’ in regard to Russian transliteration – Carr being far from a poor precedent to follow in this, as in many other matters.²²

The changing names of cities across this period also imposes challenges: I have chosen to refer to the Georgian capital as ‘Tbilisi’ rather than ‘Tiflis’ almost exclusively throughout, though the former designation came into truly widespread and generally accepted usage only in the 1930s. Where less well-known cities changed their names across this period – for example, Port Petrovsk, capital of Dagestan, which only gained its more modern title of Makhachkala in 1921 – I have retained the former title in parallel to the chronology where it is relevant (in coverage of the 1917–20 time period, for example). This too might be regarded as

inconsistent, but I would argue that in this field, inconsistency is wholly inevitable. In many instances even the most modern existing literature on the subject offers a baffling variety of spelling options, particularly for the Azeri language. I have chosen to render the name of one prominent Azeri political party as *Hummet* (in strict Russian, transliterated as *Gummet*), but Western sources attempting to give a rendering closer to the Azeri version now often render it as *Himmet* or *Himmät* (in the same way that ‘Kiev’ nowadays is sometimes rendered by some scholars as ‘Kyiv’ in deference to West Ukrainian nationalist sentiment). Transliteration will always be a source of contention, and I make absolutely no apologies in advance to those who choose to be offended or to read political implications into such matters.

Dates are likewise troublesome, since right on a critical fault line in the very period covered (31 January 1918), the old Tsarist (Julian) calendar, running thirteen days behind the West, was replaced by the Western Gregorian calendar, a fact not recognized at the time by General Denikin’s forces, amongst others. Where dates are explicitly still according to the Julian calendar, I have sought to emphasize the fact by appending the bracketed abbreviation ‘OS’ for ‘Old Style’.

Glossary of terms

‘*alim* (pl. ‘*ulama*’) a learned man, particularly in Muslim legal and religious studies; occurs in varying forms such as *mallam*, *mullah*, *molla*, etc.

AO (autonomous oblast) a Soviet territorial-administrative unit designed for smaller ethnic groups, often part of a larger territorial unit (SSR).

ASSR Autonomous SSR, a national-territorial unit with a reduced legal status compared with a full SSR, but enjoying more rights than an AO (see above). The RSFSR in 1978 contained 16 subordinate ASSRs, including Dagestan, Chechnia-Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia.

aul a mountain village in the Caucasus.

CUP Ottoman ruling Committee of Union and Progress (established, 1890; overthrown, 1918).

desiatin an imperial Russian unit of land measurement; 1 *desiatin* = 2.7 acres.

guberniia a major territorial-administrative subdivision of the Tsarist Empire, traditionally the responsibility of an appointed governor (*gubernator*).

ispolkom an executive committee, an elected Soviet local governmental organ.

kadi a Muslim judge qualified to adjudicate disputes on the basis of *shari’a* law.

Komsomol youth wing of the Communist Party, the youngest members being 14 and the oldest 28.

krai an extremely large territorial unit, traditionally subdivided into districts (*raions*).

narkom people’s commissar; the head of a Soviet government ministry (*narkomat*) before 1946. The Council of People’s Commissars was known as Sovnarkom and was the highest government organ in the Soviet Union.

Narkomnats People’s Commissariat of Nationalities, a Soviet institution in existence from 1917 to 1924, chaired by Stalin.

NEP New Economic Policy (1921–28).

- obkom** a governmental unit in the Communist Party organizational hierarchy of the Soviet Union with supervisory responsibility within a territorial oblast – literally the ‘oblast committee’.
- oblast** an administrative division of land – a ‘province’ – used in both Tsarist and Soviet times; the subunit of an oblast was a *raion*.
- okrug** a large administrative district of the Tsarist and early Soviet period, most often corresponding to a military administrative district, and set up to encompass recruitment, training, a mobilized reserve and the provision of regional security, as envisaged by the reforms of War Minister Miliutin in the 1860s. Most okrugs not related to the military district system were abolished in the Soviet Union by 1930.
- orgbiuro** the organizational bureau of the Communist Party at either regional or national level
- otdel** literally translated, a section or department, but with the geographical implication of a small section or strip of territory.
- pud** an imperial Russian unit of weight; 1 *pud* = 16.381 kg.
- raion** district (see *krai* and *oblast*’).
- revkom** a non-elected governmental body of the early Soviet period.
- RSFSR** Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic, after 1991 the Russian Federation.
- selsovet** a village council; the foundation unit for Soviet government in the countryside.
- SKVO** North Caucasus Military District
- sotnia** a Cossack cavalry unit derived from the word for ‘one hundred’; a typical Cossack regiment in the Tsarist army was composed of five *sotnias*, or squadrons, of men.
- SSR** Soviet Socialist Republic.
- troika** a three-person tribunal providing extrajudicial justice; introduced during the Russian Civil War, then later revived during both collectivization and the purges of 1937–38. By 1937–38 a troika comprised a territorial party first secretary, procurator and NKVD chief.
- uezd** Tsarist predecessor of a *raion*.
- ‘ulama’** the collective term for the scholars or learned men of Islam; see *‘alim*.
- VKP(b)** The All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), the name adopted after 1925 for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

1 The North Caucasus

Between *gazavat* and modern revolution, 1700–1905

Cultural and social interstices

In February 1905 Tsar Nicholas II, Emperor of All the Russias, appointed a frail and frightened old man viceroy of the Caucasus, in an effort to pacify a region that had continuously troubled the Tsarist Empire ever since its first acquisition just over 100 years before. The problems that faced the new viceroy, Count Vorontsov-Dashkov (1837–1916), when he first came into office were not in themselves new by any means, but had recently begun to sharpen in intensity. There was clearly some hope in court circles that the elderly Vorontsov-Dashkov, as a relative by both bloodline and marriage to Count Mikhail Semenovitch Vorontsov, a previous, highly successful viceroy of the Caucasus, had inherited the abilities of a talented colonial administrator, and might therefore be ideally suited to help placate the region through the traditional means of finding an imperial *modus vivendi* with the local population. Vorontsov-Dashkov's own earlier career, as we shall see, had entailed extensive military service in both the Caucasus and Central Asia, making him in some ways an ideal candidate for the post, although in practice the interval between his active service in these theatres and his return to the Caucasus as viceroy was a long one. However, he was destined to be the penultimate Tsarist viceroy of the Caucasus, with his reign – which ended in 1915, shortly before his death (from natural causes) – becoming associated instead with unprecedented political and social unrest that ultimately ushered in a new age.

The strategic importance of the Caucasus had been evident to Russian statesmen since at least the late sixteenth century. A complex zone of contest between the rival Russian, Persian and Ottoman empires, geopolitics rendered it a region that could never be simply ignored. Ottoman outposts on the eastern Black Sea coast presented a direct military threat to Russian state interests, whilst the Ottoman slave trade encouraged the Ottomans' Crimean Tatar allies to regularly sweep through both the Ukraine and south Russian borderlands. One Soviet historian later estimated that, in the period 1607–17, Tatar raids had captured and enslaved 100,000 Russians, and in the next thirty years another 100,000.¹ Such direct threats aside, the position of Georgia and Armenia as territorially Christian islands in a predominantly Muslim religious sea also attracted considerable Russian sympathy and attention, with the brutal sack of Tbilisi in 1795 by Shah Aga

Mohammed in particular going down in infamy amongst both local contemporaries and future historians of the region. Tsar Alexander I, Nicholas II's great-great-uncle, then officially annexed the Christian kingdom of Georgia as a protectorate of the Russian Empire in 1801, but the mountain chain of the North Caucasus that separated European Russia from Georgia remained a restless and unsettled frontier region, divided lengthways north to south by the strategically vital Georgian Military Road. Defence of the road itself involved the military pacification of the mountain tribes that flanked it, and Russia for much of the first half of the nineteenth century consequently came to be engaged in a bloody and violent struggle to achieve peace and security in the region. Not coincidentally, the Caucasus was also an area long known for its ethnic complexity, early Arab geographers having referred to the region as the 'Jabal al-Alsun', the mountain of languages. This linguistic and cultural diversity was married to a warlike reputation similar to that of the contemporary Afghans, with one Russian scholar at the beginning of the twentieth century making the parallel explicit by referring to Afghanistan itself as the 'Anglo-Indian Caucasus'.²

The mountaineer tribes of the Caucasus became notorious in nineteenth-century Russian accounts for their blood feuds and daring raids upon local settlements on the plains. Amongst the most infamous were the Adygei-Circassians and Kabards of the north and north-west Caucasus, the Chechens and Ingush of the central region, and the numerous tribes of Dagestan to the south-east, so linguistically diverse that imperial and Soviet ethnographers would spend decades trying to categorize them. Local identity before Soviet times was largely founded upon religion and clan rather than upon ethnicity or clearly demarcated territory. Social structures amongst the various ethnic groups were also extremely diverse, with the Russians early on discovering that those groups which already possessed a strongly developed indigenous nobility (such as the Kabards) were in many ways far easier to integrate than their neighbours. In merely the most famous demonstration of this, Tsar Ivan IV (Ivan Groznyi) took a Kabard princess as a bride in 1561, precipitating the first Russian military expeditions into the North Caucasus in support of local clients, and the appearance of the first Russian local fortifications in 1567.

By contrast with the Kabard elite, however, the basic socio-organizational unit in Dagestan before the Russian presence made itself strongly felt was the *jama'at*, a type of fortified settlement surrounded by farmsteads and fields that first began appearing there in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and which became more entrenched following the appearance and proliferation of firearms in the region during the sixteenth century. Membership of a *jama'at* comprised the single basic item of socio-political identity in Dagestan, and was encoded in law. The members of a *jama'at* counted themselves as *uzden* (freemen), and acknowledged no masters beyond a traditional respect for elders. Exile from one's *jama'at* was accordingly the highest possible punishment for wrongdoers, the equivalent in practice to a death sentence.³ Within each *jama'at* there lived several individual clans, or *tukkhums*. Extended clans, or *tukkhums*, divided Dagestan, and in neighbouring Chechnia and Ingushetia local *teips*, many subunits of larger *tukkhums*, performed an almost identical cultural role. These *teips*, incorporating joint extended families, with a

strict patriarchal ideology founded on endogamy and veneration of the ancestors, claimed to be bound together by a system of ancient blood relations, although in reality this was scarcely the case. Belief in a common mythic ancestor, the use of communal agricultural land, a communal cemetery and a local stone defensive tower were the key distinguishing characteristics of such societies. With the spread of Islam in the region it also became extremely common to claim that the honoured ancestor-founder of each *teip* had himself been an Arab.⁴ Some scholars have in recent years promoted the idea of the North Caucasian *jama'ats* as being themselves early forms of democratic society, but in general this is to deliberately misinterpret the nineteenth-century Russian descriptions of these cultures as 'free societies' (*vol'nye obshchestva*).⁵ Whilst the Dagestani *jama'ats* in their social structure and trading networks bore some resemblance to the early Greek *polis* (itself a very different thing from modern-day 'democracies'), what in reality was meant by this anthropological description at the time it was coined (and undoubtedly closer to the truth) was that they were 'free' in the sense of being anarchic groupings, often living on the very borderline of economic sustainability. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, when the local Russian presence was only just beginning to make itself more strongly felt, local economic and environmental changes rendered these societies even more fractured and conflict-prone.

The main elements in the local economy before the growing Russian presence itself instituted significant changes were agriculture and cattle breeding, although questions over the relative dominance of one or the other branch have also been the cause of extensive scholarly debate in the past. Most scholars are united, however, in recognizing the highly marginal nature of the local agricultural economy, a factor evident in the desire to use every available inch of fertile soil by the creation of intensively cultivated terraced farming on the mountain slopes. The main crops from such activity were millet, oats, flax, hemp, beans, lentils and, above all, barley. The mountain climate was exceptionally dry and severe, however, creating consistently low year-on-year crop yields. Indigenous production was so low in the mountainous regions of Dagestan that local bread was sufficient for only half the year at most; for the remainder, local communities were dependent on trade exchanges with Chechnia and eastern Georgia. Cattle breeding on the plains and valley floors offered a similarly tenuous existence owing to harsh winters, local rustling, and disease.⁶ Between the start of the eighteenth and the first part of the nineteenth century, however, shifts in the local agricultural economy created a dramatic migratory crisis, with consequences that remain controversial amongst local scholars even today.

The spread throughout Africa and Asia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of new agrarian products from America – most significantly, as far as the Caucasus was concerned, maize, which came via Italy and the Balkans – introduced crops twice as productive as traditional local foodstuffs, fostering in turn dramatic population growth that rendered issues surrounding local land ownership a source of increasingly sharp competition. Retrospective archaeological surveys made in the region during the 1920s traced a prominent shift of formerly mountain-dwelling

tribal peoples onto the valley floors during the latter part of the eighteenth century, in a migration in search of more spacious and fertile grazing lands; the Ingush in particular began to migrate to both the south and east of their traditional settlements.⁷ This phenomenon was in some ways the product of broader processes of globalization which had already instituted dramatic social changes in Europe. There, the transition from antiquity to feudalism had already been prompted by the dramatic synthesizing of agrarian means of production; prior to this broader transition, both the Greek *polis* and Roman state had been simultaneously hampered and shaped in critical ways by their relatively limited agrarian modes of production, which imposed their own inescapable demographic constraints.⁸ The further revolution in ship technology and navigation techniques during the sixteenth century, which then turned the Mediterranean almost overnight from a European and North African lake into a highway of globalized world trade, inevitably bore similar revolutionary social consequences into even such a relative backwater as the Caucasus.

A more vibrant agrarian economy thereafter also increased wealth differentials within these mountaineer societies, and correspondingly increased the value attached to raiding parties and gathering booty. Commenting on this phenomenon with regard to the Chechens, one prominent eighteenth-century Russian observer noted that:

whilst the Chechens were poor... they were calm and not troublesome; but when there began to emerge rich villages, and when on fertile meadows there began to travel large herds, hitherto peaceful neighbours turned into indomitable robbers... as the population in Chechnia grew rapidly, as the well-being of the inhabitants increased daily, so too their warlike spirit reached its full development.⁹

Migration therefore created growing social conflict over land use which pre-dated the Russian presence. The most obvious social symbols of this phenomenon were the increasing breakdown of the local *teip* system, and the consequent diminution of the social prohibitions it imposed, most notable in the lowered status of those who fell into the category of *uzden*. By the early nineteenth century contemporary observers noted that the role of elder, or leader, within local *teips* had in many instances become practically a hereditary position, comparable to the feudal nobility of medieval Europe. Men fulfilling this role now possessed greater quantities of land than others, whilst also often disposing of significant numbers of slaves.¹⁰

Against this shifting economic backdrop, contemporary foreign observers and travellers in general meanwhile therefore also recorded the proclivity for robbery and violence amongst the local mountaineers, and later in the nineteenth century the famous Russian Slavophile publicist and intellectual N. Ia. Danilevskii characterized the Caucasus mountaineers in general as 'natural predators and robbers, who neither can nor ever will leave their neighbours in peace'.¹¹ Tsarist commentators were inclined to see robbery and murder as simply a way of life amongst the

mountaineers, although later, more objective studies demonstrated that such raids for plunder were a more sporadic phenomenon, conducted largely for cultural reasons – the gaining of honour and respect within one's own local community.¹² Such raids also varied dramatically in scale, however, over discrete periods of time, with the first half of the eighteenth century witnessing particularly large-scale expeditions, owing to the local agricultural revolution and associated land crisis. During the 1740s and 1750s, eastern Georgia, for example, was raided by war parties of Dagestani mountaineers varying in size from 3,000 to 20,000 men. Between 13 July and 5 November 1754 alone, the regions of Kakhetii and Kartli in modern-day Georgia experienced no fewer than 43 separate raids from mountaineer bands, which collectively netted large amounts of personal property, cattle and 350 prisoners.¹³ Prisoners were both ransomed and fed into the growing slave system that was developing in the North Caucasus during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Slaves in the Caucasus comprised two general social orders, the *lai* and the *iasyr*. The *lai* represented that class of hereditary slaves who had lost all contact with their kin and therefore all hope of being bought out of slavery; the *iasyr* that class of slaves, mostly recently acquired prisoners, who still hoped to re-obtain their freedom. A member of the *lai* class had lost all right to consideration as an individual. As the property of his or her master, a slave in this category could be sold, punished or even killed by the latter without disturbance to accepted custom. Marriage was also an affair controlled by the slaves' master, and the offspring of such marriages, even if one partner were free, were slaves themselves, thus sustaining the class of hereditary slaves. Even following the abolition of local slavery by the Tsarist state after 1866, the descendants of the *lai* class would for generations occupy a low social position in the North Caucasus, so that for example they had to pay twice the bride-price that their freemen (*uzden*) counterparts paid in order to marry the daughter of a freeborn family. Though some slaves occupied the post of domestic servants, the dominant occupation for most slaves of either class lay in tilling the fields of their masters' land.¹⁴

Whilst growing local social tensions played an unmistakable role, cultural conflict between the Russians, with their Christian Orthodox faith, and the local populace was to some degree also exacerbated by the regional vibrancy of Islam. The Islamicization of the Caucasus had first been initiated by Arab conquerors in the early eighth century, when Derbent in eastern Dagestan became a local stronghold of the global Muslim caliphate. Dagestan and the border zone with Iran remained more heavily Islamicized than the central and north-west Caucasus, however – the Chechens were only gradually converted to Islam during the course of the eighteenth century, and the Adygei-Circassians of the far north-west retained a potent mixture of pagan, Islamic and Christian customs well into the nineteenth century. For this very reason the Chechens in particular identified closely with mystic Sufi brotherhoods widely regarded as heretical in the more traditional Arab Muslim world. Sufism itself permitted the retention of pre-Islamic rituals and customs, and inculcated a pantheon of saints altogether foreign to the Hanbali school of Islam still devoutly practised in Saudi Arabia today.

The relatively recent penetration of Islam in the region also meant that many Russian colonial administrators during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were anxious to 'rescue' the Caucasus natives from this 'foreign' faith and revive much older Christian customs. An extensive cult surrounding the old Byzantine Empire, fed by a more general European Romantic tradition of fascination with lost languages and cultures, convinced many Russian thinkers and writers that the peoples of the Caucasus had once been Christian in ancient times. According to this narrative, the mountaineers were naive lost souls, who had fallen into paganism and obscurantism with the passing of the Byzantine era: consequently they were now in need of substantial spiritual aid and sustenance from the Byzantine Empire's one true legitimate successor, Orthodox mother Rus'. Evidence to back this agenda was found seemingly everywhere – Adygei folk songs contained themes and melodies similar to Georgian church music, whilst a Russian military expedition campaigning through Chechnia in 1844 stumbled across a giant stone cross almost 7 feet high on the left bank of the river Argun.¹⁵ In 1860 Prince Bariatskii, Russia's viceroy in the Caucasus at the time, helped establish the Society for the Restoration of Orthodoxy in the Caucasus, an organization whose financial backers were awarded a special cross adorned with the name of St. Nino, Georgia's fourth-century Christian evangelist. Bilingual mountaineers were soon co-opted by the society to help transcribe the North Caucasus languages, and to serve as teachers in Restoration Society schools. In 1865, 1,500 copies of the Bible in Ossetian, 3,000 copies of a prayer book in the same language, and 2,400 copies of an Abkhaz reader created by a local Tsarist general were printed by the society.¹⁶ In many ways, however, the society itself was merely a natural outgrowth of a much earlier Russian-sponsored local religious institution – the Ossetian Spiritual Commission founded in 1746.

The near neighbours of the Ingush, the Ossetians, underwent extensive Christianization at the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church from the beginning of the eighteenth century, a factor that meant that they were also the sole mountaineer grouping in the North Caucasus before 1917 to have acquired a truly well-developed literary language and national intellectual elite. The Ossetian Spiritual Commission redoubled its efforts to enlighten the Ossetian people in the ways of Orthodox Christianity in 1815, when 33 churches and 14 schools, 6 of them in Ossetia itself, were rapidly constructed. Native Ossetians by mid-century also employed the alphabet developed by the Russian philologist and ethnographer P. K. Uslar (about whom more will be said below) to publish collections of Ossetian folk tales and proverbs.¹⁷ By 1900 in particular, the writings of the young Ossetian poet and publicist Kosta Khetagurov (1859–1906) had acquired general popularity both amongst his own people and in Russia itself. Knowledge of Russian was also exceptionally widespread – in the first empire-wide census of 1897, more than 92 per cent of Ossetians were registered as knowing Russian well, compared with only 32 per cent of the Karachai people and, in last place regionally, only 8.8 per cent of Chechens.¹⁸ In Vladikavkaz okrug by 1915, some 24,615 individuals were officially registered as literate (around 12 per cent of the population), of whom 17,137 were men, a figure that again set the Ossetians strongly apart from their immediate mountaineer neighbours.

The Ossetians were also distinguished by the fact that they performed military service in the Tsarist army, an obligation from which the other mountaineer nationalities were formally exempt. As many as 3,000 Ossetian officers may have served in the Tsarist army during the First World War (a significant number, given an overall population at the time of just 130,000), and this cadre was destined to play a significant local role in the revolution and civil war after 1917.¹⁹ One of the most outstanding Muslim representatives of the Ossetian intelligentsia to emerge during this later period meanwhile was the prominent journalist and Menshevik social-democrat Akhmed Tsalikov (1882–1928). Between 1905 and 1917 he became best known within the Russian Empire for his propagation of the need for social revolution *without* class war, and for his shift from initial socialist positions compatible with European Marxism of the Second International era to a stance which, in several significant aspects, more closely resembled Pan-Islamism.

The Ossetians, however, were not alone in having their spiritual loyalties divided and contested even late on into this period. The Islamicization of the Ingush to the north-east occurred even later than with the Chechens, the whole process not being considered complete until 1863, when the last Ingush settlement finally abandoned pagan customs and began praying towards Mecca. Amongst the mountaineers more generally, Islamic sharia law also competed eternally with *adat*, the local law of traditional custom, and human slavery, officially circumscribed by Islam to affect only the infidel, in reality came to thrive in the region, encompassing both Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Therefore although religion undoubtedly played a role during the nineteenth-century conflict in the North Caucasus, the local dynamic remained considerably more complicated than the over-simplistic thesis of a ‘clash of civilizations’ propagated by Samuel Huntington in the late twentieth century as a tool for predicting conflict zones.²⁰ Above all, local identity often still remained a shifting patchwork, of which there was no greater symbol than the Russian Cossacks themselves – the outward face of Russian expansion in the region, but a social group who were also in many ways culturally integrated into the Caucasus, and who relied on their supposed mountaineer enemies to obtain the best horses, swords, cloaks and boots. As late as 1885 the Terek Cossack Host was reportedly purchasing 1,700 Cherkessk jackets and the same number of hooded cloaks (*bashlyks*) every year from the Chechens, in a trade worth 10,000 roubles annually to the local economy.²¹

The origins of the Cossacks – a form of mounted militia – on the empire’s frontiers again date back to the sixteenth century. As already alluded to, whilst their roots were connected to freebooting militarized Slavic communities of that era, Cossack cultural identity, weaponry and lifestyle went on to become deeply influenced by close contact with their Muslim opponents. As a group they occupied a political and cultural no-man’s-land between the official Russian state and the Muslim principalities that adjoined Russia’s southern and eastern frontiers. Their mixed status in the Caucasus was reflected in their very weaponry, equipped as they were both with firearms, and with *shashkas* and *kinzhals* copied from their mountaineer opponents – the former, a long, lethal, barely curved sabre; the latter, a broad, large, double-edged straight dagger, akin to the old Roman infantry

gladius. Cossacks represented both a direct tactical and a tacit strategic threat to the North Caucasus mountaineers. They conducted running cavalry raids against mountaineer villages and settlements as forms of punishment or retaliation, whilst the Cossacks' own farm settlements (*stanitsas*) also encroached upon the mountaineers' traditional agricultural lands.

As military colonists, the Cossacks enjoyed a specialized legal status within the Tsarist state, and they remained administratively distinct from the Russian regular army. Three distinct Cossack hosts formed the vanguard of Russian penetration into the North Caucasus region during this period – the Don, Terek and Kuban hosts, although the last was only officially created in 1860.²² Each 'host' (*voisko*) was headed by an *Ataman*, an individual wielding extensive military and political power at the local level. At the same time the Cossacks themselves bore all the racial characteristics of centuries of inter-cultural personal contact with the indigenous tribes – in the aforementioned census of 1897, 0.9 per cent of the Terek Cossack Host designated their native language as Ossetian, 0.3 per cent spoke Georgian and 1.6 per cent declared either a local mountaineer or Tatar dialect as their first language.²³ At the start of the twentieth century these Cossack hosts, in return for their privileged position within the state, deployed trained military units in both peacetime and wartime. The Terek Cossack Host, for example, maintained four mounted regiments in peacetime and twelve in wartime, as well as providing half the Guard Regiment for the Tsar's Imperial Convoy, and two horse-drawn Cossack artillery batteries.²⁴ The total Cossack population in the Terek by 1917 stood at around 225,000, and within the region as a whole their presence impinged increasingly heavily upon the local land question.

War, colonization and migration

Russian military incursions in the North Caucasus, spearheaded by the Cossacks, and soon overlapping with the social crisis imposed by the local agrarian revolution, rapidly provoked the emergence of organized as well as informal regional resistance. Amongst the tribes of the north-east Caucasus during the early nineteenth century, three successive Naqshbandiya Sufi *Imams* arose and declared *gazavat*, or holy war, against the infidel, garnering considerable popular support as they did so. In conditions of nascent social crisis, Islam in this region was in fact ultimately to provide the political 'glue' for a full-scale 'peasant war' to erupt, very much along the pattern diagnosed by Friedrich Engels in earlier European feudal societies. Despite the current unfashionable status of Marxist analysis in most Western social science discourse, one should therefore not exclude the insights granted by class-based analysis for understanding what followed, particularly when considering the degree to which the indigenous local nobility, as well as the Russians, ended up being targeted and attacked by the contemporary insurgent leadership.²⁵

The war conducted by the Russian army against these Sufi-inspired uprisings was both long and bloody, and marked by atrocities on both sides. Faced with an enemy who proved immune to the lure of outright military victory or defeat in a

single, large-scale, organized battle, the Russians gradually adopted an attritional siege strategy, via the building of major fortresses together with extensive forest-clearing activities (the so-called 'strategy of the axe'). Such methods gradually deprived their opponents of places of refuge or shelter, and steadily shrank the borders of the recently-established *Imamate*, the theocratic proto-state created by Shamil, the third and most militarily capable of these *Imams*. The *Imamate* provided the previously entirely absent socio-political base for the insurgent leadership to raise taxes, dispense sharia justice, organize regular forces, and deploy such relatively unusual local military innovations as a modest artillery park, the upkeep and maintenance of which was primarily assigned by Shamil to Russian military deserters.²⁶

Though the *Imamate's* fortunes declined rapidly after the conclusion of the Crimean War in 1856, both Britain and the Ottoman Empire, as interested external spectators, had since the late 1820s expressed sympathy with the mountaineers' struggle, and individual representatives of these states periodically arrived with offers of support and even arms, although never in substantial numbers. In 1836 James Bell, a British adventurer, ran the gauntlet of Russian military shipping in the Black Sea to spend three years amongst the mountaineers in the north-west Caucasus, returning to propagandize the cause of the Circassian 'freedom fighters' to his English audience. His close contemporary, the Turcophile diplomat David Urquhart, had already visited the region in 1834, and went on to design a Circassian national flag, as well as chair numerous public foreign affairs committees championing the mountaineer cause at home. Given the Russophobic spirit of the times, even Urquhart's favoured domestic target for public vitriol, the British statesman Lord Palmerston, went so far as to explicitly link Russian advances in the Caucasus to the future safety and security of British India.²⁷ One Tsarist diplomat for his part meanwhile later recalled that one of his earliest childhood memories was of being shown a pistol taken from a fallen Caucasus mountaineer with the foundry mark 'Birmingham' still clearly stamped on the barrel.²⁸ Sheikh Shamil was only finally captured in 1859, and war in the north-west Caucasus against the neo-pagan Adygei peoples continued to rage until 1864. The conclusion of hostilities in the west was then marked by a mass migration of those Muslim peoples who still remained irreconcilable to Tsarist rule, and who no longer enjoyed the option of being able to play off one side against the other.

Since forced migration was destined to play a large role in the history of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Caucasus, it is worthwhile focusing in more detail upon this first great wave of human movement. A traditional Muslim response to times of crisis, the *makhadzhirstvo*, or voluntary migration, assumed a truly tragic scale during the early 1860s. This particular movement at the time was in part voluntary (encouraged by Ottoman propaganda), partly a response to economic changes – especially the banning of the slave trade – and in part also the product of deliberate Tsarist design. At a special conference in 1860 the Russian authorities had already chosen a strategy of more rapidly concluding the war in the north-west Caucasus by a radical policy of forced migration, although subsequent operations proceeded less than smoothly, and the final scale of the migration itself

ultimately came to cause concern even within the Tsarist administration. The final migration affected the Circassian population (a term encompassing all Adygei-speakers, a language group which includes the Kabards, the Adygei, the Karachai and the Cherkess) particularly strongly. At least 400,000 Adygei-Circassians in the 1860s, and perhaps a million individuals over the whole period, departed Russian shores, the majority crowded onto overloaded boats where disease further ravaged their numbers.²⁹

The full scale of this migration, and the complete incapacity of the local Ottoman authorities to mitigate its worst effects, was captured in the notes of the Russian consul in Trebizond at the time. Of the 240,000 mountaineers who had arrived in Trebizond recently, the consul estimated that 19,000 had already died; the average rate of mortality ran at 180–250 a day. To protect the inhabitants of Trebizond itself, the migrants were then moved on as fast as possible by the Ottoman authorities – more than 110,000 of them to Samsun, where the death rate from typhus ran at 200 a day. Camps were also built at Achkale and Saradere for those migrants passing through Trebizond, where exceptionally poor local climatic conditions again created a high mortality rate. The consul himself subsequently calculated that, of all the migrants passing through Trebizond alone between the start of the migration and May 1864, more than 30,000 must have died.³⁰ Conditions were little better on the Russian shores, where a leading Tsarist functionary within the local Caucasus administration, A. P. Berzhe, later recalled sights that would subsequently become all too universally familiar in the twentieth century:

I will never forget the overwhelming impression left upon me by the mountaineers in Novorossiisk harbour, where there were gathered on the shore around 17,000 people. In wintry, cold and terrible weather, the practical total absence of means of sustenance, and an epidemic of typhus and smallpox amongst them, rendered their position truly hopeless. And really, whose heart would not be touched by the sight, for example, of a young Cherkess girl... lying on the bare ground under an open sky, with two young children, of whom one already shuddered in the throes of death, whilst at the same time the other sought sustenance from the breast of the already rigid corpse of her mother... Such scenes were not uncommon.³¹

During the 1860s, European and American consciousness of and interest in this migratory phenomenon sparked a brief flurry of appearances by ‘Circassian women’ (Circassian females being considered the ‘purest’ of the white races, and consequently the most beautiful on Earth) at travelling roadshows and circuses. The infamous American self-publicist P. T. Barnum even placed a live ‘Circassian Beauty’ on display at the American Museum in 1865. The Circassians in exile, however, remained not just a popular ethnographic curiosity to be exploited, but also a powerful hostile diaspora, one which would continue to raid the Russian border and provide irregular cavalry for Russia’s main enemy, the Ottoman Empire, particularly during the war of 1877–78. A visible legacy from this time of

exile can still be seen today in the Circassian bodyguard of the royal house of Jordan, a unit which, even in their new desert environment, elected to retain their traditional 'Cossack' style of dress (the Cossacks, as has been noted, having largely adopted their own uniform from that of their Muslim opponents). During the 1990s, over a century after this mass migration, there finally emerged the International Circassian Association (ICA), which sought to reunite the population still living in the Caucasus with a diaspora which was by then scattered all the way from Turkey, Syria (particularly around the Golan Heights), Jordan and Saudi Arabia to as far afield as Germany, the Netherlands, the USA and the now former Yugoslavia.³²

Back in the 1860s, meanwhile, Russian civilian settlers and Cossacks were quickly drafted in by the Tsarist authorities to occupy and farm the now largely abandoned fields and orchards of an enviably fertile region. The Kuban and Terek Cossack hosts in particular poured into new land where, thanks to the factor of forced migration, bulls could now be bought for 3–5 roubles apiece and cows for only 2–3 roubles.³³ Eighty-one new Cossack *stanitsas* were founded between 1861 and 1865 alone on the plains of the north-west Caucasus, and a further 1,233,900 acres of land were opened up for colonization and settlement by a statute of 1866. By the beginning of 1865 barely 100,000 Adygei-Circassians remained living in the Kuban region, their ancestral land, compared with 220,000 Cossacks, most having departed to find refuge in the neighbouring Ottoman Empire.³⁴ In the Terek region, meanwhile, Cossack settlements by 1916 formed two great defensive lines, effectively dividing up and cutting off the Ingush in particular from access to the plains. The 'Terek defensive line' ran (west to east) from Prokhladnyi train station to Kizliar, whilst the more famous Sunzhenskoi line ran from just north of Vladikavkaz eastwards to Port Petrovsk. In response to British criticism of the engineering of such an exodus and annexation, Russian writers in the contemporary press remarked that Russia was doing no more than repeating the pacification policies practised by the British government towards Scottish Highlanders.³⁵

Across this whole period, however, behind the facade of a grand imperial design, the Russian authorities actually implemented a disjointed jumble of colonization policies in attempting to render their southern frontier more secure. The very concept of colonization itself was remarkably underdeveloped in Russia by comparison with other empires, and was often conducted in a piecemeal, improvised fashion.³⁶ Tsarist Russia itself entirely lacked the advanced racial theories that predicated and justified the imperial policies of other nations. There was no equivalent in Moscow or St. Petersburg, for example, of the explicit warning notices posted outside certain clubs regarding 'No dogs or Chinamen' that once characterized British imperial rule. Russian rule by contrast was relatively egalitarian, and Armenian and Georgian officers swelled the ranks of whole generations of the Russian armies that fought in the Caucasus, with 155,000 Georgians alone allegedly serving in the Imperial Army during the First World War.³⁷ An Armenian officer who especially distinguished himself in administering the Terek *oblast'* between 1864 and 1876, Loris-Melikov, even briefly went on to become one of imperial Russia's most famous nineteenth-century interior ministers.³⁸ Being essentially both *ad hoc* and uncoordinated with each other, Russia's diverse

colonization campaigns, in conjunction with new local economic realities, produced in practice only further social contradictions that ultimately complicated the situation, and increased the possibility for yet further inter-ethnic strife. Part of the irony underlying this situation lay in the fact that not until 1881 would near-unrestricted migration to the Caucasus be made a possibility for the Russian Orthodox peasantry themselves, a fact connected to the persistence of indentured serfdom within Russia itself right up until 1861.³⁹

Amongst the earliest officially enlisted settlers of the Caucasus, alongside the Cossacks, were German sectarians and Russian regular army soldiers who had served in the army of Nicholas I on the Caucasus frontier. Between 1817 and 1818, as a result of appeals to Tsar Alexander I, several thousand German sectarians, comprising various sects who had broken away from the Lutherans, were granted permission to settle in the Caucasus and Transcaucasus. Land, houses, livestock and agricultural tools were provided to these German colonists, and Russian troops were also assigned to help protect them from potential attack.⁴⁰ The Germans remained a relatively self-contained local community, however, who were inevitably also bound to become objects of state suspicion as interstate relations between their German motherland and Russia gradually worsened. In 1908, amidst growing condemnation in the Russian press about German colonization, villages of German colonists in the Transcaucasus were banned from bearing arms, or even killing and butchering animals openly in the street. The outbreak of war in 1914, meanwhile, filled German colonists with well-founded fears regarding its local repercussions: despite open displays of loyalty to the Russian Empire, including the dispatch of clothing and goods to the front, all German subjects who remained non-Russian citizens were made the subject of an imperial *ukaz* of 18 February 1915, ordering their deportation to Siberia. This at one stroke deprived the local German communities in the Transcaucasus of their pastor. The following year all German villages in Azerbaijan were retitled with Russian names, and an empire-wide law was passed, ordering the liquidation of Austrian, Hungarian and German landholdings. These measures sparked the first open social protests from the Transcaucasus, amongst them complaints that local Germans were being targeted in a war in which 45 German colonists had already given their lives fighting in the Russian army, whilst 71 were also wounded or missing. Only revolution in 1917, however, imposed a pause and led to a fundamental shift against the growing tide of anti-German sentiment from the side of the central government.⁴¹

The long-suffering soldiers of Nicholas I, by contrast, on leaving military service (a twenty-five-year term popularly regarded as the equivalent of a death sentence by their kinfolk) were granted the right to reside alongside their families on 14 *desiatins* of land around local army outposts. It was the labour of these groups that largely founded the new Russian settlements of Khasaviurt, Vozdvizhensk, Vedenov and Shatoi in the Caucasus. These communities were amongst the most conservative elements of the local Russian peasantry, and were deeply hostile towards both the local Muslim mountaineers and the Cossacks. In 1830 Nicholas I pursued a further policy of intensified colonization, this time towards the Transcaucasus, by the forced dispatch there of Russian religious dissidents. This

wave of settlement included the so-called Dukhobors (who believed that their hereditary leaders were endowed with the divinity of Christ), the Subbotniks and the Molokans, alongside (subsequently) Old Believer communities. Exiled to these regions at first as a punishment, these religious sectarians soon came to play a significant role in the local peasant economy.⁴² All these groups nonetheless remained relatively isolated and self-contained, making a minimal overall impact to the local ethnic balance. By the end of the nineteenth century the sectarian Russian exile community in the south Caucasus was moreover rapidly fragmenting and vanishing again. An extraordinary Dukhobor pacifist revolt occurred in 1895, caused by a spiritual schism within that community, and subsequently manifested in large public gatherings of people who categorically refused military service (conscription having been introduced in the Transcaucasus in 1887). In response to forced conscription the Dukhobors symbolically burnt their personal weapons, in ceremonies accompanied by vocal prayer and psalm-singing, acts which then sparked arbitrary and often brutal retaliation from the side of the local Tsarist administration. The Tsarist backlash against this Dukhobor rebellion included beatings, arrests, gang rapes, and sentences of imprisonment and exile. Eventually one-third of the local Dukhobor community – some 7,500 people – emigrated to Canada between 1898 and 1899, in the absence of any alternative way out.⁴³

In the wake of this Dukhobor revolt the Molokans too expressed their growing opposition to the demands of the Tsarist government (primarily, again, to military conscription) a factor which, alongside discontent over increasing land shortages and reduced harvests, led eventually in the early twentieth century to many thousands of Molokans ultimately emigrating to the United States and Mexico. The growing economic problems they were facing, however, were ironically also a result of their own considerable success in land-intensive livestock rearing, the rapid growth of their flocks in the Transcaucasus having made land itself an increasingly contested commodity.⁴⁴

The sectarian movement aside, even more dramatic changes in terms of local colonization however came about in 1868 under Alexander II, when a new law was introduced allowing peasant families to live on Cossack land by rent, without having to enlist in the local Cossack forces. This created the so-called *inogorodnie* class, peasants migrating from central Russia who rented land from the local Cossack host. In the Terek and Kuban regions these migrants soon formed a discontented local underclass, who suffered under the exaction of special Cossack-instituted taxes. Some *inogorodnie* and Cossack elements also came to form something approaching a regional merchant class, changing forever the former purely military character of the older Cossack *stanitsas*. Both peasants and the *inogorodnie* engaged in market agriculture to a far greater extent than the Cossacks, and they were also often engaged in more intensive forms of natural agriculture, employing more hired labourers as well as more advanced agricultural machinery. Within each *stanitsa* of the Kizliar region of Terek *oblast'* these new settlers also helped establish by the late nineteenth century anywhere between five and twenty-five trading stalls and shops. These new trading communities also regularly employed local seasonal workers from the non-Russian population, primarily from amongst the

local Nogai and Kalmyk nomads.⁴⁵ Almost unconsciously, therefore, the growing Russian presence in the region was incrementally changing local economic relationships and fostering new forms of closer interdependence.

The discovery of oil in the 1880s between the Terek and Sunzha rivers had a further significant impact upon the local economy. Between 1896 and 1907 the number of oil wells in the Terek *oblast'* rose from just 8 to 265, and 94 million *puds* of oil were being extracted by 1914, or some 17 per cent of all the oil produced in the Russian Empire. Oil from the Terek region was particularly attractive, since it was already rich in petrol and needed little refining. The production of petroleum accordingly leapt from 17,900 barrels per annum in 1901 to 47,500 by 1913. Both Cossacks and the *inogorodnie* provided seasonal workers for this new oil industry, with the local Anglo-Russian Maximov Company recording in 1903 that it had 121 workers from the Terek region on its books, of whom 53 were Chechens and Dagestanis, and the remainder Cossacks.⁴⁶ Finally, overlapping this local development, during the 1880s and 1890s land hunger in central Russia led to a new wave of peasant migration taking place, with yet further complicating consequences for the Caucasus. The last high commissioner of the Caucasus before Vorontsov-Dashkov's appointment in 1905, Prince Golitsyn, was also one of the few to seriously attempt a policy of deliberate 'Russification' of the area via massive peasant resettlement. The failure of this policy, and the violent backlash and local unrest that it caused, would be part of Vorontsov-Dashkov's inheritance upon coming to office.

Though both migration and colonization were intended to assure ultimate pacification, many mountaineer tribes, such as the Chechens, the Ingush, the Avars, the Laks and the Lesgins of Dagestan, remained, and the region as a whole remained a restless and difficult one for the Tsarist authorities to administer. The effect of Cossack colonization in particular led to a permanent imbalance in terms of land ownership between the Cossacks and the indigenous mountaineers, which increased pressure on the already highly contested agrarian economy in the region. The Terek Cossack Host for example represented around a fifth of the entire local population, but controlled an estimated 60 per cent of the land in the Terek region, with each individual Cossack possessing an average of between 33 and 42 acres of soil. The average mountaineer in the same region by contrast possessed only around 16 acres of cultivable land, and this naturally fed long-running resentment and unrest over questions of property and land use.⁴⁷ Conditions in more remote mountainous regions were, if anything, even worse. In 1912, out of twenty-one villages in the mountain districts of Vedeno okrug, only three disposed of more than 1 *desiatin* of land per head of population; in the mountainous strips of Ingushetia that same year, the average per capita landholding amounted to just 3.3 *desiatins* in total.⁴⁸ However, these overall disparities were then further slanted by the favouritism shown by the Tsarist administration towards retired senior officers and loyalist members of the local mountaineer nobility. On 23 April 1870 Alexander II signed into effect a new law permitting Cossack generals in the North Caucasus 1,500 *desiatins* of land, staff officers 400 *desiatins*, and NCOs 200 *desiatins*, with retired generals also entitled to 800 *desiatins* (over 2,000 acres). In practice, serving

military officers often owned considerably larger amounts of real estate, with Colonel Tsiklaurov owning 450 *desiatins* of land in Lesser Kabarda during the 1880s, Colonel Eristov 700 *desiatins* and General Tumanov 1,500 *desiatins*. In 1895 the Tsarist administration also redistributed over 14,000 *desiatins* of the best land to just 126 Chechens and Ingush, predominantly those serving within the Tsarist military – Colonel Adu Vagan received 500 *desiatins* of land; Colonel Kurumov, 562 *desiatins*; and Lieutenant Colonel Bazorkin, 547 *desiatins*, for example.⁴⁹ The long war against Shamil, and the losses it brought about through death and migration, may therefore have temporarily relieved earlier demographic pressures within the local population, but the post-war settlement also created new sources of violent discontent.

As early as 1866 an official government report noted that ‘the economic mode of life of the Chechens is far from flourishing. Agriculture is very limited. Maize is the staple food of the people. Haymaking is almost unknown. There is no land at all for either cattle or cultivation.’⁵⁰ Little had changed by 1912, when the head of the Vedeno district in the Terek *oblast’* complained that disputes over the demarcation of landholdings were near incessant, due to too-infrequent government regulation of the matter. Land in addition was divided up, not according to the number of people in need of it, but according to the number of tax-registered dwellings, so that the members of a Chechen household would accordingly often squabble between themselves over the apportionment of land, as well as with their neighbours. All this, the 1912 report noted, led in consequence to internecine strife that frequently descended into uncontrolled bloodshed and murder. The most famous example of this phenomenon across this whole period occurred in 1883, when a dispute between the Chechens and Ingush over land in modern-day Ingushetia culminated in a bloody full-scale open battle being fought between approximately 10,000 warriors of both sides, a conflict that ended in a Chechen victory in which some 2,000 Ingush were taken prisoner. In 1891 Lieutenant General Kakhanov, the then head of the Terek *oblast’*, attempted to forestall any reoccurrence of such a conflict by the issuance of a circular forbidding the mountaineers of one nationality to live on the territory of another nationality, but this failed to address the underlying question of land shortage.

Many mountaineers sought respite from these tensions in yet further migration instead, long after the official *makhadzhirstvo* was over – more than 1,000 Ingush from fifteen different villages in the region migrated wholesale to Turkey in 1904, for example. Cossacks for their part were expressly forbidden by their leaders from leasing land to mountaineers, and were severely punished when they tried to do so. A further injunction in 1895 by Kakhanov also undermined a centuries-old tradition of Cossack–mountaineer interaction by forbidding Cossacks, under the threat of heavy fines, from any form of openly expressed friendship with the native mountaineers. This affected those Cossacks who had been settled longest in the Caucasus very strongly, although in Ossetia, for example, such directives were in practice virtually ignored.⁵¹

For most mountaineers, therefore, the ending of hostilities against Shamil and the firm establishment of Russian administration in the region brought very little

in the way of material economic improvement in their own lives. In Dagestan at the start of the twentieth century 67 per cent of the arable land and 74 per cent of all pastures were concentrated on the plains, but 70 per cent of the entire population remained confined to the mountains.⁵² One Russian scholar, having conducted a statistical survey in 1904 in a corner of North Ossetia located only 70 versts from the regional capital of Vladikavkaz, concluded that practically every mountaineer family in the region was starving for between five and ten days every month, and that only half of the children born there ever reached fifteen years of age. The ratio of doctors to population in Vladikavkaz okrug as a whole meanwhile amounted to just one doctor for every 100,000 rural inhabitants.⁵³

One of the few native mountaineers to escape this vicious circle of economic deprivation and ethnic conflict, Tapa Chermoev (1882–1937), did so largely because of the special privileges granted by the state to his father, General Chermoev, for his role in helping put down the Chechen uprising of 1877. The family was granted 570 *desiatins* of land by the Tsarist state as a reward, and Tapa himself became a major oil tycoon in the newly emerging industry in Grozny, first buying the rights to explore and exploit oil on land bought at 30,000 roubles per 90 *desiatins*, and then himself selling exploitation rights to his competitors at a rate of 250,000 roubles per 5 *desiatins*.⁵⁴ He and other ‘winners’ in the colonial order at least therefore did not have to face the constraints of extreme deprivation experienced by the vast silent majority of ordinary mountaineers, of whose situation it was popularly recounted in 1905 that a section of land large enough for a single cow to stand on would cost them as much as the cow itself.⁵⁵

The emergence of Islamic reformism and the political rise of the ‘*ulama*’

Territorial disputes created by land hunger aside, religion also continued to remain a factor in local politics. Sufi Islam, interpreted as a major force of latent resistance amongst the local peoples in Shamil’s time, was officially repressed, with the Tsarist authorities preferring to administer the Caucasus mountaineers through their local customary laws (*adat*) rather than through sharia (Koranic) law. The branch of Sufi Islam practised by Shamil and his followers, the Naqshbandiya, fell into temporary eclipse following his fall from power, but it was replaced as a local force of resistance by the Qadiriyya sect of the same faith. Whilst followers of the Naqshbandiya were known in their worship for their famous meditative ‘silent *zikr*’, the Qadiriyya sect were distinguished by the loud shouting and dancing that accompanied their rituals of worship. At first the Tsarist authorities welcomed Qadiriyya practices in the hope that, through their spirit of self-abnegation and humility, they might provide a means for the mountaineers to become reconciled to Russian rule.⁵⁶ During the early 1860s, however, they became increasingly concerned by the spread and public practice of Qadiriyyism under the influence of a single charismatic individual, the Chechen spiritual leader Kunta Khadzhi, until finally, in 1864, they repressed an attempted uprising by his followers, and arrested and exiled Kunta Khadzhi himself.

Memories of the administrative achievements of Shamil's *Imamate* in the region meanwhile also continued to remain strong, and the Tsarist authorities pursued a cautious policy of continuing to employ Shamil's *naibs* (regional military-political commanders) in their own administration, in an attempt to lessen the disruption created by their own presence. One of these post-1860-era *naibs*, Nazhmutdin of Gotso (1859/65–1925), better known in subsequent Soviet accounts as Gotsinskii, would himself later come to play a key role in the revolutionary events that engulfed the North Caucasus after 1917.

Gotsinskii's prominent social position in the Caucasus at the time of the 1917 revolution was a product of his own, typically complex, family history. His father, Donogo Mukhammad, had supported Shamil's cause during its initial phase in the 1830s, but after being captured by the Tsarist military had subsequently entered Russian military service, only to then again defect to serve as one of Shamil's *naibs* in Dagestan. Shamil's defeat in 1859 nonetheless saw Donogo Mukhammad serve as an intermediary between Shamil and the Tsarist forces, helping persuade the *Imam* to surrender, for which service he received rapid promotion in the post-conflict local Tsarist administration. Appointed commander in 1862 of the fifth (shortly thereafter renamed third) *sotnia* of the state-maintained Dagestani militia, a post he held until 1883, he was also appointed *naib* of the Koisubulinskii district in 1865, and subsequently received military awards (the order of St. Stanislay, second class) for his role in helping put down the mountaineer uprising of 1877. Unsurprisingly, contemporary opinion amongst both ethnic mountaineers and Russian administrators regarding Donogo Mukhammad himself, and where his real loyalties actually lay, remained deeply divided.⁵⁷ Far greater consensus existed, however, regarding the virtues of Donogo Mukhammad's eldest son (Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii's older brother), Abdulatip, who, in defiance of his father's wishes, became a Sufi adept and established a prestigious *madrasa* in the settlement of Lower Dzhengutai. So widely renowned was the erudition of Abdulatip, who was fluent in Arabic, Turkish and Persian, that al-Azhar university in Cairo granted him the rarely bestowed distinction of being allowed to issue fatwas in all four of the main recognized legal schools (*madhhabs*) of Islam.⁵⁸

The conflicted legacy of being both the son of a man regarded in most quarters as deeply compromised, however unquestionably adept at negotiating the secular realpolitik political currents of the region, whilst also simultaneously the younger brother of a man renowned and honoured for his spiritual learning, would go on to strongly influence Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii's own subsequent political career in 1917–25, when he would periodically attempt to fuse both world-views together in his own career and actions. Nonetheless, though Gotsinskii himself aspired to be seen as Shamil's successor, as one prominent Muslim contemporary pointed out, his own considerable inherited landholdings served as a brake upon any attempt at restoring the utopian sharia state that Shamil himself aspired to. Historically trapped between feudalism and modernity, and a major landholder himself, Gotsinskii could profit neither from attacking fellow landholders, nor from undermining the very social order within which they sat, by any renewed version of a local 'peasant war'.⁵⁹

The views and programs of the 'Ulama' as a whole, meanwhile, of whom Gotsinskii would become one of the most prominent representatives, continued to be shaped by their interaction with Tsarist administrative views of how the region could best be managed. The Caucasus after 1864 continued to be governed by military viceroys, with the Tsar's own brother the Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich replacing Prince Bariatsinskii in 1864, but in 1882 the post of viceroy was abolished, temporarily replaced by the creation of a local governor-generalship (or 'high commissioner'). The first occupant of this role was Prince Dondukov-Korsakov. This step perhaps symbolized a desire by Alexander III that the Caucasus now be increasingly seen as a normalized region within the empire. Such a shift certainly paralleled the increasing administrative remodelling of the region in accord with new national divisions identified both here and elsewhere by Tsarist ethnographers. By the end of the nineteenth century the North Caucasus had effectively been divided into three distinct regional administrative units – the Kuban, Terek and Dagestan *oblasts*. In 1888 the Terek region was furthermore subdivided into three (four after 1905) sections and four districts, with these administrative divisions now also generally corresponding to the governmentally designated national elements living within those boundaries. Such internal administrative subdivisions increasingly tallied with Tsarist ethnographers' own definitions of a *narod* (people), according to which each *narod* possessed its own history, language, cultural divisions and bounded territory.⁶⁰

One prominent example of this legacy can be seen in the territorial status, well into the Soviet period, of Ingushetia. The attempt made after 1877 to subordinate the Ingush to the Terek Cossack administration was a recognized policy failure by the autumn of 1905, spurring on Vorontsov-Dashkov himself to create a special Nazran administrative okrug for them. Though the administrative centre of the new Ingush district was intended to be Nazran itself, in practice, owing to a lack of suitable buildings, it came to be situated in Vladikavkaz instead right through till 1917.⁶¹ Such a territorial policy in general meanwhile represented a vision of ethnicity remarkably compatible with that later espoused by many Communists, albeit amongst the latter with a much more noticeable anti-imperialist bias. In 1913 Iosif Stalin, then still a young Georgian revolutionary working under Lenin's guidance as the main Bolshevik party ideologue on the 'national question', would himself come to define nationality in terms that would have been conceptually transparent and comprehensible to Tsarist ethnographers. A nation, according to Stalin, was 'a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture'.⁶² Tsarist administrative divisions therefore had unusually long consequences even in areas of later Soviet practice, in both a material and intellectual sense – the Nazran administrative okrug formed after 1905 for the Ingush, for example, lasted in practice until 1924, and the administrative and party structures for Ingushetia itself also remained quartered in Vladikavkaz right through until 1933.⁶³ In the intellectual sphere meanwhile, Lenin had already met Sergei Ol'denburg, one of Tsarist Russia's pre-eminent orientalists, in 1891. When their paths again crossed in late 1917, the two men discovered that, despite

considerable political differences, they shared a similar enthusiasm regarding the potential for scientifically ordered government, as well as compatible views towards nationality issues. Ol'denburg would thereafter become the personal bridge allowing large numbers of Tsarist ethnographers, linguists, geographers and other scholars to continue to work diligently for the Soviet regime.⁶⁴

Such a vision of the Caucasus as a cauldron of different and distinct peoples may have promoted a degree of continuity between the administrative viewpoints of the Tsarist and Soviet regimes, but it also contrasted sharply with the traditional Muslim view of the world, of which the Caucasus still remained a vital part. From the traditional Muslim perspective, ethnic or territorial divisions were of little or no significance compared with religious allegiance and the unity of the *umma* (the community of the faithful). The unity of the Muslim community rested both upon the dominance of Arabic as a literary and diplomatic language, and upon the respect shown toward the '*Ulama*', the traditional scholarly or learned men of Islam. According (again) to the first official census, of the 52,826 individuals registered as literate out of Dagestan's total population of 571,154 in 1897, over 75 per cent – nearly 40,000 individuals – were literate in Arabic.⁶⁵ Education accordingly formed one of the most significant cultural fault lines between the traditional world of Islam and the new influences introduced by the Russians.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Tsarist Russia had become increasingly conscious of its 'imperial mission' to enlighten the backward peoples of Asia, with perhaps the single most important and influential thinker in this sphere being Nikolai Il'minskii (1822–91).⁶⁶ A Russian Orthodox missionary based in Kazan University, Il'minskii possessed both an extraordinary talent for languages, and a deep and abiding interest in combating apostasy amongst baptized non-Russians in his own region. By the end of the 1860s he had accordingly formulated, and begun to implement locally in the Volga region, a profoundly practical new educational policy, aimed at instituting greater literacy and access to modern ideas for non-Russians via the creation of textbooks in their own native languages. The most obvious follower and proponent of the 'Il'minskii method' in the Caucasus was the ethnographer, philologist and Tsarist military veteran Baron P. K. Uslar (1816–75). In the 1860s Uslar consciously set out to create a new 'Caucasus alphabet', based on Cyrillic, but with certain adjustments made to express local dialects. His explicit intent was to wean the mountaineer peoples away from the use of Arabic as a literary language and towards greater use of their own dialects. Uslar, like many others, believed that the cultural pre-eminence of Arabic in the Caucasus helped to entrench backwardness and 'fanaticism' amongst the local peoples. 'Literacy in one's [own] language', he at one point proclaimed, 'is the first step to enlightenment.'⁶⁷ However, just as British and French attempts to cultivate a loyal and indigenous new local intelligentsia within their respective empires later had unforeseen results, so too did the efforts of Uslar and his accomplices in practice lay the groundwork for many new and unexpected challenges to traditional imperial rule.

The best example of the contradictory effects created by the provision of new secular educational opportunities to select groups of mountaineers became the

Stavropol gymnasium, an institute repeatedly criticized by elements of the Tsarist establishment for the 'free-thinking' atmosphere enjoyed by its pupils. During the 1860s the gymnasium's library was regularly purged of revolutionary and inflammatory material, following the discovery that students there enjoyed access to the writings of Chernyshevskii, Dobroliubov, and the journal *Den'* ('The Day'), amongst others. Nonetheless the reputation of the institute for embodying an overly liberal educational philosophy remained. Within the same institution the assigned teacher of Eastern languages, Khasan-bek Nutsalov, became in practice effectively both patron and mentor to a whole new generation of mountaineer students, who would collectively come to affectionately label him 'our consul' because of his continuous care for their physical and emotional needs. Nutsalov worked closely alongside N. Lopatinskii to create work-groups of mountaineer students, the purpose of which, it was originally intended, was to be sent out to gradually disseminate a greater knowledge of Uslar's alphabet and primers amongst their fellow mountaineer tribesmen. When a future Dagestani Bolshevik, the young and impressionable mountaineer student named Said Gabiev (1882–1963), came to the gymnasium in 1894, he quickly found an intellectual refuge under Nutsalov's wing.

Gabiev's family had been amongst the thousands of Dagestani mountaineers punitively internally exiled as a consequence of their participation in the rebellion of 1877, who only returned to their homeland after years of quiet suffering in the Russian interior. Gabiev himself therefore grew up listening to accounts of the 1877 uprising and to local memories of mountaineer resistance from Shamil's time. On joining the Stavropol gymnasium, however, he was then introduced to the (for him) wholly new writings of classical European civilization, amongst them the works of Homer, Caesar, Livy and Plutarch, as well as to such Russian writers of the golden age as Pushkin, Herzen, Lermontov and Griboedov – an experience that spurred on both his personal political awakening, and his subsequent lifelong interest in history. Suddenly conscious that his own people lacked a literary history, he began work whilst still a student on a modern history of the Lak people. When this covert enterprise was uncovered by the head of the gymnasium, far from Gabiev himself being punished, parts of it were later edited and published by the local Tsarist authorities in the journal *Opisaniia mestnostei i plemen Kavkaza* ('Portraits of Places and Tribes of the Caucasus'), a periodical collection intended to better educate Tsarist military administrators about the lifestyles, history and customs of their native charges.

By the time he graduated from the gymnasium in 1903, Gabiev was a completely changed man. His instinctive hatred of Tsarist rule, inculcated in him since childhood, would henceforward be articulated in a new European language of civil rights, natural justice and mutual responsibilities – influences which, had he not been snatched up by a Tsarist educational program intended to create a new and wholly loyal class of local cultural interlocutors and imperial functionaries in the borderlands, he would very likely otherwise never have become exposed to.⁶⁸ In 1904 he joined the mathematical faculty of St. Petersburg University, where he almost immediately also joined the local wing of the radical Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party, a political choice that he proudly justified in later life

by explicit reference to his mountaineer identity – ‘I am a mountaineer, and mountaineers, as is well known, look truth in the face and overcome all obstacles before them decisively and deftly, without looking back.’ By 1912, having temporarily forsaken illegal underground revolutionary activities, he had taken up editing and publishing in St. Petersburg *Zaria Dagestana* (‘The Dawn of Dagestan’), a weekly paper with articles in the Russian, Lak and Lesgin languages, and whose sometimes critical commentary on Tsarist administration of the Caucasus regularly earned it heavy government fines.⁶⁹

Access to secular education at an early age had a similar radicalizing effect upon the later life path of one Ullubii Buinakskii (1890–1919), an early Bolshevik martyr in the Caucasus who was destined to die in the cause of the revolution before he was even thirty. Born in the village of Ullu-Buinak in the Temir-Khan-Shura district of Dagestan, Buinakskii’s world-view and future prospects were again permanently altered when, with the aid of relatives, he attended first the Stavropol and then the Tbilisi gymnasiums; he gained a silver medal of distinction at the latter before going on in 1910 to attend the judicial faculty at Moscow University. Once in Moscow, Buinakskii, like Gabiev in St. Petersburg, gravitated rapidly and naturally towards the social-democratic student underground, an allegiance he maintained on returning in 1913 to Tbilisi. There he became a key player in the local revolutionary movement, even gaining the ultimate distinction within revolutionary circles of a conspiratorial code name – ‘Kolia’. Police pursuit forced him before very long to return to Moscow, but the revolution of 1917 again brought him back – twice – to his homeland of Dagestan, first in 1917–18 and then again for a second time, with fatal personal results, in 1919.

However, though destined to play a key role in the revolutionary maelstrom of 1917–20, individuals such as Buinakskii and Gabiev nonetheless remained exceptions to the general rule, with traditional Muslim religious education within the North Caucasus remaining a vital influence upon the local community, even under Tsarist administrative control. Despite Tsarist efforts to introduce secular local language schools, the *maktab* and *madrasa* remained by far the dominant form of education for the Muslims of the Caucasus right up to the 1917 revolution and beyond. Within the *maktab*, the basic nucleus of male Muslim education across this period, a child was given only the most basic of literacy skills, emphasis being placed instead upon inculcating basic elements of culture and proper modes of behaviour (*adab*). Within the *madrasa*, the institute of higher learning that was intended to create a professional class familiar with various aspects of Islamic law, pupils sat on the ground before their teacher and repeated lessons by rote, the usual substance of these consisting of syntax, law, Koranic interpretation, dialectics, numeracy and (more rarely) geography and astronomy.⁷⁰ More modern subjects such as economics, biology, applied physics or chemistry were notable by their absence. Nonetheless, and despite Tsarist efforts to maintain a degree of continuity, the Muslim communities in both the Caucasus and Central Asia also underwent a massive sociological shock from the impact of the Tsarist conquest. Even here, therefore, there was an indigenous reaction, which created an alternative, purely Muslim discourse on the correct path towards modernity.

In religious terms, domination by the infidel removed these communities from the blessed state of the *dar-al Islam* and placed them within the *dar-al harb*, the realm of war. The performance of basic religious rites fundamental to every Muslim, such as the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca, now became dependent upon the goodwill of the Russian colonial authorities, and the granting of the necessary stamps and passports by infidel governors. This new conditionality applied to traditional rites then often created truly unforgettable sensations of submission and humiliation. Nazhmudin Gotsinskii's older brother, Abdulatip, had himself carried out in 1889 an unauthorized pilgrimage to Mecca, for which, upon his return, the Tsarist authorities had first arrested and then punished him by internal exile to Kursk *guberniia* in central Russia, where he died shortly thereafter.⁷¹ Within Tsarist Central Asia, just such experiences in the late nineteenth century provoked a period of painful indigenous soul-searching, and led to a tiny breakaway educationalist movement which criticized the traditional *maktab* and *madrassa* system, and sought by contrast to provide Muslim children with a more modern system of education. The supporters of an indigenous 'new method' system within the Central Asian community, men themselves inspired by the Tatar educational doctrines of Ismail Bey Gasprinskii, became collectively known in the early twentieth century by the Arabic word signifying 'new', *jadid*.⁷² In Central Asia the Jadids enjoyed some limited local success, though they were viewed there with suspicion both by the Tsarist military authorities and by their opponents within the traditional Muslim religious community, the Qadimists. Within the North Caucasus, however, the propagation of such methods enjoyed considerably less success, even by comparison with the very modest results achieved in Turkestan. By contrast with Turkestan, Tatars from the Crimea and Kazan enjoyed relatively little cultural prestige in the Caucasus, where the influence of the generally more conservative 'Ulama' of Dagestan remained dominant.

The main agitator for Jadid-style educational reforms in the North Caucasus, Abusuf'ian Akaev (d. 1931), himself managed to publish books in the early part of the twentieth century on a wide variety of themes using the local languages of the Caucasus. He was inspired to follow this path by a visit in 1900 to Orenburg, where he had become acquainted with Gasprinskii's ideas. Despite some quite successful and original publications, however, Akaev's best efforts failed to deeply root the Jadid-style educational movement in the North Caucasus. In 1908 only eight new-method schools in Dagestan had been opened, most in the Temir-Khan-Shura region, where they failed to win a good educational reputation for themselves. In these eight schools at the time, 586 students were enrolled, 116 of them girls, and education was focused on literacy in Arabic (and, in some schools, Turkish as well) and mathematics.⁷³ The publication of a local reformist newspaper in the Arabic language, the *Dzharidatu-Dag'istan* ('The Rose of Dagestan', published in 1913–16, and edited by one of Akaev's colleagues, Ali Kaiaev), also prompted a negative response from more conservative local Muslim 'Ulama'.

Ali Kaiaev (1878–1943), Akaev's accomplice in promoting Jadid-style educational reform, and a Muslim 'alim destined to play a significant role in Dagestani political events during the revolution, owed many of his own convictions to a trip to

Cairo in 1905, which he made in order to undertake religious studies at al-Azhar university. During the trip, however, he had also become yet further acquainted with the contemporary writings of both Jamaal al-Din al-Afghani and Rashid Rida.⁷⁴ In 1913, as well as continuing to edit *Dzharidatu-Dag'istan*, Kaiaev opened a *madrasa* in Temir-Khan-Shura, through which there then graduated a whole generation of figures later destined to become prominent political actors in the Dagestan ASSR. During the civil war years, he retired to his home village of Kumukh, and continued to teach around 300 students traditional religious studies alongside chemistry, physics, algebra, astronomy and the Lak language. The emergence of Soviet power affected him relatively little at first, since right up until 1925 he remained the chairman (*kadi*) of the local Soviet sharia court in his native village. His first arrest by the Soviet authorities occurred only in 1930, but the actions of one of his former students, who was now secretary of the Dagestan *obkom* VKP(b), soon brought him freedom once again. In 1938 a second arrest led to internal exile in 1940 in Kazakhstan, however, where he eventually died.⁷⁵

The efforts of men such as Akaev and Kaiaev aside, traditional educational institutes at the turn of the century nonetheless continued to expand, with the 685 Muslim schools registered in Dagestan alone in 1904, teaching 5,118 students, actually growing to 743 *maktabs* and *madrasas* enrolling more than 7,000 students by 1914.⁷⁶ As late as 1925 in Dagestan, well into the Soviet period, no fewer than 175 traditional *madrasas* continued to operate, enrolling some 4,795 students, whilst the total number of local Muslim students still enrolled in traditional Islamic educational institutions of all types at that time still stood at 11,631.⁷⁷ Within the North Caucasus as a whole, in fact, the dominance enjoyed by traditionalist schools of Islamic education was even more crushing than in Central Asia and, as these figures attest, such institutions actually underwent something of a minor renaissance in the years immediately prior to 1917. In part this was a product of the social aftermath of the Sufi insurgency and Russian counter-response, which had socially and politically remapped the region between the 1830s and the end of the 1850s. The main victims of this vast upheaval, their estates first targeted by Shamil's men and then largely annexed by Russian administrators after 1864, had been the local tribal nobility. With this proto-feudal layer of society, which had itself largely only begun to emerge in the eighteenth century, now abruptly marginalized, the Islamic clergy to some extent simply expanded to fill the gap and lay claim to the loyalties of the populace. This process may have been further facilitated by the fact that Russian rule itself had the contradictory effect of actually stabilizing and institutionalizing the Muslim clergy. As the Russian ethnographer S. G. Rybakov noted, Russian law before 1917 effectively turned the Muslim clergy into a legal class, or estate, with correspondingly delineated and binding sets of rights and responsibilities – creating in reality 'an institution foreign to the Muslim world, and not foreseen by sharia law'.⁷⁸ Even within this new but still inherently conservative social class, however, there still raged a theological division over acceptance (or rejection) of the local Russian presence.

The Naqshbandiya-Khalidiyya sect of Sufi Islam, which had played such a central role in local resistance to the Russian presence under Shamil, split after

1859 into two distinct factions. One branch of this particular theological tree, under the direction of Sheikh 'Abd ar-Rakhman as-Suguri (1792–1882), a religious leader from the village of Sogratil', attempted to continue the *gazavat* in central Dagestan, whilst the other branch – a new brotherhood penetrating Dagestan from Shirvan, and labelled the Khalidiyya-Makhmudiyya – opposed any form of continued military confrontation.⁷⁹ The first school was notable for its role in continued revolts even after Shamil's surrender and exile. The son of Sheikh as-Suguri, Mukhammad-Khadzhzhi, was selected as *Imam* to lead a renewed uprising against the Russian authorities in 1877, for which offence his father, Sheikh 'Abd ar-Rakhman as-Suguri himself, was placed under close house arrest following the repression of the rebellion, a condition in which he remained right up until his death in 1882. Mukhammad-Khadzhzhi, meanwhile, alongside many other leaders in the uprising, was hanged. The repression of as-Suguri and his followers led to a general scattering of the movement as a whole, with many electing to migrate to the Ottoman Empire, whilst others, like Said Gabiev's family, were forcibly resettled by the Tsarist authorities in the Russian interior. One of the most famous of as-Suguri's followers, Il'ias Khadzhi (1827–1908), lived in Saratov province in the Russian interior from 1889 onwards, a fact that did nothing to hinder many of the faithful continuing to travel from Dagestan and elsewhere to hear his teachings. Il'ias Khadzhi's two major literary works of this later period, which continued to propagate doctrines inculcated by traditional Naqshbandiya-Khalidiyya Sufism from Mukhammad al-Iaragskii right down to Sheikh 'Abd ar-Rakhman as-Suguri, were subsequently published in Kazan and Simferopol. According to these later writings, spiritual unification with God for a Muslim remained attainable in only two ways – through love of God expressed in observance of sharia law, as articulated via the performance of daily ritual to the point of ecstasy, and through embracing death itself. Mukhammad-Khadzhzhi, the doomed leader of the 1877 uprising, was upheld by these teachings as the ideal example of such an individual living by these rules in his everyday practice.⁸⁰

In Dagestan, meanwhile, Sheikh Makhmud al-Almali (1810–77), a participant in Shamil's war during the 1850s (for which he was also internally exiled by the Russian authorities), was also the founding practitioner of the local Khalidiyya-Makhmudiyya movement. After a period of exile he put down spiritual roots and gathered followers upon his return to his homeland of Dagestan in 1862/3; before long the Tsarist authorities had again exiled him, this time to Astrakhan. His teachings were notable by their emphasis on quietism, and by his attack on as-Suguri's teachings as having introduced unnecessary innovations into Naqshbandiya practice.⁸¹ Whilst as-Suguri's followers continued to remain dominant amongst the Avars of northern and central Dagestan, Sheikh al-Almali recruited followers predominantly from amongst Turkic speakers in Shirvan and along the Samur river, amongst the Kumyks of northern Dagestan, and amongst Tatars of the Volga region. His followers and spiritual descendants into the twentieth century continued to refer for guidance to the opinion of the South Asian Sheikh Akhmad as-Sirkhindi (1564–1624) that 'a jihad of words is better than a jihad of violence'. These divisions within the local Sufi community remained real well into the civil war period

after 1917. Both Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii and Uzun Khadzhi, Gotsinskii's patron and mentor in 1917, remained adherents of the group of '*Ulama*' once headed by 'Abd ar-Rakhman as-Suguri, and notable by its emphasis on violent physical *jihād*'.⁸²

By the end of the nineteenth century the North Caucasus had therefore passed through a violent tumult of events, a process which both physically redrew the map of the region, and created social, economic and psychological undercurrents whose full consequences were not yet played out as the century drew to a close. The expansion of Tsarist control into the region from the 1780s onwards had been spontaneous and piecemeal rather than planned, and overlapped with ongoing local social developments. The absence of a clear and consistent plan for administering the region on the part of the Tsarist authorities was reflected both in changing governmental attitudes towards German and Russian sectarian settlers, and in the wholly unforeseen and dramatic growth of the local oil industry. The sharp decline of the local feudal nobility in much of the North Caucasus after 1834, as a consequence of their becoming the primary victims of Shamil's 'peasant war' on one side, and Tsarist administrative practices on the other, also created a power vacuum, a social space then filled by an expanding local '*Ulama*' after 1864, but with the '*Ulama*' nonetheless also remaining internally divided over both how to interact with the Tsarist presence, and how to meet the broader challenges of modernity itself. The revolution of 1905 as it unfolded in the Caucasus and Transcaucasus, however, was also to demonstrate and underline just how complex, challenging and multifaceted had become the ongoing legacies of these numerous (often clashing) political, social, economic, cultural and demographic trends.

2 1905–17

The first crisis of modernity in the Caucasus

Politics, revolution and the Transcaucasus

If the effect of Tsarist occupation of the North Caucasus was limited (if still significant) in terms of its cultural impact on the ground, sociological changes within the Transcaucasus were far more dramatic and profound, as the revolution of 1905 underlined. Though the discovery of oil had transformed Grozny by the turn of the century from a military outpost into a boom town, the Russian authorities, with the exception of the small-scale secular educational initiatives in areas such as Stavropol outlined in the last chapter, had in many ways already turned their back on the North Caucasus mountaineers, embittered perhaps by over forty years of near continuous conflict there. However, hopes regarding the economic and cultural development of the Armenian, Georgian, Kurdish and Azeri peoples south of the main Caucasus mountain range burnt far brighter.

In the territory of what later became known as Azerbaijan, an earthquake in 1859 had devastated the old regional capital of Shemakha, leading the Russian viceroy in the Caucasus at the time, Prince Bariatskii, to suspend reconstruction and propose Baku instead as the new *guberniia* capital.¹ The coastal town of Baku, which had a population of just 2,500 at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had by the end of that same century, as a result of both Bariatskii's fateful decision and the subsequent oil boom, become a major industrial and commercial centre, with a thriving urban population of 200,000. Its flourishing oil wealth, combined with the new fields just beginning to open up around Grozny, contributed significantly to the fact that by 1893 Tsarist Russia had become the single largest oil-producing country in the world. The discovery of major oil fields around Baku by the turn of the century seemed to bode well for the general future economic development of the region, whilst to the west the neighbouring Georgians were also widely regarded as a highly cultured people, with a literary tradition stretching back many centuries, as opposed to the 'savage' mountaineers.² This bias by Tsarism towards parts of the Transcaucasus in fact continued well into the Soviet period – whereas the vast majority of the Soviet Union's peoples were later judged by the Bolsheviks immediately after 1917 to be 'culturally backward', the Georgians and Armenians enjoyed the privilege of being designated as culturally 'advanced', and therefore worthy of placement in the same category as Russians, Ukrainians, Germans and Jews.³

By contrast with their immediate Armenian and Georgian neighbours, however, and despite Baku's own sudden economic ascendance, the overall position of Azerbaijan and Azeri national identity remained altogether more ambiguous, partly as a consequence of the territory that was later to assume that name having been, up until 1747, a province of Iran. The emergence in that earlier period of some eighteen competing local khanates, in the wake of the death of the Persian monarch Nadir Shah (1698–1747) and the Iranian power vacuum that followed his assassination, was only definitively interrupted by the growing Russian presence from the 1780s onwards. These local khanates at the time deployed their own administrative organs, including tax-gathering powers, as well as armed forces, and were strictly feudal organizations, within which hereditary landed nobility held all the important positions of state. From the early 1800s onwards Russia's own chief local administrator in the Caucasus, the Georgian Prince Pavel Tsitsianov, had begun a policy of increasingly forcefully subordinating each of these individual khanates to Russian control.⁴ Just as in neighbouring Georgia, therefore, which up until its absorption by Russia in 1801 had consisted for centuries of numerous endlessly competing feudal kingdoms, Russian administration in practice led to a historic 'gathering of the lands', catalysing the emergence of a completely new proto-state. The Russian-Iranian Treaty of Turkmanchai in 1828 then permanently separated by a state frontier a single ethnic-linguistic group, the Azeri people, and also entailed population exchanges that resulted in 105,000 Armenians migrating from Persia and the Ottoman Empire to the Russian Empire by the end of 1829, with many settling in Nagorno-Karabakh, a region later to become a source of considerable Armenian-Azeri tension.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, additional social inequalities created by the new oil industry further radically changed the local ethnic balance, spurring on the politicization of the local population. The flourishing development of Russian Azerbaijan, combined with the decay of Iran's own economy, made the region a magnet for peasants from Iran's own northern provinces of Iranian Azerbaijan and Gilan. As early as 1855 K. E. Abbot, the British consul in Tabriz, had reported with surprise the issue of 3,000 visas by the Russian consulate to Iranian migrant workers. Over time these figures continued to rise, with 20,000 itinerant Iranian workers reportedly working in the summer of 1895 on the new railway that the Russians were constructing between Tbilisi, Alexandropol and Kars. By the turn of the century one Iranian writer estimated that some 60,000 Iranians were living and working regularly in the various regions of the Russian Caucasus.⁵ These migratory patterns led to growing social radicalism within the local Muslim community inevitably then also coming to bear a trans-national, rather than a purely local, aspect, just as did contemporary Armenian radicalization.

The commercial realities of the growth of a new industrial centre such as Baku also lent this radicalization an increasingly ethnic edge, amongst a community within which national self-identity had until now been weakly developed. Up until the beginning of the 1870s, Azeris predominated as managers within the growing regional oil industry, with Azeri entrepreneurs owning 54 per cent of the kerosene factories in and around Baku.⁶ Restricted by Tsarist regulations from participating fully in local urban political life, these Muslim entrepreneurs soon began to seek

an alternative political and cultural outlet through philanthropic activity. Perhaps the best-known individual within this group was the oil millionaire Khadzhi Tagiev. One of the wealthiest individuals in Baku, thanks to his having invested in land and struck a ‘gusher’ in 1878, Tagiev became well known within his local community for establishing the first Azeri national theatre in 1873, founding the first school for Muslim women in 1896, and owning and financing several local journals, including *Kaspii*, the single most significant newspaper for Azeri political expression in 1905–7.

Whilst rich men such as Tagiev began to experiment with and promote local forms of national self-expression, Azeri Muslims in general also predominantly formed the worker class of the new oil industry where, as time went on, Armenians and Russians came to occupy many powerful managerial positions, sharpening local ethnic tensions between these communities. Armenians by 1905 accounted for 17.5 per cent of all workers in Baku, but held 25 per cent of the highly skilled jobs, whilst the local Muslim population – Azeris, Lesgins, Iranians and Volga Tatars – formed more than 70 per cent of the low-paid, unskilled workforce.⁷ To employ Marxist terminology for a moment, this was clearly a politically dispossessed proletariat in the making, for whom the need to find a new outlet to express local social grievances was perhaps historically inevitable. Between approximately 1900 and 1903, with a sharp drop in world oil prices, the Baku oil industry entered a period of crisis, prompting worker lay-offs, protests and strikes. By 1903 workers had begun to openly demonstrate in the streets, and their rallies had to be restrained by local Cossacks. By mid-July 1903 over 20,000 workers in Baku and the outlying regions were participating in a general strike calling for better pay, shorter working hours and better living conditions.⁸ In 1904 such growing social pressures led to the emergence of the first social-democratic party in the Muslim world, Hummet, which was allied closely with the Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (RSDRP) of Baku.

The mixed and turbulent social and political nature of Baku also continued to be reflected in its actual physical appearance well into the later revolutionary period. A British officer who visited the town in 1918 found that it remained a curious blend of the old and the new, very much befitting the ‘alien enclave’ of a typical colonial state.⁹ From its sea approaches to the south, the town was dominated by what at first appeared to be a large green forest, in reality a great cluster of oil derricks, symbols of the region’s new wealth. The other two dominating aspects were the glitter of Orthodox Church minarets in the town itself and the bluish glint of spilt oil on the sea surface, clearly visible in the sunshine. The internal division between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ towns on the ground itself was also still, in 1918–19, quite visible to this English visitor. Within the new town a small opera house, a brothel, expensive hotels and an exclusive club, where people of both sexes and many nationalities met, danced and drank to the sound of a European orchestra, were all notable attractions. The old town by contrast remained, in this officer’s eyes, a narrow and exotic sprawl of ‘typically Oriental’ streets, where the ruins of the region’s Persian legacy were still clearly visible – crumbling mosques built in the eleventh century sat forlornly alongside the ruins of a Persian khan’s former palace.¹⁰

Not mentioned by this English observer, but of equal significance to the local political scene, were the hastily assembled shanty dwellings on the town outskirts, around the oil derricks themselves, where the vast majority of the local Muslim population lived and worked in often appalling squalor within the new oil industry. It was from here that Hummet both gained a cause to fight for and enjoyed mass support. Before the 1917 revolution Baku therefore enjoyed the reputation of being the most expensive, lawless and debauched town in the whole of Russia. The unique political and social character of this urban centre would go on to shape the whole course of the subsequent revolution across the Caucasus.

Further to the west in Georgian Tbilisi, meanwhile, the Russian authorities invested substantial effort in creating a regional cultural capital, with the establishment of both a local theatre and an opera house. Named Tiflis by the Russians before 1917, Tbilisi was the main seat of regional power in the Caucasus, where the Caucasian viceroy himself both had his personal residence and held court to deal with local affairs. The local seminary also provided the best education locally available, and simultaneously served as a stalking-ground for the new, younger generation of social revolutionaries. In 1893, just one year before the entry into the seminary of a young Ioseb Jughashvili (the future Iosif Stalin), student demonstrations there had already led all teaching to be temporarily suspended. Already legendary amongst the local revolutionaries in Georgia even before 1905 meanwhile was the Armenian Semon Ter-Petrosian, known universally as Kamo, a man whose activities as a bank robber would also gain him infamy in the European press of the day. Though his activities were ostensibly wholly political, many of Kamo's personal characteristics in fact resembled those of a dangerous, even psychotic criminal. Known even amongst his fellow Bolsheviks as something of a madcap, his most legendary feat related to his once having allegedly simulated the appearance of complete insanity for over three solid years, a ruse so convincing that it supposedly deceived trained psychiatrists, and thereby facilitated his escape from the psychiatric ward where he had been incarcerated instead of prison.¹¹

Though his bizarre accidental death in a traffic accident in 1922 would prevent him from leaving a deep imprint on the later Soviet period, Kamo before 1917 was already idolized by the younger generation of socialist revolutionaries in the region, amongst them a young descendant of impoverished Georgian nobility by the name of G. K. Ordzhonikidze – a burly, thickly moustached bandit fondly nicknamed 'Sergo' by all who knew him. Sergo, Kamo and Stalin formed a close revolutionary circle in Georgia during the early twentieth century, their activities in bank robbing and extortion providing a major source of income for Lenin's still-young RSDRP (later 'Bolshevik') party organization. Both Stalin and Ordzhonikidze at this time periodically suffered arrest and exile to Siberia for their efforts, though, as was the case with so many other revolutionaries, the February 1917 revolution was to again give them the necessary liberty to emerge once more, this time upon the national political stage.

Though the mountaineer communities of the Caucasus meanwhile remained in many ways socially and politically isolated by comparison with Tbilisi or Baku, the overall effect of economic development in the neighbouring Transcaucasus

trickled over even there, creating a generation politicized by economic change and the accompanying labour migrations. One of the most remarkable representatives of this new breed was Nazhmutdin Samurskii, a man whose life was eventually to become inextricably intertwined with the wider political and social development of the Soviet Caucasus between 1917 and 1937.

Born Nazhmutdin Efendiev into the small Lesgin community of Kurush, the highest inhabited settlement in the whole of the Caucasus, Samurskii came from a traditional Muslim mountaineer community which had once given shelter to Mukhammad al-Iaragskii, the spiritual father of the whole Sufi resistance movement in the 1830s. Samurskii's grandfather had been head of the local mosque, whilst his father was a traditional nomadic sheep-farmer. In a different age Samurskii himself might never have left this community, and might eventually have become either a shepherd or a local religious functionary. His traditional large family (Samurskii had five sisters) placed his father in difficulties regarding the boy's education however, and an offer from an uncle, Alisultan, to take care of his nephew's education in the nearby town of Akhti was gratefully accepted. Akhti resided on the plain rather than in the highlands however, and the education and experience that Samurskii was to accumulate there went on to significantly shape and alter his whole subsequent direction in life.

Sent by his uncle, who was himself a member of the local sharia court, to the nearby Russian secular school rather than to the *maktab*, Samurskii would simultaneously have witnessed at around him the magnetic pull that the new oil industry in Baku was exercising upon Akhti. Around the turn of the century some 18,000 Dagestani mountaineers migrated to work in Baku, of whom some 7,000 came from Akhti alone. Whilst in Baku, many became politically radicalized, and some would return to their remote mountaineer villages to preach the new gospel of revolution and progress; at around this time a purely Lesgin underground organization, 'Faruk', briefly conducted socialist propaganda amongst the local Azeri and Dagestani communities. Samurskii's brief experience of life in Akhti was sufficient to alienate him from the traditional path that his life might otherwise have followed. Rather than continue his education in a *madrasa*, he elected around 1906 to instead depart with one of his cousins for the distant Siberian town of Irkutsk. There he worked, initially in desperate conditions, on a wage of 3 roubles a month, for an iron-tool manufacturing company named Rubinovich and Sons. His biography now assumed a classic 'Bolshevik' path, as Samurskii both experienced the hardship of proletarian life at first hand, and strove during his every spare moment to educate himself in history, geography and foreign languages, particularly English. Having returned to the Caucasus shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, he gravitated naturally towards Baku to find work, and became involved in the oil industry there. Once settled in that town, he initially organized workers' strikes, before ultimately joining the local Bolshevik party in June 1917. Nonetheless, despite his extensive travels, Samurskii would never forget his early life in Kurush, and his memory of the rituals of Muslim life, his early inculcation into Koranic learning, and his knowledge of the lifestyles of tribal communities granted him a unique insight that many other future Bolsheviks completely lacked.¹²

Like his close political and philosophical contemporary Ullubi Buinakskii, therefore, Samurskii benefited from the twin social pressures of having been born into a traditional large Muslim family in an environment where local educational opportunities had also changed dramatically. In both cases, the traditional Muslim imperative to lend aid and financial assistance to even distant relatives resulted in both men receiving a radically different educational experience from their grandfathers.

The results of economic and political developments in the Transcaucasus region became most fully apparent when the revolution of 1905 shook the region. The revolution would both reveal a host of boiling ethnic tensions within the new cities of the region, and also crucially contextualize the emergence of several significant local revolutionary parties – the Azeri *Musavat* and *Hummet*, and the Armenian Dashnaktsutiun – which were to dominate local politics right through to the revolution of 1917 and beyond. The *Dashnaktsutiun* was the oldest of these parties. Founded in 1890, it formed its initial base around the Armenian peasantry, with a programme at first similar to that of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party. Over time, however, it became more and more openly nationalist, and promoted the formula of a united and independent Armenia. Initially the party aimed only at the liberation of Armenians within the Ottoman Empire, where a large Armenian diaspora lived, and where occasional Dashnak terrorist outrages in turn provoked government-sponsored reprisals and acts of savage repression. The Russian state's confiscation of the property of the Armenian church in 1903, however, also provoked a distinct anti-Russian edge within the movement, and soon led it to campaign for the liberation of all Armenians within both the Tsarist and Ottoman empires.

Developments within neighbouring Azerbaijan, meanwhile, thanks to the aforementioned political, social and economic changes, were no less dramatic. At the end of 1906 *Hummet* became an independent party, and that same year some of its members participated in the revolutionary movement in nearby Iran. Other parties also sprang up, some with yet more radical national agendas; at the end of 1905 in Giandzha (Elizavetpol) there appeared *Heirat*, a party of Turkic social-federalists dedicated to the separation of the Caucasus from Russia and the granting of total autonomy to the local Muslim population. Tsarist repression ensured that this party existed for barely a week, but it was to re-emerge after February 1917 as the 'Turkic Federalist Party'. In the interim, 1912 also witnessed the emergence of *Musavat*, a party headed after 1913 by the gifted local journalist and ideologue Mehmet Rasul-Zade, and a party whose history was destined to see a swing from initial semi-socialist positions to ones of greater overt nationalism and confrontation with *Hummet*. The first programme of *Musavat*, however, was heavily influenced by the contemporary current of Sayyid Jamal al-din al-Afghani's pan-Islamism. The party initially sought to spur on a general revival in the Islamic world, rhetorically lamenting the weakness that had now befallen 'the noble people of Islam, [who] had once reached with one hand to Peking... and with the other built at the far end of Europe the Alhambra palace'.¹³ In this context Ottoman Turkey in particular was perceived as a vital state, and it correspondingly received strong *Musavat* political support during the First Balkan War of 1912.¹⁴

In June 1917, however, *Musavat* would come to absorb the smaller Turkic Federalist Party that had itself again reappeared that same April, and *Musavat* thereafter would become a party promoting Azeri independence, going on to dominate many aspects of Azeri political life between November 1918 and April 1920.

During the course of 1905 in general, internal tensions within the Russian Empire, greatly fanned by a costly and apparently futile war against Japan in the Far East, finally broke out into open violence, with widespread insurrections across both the towns and the broader countryside. This inevitably came to affect the Caucasus as well, in a variety of potent ways. Caucasus mountaineers were generally excused military service within the Tsarist Empire, but were still free to form voluntary military units for the Caucasus Cavalry Brigade. Within the Far Eastern theatre of military operations itself, however, the Terek-Kuban regiment of this brigade gained a reputation for disobeying orders: in October 1904 the Chechen and Kabard troops had declared that they did not want to move forward to the front line, and that they had generally lost all further desire to serve. Some 120 Kabard cavalymen then retired from the fighting front against the direct orders of their commander, and after three days had to be surrounded by Cossack units and disarmed, with mutinous ringleaders amongst the troops subsequently isolated and arrested. News of the revolt trickled back to the Caucasus, and mountaineers in the Terek *oblast'* thereafter refused to volunteer as reinforcements for the Terek-Kuban regiment, even when subsequently offered a 240 rouble advance as an incentive.¹⁵ The regiment throughout the remainder of the war in fact retained both a troubled and a warlike reputation; in addition to the open mutiny just cited, during the whole course of the war 28 Chechens and 18 Kabards from their individual 145-strong *sotnias* were also sentenced to between two and eight years' exile for various crimes under military law. Yet at the same time, 12 men of the Kabard *sotnia* also received military awards for outstanding deeds in combat.

The new railway lines that by this time increasingly spanned the empire also served as arteries of revolutionary unrest, bearing rumours, letters from the military front, newspapers, pamphlets, mutinous soldiers and reservists, and revolutionary propagandists. Railway engineers, for example, most of them ethnic Russians, formed the well-mobilized 'proletarian core' of revolutionary unrest in areas such as Tsarist Central Asia.¹⁶ Within the Caucasus itself, the newly appointed viceroy, Vorontsov-Dashkov, shortly after arriving, came to note that the Vladikavkaz railway dangerously linked together a growing number of local 'revolutionary centres', amongst them Novorossiisk, Ekaterinodar, Piatigorsk, Vladikavkaz and Grozny. The Caucasus was also desperately under-policed by comparison with central Russia, with the new viceroy correspondingly also feeling driven to complain that 'our Caucasus rebels and robbers are armed with rapid-fire magazine weapons of the latest type, whilst our guards have [single-shot] Berdans and the town police poor-quality old revolvers'.¹⁷ Consequently the need to resort to conventional military force as the only available alternative for putting down political unrest, a phenomenon that had already severely antagonized and intensified the political and social crisis in central Russia, became even more characteristic of governmental measures in the Caucasus.

The revolution of 1905 as it played out in the Transcaucasus itself revealed almost everywhere a local political environment still on a knife-edge between tradition and modernity. Baku erupted in ethnic conflict in what became known locally as the ‘Tatar-Armenian war’. The roots of this clash had been laid down in part by Viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov’s own immediate predecessor, Governor-General Golitsyn, who carried out administrative changes interpreted locally as favourable to the Muslim population, and which were accordingly regarded as provocative by the Armenians. As the man responsible in particular for assaults by the Russian state on the Armenian church, Golitsyn narrowly survived an attack from enraged Armenian nationalists in 1903, but departed shortly thereafter, his policies being largely continued by the governor of Baku, Prince V. I. Nakashidze. The Dashnak party finally avenged itself on Nakashidze by murdering him in a bomb attack in May 1905. Vorontsov-Dashkov’s response to these outrages was to switch back to what he perceived to be the older (and implicitly wiser) Russian policy of cultivating Armenian public opinion at the expense of local Muslim sentiment.

Major unrest within the North Caucasus itself meanwhile also began in earnest in February 1905 when, in response to urgent requests by the local authorities, fifty armed Cossacks were summoned to disperse local Ossetians engaged in illegal tree-felling along almost the whole length of the Alagir gorge.¹⁸ The local land question remained the most painful source of political discontent, as petitions from both the Ossetian and Ingush peoples to Vorontsov-Dashkov upon his arrival testified. Ingush petitions in particular complained that the recent appointment of Major-General Surovetskii as commander of the Sundzha *otdel* had led to an increase in robberies and violence against them from the side of the Cossacks. Particularly resented by the Ingush were the night-time searches of their villages conducted by Surovetskii and his soldiers. On 10 July 1905 ten Cossacks had become involved in a night-time skirmish against much larger numbers of enraged Ingush; the Cossacks had to retire and take refuge in the nearby village of Middle Achalukov. Unrest in Ingushetia itself was particularly intense because of the close-packed nature of Cossack and Ingush settlements in the region; there the land question had become truly acute. The chance murder of an Ingush villager on 28 May 1906 by a group of Cossacks led first to an expanding battle between villages from both sides, then to a Cossack blockade of the Ingush village of Iandyrke. Subsequent Ingush pleas for intervention by the Tsarist authorities to end the violence led only to the hated General Surovetskii leading a battalion of infantry and three Cossack *sotnias* up from Vladikavkaz to intensify the blockade.

Despite pleas by the Russian head of the Nazran district to impose a general ceasefire, Surovetskii used his machine guns to intensify the bombardment of the Ingush village instead, killing seven and wounding thirty Ingush, and driving the local women and children to flee into the woods in the process. Ingush representatives to the first State Duma would later bitterly complain that ‘the authorities’ attitude in this affair finally convinced us that they only wanted to finish us all off’.¹⁹ The month of May however also saw a bitter Ingush-Ossetian conflict take place, as local blood feuds rapidly escalated on the 23rd into a situation where the

Ingush *aul* of Bazorkino mounted a full-scale armed attack on the neighbouring Ossetian village of Ol'ginskii. Regular Tsarist military forces, including two artillery batteries and a battalion of infantry, had to be dispatched from Vladikavkaz to drive back the Ingush to their own village, where they then erected trench lines and maintained a lively fire on the besieging government forces until one in the morning.²⁰

In neighbouring Chechnia the situation soon became just as bad: the local commander of the Vozdvizhensk garrison openly reported his fears that the surrounding Chechen population were planning to raid local military armouries and storehouses. Soldiers recalled from the reserves and sent along the railway towards the Transcaucasus to pacify the local situation unfolding there also ran amok *en route*, carrying out a brutal pogrom in Groznyi on 17 October 1905, during which no fewer than seventeen Chechens were killed. In revenge, exactly seven days later, local bandits stopped a train travelling from Groznyi to Dagestan and shot dead seventeen Russian passengers on board.²¹

By 23 December the whole Terek *oblast'* was accordingly placed under a state of martial law. Earlier that same month, meanwhile, the Ossetian cavalry division had revolted, with around 1,000 armed mountaineers coming to their aid from the surrounding villages of the Vladikavkaz okrug. Owing to a lack of clear leadership, planning or direction, however, the mutinous units were eventually surrounded and disarmed by pro-government military forces. That month robberies and violence in Ossetia nonetheless reached something of a peak, with the recall of overstretched Cossack *sotnias* to reinforce Vladikavkaz leaving the villages of Ardon and Alagir to descend rapidly into anarchy.²² A similarly unsettled situation in central Russia meanwhile unexpectedly also created a novel form of employment, as the need for shops and businesses to better guard their premises increased dramatically. In 1906 the head of the Terek district was driven to complain that criminals and murderers wanted by the local authorities were increasingly escaping justice in large numbers by finding employment as bodyguards in central Russia.²³

The penultimate imperial viceroy

The man charged with settling these local disorders, Count Illarion Ivanovich Vorontsov-Dashkov, was by both family lineage and mentality the living embodiment of the Tsarist imperial tradition in its most highly developed form. His return to the Caucasus in February 1905 came as the crowning act of a long and distinguished career, one particularly marked by his close and lifelong personal links with the ruling Romanov dynasty. The new viceroy's own family-tree incorporated two of the most distinguished lineages in Russian nobility, the Dashkovs and Vorontsovs, but his own surname dated back no earlier than 1807. In that year the last male descendant of the prestigious Dashkov family line had died, and Ekaterina Romanova, wishing to preserve her family name for posterity, had passed it on to the grandson of her nephew. Count Ivan Illarionovich Vorontsov-Dashkov (as he now became), even before gaining his new surname, already belonged to one of the most distinguished noble lineages in Russia. The Vorontsov family were amongst the richest landholders in Russia, possessing by 1801 some 232 villages, 5,711

farm buildings (*dvora*), 53,478 serfs and 271,363 *desiatins* of land, all of which still granted them by the late nineteenth century a considerable financial income from timber sales, wine production, and iron and copper mining.²⁴ In 1834 Ivan Illarionovich Vorontsov-Dashkov married Aleksandra Kirillovna Naryshkina, a woman whose mother was known in Petersburg circles for her passionate support for Aleksandr Pushkin. The marriage was apparently a happy one, and the young couple's new home in St. Petersburg rapidly became known for its winter balls, from which the Russian poet Lermontov was on one infamous occasion ejected by his host.

Count Ivan Illarionovich also became sufficiently well known in Russian literary circles to become the prototype for one of the characters in Turgenev's later work *Fathers and Sons*, and he was further immortalized in the verse of the Russian poet N. A. Nekrasov. In 1837 his wife bore him a son, the future viceroy of the Russian Caucasus Illarion Ivanovich. This young nobleman entered military service at the age of nineteen, and in 1858 came to the Caucasus for the first time, joining the suite of the talented Russian viceroy Prince Bariatsinskii at the very moment when the latter was engaged in the concluding stages of the epic war against Shamil.

From this point forward, Vorontsov-Dashkov became a lifelong disciple of Bariatsinskii, remaining forever grateful to the prince, both for the medals he had won during the actual fighting, and for the rich administrative experience he had garnered through investigating such issues as the economic status of the Caucasus, issues far from irrelevant to the role that he would himself subsequently undertake over forty years later, as Imperial Russia's penultimate Caucasian viceroy.²⁵ Illarion Ivanovich's links to the Russian colonial elite that presided over the conquest of the Caucasus were further cemented by his marriage in 1867 to Elizavet Andreevna Shuvalova, the granddaughter of the Caucasus's very first nineteenth-century viceroy, Prince Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov. Her mother, Sofia Mikhailovna Vorontsova, was according to some hypotheses the illegitimate daughter of Pushkin, again tying together the Vorontsov-Dashkov family tree not only with the very highest elite of the Russian nobility, but also with the golden age of Russian literature and poetry – the very generation which, through the writings of Pushkin, Lermontov and Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, had also permanently imprinted the 'exotic' Caucasus within the popular imagination of the general Russian reading public.

Illarion Ivanovich went on to serve in a number of state and military posts, forming a close friendship with the young tsarevich who was to become Alexander III, and contributing in 1880 a relatively radical critique on the internal condition of the Russian countryside to R. A. Fadeev's Leipzig-published *Letters on the Contemporary Condition of Russia*. When Alexander III took the throne in 1881 in the wake of the violent assassination of his father, Illarion Ivanovich adopted the additional role of organizing the new tsar's private bodyguard (*sviashchennaia družhina*), thereby becoming responsible for ensuring the monarch's personal safety at the imperial retreat of Gatchina. He subsequently headed the ministry charged with managing the imperial estates and palaces, a dry bureaucratic role concerned primarily with economic activity, the appointment to which nevertheless served as

an unmistakable mark of special favour and trust within the imperial court. By the time he took over his new post as Caucasian viceroy, therefore, Vorontsov-Dashkov had already acquired several decades' worth of experience of working within the imperial bureaucracy, both in the borderlands and in the central provinces of Russia.

On becoming viceroy in 1905, Vorontsov-Dashkov had nonetheless also immediately inherited the disjointed legacy of decades of imperial quasi-colonial rule in the Caucasus, at the very moment when traditional violent discontents were again rising alongside radical new political and social currents. In both the Caucasus and Central Asia, Russian administrators, the great majority of them military men, had encountered traditions, societies, methods of land demarcation and social customs wholly foreign to ordinary Russian practice, culture and experience.²⁶ The response of the great majority of administrators to handling these 'alien' borderlands traditionally swung sharply between attempting to integrate these new territories via the imposition of Russian rules and norms, on the one hand, and a more minimalist approach of administering them at arm's length through local institutions on the other, whilst simultaneously maintaining a close 'orientalist' surveillance over local societies. Because of the extensive powers wielded by Russian viceroys and governor-generals in both the Caucasus and Central Asia, the pendulum of such policy changes often swung violently back and forth in fairly predictable fashion, as each successive administrator repeatedly repudiated almost entirely the policy preferences of his immediate predecessor, whilst striving time and again to imprint his own unique stamp on the region. Within the Caucasus, these dramatic shifts were most evident in the manner that the Russian authorities had traditionally viewed and treated both the local peasantry and the regional nobility.

Under the rule of General Ermolov, Russia's main proconsul in the Caucasus between 1816 and 1827, the local Muslim landed nobility – the *beks* and *agalars* – had been objects of deep suspicion, and were transformed into little more than state servants or village administrators by Russian regulations. Yet under the guidance of one of Ermolov's most influential successors, Prince M. S. Vorontsov, the emasculation of the Muslim landed class begun by Ermolov had then been dramatically reversed, with an 1840 law which had denied them all hereditary rights now in particular being declared 'a mistaken measure'. Prince Vorontsov's own general attitude towards all members of the local nobility, be they Muslim or Christian, far from being overtly suspicious, was benignly patriarchal: all native noblemen were to be incorporated and assimilated if possible into the Russian service, in order to assist the general integration of the region into the Russian Empire.²⁷ In 1846 a new law reasserted the rights of local nobility to hereditary land ownership, and even bound the Transcaucasian peasantry far more tightly to the land, in a manner more akin to the serfdom of central Russia than to indigenous local traditions.

With the defeat of Shamil in 1859 and the winding down of hostilities by 1864, Tsarist governmental attitudes towards the indigenous Caucasian nobility inevitably underwent a further shift, in line with the Great Reforms being introduced in central

Russia. The ‘advanced’ peoples of Georgia shared in these reforms through the abolition of serfdom in Tiflis province in 1864, and the extension of this abolition to Kutaisi province in 1865 and to Mingrelia by 1866.²⁸ The extension of these changes to Muslim-dominated areas, however, delayed by fears of instability, but steps began to be taken there as well, and reform seriously considered. *Bek* committees were set up in the Caucasus in 1864 to investigate the legitimacy of landholders’ claims to hereditary rights and privileges, and the coming to power of Prince Dondukov-Korsakov in 1882 triggered yet another general policy review. Referring to ‘uncorrected mistakes committed in 1846’, Dondukov-Korsakov himself personally viewed the *beks* and *agalars* as an artificially created landed elite, one which now lived as parasites at Russian state expense. Only fears regarding local social stability, were this class to be abruptly deprived of its income from the taxed peasantry, served again as a brake upon significant land reform. Under Vorontsov-Dashkov after 1905, however, measures were finally taken to push administrative reforms relating to the local nobility towards their logical conclusion. In December 1912 the redemption of land was made compulsory, and only then did the state facilitate the peasantry’s redemption of the land. On 1 January 1913 the dependent classes of Dagestan were finally freed of all obligations to their *beks*.²⁹ The whole convoluted tale of Tsarist attitudes towards the landed Muslim elite summed up the story of Tsarist administration of the Caucasus in microcosm – a tale of continuous but often curiously indecisive policy shifts, illuminating the critical and capricious role of individual agency within the local administration.³⁰

Within this overall context, Vorontsov-Dashkov’s own approach was important, less because it broke with that of his immediate predecessors (this was entirely predictable) than because, through an accident of history, his also happened to be the last fully formulated Tsarist appraisal of how the Caucasus might best be administered. The elderly nobleman whom Nicholas II appointed was therefore unwittingly also about to become the final benchmark against which the degree to which Tsarist policies and practices had or had not advanced in terms of ruling the Caucasus were to be ultimately measured. His policies towards the local problems of land and estate represented views he had already formulated regarding central Russia in the 1880s, but were also framed by more recent political events – he had warned the tsar in a letter of 7 November (O.S.) 1905, for example, that all hopes for restoring order and calm in the country now rested upon the representatives of the newly convened State Duma, and upon the conditions of the October Manifesto being rigidly implemented.³¹ His own recognition of local tensions and desire for change became evident in 1906, meanwhile, in his setting up of the so-called Abramov commission to review the local land question.³² The Abramov commission was given the task of reviewing the land rights of 187,193 persons living on 1,309,600 *desiatins* of the most mountainous territory of the Terek *oblast’*. However, whilst the commission, which eventually delivered a report in 1908 running to hundreds of pages, noted the painful physical constraints affecting the majority of persons within the territory it surveyed – twenty-three Chechen villages were apportioned less than 1 *desiatin* of land (2.7 acres) per male farmer, whilst only

two villages were able to apportion over 4 *desiatins* of land per male farmer – it was also unable to present an agreed proposal for a fairer redistribution of land rights. The majority of commission members wanted all mountain strips of land to be transferred wholesale to the state, whilst a minority wanted a Stolypin-style reform transforming individual mountaineers into private landholders. Consequently no recommendations were fully taken forward, and time was wasted instead in commissioning yet further reports and reviews.³³

Vorontsov-Dashkov meanwhile proposed a parallel raft of reform measures for the region, including improving the personnel make-up of lower administrative organs in the region, reforming the local court system, and having village heads elected by their local communities rather than appointed by the regional administration.³⁴ At the same time, he did not hesitate to use heavy military pressure to restore a degree of local calm and stability. On 7 January 1906, for example, a punitive column under Colonel Liakhov was dispatched to restore order in Vladikavkaz okrug by imposing taxes on individual Ossetian settlements (imposing fines amounting to 500,000 roubles overall), arresting the insubordinate, and flaying rebellious individual villages with artillery fire. Military field courts were set up in Vladikavkaz itself, in line with the general introduction of martial law by the end of 1905, and over the duration of their existence issued 195 death sentences, as well as internally exiling 47 persons. Nonetheless a number of administrative experiments were also undertaken. As a consequence of meetings that took place between December 1905 and February 1906 between Cossack and mountaineer representatives, proposals were brought forward to create a third tier of ‘people’s reconciliation courts’, formed on a mixed ethnic basis, and set up to judge crimes and award recompense to victims on both sides. However, despite a provisional statute being developed, and in principle approved by the viceroy in April 1909, by April 1910 this innovation was formally abandoned, because ‘of the lack of preparedness amongst the population to really put into practice the basic principles of such courts’ and as a consequence of the ambiguity created by such legal pluralism. Most obviously, offenders remained open to prosecution through the ordinary criminal courts, even after financial recompense had been awarded by the reconciliation courts, a position perceived by the mountaineer population as inherently unfair.³⁵

Vorontsov-Dashkov was also in favour of abolishing all military administration in the Caucasus, advocating in its place the introduction of the *zemstvo* structures used to administer rural territories in central Russia instead – a position strongly opposed by both the War Ministry and the Interior Ministry’s Department of Police. The viceroy’s proposals were stalemated by this bureaucratic resistance, as was one last attempt to introduce such a reform: the suggestion of thirty-seven Duma deputies on 14 January 1914 to introduce *zemstvo* administration in the Terek region, an idea which, as a compromise, would have also allowed traditional Cossack self-administration to continue. The latter point was effectively ignored by the Interior Ministry, which pointed to the failed attempts to introduce *zemstvo* governance in the neighbouring Don territory as sufficient reason to block these proposals.³⁶

The ultimate failure of Vorontsov-Dashkov's administration to resolve the numerous agrarian and social issues racking the Caucasus was reflected in the 1910 statistics for robbery and violence in the Terek district – 3,650 such cases were recorded in that year alone.³⁷ The prison population in the Terek district's six jails also remained at a fairly constant and troubling high, with 11,439 inmates on the books in 1908, and 11,258 inmates in 1912.³⁸ The most famous of the North Caucasian *abreks* (robbers) in this period, Zelimkhan Gushmazukaev (1872–1913), so enraged Vorontsov-Dashkov by an attack in 1911 upon a local road-working party of government engineers that Tsarist military forces in retaliation occupied a whole series of small mountaineer settlements, a fine of 100,000 roubles was imposed on the entire Chechen population, and a number of prominent local sheikhs, amongst them Ali Mitaev, Deni Arsanov and the diminutive Uzun-Khadzhi (all of whom were to re-emerge in 1917), were rounded up and deported to Kaluga, Astrakhan or Siberia.³⁹ The failure of such purely military measures to achieve significant results, however, was summed up by the contemporary Russian local observer V. Kozachkovskii, who, in a book on robbery and violence in the Caucasus of that period, noted that Zelimkhan, though regarded by the Tsarist authorities purely as a 'robber and thief', was seen by the local population as 'a courageous and generous knight and...as a defender of the oppressed'.⁴⁰

The stagnation of renewed efforts at administrative reform within the Caucasus, despite the clear warning signal of 1905, assumed an altogether weightier aspect with the approach and outbreak of the world war in August 1914. One of Vorontsov-Dashkov's last attempted reforms was to have the local administration in the Dagestan countryside conduct its affairs entirely in the Russian language, a move that provoked fierce local resistance. Such a move directly threatened the financial income of the local Muslim *kadis* who had until now performed the function of a 'living wall' between local mountaineers and Russian administrators, and they in turn warned the local population that such a measure could only possibly precede yet further, even more extreme, administrative steps – the introduction of compulsory military service, censuses to increase tax demands, and the abolition of local Muslim courts.⁴¹ On 13 March 1914 an estimated 6,000 Dagestanis marched on the regional capital of Temir-Khan-Shura, in a demonstration of discontent sufficient to convince the Tsarist authorities not to implement the proposed reform.⁴² Such a public protest just a month before the First World War officially began indicates just how unsettled the region in some regards still remained.

The Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia in November that year, but the first few months of fighting on the Caucasus front then represented a desperate crisis for the local administration, one that finally subsided only during January 1915. In that month the battle of Sarikamish, deep within Russian-held territory, culminated in a clear victory for the Tsar's army, during which perhaps as many as 75,000 troops of the Ottoman invasion force, with practically all their accompanying artillery and field transport, were totally destroyed.⁴³ The Tsarist authorities nonetheless kept a nervous watch on the local Muslim population in the Caucasus throughout the duration of the subsequent conflict, acutely conscious that the

Ottoman caliph in Constantinople, as the global spiritual leader of the faithful, had called upon all Muslims to fight the infidel.

The Tsarist Corps of Gendarmes employed Muslim agents to test and measure public opinion in the Caucasus as hostilities continued. In January 1917 one such correspondent warned that the Muslims of the North Caucasus were deeply concerned about and antagonistic towards the prospect of being called up to serve in labour battalions behind the lines (just such a measure having in fact provoked a widespread and extremely violent rebellion in Central Asia in 1916). He and another correspondent, ‘Murad’, also reported that Nazhmutdin Gotsinkii was by now the single most popular and respected spiritual leader in Dagestan, and the one figure to whom all now turned for guidance.⁴⁴ The local military governor, General Vol’skii, had suspected Gotsinskii of being the organizer behind the earlier 1914 rebellion and march on Temir-Khan-Shura, and according to one later Soviet account (by a local intellectual in a position to know), only the intervention on Gotsinskii’s behalf of a Tsarist Muslim officer, General Khalilov, had on that earlier occasion dissuaded Vol’skii from exiling Gotsinskii from Dagestan altogether.⁴⁵

The practice of using armed mountaineer units within the Russian army during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 had, as we have seen, borne mixed and even harmful consequences. Nonetheless during the First World War such measures were revived and even extended. Upon the outbreak of war in August 1914, Tsarist officials in the Caucasus raised a complete native contingent, informally dubbed the ‘Wild Division’, on a voluntary basis, creating a force which, in the words of one of its commanders, served the dual purpose of both exploiting the ‘excellent fighting qualities’ of the Caucasus natives, and also effectively removing from the country in wartime ‘the more turbulent elements of the population’. The Wild Division eventually comprised three brigades of eight regiments – a Kabard, Ingush, Chechen, Tatar, Cherkess, Dagestani and two Ossetian cavalry regiments. When a member of the Armenian clergy asked to officiate at the departure of the troops in 1914, despite the fact that none of the troops were themselves Christians, this commander also believed that in reality the priest had sought to be present only in order ‘to thank the Almighty that eight hundred of his bitterest and most dangerous enemies were going far away, and also fervently to entreat that none of them should ever return’. During the war itself the dazzling record of the unit as a fighting force on the Austrian front was matched only by its reputation for looting and rape behind the lines, activities upon which their commanders took the permissive approach that ‘at war it is more important to preserve the life of a man than the virtue of a woman’.⁴⁶

Commanded initially by the Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich (to whom the imperial succession would initially fall when Nicholas II abdicated in 1917), the Wild Division remained unusual on a number of counts. With the tsar’s younger brother in personal command, the division’s officer corps inevitably read like a who’s who of the Russian and Caucasian nobility, whilst the unit was also one of the few to remain established on a purely voluntary basis for the duration of the war. It received four waves of reinforcements between 1914 and 1917, with steadily less enthusiastic results, with the last wave of volunteers entering the ranks

on 22 July 1917.⁴⁷ As one of the few native military units that the old Tsarist army ever raised, the Wild Division also came to possess modern military skills that gave it regionally a strategic and political significance altogether disproportionate to its actual numbers. During the later Kornilov revolt of June 1917, the unit soon played a critical political role on the national stage, first supporting and then partly rejecting Kornilov's cause during his advance on Petrograd. As Tsarist Russia's overall military fortunes in the war continued to wane, and domestic revolution consequently became ever more likely, the officers and soldiers of the Wild Division therefore naturally also came to be viewed as a potent political prize, one soon to be ardently courted by all sides during the civil unrest that then rapidly seized the whole of the Caucasus after March 1917.

3 1917–18 in the Caucasus

From world war to civil war

During 1917 the Russian Empire, the largest continental land empire in the world, completely shattered, bringing to a head all the tensions that had been growing within its borders since the late nineteenth century. Almost from the moment that the Tsar abdicated his throne in March 1917 to be succeeded by the Provisional Government, all traditional political authority in the imperial borderlands collapsed. A diverse horde of political parties, demagogues and military dictators began almost immediately struggling to gain power, even as the old Imperial army, steadily disintegrating, slowly rolled back from the still-smouldering front lines of the war in Central Europe and the Transcaucasus. At first, the Bolshevik ascent to power in Petrograd in November barely impinged upon this process, and only gradually did the Russian Civil War (which, given the number of nationalities and agendas actually involved, might more accurately be given in the plural, as ‘civil wars’) begin to erect clear battle lines.¹ By the time this extraordinary conflict was over, complete unification of authority under the Bolsheviks still remained ambiguous in many of the ravaged borderlands, whilst around 20 million people had by then lost their lives to famine, disease, political purges and military activity. By stark contrast, direct military action during the First World War alone had exacted from Russia a cost of ‘only’ some 1,860,000 dead, with civilian losses of course being minimal – a still-terrible figure, but one dwarfed by what was to follow.²

Revolution also ushered in a dazzlingly diverse number of local political regimes in bewilderingly rapid succession – the East Siberian region of Buriatia alone, for example, between 1918 and 1922, witnessed some 14 different governments, wielding 6 different armies, each claiming to control the region.³ In few areas of the former Tsarist Empire, however, was this process quite as tortuous and complex as it soon became in the Caucasus.

Events in the Caucasus were also destined to play a central role in the 1917 Russian revolution and the civil war that followed. Though combat against Iudenich in the north around Petrograd and in the east against Kolchak in Siberia would each produce their own fair share of regime-defining myths and heroes, it was very much in the Caucasus that the true fate and nature of the Bolshevik revolution was fundamentally formed. It was there that Stalin, Ordzhonikidze and Kirov, figures central to the evolution and fate of the Bolshevik experiment, first made their careers. Stalin’s first prominent appointment within the post-October

Bolshevik party hierarchy came as commissar for the North Caucasus, followed soon thereafter by his appointment to the strategically vital Commissariat of Nationalities, wherein he interacted directly with a whole new generation of Muslim political actors. It was due as well to critical events in the Caucasus during the civil war that the sleepy Volga town of Tsaritsyn subsequently came to be renamed Stalingrad in 1925, a title destined to gain it truly iconic significance during the Second World War (although Stalin's own precise role in the defence of the town against White forces in 1918 was ironically also the subject of deep controversy).

The process of establishing Bolshevik power in the Caucasus also soon came to shape and define Soviet nationality policy, Soviet attitudes towards Islam, and Soviet relations with the external world. It was nonetheless an extraordinarily complex process, best viewed in retrospect perhaps as three overlapping event zones – the Red–White conflict in the northern Don and Kuban region, a complex set of political developments in the central belt encompassing Dagestan and the Terek region, and dramatic military and political shifts in the southern Transcaucasus in 1918 – where events came to be shaped first by an Ottoman invasion, and almost immediately thereafter by a countervailing British military intervention. For the sake of relative simplicity, this chapter will look at events in all three ethnic 'shatter zones' in more or less relative geographical sequence, north to south, whilst also stressing that events in each zone powerfully affected developments in the other two.⁴

The north, 1917–18: the Red–White clash in the Don and Kuban

The news of the March revolution stirred the same admixture of enthusiasm and disorientation in the Caucasus as it did in the rest of the country. The North Caucasus had already been badly hit by the general agrarian crisis brought on by the war, a phenomenon caused primarily by the classic wartime evils of reduced manpower and galloping monetary inflation. Taking into account that the Russian Empire overall between July 1914 and 1 January 1917 experienced 736 different agrarian rebellions protesting against new taxes, rising prices, or other governmental impositions, 168 of these uprisings during that same period occurred in the Kuban, Stavropol and Terek districts.⁵ Elections eventually held for the Constituent Assembly in November 1917 (OS) confirmed that the political mood of the region, as in the country as a whole, had become predominantly socialist and left-leaning. In the overall national figures, as a percentage of the total national vote, the Bolsheviks would receive 24 per cent of the votes cast, the other socialist parties 59.6 per cent, and the right-leaning Kadets a mere 16.4 per cent. In July–October 1917 in the North Caucasus, meanwhile, the most popular political grouping of all remained easily the peasant-friendly Socialist Revolutionary Party, which polled 88 per cent of the votes in the November elections in Stavropol.⁶ At the same time, before these elections even occurred, the demise of Tsarist rule in March 1917 also left in place a significant imperial legacy in the region, since it devolved local administrative power almost entirely to the Cossack *Atamans*. Over the

remainder of the course of 1917 all three *Atamans* wielding power in the Caucasus – Kaledin in the Don, Filimonov in the Kuban, and Karaulov in the Terek – would both consult one another and attempt to coordinate their actions. All three men ultimately refused to recognize the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917. Wartime conditions in the interim, however, also transformed the local urban centres, and accordingly altered the tenor of political life in the region, with the city of Rostov alone nearly doubling its worker population during the war years to 35,000.⁷

Amongst the first acts of the Provisional Government meanwhile was the establishment of empire-wide ‘public’ or ‘civic’ executive committees (*ispolkoms*), bodies staffed by civilian representatives of ‘educated society’, these elites having become generally more emboldened by the sharp wartime growth of a more vibrant strain of civic activism. In this sense the members of the Provisional Government truly saw the revolution ‘as the crowning achievement of their prewar and wartime campaign for an enlightened and technocratic order’.⁸ They supplemented attempts to impose a new bureaucratic order from above by appointing regional commissars intended to be the local representatives of the Provisional Government to the Caucasus – D. D. Starlychanov for Stavropol district, M. A. Karaulov to the Terek region, K. L. Bardizh to the Kuban, V. M. Voronkov to the Don, and N. I. Nikolaev to the Black Sea coastal strip.⁹

Despite these ambitions the revolution itself, however, was destined to be shaped by the fact that the Russian Empire as a whole was still awkwardly transitioning between a pre-modern and a modern socio-economic system. When the ruling dynasty lost power in March 1917, feudal Muslim *beks* and khans still coexisted within the same social and political spectrum as an only relatively recently emancipated rural Russian peasantry, and a much more educated and literate (but also much smaller) urban class of bankers, businessmen, lawyers, oilmen and commercial speculators. The ‘civil society’ upon which all the various democratizing forces in 1917 laid their hopes was therefore extremely diverse and fractious, with the difference in views and actions between city and countryside, as the revolution of 1905 had already demonstrated, being particularly sharp. Whilst the urban intelligentsia in 1917 dreamed of ambitious and complex new social utopias, the single most popular political party in Russia at the time, the SRs, owed their massive support primarily to their relatively simplistic campaign promises of wholesale land redistribution to the working peasantry, the latter being the newly enfranchised class which constituted the single largest electoral demographic in the country. Huge numbers of only relatively recently conscripted soldiers and officers, the vast majority of them soon ‘voting with their feet’ by retiring back from the wartime front lines for sometimes hundreds of miles towards their home towns and villages in the rear areas, further complicated this picture.

Because of their weakly forged bonds with ‘the masses’, the Provisional Government’s civic executive committees from the very outset therefore had to coexist across the country with the institution of local soviets (‘councils’), units again already made familiar to the Russian public from the 1905 revolution. By April 1917 there were already some 400 soviets of soldiers’ and workers’ deputies

at *guberniia* and *uezd* level across the whole Russian Empire, creating the infamous system of ‘dual power’ (*dvoevlastiia*) which would soon prove to be so unsustainable.¹⁰ The rise of the Bolsheviks to power after November 1917 accelerated this process – by mid-1918 there were around 12,000 soviets throughout Soviet Russia, all operating at various levels of administration, none of them within a solid legal framework, and with many conducting affairs completely autonomously from the centre. Where before there had largely been an almost total vacuum of competitive politics at the district and municipal level in Tsarist Russia, there now sprang up a wild and almost untamable excess of activism.

Against this backdrop, none of the leading revolutionary parties in 1917–18 in fact possessed any form of clearly predetermined programme for reforming the administration of such a complex state. Even the Bolsheviks, the ultimate victors from the struggle that would follow, remained in 1917–18 wedded to the amorphous concept of the ‘state commune’ (inspired by the Paris Commune of 1871) – the practical implementation of which, with the accompanying task of ultimately managing the state through a ‘Council of Soviets’, had eventually to be abandoned.¹¹ In the meantime, Kadets, SRs and Mensheviks dominated the new political institutions that sprang up in the Don region in March 1917, amongst them the entirely self-appointed new Don executive committee (*ispolkom*). With the abolition by the Provisional Government of all divisions created by estate or religion, Cossacks of every political stripe now also scrambled to construct new political organs to represent their own interests, leading to the emergence by mid-May 1917 of a Don Cossack government (*Krug*) – an organization conceived in part to specifically contest the claims of the Don *ispolkom* to speak for the territory as a whole. The Terek region further to the south had undergone a similar process even more rapidly, with the establishment as early as March 1917 of a local ‘Cossack government’.

The process of Bolshevik power projection southward from Moscow after the seizure of power in November 1917 therefore subsequently encountered its first real direct physical and political obstacle in the person of the new *Ataman* of the Don Cossacks, Aleksei Kaledin, an individual who had sworn opposition to the Bolshevik regime as early as 7 November 1917. A war veteran who had seen much active service on the Galician front, but who earlier in 1917 had also been dismissed by the new commander-in-chief, Brusilov, for opposing the imposition of democratization within the Russian army in the form of ‘soldiers’ committees’, Kaledin was elected *Ataman* of the Don Cossacks in June. By mid-August he had already publicly spoken out in Moscow on the need to abolish all soviets and committees in order to facilitate a reinvigoration of the general war effort against the Central Powers. By November therefore it was unsurprising that he was a self-declared enemy of the new Bolshevik regime in Petrograd. Under these circumstances it was also natural that the south Russian town of Novocherkassk in Kaledin’s own Don region quickly became the hub of the slowly emerging anti-Bolshevik White movement, led by Generals Alekseev and Kornilov.

Mikhail Alekseev, one of the most capable members of the pre-war Russian General Staff, had served as the Tsar’s chief of staff during the war, before going

on to briefly become commander-in-chief of all Russia's wartime armies. By 1917, however, he was already nearly sixty years old, and his health was greatly strained by the burden of prosecuting large-scale military conflict at the very highest strategic levels over the course of nearly three years of total war. What subsequently became the White movement nonetheless remained largely his own brainchild, emerging by proxy via his efforts to establish a charitable network for former serving army officers, in which cause he had already gained the financial support of a number of prominent businessmen. His colleague Lavr Kornilov, by contrast, the other most prominent early leader of the White movement, was both a much younger man than Alekseev, and a more unusual product of the pre-war Russian General Staff Academy. He was the offspring of a Siberian Cossack family, and his pre-war career had been marked by daring intelligence expeditions in Asia, and by service as the main Russian military agent in China. Half-Asian in appearance himself, and with a talent for languages, he enjoyed a special bond with the other ranks amongst the Asian troops of the old Tsarist army, most notably the Tekke Turkmen cavalymen of Central Asia, as well as the men of the North Caucasus 'Wild Division'. Shortly before rising to become leader of the nascent White movement in the Don territory, he had already been imprisoned for allegedly attempting to overthrow the Kerenskii-led Provisional Government in August–September 1917.

Following the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd in November 1917, both Alekseev and Kornilov sought to take advantage of local events in the Don region, though their mutual personal dislike also undermined their efforts to some degree. Neither man was an instinctive monarchist – Alekseev had helped persuade Nicholas II to abdicate in March, and Kornilov under the Provisional Government had then arrested the whole imperial family. Amongst their major personal differences nevertheless was Alekseev's more conciliatory political approach, fostered by his personal contacts with the Russian Kadet party, compared with Kornilov's instinctive distaste for politicians of every caste, and open preference for more violent, radical solutions. When fighting eventually broke out between their own followers and Red Guard groups, Kornilov would set the tone for much of the subsequent civil war by ordering that no prisoners be taken – '[t]he greater the terror, the greater our victories'.¹² Together these two men nonetheless set about creating after November 1917 a military opposition to the new Bolshevik regime, recruiting in the main from amongst the officer corps of the old Tsarist army.

On 20 November 1917 the Don Cossack *Krug* had formally declared its independence, but it continued to remain ambiguous about its relationship with 'Alekseev's Organization', fearing possible interference and invasion by the Bolsheviks. In addition, relations between the traditional Cossack elite and the *inogorodnie* were already becoming strained, a factor that would later split the whole Cossack movement during the civil war. Whilst Cossacks of the older generation still retained a strong nostalgia for the Tsarist regime and all its associations, younger Cossack smallholders and war-weary veterans (*frontovniki*) returning from the European battle front were more easily bewitched by Bolshevik propaganda, which created a classic generation gap within the Cossack community.

Becoming increasingly aware that his own men would no longer follow him as a unified force, Kaledin reluctantly began to employ the officers of 'Alekseev's Organization' purely as a scratch police-force to help guard and regulate the demonstrations and disorders that attended the return of ever-increasing numbers of *frontovniki*. In these early days, Alekseev's own men consequently acquired most of their weaponry from self-demobilizing former army units. However divided the Cossacks may have remained meanwhile, the appearance of Red troops quickly brought about a clash between these nascent Red and White military forces.

The emergence of the Don Cossack government, itself a reactive gesture, had provoked a further response in the local urban capital of Rostov, where a coalition of moderate socialists and Bolsheviks announced the formation of a unified military revolutionary committee. Requests by the Soviet special commissar in the city, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, to bring in military reinforcements from the Bolshevik-aligned Black Sea Fleet then culminated in fresh political divisions and infighting which, after two days of combat, saw Red Guard units taking control of the whole city. Kaledin, who found his own Don Cossack forces divided and reluctant to address the challenge, turned to 'Alekseev's Organization' – which numbered at the time just 400 to 500 men – to take the city back from Bolshevik control. The battle of Rostov between 9 and 15 December (OS) 1917 is generally considered to mark the first major clash of arms in the Russian Civil War. It ended in the complete rout of the disorganized Red Guard forces, which at this stage of the conflict still comprised little more than a train-borne, loosely disciplined militia, rushed to the various hot spots of conflict by inexperienced leaders. It would take nearly a whole year before the clear and pressing need to defend the revolution provoked the Bolshevik regime into a frantic mobilization and training effort that ultimately led, under Trotsky, to the emergence of the Red Army.

As a direct consequence of these events, the clear emergence of a coalition to the south, however fragile and weak, that could nonetheless potentially topple the then equally weak new Bolshevik regime in Moscow, and bring Russia back into the war against the Central Powers, also attracted the attention of Russia's erstwhile allies. On 30 November 1917, just a few weeks before the first military clashes around Rostov, an Inter-Allied Conference in Paris had already elected to send a combined Anglo-French military mission from Romania to General Kaledin's headquarters in south Russia, a resolution subsequently overtaken by events. Immediately afterwards, British intelligence agents and a military mission under Colonel G. D. Pike were also dispatched to the Caucasus.¹³ With minimal discussion, the British War Cabinet for its own part had also already resolved on 28 November to support 'any responsible body in Russia that would actively oppose the Maximalist [Bolshevik] movement', a decision that laid upon the British ambassador to Russia, Sir George Buchanan, the corresponding burden of setting up *in situ* a series of new Ukrainian, Cossack, Armenian and Polish banks to finance such movements.¹⁴ However, at least at first, these international contacts failed to significantly bolster the Whites' own fortunes. Despite the onset of a military stalemate in the region, the Don Cossacks soon completely ceased to recognize Kaledin's authority, whilst a renewed Red offensive on Rostov at the beginning of

January 1918 led to the White army leaving the Don region for the Kuban, yet another Cossack bastion to the south. In the Kuban, Kornilov held high hopes of mustering substantial political and material support from both the local government – the Kuban *Rada* – and via General Sultan-Kilich-Girei, a former commander of the Caucasus-raised Wild Division.

On 29 January/11 February 1918, just over two months after his first open declaration of defiance, in response to these multiplying internal discontents, a despairing General Kaledin retired to his private office in Novocherkassk and shot himself through the heart. The White army, meanwhile, during its retreat before the new Bolshevik offensive, now also undertook its dramatic ‘ice march’ southward across the frozen steppe towards the Kuban, the most famous episode of the whole civil war, and one critical to forging the Whites’ own subsequent self-image. The medal later awarded to participants in this campaign incorporated the image of a crown of thorns, a stark symbol of human suffering. Veterans would long remember how a straggling single column of soldiers and civilians, some 4,500 in all, poorly dressed and low on ammunition, crawled southward through the snow and mud of the steppe, requisitioning desperately needed food and supplies from the surrounding sea of hostile peasantry by force of arms as they went. On arrival in the Kuban they found no respite, since here the civil war between local Red Guard forces and what (by proxy) then rapidly became pro-White military factions had by now also begun in earnest.

Here too the Bolshevik movement had already found a natural base of support amongst demobilizing soldiers and the peasant *inogorodnie*. The recently demobilized 39th Infantry Division helped to set up pro-Bolshevik soviets in the towns of Tikhoretsk, Stavropol, Kavkazskaia and Armavir, and, on the 13 March, Ekaterinodar itself had been evacuated by the Kuban *Rada* and its few loyal troops in the face of a general Bolshevik offensive.¹⁵ In early April 1918 therefore, by now joined by the men of General Pokrovskii’s Kuban army (a force of some 3,000 Cossacks), Kornilov’s Whites mounted a bold but suicidal assault to retake Ekaterinodar, the capital of the newly established North Caucasus Soviet Republic. Even here, however, ill fortune dogged their every move. Early on the morning of 13 April, a shell struck Kornilov’s improvised farmhouse headquarters amidst the siege lines outside the town, mortally wounding Kornilov himself. General Denikin, until then a subordinate of Kornilov’s, now took over command of the whole White army and immediately led it by forced marches away from Ekaterinodar, still untaken, back north towards the still-unsettled Don.

So devastating was this apparent sequence of reverses that Lenin, prematurely, announced that the civil war was over, and Bolshevism triumphant. At least initially, subsequent events appeared at first to grant Lenin’s judgement even greater weight. By September 1918 Alekseev, the co-founder and inspirer of the White movement, was also dead, felled not by enemy action but by cancer and physical exhaustion.¹⁶ However, with Denikin at its head, the White army’s local fortunes soon dramatically improved, to the extent where it came to dominate the North Caucasus as a whole, taking control not only of the Don, Terek and Kuban *oblasts*, but also of the whole of Dagestan. In the process it would also eventually expand

from the ragtag wandering band of barely 5,000 ill-equipped men it had been in late 1917 and early 1918 into a force of some 100,000 troops, generously provisioned with British tanks, aircraft and modern artillery. Of all the White armies, it was ironically Denikin's that would eventually become the one force that came closest to truly toppling the Bolshevik regime in Moscow.¹⁷

Developments in the Terek and Dagestan districts, 1917–18

Even as the first major clashes between Red and White troops whirled back and forth across the northern Don and Kuban territories between the end of 1917 and the middle of 1918, political life further to the south was also in ferment, change having again already begun with the fall of the Tsar in March, and the election that same month of a local Cossack government led by the new *Ataman*, M. A. Karaulov (1878–1917). The critical regional centres in the events that followed were Vladikavkaz (renamed Ordzhonikidze from 1931 to 1944 and from 1954 to 1990), Baku, Grozny, Tbilisi, Port Petrovsk (renamed Makhachkala in 1921) and Temir-Khan-Shura (later renamed Buinaksk). On 9 March 1917 (OS) there had already been formed in Temir-Khan-Shura a thirty-man provisional *oblast'* executive committee (*ispolkom*), a governmental body headed by an engineer, Z. Temirkhanov of the Russian Kadet party. In Vladikavkaz there likewise arose a civilian *ispolkom* headed by an SR, one K. Mamulov.¹⁸ Before long as commissar of the Vladikavkaz district there was also selected Simon Alievich Takoev (1876–1937), a Menshevik activist and serving soldier who had only just returned to Ossetia at the end of August. Despite the creation of these regional *ispolkoms*, however, local organs of Tsarist power also remained in place and coexisted with the new regime until April 1917. Internally these new executive committees were politically, ethnically and socially extremely diverse. The membership of the new Dagestan *ispolkom* comprised men such as Prince Nukh-Bek Tarkovskii (1878–1951), a former commander of the Caucasus Wild Division, the former *naib* Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii, the fabric industrialist M. M. Mavraev, the Arabic scholar M. K. Dibirov, the local lawyers Gaidar Bammatorov and A. Gasanov, and the jurist Abdusalam Dalgat. Later the membership of this particular *ispolkom* was expanded by the arrival of individuals such as Makhach Dakhadaev, Dzhalalutdin Korkmasov and Alibek Takho-Godi, all of whom after May 1917 formed part of the local so-called 'socialist group'.¹⁹

Simultaneously in Tbilisi, after the February revolution, there had been formed the Special Transcaucasus Committee (henceforward OZAKOM), headed by B. A. Kharlamov, supplanting the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, the last Russian viceroy of the Caucasus. On 6 April 1917 this Tbilisi-based body directed for the administration of Dagestan the formation of a special commissariat headed by Ibragim Gaidarov, and including Mokhammad Dalgat and the representatives of the regional *ispolkom*. The commissariat immediately began appointing commissars to every district. In early May 1917, however, the regional situation was further complicated by the emergence of the newly formed Union of Mountaineers, itself the product of a provisional committee of local political actors that had

first met on 6 March (OS). Though it lasted only until November, the Union of Mountaineers quickly gained recognition from the Provisional Government in Petrograd as a legal assembly.²⁰

The First Congress of the United Mountain Peoples of the North Caucasus and Dagestan met in Vladikavkaz between 1 and 9 May 1917 (OS), with the subsequently produced manifesto calling for the creation of a federal republic of autonomous, self-governing provinces, as well as an end to the war. The congress itself was funded by the Baku-based Azeri millionaire Khadzhi Tagiev to the tune of 50,000 roubles, and by 20,000 roubles from the Chechen oil entrepreneur Tapa Chermoev.²¹ The union that resulted was headed by a seventeen-member executive committee comprising figures such as Tapa Chermoev (Chechnia), Nukh-Bek Tarkovskii (Dagestan), Vasan-Girei Dzhabagiev (1882–1961, Ingushetia), the local Kabard horse-breeder Pshemakho Kotsev (1890–1968), Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii (Dagestan), Prince Rashidkhan Kaplanov (1883–1937, Dagestan), Abdusalam Dalgat and the scientist, writer and publicist Bashir Dalgat. The main characteristic of such men was their role as ‘accidental’ nationalists: before the war they had either been politically completely inactive, or had played only the most minor of roles within pre-existing Russian political parties; Tapa Chermoev in particular owed his entire personal fortune to the circumstances of the pre-war Tsarist political system.²² The union itself ultimately claimed to represent and encompass the diverse peoples of the Terek and Dagestan provinces, with Chermoev as its president and Kotsev as vice-president.

Alongside its own demands, this new body also responded positively when Karaulov, the newly appointed local commissar of the Provisional Government and the recently elected *Ataman*, of the Terek Cossack Host, urgently called upon the local Cossack and mountaineer peoples to reach a new level of mutual understanding, cooperation and trust, in order to maintain order across the region. Karaulov himself was an unusual man amongst the Cossack community – a university-educated idealist, who had already in the pre-war period authored a number of historical studies of the Terek Cossacks, and had also attended the second Duma of 1907. Within the latter institution he had already campaigned on a relatively radical prospectus for the Terek Host itself to be reformed, demanding the establishment of permanent elected councils (the Cossack institution of the *Rada*) as well as the forceful seizure of officers’ land. The mutual desires now being expressed by Karaulov and the Union of Mountaineers in May 1917 for a bold new era in local relationships to begin would soon prove much harder to achieve and implement in practice however.²³

The major outcome of the ten-day work of the Union of Mountaineers’ first congress in May was the formation of a Mountaineer Government comprising some 340 local delegates.²⁴ A recent Western study has emphasized that the majority of the members of the union envisioned ‘a Western-style secular democracy’ as the future for the region.²⁵ However, whilst the majority of voices in the congress certainly supported the creation of a territorial federation, the general mood was altogether more ambiguous than this later description implies. Kaplanov, it is true, used his opening speech at the congress to stress the defensive nature of

the union, and the need to incorporate within it mountaineers of all religions (a specific reference to the Christianized Ossetians). Said Gabiev – whose pre-war education in the Stavropol gymnasium, as previously touched upon, empowered him to interweave the emotion of local mountaineer resentment with a new European language of freedom and natural rights – also promoted and received support at the first congress for the establishment of a secular education system for all mountaineers. However, the congress also passed a motion calling for the introduction of sharia law into the local court system, and for the establishment of the post of a *sheik-ul-islam* in the centre of Russia.²⁶

Given such contradictions, it is unsurprising that even the members of the union's own central committee felt that the first congress had not yielded all the results that might be expected, and that 'questions of primary importance, such as the agrarian issue, supplies, public education and spiritual administration did not receive decisive resolution at the first congress'.²⁷ Notions meanwhile of the supposed 'legitimacy' of this Mountaineer Government, a concept which some Western historians and scholars have in recent years advanced, mostly in order to present it as a natural expression of mountaineer unity later wickedly suborned and overthrown by the Bolsheviks, also need to be carefully questioned. Having been created by revolution, the Mountaineer Government was itself no more inherently 'legitimate' than the Bolsheviks themselves were, and before long it enjoyed considerably less broad popular support. As events were soon to show, the union itself was also quite capable of disintegrating of its own volition, with very little Bolshevik pressure.

Members of the Union of Mountaineers also mixed with and participated within the other main new organ of local power, the Dagestan *ispolkom*. One prominent political actor in both institutions, Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii, had begun his early political career as a member of the Dagestan people's court before following in his father's footsteps as a *naib* of the Koisubulinskii district. He was also, as was discussed in Chapter 1, a large landholder and the possessor of large herds of livestock. However, a three-month stay in Constantinople in 1903 had also led Gotsinskii to be viewed with considerable suspicion by the Tsarist authorities, and his activities in the Caucasus immediately prior to the outbreak of the world war, as we have seen, had been associated with significant local unrest. Stout, bearded and outwardly non-flamboyant, Gotsinskii nonetheless commanded considerable respect amongst the Muslim mountaineers, in part through his widely noted talent for writing verse poetry. His complete immersion in Arabic literature was also balanced by the fact that, as even his socialist opponents recognized, he was 'no fanatic', but rather (like his late father) a political pragmatist, one moreover with a shrewd and instinctive grasp of the psychology of the 'mountaineer masses'.²⁸ His local status was only increased when, with the support of the recently returned Sheikh Uzun Khadzhi, he was elected *mufti* and spiritual leader of the Union of Mountaineers in May 1917. He then broke from the mainstream political process in August, however, by trying to immediately declare independence and re-establish an *Imamate* in the North Caucasus, a process begun at the second mountaineer congress held in Andi, one of the most inaccessible parts of Dagestan, in a village packed with Gotsinskii's supporters.

In August, during a large meeting in Andi at which, owing to bad roads, some 5,000 other delegates arrived only very late, Gotsinskii's status was increased to *Imam*, but a third, more formal meeting of the Union of Mountaineers in September then refused to recognize this change, triggering the beginnings of an internal feud. Gotsinskii's claim to be *Imam* explicitly sought to revive the tradition of Shamil, and, if fully implemented, would have made Gotsinskii the latter's direct spiritual successor. However, Chechen sheikhs in particular, amongst them Sheikh Deni Arsanov, refused to recognize the Dagestani Gotsinskii as a new *Imam*, whilst the mountaineer congress itself grew alarmed by the implications of declaring a new *Imamate*. Gotsinskii himself, displaying the sudden hesitancy which was to subsequently characterize his whole career, and lead ultimately to a split between him and Uzun Khadzhi, then compromised, and in October publicly settled upon only being given the title of *mufti*.²⁹ Though unable to gain universal recognition as *Imam*, Gotsinskii nonetheless continued to see the application of sharia strictures as the best means to restore law and order locally, much as the leaders of the Taliban movement in war-torn Afghanistan were to do some eighty years later. In November he urged local mullahs to choose God-fearing people and set up fighting detachments in order to combat the 'thieves, bandits and murderers' now plaguing the region, employing in the process such sharia-approved punishments as amputating the hands of thieves and executing murderers on the spot.³⁰

Illustrative of the divisions within these new local revolutionary organs of political power meanwhile was the fact that one of Gotsinskii's fellow *ispolkom* members, albeit a later arrival, one Dzhahalutdin Korkmasov (1879–1937), had also spent some time before the war in Istanbul, but nonetheless came from the opposite end of the social and political spectrum from Dagestan's new *mufti*. Korkmasov was a graduate, like many other later twentieth-century Asian revolutionaries, of the Sorbonne in Paris (where he had married a Russian student), and his stay in Istanbul in 1910 had been marked by his enrolling in an Ottoman socialist party, and by his activities in editing and writing for a local Russian-language newspaper, the *Istanbul News*. Having been a participant in the 1905 revolution, Korkmasov had then been invited to Turkey by his personal friend Mustafa Subhi, the founder of the Ottoman Socialist Party, and a man who from 1918 onwards would also lead the Moscow-backed Communist Party of Turkey. Subhi himself would later die in mysterious circumstances in 1921, having embarked on an ill-considered trip to spread the revolutionary gospel of Communism in post-war Turkey. The 1917 February revolution had then again found Korkmasov back in Paris, however, and only in May did he return to Dagestan, where he eventually became head of local land affairs in the regional *ispolkom*. He also took part in the activities of the Union of Mountaineers, but never sat on its central committee. Of all the members of the *ispolkom*, Korkmasov had the reputation of being the most politically radical, and accordingly as the man with the most local enemies. Having arrived from Paris filled with revolutionary enthusiasm, he apparently earned particular enmity in Dagestan on one occasion by stating that 'whether the mullahs want it or not, the revolution will decide the land question and the status of women in its own way'.³¹ However, he was no Bolshevik at this

stage in his career either, and in mid-1917, like almost every other local political actor in the Caucasus, he publicly supported all such questions being finally resolved only once the legally elected Constituent Assembly took office in January 1918. The immediate response of the entire Dagestani ‘socialist group’ to the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd in November was in fact to decry Lenin’s Bolsheviks for ‘attempting to accomplish the impossible’ – which supports the view of more than one contemporary eyewitness that, in reality, local politics in Dagestan remained heavily coalitional in nature well into the first quarter of 1918.³²

The year 1917 also brought a much less experienced generation of political actors in the Caucasus into public prominence for the first time. Yet a third Dagestani *ispolkom* member and simultaneous participant in the Union of Mountaineers, Alibek Alibekovich Takho-Godi (1892–1937), was neither a pre-war socialist such as Korkmasov, nor a representative of the regional Muslim elite such as Gotsinskii, but rather a younger representative of the local intelligentsia who had worked within the Tsarist government. As a member of the younger generation, he possessed neither Korkmasov’s credentials as a pre-war revolutionary, nor even the vague aura of Tsarist bureaucratic suspicion and disapproval that surrounded Gotsinskii; he was rather a classic technocrat, a man brought to national prominence both by wartime conditions and by the Provisional Government’s own policies. Having just finished the legal faculty of Moscow State University in 1916, he had worked as a barrister in Vladikavkaz in 1916–17 before then, at the precocious age of just twenty-five, becoming chairman of one of the local militia organizations and editor of a local newspaper, *The Voice of Dagestan*, in 1917. Takho-Godi later characterized his own section within the *ispolkom* in 1917, the so-called ‘socialist group’, as fundamentally a nucleus of only five or six men, of whom Korkmasov, Makhach Dakhadaev, M. M. Khizroev and Said Gabiev were the most significant actors. The group lacked any kind of unified programme or fixed party line but was instead, in Takho-Godi’s own words, a product of ‘well-known Dagestan realities’, unified mainly by their opposition to the concept that all the region’s problems could be resolved by the application of sharia law.³³

Despite (as we shall see) their growing success within the rapidly dissolving Tsarist army meanwhile, within the Caucasus and Transcaucasus as a whole the Bolshevik party was still often in a complete minority. In Tbilisi in March 1917 there were still no more than fifteen to twenty local Bolsheviks.³⁴ In Vladikavkaz in March there were so few Bolsheviks that it was resolved to found a joint Bolshevik–Menshevik party committee, comprising three Bolsheviks (amongst them Sergei Mironovich Kirov) and three Mensheviks; during the simultaneous elections to the local soviet of workers’ deputies, only two Bolsheviks succeeded in being elected as candidate members. Mensheviks and SRs also dominated the soviet of soldiers’ deputies elected on 14 March by the Vladikavkaz military garrison.³⁵ In Grozny, where local politics was rather more radicalized, a soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies was dominated by SRs and Mensheviks, but chaired by a Bolshevik, N. A. Anisimov.³⁶ The Bolsheviks, however, steadily gained in strength over the course of 1917 in the Caucasus, just as they were to do in

much of the rest of the country. The Groznyi party organization by July 1917 mustered some 2,000 members, and in the elections to the Constituent Assembly in Vladikavkaz on 26 November (OS), the Bolsheviks polled over 44 per cent of the vote. In Piatigorsk in those same later elections, the Bolsheviks gained 8,000 ballots, half of all the votes cast.³⁷ However, they were able to occupy relatively few leading positions in local government before 1918. In general, wherever Russian soldiers paused for rest or shelter as their trains travelled back from the front lines, or where pre-existing garrisons already guaranteed their presence – in Baku, Groznyi, Piatigorsk and Kizliar – the Bolsheviks generally mustered some support, but amongst both the mountaineers and the Georgian, Armenian and Azeri populations their indigenous support remained fairly minute. Only in the eastern coastal regions did the Bolsheviks gain significant early successes in terms of actually seizing the reins of power, and December 1917 saw the creation of both a Baku soviet headed by the Armenian Bolshevik Stepan Shaumian (1878–1918) and, further to the north, a smaller Bolshevik soviet in Port Petrovsk headed by the Dagestani Ullubi Buinakskii. Shaumian on 16 December was also appointed Lenin's 'extraordinary commissar on the affairs of the Caucasus', a role reflecting the critical symbolic importance of Baku to Bolshevik strategy in the region at the time.³⁸

The first act of most soviets meanwhile, whether Bolshevik, Menshevik or SR dominated, was to form armed militias and food-rationing committees; the Groznyi soviet shortly after its establishment, for example, successfully lobbied for the dispatch of 3,000 rifles and 300 revolvers from the Provisional Government in Petrograd.³⁹ The Port Petrovsk soviet also quickly set about creating an armed militia to defend the town and surrounding area, a hastily assembled and miscellaneous force comprising both demobilized soldiers and Muslim mountaineers. Developments elsewhere, as the system of *dvoevlastiia* gradually broke down from July 1917 onwards, proved such measures were vitally necessary. In Chechnia and Ossetia, in the towns of Groznyi, Khasaviurt and Vladikavkaz, workers' soviets that had burst briefly into life earlier that year underwent rapid repression in November–December 1917 at the hands of forces directed by Ataman Karaulov. Of all the local Bolshevik political actors, four men in particular, despite unpromising local circumstances, were nonetheless destined to later rise to real national prominence in the events that followed. This group comprised the wily Georgian bandit and bank robber 'Sergo' Ordzhonikidze; the passionate young propagandist and political agitator Sergei Kirov; the aforementioned leader of the Baku soviet, Stepan Shaumian; and the partisan leader N. F. Gikalo (1897–1938).

As Bolshevism began to take its first tentative steps into the spotlight in the broader Caucasus political arena, both the Dagestan *ispolkom* and the Mountaineer Government also began rapidly fracturing in a manner destined to later define the very nature of the civil war in the North Caucasus. The complexity of the local political situation at the time produced conflicting narratives that made, and still make, all subsequent analysis of events in the region a particularly tortuous affair. Later, during the purges of the 1930s, the very presence of individuals such as Dakhadaev, Takho-Godi and Korkmasov in the Dagestan *ispolkom* would be used

by other Soviet politicians to condemn them *post facto*. In 1934 Samurskii would boldly proclaim that ‘the “socialist group” by their very participation in the bourgeois-clerical *ispolkom* not only strengthened the rule of the bourgeoisie and their supporters, the clergy, but disorganized the working masses of Dagestan, amongst whom they helped to sow petty bourgeois illusions’.⁴⁰ Even a later, more sympathetic Soviet academic account from the 1970s stressed that ‘the Dagestan socialist group made a series of serious political errors; its actions were not always consistent, [and in October 1917] individual members of the group...participated in meetings with reactionaries’.⁴¹ Suspicion clearly later arose over the fact that men such as Korkmasov and Dakhadaev had not formally embraced the official Soviet platform until May 1918, over six months after the first Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd. Moreover, even at the very opening of the later Temir-Khan-Shura soviet in June 1918, Makhach Dakhadaev would pointedly warn against mechanically implementing Marxism-Leninism in Dagestan, declaring that ‘not everything that is good for central Russia is acceptable at the local level’.⁴²

Given such ambiguities then, even retrospectively categorizing the beliefs and parties to which the members of the ‘socialist group’ belonged proves intensely problematic. For decades Korkmasov’s beliefs pre-1918 were loosely categorized in both Soviet and émigré historiography as ‘anarchist’, though little in his actions or statements indicated any strong formal attachment to anarchism. Men such as Dakhadaev, Gabiev and Korkmasov were torn by changing times, and were themselves products of catharsis as divisions emerged towards the end of 1917, within both the *ispolkom* and the Union of Mountaineers, between individuals such as Gotsinskii and men like themselves. Moreover, figures within this debate would soon find themselves on opposite sides of the political divide, despite backgrounds that were often startlingly similar. Another prominent local political actor, the Kumyk politician and public intellectual Gaidar Bammatorov (1890–1965), serves as a striking example of this phenomenon.

During his early career in the Caucasus, Bammatorov, like Takho-Godi, was both a lawyer and a self-proclaimed socialist, a background which facilitated his eventual rise to become minister of foreign affairs for the self-declared North Caucasus Mountaineer Republic in 1918. Like Korkmasov, meanwhile, he was also a graduate of the Sorbonne in Paris. His pre-war career had seen him attack the Tsarist Empire in the press as a corrupt and despotic colonial power, and to proclaim the need to fundamentally reform governmental and social affairs in the Caucasus. Yet Bammatorov never became reconciled to Bolshevik power either, and following the later Soviet absorption of the North Caucasus he emigrated to Paris, where he lived out the remainder of his days as the editor of a major émigré journal, *The Caucasus (Kavkaz)*. His critical point of division from other reform-minded individuals such as Korkmasov probably lay in his attitude to the religious question – in May 1917 Bammatorov had firmly declared that, in Russia, ‘for Muslims the meaning of Islam and nation are indivisible’.⁴³ He saw Islam as a source of unity and the equivalent of national identity; individuals such as Korkmasov by contrast would spend their lifetimes creating territorially and ethnically based visions of

the nation instead. These divisions over approaches to modernity reflected a wider trend – the split between Islamists and secularizing socialists – that would later come to define much of the whole course of the twentieth century.

The Andi congress in August 1917 at which Gotsinskii had first attempted to become *Imam* prepared the seedbed for further tensions and divisions within this diverse group of local political actors. The first open signs of renewed internal difficulties within the Dagestan *ispolkom* came when a former colonel in the Tsarist army, Daniil Apashev, formed the Dzhamiat ul-Islam, the ‘party of Islam’. During September 1917 in Temir-Khan-Shura, on the basis of the Dzhamiat ul-Islam, there was formed the Dagestan National Committee, or *millikomitet*, headed by Apashev, Gotsinskii, M. K. Dibirov and others. The very title of this organization signified a fine line between the traditional and the modern. Within the Ottoman Empire up until 1856 the term *millet* had traditionally referred to a religious community of *dhimmi* (protected people), guaranteed their own laws and customs in return for a contract of subordination and loyalty. However, during the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Arabic-derived word *millet*, traditionally referring to just such an administrative unit or community, came instead in both Turkey and Iran to become associated with the more modern-day secular concept of a ‘nation’. In the immediate pre-war period Rasul-Zade, the prominent leader of the Azeri *Musavat* party, had himself already argued in the press that the term *millet* was more appropriately applied and understood in the sense of identifying a ‘nation’ rather than merely as a reference to a religious group.⁴⁴ The *millikomitet* of Dagestan as a ‘national’ organization therefore deployed its own militia, and itself became a subordinate part of the Union of Mountaineers which had already been formed in May. Takho-Godi himself nonetheless explicitly referred to the members of the *millikomitet* as the ‘sharia bloc’ (*sharblok*) and as ‘Islamists’, surely one of the earliest references to such a faction in twentieth-century political thought.⁴⁵ In terms of military forces, the *millikomitet* sought support from both local militias and the troops of the North Caucasus Wild Division, that force of mountaineers who had served out a period of tough military service during the world war, and which General Kornilov to the north also courted.

The ambitions of the *millikomitet* interacted with broader political developments. Since July 1917, Chechen and Ingush bands had begun actively skirmishing with local Cossacks around Vladikavkaz and Groznyi. Local unrest had begun in Northern Ossetia around land contested between the Ossetians and Ingush, with the village of Bazorkino eventually again becoming a scene of fierce fighting, just as it had in 1905. The local land question had now clearly been reignited by wider political changes, and the *Ataman* of the Terek Cossack Host, Karaulov, considerably alarmed, soon ordered his own men to construct a series of defensive trenches along the existing Sunzhenskoi line. Tensions were now also growing between the Cossacks and armed *inogorodnie* detachments, the latter refusing to pay taxes and demanding a permanent allotment of the land that they rented from the Cossacks.⁴⁶ Under these local circumstances, Karaulov’s reaction to the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd in November 1917 was wholly negative: he quickly placed the whole Terek region under martial law, initiated repressive

acts against local soviets in towns such as Grozny, and ordered all local Cossack units to assume a state of full military readiness.

At its second session in September 1917, meanwhile, the Union of Mountaineers as a whole had already declared itself a 'sovereign government' fully independent from Russia. In October the central committee of the Union of Mountaineers was then invited to participate in the so-called 'South-Eastern Union', a concept concocted by the leader of the Russian Kadet party, Pavel Miliukov, in collaboration with Generals Alekseev and Kaledin. Funding for the organization after 28 December 1917, however, was being organized covertly by the British, with a certain Major Keyes, attached to the British embassy in Petrograd, forming an alliance during January 1918 with a dubious Polish financial speculator, Karol Iaroshinskii, in order to create a 'Cossack' bank which was to be supported by a group of seven leading Russian banking institutions. The creation of the latter conglomerate itself involved the setting up a bloc that would effectively have established overnight a controlling stake in the whole of the Russian economy; without the backing of this group no subsequent Russian government of any political stripe would have been able to function effectively. Keyes himself gained promises from Iaroshinskii that 'at least 100 young Englishmen' would serve in all the branches of this shadowy financial consortium, whilst directorships and seats on the boards of all the banks and companies controlled by the banks would also be given to the British, a scheme which, had it been ultimately realized, would undoubtedly 'have reduced the Russian Empire to the status of a satellite of the British Empire'.⁴⁷

From 16 November 1917 onwards in Ekaterinodar there had meanwhile already begun to function a hastily assembled government of this 'South-Eastern Union'.⁴⁸ Members of the Union of Mountaineers, including Bammatov and Gotsinskii, oblivious to the British shadow-play unfolding behind the scenes, quickly declared themselves in favour of joining the South-Eastern Union in order to avoid the threatening war between Cossacks and mountaineers in the region; joint members from the Dagestan *ispolkom* such as Korkmasov and Makhach Dakhadaev opposed such a move, but ineffectively. However, in Petrograd the covert British financial scheme, upon which the maintenance of the South-Eastern Union depended, descended rapidly into farce and then collapse. Funds went astray, and a loan to Iaroshinskii was subsequently sabotaged by the Soviet Cheka's pursuit of an important intermediary based in Rostov-on-Don, a financier named Poliakov. The Bolshevik nationalization of all state banks, accompanied by the expropriation of their assets and cancellation of all shares, further complicated the process, and caused increasing concern to the British Treasury over the viability of Keyes's scheme, into which the British had by now already sunk some £1 million – an investment which an already heavily indebted Britain could only undertake with covert American political backing.⁴⁹ Growing conflict and dissent in the Don region, culminating in Kaledin's dramatic suicide on 11 February 1918, then rendered the proposed South-Eastern Union a defunct concept practically before it had ever begun.⁵⁰

In Vladikavkaz, meanwhile, despite these wider strategic reverses, from 6 November 1917 onwards there had nonetheless already begun operating for the

whole Terek *oblast'* what were in effect two different governments – the Union of Mountaineers on the one hand, and the Terek Cossack *Krug* on the other. Aware of their limited authority, however, on 1 December 1917 they undertook the further dramatic step of officially forming in Vladikavkaz the coalition 'Terek-Dagestan government' (henceforward TerDag), an organization intended to represent the interests of both mountaineers and Cossacks. Rashidkhan Kaplanov now became chairman of this government as well as foreign minister, and Ataman Karaulov its deputy chairman and finance minister.⁵¹ On 21 December 1917 the TerDag went yet further in declaring its intention to create an independent Mountaineer Republic. Authority across both the Terek district and Dagestan was now effectively divided between the *millikomitet*, the TerDag, and the Bolshevik faction in Port Petrovsk, with the Dagestani *ispolkom* now an increasingly meaningless cipher spanning all three. Polovtsev, the commander of the North Caucasus Wild Division, who in this period now also found himself suddenly appointed military commander of the whole of the North Caucasus, later pithily summed up the general situation by stating that 'there were too many authorities, but nobody obeyed them, whereas actual power was speedily passing into Bolshevik hands everywhere'.⁵²

All sides were now counting upon the loyalties of the growing numbers of national militias dispersed throughout the region. Given their importance to the local political power balance, it is worthwhile therefore briefly summarizing the size, nature and equipment of these various forces. Whilst the data given here derives from a 1919 intelligence report by a Russian officer who had by then joined Denikin's White movement, his previous background and experience allow it to be taken as a fair reflection of the evolving situation in 1917–18 as well.⁵³ The Ingush were seen as the best-organized indigenous military force in the region, with the entire population soon under arms, each man possessing the Mosin-Nagant magazine rifle used by the Russian army during the war, alongside 200–300 rounds of ammunition apiece. Able to put 15,000–20,000 men in the field alongside a small number of machine guns and artillery, they also possessed rudimentary training in infantry, cavalry and trench-warfare tactics, and boasted some 40–50 officers in their ranks, mostly cavalymen. The Chechens, by contrast, despite their ferocious contemporary reputation as a consequence of more recent events during the 1990s, were in 1917–20 much less well armed and organized. Though able to field more men, they possessed no solid chain of command, and were further hampered by a much more diverse variety of weaponry, creating difficulties with ammunition standardization; their problems were magnified by extremely poor internal discipline and a greater inclination to sudden panic. Dagestan meanwhile was reportedly able to field 15,000–20,000 men, mostly infantry, but such forces as did exist possessed very little ammunition, and practically no formal military training, the single exception being the 500 men of the Dagestani Cavalry Regiment that previously formed part of the Wild Division. In Ossetia, the organization of a national militia had been entrusted to a certain General Fidarov, a Turcophile political adventurer, but here the problem ironically lay in a reverse of the usual officer-to-soldier ratio pertaining elsewhere: Ossetia possessed 'a lot of officers, but of unsatisfactory quality'. As a result,

relatively little seems to have been achieved in practice in establishing a permanent standing force.⁵⁴

This local military-political kaleidoscope proved difficult to master. Though its major participants would continue to play a significant role in Caucasus politics well into 1919, and would indeed become prominent figures within the post-war Caucasus diaspora, the TerDag itself also had an extremely short and controversial existence. Cracks were already clearly visible by January 1918, as the TerDag became a victim of the increasing instability of the local political environment in terms of ethnic conflict. Although the various national councils (Chechen, Kabard, Ossetian, Ingush, Balkar and Karachai) that had emerged during the summer and autumn of 1917 were officially meant to be subordinate to the TerDag, in practice they all without exception sought to pursue their own policies from the very outset, with relatively little advance warning or consultation.⁵⁵

The Third Congress of Peasants' Soviets of the Terek Region meanwhile, which met in Vladikavkaz from 16 to 24 December 1917, had already refused to recognize the authority of the TerDag.⁵⁶ Amongst the North Ossetians during the summer of 1917 there had also emerged an indigenous local revolutionary party, 'Kermen', which on 1/14 October 1917 convened its first central committee in Vladikavkaz under the leadership of D. Gibizov. The programme of the party, which had a membership of nearly a thousand by the end of 1917, called for the liquidation of landlords and the transfer of all land to the peasantry – demands that led the party to be closely associated with, and later in April 1918 to ultimately amalgamate with, the Bolshevik party. However, the methods of the party differed from those of its Bolshevik counterpart, as local participants later emphasized. Taking account of the fact that 'patriarchal, clan and family relations' played a greater role than 'class struggle' in the countryside, the leaders of Kermen set out to draw ordinary peasants in North Ossetia by naming their own party after a legendary local hero, and creating in the process a party of 'the Bolshevik type, but suitable for Ossetian conditions'.⁵⁷ During all of this, the party's organizers enjoyed the full support of Kirov, a Bolshevik uncommonly well acquainted with local political realities.

In December, a newly formed Ossetian national council led by the still-Menshevik-affiliated Simon Takoev also announced its opposition to formal recognition of the TerDag. On 30 December, meanwhile, the TerDag had ordered officers of the Ossetian cavalry regiment to disband the Vladikavkaz soviet; Kirov himself escaped capture only by his coincidentally not having attended that day's session. The other members of the soviet, however, though imprisoned, were liberated shortly thereafter by armed bands of Kermenists and quickly went underground.⁵⁸ Chechen and Ingush raids against Cossack and Russian settlements, meanwhile, followed by retaliatory Cossack raids on mountaineer villages, continued to undermine the efforts of the TerDag to reconcile local ethnic tensions. Polovtsev again noted caustically regarding the general situation that:

Usually, on a Sunday, the inhabitants of one of the Cossack villages, after having freely taken of their reserves of vodka, would pull out an artillery gun

and, just for fun, send a few shells into the neighbouring Ingush villages, so as to give some practice to the gunners. After that they went peacefully to bed. On Monday, the enraged Ingush would mobilize their forces and counter-attack...On Tuesday, the battle would rage along the whole front. [...] On Friday, peace would be declared...and on Sunday the whole thing would start again.⁵⁹

In the second half of December a fully fledged civil war finally engulfed much of the wider Terek region, sparked by two critical events: the death on 27 December (OS) of Sheikh Deni Arsanov, head of the Chechen National Council, and the murder of five Ingush in Vladikavkaz itself just a few days later.⁶⁰ Ataman Karaulov, the TerDag's finance minister and the Provisional Government's most prominent local representative amongst the Terek Cossacks, had by this time himself also become a victim of rapidly unfolding events. Two weeks prior to Deni Arsanov's murder, Karaulov had been forced to resign as *Ataman* of the Terek Host because of Cossack discontent towards his policy of cooperation with the Union of Mountaineers, and whilst en route back from Vladikavkaz to Piatigorsk, on 13/26 December 1917, on a stopover at Prokhladnyi train station, he and his brother were murdered whilst resisting arrest at the hands of a rogue military unit; their train carriage was riddled with bullets.⁶¹ The military units upon which the TerDag were in the meantime relying for support to retain calm, particularly the troops of the North Caucasus Wild Division, soon also proved in practice to be completely unreliable. Polovtsev had stationed the units of his native cavalry corps upon the soil of the various national territories from which they were originally formed, but noted that towards the end of 1917 'the first symptoms of disorganization appeared amongst them', the causes of which he ascribed both to lack of pay and to Bolshevik propaganda. Allied representatives from Tbilisi had earlier met with Polovtsev, men whom he later described as individuals interested in preserving order and stability in the Caucasus since by then 'petrol alone [was] an important item even apart from politics'. However, he later bitterly recollected that their promised financial support was subsequently unforthcoming. The Kabard regiment of the Wild Division subsequently disbanded itself upon the resolution of an internal committee, and the final collapse came in January 1918 during intensified attacks on Vladikavkaz.

In January 1918 Takoev led a band of 500 Ossetians in a march on Vladikavkaz, the TerDag's nominal capital, demanding that the TerDag resign and hand over power to the various regional national councils; the arrest and imprisonment of the Vladikavkaz soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies in December had created a decisive split between the TerDag and the Ossetian National Council. Within Vladikavkaz itself, meanwhile, absolute anarchy reigned. The opening of the local prison, and the release of at least 200 murderers, thieves and other local criminals onto the streets in the first few days of January, led to widespread looting and destruction.⁶² This coincided with an Ingush campaign of concerted attacks on the city outskirts that began on 31 December 1917. Polovtsev, in Kislovodsk at the time, learnt that the Wild Division native units in his absence had disbanded into the

hills, his local staff had been dispersed or killed, and that, as he later put it, nothing now remained to be done beyond ‘saving my own skin’ through flight into exile abroad. After several adventures, with British assistance he ultimately found refuge on his own private farm in far-away Kenya.⁶³

Both Grozny and Vladikavkaz now became centres of conflict in this whirlwind of violence. Grozny itself, as a result of Sheikh Deni Arsanov’s death on 27 December/9 January, came fully under siege from Chechen bands organized by the Chechen National Council, with the railway on both sides of the town effectively destroyed, and the oil fields already ablaze from November 1917 onwards; they would now burn uninterruptedly for a further seventeen months.⁶⁴ Cossack–Chechen tensions in Chechnia had rapidly mounted across the whole of 1917, and with Arsanov’s death the last man capable of maintaining calm had been eliminated. The Grozny soviet elected a military-revolutionary soviet with a Cossack as its chairman and a Bolshevik as its secretary, and this new group then divided the town into 14 sections, each under a commissar. An armoured train and two armoured cars were enlisted in the town’s defence, and a number of prominent businessmen within the local oil industry were summarily interned for refusing to contribute 1 million roubles to support these organizational measures. Their release was eventually obtained for the sum of 250,000 roubles.⁶⁵ For their part, Chechen bands besieged and eventually forced the capitulation of the nearby military garrison at Vedeno, acquiring in the process 19 field guns and a large quantity of shells, rifles and other small arms. As late as April 1918, as a result of these developments on both sides, Sergei Kirov noted that Grozny still remained a ‘besieged camp’, the whole male population of the town having been mobilized in its defence, and with the town outskirts now entwined by an interlocking network of trenches and electrified barbed wire.⁶⁶

Local chaos was compounded by the fact that the Terek Cossack Host had by early 1918 also fractured completely, as returning troops from the front line condemned the official policy line of the Host in repressing local soviets; Karaulov’s dismissal and subsequent death in early December were amongst the first symptoms of this backlash. This internal tumult ultimately led the Host to first split with and then, on 20–21 January 1918, completely withdraw its representatives from the TerDag. Karaulov’s successor as *Ataman* of the host, Medianik, was himself captured and killed by a roving Ingush band whilst travelling from Vladikavkaz to Tbilisi just a few days after this decision was made.⁶⁷ Growing chaos caused by the Ingush and Ossetian attacks in January meanwhile led to a mass exodus from Vladikavkaz, which threw together in the process a diverse collection of local socialist groups – Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, SRs and Kermenists – who later bonded to form a coalition government that would ultimately return to seize power in Vladikavkaz itself.

These events cast a shadow over the whole subsequent history of the TerDag and its representatives, who themselves retained a bare foothold in Vladikavkaz until March 1918 thanks only to the stabilization measures undertaken there by a certain Colonel Belikov, the former commander of the local military garrison. Faced with spiralling anarchy, Belikov was able to round up a sufficient number

of demobilized and unemployed officers and students to create an urban militia that was then able to police the streets and restore calm to the town centre.⁶⁸ In March 1918 a delegation of the now much-weakened TerDag participated in new negotiations between the Ottoman government and Trans-Caucasian Commissariat, arguing against all the odds that the Caucasus still had to be unified into a single whole, on the basis of 'geographical, economic, strategic and political considerations'.⁶⁹ Even as they made this argument, however, the domestic base of the TerDag itself was already finally slipping from their grasp. Vladikavkaz had already been effectively surrendered without a fight on 18 March, when the Piatigorsk congress (about which more details will be given below), in the wake of negotiations with Colonel Belikov, simply arrived by train and moved bloodlessly into collective residence of the former local cadet corps building. In early May a new Bolshevik advance drove the remnants of the TerDag from Temir-Khan-Shura in Dagestan, and, after travelling more like refugees than prominent politicians through Georgia, TerDag representatives paused and finally gathered themselves once more in the port of Batum, the latter by now under full Ottoman control.

In Batum on 11 May 1918, having thus temporarily re-established themselves under Ottoman patronage, the former TerDag representatives announced the creation of an independent North Caucasian Republic under a 'Mountaineer Government', headed by Tapa Chermoev and Prince Nukh-Bek Tarkovskii, with Gaidar Bammatorov serving as foreign minister. Having declared independence, they also continued to press for the creation of a Caucasian confederation, and pursued contacts with the newly independent states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan with this same goal in mind. However, the territory to which these men were by now imaginatively laying claim was in reality by this stage largely governed by the Bolsheviks, an uncomfortable political fact which did not prevent this fantasy state subsequently enjoying a considerable psychological allure amongst the interwar Caucasian diaspora. More reflective of reality at the time, however, was the fact that a note sent by Bammatorov to the Soviet Foreign Ministry via the German ambassador, Mirbach, declaring the creation and independence of this Mountaineer Republic, was treated with exactly the level of contempt from the Soviet side that it undoubtedly deserved.⁷⁰ The Ottoman government nonetheless signed a treaty of friendship with this exile government on 8 June 1918, and thereafter Ottoman assistance would become critical to all their subsequent efforts to regain power up until the end of 1918. On 12 August 1918 an Ottoman Circassian diaspora representative, Major-General Yusuf Izzet Pasha, was appointed overall commander of forces in the North Caucasus, as well as the main Ottoman political and military attaché to the Mountaineer Government.⁷¹

Bolshevik power throughout the Caucasus in 1918 meanwhile suffered wildly fluctuating fortunes. In March, as we have seen, a broadly pro-Bolshevik regime representing the 'Terek People's Republic' peacefully reoccupied Vladikavkaz, having been guided to this point by the highly flexible and adept policy of Sergei Kirov. The tone of the Mozdok congress held on 25–31 January 1918 which first facilitated the emergence of this new coalition government was reflected in Kirov's own speech of 29 January, wherein he advocated to the 400 delegates present the

observance of strict tolerance and a plurality of political opinion – ‘we are all making mutual necessary retreats in order to overcome the general danger’.⁷² Amongst the other participants at this first congress were Simon Takoev, N. F. Gikalo, and the Menshevik-Islamist Akhmed Tsalikov. Kirov, however, was the undoubted political star at this gathering, given that it had been originally convened by the Mozdok military-revolutionary soviet with a view to both replacing the now discredited Terek Cossack *Krug*, and garnering sufficient support to allow the virtually unhindered prosecution of a war of annihilation against the Chechens and Ingush. Members of the Terek Cossack Host heavily dominated the first congress, with 191 Cossack and *inogorodnie* representatives compared with 35 deputies from Ossetia, 53 from Kabarda and Balkaria, 15 from Russian and *inogorodnie* settlements in Khasaviurt district, and 54 delegates from the various soviets of workers and soldiers’ deputies, town soviets and other political groupings.⁷³ Kirov, however, managed, purely by his command of political rhetoric, to talk the congress down from undertaking a military expedition against the Chechens and Ingush: the final ballot taken on the subject recorded 168 delegates voting for peace versus 132 for war (a still relatively narrow majority).⁷⁴ The first congress subsequently agreed in its conclusions to invite the so-far excluded Chechens and Ingush to peace talks, with the aim of finally ending what one of the delegates termed the ‘national-tribal war’ that wracked the region. At the first congress it was also decided to subsequently allow the election of one representative per 35,000 local inhabitants to a new ‘People’s Council’, resulting in ten Chechen representatives, two Ingush, six Ossetians, five Kabards, a Balkar, eight Cossacks, ten *inogorodnie* and one Kumyk.⁷⁵ Chechen and Ingush delegates eventually then attended the second congress held on 16 February–15 March 1918 in Piatigorsk, which in turn then elected a *sovnarkom* (council of people’s commissars) of the Terek republic and also voted to recognize and join Lenin’s RSFSR.

The conditions for this political compromise nonetheless undoubtedly remained entrenched in local ethnic conflict, as Sergo Ordzhonikidze himself recalled just one year later:

This recognition by both sides of Soviet power occurred purely for diplomatic reasons. The Cossacks, recognizing Soviet power, hoped to gain arms from the Soviet authorities and thrash the mountaineers.

The mountaineers, afraid of being labelled counter-revolutionaries, and hoping somehow to save themselves from Cossack attacks, also declared themselves allies of Soviet power...this was not Soviet power as we understand it – this was the power of neutrality.

Neither Cossacks nor mountaineers occupied responsible posts in this government.⁷⁶

The ‘middle ground’ that might provide political stability in such a scenario lay with the Ossetians and the local *inogorodnie*, who dominated the posts of ‘people’s commissars’ in the subsequent elections; the only Cossack to be elected

occupied the post of Cossack affairs, whilst the sole Ingush representative, Gapur Akhriev, headed a commissariat for mountaineer affairs.⁷⁷ The Terek district now became a nominal Soviet republic, with Ordzhonikidze by the beginning of July serving as Lenin's 'extraordinary commissar' in the region, and real power locally now divided between three bodies – the Terek People's Congress, with one deputy per every 3,000 members of the local population; the 'People's Council', with one representative per 25,000 voters; and the 'Council of People's Commissars' (SNK), a body hand-picked by the People's Council, and headed by the Georgian Bolshevik Samuil Grigorevich Buachidze. The coalition nature of the enterprise was reflected in the fact that, of the fourteen commissars in the SNK of the Terek People's Republic, only three – Buachidze, Markus and Figatner – were Bolsheviks, the remainder being Mensheviks or SRs.⁷⁸ In practice, however, the change at the local level was rather less dramatic, since the 'national councils' that had sprung into existence under the Provisional Government, and which had proven so insubordinate towards the TerDag, often merely reappeared as local 'People's Councils', with their personnel virtually unaltered. Internal tensions within the government were also rife from the very outset, with the chairmanship of the People's Council rotating between SRs and Mensheviks rather than the Bolsheviks – amongst them Akhmed Tsalikov, who had already managed to arouse Lenin's ire in the pre-war period. The government may therefore have been characterized by its predominantly socialist orientation, but this was hardly a diehard formula for internal harmony, particularly given the fact that barely a year earlier the SR Party had itself finally split into left and right-wing factions, with the left-wing group in July 1918 then abruptly abandoning a power-sharing arrangement with the Bolshevik central government in Petrograd.⁷⁹

Across the whole course of 1918 in fact, the Terek People's Republic represented an extraordinary experiment in coalition-shaped revolutionary democracy, right at the very height of a violent civil war. Sessions of the five congresses held across the course of the year reflected a wide plurality of opinion, and even prominent political speakers were often barracked by a restless and sometimes hostile audience. Here there was none of the 'rubber stamp bureaucracy' by which foreign observers traditionally later criticized Soviet rule – decisions were frequently taken on a knife-edge vote, and the congresses represented a real and vibrant, albeit unstable, form of local democratic decision making. They also represented a striking implementation of revolutionary culture in an unusual environment: on 16 February, during the second congress in Piatigorsk, events opened with an orchestra playing the old French revolutionary anthem the *Marseillaise*, but the session was then drawn to an early close by the recently appointed chairman, Simon Takoev, on the grounds that it was a Friday and that the Muslims present had to perform their prayers.⁸⁰

The second congress in Piatigorsk illustrated in full the continuing underlying tensions within the new government all too clearly, with the Cossack delegates present in particular aware that a self-declared Cossack *Krug* was by then holding a simultaneous parallel session in Vladikavkaz. The evidence that the Terek Cossack Host was hopelessly divided, particularly over the peace policy now being pursued

towards the Chechens and Ingush, and the associated but more underlying problems surrounding resolution of the local land question, was now exposed in full and aired for all to see. On 17 February a Cossack representative at the Piatigorsk congress fulminated that what was occurring in Vladikavkaz was ‘clearly not a *krug* but an individual meeting by incompetent Cossacks rather than real deputies’, citing as evidence the fact that many Cossack villages of the Mozdok *otdel* had sent no representatives there.⁸¹ The Piatigorsk congress, following two ballots on the issue, elected not to send a collective telegram to Vladikavkaz that would have invited the Cossacks there to Piatigorsk, but this outcome was then in turn met with loud shouts of protest by members of the Cossack faction within the congress.

Within the ‘socialist bloc’, splits also emerged over the correct electoral system to adopt for the new local administrative organs. Individuals within the Bolshevik faction upheld the revolutionary principle of disenfranchising ‘capitalists and landowners’ and holding public ballots, whilst the Mensheviks and right-leaning SRs by contrast supported the ‘four level’ voting arrangement – universal, direct, equal and secret elections. The Bolshevik Sakhandzheri Mamsurov proposed an amendment that would have allowed some Bolsheviks’ preference for disenfranchising certain classes of society to remain in force regarding elections to the People’s Council, but he was voted down by 155 to 92 votes, with 28 abstaining. Most striking at the time, however, was the manner in which the leaders of the Bolshevik faction within the congress themselves sought to politically distance themselves from Mamsurov’s line. Korenev, then the head of the committee on nationality affairs, and later a leading Bolshevik historian of the revolution in the region, commented with heavy sarcasm at the time regarding Mamsurov’s ‘politically illiterate’ proposals that it was impossible to discriminate against bourgeois voters prior to votes actually being cast, since in real life bourgeois class enemies did not simply walk around with their class affiliation stamped on their forehead. Nonetheless a compromise solution was eventually adopted, against Menshevik and SR resistance and abstentions, with the outcome that the ‘four-level’ electoral system would not be unilaterally imposed as a compulsory model everywhere.⁸²

As time went on, and the government settled in Vladikavkaz and became ever more formalized, such internal tensions actually increased. General Madritov, an acute observer, later identified splits amongst the Bolsheviks themselves as having played a critical role. Stating that ‘in fairness’ one had to recognize that the SNK under Buachidze’s leadership had ‘evidently sincerely desired to work in a peaceful direction’, Madritov laid the blame for much of what followed upon the Piatigorsk soviet headed by the more radical Bolshevik Andzhievskii – in June, when Andzhievskii returned from a trip to Moscow, in Madritov’s eloquent comment, ‘the shooting began’.⁸³ Bolshevik histories in the immediate post-war period tended to agree with Madritov’s account, with Andzhievskii being described as far too uncompromising, a product in part of the fact that his own political support base rested with that section of the local *inogorodnie* most openly hostile to the traditional privileges of the Terek Cossack Host.⁸⁴

The land question when addressed at the second Piatigorsk congress had already proven controversial, the heated and sometimes violent arguments produced by

the 300–400 participants present during discussions over appropriate policy development having dissuaded the first elected chairman of the committee and his three secretaries – all of them trained agronomists – from even taking up their posts.⁸⁵ At the third congress of the Terek republic's new government, held in Grozny in May, a policy of resettling the Cossack *stanitsas* of Tarskoi, Aki-Iurt and Sunzhenskoi was resolved upon, with the intent of reversing the Tsarist policy of Cossack land settlement which had earlier taken place at the expense of the mountaineers.⁸⁶ The Cossack Sunzhenskoi line was now to be broken up, with the Cossacks who lived there to be moved en masse to Piatigorsk and their former land – over 35,000 *desiatins* – handed over to the Chechens and Ingush. Bolshevik land policy was dedicated to reversing the Tsarist legacies of the region, obliterating the physical imprint of Tsarism by implementing an equally severe policy of territorial ethnic cleansing against the Cossacks. The forced migration of some 10,000 members of the indigenous local Cossack population to distant Piatigorsk caused by these measures was conducted under difficult conditions, and accompanied by widespread starvation and illness.⁸⁷ On 23 June, in response to this deeply unpopular land policy, practically the whole Terek Cossack Host, led by the Menshevik Ossetian activist G. Bicherakhov, the Cossack Andrei Shkuro, and General E. Mistulov, went into open revolt, creating a violent split within the existing revolutionary government in the process.

Buachidze himself had been killed three days earlier in Vladikavkaz by shots fired from a crowd of mutinous Cossacks. The insurgency that followed was notable by the fact that all its participants explicitly linked their cause to the defence of what they interpreted as the 'revolution'. Far from being openly counter-revolutionary or pro-monarchist, as factions within the Denikin-led White movement further to the north-west were, the Cossack insurgents in the Terek People's Republic during the summer of 1918 in fact accused the *Bolsheviks* of having betrayed the promise of the March 1917 revolution, whilst stressing their own readiness to embrace the organizational tools and nomenclature of revolutionary government via their creation of a 'Terek Cossack–Peasant Council'.

The Cossack revolt quickly established Mozdok as its main territorial base, that being the site to which the Cossack faction of the People's Council in Vladikavkaz had moved. The rebellion was hindered from the very outset by military disorganization and strategic dissent. Contact with Denikin's Volunteer Army to the north-west, a potentially valuable source of military assistance, was established only in September by aeroplane; the Menshevik leader of the revolt, Georgii Bicherakhov, regarded Denikin with suspicion, and remarked to one of his military commanders, General Madritov, that '[i]t is unknown what the Volunteer Army will bring us; maybe we Terek folk will have to fight them'.⁸⁸ The rebellion's military commanders desired to institute a full-scale mobilization under military discipline, but their political counterparts insisted on volunteer units and the election of commanders, a throwback to the heady 1917 days of 'revolutionary democracy' within the armed forces. There was also a more general and damaging split between the Cossacks and professional military officers of the old Tsarist army such as Madritov, who accused the Cossacks of having an inbuilt prejudice towards non-Cossack

officers that resulted in their hoarding official appointments and engaging in extensive nepotism. This, in Madritov's caustic account, led to a situation where:

At a time when on the military staffs [of the insurgency] sat almost wholly illiterate people, in the *stanitsas* there lived General Staff officers without any kind of work who, when they presented their services without consideration of rank or appointment, were sharply turned down.⁸⁹

Whilst the military command urged linking up with Denikin around Prokhladnyi train station to the west, Georgii Bicherakhov and his supporters were by contrast orientated wholly eastward, towards Georgii's brother Lazar (see below) in Port Petrovsk, from where the revolt had already received 2 million roubles in financial assistance, alongside military supplies. However, Kizliar, a critical transport hub held by around 750–800 pro-Bolshevik troops, formed a geographical 'cork' blocking Bicherakhov's forces from meeting up fully with those of his brother. Though besieged from August 1918 onwards, the town never fell, and the arrival of Bolshevik relief forces from Astrakhan in mid-September, in the form of guns, cavalry, ammunition, armoured cars and units of the famously stoic Latvian riflemen, marked a critical turning-point in the overall fortunes of the Cossack revolt.⁹⁰ Even here, however, Madritov saw evidence of the Cossacks' own weaknesses rather than overwhelming Bolshevik strength. Around Kizliar, in his own account, endemic drunkenness reigned amongst the besieging troops, wine being omnipresent in the trenches, and fraternization frequently occurred between the two supposedly warring sides. When Bolshevik reinforcements eventually arrived in September, the town was already effectively 'de-blockaded', the Cossacks having dispersed back to their native *stanitsas*.⁹¹ Attempts at other critical points to form a junction between Lazar and Georgii Bicherakhov's forces were furthermore foiled by relatively small bands of pro-Bolshevik Chechens. When, on 8 September, Lazar occupied the town of Khasaviurt, only a destroyed railway bridge separated his forces from those of his brother; however, the repairs to this bridge that Georgii Bicherakhov's men effected by day were then undone by Chechen night-time raids, and the Chechens' placement of just two artillery guns on the dominating heights east of Gudermes then created just sufficient additional harassment to again prevent military unification being achieved.⁹² The injunction against introducing formal mobilization, meanwhile, combined with the decision to observe only the 'discipline of conscience', resulted in individual Cossack military units in general manning the front lines for only one or two weeks at a time, whilst the revolt as a whole consequently never mustered more than around 12,000 men and 40 guns in the field. Under such conditions, General Denikin later observed, what was truly remarkable was that such a rebellion, surrounded by enemies, actually lasted five months.⁹³

Despite such glaring weaknesses amongst their opponents, the revolt in fact created great difficulties in the military sense for the pro-Bolshevik rulers of the Terek People's Republic right from the very beginning. The army that the Vladikavkaz soviet had briefly endeavoured to set up in April 1918 relied for

professional leaders on unemployed and often starving Tsarist officers. Generals Ruzskii and Radko-Dimitriev, two of the more talented officers of the old Tsarist army, had refused to lead this Terek army, and were eventually executed as a consequence, which led to the responsibility for commanding these new formations falling upon General Madritov, who accepted the new post of commander-in-chief of all forces in the Terek *oblast'* at the beginning of June 1918. Madritov sympathized with the White cause, however, and his subsequent defection to the side of the Cossack–peasant council during the ‘August Days’ fighting in and around Vladikavkaz then rendered stillborn regional Bolshevik efforts to enlist military specialists for the creation of better trained and led local military forces.⁹⁴

The first major battle around Prokhladnyi also ended in both the tactical defeat of Soviet forces, and the wider strategic reversal that, as a consequence, for four months they were then cut off from the Bolshevik 11th Army operating around Astrakhan. Ordzhonikidze tried to reopen talks and divide the ordinary Cossacks from their officer corps, but without success. August saw a key battle being fought for Vladikavkaz, the capital of the Terek People’s Republic itself, right in the midst of the fourth Soviet congress being held there. On 6 August 1918, at five in the morning, an eighty-man Cossack–Ossetian formation under the command of Colonel Sokolov attacked and virtually seized control of the town centre. On their own side, the Soviet defenders when the attack began could only muster the 1st Regiment of the Vladikavkaz soviet, ethnic Chinese soldiers from the Chinese Revolutionary Detachment, some armed Ossetian members of Kermen, and fighters of a workers’ self-defence unit from the suburbs of Kursk and Molokan. Pro-Soviet forces were consequently reduced to clinging onto these two outer suburbs and shelling their opponents in the town itself from an armoured train.

Matters became truly critical on the fourth day, when a shell from the armoured train accidentally destroyed the town’s water supply system, depriving the hapless Bolsheviks themselves of all drinking water. That night a complete retreat was seriously contemplated, and the order given for the armoured train to expend its remaining shells, which resulted in 200 artillery rounds raining down on the town in the space of a few hours. The train then retired further down the track to the small station of Beslan, where enough water was found and gathered to prolong the resistance. Bolshevik spirits were also raised by the arrival of Ingush fighting detachments to their aid – although too disorganized and ill-disciplined for urban warfare, they brought the moral reinforcement, as Ordzhonikidze later remarked, that ‘we were not alone’.⁹⁵ Eleven days after the initial attack occurred, the forces representing the Terek Cossack–Peasant Council were finally successfully driven back from the town centre.

For the Bolsheviks, the battle of Vladikavkaz was perceived to have placed the fate of the revolution in the Terek People’s Republic on a knife-edge; the ‘August Days’ of 1918 consequently formed a key part in all post-war Soviet histories of the revolution in the region. In reality, however, the battle was shaped throughout by a string of errors due to incompetence on both sides that at times verged on farce. Sokolov’s initial attack on the first day was meant to have been supported by an Ossetian detachment that, despite hearing gunfire from the town centre,

remained passively waiting on a bridge outside the town until joined by Sokolov's retreating forces at 10 a.m., the latter having in the interim lost 40 men from their original 80-strong force. Why the Ossetian detachment did not come to Sokolov's aid during the first day's critical first few hours of fighting, when surprise was still fresh, was, as Madritov later remarked, a mystery known 'only to Colonel Ivanov', the detachment's commander.⁹⁶ Madritov himself, who crossed the front lines at around this time to briefly take command of the Cossack–Ossetian forces besieging the town, was quickly appalled by the disorganization and indiscipline that he uncovered. The Cossacks' concern over the security of their own *stanitsas* as a first priority rendered them a wholly unreliable fighting force – on day six of the siege, Colonel Belikov reported to Madritov at 5 a.m. that he had 477 men gathered and ready to push into battle, but by 8 p.m. that same day he was forced to recant, stating that he had only 11 men left, the remainder having retired to their own homes.⁹⁷

The entry of the Ingush into the fight on the Bolshevik side was in this sense critical, not so much for its impact upon the fighting within Vladikavkaz itself, but because it rendered the Cossacks more nervous over the safety of their own homes and property, undermining their will to continue fighting within the town at a time when their families in the rear potentially faced increased danger. Yet even this problem could have been avoided with greater preliminary military-political organization: according to another participant, the Terek Cossack–Peasant Council had already reached an agreement with the Ingush not to attack Vladikavkaz without their participation. Sokolov's initial thrust into the town was perceived by the Ingush as a betrayal of this bargain, and the Ingush entry into the conflict on the Bolshevik side was thereafter influenced as much by traditional Ingush–Ossetian antagonism (the Ossetians during the first few days of August having looted Ingush homes and property in Vladikavkaz) as by any political considerations.⁹⁸

Madritov saw enough indiscipline and disorganization during the siege of Vladikavkaz itself to convince him not only to renounce the role of siege commander after only a few days, but also to inform Bicherakhov and the Cossack–Peasant council that he had lost all faith in their capacity to achieve ultimate victory over the Bolsheviks as a consequence. Both during the siege itself and subsequently, he reported that he was never once able to work out the lines of command or administrative responsibility between the council and the numerous military commanders leading individual detachments such as Colonel Sokolov, Colonel Fediushkin (the official commander-in-chief of the revolt, Mistulov having been temporarily incapacitated by injury), Colonel Roshchupkin, Colonel Danil'chenko or Colonel Belikov. In retrospect, he noted, the Terek Cossack revolt suffered from a fatal absence of unified command for the whole duration of its existence, a fact symbolized by the official commander-in-chief, Mistulov, who once apparently remarked to Madritov rather pathetically that 'I cannot interfere in the affairs of the Kizliar front.'⁹⁹

Groznyi itself meanwhile was now again also under siege, this time not from Chechens but by Cossack troops, with the defence of the town organized by the remarkable Bolshevik politician and partisan leader N. F. Gikalo and his Chechen accomplice Aslanbek Sheripov, even though they could muster to the defence just

1,000 bayonets, 6 field guns and 12 machine guns. Gikalo, a Georgian veteran of the Tsarist army born in Odessa, was already a dedicated Bolshevik; Sheripov, another former soldier and a member of the Chechen National Council, was a more recent convert to the cause, having attended the second People's Congress in Piatigorsk. The town itself was surrounded on three sides, with the only uncovered approach giving access to Chechnia. For nearly 100 days, between 11 August and 12 November 1918, employing home-made bullets and shells alongside improvised sniper teams, the isolated Groznyi garrison, in savage street-by-street fighting, repelled all attacks, earning Gikalo glowing testimonials in subsequent Soviet accounts of the civil war. However, the indecisive nature of the fighting, and the capacity of Groznyi to continue to resist, also depended heavily upon the fact that the town itself was never completely surrounded, and was able to maintain contact with the pro-Bolshevik Chechen revolutionary council in Goiti. As one direct participant later testified, Goiti was critical in providing both food and military supplies to Groznyi at this time, and pro-Bolshevik Russians and Chechens fought side by side in the Groznyi trenches.¹⁰⁰

Ordzhonikidze himself later recalled that the greatest general trials at this time came from the complete isolation of the Terek People's Republic from the Moscow centre, and correspondingly from any hope of resupply. Troops had to be equipped with bullets and shells bought from what would nowadays be termed 'conflict entrepreneurs' (Ordzhonikidze labelled them simply 'speculators'), with an individual bullet priced at five roubles, and shells at several hundred roubles apiece.¹⁰¹ Ordzhonikidze and a certain comrade Levandovskii, the founder and organizer of the very first formal Red Army units on the Terek, joined Gikalo in the town by the end of October, and helped organize a final counter-attack and breakout that eventually ended the siege. The arrival of an armoured train from Vladikavkaz had raised the spirits of the Groznyi garrison, whilst at the beginning of December the returning Bolshevik 11th Army finally managed to seize Mozdok, decisively breaking the back of the Cossack revolt. The Terek Cossack Host, always divided, had by now also again split politically, with a number of *stanitsas* – Kara-Bulak, Troitskaia, Assinovskaia, Neserovskaia and Mikhailovskaia – joining the Bolshevik side at a critical moment in the fighting.

With the capture of Mozdok, the Terek Cossack revolt effectively shattered completely. Georgii Bicherakhov, with around 2,000 armed followers, fled to Port Petrovsk; another detachment of around 4,000 men moved to link up with Denikin's Volunteer Army by a circuitous route through the mountains south of Piatigorsk; and many of the remainder simply dispersed to their home villages. The Ossetian General Mistulov, the last military leader of the Terek Cossack rebellion, imitated the earlier example of General Kaledin further to the north in responding to these multiple internal discontents and reverses by committing suicide.¹⁰² However, Ordzhonikidze himself also recognized the immense costs locally of so many months of indecisive fighting:

there were no cartridges, no shells, no uniforms and no medical supplies. At the beginning of winter our poorly clothed soldiers began to become ill.

Typhus began to grow fiercely. At the end of January [1919] we already had 50,000 typhus cases. A day did not pass when in each town we did not bury two to three doctors.¹⁰³

The hollowing-out of the material and moral force of the Terek People's Republic during the course of suppressing the Cossack revolt, a process which would very shortly render it such easy prey for Denikin's forces in 1919, had by the winter of 1918–19 already fully begun.

Against the background of this ongoing violent revolt, the five congresses held across the course of 1918 in the Terek region had also witnessed an important realignment of local political actors and movements, which was destined to bear a longer term legacy. Though openly courted by the Bolsheviks at the time, the Ossetian politician Akhmed Tsalikov stubbornly resisted co-option to the Leninist cause, remarking that:

I am not one of those people who, utilizing the moment, declare themselves a Communist – I am a socialist-internationalist...I know the mountaineer environment, which is in a truly primordial condition, and I say that those who claim that communism is possible amongst us now are either political fraudsters, or need to be sent to the lunatic asylum.¹⁰⁴

On the other hand Said Gabiev, the mountaineer best known for his pre-war lectures on Muslim history, and who had already spoken so forcefully at the first congress of the Union of Mountaineers barely a year previously, chose at the fifth Terek congress in November 1918 to now articulate his new-found alliance with Bolshevism in a manner that suggested an important intellectual accommodation had been reached:

I believe in our victory just as I believe in the Koran and sharia, for I know that neither one nor the other contradicts the ideas of communism. Bolshevism is not new to Islam, there were communists in the second era of Islam, and they were so labelled in the sharia-communists.¹⁰⁵

The Ossetian-Cossack revolt and its subsequent repression therefore radicalized actors on all sides. In December, Kirov officially introduced legislation to fully introduce Soviet power in the region. By 9 January 1919 the constitution adopted by the Terek People's Republic at Piatigorsk the previous year had been abandoned, in favour of the constitution already in force within the RSFSR. 'People's councils' were now to be formally replaced by revolutionary committees, *ispolkoms*, and councils of peasants' deputies, in a process hailed in the local press as marking the final transition from the era and legacy of the Provisional Government (*kerenshchina*) to the new Communist order.¹⁰⁶

Chaotic events in the Terek region also interacted quickly with events in neighbouring Dagestan. In January 1918, when Vladikavkaz first descended into chaos, the Dagestan *ispolkom* had itself held a congress in Temir-Khan-Shura intended to address looming local administrative disorder. The congress began by calling

upon local Muslim clergy to rally behind it and help formulate law in the state, since the commissars of the Dagestan *ispolkom* were suffering an increasing credibility crisis in the countryside. However, on 10 January the congress had also witnessed an intimidating display of force by Gotsinskii and Uzun Khadzhi, who elected to attend accompanied by 6,000 followers wearing red and green turbans, bearing banners inscribed with Islamic prayers in Arabic script, and armed with revolvers, sabres, rifles, and *kinzhals*.

Gotsinskii upon entering the town was again proclaimed *Imam*, but strove to moderate the situation, continuing to advocate friendly relations between mountaineers and Russians, and using his own troops to post a guard around Russian Orthodox churches in order to preserve them from harm.¹⁰⁷ However, members of the local 'socialist group', who had themselves earlier formed and armed around 300 of their supporters in response to the advance of Gotsinskii's forces, felt extremely threatened. Makhach Dakhadaev organized a guard of 100 men around the local *kinzhal* factory that he owned, and Dakhadaev's own house came to be defended by personal bodyguards who sat on the rooftop, holding hand-grenades, for the whole duration of Gotsinskii's stay in the town.¹⁰⁸ In the end, the crisis was defused by the intervention of M. K. Dibirov and other members of the increasingly weak local *ispolkom*, who successfully interceded with Gotsinskii to again accept the title and role of *mufi* rather than that of full *Imam*. Such a compromise, however, also led to a breakdown of relations between Gotsinskii and a furious Uzun Khadzhi, who, inflamed by such indecisiveness, led his own supporters away, thereby leaving Gotsinskii in Temir-Khan-Shura with only his own personal bodyguard.

Takho-Godi later recognized that only a miracle had prevented an open clash occurring in January between Gotsinskii's followers and the members of the socialist group in Temir-Khan-Shura. Both sides at the time had recognized the authority of the local *ispolkom* as an arbitrator 'only temporarily and nominally, insofar as they had not yet abandoned old illusions and the very idea of arbitration'.¹⁰⁹ However, before long, events in both the neighbouring Terek republic and within Dagestan itself again raised local political tensions to the point of open conflict. In particular, the presence by February 1918 of a Bolshevik-dominated Muslim national committee in Port Petrovsk, which announced the nationalization of private industry in Dagestan, soon served as a serious new provocation for Gotsinskii and his followers.

Just as in the neighbouring Terek region, a radical political programme followed on too rapidly from the initial Bolshevik seizure of power. In Port Petrovsk the local soviet, which had been in office since December 1917 under the chairmanship of Ullubi Buinakskii, now instituted an eight-hour-long working day, the expropriation of the rich, and a special punishment tax for 'class enemies' accused of sabotaging the local Soviet system, with the alternative to payment of the tax being arrest and imprisonment. Newly formed armed bands – a 'Red Guard' and 'International Regiment', the latter mostly comprising recently released German and Austrian prisoners of war – served as the praetorian defenders of this new government. Parallel to these developments, meanwhile, the local socialist group within the Dagestan *ispolkom*, in the wake of the departure of Gotsinskii's forces

from Temir-Khan-Shura, had also supported and backed the nomination as head of the Dagestani clergy of Sheikh Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii (1847–1930), a deeply religious man sympathetic to socialism, whose election also served as a clear snub to Gotsinskii.

Further splits emerged when Korkmasov and Makhach Dadaev were additionally able to enlist Ali Kaiaev to write a proclamation condemning Gotsinskii's appropriation of the title of *Imam* as both historically unjustified and legally spurious.¹¹⁰ Such divisions and provocations alienated other actors within the still weak and chaotic local political system, including non-socialist members of the now nearly defunct *ispolkom*, and the still active and well-mobilized members of Gotsinskii's *millikomitet*. Tsarist-era Muslim officers in the region, led by Nukh-Bek Tarkovskii, had by now also managed to assemble a small but reliable contingent of forces, comprising two battalions of infantry and the men of Tarkovskii's own 1st Dagestan Cavalry Regiment. These were reinforced by local militias, Turkish prisoners of war, two mountain guns (1909 vintage) and two batteries of 1895 field guns, alongside the 300–400 armed followers of former Tsarist officer Kaitmas Alikhanov, who had remarkably managed to preserve the Tsarist-era fortress of Khunza and its accompanying military stockpiles intact. This grouping lent the weakening forces of the *ispolkom* a military spearhead with which to attack the perceived growing Bolshevik menace.¹¹¹

In February a coalition of Gotsinskii's forces and *ispolkom* followers successfully occupied Temir-Khan-Shura once more, and on 25 March 1918 moved on to attack Port Petrovsk itself, bringing about a battle that ultimately killed 1,200 people.¹¹² This marked the opening of the civil war proper in Dagestan, although negotiations, shifting coalitions of convenience, and political compromises would also continue to play a surprisingly significant role in the fighting that followed right down to the end of 1919. Port Petrovsk fell to the Dagestan Cavalry Regiment and *millikomitet* militia in short order, with Buinakskii and many others either fleeing by ship for Astrakhan to the north, or dispersing to find refuge in Baku and Prokhladnyi. The *ispolkom* had justified this action in a declaration on 10 March to the 2nd Dagestan Cavalry Regiment, ordering them into action to 'restore legal order' in Port Petrovsk and in the process overthrow a group who had 'delivered a great insult to the national dignity of the Dagestani people'.¹¹³ The language of legitimacy and statehood was already, even at this early stage in the civil war, a powerful ideological weapon. In April, however, in an event characteristic of the anarchy that in practice now reigned in the region, bands led by Uzun-Khadzhi and Gotsinskii followed through on their actions in Port Petrovsk by first peacefully entering, then subsequently looting and burning to the ground, the regional centre of Khasaviurt, home at the time to over 10,000 inhabitants.¹¹⁴ Takho-Godi would for his own part meanwhile later bemoan the fact that the *ispolkom* was in practice declaring war against Soviet power at a time when Soviet governments already encompassed Dagestan from three sides, holding power in Baku, Astrakhan and Vladikavkaz.

The position of the 'socialist group' within the *ispolkom* at this time was certainly a curious one. Takho-Godi would subsequently sum up his companions as

disorganized, stating that Korkmasov at the time was travelling on a minor piece of business regarding sheep theft, Khizroev was ill, Makhach was busy in the Transcaucasus, and that he himself was receiving lessons at the time in 'just how helpless an individual can be in the face of historical events'.¹¹⁵ M. K. Dibirov, however, unhelpfully later remembered things a little differently, remarking that the actions of the military-revolutionary committee in Port Petrovsk had clearly gone too far, and that their excesses had provoked objections by 'a majority' of members even within the Dagestan 'socialist group'.¹¹⁶ The arrival of Gotsinskii and *millikomitet* forces in Port Petrovsk in March in any event also coincided with the receipt of telegrams from Baku, bearing news from Khadzhi Tagiev (amongst others) that the Shaumian-led Baku soviet to the south had just initiated bloody outrages against the local Muslim population (about which more will be related below). In response, Gotsinskii sent on towards Baku military units of the Dagestani forces, amongst them a cavalry regiment commanded by Colonel Dzhaifarov, together with armed volunteers – in all, a force of around 10,000 men.¹¹⁷ Soviet-held Baku for its own part was now temporarily left dangerously isolated, since Port Petrovsk and its accompanying rail link formed a vital transit point for both food and oil for Shaumian's administration.

On 7 April 1918 a chaotic battle in northern Azerbaijan on the open approaches to Baku, between the forces dispatched south by Gotsinskii, and the advancing Red Guard and Red International regiment, ended in the rout and retreat of the Dagestani troops. Shaumian followed through on this initial success by dispatching 2,500 men of the still well-disciplined 36th Turkestan regiment, together with 500 men of the local Red Guard and a small quantity of accompanying artillery, on transport ships northwards to disembark to the north and south of Port Petrovsk and then retake the town, which at the time – 20 April – was only lightly held by two cavalry *sotnias* and some 700 rag-tag militia equipped with three artillery pieces and two machine guns.¹¹⁸ However, the town itself then became the object of a much fiercer battle when Gotsinskii's and Tarkovskii's forces attempted its recapture on 27–28 April, with the now-entrenched Red Guard troops, having meanwhile been reinforced from Astrakhan, and enjoying artillery fire support from the diesel engine gunboats *Kars* and *Ardagan* moored offshore, engaging in fierce street-to-street fighting with their attackers. Naval gunfire turned the tide, however, the four- and six-inch guns on the *Kars* and *Ardagan* outranging the more antiquated artillery available to Tarkovskii's and Gotsinskii's troops, and with the mountaineer militias scattering as shrapnel exploded overhead.¹¹⁹

With Gotsinskii's followers repulsed with heavy casualties, control over the town this time remained in Bolshevik hands, whilst Ullubi Buinaskii had by this stage also returned on the very same ships that brought Soviet military reinforcements from Astrakhan. In short order thereafter, following remarkable, almost surreal negotiations, the Dagestan *ispolkom* itself then came out in favour of the Soviets. The 1st Dagestan Cavalry Regiment crossed sides to join the Red Guards, and finally Dakhadaev, Buinaskii and Red Guard troops re-entered Temir-Khan-Shura in triumph on 1 May 1918, driving (as we have already noted) the last remnants of the TerDag into exile in Georgia in the process. Gotsinskii's control over Port

Petrovsk had in practice therefore barely lasted three weeks. Within the first few weeks of May, yet another new organ of local power – the provisional military-revolutionary committee (VRK) – emerged, the prelude to the establishment of a full Dagestan soviet in June 1918.

The VRK itself represented a coalition of Bolsheviks and non-party, formerly *ispolkom*-aligned local socialists, the latter symbolized by Dzhalalutdin Korkmasov, who became the committee's first chairman. Temir-Khan-Shura now became the first capital of Soviet Dagestan, and Makhach Dakhadaev as military commissar now also undertook preparations to organize and lead the first local branch of the Red Army, utilizing the troops of the 1st Dagestan Cavalry Regiment and reinforcements from Astrakhan to eventually raise a force of some 3,000 bayonets. The presence of a great number of undisciplined Armenian Dashnaks amongst the forces that had arrived from Baku created its own problems, however, with these contingents being accused by eyewitnesses of various outrages, including the shooting of entirely innocent peasants, looting and robbery.¹²⁰ The power of the Temir-Khan-Shura soviet also remained confined to the Dargin, Temir-Khan-Shura and Kazikum districts, whilst Gotsinskii and his supporters remained dominant in the highlands. In the *aul* of Gunib towards the end of May, Gotsinskii, having regained Uzun Khadzhi's patronage, again rallied his supporters, and was finally and definitively proclaimed head of a Muslim Mountaineer *Imamate*, the role he had been cultivating ever since mid-1917.

The congress that proclaimed Gotsinskii *Imam* now also issued a proclamation calling upon all mountaineers between the ages of seventeen and fifty-five to serve as foot soldiers in a new Muslim sharia army. Sharia courts were also set up in numerous villages and towns as an alternative power base to that of the godless infidel government now residing on the plains of Temir-Khan-Shura, and Tsarist-era Muslim officers were co-opted on a broad scale. Before long, distinct fronts for this growing army of God had emerged – around Kizliar lay forces led by General Khalilov, another former Tsarist Muslim officer; around Gimri, troops led by Colonel Dzhaifarov; and around Arkassi, armed units led by Colonels Nukh-Bek Tarkovskii, Alikhanov and Aratskhanov. Battle recommenced on 11 June around the *stanitsa* of Char-iurt, just 80 versts from Port Petrovsk and 50 versts from Temir-Khan-Shura, where Gotsinskii's forces mounted an unsuccessful attack, eventually costing them a further 400 casualties. A Red Army force then advanced against Gotsinskii and Uzun Khadzhi's base in the *aul* of Kostek on 22 June, but though post-action official reports later recorded the infliction of more casualties than they received, contemporary pro-Bolshevik eyewitnesses recorded fifty dead and many wounded, in return for enemy losses of just two Kumyks and eleven Chechens. The outcome was that the detachment was forced to retire again as night fell.¹²¹ The reasons for the inherently indecisive nature of the fighting were summed up by one eyewitness and former *millikomitet* member, M. K. Dibirov, as being related to military culture and technology as much as terrain:

Nazhmudin and Uzun Khadzhi's detachments, not being used to artillery fire, would scatter as soon as artillery shells began to fly overhead. The Bolsheviks

did not dare to get engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with the mountaineers, and shot at them with artillery and machine guns. The Russian Bolsheviks were afraid of the hand-to-hand *kinzhal* fighting of the Dagestanis. For these reasons, battles between the Bolsheviks and the mountaineers were extremely short, ending in the flight of Bolsheviks from hand-to-hand fighting, or of the mountaineers from artillery fire. Gotsinskii's and Uzun Khadzhi's detachments, if beaten in battle, would not stop in flight until they reached their own homes. Beaten at one point, they would not occupy and fight for a second point. Uzun Khadzhi and Gotsinskii would [instead] have to gather them all again.¹²²

By July 1918, therefore, despite some sixteen battles having occurred since March, costing the lives of at least 1,600 fighters on both sides, a temporary, inherently unstable, military-political equilibrium again reigned in Dagestan, demarcated almost exactly along the foothill boundaries between the mountains and the plains. Events further to the south, however, would soon tip this precarious balance once more, precipitating yet further violent local unrest.¹²³

Events in the south in 1917–18: twin foreign interventions

Whilst in the Terek and Dagestan districts during 1917–18 the members of the multifaceted regional tools of the Provisional Government strove to assert their authority, the Tsarist army that had itself fought for four long years against the armies of the Ottoman Empire to the south-west was also rapidly disintegrating. Amongst the troops of the Caucasus army there had sprung up, as elsewhere in Russia, soviets – groups centred on political agitators (commissars) who claimed to represent the weary troops' interests, and who under the Provisional Government's infamous 'Order Number One' sought to override the officer class and regulate all future military activity. In practice their influence reduced the army to an armed mob incapable of organized military operations. In June 1917 General Iudenich, the skilful commander of the Caucasus army for so much of the war, resigned, to be replaced by General M. A. Przheval'skii.¹²⁴

Meanwhile for its part the Ottoman army, which was not itself forced to surrender until nearly a year later (in November 1918), would shortly undertake a dramatic campaign to exploit this sudden weakness in the Russian armed forces by attempting to carve out a vast new eastern empire in both the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. Conscious that the conclusion of hostilities would now inevitably entail vast territorial losses in both Mesopotamia and Palestine, the Ottoman triumvirate of Enver, Dzhemal and Talat Pasha would before very long resolve to seek, in the closing months of the war, rich territorial compensation in the east. However, during the autumn and winter of 1917 this turn of events still lay just over the political horizon, and in the meantime a precarious local ceasefire remained in effect. The Tbilisi-based OZAKOM brought to power by the February revolution, later labelled by one scholar as a kind of 'collective Viceroy, only much weaker and without the prestige which the representatives of the Tsars

had enjoyed', found itself in conflict with a wide range of alternative regional power bases, not just in Dagestan, Azerbaijan and the Terek region, but in Georgia itself, notably from the Tbilisi soviet of workers' deputies, a body dominated by the Georgian Mensheviks.¹²⁵ Led by Noi Zhordaniia, the Mensheviks pressed for the negotiation of a formal ceasefire with the Ottoman government, a line opposed to the Kerenskii government's official policy of continuing the war on all fronts. Locally, however, calls for a ceasefire were also fiercely resisted by the Armenians, who rightly feared the vengeance that Ottoman forces might wreak upon the Armenian population were the Caucasus army to retire entirely from its present front lines so deep within Ottoman territory. A *Dashnaksutsian*-initiated Armenian national congress held in Tbilisi in October 1917 called for the Caucasus front to be militarily strengthened, alongside measures to secularize Armenian primary schools, nationalize the secondary school system, and create a permanent Armenian national council.

In practical terms, however, control of the Caucasus army did not lie with the Dashnaks, *Musavat* or *Hummet* – none of these enjoyed strong representation within the army – but was contested between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Revolutionary unrest in the rear areas also disrupted the regular movement of supplies along the Transcaucasus railway, upon which the Russian armies in the region were highly dependent. Men within the regular army were consequently by this time striving to subsist on, in some cases, half a pound of bread a day, supplemented by the meat of cats, dogs and donkeys. In such circumstances Bolshevik propaganda aimed at the Russian peasants who formed the majority of the army's rank and file found fertile soil. During most of the summer of 1917 an uncontrolled voluntary demobilization took place, and by November that year only a few hundred Russian officers remained who were willing to fight along the whole Caucasus front.¹²⁶ The large collection of arms pouring back wholly unchecked and unaccounted for from the front lines – machine guns, rifles, grenades, shells, small arms ammunition, mortars and even field artillery – became a rich source of supply for every warring faction active in the Caucasus between 1917 and 1921.

Fears within the Provisional Government of civil strife, particularly over growing Cossack–mountaineer conflict in the Terek region, led the OZAKOM in mid-1917 to mount a half-hearted campaign to disarm the population of the North Caucasus. These calls were resisted locally, however, both by the Union of Mountaineers and by the socialist group within the Dagestan *ispolkom*. The Union of Mountaineers interpreted the proposal as a measure 'directed only against Muslims', and warned darkly that 'a mountaineer and his weapon form a natural inseparable whole. The right to freely bear arms for a mountaineer is an essential external symbol of the freedom he has gained.' The union's central committee in this instance appeared wholly oblivious to the glaring contradiction between toleration of the ever-growing and wholly unregulated number of arms in circulation, and its own earlier stated commitment to preserving peace and order in the region.¹²⁷ Ironically it would be left to the one true successor of the Provisional Government, the Soviet regime, to eventually disarm the North Caucasus mountaineers forcefully. In the meantime, as we have seen, this flood of arms also facilitated the creation

of national forces, which some still hoped would serve in the trenches and thereby deter the Ottoman threat. In Azerbaijan, for example, as local *Musavat* politicians observed how rapidly the Armenians were by now arming themselves, the raising of corresponding armed Muslim detachments from amongst their own supporters became an urgent priority. In January 1918 a large crowd of Azeris halted a Russian troop train travelling along the Tbilisi–Baku rail line and demanded the handover of all military equipment on board. The refusal by the soldiers on board to comply then led to the train being stormed, and close to 1,000 people died in the fighting that followed, in what became known locally as the ‘Shamkhor massacre’, with the Azeri attackers gaining vast amounts of war material as a direct consequence.¹²⁸

In April 1917, meanwhile, following meetings with Lenin in Petrograd (Lenin’s famous ‘April Theses’), the local Georgian Bolsheviks officially broke entirely with the Mensheviks, forming their own separate organization, though in practice sporadic cooperation continued between the two sides until June. This followed a pattern seen throughout the Caucasus and indeed elsewhere, where the Bolsheviks were slower in practice to break with the Mensheviks than Lenin’s official line dictated. In the town of Nal’chik in the Terek region, for example, the local joint Bolshevik–Menshevik party organization actually survived unchanged right through to January 1918.¹²⁹ By early November, however, as the implications of the Bolshevik takeover in Petrograd became clear, the Tbilisi-based OZAKOM quickly ceased to be relevant, and came to be replaced by the newly formed Trans-Caucasian Commissariat, dominated almost wholly by Zhordaniia’s Mensheviks.

The Mensheviks believed that Russia was simply not yet ready for what Marx had termed the proletarian stage of world revolution, and consequently they regarded the Bolshevik seizure of power as a senseless flouting of the laws of history. Lenin by contrast since at least April had adhered firmly to the view that Russia could effectively ‘leapfrog’ the bourgeois stage of the revolution and become a fully functioning proletarian state. Though in many senses this was an abstract ideological debate, a gulf had emerged between the two sides over this matter that later bore practical and lethal results. The Mensheviks, alongside other factions in the Caucasus, declined to recognize the Bolshevik coup, and elected instead to calmly await the inevitable toppling of Bolshevik power that would come about through the holding of legitimate elections to the Constituent Assembly in January 1918. Though they regretted this break from central Russia, in late 1917 they harboured few separatist tendencies of their own, and blithely anticipated the day when they would be reunited with a free and democratic Russian state.

As time went on however, the Menshevik-dominated Trans-Caucasian Commissariat nonetheless set about celebrating its continued liberation from Tsarism with a naive and often clumsy enthusiasm. In Georgia itself, train station and road signs written in Russian soon came to be whitewashed over and rewritten in Georgian alone, often to the irritated incomprehension of many. Efforts were also made to raise and train an indigenous Georgian army, with only very limited results, around 10,000 men being mustered, possessing very few heavy weapons,

and with extremely low morale. In the meantime, though in 1917 and early 1918 not yet fully separatist, Georgian politicians harboured extreme, and grossly unrealistic, regionalist ambitions. Ottoman demands for the return of Kars, Ardahan and Batum, territories annexed from them by Russia in 1878, were stubbornly resisted, and eventually precipitated renewed conflict in 1918. Abkhazia too became a source of violent contention between Georgia and the Union of Mountaineers, with Georgia attempting to claim the territory of the Muslim Abkhaz for itself (a dispute destined to be reignited in the 1990s). Even following the later collapse of the Trans-Caucasian Commissariat itself, in the wake of the Ottoman offensive in February 1918, meanwhile, Georgian territorial claims to the ownership of Batum subsequently persisted. During the whole course of its short independent existence, Georgia would therefore come to be engaged in no fewer than eight military conflicts with both internal opponents and its own immediate neighbours.¹³⁰ The British journalist Charles Bechhofer, who later travelled throughout the region and witnessed Georgian policy-making at first hand in the wake of the Ottoman collapse and British occupation of 1919, subsequently remarked, with good reason, that:

the free and independent Social Democratic State of Georgia will always remain in my memory as a classic example of an imperialist ‘small nation.’ Both in territory-snatching outside and bureaucratic tyranny inside, its chauvinism was beyond all bounds...[T]he record of the Georgian government, in its two years’ existence in the Transcaucasus, has been marred by nearly every fault that a state can commit.¹³¹

Following independence in 1991, Georgian petty imperialism, corruption and regionalist ambitions would again cast a dark shadow over the Transcaucasus. However, during the earlier civil war period in Russia, the Georgians were not alone in their fantasies and ambitions. In the latter half of 1919 a similar air of overweening geopolitical delusion also came to afflict the contemporary Dashnak-dominated government of neighbouring Armenia, a government which, in the wake of the Ottoman collapse, would itself come to demand the creation of a greater Armenian state stretching from the Mediterranean to the Caspian, encompassing both Cilicia and Anatolia. Conflicts brought about by these conflicting territorial claims would dog the Transcaucasus, and result in much useless expenditure of governmental energy and effort throughout the whole of 1918–20. In addition to feuding with the Ottomans and battling internal opponents, Georgia also entered into a territorial dispute with the forces of General Denikin over the Black Sea port of Sochi, whilst the Armenian and Azeri national governments were to engage in bitter hostilities over the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh. In the case of this latter dispute, only Bolshevik intervention ultimately created a state of peace, and the internal decline of the Soviet Union after 1988 would lead to this particular territorial conflict again flaring into life some seventy years later.

This level of local intransigence over territorial matters soon bore baneful political and military consequences. In February 1918 the Ottoman government,

frustrated by continued disagreements with the Trans-Caucasian Commissariat, particularly by the latter's refusal to honour the broad territorial promises made by the Bolsheviks in the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, finally invaded the Transcaucasus, shattering a fragile armistice that had been signed the previous December. The Turkish 3rd Army of Vehip Pasha, comprising some 45,000–50,000 men with 160 guns, including several German and Austrian howitzers, had been thoroughly rested, well supplied and carefully reserved for just such an action, despite severe pressure upon the Ottoman Empire on other fronts. Consequently, it rapidly overwhelmed the scattered and poorly disciplined local forces that resisted it. The Ottoman high command for its part painted itself as a defender of Muslims of the Transcaucasus, who had come under increasing attack from the Armenian Dashnaks. Nonetheless, for the Azeri Muslim population in particular, worse was still to come.

Towards the end of March 1918 in Azerbaijan, in part because of the actions of Shaumian in the Baku soviet, a full-scale ethnic conflict erupted between the Armenian and Azeri populations. Baku itself became a battlefield, with trenches dug, barricades erected and barbed wire strung across the city streets. Bolshevik power in Baku since December 1917 had always been on a knife-edge, with the Bolsheviks themselves able to count on only 6,000 truly loyal troops.¹³² Forced to seek support from either the well-armed forces of the Muslim *Musavat* or from the 4,000 armed men of the Armenian *Dashnaktsutsian* party in order to consolidate his own local power base, Shaumian, himself an Armenian, eventually chose the latter. Lenin's extraordinary commissar in the region later openly admitted that his selecting the Dashnaks as allies 'gave the civil war [here] some of the character of a national bloodbath, but this was unavoidable. We went forward conscious of this.'¹³³ Following initial skirmishes in the streets, the Dashnaks proceeded to initiate a massacre, wildly killing *Musavat* military elements and Muslim civilians alike without mercy or discrimination in both Baku and the surrounding countryside. The massacre in Baku lasted three days and achieved a temporary local supremacy for Shaumian, allowing him to subsequently come to the aid of Buinakskii's followers and drive Gotsinskii from Port Petrovsk that same April. However, in the western Transcaucasus it also provoked further Ottoman advances, which the weak forces of the Trans-Caucasian Federation were quite unable to stop.

On 14 April 1918 Ottoman forces captured without a fight the Black Sea fort of Batum, garrisoned by 3,000 men, and – thanks to the presence of the world's first oil pipeline, which connected the port to Baku – the key to exporting the oil resources of the region. By the 25th the fortress of Kars had been evacuated amidst much confusion and looting. Emboldened by such victories, Vehip Pasha now presented a set of fresh diplomatic demands, amongst the most important of which was the free use by the Turks of all the Transcaucasus railways so long as the war against Britain continued, thereby facilitating the general advance of Ottoman troops all the way into north Persia.

The impending crisis brought about by the long-delayed but now complete collapse on the military front now also tore apart the short-lived Trans-Caucasian

Commissariat. Georgia itself attempted to mediate with German representatives to tame the German's Ottoman ally, whilst the Muslim population of the south-west Caucasus greeted the Ottomans as liberators, doing everything in its power to assist their advance via guerrilla activity in the rear lines. Azeri forces in particular, based around Giandzha and led by Ali Agha Shikhlinskii, looked to the Ottomans as welcome reinforcements to retake Baku from Shaumian's government and thereby repay the butchery of late March. Georgian politicians meanwhile informed the Germans in grovelling tones on 15 May of their readiness to incorporate Georgia in the German Reich, 'either as a Federal state ruled by a German prince, or under conditions similar to the British dominions, which would be controlled by a German Viceroy'.¹³⁴ It is in this light that one must assess Georgia's formal first declaration of 'independence', read out on 26 May 1918 by Noi Zhordaniia as a vital prelude to the hasty signing of agreements between Germany and Georgia which spared Tbilisi the humiliation of occupation by Ottoman troops. Georgia became the Kaiser's protectorate, and, by 13 June, German troops in their distinctive field-grey uniforms and steel helmets were parading through the streets of Tbilisi in order to maintain order and calm. This development created considerable tension between the Ottoman and German governments, and led to a minor military skirmish which was prevented by hasty diplomatic measures from becoming more serious.¹³⁵

The collapse of the fighting front also led to the departure of the British military mission that had been based in Tbilisi since late 1917. On 29 March this mission under Colonel Pike left for Vladikavkaz, where, shortly after resettling and taking up residence, it became the political and financial backer of the Cossack-Ossetian uprising that attempted to seize power in the Terek People's Republic in August. In the wake of that revolt's suppression, Colonel Pike was killed by a stray bullet, and the remaining members of the mission, their conspiracy incontrovertibly uncovered from intercepted correspondence with Robert Bruce Lockhart (the lynchpin of British intelligence operations in Russia at the time), were arrested by the Bolshevik authorities and subsequently imprisoned in Moscow.¹³⁶ In the wake of Georgia's fall, meanwhile, Turkish forces in general, by now regrouped into the 'Army of the East', and commanded by Enver Pasha's uncle, Halil Pasha, were daily continuing to drive forward through Armenia and towards Baku.

The luckless Armenian national forces, devoid of any meaningful external support, and being compelled by the poor military judgement of their leaders into attempting to fight a conventional conflict rather than a more promising partisan struggle, battled stubbornly, but were repeatedly outflanked and nearly routed during the subsequent Ottoman advance.¹³⁷ By 4 June the road to Baku lay in Turkish hands, and Armenia itself was left with no more than 11,000 square kilometres of free land, which was now crammed with at least 600,000 refugees.¹³⁸ The Turks refrained from occupying the Armenian capital, Erevan, electing instead to use their 'Army of Islam' – now based around Giandzha in Azerbaijan, and comprising some 6,000 Turkish regulars and 10,000–12,000 local Muslim irregulars and militiamen – to push on towards Baku. Personal command of this army was changed again, transferred this time to Nuri Pasha (1881–1949), Enver's

younger half-brother, only recently recalled from Tripolitania, and a man well known for his devotion to extreme Pan-Turanian ideals about building a new Turkish empire in the east.¹³⁹ By selecting both his uncle, Halil Pasha, and his brother, the militarily relatively junior Colonel Nuri Pasha, to successively lead this enterprise, Enver also signalled his own close personal commitment to liberating the Caucasus; indeed, this was to become the final great military-political adventure of his own remarkable career. In the summer of 1918 Gaidar Bammatov, reviewing the overall situation, would for this very reason in fact lament that Enver Pasha was the North Caucasus mountaineers' only true friend within the ruling Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (CUP).¹⁴⁰

The Ottoman lightning advance meanwhile had for some time now alarmed the British, who from their regional base in the former Ottoman vilayet of Baghdad had followed the unfolding events to the north-east with increasing dismay. The world war was now nearing a critical stage. German offensives in France during March had met with tremendous success, and not until August would it become absolutely clear that the tide in the West had turned decisively in the Allies' favour. Most in the Allied camp expected the war to continue well into 1919, and preliminary planning in Europe had already been made with this perspective in mind. The prospect of German or Ottoman acquisition of the oil supplies of Baku – not to mention the 200,000 tons of harvested raw cotton (essential in the manufacture of both high explosives and uniforms) sitting practically unguarded upon railway sidings in Central Asia – presented a potentially serious blow to wartime British strategic interests.

Furthermore, in July 1918 Captain E. D. Jarvis, a British intelligence officer freshly returned from Trans-Caspia in Russian Turkestan, had reported that in his view the local Bolsheviks were in the pay of the Central Powers, and intended to evacuate the country and leave the road to Afghanistan entirely open. This reflected a general misperception, commonplace within British intelligence at the time, that the Bolsheviks were merely German agents, rather than a powerful indigenous revolutionary phenomenon – a belief initially fostered by Allied knowledge of the role played by Germany in Lenin's return to Russia, and one later further reinforced by the infamous 'Sisson papers' forgeries. Some in British intelligence therefore became excessively alarmed by the supposed danger of fresh German or Turkish military missions to Afghanistan, which might potentially stir up trouble on British India's north-west frontier. British policy-making councils nonetheless remained divided, with Delhi rather more sceptical than London about the true scale of the political and military threat from this direction. Nonetheless, in the words of their own post-war official history, the British now considered it 'very necessary to consider the future, and particularly possible enemy action in the East in 1919'.¹⁴¹

The concept of Allied intervention in Russia was already scarcely a new one: in February–March 1918 British marines, at the invitation of Trotsky, had already landed far to the north at Arkhangelsk, heralding the onset of general Allied involvement in the Russian Civil War. Though Anglo-Soviet relations had rapidly soured since then, overall Allied intervention in Russia had equally rapidly accelerated.

France and Britain had already divided south Russia into theatres of operation as early as 26 December 1917, with Britain taking the Caucasus, and France the Ukraine, the Crimea and Bessarabia. New strategic horizons also rapidly forced the construction of new *ad hoc* policy-making institutions. During March 1918 in London there was set up the Eastern Committee, headed by Lord Curzon, a former viceroy of British India, who in January 1919 would go on to become British foreign secretary. The Eastern Committee was put in charge of all strategic matters on an arc stretching from Egypt to India, and soon became hotly exercised by the unfolding course of events in both the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Just two months prior to the Eastern Committee's own emergence, in January 1918 the British military establishment had itself engaged in a short-lived and unique administrative experiment, unifying the traditionally distinct functions of operational activities and strategic intelligence within a new department, designated MIO. This new establishment took specific responsibility for all matters regarding Russia, Romania, Siberia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Persia and Afghanistan.¹⁴² Colonel Richard Steel, an intelligence officer of extensive pre-war experience within the British Empire, who in his last pre-war posting had served as British military attaché in Tehran, himself headed the new MIO. MIO was therefore both a direct response to the Russian revolution, and the brainchild of Steel's own unorthodox approach to military affairs: in the wake of the general Russian collapse, Steel felt organized guerrilla activity and the establishment of proxy local forces offered the best means to offset the enormous negative effect of the Bolshevik revolution for British imperial interests. The effect of Steel's thinking quickly made itself apparent on the ground. From February 1918 onwards British imperial and Commonwealth troops began to steadily gather in north Persia under the command of Major-General Lionel C. Dunsterville. The formations which became known as 'Dunsterforce' were originally brought into existence with the intention of their going to Tbilisi to help organize and train the local Georgian and Armenian national forces. Dunsterville himself was a noted linguist, and his command as a whole, because of the secrecy surrounding its formation and actions, became known unofficially amongst the British in Mesopotamia as the 'Hush-Hush Force'.¹⁴³

The troops who served were specially chosen from a wide variety of theatres, and mainly comprised members of the Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African national forces, making Dunsterforce a truly imperial enterprise. Colonel Steel personally explained both the importance and the aims of the mission to Dunsterville at the Tower of London shortly before his departure for Persia. Both men were Indian Army officers, and therefore already inculcated through pre-war experience in the twin concepts of irregular warfare and small-scale expeditionary forces. Nonetheless, considerable ambiguity still existed at the time, and has existed ever since, over the true purpose of British intervention in the Transcaucasus in 1918. One scholar who has since studied these events has defended British policy at the time by arguing that British forces went to the Caucasus in the autumn of 1918 essentially as peacemakers, and that their main role was to pacify the region rather than to fight Bolshevism.¹⁴⁴ However, this

viewpoint flatly contradicts the personal near-contemporary record of at least one direct military participant in these events, who stated bluntly that Dunsterforce was designed both to ‘make common cause with Armenians, Georgians and Tartars [*sic*]’ and to ‘combat and overthrow Bolshevism’. The presence within Dunsterforce of a number of Russian officers who had fled death at the hands of the Bolsheviks also suggests that the force possessed from the very beginning an at least latent sympathy for the White cause in the Russian Civil War.¹⁴⁵ Such contradictory statements and impressions reflect not so much plain misunderstanding, however, as the very mixed motives and confused operational thinking that was predominant at the time. Amongst Dunsterforce’s other potential tasks was the repression of the Jangali bandit movement in Northern Persia, and the destruction, if they could not be defended, of the Baku oilfields. Whilst the British ambassador in Tehran, Charles Marling, in fact saw the main role of Dunsterforce as being to stabilize North Persia, the British commander-in-chief in Mesopotamia, General William Marshall, regarded the whole enterprise vis-à-vis Baku as adventurism of the worst kind, and openly questioned how a relative handful of troops were expected, if necessary, to blow up more than 2,000 oil wells, each around 500 feet deep and protected by dense layers of asbestos and ferroconcrete.¹⁴⁶ In addition to this lack of clarity from the very outset, the complete collapse of the Trans-Caucasian Commissariat, and the rapid Ottoman advance, presented Dunsterville’s picked troops with a new mission. In the apt words of one later scholar, ‘[t]he group of individuals on whom MIO was relying to generate an army was going to be the army itself. All four hundred of them.’¹⁴⁷

The British were in fact by now laying all their hopes for defending Baku upon two elements: the efforts of their own troops and technical assistance, and the support provided by the troops of Cossack Colonel Lazar Bicherakhov (1882–1952). The latter was one of the boldest and strangest adventurers of the whole civil war, a man owing permanent allegiance to no one side but who, rather like a pirate of old, made the best of his own fate within the changing and often chaotic tide of political events. An Ossetian Cossack by birth, Bicherakhov was already an old hand in the region, having served with General Baratov’s Russian Expeditionary Corps in north Persia during the world war. He was therefore one of the few men to have served as a liaison between the British forces in Mesopotamia and the Russian Caucasus army, at a time earlier in the war when the two had made sporadic attempts to coordinate their efforts against the Ottoman Empire. When General Dunsterville later advanced with his small force to Kirmanshah in north-west Persia, he was therefore grateful to be reinforced once he arrived by some 1,000 seasoned Cossacks under Bicherakhov, these being one of the few armed formations in that unsettled region that he considered to be at all reliable. In his memoirs Dunsterville labelled Bicherakhov ‘a truly heroic figure’ and a ‘fearless leader’, whilst the British high command in general certainly also rated him highly enough to have him appointed CB and awarded the DSO.¹⁴⁸

There was, however, also considerable ambiguity in the relationship between Bicherakhov and the British, over which post-conflict accounts tended to draw a discreet veil. Dunsterville privately warned his superiors at the time that ‘the only

bond that really bound him [Bicherakhov] to us now is a financial one', whilst Charles Marling openly expressed the doubt that 'Bicherakhov is [now] just trying to make money out of us.'¹⁴⁹ Donohoe, another British participant, also noted that although the Russians of the north Persian expeditionary force officially sold all kinds of military stores to the British, problems then emerged over actually laying hands upon this equipment, creating 'a deadlock that was never satisfactorily adjusted'.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, although officially praised in post-war British memoir accounts, Bicherakhov's actual actions in the Caucasus earned him a dark reputation amongst the local population, leading one prominent local member of the TerDag Mountaineer Government to simply categorize him later as 'a rioter and a renegade'.¹⁵¹

Nonetheless, before long the British military authorities were arming, equipping and paying Bicherakhov's troops, relieving their parlous economic and material condition in the wake of the general Tsarist collapse. Bicherakhov himself was soon to become one of the major tools of British policy not only around Baku, but throughout the Caucasus as a whole, not least because through his contacts with his Menshevik brother Georgii in the Terek People's Republic, the British relied on him to provide intelligence not only about events in Baku itself, but also about events in Dagestan, Port-Petrovsk and the Terek People's Republic.¹⁵²

In July–August 1918, whilst the RSFSR-aligned Terek People's Republic to the north descended into renewed anarchy, and Korkmasov and Makhach Dakhadaev strove simultaneously to establish Soviet power in Dagestan, first Bicherakhov and then Dunsterville himself came to the aid of Baku, now imminently threatened by the advance of Nuri Pasha's Army of Islam. Shaumian in late June had already assessed the geopolitical situation around Baku – with the emergence to the west of an independent German-backed Georgia, a rival Azeri government in Giandzha, Ottoman military advances and, from the south, a corresponding and growing British military interest in events – as 'in the international sense, diabolical'. Given such a complex situation however, full, as he saw it, of both danger and opportunity, he felt practically compelled to gamble on a military offensive by the newly formed Caucasus Red Army. However, Shaumian's deputy chairman of military affairs, in an addendum to one of Shaumian's own letters to Lenin on this issue, also noted that the aforementioned army was badly officered, poorly logistically supported, and overly dominated amongst its lower ranks by Armenian Dashnaks. The latter, nicknamed 'Mauserists' by local contemporaries because of the near-omnipresence amongst them of the 1896 broom-handled Mauser semiautomatic pistol, were seen as politically unreliable, given that they could switch their allegiance from the Soviet to the British cause overnight.¹⁵³

On 16–18 June the first battle between Shaumian's troops and the Army of Islam had ended in a significant reverse for the latter, but the arrival of Ottoman reinforcements then tilted the local military balance in the Ottoman favour, in a manner that Shaumian, with his exceedingly limited manpower reserves, could not match. Between 27 June and 1 July the Caucasus Red Army suffered a severe battlefield defeat, one magnified by a crippling epidemic of dysentery within its

own ranks, and it thereafter retired slowly but steadily back to the outskirts of Baku itself. In the midst of all of this Bicherakhov had initially arrived as an unlikely convert to the Soviet cause, reassuring the Baku soviet that ‘I am neither a Bolshevik nor a Menshevik. But I love my homeland, I can fight a little, and I will come to the aid of the Baku soviet to defend the town of Baku from invasion by the Turks.’ Under this curious remit, Bicherakhov’s Cossacks were temporarily incorporated into the Caucasus Red Army, and were placed at the disposal of Commissar Korganov.¹⁵⁴ Both Bicherakhov and subsequently the British soon found the local situation militarily and politically untenable, however.

On 1 August in Baku a political coup overthrew Shaumian and his fellow Bolsheviks, who were imprisoned. This occurred because the Baku commune had finally split over the issue of openly inviting British support to defend the town. Shaumian himself had earlier given several indications that he was not personally opposed to British military assistance, but he was hamstrung by strict orders from Lenin to reject just such a proposition. In place of Shaumian’s group there was now established a five-man ‘Centro-Caspian Dictatorship’ dominated by the Bolsheviks’ main local rivals, the SRs. It was they who now formally invited the British into Baku with open arms. Between 4 and 17 August, Dunsterville’s small expeditionary force of infantry, armoured cars and artillery first disembarked in Baku harbour, and then attempted to provide military support to the endangered local garrison. By 14 September, however, the local situation had become desperate, as the numerically superior Army of Islam surrounded the town and began to shell the streets, creating panic amongst the local population. Dunsterville ordered the evacuation of his troops by ship that same day, having in the interim fighting lost 180 of his own men killed, injured or missing in action, around 20 per cent of his original strength. With the departure of the British, Baku itself fell rapidly into the hands of the Army of Islam, bringing an inglorious end to this particular phase of Britain’s military adventure in the region.

The fall of Baku was controversial at the time, and indeed has been ever since, and was certainly not due to any lack of armaments. On arrival the British had been astonished to come across thousands of rounds of artillery shells lying around untended in dockside warehouses, as well as numerous field guns. With British reorganization, 86 functioning artillery pieces were eventually put into action on the front line. On evacuation the British also removed much still-unspent war material with them, in order to prevent it falling into Ottoman hands. The final tally of munitions removed during the last days before the fall of the town amounted to an astonishing 9,000 artillery shells, 9,000,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and some 600 pounds of untouched dynamite and guncotton. The British instead preferred to blame the poor defence of Baku upon the unreliability of the Armenian military forces, and political treachery within the Centro-Caspian dictatorship. Some Armenian political actors retaliated that they had been promised the assistance of thousands of British troops, not the actual force of under 1,000 officers and men that eventually arrived.¹⁵⁵ Whatever the ultimate explanation, however, the fall of Baku was a debacle, and a considerable blow to British military and political interests in the region; wider events, however, would

soon demonstrate that this reverse was destined to prove remarkably temporary and local in nature.

Bicherakhov, recognizing the military position as hopeless, had already abandoned Baku in the middle of July, leading his loyal Cossack band northward to Derbent. Already in contact with advancing Ottoman forces whose remit was to help re-establish the Mountaineer Government, he reassured their commander that he intended only to drive the Bolsheviks from Dagestan.¹⁵⁶ As he moved, Bicherakhov also took some of Baku's defenders who had also already seen the writing on the wall: his own forces had by now grown to comprise several armoured cars, two armoured trains, artillery, cavalry, and a battalion of Dashnak infantry. The Dashnaks certainly foresaw the future accurately, for when Baku finally fell to the Azeri-Turkish Army of Islam, a massacre ensued in revenge for the events of March, with several thousand Armenians murdered in the streets and surrounding area before Ottoman forces were finally able to restore a semblance of calm.

Amongst the refugees who fled the final fall of Baku in September in an armada of small ships, there also escaped both the leaders of the Centro-Caspian dictatorship and Shaumian and his fellow commissars. In one of the most controversial episodes of the whole civil war, however, Shaumian's own boat sought port again not in Bolshevik-held Astrakhan to the north, but in Krasnovodsk, placing Shaumian and the other commissars again in the hands of their political opponents. Shaumian and his colleagues were promptly arrested upon disembarkation, jailed, and then in early September shuttled by train into the middle of the Trans-Caspian desert near Ashkhabad. Once out of sight of any possible observers they were herded a few yards away into the dunes, forced to dig their own graves, and then summarily shot, their bodies being hastily buried in the shifting sands. The British high command was at best negligent regarding the fate of the Baku commissars, and at worst fully implicated. The British chief of staff in Simla had earlier warned in one telegram that Shaumian was a 'dangerous man', and the local British commander in Trans-Caspia, General Malleon, described the execution at the time as at the very least 'politically advantageous' from the British perspective.¹⁵⁷ Whatever the whole truth, a stirring Bolshevik legend was later born around the grim final fate of the 'martyred' Baku leadership.

However useful it was for future Bolshevik propaganda, the fall of the Baku soviet in early August, followed shortly thereafter by the execution of nearly the entire local leadership, also placed Soviet power in Dagestan in the second half of 1918 in an increasingly precarious position once more. With Shaumian no longer in the picture to intervene as he had in April, the nearest source of Soviet support for the revolutionary government led by Korkmasov in Temir-Khan-Shura now lay in distant Astrakhan or Tsaritsyn. The forces of the Gotsinskii-led coalition now advanced again onto the Kumyk plain, whilst further to the north-west the Kuban and Terek regions were still ablaze with unrest, keeping the Soviet authorities in Vladikavkaz and Groznyi fully occupied. During June in Mozdok, as already mentioned, the Terek Cossacks, sickened by Bolshevik land policy, had raised the banner of revolt and laid siege to Groznyi and Kizliar, led by Bicherakhov's own Menshevik brother Georgii, with whom Lazar was by now eager to join up. During

the closing months of 1918, however, the most immediate threat to Temir-Khan-Shura and Port Petrovsk came not from the north, but from Bicherakhov's own British-backed forces further south.

In August 1918 Bicherakhov came into conflict with Soviet forces around Derbent, finally taking the town on the 15th thanks to the defection of troops from the Soviet 6th Tsaritsyn Rifle Regiment into his own ranks. In nearby Port Petrovsk, meanwhile, the Soviet authorities found it increasingly difficult to maintain order amongst their own troops, owing to a shortage of both money and provisions and to growing demoralization in the ranks. Artillery and machine guns were in particularly short supply, a source of special concern given the resources at Bicherakhov's disposal – some 1,300–1,500 infantrymen, 200 cavalrymen, and 6 artillery pieces. By the end of August 1918, despite critical and rapidly accelerating events around besieged Baku to the south, Port Petrovsk was again under attack from both land and sea, as the gunboat *Kars*, positioned offshore, fired into the town in support of Bicherakhov's forces (elements of the Caspian Sea Flotilla having been dispatched to Bicherakhov's assistance by the Centro-Caspian Dictatorship, an illustration if it were still needed that there was no love lost between the Bolsheviks and SRs). The perilous situation of the town in March–April, just a few months previous, was now replayed in a situation where much of the town had already been fought over, and where defensive positions destroyed in the previous fighting still lay in ruins.

Korkmasov's new government in Temir-Khan-Shura was prevented from immediately dispatching any forces to the aid of Port Petrovsk by the pressure of fighting on the front with Gotsinskii. Only at the beginning of September could two columns led by Makhach Dakhadaev be sent to aid the beleaguered Soviet garrison, but these alone could not break through Bicherakhov's encirclement. The situation in Port Petrovsk remained desperate, with Bicherakhov's forces occupying all the commanding heights surrounding the town, whilst sea-based artillery fire from the *Kars* severed all rail communication with both Rostov and Temir-Khan-Shura. On 1 September, Bicherakhov wrote to Dakhadaev, the leader of the stalled relieving force, a curious letter, assuring the latter that he did not see him as a true Bolshevik, but merely as a victim of 'Dagestan realities', one who had found in Bolshevism a temporary ally. He consequently invited Dakhadaev to ally with him instead, in order to fight the combined 'Turco-German menace'.¹⁵⁸ In response Korkmasov himself travelled across the battle lines between the two sides, and, not for the first time in Dagestan, a curious set of negotiations ensued. On 2 September there was signed between the two warring sides what Takho-Godi subsequently labelled a 'business contract', dividing power locally, the conditions of which allowed Bicherakhov to occupy Port Petrovsk on the condition that he did not interfere in internal affairs in the rest of Dagestan. Such a policy of compromise might theoretically have worked; the earlier Bolshevik treaty of Brest-Litovsk had after all also been a pragmatic recognition of immediate military realities, intended to trade space for time on a much grander strategic scale. In practice however, within two weeks, this local 'contract' lay in ruins, because of both Bicherakhov's own perfidiousness and the reintervention on the scene of

the Ottoman-backed 'Mountaineer Government' of Chermoev, Tarkovskii, Dibirov and Bammatorov.

As agreed between Korkmasov and Bicherakhov, Port Petrovsk was transferred peacefully into Bicherakhov's hands on 3 September 1918, and became in turn a refuge for the members of the Centro-Caspian Dictatorship as Baku to the south fell into Ottoman hands. Bicherakhov in practice, however, still hoped to eventually occupy Temir-Khan-Shura, which became the object of a race between his forces and those of the Ottoman-led advance force representing the Mountaineer Government. Bicherakhov won this race, and consequently a new dynamic began to emerge in the region as news spread of Baku's fall, with Russian Bolsheviks and Armenians siding with Bicherakhov, even as the local Muslim population increasingly sided with the Ottomans. Prince Tarkovskii, arriving at the head of Ottoman-backed troops at Temir-Khan-Shura, entered into yet another set of negotiations with his fellow former officer (both having previously served in the Tsarist army), and before long yet another new deal or 'business contract' was reached. This allowed Tarkovskii as representative of the Mountaineer Government to enter Temir-Khan-Shura, provided that Ottoman troops withdrew to the south out of Dagestan within one month. Tarkovskii entered Temir-Khan-Shura shortly afterwards, and on 25 September declared himself the provisional dictator of Dagestan.¹⁵⁹

By late September 1918, Soviet power in the whole of Dagestan began rapidly dissolving under the combined blows of these twin opponents. Local Bolshevik leaders, their forces decimated by hunger and disease, elected to attempt to go underground in order to regather their strength, but were badly hurt by pre-emptive actions from Bicherakhov's side. On 22 September, whilst travelling on the road from Lower Dzhengut to Kadar, Makhach Dakhadaev was detained by Bicherakhov's troops and shot dead in cold blood. Repressing all local Communists, Bicherakhov arrested over 300 individuals in Port Petrovsk alone; in the village of Ullu-Buinak, the birthplace of Ullubi Buinaskii, 270 inhabitants were also arrested by Bicherakhov's Cossacks, and 63 of their number were shot en route to Port Petrovsk. Ullubi Buinaskii himself escaped the net and found refuge in Moscow; but Dzhalalutdin Korkmasov and other leaders were now placed under arrest and held in close confinement in Dagestan. The first era of Soviet power in Dagestan had come to an ignominious end, as shattered, starving and demoralized forces now scattered under successive enemy blows. The very fragility of Bolshevism's shallow roots in the Caucasus had been cruelly underlined.

The end of 1918, a year of enormous and lightning-fast shifts in the local military-political environment, saw Bolshevism as a whole faced with bleak prospects in the Caucasus. Soviet power in Port Petrovsk, Temir-Khan-Shura and Baku had been almost completely snuffed out, whilst open revolt in the Terek region against Soviet power in Vladikavkaz and Groznyi had been suppressed only at enormous cost. The survivors from the collapse in Baku had largely escaped by sea and, following the route taken by the Bolsheviks from Dagestan, sailed up the Caspian to find refuge in Astrakhan. Amongst those who arrived in November in Astrakhan from Baku, and who were thereby fortunate to escape Shaumian's fate,

were Nazhmutdin Samurskii, the Lesgin mountaineer who had firmly tied his own fate to that of the Bolshevik party in June 1917. Once in Astrakhan, Samurskii soon plunged himself into political work once more, working within the demoralized remnants of the Bolshevik 11th Army, the force that was later to reconquer much of the Caucasus. For the first time in his life, Samurskii now also crossed paths with the likes of Ullubi Buinakskii, the Abkhaz Efrem Eshba, and with Stalin and Sergei Kirov. Though 1918 had in many ways been a disastrous year overall for Soviet fortunes in the Caucasus, the very act of retiring and regrouping ironically brought together in close proximity for the first time a number of critical actors who were destined to be vital to the future of Soviet power in the region.

Aside from the damage caused by almost incessant military activity, the effect of being cut off from Russia also brought devastating economic results for the entire Caucasus region across this whole period. Visiting Georgia in 1919, Bechhofer found that bread locally cost as much as the staple Georgian dish, turkey, whilst butter cost more than either. Economic speculation was rife, and the occupying British troops later discovered that the local exchange rate allowed them to live, in Bechhofer's caustic expression, 'like millionaires', whilst ordinary Russians starved on a monthly wage that barely sufficed to buy them food for a week. Environmental conditions at the time were especially harsh for young children; typhus was rife, killing both young and old, Russian and British alike. In the north around Rostov and Taganrog, where the Red Army and Denikin's White army still wheeled and clashed, the war had rapidly assumed a heavily rail-reliant character. Lack of sufficient local accommodation, and the tactical nature of the war itself, led to railway coaches becoming the new homes of both soldiers and civilians, but, as Bechhofer noted, 'nobody was able to cope with the filth that resulted...every thaw turned the station-yards into sewage-fields'. Asking the opinion of one local man as to which side would eventually win this bitter civil war, he was told that it would undoubtedly be the Bolsheviks, since they possessed the warmest coats.¹⁶⁰

The general food crisis in Russia as a whole meanwhile had already driven the Bolsheviks in mid-1918 to adopt the brutal requisitioning policies of 'War Communism'. In May of that year Lenin had declared that '[t]he struggle for bread is now the struggle against the counter-revolution that has already succeeded in Finland, the Baltics and the Ukraine; it is the struggle for Soviet power, for socialism!' In Dagestan that July the Temir-Khan-Shura soviet had sent Red Army soldiers into the surrounding villages to requisition grain at bayonet point, and then ordered that food be redistributed on a preferential basis to those *auls* and villages that recognized Soviet power.¹⁶¹ By the end of the year the war against 'hostile elements' had also led the Bolsheviks to introduce their first regulations setting up labour concentration camps: in the Stavropol district before long there appeared two such camps, one of 500 political undesirables, and the other for 2,000 military prisoners. Both employed their inmates in compulsory labour battalions allocated to nearby towns and villages.¹⁶²

The increasing resort by all sides to coercion, intimidation and force was also driven at least in part by the prevailing financial chaos. When British forces

reoccupied Baku in November 1918, they found that the rate of the locally printed 'Baku Bond' to the British pound was 80 to 1; by the time they again left in August 1919, that same rate had risen precipitously to 300 to 1.¹⁶³ The *Musavat*-dominated government of Azerbaijan that emerged after November 1918 in the shadow of the British presence tottered permanently on the verge of total bankruptcy, and no single reliable currency circulated in the whole region; instead, a grotesquely diverse variety of competing notes and coinage flooded the market. Against this grim general backdrop, war and civil conflict in the Caucasus towards the beginning of 1919 then spun into its second, even darker, stage.

4 1919–20

The British and Denikin's Caucasus

Who shall firmly establish himself in the Caucasus? Who shall use the oil, or the most important roads leading into the depths of Asia – the Revolution or the Entente? That is the whole question.

(Stalin, November 1920¹)

British hegemony in the Transcaucasus

Against all the odds, the British at the end of 1918 retained a presence on the Caspian following the ignominious retreat of Dunsterforce from Baku. Dunsterville himself became a scapegoat for the setback of September and lost his command, but his contingent was renamed 'Norperforce', and rapidly regrouped around the Persian port of Enzeli. Moreover, the efforts of Royal Navy personnel from the East Indies Squadron were to ensure that the UK, despite considerable logistical obstacles, was now about to gain a true fleet-in-being upon the Caspian Sea for the first time. Under the efforts of Captain Washington and Engineer-Commander O'Dogherty, the port facilities at both Enzeli and Krasnovodsk were scoured and used to convert several recently purchased merchant ships into improvised gun-boats. Before long a small naval force under Commodore Norris, comprising the recently named *Venture*, alongside the *Allaverdi*, *Emile*, *Nobel*, *Asia*, *Bibiabat*, *Zoroaster* and *Slava*, was ready to make to sea. These ships were slow-moving, light-draught vessels which had been stripped down and had their decks retrofitted with antiquated 4.7 inch naval guns, the latter transported painstakingly by land over the tough mountain roads of north-west Persia. Compared with both the gun-boats of the Russian Caspian Sea Flotilla, and the potential menace of the Bolshevik-controlled Baltic Fleet, which could theoretically enter the Caspian via the Volga river, the British naval flotilla was a tactically weak force. Nonetheless its very existence, and the bold manner in which it was employed, kept the British contingent as a valid political presence in the region for several months to come.²

In October 1918 the First World War finally drew towards a close, and in November Major-General William Thomson, the British commander of Norperforce, ordered the Ottoman authorities to evacuate Baku. Events were initially slow to develop on the ground, however, with Nuri Pashi's troops now claiming to represent not the Sultan in Constantinople, but rather the local Azeri

government. On 5 October, meanwhile, Ottoman forces led by Izzet Pasha had finally seized Derbent, and on the 13th a ceremony was held there celebrating the recreation of the North Caucasus Mountaineer Republic. The Mountaineer Government's own renewed sense of confidence, as well as the changing balance of power in the region, became reflected at the beginning of November, when two Bolshevik representatives from the Terek People's Republic, seeking a political compromise, arrived in Tbilisi for three days of negotiations. Kotsev and Vasan-Girei Dzhabagiev, the Mountaineer Government's representatives, pointedly scorned this approach, issuing what was effectively an ultimatum demanding the complete dismantlement of Soviet institutions in the region, coupled with recognition of the whole of the North Caucasus as an independent federation.³

Bicherakhov in Port Petrovsk, meanwhile, was now besieged by Ottoman forces, relations between him and the Turkish-sponsored Mountaineer Government having rapidly deteriorated, and when five ships of the British naval flotilla sailed into Petrovsk on 6 November 1918, they found a full-scale military battle still raging between Bicherakhov's forces and Ottoman troops on the surrounding hills outlying the town, particularly around the dominating height of Tarki mountain. Ottoman forces, according to several later accounts, were being assisted in this battle by native *gortsy* forces owing allegiance to the Mountaineer Government of Tapa Chermoev, but in fact the core of the fighting forces remained Ottoman infantrymen from the lands of what were soon to become Syria, Palestine and Iraq. Izzet Pasha himself later commented that the idea of national independence simply did not exist at the time amongst the rural Dagestani population, and he personally declined to use Prince Nukh-Bek Tarkovskii's cavalry units in action, doubting their reliability.⁴

In Port Petrovsk, Bicherakhov greeted the British relieving force gruffly, already growing suspicious regarding their broader intentions in the region. When asked by British officers if their ships might fly under their own national ensign, he replied that the Caspian was a Russian sea, and that no foreign ensign had ever flown its waters. To allow such a precedent to occur would, in his eyes, fatally damage his own prestige; consequently a compromise had to be struck. Since a ceasefire with the Turks around Petrovsk proved unattainable, however, the British evacuated Bicherakhov and his men by sea that same day, with the departing ships again crowded with panic-stricken Armenians.⁵

By the morning of 8 November, word had reached the Ottoman troops that Petrovsk had been evacuated, and they marched in to secure it at dusk and provision themselves with food and other supplies left abandoned on the docks. In this, their final and perhaps strangest battle of the whole war, the Ottoman 15th Division had incurred 23 per cent casualties, with Izzet Pasha, its commander, having personally suffered both a painful injury in the foot and a bout of malaria whilst fighting alongside his men in atrocious weather conditions outside the town. The battle itself was an almost ludicrously energetic dying spurt of activity, on behalf of an empire which was itself about to enter the history books. It also marked in microcosm the last symbolic spasm of Enver Pasha's own policy vision for the Caucasus. On 3 July the Ottoman throne had been inherited by Mehmet VI (Vahdettin), with

the new Sultan already an open opponent of the governing CUP.⁶ On 8 October the CUP government in Istanbul finally collapsed, with Enver, Talat and Dzhemal Pasha about to become exiles on the run in Germany, even as Port Petrovsk fell into Ottoman hands. One direct result of this sudden armistice was that penny packets of Ottoman troops remained adrift in the Caucasus rather than immediately returning home, finding service with the local sides who continued their own private wars in quests for territory and power. Some 3,000 Ottoman military personnel and schoolteachers remained behind to enter service in the ranks of the Azeri Democratic Republic, for example.⁷ Turkish policy towards the Caucasus and Transcaucasus now also fell rapidly into a schizophrenic confusion, as the nominal rule of the Sultan in Constantinople until 1922 also came under increasing challenge from the Kemalist movement in Eastern Anatolia.

Of all the figures characteristic of this period, perhaps the strangest fate of all was to befall Nuri Pasha, who, like his elder sibling Enver Pasha, preferred a temporary alliance with Soviet power, and the life of a mercenary, to facing a potential trial for war crimes at Allied hands. Enver himself would ultimately die in Central Asia in 1922 at the hands of the Red Army, having abandoned his Bolshevik employers there for one last fateful crusade at the head of the local *basmachi* resistance movement – a futile political gesture, which nonetheless potently symbolized his lifelong devotion to a Pan-Turanian dream.⁸ Having escaped British captivity in Batum on 7 August 1919, Nuri Pasha by contrast would reunite with Enver's uncle, Halil Pasha (who had remarkably escaped Allied captivity in Constantinople on exactly the same day), with both men then returning to serve as intermediaries between the independent Republic of Azerbaijan and the Soviet government in Moscow.

The government of Azerbaijan, like that of Georgia, was fiercely anti-Denikin, and, as Bechhofer recognized, was 'working hard against Denikin behind the scenes, while, however, publicly professing neutrality in the struggle between him and the Bolsheviks'.⁹ One Turkish officer who was present later commented pointedly upon the strange political no-man's-land that most Turkish military professionals now found themselves operating in. Though officially employed by the Azeri government, and initially opposed to Bolshevism, Nuri Pasha for example still closed his eyes to the activity of a Bolshevik telegraph operator working within his own immediate area of command, conscious that openly attacking the Bolsheviks would bring no great reward in such an unstable political scenario where, given the internal political unrest affecting Turkey at the time, events 'compelled him to remain in the mountains of Dagestan'.¹⁰ This peculiar political shadow-play led Nuri Pasha to before very long then head the Bolshevik-aligned Dagestani 'Army of Liberation' which, by September 1919, claimed 15,000 followers in its ranks, and which was awarded a specially forwarded red banner from Soviet Russia for its anti-White partisan activities.¹¹ Such adventures reflected the highly complex and unsettled maze of shifting political allegiances that characterized the 1917–20 time period in the region.

Events around Port Petrovsk, meanwhile, proved to be a temporary Allied reverse, since on 16 November Norperforce sailed peacefully back into Baku, disembarking

both British troops and Bicherakhov's Cossacks. They were met ashore by representatives of the local Azeri government, a group who were understandably nervous about how to deal with such a dramatically reversed situation; Ottoman flags still flew in the streets as British troops re-entered the town. Upon his arrival, General Thomson ordered the new Azeri national flag to be pulled down, and used his first speech to sing the praises of Russia. For his own part, Bicherakhov soon set himself up in one of the finest houses in the city, the former property of a rich Armenian merchant and, in the caustic account of one British participant, rapidly created around himself a 'sort of semi-regal or at least viceregal establishment'.¹² Such grandiose displays, however, concealed Bicherakhov's own increasing decline in real value as a local political actor – his men were growing ever more war-weary, and the British were increasingly exasperated by the friction of working alongside such an ally. Lazar had been unable to effectively unite his forces in a timely manner with those of his brother, and further to the north the local Cossack revolt in the Terek region had been successfully held in check, though at great cost, by the Vladikavkaz Soviet, being virtually suppressed by September–October 1918. By November, when the British first sailed into Petrovsk, Lazar's Menshevik brother Georgii, alongside a large number of armed followers, had already joined him as refugees from Soviet power.

Nascent divisions between Bicherakhov and the British became very public the following year. Amongst other factors, the British came to suspect him of planning a coup against the Azeri government, an action that would have allowed this wily political operator to unite with Denikin and place both the Caspian Flotilla and the substantial oil resources of Baku at the latter's disposal. In May 1919, when the British as a pre-emptive measure employed their own recently imported motor torpedo-boats to finally force the disbandment and dismemberment of the increasingly mutinous, unreliable and pro-Bolshevik Russian Caspian Sea Flotilla, Bicherakhov's men were pre-emptively sent outside Baku itself, by rail northward towards Port Petrovsk, in order to forestall any potential interference from their side. Before long Lazar himself, in the face of British pressure, and under the pretext of making a trip to England as an honoured guest, left the region altogether, supplanted as a military commander by General Przheval'skii (the latter considered by the British a more manageable figure), and with his remaining troops now made officially subordinate to General Denikin's White administration further to the north. Disappointed both by the failure of his own political programme, and by his growing political and military impotence, this maverick Ossetian-Cossack adventurer would subsequently join that already growing exile community in Europe destined never to see their homeland again. Thomson, meanwhile, an Indian Army officer like his immediate predecessor, soon predictably changed his rhetoric towards Russia as a whole, and began privately reporting back to his superiors in London that the people of the Transcaucasus 'hate Russia, and would vastly prefer to be a protectorate of Britain or France as a guarantee against oppression'.¹³

During this same period the British fleet on the Caspian also engaged in its only significant military engagements with Bolshevik forces. To both aid Denikin, and cut the North Caucasus-based Bolshevik 11th Army's rear lines of communication,

the cruisers *Slava*, *Venture* and *Asia* on 29 December bombarded the coastal warehouses at Staro-Terechnoi, sinking cargo barges and seizing a hospital boat, together with all the wounded on board.¹⁴ The Bolshevik fleet in Astrakhan, meanwhile, also underwent some reinforcement during the winter of 1918 via ships transferred from the Baltic, and by April 1919 it was coming under increased pressure from Lenin to break the British blockade and retake Port Petrovsk, in order to assist efforts by the 11th Army to recapture Grozny, with its accompanying strategically valuable oil reserves. With this end in view, a preliminary raid on the White fort at the port of Aleksandrovsk on the north-eastern shore of the Caspian resulted in both the capture of the fort itself, and the interception of a steamer ferrying important correspondence between Denikin and Kolchak; the unfortunate courier on board at the time, Major-General Grishin-Almazov, shot himself rather than face capture.¹⁵ On 20 May 1919, however, Commodore Norris's small fleet, enjoying close air support from forty planes based around an aerodrome that the British had established at Port Petrovsk, sailed north-east to bombard and retake Aleksandrovsk. There they engaged in an hour-long gun battle that allegedly resulted in the sinking of nine enemy ships, with the remainder of the Bolshevik fleet retiring north-westward to shelter in the mouth of the Volga once more. This naval engagement had little overall impact on the course of the civil war, however, beyond further underlining the recklessness of British policy at the time. By late August that same year, the ships of the Caspian Flotilla were being broken up and divided between Denikin and the Azeri government, whilst Commodore Norris and his staff headed home.¹⁶

British policy towards the Caucasus as a whole throughout this period was dogged by contradictions and ambiguity. A Foreign Office memorandum from November 1918 had already concluded that the Transcaucasus would be best off under a combined French-American mandate, but also opined that US President Wilson was probably too canny to take on a combined mandate for Georgia, Dagestan and Azerbaijan, given that this represented 'a considerable and difficult burden, without any countervailing glory or profit'.¹⁷ The reasoning behind such a conclusion was that, whilst Georgia was certainly the easiest territory to administer in the region, Dagestan was practically ungovernable, whilst 'the Azerbaijanis are a comparatively backward, Moslem Turkic-speaking race, who are probably incapable in their present stage of establishing an orderly, civilized Government, and certainly could not cope, by themselves, with the administration of Baku'.¹⁸ The memorandum therefore patronizingly concluded that perhaps the best overall outcome would see both Baku and its accompanying oil wells falling directly under international control, 'on the model, perhaps, of the Danube Commission'.¹⁹ President Wilson, meanwhile, confirmed the British Foreign Office's expectations by resting all his own hopes for persuading both the Senate and Congress to take up an American mandate in the Transcaucasus solely on Armenia, a state and people which had aroused considerable sympathy in the United States during the war. Public support and diaspora lobbying nonetheless still proved insufficient to sway the key group of 'irreconcilables' within the US Senate who remained adamantly opposed to their country becoming entangled in any aspect of Wilson's proposed League of Nations.²⁰

The British occupation-troops that now came to be based in both Baku and Tbilisi meanwhile officially came under the remit of the Army of the Black Sea, under the overall command of General G. F. Milne. In practice, however, producing a unified policy in the region presented almost insurmountable difficulties, with only George Nathaniel Curzon, former Indian viceroy, and former chairman of the now defunct Eastern Committee, even remotely enthusiastic about the longer-term prospects for stabilizing the region and ensuring its permanent separation from Russia.²¹ The local Georgian, Armenian and Azeri national governments inspired little interest or sympathy from the British during their stay in the Transcaucasus, with Milne in January 1919 characterizing the whole region as economically ‘rotten’, and the local inhabitants as ‘not worth the life of one British soldier... I have never seen a more miserable country or people’.²² The main lingering memory of the British presence locally meanwhile was to be one of economic exploitation. Britain pressurized Azerbaijan to produce and transport oil to Batum at lower than world market prices, in order to build up a stockpile of 20,000 tons for British and Allied naval use. Georgia in turn provided Britain with materiel, troop transport, locomotives and other services valued at about £78,000, but Britain then attempted to pay its debt to Tbilisi in devalued roubles. Having unsuccessfully sued the British government in the English courts for payment, the Georgian government was then effectively denied the money altogether, despite the urgent need for credit in order to buy flour. Britain during its occupation of Batum meanwhile still also taxed all oil exported from the port, creating a comfortable net profit for the UK government of £49,027.²³

Regionally, the situation also remained politically extremely complicated. Although the Ottoman Empire was now effectively defunct, before very long the man soon to become known as Kemal Atatürk would lead an indigenous Turkish revolt against Allied occupation from eastern Anatolia. Mustafa Kemal sought a temporary alliance with the Bolsheviks, and came to view Allied recognition of the three Transcaucasus republics in January 1920 as an imperialist plot, aimed at establishing a geographical barrier between a friendly Russia and a free Turkey. This in turn led him at the time to even contemplate a joint Turkish-Bolshevik offensive to avert such an outcome.²⁴ When Kemal’s forces came into conflict with the government of Georgia over the same territorial disputes that had triggered the initial 1918 Ottoman attack, meanwhile, British policy for its part accordingly wavered between backing the Turks as a potential future barrier against Bolshevism, and supporting indigenous governments in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Relations with Denikin’s White Army further to the north were just as problematic. Whilst British Secretary of State for War Winston Churchill favoured Denikin as the commander best placed to defeat the Bolsheviks, Curzon viewed Denikin with greater suspicion as a traditional Russian imperialist, one whose final victory might only result in the re-emergence of his hated old enemy, the Russian Empire. From Denikin’s perspective, the British military command on the ground painfully reflected these wider political divisions within Whitehall. As he later recounted, the British representatives in Ekaterinodar – General Poole, and his subsequent replacement, General Briggs – were men of honour and ‘soldierly directness’, who

harboured genuine goodwill towards Russia, but the British command in Tbilisi under General Forrester-Walker, along with his subordinates generals Thomson and Malleeson, he characterized by contrast as a purely ‘Russophobic’ administration, intent only on entrenching British economic influence in the Transcaucasus.²⁵

The presence of the British in the region also forced other local actors to adapt their policies to radically changed political circumstances. Between 15 and 19 December 1918 the Mountaineer Government of Tapa Chermoev was officially dissolved, replaced by a new coalition government that again reincorporated members of the increasingly atomized Terek Cossack Host. This new government was headed by the Kabard politician Pshemakho Kotsev, and it inevitably relied heavily on British, rather than Ottoman, support to maintain its political influence in the Caucasus. In parallel with the Azeri government, the first symbolic act undertaken by this group to try to cultivate greater British favour came in the setting up of a formal parliament, one in this case labelled the ‘Alliance Council’. The parliament convened for the first time in January 1919, one of its first visitors being an Abkhaz representative who begged for assistance from his fellow mountaineers against the violent assaults and depravations of the Georgian Menshevik government.²⁶ Gaidar Bamatov remained as acting foreign minister of this government, whilst Prince Nukh-Bek Tarkovskii became its official minister of defence, Major-General Khalilov, his deputy, and Rashidkhan Kaplanov, its only interior minister.²⁷ Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii meanwhile took up a new post within the government as head of its sharia administration, on a salary of 4,000 roubles, with his responsibilities including the judicial establishment of a military-sharia court system.²⁸

A certain Colonel Rawlinson became the British military attaché to the new Mountaineer Government, tasked with coordinating its activities in the fight against Bolshevism, and eventually even with control of its armed forces. General Thomson on 27 November meanwhile had already informed the mountaineer politicians that they could count on British assistance, so long as they in turn established a coalition government, united against the Bolsheviks, reconstructed rail and sea communications, expelled all Ottoman forces from the country, and helped the Allies maintain contact with Denikin.²⁹ In financial terms, meanwhile, Kotsev’s government relied heavily on Azerbaijan, a reflection of the fact that its influence was never destined to spread much further than Temir-Khan-Shura in Dagestan. In February 1919 there was accordingly finally approved a financial loan from the Azeri government of 10 million roubles over two years, without interest, for sustaining the Mountaineer Government’s scanty infrastructure, politicians and military forces.³⁰ However, the new Kotsev government was also deeply divided internally, and was ultimately to prove even weaker and more ineffective in achieving its goals than the administration of Chermoev had been, catalysing a chain of events that culminated in a fresh political crisis as soon as May 1919.

Denikin’s conquest of the North Caucasus

Even as the political kaleidoscope in the Transcaucasus again shifted with the end of the First World War, it was to be Denikin’s military ascendance in the North

Caucasus between the end of 1918 and March 1919 which in fact most overshadowed and shaped all other events in the region. Towards the end of 1918, the Whites had experienced increasingly fractious relations with both their Don Cossack allies and the Kuban *Rada*. In the Don region, the tragic Kaledin's most recent successor, the pro-German Ataman of the Don Cossacks General Krasnov, was a divisive figure, whose ultimate resignation from his post on 2 February 1919 came as little surprise to anybody. He subsequently vanished into exile and obscurity, his fame later only dubiously revived when he became one of the leading collaborators with Nazi Germany during Hitler's brutal invasion of the Soviet Union. The Kuban meanwhile had finally become a White bastion with the fall of Ekaterinodar in August 1918, the very town whose initial siege during the White army's first Kuban campaign just four months earlier had resulted in the death of General Kornilov.

With the Whites now ascendant, however, the Kuban *Rada* went on to send a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference demanding recognition as an independent government, whilst its local leader, Bych, agitated for the creation of a Caucasus federation to direct the war against Bolshevism. Denikin, however, remained intensely frustrated by the actions of the *Rada* and by other groups in the Caucasus. In his view, to await the emergence of a unified federal government encompassing the Don, Kuban and Terek, alongside Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Mountaineer Republic and the Ukraine, constituted an unwarranted delay, whilst to place the whole fate of the anti-Bolshevik struggle in the hands of individuals such as Bych, Noi Zhordaniia, the Ukrainian nationalist Petliura or the Chechen Tapa Chermoev was little more than a bad joke.³¹ Given that Denikin's own watchword was 'Russia, One and Undivided', he inevitably viewed all discussion of a federal state with suspicion, and always strove first and foremost to create a unified military front against Bolshevism. He would later lament that these internal divisions in the south continued at the very time when, towards the end of 1918, his Soviet counterpart, Lev Trotsky, had finally created a unified military command structure, one capable of regrouping and redirecting along interior lines decisive military force against whichever was judged to be the most critical of the Bolsheviks' numerous battle fronts.³²

Since the White Army was now about to become the dominant military force in the North Caucasus, and as its precipitous disintegration shortly thereafter was destined to be just as rapid as its sudden ascendance, a fuller understanding of the events that followed demands a slightly greater investigation of that force's strengths and weaknesses, and the nature of the military challenges facing it. By the end of 1918, Denikin's feuds with his allies had temporarily subsided somewhat, and the South Russian Volunteer Army – via some at this stage still limited British assistance, new recruits, and arms received earlier in the war from the Germans via *Ataman* Krasnov³³ – had swollen to a strength of approximately 40,000 bayonets and sabres, 193 guns, 621 machine guns, 8 armoured cars, 7 armoured trains and 29 aircraft. This increase was in part brought about by conscription, introduced after the capture of Ekaterinodar in August 1918 to affect both the local Cossack and *inogorodnie* population alike, and in part also by

Denikin's lifting of Kornilov's draconian regulations barring the taking of prisoners; captured Red Army troops were now to be encouraged to defect to the White ranks.

The Volunteer Army therefore ceased to correspond to its own original designation, this label now being kept amongst its followers purely as a nostalgic remembrance of earlier, more romantic, days. Almost overnight the tasks and challenges facing the army completely altered; territorial administration, and the coercive enlistment, induction and training of regular drafts of new recruits, became a significant consideration. The need to mobilize and indoctrinate significant masses of men, many of whom had no previous affiliation with the White movement, and most of whom either had earlier desired to remain neutral, or who may more likely have supported one of the many Russian socialist parties in 1917, also served only to render the ideological vacuum at the very heart of the White movement increasingly apparent. Denikin's cause, insofar as it ever had any natural political bedfellows, was closest in spirit to the Russian Kadets under Pavel Miliukov. Across most of 1917, by contrast, the single most popular political party in the North Caucasus by some considerable margin had been the SRs. The Whites' policy towards the land question meanwhile remained reactionary, whilst subsequent brutal anti-Semitic pogroms in the Ukraine, and rampant general corruption and looting, only went yet further towards undermining the development of any possible broader base of popular support for their cause. The officers who had joined Alekseev and Kornilov's movement in the middle of 1917 also possessed a hatred of Bolshevism which was both visceral and instinctive, married to a passionate desire to resume the war against Germany. By 1919, however, the war against Germany was already over, and the views of those selfsame officers, though they remained in command of the army, were no longer necessarily shared by many of the troops under them.

Denikin's army therefore faced a conundrum common to practically all armies throughout history that have experienced rapid mobilization and expansion in the midst of ongoing fighting and political turmoil: the larger and theoretically more operationally potent such a force became, the more potentially fragile in practice became its internal coherence. During the civil war both Reds and Whites alike faced an inescapable administrative conundrum, embodied in the vicious circle of mass conscription. Seen by both sides as essential for ultimate strategic success, mass conscription in practice often only served to expose gaping problems in supplies and training, which then in turn provoked mass desertion. Lenin for this very reason prophetically remarked that 'universal mobilization will be the ruin of Denikin as it was of Kolchak... Peasants recruited into Denikin's army will do the same in that army as the Siberian peasants did in Kolchak's army – they brought complete disintegration into the army.'³⁴

The Red Army itself addressed this challenge through pro-peasant propaganda, as well as by pursuing extensive rather than intensive recruitment – counting on sheer weight of numbers to strike a rough equilibrium at any one time between active front-line troops and the sick, incapacitated, untrained and unwilling. Even here, however, the operational stability of an army in the field which was effectively

continuously both expanding and collapsing was inherently precarious. Denikin's army was identically challenged, but politically poorer placed – it may have grown substantially, but it had also become more brittle and difficult to control. The impact of the officer veterans, as the most experienced and professional cadres within the army, was now greatly dulled by the large influx of new recruits, and this new and larger army would soon prove less resilient at sustaining major battlefield reverses and other hardships than its much smaller predecessor had been. For a high command doctrinally and instinctively still wedded to high-tempo offensive manoeuvre, accompanied by relatively high casualties, and conditioned by an assumption that the junior ranks were ready and willing to sacrifice themselves steadfastly for the cause, this proved an uncomfortable shift to accommodate.

The failure of the tiny White administration to properly appreciate and evolve in light of these new challenges was a key factor behind the White movement's own subsequent stagnation and eventual dramatic collapse, even though Moscow itself began to appear (from 3 July 1919) as a real operational objective in Denikin's orders for the first time. All this still lay in the near future, however, and these increased forces at the end of 1918 were nonetheless still fielded and deployed in four main groups, with one relatively small force in particular – the 'Caucasus group', made up of just 25,000 men and 75 guns – assigned, in Denikin's own words, to 'liberate the North Caucasus, break through and establish contact with the English at Enzeli, and cut off Soviet Russia from the Baku and Grozny oilfields'.³⁵

Despite their growing size and resources, Denikin's troops during most of 1918 remained dwarfed by the Red Army forces that opposed them – at the very end of August 1918 the Bolsheviks mustered around 70,000–80,000 troops in the North Caucasus, but large numbers aside, these forces were also infinitely poorer in every other aspect of training, organization, leadership and equipment. Only on 3 October had pro-Bolshevik armed contingents in the North Caucasus been officially reorganized into the 11th Army, in line with Trotsky's general reforms, but even then the military command, all of them veterans of the earlier fighting in the Kuban, remained hopelessly internally divided between Sorokin, the official commander-in-chief, and Matveev, commander of the so-called 'Taman Army'. Most reflective of the poisoned relationship between these two men was the fact that Sorokin eventually ordered Matveev's arrest and execution on 7 October 1918, only then himself subsequently be declared a traitor, arrested and casually murdered in prison by one of Matveev's men on 2 November. Soviet authors long blamed the dissent that raged within the ranks of the 11th Army during 1918, fatally undermining much of its military activity, upon Sorokin himself – a man inevitably an object of deep Bolshevik suspicion given his publicly proclaimed political allegiance to the SRs. Even at the time, however, Ordzhonikidze emphasized that Sorokin had 'absolutely no kind of connection with counter-revolutionaries', the whole dispute being generated instead by the retreat from the Kuban, and the deep distrust that arose as a consequence between Sorokin and the Kuban Soviet authorities. More recent research meanwhile has also gone on to emphasize the role of White military intelligence in deliberately fomenting

and encouraging these internal feuds, via planted agents within the 11th Army's own high command.³⁶

The military front line between Denikin's Whites and the Bolshevik 11th and 12th armies in the North Caucasus by the latter half of 1918 snaked from around the hinge of Kislovodsk and the Mineral'nye Vody region in the south vertically 200 miles northward, to eventually converge with the Don Cossacks' area of operations, where the Soviet 10th Army maintained a tenuous grip on the key citadel of the Bolshevik southern front, Tsaritsyn (later renamed Stalingrad). Neither side possessed the resources or the energy to create deep defensive zones, however, as a result of which the overall nature of the fighting remained far more fluid than that experienced during the First World War. The front line between the two sides in the North Caucasus was instead characterized by its continuously shifting nature and open flanks, with both sides largely concentrating their fighting efforts on capturing settlements where men could afterwards sleep at night and feed their horses. The only continuous formal stretch of trenches to be constructed along the whole length of the front covered a section of the Vladikavkaz railway, and even this remained incomplete.³⁷ By late October 1918, critical battles were being fought around Stavropol, recaptured by Soviet units of the former Taman Army following a daring moonlight attack on the 28th, but then abandoned after a ten-day battle in the wake of Sorokin's own arrest and execution. Such reverses owed much to the sudden leadership vacuum these events created, with Sorokin himself only being replaced as a front commander by I. F. Fed'ko on 20 November.

Though still smaller in size, Denikin's forces meanwhile possessed a considerable superiority in trained and experienced cavalry, men for whom a forced march of 74 miles in 48 hours was not unusual. His general operational plan during the latter half of 1918 therefore revolved around probing attacks along the whole length of the front, exploiting local tactical opportunities to then conduct the type of outflanking movements and deep penetrations granted by the presence of high-calibre manoeuvre formations such as Baron Wrangel's cavalry corps of 6,200 sabres and 20 field guns.

Under concerted White pressure, Bolshevik forces near the centre of the front crumpled first, and on 3 January the Taman group of the 11th Army found itself outflanked on its right by rapidly advancing groups of Kuban Cossacks under Wrangel. These latter forces penetrated deep into the Bolshevik rear, driving them back in great disorder both south and south-east. Compelled to choose between making one last stand along the line of the Terek river, where the local Cossack Host remained a restless latent potential threat in the rear, or alternatively covering their remaining lines of communication and retiring back across the barren steppe and desert towards Astrakhan (thereby losing its hold over the North Caucasus entirely in the process), the high command of the Bolshevik 11th Army was eventually reluctantly driven to choose the latter course, having witnessed its troops descend into uncontrolled flight. The front lines thereafter shifted rapidly, and by March 1919 – in the wake of the 11th Army's final collapse and the loss of the whole of the North Caucasus – Astrakhan to the north-east, covering the mouth of the Volga river, became the last outlying bastion of Soviet influence in the region.

Before long, that town itself was declared to be in a state of siege, with Kirov, by that time serving as chairman of the local military-revolutionary council, issuing instructions that all disorderly elements within the town were to be shot on the spot, whilst all those who refused to work were to be denied ration cards. By early August 1919 the exhausted remnants of the 11th Army had also been recreated around Astrakhan and again regained their old former title, but this time as a standing force of just 14,240 bayonets and 3,250 sabres.³⁸

The dramatic reverses experienced by Soviet forces in the North Caucasus during the winter of 1918–19 came about in part through the yawning disproportion in the size of forces fielded, and the logistical arrangements available to sustain them. Whilst Denikin's numerically smaller forces could rely on the relatively rich grain belt in the Kuban for food and fodder, the supply situation of the Soviet armies, pushed further and further back against the dry and barren steppe of the Caspian coast, and reliant upon convoys of camel trains from Astrakhan, quickly became critical following Wrangel's northern breakthrough. On 20 January the division of the White General Ulagai had finally seized the vital railway station of Sviatoi Krest, depriving the 11th Army at a stroke of all communication to the north-east, and leaving the only remaining roads open to them either the route through Vladikavkaz to Georgia, on the one hand, or a circuitous and tortuous journey through Mozdok and Kizliar to Astrakhan, on the other.³⁹ By January 1919, therefore, the Red Army in the North Caucasus was effectively leaderless, reeling from a number of significant military defeats, decimated by typhus, and more disorganized than ever. All that really remained was for Denikin's much smaller but more mobile and effective forces to deliver the final military *coup de grâce*.⁴⁰

Denikin's reading of events in the Caucasus during this period was shaped by two overarching factors: the physical threat posed to his own forces by the now rapidly disintegrating Bolshevik 11th and 12th armies, and the more minor threat of the Soviet government established in Vladikavkaz by Kirov, Ordzhonikidze and Buachidze the previous year. Looking at the mountaineer tribes of the Caucasus itself, he observed several local political factors to be operating at once. The Ingush he dubbed the 'landsknecht' of Soviet power in the region, a minor but extremely active nationality bought off, in his view, by Bolshevik promises of land redistribution. In this instance, reports from General Madritov and Colonel Belikov, participants in the earlier rebellion within the Terek People's Republic in 1918, undoubtedly strongly shaped Denikin's own views. Madritov, for example, had opined that in order to stand any chance of restoring stability to the region, the Ingush would either have to be completely exiled or totally disarmed.⁴¹ The Ossetians in Denikin's view were by contrast divided between a pro-Soviet majority amongst the intelligentsia, and a more disorganized minority that favoured closer ties to Turkey and the Ingush. Kabarda lay similarly divided, with Lesser Kabarda recognizing Soviet power, and Greater Kabarda having sided with the Terek Cossack revolt led by Georgii Bicherakhov and General Mistulov the previous year. The Chechens were again also divided between two Soviets, one based in Goiti and receiving arms, money and other supplies from the Bolsheviks, and

the other, based in Vedeno district, having been a passive supporter of the Cossack-Ossetian rebellion.⁴²

Against this backdrop, regiments of Denikin's 3rd Army Corps, mostly comprising Kuban Cossacks, had already pushed into Ossetia and Ingushetia by November 1918, and the corps commander, V. P. Liakhov, issued a demand to the local mountaineer tribes that they hand over local Bolsheviks, 'cleanse' (*ochistit'*) Vladikavkaz and the surrounding villages of their followers, and re-establish previously destroyed Terek Cossack villages.⁴³ Thereafter, with the precipitous collapse and retreat of the 11th Army, a division led by General P. N. Shatilov seized control of Groznyi on 5 February, spurred on by a desire to pre-empt the rumoured move of a British detachment to occupy the local oilfields from the direction of Port Petrovsk. Finally, on 10 February, partisan cavalry detachments led by General Shkuro, one of Denikin's boldest and most savage Cossack commanders, as well as a prominent participant in the earlier 1918 Terek Cossack revolt, rode fully into the centre of Vladikavkaz itself, following a bitter two-day battle around the nearby railway station of Beslan.⁴⁴ Whom exactly they were fighting against by this stage was, however, soon destined to be a source of controversy. Denikin himself noted that the Bolsheviks' final stand in the Terek region was fought with great determination, with Bolshevik and Ingush military detachments holding out to the last man in one six-day battle alone against the forces of General Geiman (one of Liakhov's subordinates) further to the north, despite an utterly hopeless military position. A stubborn opponent even when logistically poorly supported, the 11th Army was subsequently credited by Denikin with 'greater spirit' than other Bolshevik forces, a factor which caused the White army correspondingly heavy casualties. When the smoke finally cleared, however, the cumulative scale of the military defeat inflicted by the winter 1918–19 North Caucasus campaign upon the nascent Red Army was crushing: 50,000 prisoners ultimately fell into White hands, along with 150 guns, 350 machine guns and a host of other war material.⁴⁵

As was typical of most of the battles of the civil war, once the major urban centres were captured, what remained of the local pro-Bolshevik forces rapidly scattered and went underground, with Bolshevik leaders such as Ordzhonikidze and N. F. Gikalo initially finding refuge in the mountains of Chechnia and Ingushetia. The final flight of most Bolshevik supporters in the region was arduous and risky, with the 3,000 troops and hangers-on who retreated from Groznyi after 5 February initially planning to fall back on Vladikavkaz, having lost touch with the sheer pace of events, before eventually being forced to abandon their heavy guns and transport, burn all their documents, and break up to make their way, singly or in small groups, towards the Chechen *aul* of Goiti. Those Bolsheviks who through sickness, wounds or physical incapacity were simply too slow to outrun the pursuing Whites were generally treated mercilessly; on 16 February, for example, a young pro-Bolshevik girl named Nastia Bakina was caught and hanged in the Cossack *stanitsa* of Assinovskaia.⁴⁶ Gikalo himself was robbed and stripped of his clothes during the final retreat from Groznyi, and one eyewitness later frankly admitted that some villages had been offered bribes in order to let the Bolsheviks through.⁴⁷ Immediately prior to the fall of Groznyi, Aslanbek Sheripov was also personally

entrusted with spiriting away 300,000 roubles into the mountains, leading to allegations of corruption from which this same Bolshevik observer, over a decade later, still felt it necessary to defend him.⁴⁸ In the meantime, the terrible retreat of the remnants of the 11th Army across the barren and windswept steppe towards Astrakhan left corpses littered in its path; eyewitnesses later recorded the large number of suicides committed amongst the ill, starving and freezing soldiers who underwent this purgatory. The subsequent officially calculated death toll incurred during the final 400-verst march from Kizliar to Astrakhan ran at 25,000 souls.⁴⁹

The total collapse of the Bolshevik 11th Army during the first few months of 1919, despite – on paper – its significant manpower superiority over its enemies, was inevitably a source of acute controversy and acrimony, both at the time and immediately afterwards. Svechnikov, a veteran of the Tsarist army, and Soviet commander of the newly formed Caspian–Caucasus front from 22 November 1918, later tried to lay some of the blame directly at the door of Trotsky. In Svechnikov's view the critical node of the whole front was in fact Port Petrovsk, and 'only the situation unfolding in the region of the 11th Army' had in fact drawn the attention of the *revvoensovet* (revolutionary-military council) away from what he defined as strategically 'the main task' facing the front at the end of 1918 – liberating Port Petrovsk from Bicherakhov and the Ottomans. In this analysis, seizure of Port Petrovsk had held threefold significance. It would have reopened the sea lane of communication between Astrakhan and Port Petrovsk, considerably alleviating the logistical nightmare of the Soviet armies fighting in the North Caucasus. The sheer moral effect of a Soviet occupation of Port Petrovsk would furthermore have dissipated entirely the potential threat of a mountaineer – particularly Chechen – uprising in the Soviet rear areas. Third and finally, Svechnikov argued that only by securing the line between Port Petrovsk and Georgievsk (the latter the critical rail junction for the spur line to Sviatoi Krest) would the Soviet armies in the North Caucasus acquire a secure base from which they could then themselves undertake a truly effective counter-offensive, sweeping into the flank and rear of Denikin's own forces.⁵⁰

Svechnikov's views in 1926 on the strategic situation pertaining in the North Caucasus during 1918–19 were not entirely uncontested, however, either then or later, as the numerous footnotes made by the editorial board on his own book at the time made clear. Whilst he placed heavy emphasis on the refusal of Trotsky to provide more men, arms and supplies during the winter of 1918, as well as upon the reluctance of the Soviet Caspian fleet around Astrakhan to undertake any kind of major initiative against Port Petrovsk before the winter ice rendered it immobile, others emphasized the sheer pressure of events on other Soviet fronts at the time – Trotsky simply had no men or supplies to spare. To transfer an extra division from the Southern or Eastern front to facilitate the capture of Port Petrovsk, as the Caspian–Caucasus front at the time demanded, would also have taken, given the existing state of rail and sea communications, from one to two months, allowing an attack on Port Petrovsk to occur only in March–April 1919.⁵¹

Svechnikov himself actually also agreed with Trotsky on at least one point – the condition of the 11th Army rendered it a poor tool for executing any kind of grand

strategic design. In this the 11th Army resembled Shaumian's earlier 'Caucasus Red Army', which had likewise disintegrated during the course of battles against the invading Ottomans by the end of 1918, because of a near-identical combination of indiscipline, rampant illness, lack of reserves and battlefield defeats. The 11th Army suffered from a similar blend of indiscipline, an almost total lack of medical supplies (which consequently rendered some 30–35 per cent of the army permanently unfit for active service), an excess of wives and refugees in the rear areas, and a shortage of even basic uniforms so dramatic that soldiers adapted women's dresses, knapsacks, horse cloths or whatever else came to hand, which created on the whole an unenviable set of administrative difficulties for any commander to overcome. Typhus in particular was endemic, and, commenting on the epic scale of the disaster that followed, the Dagestani historian Takho-Godi would later remark that 'if it is true that snow destroyed the French army in 1812, then one can also say that lice destroyed the Soviet 11th Army'.⁵² The army was also very badly trained, the men marching in close-order formation within 20 versts of the enemy, sleeping in their trenches, and rarely deploying any fixed reserves, whilst it also suffered from extremely poor communications and intelligence arrangements.⁵³ These were precisely the sins of *partizanshchina* – a misguided revolutionary approach which ended up generating only a ragged and undisciplined mob of partisans, rather than a trained military force – which Trotsky himself later deployed as the main explanation for the 11th Army's sudden and catastrophic defeat. Other contemporaries, however, also pointed out that Svechnikov's own time in command had in practice not made matters any easier, because of his attempting a complete military reorganization on 1 December 1918.

At one level this new directive had represented a long overdue effort at standardization, aimed at creating three–four regular divisions of three battalions per regiment, three regiments per brigade and three brigades to a division. However, this attempted rationalization was being applied to a ramshackle force of 60 infantry regiments, 44 individual infantry groups and battalions, 35 individual rifle and machine-gun commands, 17 cavalry regiments, and 22 individual cavalry squadrons and *sotnias*, all of them of uneven size, and all of whom would have to remain in contact with the enemy whilst this attempted reorganization took place. It also did nothing to remedy the existing subordination of cavalry units to infantry commanders, and mounted units during Svechnikov's era of command remained scattered in penny packets across the whole length of the front when, had they been regrouped into an independent command instead, the concentrated force of 10,000 sabres thus generated would have constituted a more powerful mobile reserve than that possessed by any other Soviet front at the time.⁵⁴

Svechnikov's critics also felt that these shortcomings had then been only further compounded by an excessive emphasis on *offensive* operations. Lenin, aware of the growing importance of the southern front, had ordered the urgent build-up of military supplies in Astrakhan, where, by December 1919, reserves amounting to some 11 million cartridges and 21,000 artillery shells had been stockpiled.⁵⁵ However the immediate reserve of munitions in the 11th Army's rear areas on 17 December still amounted to just 2,104 shells, 2,100 rifles, 90 hand grenades, and 33,405

cartridges – only just enough, when taking into account each man's personal supply, to ensure around 10 cartridges per rifle. The Caspian–Caucasus Front nonetheless still undertook an ambitious offensive along the twin axes Ekaterinodar–Novorossiisk and Tikhoretsk–Rostov from 4 January onwards, a scheme which poorly conformed to the front's actual material state, and consequently only induced even greater confusion when, following reports on 5 January that the advance had begun with great success, a long pause in communications was then followed up by announcements on the 14th that the front was collapsing, accompanied by desperate calls for help.⁵⁶

Denikin's advance, and the sharp collapse and dissolution of both the 11th Army and the Terek People's Republic, also brought the Whites rapidly into contact with the new Kotsev-led Mountaineer Government based in Temir-Khan-Shura in Dagestan. Denikin's suspicions about this government and its English backers had already been aroused in January, when General Thomson in Baku warned Denikin's local theatre commander, General Erdeli, that any future changes in the status of Dagestan would have to be agreed with General Milne in Constantinople. All existing Russian factories, railways and buildings in Azerbaijan had meanwhile already been transferred to the new local government, and could therefore now only be utilized by the Whites through arranging payments with Baku. Such a step, in Erdeli's view, effectively prevented Dagestan and Azerbaijan from being transformed into a secure rear base area for the Volunteer Army, a political development against which he lodged an immediate protest.⁵⁷ Outwardly, of course, the Mountaineer Government and Denikin shared a common enemy, in the shape of Bolshevism, and a common ally, in the form of the British, to serve as an interlocutor between them. In practice, however, given differing agendas and British political confusion, matters rapidly descended into open conflict between the two sides, with members of the Mountaineer Government later openly complaining that the behaviour of the British military mission attached to them had been simply 'inexplicable' – a not unfounded charge, given that Colonel Rawlinson, the British officer actually appointed in charge of the Mountaineer Government's forces, left unexpectedly for Baku when fighting between the two sides in Chechnia during March was at its height.⁵⁸

Matters were not assisted by the fact that the Mountaineer Government itself was internally divided, with some Muslim members of the ex-Tsarist officer corps, such as General Khalilov – a faction later categorized by some as the 'Dagestani group' – soon displaying active sympathy towards Denikin's forces. According to the account of the Ingush representative Vasan-Girei Dzhabagiev, he and Rashidkhan Kaplanov, dissatisfied by Kotsev and Tarkovskii's lifeless response to the threat from Denikin's side, had in early 1919 already pressed for the dismissal of the entire cabinet, and the formation of a new government.⁵⁹ The seizure of Grozny by Denikin's troops on 5 February then served as a spark for political conflict between the two sides as early as 14 February, when a 'governor' and 'military commander' emerged on the ground, claiming to represent the Mountaineer Government, and loudly asserting their right to administer both the town and the wider region over the claims of Denikin's forces.⁶⁰ Denikin himself meanwhile

was distinctly unimpressed by the first official notes of communication between the Mountaineer Government and his own administration at the beginning of February 1919, one of which claimed that his troops had been able to occupy Grozny and Vladikavkaz only thanks to the assistance rendered them by military forces loyal to the Mountaineer Government.⁶¹ The Mountaineer Government's delegation, sent to Ekaterinodar for negotiations on 9 February, for its own part took umbrage at not having been granted access to Denikin himself, being pawned off instead by an appointment with General Liakhov, a commander already hated for his actions in putting down local rebellions (as well as suppressing the Iranian parliament in Tehran) in 1904–6, and with whom it consequently refused to speak.

On 25 February, Liakhov finally met Kotsev, the leader of the Mountaineer Government, and showed him a telegram of an earlier agreement between the Volunteer Army and the British, the text of which agreed that Dagestan was to enter entirely into the sphere of influence of the Volunteer Army. The impact of this on Kotsev, Liakhov reported with some satisfaction, was 'completely crushing' (from the Russian, literally 'it killed him').⁶² However, an ambiguity existed in this situation, given that the British command in Baku was not necessarily privy to this earlier agreement. This led Denikin on 8 March to deliberately ask General Briggs to verify that Colonel Rawlinson, the British officer attached to the Mountaineer Government, was fully acquainted with this telegram.⁶³ The actions of the British command in Baku, in thereafter extending their own sphere of influence further northward, right to the border of Dagestan, nonetheless still caused considerable irritation in the White ranks, with Denikin's local representative Przheval'skii remarking with heavy sarcasm that it would now be necessary to insist to 'our nice allies' on the rights of the Volunteer Army to unrestricted access to Port Petrovsk, and to free use of the transport facilities of the Caspian Sea.⁶⁴ However, Denikin's suspicion that, on the British side, political incoherence held sway, was in reality well founded.

As early as 18 February, General Milne in Constantinople had written to the War Office querying changed sets of instructions which appeared to reverse a policy line established the previous December, and which now effectively entailed abandoning Dagestan and 'a portion of Azerbaijan with it', allowing Denikin to 'come within 65 miles of Baku and astride the water supply of the town'.⁶⁵ British Cabinet-level support for the territorial claims of the Mountaineer Government was in reality always lukewarm. In April the War Office remarked that, if it were decided to keep the Volunteer Army out of the area claimed by the North Caucasus republic, then a frontier should of course be drawn along the line of the river Terek, but it added that this would of course also be blatantly 'unfair' to Denikin, since it would 'rob him of the fruits of his recent victories over the Bolsheviks' – namely, the Grozny oilfields and access to the Caspian.⁶⁶ The final demarcation line drawn up by the British on 4 April, the third such border negotiated since the beginning of the year, eventually allowed Denikin to in principle advance his forces all the way down to the joint Azeri-Georgian state frontiers.⁶⁷

Relations between the Whites and the Mountaineer Government became yet more antagonistic over military actions that Denikin undertook against Ingush settlements and military detachments. Denikin for his part, as we have already seen, saw the

Ingush primarily as mercenaries for the Bolshevik cause, but the Mountaineer Government's claim to represent all the mountaineer peoples – including the Ingush – turned these hostilities into another source of general political antagonism between the two sides. Considerable confusion and hostility was generated during this period by ambiguity as to which cause Ingush partisan detachments had themselves actually been fighting for. On 26 February, Kotsev claimed that Vladikavkaz had effectively been liberated, not by Denikin's troops on 28–31 January (OS) – even the precise date lay in dispute – but nearly a week earlier, by Ingush detachments representing the Mountaineer Government.⁶⁸ Denikin, however, as we have seen, was equally convinced that General Shkuro's final thrust into Vladikavkaz, and General Geiman's heavy battles with Ingush detachments further to the north, represented bitter final engagements against forces who were still firmly pro-Bolshevik. Liakhov, the local White theatre commander, was also explicit in his conviction that his forces had been compelled to engage in battles with Ingush militias loyal to the Mountaineer Government only *after* the fall of Vladikavkaz, during later advances to gain control of Nazran.⁶⁹

Bolshevik sources would tend to support the account of Denikin and his subordinates, the final fall of Vladikavkaz in the immediate post-war Bolshevik accounts of the civil war in the region being ascribed to 11 February 1919 – i.e., 29 January, according to the Julian calendar still used by Denikin.⁷⁰ However, the most convincing refutation of the Mountaineer Government's ludicrous claims comes from the detailed reports on the final fighting in Vladikavkaz itself produced immediately afterwards by Denikin's own staff – accounts which make it clear that, in the closing battles, the town had been defended by three armoured trains, two of which were subsequently captured at Beslan, whilst Shkuro himself had been initially beaten back from seizing the town centre by the actions of two armoured cars and well-directed artillery fire.⁷¹ Plainly the Mountaineer Government was not in possession of the town at that time, given that it never possessed forces at its disposal remotely capable of such efforts, and the fact that Vladikavkaz was held by pro-Bolshevik forces right up until its capture by Denikin's own troops therefore becomes indisputable.

The Mountaineer Government's rather pathetic claim in 1919 to have seized Vladikavkaz on its own (a claim which Gaidar Bammatorov still maintained, even in exile, as late as 1929), therefore appears to mirror an earlier, equally fantastical proclamation regarding the 'imminent capture' of Vladikavkaz which, according to Takho-Godi, they had already made to the German government in 1918, when they had been equally desperately courting recognition and support from Berlin. Far from strengthening claims to its historical legitimacy, such phenomena point to the complete impotence and ineffectiveness of the Mountaineer Government throughout almost the entire period of its curious existence.⁷²

The emergence of a complex insurgency

The almost immediate result of Denikin's growing presence in the region was in practice the implosion of the Mountaineer Government by May, and the emergence

of a complex, multi-sided local insurgency by June. In March 1919 General Liakhov undertook a violent military campaign to pacify Chechnia and Ingushetia, against a resistance movement now judged to comprise a mixture of Bolshevik-backed irregulars and pro-Mountaineer Government forces. The Whites when assessing certain individuals identified only a blurred distinction between the two groups anyway, Rashidkhan Kaplanov being characterized as a ‘Bolshevik’ in White intelligence reports, as was the Ingush leader Vasan-Girei Dzhabagiev.⁷³ On 16–17 March the Chechen *aul* of Alkhan-Iurt was attacked and completely destroyed, with White reports recording 43 Cossacks killed and 121 wounded, as against ‘no fewer’ than 1,000 dead on the enemy side.⁷⁴ Bolshevik accounts naturally differed in their assessment of the respective casualty tolls, but both sides agreed on the fanatical nature of the fighting. On the second day of the siege, ongoing resistance in the village had reputedly been continued by just 11 surviving Chechens, who continued firing from the cover of a cellar until, during the last few hours before the final assault, they were heard singing the 36th chapter of the Koran, the prayer for the dying.⁷⁵

This savage act of repression also rendered useless a final attempt by the British General Briggs to mediate between the two sides.⁷⁶ On 29 March, Briggs was instead enlisted to bear witness to an official declaration of subordination to the Volunteer Army by a Chechen congress assembled in Grozny, Chechnia being promised extensive internal self-rule and the appointment of one of its own into government in return. An official photograph captured the occasion for posterity, with Briggs, sitting alongside Denikin, and quite clearly the only foreigner present, forming a strikingly incongruous figure amidst the assembly of Cossacks, Russian officers and mountaineers. Briggs himself, probably the only British officer of such high rank ever to attend such a gathering in the very capital of Chechnia itself during the whole of its history, also gave a speech for the occasion that encapsulated the hypocrisy of British policy during the Russian Civil War. Stating to the assembled Chechen representatives that the British government did not support ‘one or another party, but only strives to preserve order until such time as the [Paris] Peace Conference has resolved all outstanding questions’, he went on in the very same breath to remark that his government had tasked him to ensure that Denikin’s army was fully supplied with guns, shells, supplies and every other kind of military requirement that might be needed ‘for the struggle he is conducting against Bolshevism’.⁷⁷ Rarely can the scant fig-leaf of official neutrality ever have been so dubiously paraded in such curious circumstances.

White intelligence meanwhile continued to monitor what it viewed as joint Bolshevik–Mountaineer Government support for rebel mountaineer insurgents, but also noted with satisfaction the decline of the Mountaineer Government’s influence – by early April it was reported that mobilization orders issued by the Mountaineer Government to resist Denikin were being openly ignored, and that ‘[t]he only ones not sleeping but by contrast working energetically [against us] are the local Bolsheviks.’⁷⁸ The interwar Bolshevik historian Takho-Godi confirmed that local Bolshevik political actors in Dagestan at around this time semi-collaborated with their Mountaineer Government counterparts against what was perceived as

the common enemy, with Korkmasov – the most prominent Dagestani Bolshevik – appearing in Temir-Khan-Shura ‘almost every week’, whilst Kotsev reportedly also approached the local Bolsheviks about conducting joint military actions against Denikin, though Takho-Godi himself emphasized that these negotiations had broken down.⁷⁹ In the meantime, Denikin’s refusal to recognize the claims of the Mountaineer Government to legitimately govern the region led to a split within that self-same government by the ‘Dagestani group’ of ex-Tsarist Muslim officers.

The election of Dzhabagiev to head the Alliance Council was interpreted by White intelligence as having occurred largely because of Bolshevik support, even as Muslim officers within that selfsame government who were altogether more sympathetic to the White cause (such as the defence minister, Prince Tarkovskii) became increasingly disaffected. Tarkovskii himself was reportedly arrested at around this time under suspicion of masterminding a coup plot to seize power in Temir-Khan-Shura and again declare himself the personal dictator of Dagestan. On 16 April (OS) a crisis session of the Alliance Council agreed to Dagestan becoming absorbed both politically and territorially wholly into Azerbaijan, but despite this, on 5/18 May, the Kotsev government finally collapsed, with power locally falling rapidly into the hands of a coterie of Muslim officers led by General Khalilov. Tarkovskii himself quickly persuaded Khalilov to unite with the White Army and rule Dagestan as Denikin’s ally.⁸⁰ White forces meanwhile rapidly capitalized on this sudden local power vacuum by seizing Port Petrovsk on 23 May, presenting the British authorities in Baku with a political fait accompli. Khalilov crossed over to the Whites immediately thereafter, a defection smoothed over by an official proclamation within the Alliance Council itself, declaring that sharia law forbade continuing any war against clearly impossible odds.

Denikin’s growing presence in the Terek region meanwhile alarmed almost all of the other major regional neighbours, as well as directly provoking the single most unlikely political alliance of the whole civil war. The latent threat of the Volunteer Army to both Georgia and Azerbaijan led to these two states signing a mutual defence pact on 16 June 1919, but Armenia refused to join this pact, favouring a semi-covert alliance with Denikin instead. Menshevik Georgia meanwhile also provided arms, military officers and financial assistance (amounting to 12 million roubles) to the insurgent resistance that quickly emerged to fight Denikin in the region. Denikin in retaliation for such latent hostility mounted an economic blockade of both Georgia and Azerbaijan as punishment.⁸¹ The friendly relations that on the other hand prevailed between Armenia and the Whites during this period led to the Georgians labelling Armenia’s Dashnak military forces – by the end of 1920 a not inconsiderable contingent of 40 battalions, 15 cavalry squadrons, 208 machine guns, 65 artillery pieces, 3 armoured trains and 10 aircraft – Denikin’s ‘7th Corps’.⁸² Denikin’s growing presence had perhaps its most radically divisive local effect, however, amongst the Islamic clergy of Dagestan.

Sheikh Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii, dissatisfied by the proclamation of one of his followers in the Alliance Council denouncing any prolongation of the war against Denikin as hopeless, had as early as 25 May already urged the population of the Dargin district in Dagestan to take up armed resistance against the White

occupation. By 7 June he had created a local ‘temporary government’, headed by him and ten others. On 16 July, Akushinskii’s armed supporters then mounted a major attack on Temir-Khan-Shura, in which the outlying *auls* of Dzhengutai, Kazanishche and Buglen changed hands several times in bitter fighting.⁸³ The local insurgents fared badly at this stage however, not least because of their hastily improvised logistical arrangements. The rebellion organizers had instructed every ten households to provide one fighter fully equipped and supplied for two weeks, raising around 2,000 fighters, but this supply system quickly fell apart after the initial battles, whilst White forces for their part also conducted enveloping attacks that caused the rebel fighters to fear for their own defenceless families. Despite having received Soviet financial support to the tune of a million Azeri roubles, in the wake of a personal recommendation by Boris Sheboldaev, one of the few remaining Bolshevik representatives in Dagestan, Akushinskii’s rebellion ultimately collapsed, with Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii himself temporarily placed under house arrest.⁸⁴ The sheikh retained a good deal of local support, however, with the head of the Dargin district himself then delaying his handover to the regional authorities in Temir-Khan-Shura. Khalilov replaced Abdusalam Magomedov, the head of the Dargin district, on 14 August, temporarily promoting his subordinate, Colonel Suleimanov, in his place, but the Dargin district still did not receive an officially appointed new head until 27 September. In the interim one of Akushinskii’s murids managed to rally a sufficient number of armed supporters to again liberate the sheikh.⁸⁵ Other members of the Dagestani clergy meanwhile now also came out against the White occupation.

Uzun Khadzhi, the cleric who had most prominently supported the election of Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii as *Imam* in 1917–18, at this time broke violently with the latter over his decision to collaborate with the new Denikin-backed Terek–Dagestan government. The aged cleric instead followed Akushinskii’s example by going into open rebellion against Denikin’s forces, finding an unlikely ally in this cause in the shape of the 21-year-old Nikolai Gikalo, the Bolshevik politician and now impoverished partisan leader who had almost single-handedly directed the near-100-day defence of Grozny against the rebelling Terek Cossack Host in 1918.

Declaring the *gazavat* that he had long sought in the North Caucasus, and converting Vedeno into his main operational base, Uzun Khadzhi appointed the Chechen ex-bureaucrat (*pristav*) Inaluk Dyshinskii (1880?–1920) as his ‘vizier and commander-in-chief of the North Caucasus Emirate’. Dyshinskii took up the additional official portfolios of foreign minister, minister of justice, minister of education, and minister of ecclesiastical lands (*waqf*) within this new, self-imagined ‘state’, officially created on 11 October 1919, in a territory which before long was also coining its own currency, raising taxes, and employing a green silk national banner aimed at deliberately evoking the era of Sheikh Shamil. Within the emirate’s new government, however, as Dyshinskii himself later remarked, only two ministers possessed any form of higher education, whilst two lacked any formal education at all, and the remainder were only partly literate in either Russian or Arabic.⁸⁶ Uzun Khadzhi’s ‘emirate’ ultimately commanded the support of around 8,500 fighters, organized into seven or eight official ‘armies’, one of which was Gikalo’s band

of Bolshevik fighters, and all of which were formally subordinated to a ‘main staff’ headed by Colonel Magomet Khaniev. Again making use of Ottoman military veterans, the emirate’s main staff also employed two Turkish officers, Khusein Derbeli as chief of cavalry, and Ali Riza Chorumlu as head of artillery.⁸⁷

Uzun Khadzhi’s and Akushinskii’s individual efforts to build up shadow state structures ran brazenly in parallel to increasingly intrusive White administrative measures to govern the region. Denikin had rapidly undertaken steps, even before the Mountaineer Government’s final collapse, to establish his own administration in the Caucasus, beginning with the appointment of Lieutenant-General V. P. Liakhov as supreme commander of all military forces in the Terek–Dagestan district. Amongst Liakhov’s first acts was the re-establishment of the Terek Cossack *Krug*, which shortly thereafter elected General Vdovenko as the new host *Ataman*. By an administrative statute developed in Denikin’s own special council, it was also resolved to administer the Terek–Dagestan region on the basis of broad autonomy, with each mountaineer nationality to be governed by an elected leader and an individual national council, a set-up not dissimilar to that already prevailing under the Provisional Government in 1917. Broad autonomy for each individual ‘national district’ was to be permitted, with locally elected governments retaining control of economic affairs, and sharia courts retained for dispensing local justice. Only in Chechnia and Dagestan did leadership elections not take place because of unsettled local conditions – General E. Aliev was appointed supreme ruler of Chechnia instead, and Major-General M. M. Khalilov, a defector as we have seen from the Mountaineer Government, eventually appointed ruler of Dagestan.

The legislative model adopted towards the region owed much to the example provided by Tsarist rule in pre-war Kabarda, where the Kabards had been granted the right to manage their own internal economic affairs via a ‘people’s congress’ that was convened at least once a year. Under Denikin’s new statute, however, such congresses were now to be extensively self-regulating, and further complemented by sharia courts headed by a *kadi* appointed for a three-year term. Pre-war Tsarist administrators had preferred to place emphasis on rule through traditional *adat* laws; like his Bolshevik opponents, therefore, Denikin was now also explicitly attempting to publicly co-opt Islam to his own cause.⁸⁸ However, the military forces of the Terek–Dagestan district were also to be directly subordinate to Denikin himself, and in August that year Dagestan was tasked with providing the Volunteer Army with 8,000 recruits between the ages of nineteen and forty, complete with their own equipment, horses and uniforms. Resistance to this newly instituted military draft constituted one of the key contributory factors behind the subsequent large-scale local rebellion in the region.⁸⁹

By April, Liakhov had already been removed from his post in connection with a corruption scandal within his own staff, and thereafter retired to the coastal town of Batum, where he was later murdered by unknown assailants.⁹⁰ In his place, Denikin appointed General Erdeli, who soon had his hands full dealing with the now reconstituted Terek Cossack Host. Denikin also acquired new local political allies, via splits within the Chechen National Council which had already emerged during 1918. Thus, whilst the 21-year-old Aslanbek Sheripov remained devoted to

the Bolshevik cause, and would fall mortally wounded fighting alongside Gikalo's '5th Army' in battles around Grozny in late August 1919, one of his fellow former council members, Ibragim Chulikov, joined forces with Denikin, and that same September would raise a Chechen militia of some 2,000 men to fight against the local Uzun Khadzhi–Gikalo alliance.⁹¹

General Khalilov, however, the new pro-White commander-in-chief of Dagestan, remained perhaps the strangest of Denikin's local allies – in the apt words of one later Soviet scholar, his literary legacy in terms of letters and speeches creates the impression 'that one is dealing not with a military man, but with a cleric'.⁹² In June 1919 a 'war of proclamations' had already broken out in Dagestan between Khalilov and Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii over the latter's imminent rebellion, with the sheikh warning that those Muslims who collaborated with Cossacks would be 'eternally cursed with them, and your joint destination will be an eternal Hell'. Khalilov responded that Akushinskii should disperse his followers, otherwise he (Khalilov) would not be held responsible for the consequences, and that if he refused, the sheikh would ultimately have to give answer 'before Allah and the people'.⁹³ This sectarian feud over the religious credibility of the two warring sides culminated on 15 August with Khalilov publicly denouncing Akushinskii as a 'traitor', and quickly appointing in his place as *sheikh-ul-islam* his own representative, Sheikh Abdul-Basyr-Khadzhi.⁹⁴ Though Akushinskii and Uzun Khadzhi both still attempted to wean Gotsinskii away from supporting the Denikin regime, meanwhile, the latter remained forthright in his new-found allegiance to the White cause, reportedly causing Uzun Khadzhi to contemptuously remark that 'I wanted to make him an *Imam*, but instead he's become an Ivan [Russian]'.⁹⁵

The rapid disintegration of the short-lived second Mountaineer Government triggered by Khalilov's coup in May meanwhile also created a Mountaineer Government in exile for a second time. An eleven-member *medzhlis* based in Georgia, this time led by Akhmed Tsalikov, and comprising men such as Gaidar Bammatov, Rashidkhan Kaplanov and Kotsev, was established to try to again garner foreign support and direct the insurgent movement against Denikin's troops. From September 1919 onwards, Tbilisi became the main centre of *medzhlis* activity, most notably as the site from where the committee's new newspaper, *The Free Mountaineer (Vol'nyi goret)* was printed and distributed. The Bolsheviks for their part also maintained a substantial underground communications and intelligence network in the Caucasus and Transcaucasus throughout the period of Denikin's rule and the British occupation of the south. In September 1919, for example, a certain Comrade Gabinskii based in Baku reported that, in Batum, the British paid so little attention to censorship that if the word 'England' were not employed, but substituted by terms such as 'predators' or 'imperialists', pro-Bolshevik propaganda could be printed there without undue constraint. The British garrison in Batum he also characterized as 'terribly cowardly' and anxious to go home, a testament, though undoubtedly exaggerated, to genuine British war-weariness at the time.⁹⁶

Samurskii, by now an important political worker with the Bolshevik 11th Army that was undergoing recovery and retraining in Astrakhan, also wrote an influential

memorandum in September 1919 urging greater support to Uzun Khadzhi's rebellion, seeing in its very ferocity a sign of dawning Marxist enlightenment – '[c]lass against class – this is the essence of this grandiose struggle now unfolding at the present moment in Dagestan.'⁹⁷ Consequently he urged adopting two lines of propaganda – one for the 'dark unenlightened masses, mainly the inhabitants of the auls', the other for the 'conscious proletarian masses of the cities and industrial centres'. This could be done by employing instrumentally the nationalist tendencies of the masses and the mullahs, the latter being 'for money... always ready to be champions of national independence' in order to bind their actions together 'in solidarity with the party'.⁹⁸ Criticizing the employment in the past of party workers 'unfamiliar with the language, customs, and habits of Muslims and mountaineers, and who did not consider their cultural level', Samurskii praised Kirov and Nariman Narimanov, leader of the Azeri Hummet party, as better-qualified interlocutors for the party's cause in the region.⁹⁹

Kirov himself remained equally personally enthusiastic about supporting the mountaineer rebellion, organizing the dispatch of several million roubles to Gabinskii in Baku to provision that cause. The death of Makhach Dakhadaev at the end of 1918 at the hands of Bicherakhov's men had left the cause of Bolshevism in Dagestan in disarray, but an underground party organization and armed partisan units had already reappeared as early as February 1919, assisted by one of Lenin's close friends, Oskar Leshchinskii, and were soon under the overall command of the recently returned Ullubi Buinaskkii.¹⁰⁰ On 28 May, however, in the wake of the Mountaineer Government's split and Khalilov's own rise to power, Buinaskkii and his whole committee were arrested and transported from Temir-Khan-Shura to detention in Port Petrovsk (at that time briefly renamed Shamil-Kale by the Mountaineer Government). There, on 18 July, a military sharia court condemned Buinaskkii and four of his fellow Dagestani co-conspirators to death. With Buinaskkii's execution, and the parallel defeat in June–July of Akushinskii's own initial rebellion, all Bolshevik hopes in the region then came to be transferred instead to the Uzun Khadzhi–Gikalo alliance in Chechnia, as well as to a newly generated local coalition emerging after September under Akushinskii's chairmanship, the Dagestan Defence Council.

The Dagestan Defence Council, an anti-Denikin coalition and shadow government, within which factionalism or 'party flags' were officially banned, was in reality itself initially the brainchild of the Tbilisi-based *medzhlis*, with its chairman, Akhmed Tsalikov, having first engaged in personal negotiations with Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii – negotiations which then led to a congress being held on 19 October 1919 in the Dagestani village of Levashi. Of the defence council's initial nineteen-member membership, over half were in fact representatives of the Islamic clergy, and, contrary to later Soviet accounts, Bolshevik representatives do not at first appear to have occupied any prominent positions within its ranks. Bolshevik and ex-Mountaineer Government officials instead came to share an uneasy coexistence as the defence council's diplomatic representatives with the outside world, with Gaidar Bammatov becoming its representative in Armenia and Georgia, whilst Takho-Godi after 25 December came to represent and defend its interests

in Baku. The Bolsheviks, however, also expended 37,000 roubles on providing the defence council with Turkish military advisers.¹⁰¹

Party workers were now dispatched to gather intelligence about the progress of the mountaineer rebellion and the local course of events, with one ‘Comrade Gordienko’ in January 1920 reporting back to the 11th Army after an extraordinary trip made through the Transcaucasus and into Chechnia at the end of the previous year. After disembarking in civilian guise at Baku off a ship from Astrakhan, and having been only briefly detained, Gordienko moved west to Tbilisi. There he found rest and shelter directly with the *medzhlis* of the anti-Bolshevik ‘Mountaineer Government’, by now temporary allies of convenience in the anti-Denikin crusade, before subsequently moving north along the Georgian Military Road towards Shatoi, the centre of Gikalo’s resistance movement, paying off the local Ingush to ensure safe passage as he went. On 19 December he finally met up with Gikalo, whose detachment of 500–600 men (30–35 per cent of whom were Balkars and Kabards) he reported as being ‘very poorly clothed’, equipped with just rifles, a single 2.5 inch mortar, and thirteen machine guns of various types. Gikalo’s unit was also accompanied by 250–300 followers who were ill, and whom he could afford to neither equip nor clothe. Gikalo himself nonetheless launched an attack on Grozny on 20 December, whilst Gordienko during that same period took up residence at the headquarters of Uzun Khadzhi’s ‘emirate’ in Vedeno.

Having met the ‘emir’, Gordienko reported wryly that ‘he is a nice old man, but who would not be tempted by a crown, if he were not a Bolshevik?’¹⁰² One contemporary Bolshevik participant later tellingly defended the alliance as ‘temporary’ in nature, justified only for as long as Uzun Khadzhi fought vigorously against the Whites and drew off their forces.¹⁰³ Uzun Khadzhi himself meanwhile made a point of thanking his ‘allies’ and ‘guests’, but also distanced himself from them, declaring that ‘he awaits his main support from the East’. Gordienko was nonetheless greatly encouraged by what he saw, writing that, were ‘no less’ than 100 million roubles provided, ‘the North Caucasus will be ours’. Gikalo in January made similar demands to the 11th Army – complaining that he had only received some 140,000 roubles via the Bolshevik underground in Tbilisi, he argued that if 90–100 million roubles could be sent, ‘I can wipe out all the Volunteer Army in two months. This is not words, but a fact.’¹⁰⁴

The Whites found the conduct of what was essentially now a counter-insurgency campaign in the region highly challenging, but still set out to profit as much as they could from ongoing divisions amongst their enemies. Nuri Pasha’s employment by the Bolsheviks at this time was in itself partly a product of the fragile undeclared alliance that now existed within the local Defence Council in Dagestan; according to the Dagestani Bolshevik historian Takho-Godi, the local Bolsheviks had themselves initiated talks with Nuri Pasha in the hope that his presence would rein in and control the *medzhlis*-appointed (and passionately anti-Bolshevik) Turkish insurgent commander Kiazim Bey, another mercenary whose presence in the region was a legacy of the earlier Ottoman intervention.¹⁰⁵ The picture from the White perspective was nonetheless complicated by the fact that they faced not a single uprising, but rather a roiling wave of rebellions, each with often specific sources

of causation – beginning in Chechnia in March, shifting to Ingushetia in June, Dagestan in the second half of June, then Chechnia again by mid-August, before matters reached a real crisis in Dagestan again by September–October 1919.

During the latter half of August, as Khalilov's recruitment campaign spurred on a second and more violent local uprising, Terek Cossack garrisons in Gunib and Kasum-Kent in Dagestan were heavily besieged and compelled to retire. A White 'punitive column' under the command of one Colonel Lavrov, consisting of around 1,000 soldiers and Cossacks, and accompanied by an artillery battery and nineteen machine guns, was dispatched on 28 August from Port Petrovsk to punish the rebellious regions, but instead found itself surrounded and pinned down in the Aia-Kaka valley where, during two days of fighting reminiscent of a nineteenth-century colonial campaign, they were practically annihilated. White intelligence analysts regarded the Lavrov disaster to be the true cause behind the subsequent large-scale general uprising, although August as a whole had already witnessed bitter fighting, with around ten Terek Cossack garrisons overwhelmed, and 2,000 Cossack and Volunteer Army troops killed.¹⁰⁶ The loss of so many men in a single battle, they reasoned, was interpreted strategically in the region as a 'sign of weakness'. The analysts also acknowledged that the general mood in Temir-Khan-Shura, Port Petrovsk and Grozny became 'nervous' as a result, and the overall political situation 'unsafe'.¹⁰⁷ By the beginning of September, White Army intelligence reported that the whole of Dagestan was aflame, with only the Avar district being spared, thanks to the 'personal qualities' of the local district head (Kaitmas Alikhanov) and the 'tact' of the local White military garrison.

Whilst admitting errors of their own in terms of the local implementation of general requisitioning policies, White intelligence at the time (and later Denikin as well) laid much of the blame for the sheer scale of the uprising firmly at the door of external actors – sixty Georgian officers and thirty German officers had reportedly arrived on the scene from Tbilisi, whilst Uzun Khadzhi had reportedly also received eighty machine guns and 2 million rounds of small arms ammunition from Georgia.¹⁰⁸ Bolshevik memoirs by local participants confirm the presence within Uzun Khadzhi's camp at this time of Georgian military advisers led by General Kereselidze, who was briefly appointed military leader of the insurgency, but their accounts also remain naturally far more disparaging about the ultimate utility of these advisers.¹⁰⁹ On 6 September the rebellion nonetheless reached a crisis, with the critical coastal town of Derbent, base of the now White-controlled Caspian Sea Flotilla, besieged by some 2,000 insurgents. During the fierce street fighting that followed, artillery fire from ships anchored offshore flattened the whole Muslim quarter of the city. The White command nonetheless interpreted their eventual success in repelling this insurgent attack to have broken the back of the revolt. Whilst the insurgent leaders and their Turkish advisers remained stubborn, it was reported in the aftermath of the battle that the insurgency itself had begun to divide, with former rebel fighters now crowding the roads back to their home villages in the mountains.¹¹⁰

By October the revolt in Dagestan was reportedly only still being driven on by its political leaders, whilst White intelligence noted with some satisfaction that

the simultaneous revolt in Chechnia was also collapsing. The turning point in repressing the latter rebellion was accredited to the role played there by local pro-White Chechen representatives, most prominently Ibragim Chulikov. In September 1919 Chulikov's troops managed to seize the critical mountain *auls* of Dubaiurt, Belgatoi and Shali. Chulikov also infiltrated his own agitators into villages occupied by enemy insurgents, and it was reported by the White command that the *auls* of Kostek and Urus Martan, under the influence of Chulikov's agents, had by their own actions then expelled bands loyal to Uzun Khadzhi, leaving the Chechen plains effectively under White control.¹¹¹

Despite some success in mustering local military and even clerical support, however, the lack of a sophisticated intelligence and propaganda service also meant that the majority of White efforts remained dogged throughout this period by a continual resort to force in the absence of more effective political alternatives. In April, General Erdeli had already bemoaned the work of OSVAG, the White Army's official intelligence and information service, whose work in the Caucasus was done 'in a very disordered fashion, and frequently by unqualified people'. He highlighted the urgent need to create a new local network of informers, employ good translators, and requisition an Arabic script typeface in order to print public declarations, official proclamations and military bulletins.¹¹² However, a distinct lack of progress on this front was demonstrated by the fact that in July the 'extreme need to publish papers in the Chechen language' was still being highlighted – 'there are no technical means to do this'. The absence of effective pro-White agitation literature continued therefore to be substituted for by military measures: Chulikov's efforts aside, calm in Chechnia under such circumstances was also to be achieved by 'isolating it as much as possible from external influences, which will be achieved after subjugating Ingushetia and Dagestan' as well as by 'periodic short blows against the insubordinate'.¹¹³ The implementation of such policies in practice meant that Grozny jail was crammed with 600 inmates by December 1919, whilst some 2,000 formal executions were also carried out within the bounds of the town itself during Denikin's occupation of the North Caucasus.¹¹⁴

Representative of the local fighting in the surrounding countryside meanwhile was the fact that in August the village of Khristianovskoi in Ossetia was surrounded by White troops demanding the handover of members of the local Kermen party, as well as the surrender of bread, horses, rifles and ammunition. All males of the village between the ages of twenty and thirty were also to be conscripted. When members of the Kermen movement within the village broke out of the White encirclement, the whole village was then pounded by artillery fire, after which its surviving inhabitants were systematically robbed before being scattered and dispersed, now homeless, into the cold and rain. The chairman of the local Kermen party, the 23-year-old Georgii Tzagolov, was subsequently found stripped and murdered, with eighteen bayonet wounds to the body, and with the corpse so badly beaten as to be barely identifiable.¹¹⁵ Fighting of this nature led to an endless cycle of savage reprisals: in October 1919, in retaliation for the discovery of the corpses of fifteen soldiers and railway workers – whose bodies were found mutilated and burnt and with their heads staved in by the followers of Uzun Khadzhi – General

Dratsenko, one of Denikin's local commanders, burnt the Chechen *auls* of Gudermes, Istinu, Engel'iurt and Khamauiurt to the ground.¹¹⁶ This cycle of violence and revenge also led to splits amongst Denikin's own allies: in November, General Aliev resigned as ruler of Chechnia in protest at the conduct of the military campaign, and was replaced by a Russian, General Pashkovskii.¹¹⁷

Towards the end of 1919 and beginning of 1920 the four-sided anti-Denikin alliance forged between the Dagestani clergy, Azeri-backed Turkish mercenaries, the Tbilisi-based *medzhlis* of ex-Mountaineer Government officials and the local Bolsheviks in Chechnia and Dagestan began to split asunder. Considerable circumspection should nonetheless be exercised when assessing White intelligence reports that this was largely a product of the level of military pressure that they themselves had been able to apply. Considerably more significant may have been the fact that the whole course of the civil war itself was again shifting sharply by the end of 1919, placing the ongoing political validity of such uncomfortable regional alliances of convenience into ever deeper question.

By October 1919 Denikin's advance towards Moscow had stalled, with the force ratio between the two sides along the main axis of advance now standing at 98,000 White troops versus 140,000–160,000 Bolshevik forces.¹¹⁸ Such a numerical disparity was not in itself necessarily critical – as the fate of the Bolshevik 11th Army had itself earlier spectacularly demonstrated – but the Bolsheviks' other fronts were now reasonably secure, and these fresh Soviet formations now also included some of the best troops in the Red Army, amongst them the cavalry corps of Semen Budennyi (the Red Army having finally learnt the advantages of massed cavalry formations taught to them by Denikin's own earlier campaigns). Denikin was also painfully overstretched combating unrest in his rear areas. His problems in this regard were furthermore not limited to the North Caucasus (where he later admitted that the local insurgency permanently pinned down some 10,000–15,000 men, as well as additionally hampering the White advance on Astrakhan), but extended to the Ukraine and along the Black Sea coastal strip as well. The latter sector alone demanded between 2,000 and 6,000 men at any one time, both to keep watch on Georgia, and to contain a local SR-aligned 'Green' movement made up of anti-White partisans.¹¹⁹

As a consequence, Denikin possessed no immediately available reserves to parry the initial Red Army counter-attack. In early November the forward tip of the salient in Denikin's Moscow-aligned front line crumpled around Orel, and by January 1920 Red Army forces had stormed forward to seize the Black Sea port of Taganrog, effectively cutting the White occupying forces stretched out across the Ukraine and North Caucasus in two. Symbolic of this shift in fortunes was the fact that the 11th Army sheltering around Astrakhan now shifted from the defensive back onto the offensive, helping to liberate Tsaritsyn on 3 January. On 6 January it advanced further down the railway line from Tsaritsyn towards Tikhoretsk, beginning a major offensive towards Stavropol. In Astrakhan itself, meanwhile, Ordzhonikidze and Kirov were reunited in a Caucasus *revkom* (revolutionary committee) now tasked with re-establishing Soviet power in the North Caucasus, and were joined in their work by Nazhmudin Samurskii, appointed on Kirov's recommendation to

head the political department for mountaineer affairs. Samurskii quickly drew up plans for agitation work amongst the North Caucasus mountaineers, as well as concrete proposals for the establishment of *revkoms* throughout Dagestan.¹²⁰

An independent unit, the 'Caucasus Expeditionary Corps', was at around this time also detached from the reorganized 11th Army at the very end of 1919 and assigned to unify the partisan movement in the region and then liberate the whole of the North Caucasus. An initial advance by the corps to link up with Gikalo's men led to the capture of Kizliar on 15 January, but a White counter-attack then caused the town to again be abandoned on 20 January, with the corps falling back to settle instead on a line between the Caspian coast and the critical railway station of Sviatoi Krest.¹²¹ White intelligence analysts towards the end of 1919 had therefore accurately reported, but probably misdiagnosed, the fact that the Terek–Dagestan revolt as they once knew it was now headed for collapse.

The most obvious immediate sign of internal splits in the insurgency – a point acknowledged even by Bolshevik historians – was the wavering of the movement's religious figurehead, Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii. The sheikh, together with Kiazim Bey, was reported by late January–early February 1920 to be ready to initiate peace talks with the Volunteer Army.¹²² This factor may indeed have been critical, if not entirely for the reasons White intelligence suggested, since Akushinskii remained a vital interlocutor providing what little coordination the local anti-White insurgency possessed. One Turkish eyewitness noted the glaring contradiction that, whilst the sheikh maintained good relations with the Bolsheviks in Dagestan, he also treated the Bolsheviks' most open political opponent within the insurgency, Kiazim Bey, as if the latter were his own son. Akushinskii's wavering therefore threatened to shatter the fragile alliance of Turkish-Bolshevik cooperation that existed in the North Caucasus.¹²³

The sympathy of interests that existed between Kiazim Bey and Akushinskii certainly appear to justify the conclusion of one later Soviet historian that the former was willing 'to lay down his life for Ali-Khadzhi's cause of defending the sharia'.¹²⁴ Nonetheless part of the explanation for the complex political manoeuvrings that followed lies in the fact that, whilst Kiazim Bey's own plans relied upon recruiting and building up an alternative power base from amongst local ex-Tsarist Dagestani military officers such as Kaitmas Alikhanov, he was never able to force a truly decisive break between his beloved father-figure Akushinskii and the Bolsheviks. In regard to the highly political mediatory role played by Dagestani clergy such as Akushinskii at the time, meanwhile, Alikhanov himself would remark to this same Turkish observer that 'our mullahs, casting aside their religious occupations, have instead become instruments of political currents. Some of them are Bolsheviks, some – Mensheviks. For this reason I hate them.'¹²⁵

Relations within the insurgency were nonetheless further strained when, on 31 January, White forces in the region launched a concerted attack to destroy the core of Gikalo's '5th Army' around Vozdvizhensk. Gikalo's fortunes had been steadily improving since Gordienko liaised with him the previous December – the number of his followers had risen to around a thousand, and the departure of Georgian advisers from the insurgency the previous year had also led to his

inheriting 11 machine guns. Even his urgent requests for additional funds were beginning to bear fruit, with 2 million roubles received at the beginning of January 1920 via 11th Army representatives.¹²⁶ However, on 31 January 1920, the 350 men that Gikalo had posted in Vozdvizhensk were surrounded on three sides and attacked by an overwhelmingly superior White force, leading to a bitter day-long battle, during which his group suffered over 60 killed and wounded, as well as the loss of most of their 12 machine guns. After repulsing repeated assaults, and having been pinned under intense shellfire nearly all day, the battered and shocked remnants of Gikalo's group were finally able to retreat along the gorge of the Argun river as night fell.¹²⁷ The bitterness of their losses were, however, then only compounded by reports that Uzun Khadzhi's vizier and commander-in-chief, Inaluk Dyshinskii, had spent the majority of the same day nearby at the head of a large mounted detachment, but had deliberately abstained from becoming engaged in the fighting, allegedly hoping to see the Bolsheviks wiped out.

This event naturally led to savage mutual recriminations when Gikalo's and Dyshinskii's forces then eventually met up at nightfall. After continuing onwards to reach Shatoi by 1 February, Gikalo and his staff quickly resolved that Dyshinskii and his immediate entourage had to be disarmed and arrested as traitors to the revolution – a threat which they then carried through on the night of 6 February. On 7 February the Bolsheviks also took decisive control of the Dagestan Defence Council, promoting Dzhalalutdin Korkmasov onto an equal footing with Uzun Khadzhi and Ali-Khadzhi Akushinskii, and appointing another Dagestani Bolshevik, S. S. Kazbekov, as chairman. Though Dyshinskii and his men were in the end freed and sent back under guard to rejoin Uzun Khadzhi at Vedeni, splits within the insurgency had by now become full-blown, and deepened further in the wake of the aged Uzun Khadzhi's own demise from typhus that same March.¹²⁸

During March, divisions within the insurgency leadership became even more apparent when Kiazim Bey placed the Bolshevik members of the Defence Council in Dagestan temporarily under arrest, leading to the murder of Kazbekov whilst in captivity. Upon the protest and intervention of Akushinskii, however, Kiazim Bey relented and then released the surviving members of the Defence Council, and before long both Kiazim Bey and Nuri Pasha were themselves compelled to flee the North Caucasus entirely. The Turkish officer groups still operating in the Caucasus during this period now split irrevocably, between those who, like Ismail Khakki Bey, joined forces with the Bolsheviks and those who, led by Ismail Berkok, continued trying to promote and bring into life a wholly independent Muslim state in the North Caucasus.¹²⁹ At a congress of mountaineer poor in Levashi on 10 October 1920 Ismail Khakki stood alongside Ordzhonikidze and entreated the assembled mountaineers not to side with Nuri Pasha, Kiazim Bey or other 'adventurers', but to embrace Bolshevism instead, soviets being not a foreign form of organizational power but rather one in fact closest to Islam, the spirit of which was itself 'opposed to despotism'. He also pointed out that 'common enemies and slogans' bound together Soviet Russia and revolutionary Turkey, with Kemal Atatürk's men in Anatolia marching under red banners whilst soviets and party cells sprang up in their rear.¹³⁰

The pro-Bolshevik Turks rallied behind Mustafa Subhi, head of the Moscow-backed Communist Party of Turkey, and in early 1921, having embarked upon an ill-fated maritime expedition to promulgate the gospel of Communism in post-war Turkey, collectively met their deaths at the hands of Kemal Atatürk's followers, in the infamous 'Black Sea Incident'.¹³¹ Ismail Berkok and his followers by contrast would continue their political activities in the North Caucasus, maintaining an uneasy truce with the Bolsheviks, until May 1920, when a conference of mountaineers organized by Berkok's followers then attempted to set up a 'national council' to govern the region, leading to a decisive political break with the local Bolshevik leadership. Thereafter life for Berkok's followers would become increasingly difficult as, short of food and funds, constantly fearing betrayal, and harried so that they could never spend more than one night at a single location, they rapidly realized the impossibility of their political aspirations. Whilst some advocated spurring their mountaineer followers on into an open battle with the Bolsheviks, in practice Bolshevik pursuit drove Berkok and his men to eventually seek refuge in Tbilisi. There, by the end of June 1920, news of the fall of Azerbaijan led to the final abandonment of their independence project, with Berkok's whole group resolving to return to Turkey instead.¹³²

The overall disintegration of the White cause in the North Caucasus meanwhile culminated in the ugly and hastily organized evacuation of the bulk of White troops from Novorossiisk to the Crimea on 25–26 March, following which an exhausted Denikin surrendered his command to Wrangel. Orders for White forces to begin an evacuation of the North Caucasus had already been issued on 6 January, and physical contact between Denikin's main group and the North Caucasus forces had been lost by 12 March. Fearing disaster from a flank retreat westwards along the Armavir–Maikop railway towards the Black Sea coast if conducted in such close proximity to Bolshevik forces bearing down from the north, Maslovskii, General Erdeli's chief of staff, had already drawn up plans the previous year for White forces in the North Caucasus to retire if necessary back into Dagestan, with the potential of then even occupying Baku. Although arms and supplies were stockpiled in Dagestan for this purpose, however, this plan was effectively annulled in the panic that followed.¹³³ White rule in the North Caucasus ended not with a bang but a whimper, with Maslovskii being compelled to instead organize the retreat of the bulk of the White forces from the Terek region south-westwards through Vladikavkaz into neighbouring Georgia. Vladikavkaz was abandoned during the night of 23 March, whilst Groznyi fell uncontested to forward elements of the Caucasus Expeditionary Corps by the evening of 25 March. A triumphant Gikalo convened a Chechen council on 3 April which then, under the direction of Ordzhonikidze and Kirov, set out to organize the establishment of Soviet *revkoms* in Chechnia and Ingushetia.¹³⁴ On 25 March, Dagestani partisans occupied Derbent and then Temir-Khan-Shura, before finally liberating Port Petrovsk on 30 March, meeting up with advancing 11th Army forces in the process. By 11 April the Dagestan Defence Council had been reorganized into the Dagestan *revkom* under the chairmanship of Korkmasov, with Samurskii, after arriving by ship at Port Petrovsk on 20 April, becoming his deputy. With the White collapse just as

sudden and rapid as their earlier violent ascendancy, the whole of the North Caucasus now abruptly lay nominally under Soviet rule.¹³⁵

The Dagestan rebellion

Though he had supported Denikin's Whites, breaking decisively in the process over this matter with both his former ally Uzun Khadzhi and long-time rival Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii, Nazhmudin Gotsinskii had in practice generally kept a low political profile during much of the course of 1919. In his own later account, the collapse of the White movement by early 1920 prompted an informal conference in Khunza, where a variety of local Dagestani political actors such as Kaitmas Alikhanov and Nukh-Bek Tarkovskii resolved to scatter and either go abroad or underground. Gotsinskii himself alleged that he had resolved at this same meeting to simply go home and await arrest by the Bolsheviks, but illness along the way forced him to rest up and take shelter in the village of Gotsatl' instead. There, within a few weeks, between 500 and 600 armed followers arrived pledging support, and he resolved to declare war on the Bolsheviks instead, going on to enter into an alliance with Alikhanov in June, and simultaneously opening talks with the Menshevik Georgian government to gather financial and material support.¹³⁶

Gotsinskii's last throw of the political dice was better calculated than it might appear at first glance, particularly since Bolshevik rule across much of the North Caucasus in 1920 was still highly tenuous given the speed of the White collapse. Despite warnings from Lenin to act cautiously and with maximum tact regarding local customs, the political errors of early Soviet rule in Dagestan were also particularly egregious. Internal discord and arbitrary actions therefore quickly rendered the local political terrain ripe for yet further rebellion, despite the country already being exhausted by over two years of civil war. To begin with, the Dagestan *revkom* under Korkmasov's chairmanship had a shifting membership, expanding from ten to twenty members, and not until 1921 would it acquire the political ballast of Sheikh Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii as both candidate member and head of Dagestan's spiritual administration. The actions of the local Cheka also quickly aroused the ire of both Samurskii and Said Gabiev: the former wrote to Ordzhonikidze in Baku as early as 2 May that the Cheka's insubordination and arbitrary activity was stirring up rural discontent. A month and a half later, the head of the Port Petrovsk Cheka, Volkov, was himself placed under arrest for 'counter-revolutionary' activity, but other problems nonetheless continued to multiply.¹³⁷

The presence of Red Army forces also brought with it an increase in violence and robberies, as the poorly supplied troops sought to supplement their rations and supplies at the expense of the local population. The scale of arbitrary arrests and executions meanwhile had already led Akushinskii to warn the *revkom* as early as 4 April that, if robbery and violence continued on this scale, it would inevitably trigger a violent rural backlash. At the end of that same month, the Bolshevik central government had already allocated, after formal investigation of these proliferating local complaints, 5 million roubles compensation for those Dagestanis who had suffered robbery or other harm to their person, but the sum also remained clearly

inadequate for the scale of abuse. Even local party activists meanwhile now began to agitate for the withdrawal of Red Army garrisons from local towns and villages. Local food requisitioning parties meanwhile, continuing the policy of 'War Communism', generated yet further unrest and resentment by imposing massive supply appropriations in return for payment in devalued roubles. The region of Chiriyurt, for example, was charged to provide around 1,500 head of cattle and sheep at a price of 400 roubles per kilogram, at a time when 5,000 roubles were not sufficient to buy a local mountaineer even a single chicken.¹³⁸ The mountain districts also remained deprived of basic essentials such as salt and kerosene, and a trip through the country by Samurskii in September led him to warn that the cost of salt in certain regions had correspondingly risen to 300 roubles a pound, and the cost of kerosene to 1,000 roubles a pound. This, he warned, led the disenchanted local population to lose faith in a Soviet power which apparently could not even deliver to them basic products such as kerosene, situated so obviously nearby in Baku.¹³⁹ Here again, urgent warnings from Samurskii and the rest of the Dagestan *revkom* regarding an imminent famine led to Lenin by the late summer beginning to dispatch, by both sea and rail, large stocks of food, kerosene, salt, sugar and other vitally needed supplies. Dagestan's shattered transport infrastructure, however, remained a considerable obstacle to disseminating this aid throughout the countryside.

When it eventually reached remote villages, the impact of such aid was immediate: Samurskii's deputy within the Dagestan Interior Ministry reported that the arrival of several thousand tons of manufactures and supplies for the 67,000 inhabitants of the Andi region was 'the first fact to corroborate the actual existence of Soviet power in Dagestan, and the principle behind distributing this aid furthermore demonstrated that the Soviet authorities are the true representatives of the poor'.¹⁴⁰ However, rather like the American occupation of Iraq after 2003 (where petrol shortages, amongst other factors, likewise provoked public outcry, disbelief, and savage scorn), a critical window of opportunity to maximize and build upon immediate local goodwill had been lost, and the first four to six months of early Soviet rule in Dagestan, characterized by dissent, disorder and internal disorganization, instead created a breeding ground for a major insurgency.

Against this backdrop, therefore, Gotsinskii's plans to invoke and lead a massive insurrection against Soviet power in Dagestan prospered. In addition to rallying support from a coalition of Tsarist-era Muslim officers, local political veterans such as Akhmed Tsalikov and Gaidar Bammatoev, and the Menshevik Georgian government, Gotsinskii was able to muster further rural support by adding a new political actor into the equation, in the form of Said Bey (1901–81), the grandson of *Imam* Shamil. Raised in Turkey, multilingual, and benefiting from a European education, the recently arrived Said Bey was willingly drawn into the Dagestan rebellion of 1920–1, seeing his own role as its nominal leadership figure as continuing the noble cause of his grandfather. In the wake of these events he would in fact remain an influential political actor within the Caucasian diaspora right up until the Second World War. The insurgency's ringleaders meanwhile began organizing their efforts in Georgia from June 1920 onwards, with Colonel Dzhabarov

taking on loose military leadership of the whole force, whilst spiritual authority was vested in the ‘Council of the Four Sheikhs’ – Nurmagomed-Khadzhi Ansaltinskii, Dervish-Magoma-Khadzhi Andiiskii, Magoma-Khadzhi Balakhanskii and Ibragim-Khadzhi Kuchrinskii.¹⁴¹ In August insurgent military activity began with two raids into Dagestan, but serious campaigning did not get under way until early September.

The two dominant characteristics of the fighting that followed were the relatively large number of forces deployed by the insurgents, and their resolve to conduct a regular war, besieging local Soviet garrisons, and ambushing Red Army relief columns, rather than engaging in more decentralized partisan warfare. The movement of 500–600 men from Georgia into Dagestan in early September, under Alikhanov, led Red Army intelligence to warn that it was now engaged in conflict not merely with a warlike population, but with regular army-style enemy detachments, well officered and equipped with machine guns.¹⁴² Enemy numbers on 12 September were estimated at 3,000, but by 1 November they were calculated to have already risen to 5,400 men, and they then peaked in January 1921, when Gotsinskii’s rebellion was estimated to have between 9,700 and 10,000 men behind it.¹⁴³

The fighting itself focused on Soviet positions in the mountain chain that covered the approaches to Temir-Khan-Shura and the coast, specifically Botlikh on the northern flank, Khunza in the centre, and Gunib to the south-east. All three of these strategic sites were only lightly garrisoned when hostilities began: Khunza was initially held only by the second battalion (200 bayonets and 6 machine guns) of the 1st Dagestan regiment, alongside a group of pro-Soviet militia under Commissar Ataev; Botlikh, by some 100 pro-Soviet militia; and Gunib, by 85 bayonets and 2 Lewis guns of the same regiment.¹⁴⁴ In addition to fielding superior numbers at first, the insurgents enjoyed ongoing external support, with the Menshevik Georgian government’s interior and defence minister, Ramishvili, alongside its president, Noi Zhordaniia, both personally visiting Gotsinskii in Dagestani shortly after the revolt’s successful beginning to promise additional support. This soon arrived in the form of 2,400 rifles, 4 machine guns and a wagon-load of ammunition and supplies. Georgian emissaries along the common Georgian-Dagestani frontier also tracked Gotsinskii’s detachments and their military progress via heliograph signal stations.¹⁴⁵ The insurgents were hampered throughout, however, by a shortage of both shells and artillery, aside from a light artillery battery captured from Red Army forces at the end of October. This resulted in their sieges of the local Red Army garrisons having a drawn-out, indecisive character, and was also a serious shortcoming when attempting to extend their activities beyond the mountains onto the roads leading down to the coastal plains, where the arrival of armoured cars by November gave Soviet forces a decisive tactical advantage.

The Red Army nonetheless suffered a series of prominent disasters at the outset of the campaign, most notably in losing control of Botlikh to the north altogether. Here, the tiny local garrison, having been reinforced by 210 bayonets and 3 machine guns on 18 September, made the fatal mistake of overstretching itself, deploying troops forward on 20 September towards the *aul* of Shiitl, and in the process

scattering detachments like breadcrumbs en route along its line of advance until finally the advance guard, whittled down to just 70 bayonets, 70 sabres and 2 machine guns, found itself confronted by an enemy force of 300 infantry. This compelled the outnumbered Bolshevik troops to undertake a retreat which rapidly became a rout. Informed that Botlikh itself had also fallen in the interim, the few survivors from this column attempted to retire back on Khunza, but were soon surrounded and forced to surrender.¹⁴⁶

Khunza and Gunib were meanwhile also heavily besieged, but succeeded in holding out during the whole duration of the uprising, fatally compromising the insurgency's subsequent freedom of movement. On 30 October, however, a further disaster overwhelmed Soviet forces operating in the field, when the Arakani force, sent up from Temir-Khan-Shura to occupy the village of that name and thereafter reinforce Khunza, found itself surrounded in a narrow valley and then, in a near repeat of the Whites' Lavrov disaster the previous year, catastrophically routed. Despite the artillery being well served, the detachment was consistently tactically outfought, with its insurgent opponents employing carefully aimed sniper-fire to silence the Soviet machine guns. After several days of hard fighting, the cumulative casualties incurred during the final panicked collapse amounted to around 700 Red Army men lost, whilst Gotsinskii's forces (including his 16-year-old son, who fought in the ranks during this engagement) also captured 24 machine guns, 4 artillery pieces, and large stocks of ammunition and other supplies. Amongst the most prominent casualties on the Bolshevik side from this disaster was Safar Dudarov, chairman of the Dagestan Cheka at the time.¹⁴⁷

Attempts to retake Botlikh in November meanwhile led to yet further disaster, when the 1st 'Revolutionary Discipline' Rifle regiment, part of the Red Army's Caucasus Labour Army, was dispatched from Groznyi south via Vedeno to reoccupy the fort. Having successfully done this without a shot fired on 16 November, the regimental commissar, Auzen, then again fatally dispersed his forces, leaving part of his command behind as an occupying garrison, and taking two companies and a machine-gun section forward on 18 November to attempt to capture two insurgent-manned artillery pieces in the nearby *aul* of Muni. After a short battle Muni was taken, but the insurgents managed to retreat with their guns intact, whilst the requisitioning and looting of the *aul* itself by Auzen's men quickly alienated the local population. Having additionally failed to undertake even basic security precautions on its flanks or line of retreat, Auzen's detachment was then surrounded by regrouping insurgent forces, and all 250 men were practically wiped out by a combination of insurgent action and the enraged vengeance of the local population. Following through quickly on this significant moral victory, the insurgents then surrounded and re-besieged Botlikh, whose 600–700 defenders were soon negotiating to surrender both the fort and their arms in return for safe passage out of Dagestan. Colonel Dzhaifarov, leading the siege, chaired these negotiations, but whilst talks were still in progress a large band of rebels, ignoring their own commanders, stormed the building where the negotiations were occurring and wiped out nearly all the Red Army men present. In addition to the heavy casualties inflicted on the Red Army in losing Botlikh for a second time, the insurgents also

benefited considerably from acquiring the significant quantity of weapons and ammunition which had by this time been stockpiled at the fort.¹⁴⁸

If regular Red Army forces struggled to master the peculiarities of mountain warfare, and frequently experienced disaster during the campaign's early stages, two local Bolshevik initiatives, both of them brainstormed by Nazhmutdin Samurskii, nonetheless also prevented these reverses from translating into a far wider strategic collapse. The first was Bolshevik willingness, already demonstrated during the civil war, to co-opt prominent Islamic clergy in the region; the second was Samurskii's personal initiative in undertaking redoubled efforts to mobilize pro-Bolshevik irregular partisan detachments. In December 1920 the Bolsheviks developed, with one of Gotsinskii's clerical opponents, 'alim Khaibulla-Khadzhi Kakhibskii, a series of theses for subsequent promulgation by Sheikh Gasan Kakhibskii at a congress of the Dagestani 'Ulama'. These argued that subordination to existing Soviet power was not merely an act dictated by the contemporary realities of life, but by the Koran itself, whilst Gotsinskii by contrast was denounced as a 'false *Imam*' who would bring only bloodshed and suffering. Sheikh Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii had meanwhile already been enlisted in September to petition insurgents in the mountain regions of Dagestan to lay down their arms.¹⁴⁹

This rallying of pro-Bolshevik clerical support, in combination with considerable financial incentives, bore additional extremely beneficial military-political results by way of raising significant numbers of irregular partisan forces for the Bolshevik cause. As early as 29 October, Ordzhonikidze in Vladikavkaz exulted that 8,000 'Red Partisans' were fighting on the Soviet side in Dagestan – testimony, even if exaggerated, to the fact that the Bolsheviks were, on average, able to rally just as many volunteer irregular fighters to their cause as Gotsinskii was.¹⁵⁰ Samurskii himself meanwhile led a critical contingent of exactly such men, who were then able to relieve and secure the fortress of Khunza, at the time on the verge of surrender, and thereafter successfully held out against insurgent attacks for a further two months, until a major Red Army counter-offensive finally broke the siege by sweeping Gotsinskii's followers entirely from the area.

Such holding measures also allowed the Bolsheviks breathing room to attempt some reform of their corruption-ridden and ineffective local political apparatus. Serious rifts had already emerged between local Bolsheviks who had served in Dagestan during the civil war in the region, and more recently arrived comrades inclined towards a more culturally insensitive, class-based approach; the latter also had serious issues with what they saw as the 'compromising' policies and unconventional political alliances pursued by their local counterparts. Wholly characteristic of this legacy of local political accommodation coming out from the civil war, for example, was the request lodged by Korkmasov with Ordzhonikidze appealing for the release of the former interior minister of the Mountaineer Government Rashidkhan Kaplanov. Korkmasov noted that Kaplanov had helped many prominent local Bolsheviks remain at liberty during the civil war in the region and that, though not a Bolshevik himself, he could not be placed in the obvious 'counter-revolutionary' camp of a Gotsinskii or a Prince Tarkovskii either.¹⁵¹ Korkmasov's request was granted, and Kaplanov would remain at liberty, working publicly in

academic and judicial posts, until he was finally rearrested and executed in 1937. The greatest criticism at the time however of cultural misunderstanding and intolerance on the part of more recently arrived comrades came from Samurskii and Said Gabiev.

In a report to Ordzhonikidze from 10 January 1921 Gabiev, by now chairman of the *Dagrevkom*, condemned the administrative chaos and bureaucratic disorder prevalent within the local party apparatus, but reserved particular scorn for the local Cheka, who by their ‘senseless’ arrests of completely innocent people, and culturally insensitive acts such as leaving the bodies of their executed victims lying unburied to be eaten by dogs, had both offended local religious sensibilities, and engendered mass fear and repulsion. As evidence of their arbitrariness, he pointed out that the Cheka had shot around sixteen to eighteen people over the course of seven months, but in one subsequent month alone had then executed thirty-three persons – ‘I am deeply convinced that not all deserved execution.’ Most critical, however, was the complete insubordination of the local Cheka itself, and the complete lack of communication between its leadership and that of the Dagestan *revkom* – ‘I, as its chairman, hear about executions from discussions on the street.’ Gabiev attached to his report eyewitness testimony detailing local Cheka representatives’ attempts at blackmail, kidnap and rape, and his concluding warning to Ordzhonikidze effectively also signified a bureaucratic declaration of war – that ‘whilst Comrade Kviring’ (deputy chairman of the Dagestan Cheka at the time) was in Dagestan, ‘with his peculiar hatred of everything “of the East”, I can assure you that Dagestan, even in ruins, will not become Soviet any time soon’.¹⁵²

In response to such reports Ordzhonikidze in January 1921 launched his own investigation, the subsequent ‘Gorlin report’ which led to a purge of the local Cheka – an organization guilty, according to Ordzhonikidze’s investigators, of ‘a mass of crimes’, as well as of employing personnel of whom only a tiny minority were of suitable moral and political character, and many more of whom were completely illiterate.¹⁵³ Local Cheka representatives struck back, however, and Said Gabiev would before long write to Ordzhonikidze in dismay, recounting how he had learnt of plans to remove him from party work in Dagestan for a year, with his reputation also besmirched as an ‘intriguer’ (*sklochnik*). Gabiev protested that a ‘bacchanalia of lies and slurs around my name has been created by just one person, with the help of others, as I am sure is well known to you’. Ordzhonikidze came to Gabiev’s defence, and the final outcome was the removal of Kviring from his post and Gabiev’s retention.¹⁵⁴ The Cheka kept notes on the affair, however – a report from the Special Section of the Dagestan Cheka from 28 February 1921 complained that the whole revolt, far from being fed by Chekist excesses, could instead be laid at the door of Gabiev and the local *revkom*, who had become out-and-out defenders of local bourgeois interests, pursuing an indecisive ‘eastern policy’ that failed to repress banditry, disarmed the poorest peasants, and undermined the work of the Red Army. This report’s author complained that Ordzhonikidze himself defended Gabiev, closing his eyes to the consequent favouritism extended towards Muslims, as well as the ‘compromising’ policy being pursued by Gabiev

and the Dagestan *revkom* in general, whilst adding that Kviring, now transferred to the Don Cheka in Rostov, should definitely be contacted, since he had once claimed to have accumulated so much incriminating material on Gabiev that the latter could be easily arrested.¹⁵⁵ Whilst Ordzhonikidze's patronage kept Said Gabiev from immediate harm, and helped him both pursue a more moderate policy and purge the Augean stables within the local party apparatus, the shadow of this affair would appear to have somewhat hung over Gabiev's whole subsequent career – he was destined to never again occupy so prominent a post in the Dagestan party.

The arrival of Red Army reinforcements and the onset of winter meanwhile began to turn the tide of the Dagestan revolt back in the Soviets' favour. Heavy snow on the mountain passes limited the amount of aid that the insurgents could receive from Georgia, a problem that then became terminal for the insurgency when the Menshevik government in Tbilisi fell in the face of a Soviet invasion on 25 February 1921. Cut off from their main external sponsor, the revolt's leaders were reduced to trying to rally their followers, according to Red Army intelligence, with claims that further aid would be forthcoming from Turkey.¹⁵⁶ Colonel Dzhaferov, a leading participant, later also blamed the loss of momentum and subsequent collapse of the rebellion on Gotsinskii's own growing unpopularity. Remarking that Gotsinskii was already 'compromised' in the eyes of many Avars through his affiliation with the largest landholders, Dzhaferov went on to note that the *Imam* was now increasingly personally obsessed with avenging himself upon those responsible for inflicting material harm against his own personal property: 'He now shouted the whole time that so-and-so had to be killed for stealing his sheep, so-and-so had to be hanged for showing the Bolsheviks where his sheep were arrayed, and so-and-so for seizing his pastureland.'¹⁵⁷

Against this backdrop of growing dissent and demoralization, increased Red Army numbers took a rapid toll on insurgent fortunes. The Red Army itself also printed and disseminated a pamphlet advocating a more culturally sensitive approach when operating in the Dagestani mountains, but in the heat of battle this doctrine was still not universally adhered to or implemented.¹⁵⁸ The key early breakthroughs came about in reality through the overwhelming application of conventional force, seen most vividly in the attack launched on 7 January on the insurgent stronghold of Gergebil, which finally fell on 26 January amidst fierce fighting and the extensive Soviet employment of artillery fire. By 28 January, Samurskii and the much-reduced Soviet garrison at Khunza had also been finally relieved, whilst February saw a tragedy unfold in the midst of continued fighting between the two sides around the village of Genichutl'. In response to a raid by Gotsinskii's forces, the Soviet military commander, Todorskii, ordered the nearby Soviet garrison to wipe that particular village from the face of the earth: over the course of the next two days some 68 women, children and old men were killed, with the survivors then dispersed on the third day.¹⁵⁹ Artillery and siege tactics again came to the fore meanwhile in the Soviet siege of Gimri, begun on 25 December, which was brought to a successful conclusion on 18 February; Botlikh was then also finally and decisively retaken by the Red Army by 5 March. Soviet intelligence

reports noted increasing signs of disorganization and desertion within the ranks of their opponents, whilst Dzhafarov himself noted that the collapse of the insurgent cause now became ‘catastrophic’, with the scale of defections rendering it increasingly difficult to distinguish between allies and enemies.¹⁶⁰

The insurgency’s last stand came in early May around the stronghold of Gidatl, held by 250–300 of Gotsinskii’s men. In the wake of defeat there, Dzhafarov went into hiding but subsequently surrendered; he was amnestied and remained at liberty long enough thereafter to write his memoirs, before then being imprisoned in 1930 and 1933 and ultimately executed, like so many others of his generation, in the great purge of 1937. Magoma-Khadzhi Balakhanskii also surrendered in mid-1921 and died very shortly thereafter in jail, whilst Kaitmas Alikhanov and his three sons died fighting in a remote mountain pass, and Said Bey, leading the rebellion in Chechnia, was badly injured and fled to Turkey. Only Gotsinskii and Nurmagomed-Khadzhi Ansaltinskii remained at liberty as active opponents of Soviet power, and went underground to lead a covert life for years thereafter in remote Dagestani and Chechen *auls*.

In retrospect the Dagestan revolt can be seen as the historical peak of influence within Dagestani political life of the Muslim *Ulama* who had risen to such political prominence as a consequence of Shamil’s own ‘peasant war’ and the social decline of the indigenous ethnic nobility that had both accompanied and followed that earlier conflict. Whilst cadres of Tsarist-era Muslim officers and external supporters undeniably also played an important role in the struggle, both sides, insurgent and Bolshevik alike, had relied heavily on the role of the *Ulama* to mobilize supporters and maintain their morale, and the nature of the war itself as a civil war had also arisen largely as a product of divisions within the *Ulama* themselves, between groups coalescing around Gotsinskii and Ansaltinskii, and the followers of men such as Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii, Sheikh Gasan Kakhbiskii, and Islamist modernizers such as Ali Kaiaev. Whilst Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii and others remained Bolshevik fellow travellers until the late 1920s, the splits within the *Ulama* of this era were nonetheless decisive, and that group as a whole would never again play as prominent a role in Dagestani political life as it had in 1917–21, largely as a consequence of the Soviet assault on Islamic religious institutions that eventually began in earnest nationwide from 1928 onwards.

The fall of the Transcaucasus

In contrast to the ongoing and extremely worrisome battle against banditry and low-level White insurgency facing the Soviet authorities in their occupied rear areas, or even the repression of Gotsinskii’s rebellion in Dagestan, the absorption of Armenia and Azerbaijan by Soviet military forces – primarily the 11th Army – proceeded relatively bloodlessly during 1920–21. All three states of the Transcaucasus since acquiring full independence in 1918 had struggled to establish fully functioning bureaucracies, internal legitimacy, or capable field armies. In the purely military sense, Armenia was perhaps the strongest of the three states, and would come to be absorbed through a unique combination of political pressure from Soviet

Russia on one side and Kemalist forces on the other. Azerbaijan, by contrast, both governmentally and militarily, was perhaps the weakest and most dysfunctional, having never completely emerged out from the shadow of its Ottoman (and later British) sponsors.

Utilizing the services of Tsarist-era Muslim officers and Russian bureaucrats, the *Musavat*-dominated government of Azerbaijan after the Ottoman withdrawal at the end of 1918 had devoted considerable resources to generating a new national army. Military expenditures in 1919 amounted to over 400 million roubles, or over a quarter of the republic's total budget. The government also planned to actually increase spending in this area in order to increase the size of the army, from a planned 25,000 men in 1919 to 40,000 bayonets and sabres during 1920.¹⁶¹ Despite deploying by 1920 between 20,000 and 25,000 men, supported by 3 armoured trains, 2 armoured cars, 5 aircraft, 32 light artillery pieces, 24 mountain guns, 4 howitzers, and 116 machine guns, and having also stockpiled 14,000 British rifles (in addition to extant Russian supplies), this army was in reality a paper tiger, logistically disorganized and unprepared for fighting of any great duration. The country's own war minister warned that the whole army would not stand and fight long enough to resist the advance of a single Red Army battalion, a view which proved prophetic in hindsight.¹⁶² Though it may have possessed the distinction of becoming the first Muslim state ever to enfranchise women, the Azeri Democratic Republic was also internally unstable, getting through three separate coalition cabinets over the course of 1919 alone, each of which had, if anything, ever lower levels of public trust and support.¹⁶³

The underground Bolshevik party organization in Baku under Mikoian's leadership during this period also worked tirelessly behind the scenes to provoke splits within the Hummet party, succeeding over the course of 1919 in breaking away Muslim members of that organization who then went on to form the core of the underground (and still officially illegal) Azeri Communist Party (or AzKP(b)), with the latter formally coming into existence on 13 February 1920. The civil war's dissolving front lines now also allowed substantial financial and material support to be sent to this group, in the form of 50 million roubles and, from the Turkestan *revvoensovet* alone, 1,200 rifles.¹⁶⁴ Kemalist Turkey meanwhile favoured trading Azerbaijan's strict territorial sovereignty in exchange for closer relations with Soviet Russia, given its own hunger for direct access to financial and military support from Moscow against the UK, seen at this time as the common enemy. With this in mind, Halil Pasha, by now serving as Mustafa Kemal's personal envoy in the Transcaucasus, eventually signed off on a resolution in April 1920 supporting the overthrow of the current government in Baku in favour of a pro-Bolshevik Azeri government, incorporating Bolshevik representatives. This concession foresaw such a future government being able thereafter to incorporate Azerbaijan into the Soviet Union, but equally hoped that this would render a formal Soviet invasion of Azeri territory unnecessary.¹⁶⁵

Against this shifting regional backdrop, the *Musavat*-led ruling coalition in Baku split further, between those who, like Interior Minister M. Kh. Khadzinski, sought accommodation with Soviet Russia, and those who, like Foreign Minister Khan

Khoiskii, held out for complete independence and attempting military deterrence. The deterrence option became completely unsustainable however after 23 March 1920, when an outbreak of hostilities with Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh led to around 15,000 troops being dispatched to the Karabakh and Zangezur provinces to fight local *Dashnak* detachments. Though the worsening situation with Poland meanwhile made Lenin anxious to avoid a costly or prolonged struggle in the Transcaucasus, the prospect of hostilities on the western front also underlined Soviet Russia's desperate need for oil, and on 17 March he authorized the organization of a coup to topple the Baku government. On 24 April all underground sections of the AKP(b) in the Baku region took up arms, launching a formal insurrection on the 27th which, upon creating a *revkom* chaired by Nariman Narimanov, then presented an ultimatum to the standing parliament to dissolve itself. Simultaneously, at midnight on the 26th, four armoured trains of the Bolshevik 11th Army had already crossed the Azeri frontier practically unopposed, the Azeri war minister having disobeyed orders to blow up the relevant strategic bridges. With the Red Army by the evening of the 27th just 14 km from Baku itself, a crisis session of parliament, aware of the simultaneous defection of its own police and military units wholesale to the Bolshevik side, and informed by its own war Minister that military resistance was now unthinkable, voluntarily abdicated at 11 p.m. that same day. The final overthrow was both rapid and almost completely bloodless: the first Red Army trains pulled into Baku station between four and five the following morning, with Ordzhonikidze and Kirov later reporting to Lenin that the mass enthusiasm which greeted the proclamation of the Azeri Soviet Republic could be compared only with the October revolution in St Petersburg – with the added distinction that in Baku there had not even been any street fighting.¹⁶⁶

The transition of Azerbaijan to Soviet rule carried the further consequence of bringing the Soviet 11th Army into direct contact with Armenia. Azeri-Armenian hostilities continued to remain an issue even after the Soviet seizure of power in Baku, and were the subject of some of the first formal negotiations between the Soviet Foreign Ministry and Hamazasp Ohandjanian's Armenian Bureau Government in May 1920.¹⁶⁷ The occupation by the Red Army of contested sections of the Zangezur and Karabakh border territories as a means of separating the warring sides created countless opportunities for further conflict and confusion, however, not least since the Politburo in Moscow was divided over how to deal with Georgia and Armenia, at the same time as both Ordzhonikidze and the local Kemalists were pursuing their own personal regional agenda.

Though the Soviet foreign minister, Chicherin, supported maintaining formal diplomatic ties with both Georgia and Armenia, neither Stalin in the Politburo nor Ordzhonikidze on the ground shared such enthusiasm for endless negotiations, with Stalin already opining to Sergo on 8 July 1920, vis-à-vis Armenia, that 'it is not possible to vacillate endlessly between the sides; it is necessary to support one of the sides, definitely, in the given case, of course, Azerbaijan with Turkey'.¹⁶⁸ The Goris–Nakhichevan road had in the meantime become a vital communication route between Soviet Russia and the Kemalist heartland in Anatolia, yet the

detention on 31 July of a Soviet transport column by Armenian irregulars, seized whilst bearing 500 kilograms of gold destined for Mustafa Kemal, delighted rather than irritated Kemal's main local diplomatic representative, Halil Pasha. He had laboured diligently to get the Red Army into a scenario where just such an ambush occurred, remarking that 'I am doing everything to get the *Dashnaks* into conflict, since they are very naïve in politics.'¹⁶⁹ In addition to facing a difficult political situation, the economic position of the Armenian government also remained particularly parlous, the State Treasury between September 1918 and January 1920 having managed a budget deficit of 270 million roubles by resorting to the printing press. The price of a pound of meat locally correspondingly shot up from 300 roubles to 1,700 roubles between May and November 1920, and the cost of a single egg from 22 roubles to 300.¹⁷⁰ Both Ordzhonikidze and Kirov meanwhile – the latter appointed after 19 June the Bolshevik diplomatic representative to Tbilisi – continued to agitate for a more aggressive policy of Sovietization towards both Armenia and Georgia, waging what was effectively a slow bureaucratic siege by telegram against the Soviet Foreign Ministry's official line.¹⁷¹ The true breakthrough in Armenia, however, came about in the end not due to action by the local Armenian Communist Party – bloodily suppressed by the *Dashnaks* after attempting to establish a local governmental foothold in May – but from the Turkish side, with the eruption of full-blown Armenian-Turkish hostilities in September 1920.

The signing of the treaty of Sèvres on 10 August 1920 between the Entente and the Sultan's government in Constantinople anticipated a new frontier for Armenia, one quickly mapped out by aides of American President Woodrow Wilson, and which sketched a border which promised that state unencumbered access to the Black Sea via annexation of the old Ottoman vilayets of Van, Bitlis, Erzerum and Trebizond. Actual control of inner Anatolia, however, belonged to Mustafa Kemal's National Assembly, which remained unalterably opposed to the loss of these four provinces, and it accordingly resolved by military action to alter the political situation on the ground in its favour. After heavy skirmishing in the first week of September between the forces of General Karabekir, Mustafa Kemal's local commander, and Dashnak detachments, Kemal on 20 September authorized a major assault by around 25,000 men to occupy Kars province. By 29 September the Turks had occupied Sarikamish, abandoned by Armenian forces without a fight, and after a pause, during which time Turkish diplomatic probes ensured that Georgia was liable to remain neutral, conflict was resumed in earnest during October around the fortress of Kars. Following a collapse in Armenian morale, the fort itself was captured by mid-afternoon on 30 October, with around 1,500 Armenian casualties and 2,000 prisoners taken. Given that the fall of Kars also signalled the end of the effective fighting potential of the Armenian army, the *Dashnak* Bureau Government in Erevan was now increasingly left attempting to negotiate national survival, a struggle that entailed pursuing a ceasefire with the Turks whilst also sliding steadily towards becoming a Soviet republic.

With Turkish forces on the rampage in the west around Alexandropol (the Soviet Armenian government in May the following year had to organize the burial of

11,896 corpses, 90 per cent of them women and children, in the territory occupied at this time by the Turkish army), the Erevan government faced further pressure in the east from 28 November onwards, in the form of an initiative by Ordzhonikidze (who had finally resolved to slip Moscow's leash) to give covert military assistance to the advance of a pro-Bolshevik Armenian *revkom*.¹⁷² Literally five minutes after dispatching a telegram to Moscow on 29 November, apologizing for the fact that he had already acted before receiving countervailing instructions that very morning, Ordzhonikidze wrote an urgent personal telegram to Boris Legran, the Soviet diplomatic representative in Armenia. In it, he urged Legran to offer guarantees to the *Dashnak* government of a Bolshevik political amnesty, and in particular to offer Dro Kanaian, a leading member of that government, a reserved place in the Armenian *revkom*. A day later Legran replied that Dro was forming a new government in Erevan, and was not opposed to coming out 'for' Soviet power in Armenia. Exultant, Ordzhonikidze then dismissed Dro's request that Sovietization might be delayed until 3 December; in the final event, without a shot fired, the Erevan government resigned on 2 December, transferring all military and civilian authority to Dro. The Armenian *revkom* itself then arrived in Erevan on 4 December, and before long Dro was also removed from his post (he eventually emigrated, and would repay Bolshevik betrayal by later helping the Third Reich form an 'Armenian Legion' during the Second World War). At the same time as this was happening, the proclamation of Armenia as an independent Soviet republic also near coincided with the conclusion of a peace treaty with the Turks during the early hours of 3 December 1920.

The territorial losses imposed on Armenia by the Turkish-dictated treaty of Alexandropol conducted during this tense transitional period – the terms of which negated the treaty of Sèvres, and which were also subsequently legally ratified by the treaty of Moscow of March 1921 – were morally crushing. With the loss of the provinces of Kars, Bitlis, Trebizond and Erzerum, Armenia became a small, landlocked state, one cut off even from Mount Ararat (a symbol of Armenian national identity, whose twin peaks remain a central feature of Armenia's national flag today, even whilst the mountain itself also remains firmly ensconced behind the modern Turkish frontier). At least at first, however, it looked as though resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue to the east, through Soviet mediation, might offer some small compensation for these massive losses in the west.

On 1 December 1920 Ordzhonikidze – deliberately 'misinterpreting' recent statements by Nariman Narimanov, in the view of modern Azeri historians – announced that Zangezur, Nakhichevan and Karabakh were to be donated to Armenia by the Azeri *revkom*.¹⁷³ Agitation within Azerbaijan itself, however, led to significant parts of this decision being reversed by July 1921, owing to a combination of Narimanov's warnings that intensified anti-Soviet activity in Azerbaijan would result, the ethnographic problem of how to deal with land used by Muslim nomads lying between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and a perhaps submerged yet ongoing Bolshevik suspicion of Armenian 'great power chauvinism' in the region. Particularly critical by that later stage, however, may also have been the opposition of Georgian Bolsheviks who, during urgent late-night telephone con-

versations between the decisive first and second meetings over this issue, opposed the precedent Karabakh would have set for the secession of rebellious territories, given the implications this would also have carried over even at the time for their own struggles with Adzharia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁷⁴ Whilst Zangezur was therefore seceded to Armenia, Nakhichevan and Karabakh instead remained formally ensconced within Azerbaijan's borders, with Karabakh becoming instead an autonomous territorial enclave, with a predominantly Armenian population, separated from the Armenian eastern frontier proper at its shortest point by just 6 km of land. Rule from Baku remained an unpopular political-territorial compromise for the Karabakh Armenians themselves, however, and they subsequently mounted successive official protests and large-scale demonstrations, demanding absorption by either the RSFSR or Armenian SSR, in 1963, 1965, 1977 and then finally – with far-reaching ultimate consequences for the Soviet state itself – in 1988.

If the Soviet absorption of Armenia and Azerbaijan occurred in both cases as a result of a combination of more or less natural internal state failure, a Bolshevik policy of opening their ranks to former political opponents, and (from the Soviet side at least) relatively mild external military pressure, the same could not be said of Menshevik Georgia, whose regime was viewed with almost visceral loathing by both Stalin and Ordzhonikidze. Mutual antagonism was generated by political differences, by Menshevik repression of Georgian Communists in the wake of the May 1920 peace treaty between Georgia and the Soviet RSFSR (one of the primary conditions of which had been the legalization of Bolshevik political activities within Georgia), and by Bolshevik contempt for the Georgian government's officially stated stance of 'neutrality', a position which had not prevented it from funding Gotsinskii's extremely costly and painful (from the Soviet perspective) rebellion in Dagestan. As Ordzhonikidze remarked brutally on 25 January 1921 to a congress in Baku, regarding the 'safe haven' that Georgia had now become for potential anti-Soviet insurgents, 'if you want to find any kind of counter-revolutionary force – Caucasian, Russian, or foreign – go to Tiflis [Tbilisi]'.¹⁷⁵

Yet here too there also remained a continuity of weakness between Georgia and its immediate neighbours, given that the Georgian government also remained both internally divided and self-absorbed. The high commander of Georgia's armed forces, General Kvinitadze, resigned no fewer than four times between 1918 and 1921 over disagreements regarding the organization of the Georgian armed forces, as well as over military-political decisions taken by the Georgian government. The most contentious factor of all became the relationship between the army and the militia-style 'National Guard', the latter force in Kvinitadze's eyes being both completely inadequate for the battlefield, and also insubordinate in its relations with the War Ministry. Red Army intelligence reports for their own part also noted the 'sharp antagonism' between the two forces (the National Guard being reportedly better equipped and supplied), as well as the striving of each institution to 'swallow up' the other. These feuds in turn rendered the standing establishment of some 65,000–80,000 men that were in principle available to defend Georgia a dangerously internally divided force.¹⁷⁶

Internal ethnic conflict also continued to drain the Georgian military's attention away during 1920–21; in May–June 1920 a revolt in South Ossetia led to the operational deployment there of both the Georgian army and National Guard. Within days of the beginning of Tbilisi's counter-offensive, the whole skyline over South Ossetia was filled with the smoke of burning villages, whilst Kvinitadze himself later recalled his irritation on discovering National Guard troops looting shops and murdering civilians in Tskhinvali (subsequently the South Ossetian capital).¹⁷⁷ During this pacification campaign some 5,000 South Ossetians were killed and 20,000 more became refugees, fleeing across the main Caucasus mountain chain for Soviet-held territory. Such large-scale human rights violations however did not prevent the Entente from officially recognizing Georgia's *de jure* independence on 27 January 1921, the Sovietization of Armenia in December 1920 having left that country an increasingly isolated bastion of Allied influence in the region. Red Army intelligence reports in the second half of January then also recorded an upsurge in Georgian attempts to fund insurgents in Soviet-held territory, in a seemingly concerted, though largely unsuccessful, attempt to initiate a 'rollback' of Soviet influence in the region by exploiting internal unrest in Soviet-held Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹⁷⁸

As early as 2 January 1921 Ordzhonikidze and Kirov had meanwhile jointly written a top-secret letter to the Central Committee in Moscow, pointing out that they had already urged the immediate Sovietization of Georgia after their arrival in Baku the previous summer, and that further delay now meant keeping large military forces at the ready in Azerbaijan and other republics, in order both to stem Georgian-funded local insurgencies and to deter provocations from the side of the Georgian army – a clearly unsatisfactory scenario, that was now also causing unrest amongst the local population. The Central Committee reviewing this letter on 12 January proved unwilling to take up Kirov and Ordzhonikidze's bait however, but further small-scale border clashes and diplomatic disputes then finally led to the adoption of a new official line on 26 January, ordering an investigation into the general military readiness of Soviet forces along the Caucasus front. Ordzhonikidze seized on this opportunity to report that he feared for the capacity of Soviet power to retain control of Baku, so unstable was the local situation becoming given the existing status quo, and requested an additional 20,000 military reinforcements. Seeking to capitalize on this potential shift in policy, he then also coordinated with local Georgian Communists an armed uprising in the Borchalinskii and Akhalkakskii *uezds* of Georgia on the night of 11–12 February.¹⁷⁹

By 16 February there had been established in the town of Shulivari a *revkom* under A. Gegechkori and V. Kvirkeliia, an organization which, faced with annihilation from the side of the Georgian army, then served, via its own desperate appeals for aid, as the trigger for military intervention from the side of the Soviet 11th Army. The Georgian army's response to what then became a full-scale invasion was characteristically chaotic and piecemeal, with Kvinitadze, again recalled back to the ranks and eventually reappointed commander-in-chief, remarking sharply at one crisis meeting to Defence Minister Noi Ramishvili that he should stop proposing absurd plans, and instead simply follow the advice Kvinitadze had been trying to

give him for the past three years and shut up. Ramishvili did indeed temporarily shut up, but Kvinitadze was unable to rescue the poorly deployed Georgian forces, whose dire straits he considered the result of ‘either stupidity or a criminal act’ by his predecessor, and by 25 February, after a brief siege, Tbilisi itself had fallen, with the Menshevik government then retreating by rail towards the coast.¹⁸⁰

Lenin, seemingly aware of the danger of this invasion becoming seen simply as a military annexation, warned Ordzhonikidze of the need to encourage defections and pursue a policy of maximum acceptable compromise with Zhordaniia and other Mensheviks who ‘even before the rebellion were not absolutely adverse to the idea of a Soviet regime in Georgia under certain conditions’.¹⁸¹ This led to the signing of a surprisingly mild peace treaty by 18 March, granting the Mensheviks a general political amnesty, and promising to maintain the salaries of their remaining troops. Tensions between Lenin’s intention to allow the maximum possible accommodation and local autonomy, and Bolshevik policy as it actually unfolded on the ground remained however, and eventually erupted in 1922 in a full-blown dispute between Georgian Communists and Ordzhonikidze’s Kavbiuro, with these same tensions then also echoed in a rural rebellion in 1924 that again placed the regional administration in a state of crisis and high alert.¹⁸² However, the era of formal military operations was now at an end, and the Transcaucasus, like the North Caucasus, was now officially Soviet, laying the groundwork for a full seventy years of momentous subsequent social, economic, cultural and administrative transformation.

5 Insurgency, corruption and the search for a new socialist order, 1920–25

Soviet power creates nations; Soviet power helps individual tribes to become nations... What is most original about all of this is that Soviet power, that most internationalist of regimes, in fact creates and organizes new nations.

(Anastas Mikoian, General Secretary of the North Caucasus *kraikom*, June 1925¹)

Administration and ideology

The Bolshevik leaders who shaped the Soviet Union (as it became after 1922) felt in no doubt that they were creating a revolutionary new form of state, using radical and at times necessarily violent techniques. In this sense the Bolshevik elite were passionate Marxists and true ideologues, and although their efforts at state building were dismissed by some, both at the time and since, as mere empire (re)building behind a hypocritical outer face, this is both to seriously underrate and to misunderstand the sheer scale and radical modernity of the Soviet project.² At the same time, however, there was no master plan; Bolshevik nationality policy throughout its whole existence was characterized instead by the absence of rigid consistency, to the extent that '[n]ot only did the guiding principles change over time, but they were applied to different degrees to different nationalities'.³ In 1920, moreover, the Bolsheviks were also aware that, nationwide, they had only managed to come to power at all after 1917 via a whole series of tactical retreats and local coalitions. Until the summer of 1918 their hold on power at the national level had been dependent on a fragile alliance between them and the Left SRs; the whole history of the rise of Soviet power in the North Caucasus in 1917–21 meanwhile was an epic of tactical coalitions with Mensheviks, SRs, Islamists and 'bourgeois nationalists'. The civil war in the region had witnessed multiple shifting alliances and defections, of which some were even, as we have seen, openly and cynically labelled mere 'business contracts' by those involved, conducted in order to obtain temporary political breathing space.

Physical reminders of this legacy in 1920 could still be found everywhere. An Ossetian Menshevik like Simon Takoev had, by the time the conflict ended, entered the Bolshevik party ranks, as had the Dagestani SR Said Gabiev, a man who had been present at, and even addressed, the very opening session of what

was subsequently labelled the ‘counter-revolutionary’ Union of Mountaineers in May 1917. The Chechen National Council that had first emerged in mid-1917 reflected these changes in microcosm, with one member – Aslanbek Sheripov – joining the Bolsheviks in 1918 before going on to die as a martyr for the revolutionary cause in 1919, whilst one of his fellow former council members, Ibragim Chulikov, had by contrast allied himself with Denikin’s forces that same year. The sheer speed of Sheripov’s own political conversion can be judged from the fact that, as recently as 1917, whilst still an enthusiastic member of the Union of Mountaineers, strains of Pan-Turkish enthusiasm had emerged in his writings – this from a man who then went on to become one of the staunchest Bolshevik allies in the Terek People’s Republic.⁴ The country as a whole when the conflict ended was also still largely an agrarian peasant economy – nothing in fact could be further from the advanced industrialized state which Marx himself had set out as an essential precondition for the transition to communism to occur. Even so, the Bolsheviks had risen to power upon a wave of palpable and genuine popular disillusionment with conventional democratic politics, and they had themselves rapidly become a true mass political party, with dramatic consequences.

When Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917, he led fewer than 25,000 followers, but within a year party numbers had swelled to 390,000, and by March 1921 they had reached an unprecedented 732,521 members. Between 1917 and 1920, in fact, 1.4 million people joined the Bolshevik party. These spectacular increases occurred even against a background in which Lenin himself instituted the periodic expulsion of ‘non-proletarian’ elements from the party, in a drive to maintain ‘ideological purity’ – one purge in the summer of 1918 had literally halved the membership from 300,000 to 150,000, and a second major purge in the spring of 1919 again reduced party membership by a staggering 46 per cent. Yet the fundamental attraction of the party itself, as a stabilizing force offering employment and social advancement in a time of troubles, remained irresistible, spurring on continuous growth, and triggering in turn yet another major purge in the second half of 1921 which expelled a quarter of the existing membership from the ranks – over 17,000 of the expulsions which were carried out on this latter occasion occurring in the North Caucasus.⁵ The party, despite Lenin’s rearguard actions, nonetheless changed irrevocably, with the numbers of ‘Old Bolsheviks’ who had pursued the revolutionary cause since the early 1900s and before now being dwarfed by vast new, often poorly educated cadres, whose loyalty was accordingly often just as suspect as their abilities or their true grasp of Marxism. Such concerns over the ratio of well-educated cadres versus opportunists and the politically uneducated were destined to become a recurring factor in Soviet political life until at least the mid 1950s – as late as 1941, for example, partly as a consequence of Stalin’s own, much more bloody and violent purges, the number of officially registered ‘intelligentsia’ in the country, and therefore at the disposal of the party, still only amounted to some 2,539,314 individuals.⁶

Internal frictions created by such a radically expanded and simultaneously (in many instances) ‘de-intellectualized’ party membership were exposed in full during the Tenth Party Congress of March 1921. On the last day of that congress, the

passing of a resolution drafted by an increasingly exasperated Lenin finally consolidated all managerial power within the party's central apparatus, and led to the banning in future of all factions – a development set to later bear fateful and long-running consequences. Stalin was subsequently appointed to the newly created post of General Secretary in April 1922 largely to help oversee and regulate the recently introduced ban on party factionalism, and after 1926 he would use the leverage provided by this same prohibition against ideological 'deviations' to oust rivals and pave the way for his own rise to absolute power.

Within this wider context, the Caucasus itself was also something of a *tabula rasa* for the ruling Bolshevik party. Here, in Marxist terms, the social relations within many local societies still bore many purely feudal characteristics, and urban centres such as Baku, Vladikavkaz, Groznyi and Stavropol constituted isolated island anomalies within a wider peasant-tribal sea. Chechnia, with a population of 240,000 in 1921, had just 26 registered local Communists, of whom half were not Chechen; Karachai, with a population of 41,500, boasted only 43 Communists. Groznyi on the other hand constituted an authentic 'proletarian core', with its urban population of 60,000 including 678 Communists, whilst Vladikavkaz occupied a similar position, with its 80,000 residents sheltering 909 Communists. Communists in Chechnia, amongst the most populous territorial units in the region, therefore represented just 0.58 per cent of the local population, whilst in Vladikavkaz and Groznyi, by contrast, the proportion was considerably stronger, at 1.13 per cent (a healthier balance in fact than that pertaining within the RSFSR as a whole).⁷

These unusual conditions aside, Tsarist practices in the Caucasus also provided no fallback model, even had the Bolsheviks been inclined to study or adopt them. Pre-revolutionary local governance was notable only for administrative approaches which in reality changed with the appointment of virtually every successive viceroy or governor-general. The region was additionally dogged by issues over land usage which, although their roots lay in local economic changes that had begun in the second half of the eighteenth century, also remained essentially unresolved right up until the collapse of imperial rule in February 1917.

The subsequent revolution and civil war period had been notable chiefly for the wildly incoherent variety of competing visions that emerged regarding how the Caucasus should best be governed and administered – from sharia-orientated groups such as the *millikomitet* of Dagestan and the almost Pan-Islamic 'Mountaineer Union', to socialist-orientated groups such as the Ossetian Kermen movement, and the nascent federalist vision of the Transcaucasus represented by the soon-fractured OZAKOM of 1917. In 1918 the Bolsheviks had even briefly embarked upon their own unique local political experiment, via the coalition 'socialist bloc' with their Menshevik and SR opponents, an improvised framework designed to stabilize and help administer the Terek People's Republic. This paralleled the first Bolshevik experiment in overall regional organization, the North Caucasus Soviet Republic inaugurated in July 1918, of which the Terek People's Republic became an informal constituent part. This new concept, however, had been rapidly overtaken by events, with the North Caucasus Soviet Republic's first capital, Ekaterinodar,

having been captured by Denikin just a month later, requiring a hasty transfer of power to Piatigorsk. Thereafter the republic had enjoyed a purely legislative rather than full territorial existence right up until its complete liquidation by December 1918, and this six-month-long trial of a new territorial framework was thereafter never revived.⁸ Picking up and trying to reassemble the diverse and often shattered pieces of this socio-political jigsaw in 1920 represented a deeply unattractive proposition, given the factionalism and structural failure of so many of these previous attempts. Moreover the very fact of *military* victory by Bolshevism – and more specifically by the Red Army, which was now in practice simultaneously both an occupying force and a social welfare mechanism for much of the local population – gave a strong impulse to starting completely anew.

In viewing these new challenges after 1920, therefore, the Bolsheviks themselves unquestionably continued to be guided by a genuine belief in the Marxist dialectic: for them, the laws of historical materialism dictated an inevitable universal path from feudalism through capitalism to socialism, and thence onwards to communism. Those whose faith in this vision was suspect were themselves bound to sooner or later become objects of suspicion. Yet given the fact that the country as a whole, and the Caucasus in particular, was undeniably not yet ready even for socialism, the Bolsheviks were also forced into (for them) novel and previously unforeseen theoretical compromises. The earliest of these compromises lay in the creation of autonomous national districts, with the first experiment in federalism occurring in March 1918 via the creation of a Tatar-Bashkir Soviet Republic.⁹ This ethnocentric delimitation process was extended to the Caucasus in December 1920, when Stalin informed the Terek National Congress that ‘internal life should be constructed on the basis of your own way of life, customs and habits...within the bounds of the Russian constitution’. Stalin himself identified two types of autonomy within the new Soviet state: administrative autonomy, such as was to be enjoyed by the Karelians, Chuvash, and Germans of the Volga region, and political autonomy, such as was to be enjoyed by the Bashkirs, Kirghiz, Volga Tatars, and mountaineer peoples of the North Caucasus.¹⁰

Even in the North Caucasus, however, respect for the principle of administrative autonomy led in practice to the creation of 65 national regions and 86 national soviets at the sub-territorial level: Kabardino-Balkaria alone acquired 18 Russian and Ukrainian soviets, 3 German soviets, and a Kumyk, Jewish and Ossetian soviet.¹¹ Nonetheless only political autonomy attempted to draw a direct correspondence between an ethnic group and a single, relatively large, and clearly demarcated territorial space, automatically promoting a ‘titular people’, and this process was moreover carried out for highly instrumental reasons. The absence of the advanced capitalist relations demanded by Marxism would, it was now proposed, be substituted for by the establishment of deliberately fostered national identities (*natsional'noi gosudarstvennosti*), generating a world view which would in turn, by eradicating the old feudal-patriarchal order, in and of itself help instrumentally to usher in and build up new socialist economic structures and relationships.¹² As Georgii Broido, an administrator in *Narkomnats*, the Bolshevik Commissariat of Nationalities, put it in 1923, state-sponsored efforts to promote a people’s

national-cultural development were compatible with Marxism, and in fact even essential, in order to ‘emancipate the consciousness of more backward peoples’ and set them properly in motion along the rigid Marxist developmental timeline from feudalism towards (ultimately) communism. Because this process was itself being sponsored by a revolutionary vanguard, there even existed in Broido’s view the hopeful prospect that this wholly natural historical evolution might be significantly artificially accelerated.¹³

To actually implement this overarching goal, much of the history of the 1920s was nonetheless a history of what were in practice, if not in public designation, effectively uneasy coalition-style governments in the borderlands. Much of the explanation for Stalin’s ‘Great Breakthrough’ (*Velikii perelom*) in 1929 correspondingly lay in a classic Bolshevik desire to move beyond this stage to ‘full socialism’. Far from being whitewashed out of history, memories of this difficult period heavily influenced all subsequent Soviet strategy. On the basis of his own interpretation of how the Soviet Union had itself developed, Stalin for example was later always very keen, in his advice to Third World leaders, to stress that the shift from a bourgeois-nationalist government to a fully socialist one could never simply happen overnight. Part of the cause for early tensions in the Sino-Soviet relationship after 1948 lay at least in part in Stalin’s own unwillingness to recognize or believe that Mao’s new government, having seized power so rapidly, could really be considered fundamentally Communist in nature.¹⁴ Equally, post-war Soviet policy towards both North Korea and Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1948 was initially characterized by an explicit commitment towards *not* recreating overnight the Soviet Union’s own political and economic structures within these neighbouring states. Stalin himself declared at the time that ‘the victory of socialism’ could be achieved by a democracy, a parliamentary republic, or even by a constitutional monarchy, and that the imposition of a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in Poland, for example, was not only unnecessary, but would be actively politically harmful. The history of broader Communist entrenchment after 1945 was therefore at first marked by the very same use of temporary ‘coalition governments’ and a mixed economy that Stalin himself had personally observed and experienced during the expansion of Bolshevik authority in the North Caucasus in 1918–21. Such practices were sharply abandoned only as the Cold War itself dramatically intensified.¹⁵ Attempts at various times to reopen the path of ‘separate roads to socialism’ would in fact go on to wreak considerable havoc within the Communist bloc throughout the remainder of its existence, with popular disturbances in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, and Poland in 1980 all representing to some degree attempts to implement in practice the inherent theoretical promise of Stalin’s earlier assurances.¹⁶

During the 1920s, even when pursuing what for all true believers constituted a painfully slow path towards socialism, Bolshevik policy nonetheless introduced sweeping reforms in terms of territorial demarcation, the promotion of indigenous local languages and elites, the creation and establishment in some cases of national alphabets, and the provision of modern services such as medical vaccination, secular education and electrification, across the whole breadth of the former

Russian Empire. To a significant degree the Bolshevik project effectively ‘created’ territorially defined and culturally unified national identities which are still vibrantly alive and relevant in the Russian Federation and CIS today. This breathtaking social experiment was accompanied by a great deal of violence, both in its initial stages, when local rebellions in both the Russian and non-Russian countryside were ruthlessly repressed, and later on, when Stalin embarked on a second wave of social revolution after 1929.

In the economic and social crisis unfolding in the immediate wake of the civil war, the level of military force still required to hold the state together and extract food from the countryside was particularly striking. Even with the White cause officially defeated, for example, the Red Army in 1921 still incurred over 170,000 casualties fighting against local insurgents and peasant rebellions, and nearly 21,000 further losses were incurred through desertion or fighting in 1922, with 9,338 of these losses inflicted in the Caucasus.¹⁷ Yet in fact the violence and the socially progressive reform programme instituted across the Soviet Union were again, when one considers the Bolsheviks and their beliefs, two sides of the same coin: from their point of view, the latter was simply unachievable without the former. With this in mind, as Terry Martin has argued, there was certainly no dichotomy in the Bolshevik state between the ‘soft-line’ and ‘hard-line’ institutions. Both were rather inextricable parts of a radical whole, and ‘the true policy line emerged from a dialogue between them’, with the centre in Stalin’s time later often transmitting guiding signals as to which policy was more important at particular periods through the institution of public terror campaigns.¹⁸ Social violence would dramatically increase during the 1930s largely because the regime felt itself genuinely pressurized and increasingly besieged by external and internal opponents, not because Bolshevik attitudes had in themselves become any more inherently uncompromising.

Bolshevik policy towards the Caucasus following the defeat of Denikin’s forces and the gradual departure of British forces from the Transcaucasus initially fell prey (as might have been expected, given the aforementioned structural and institutional chaos of the civil war period) to a whole host of internal contradictions. During the civil war the implementation of regional policy in borderlands such as the Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia had often been delegated to intermediary party apparatuses headed by powerful charismatic individuals with extensive plenipotentiary powers: men such as Mikhail Frunze in Turkestan and Khristian Rakovskii in the Ukraine.¹⁹ At the conclusion of formal hostilities, many of these intermediary institutions with their charismatic figureheads consolidated their hold on power and remained an active force in the development and implementation of Soviet policy in their designated regions. The policy-making process during the 1920s at least therefore still remained a far more complicated process than the simple ‘centre–periphery’ relationship outlined by many Western studies of the Cold War. Contrary to the view of Richard Pipes, for example, the Soviet Union did not simply turn overnight into an authoritarian totalitarian dictatorship with the development of the first Soviet Constitution in 1923 and its signing into force in 1924.²⁰

With regard to the Caucasus, the Communist Party organization which had initially enjoyed titular control over regional policy in 1918–19, the *Kavkraikom*, had explicitly supported the idea of a single Transcaucasian bloc, wherein Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan would enjoy only regional self-administration.²¹ Up until the end of 1918 meanwhile both Kirov and Ordzhonikidze, the leading figureheads of the North Caucasus Soviet Republic, had still envisioned the retention of a single Terek republic for the entire area and its peoples. By 1920, however, the *Kavkraikom* was already a near anachronism, tainted by the military disasters of 1919, and from April 1920 onwards it was steadily supplanted by the *Kavbiuro*, led by Ordzhonikidze with Kirov as his deputy. The *Kavbiuro* adhered to a policy of establishing local *revkoms* as the initial tendrils of Bolshevik military-political power whilst it re-entrenched itself in the North Caucasus.²² *Revkoms* were centrally appointed, unelected governmental organs, assigned to lay down the roots for democratically elected Soviet power; amongst their many functions were the management and reduction of inter-ethnic conflicts, border demarcation, and the creation of peacetime conditions that would allow a transition to democratically elected Soviet organs – workers' soviets and *ispolkoms* – to occur.

It was characteristic of the administrative difficulties faced in the North Caucasus, however, that *revkoms* would periodically be reinstituted in place of failing local *ispolkoms*, long after other regions had already passed through their post-civil-war recovery period and were conducting normal elections. Typical in this regard was the Digor district in Northern Ossetia where, during July 1922, a commission reported that it had found it necessary to 'dissolve the *ispolkom* as a non-working organ, and create a *revkom*'. Elections also frequently brought forward ideologically undesirable candidates (from the Bolshevik perspective), leading to yet further external tinkering. In the neighbouring Nazran district of Ingushetia, elections for local soviets were held in December 1922, with 8,054 people taking part in the initial campaign, of whom after political review 1,451 were deprived of their voting rights. Despite these precautions, however, by March 1923 a fresh review had led to measures already being taken to purge these newly elected organs in selected villages, in order to cleanse them of 'alien class elements'.²³ In Chechnia an elected *ispolkom* was introduced in January 1922, but then again replaced as early as June that same year by a *revkom* in the face of escalating local banditry.²⁴ *Revkoms* would continue to be reinstituted periodically in the North Caucasus right down to 1926, and were used in individual instances even thereafter.²⁵

Ordzhonikidze himself meanwhile remained a fairly controversial figurehead in local Soviet policy-making, not least because of his authoritarian tendencies and propensity for forming personal alliance networks.²⁶ As early as 1918 Kirov, in a note to Kamenev, secretary of the Bolshevik party central committee, had noted with alarm the beginnings of an agitation campaign against 'our Georgian party workers – Ordzhonikidze, Kvirkeliia, Lado, Dumbadze, Sergei Kavtaradze and others'. The main charge levelled against them, Kirov noted, was one of 'nationalism', an allegation which had created a 'very heavy atmosphere' for conducting party work in the Caucasus.²⁷ Later, in 1920, Lenin himself personally received an anonymous letter complaining about Ordzhonikidze's behaviour as

Soviet proconsul in the Caucasus, alleging that he ‘gets wildly worked up over trifles’. The most serious allegation levelled in this letter was that once, having been stopped at a Soviet checkpoint and asked for his identity papers, Sergo, furious at not having been immediately recognized, had actually killed a Red Army man in a blind rage. Moreover, in this letter he was again accused of his ‘main defect’ – nationalism, or as the anonymous correspondent put it, ‘turning a blind eye to Georgians when selecting party workers’, the latter, it was alleged, mainly Mensheviks who had only recently changed sides.²⁸ This type of accusation against Ordzhonikidze became a full-blown scandal at the end of 1920, when the Cheka special representative for the region, Vadim Lukashev, sent an extended report to the Bolshevik party central committee alleging a whole series of errors in policy-making in the Caucasus, not least the appointment of political adventurers such as Nuri Pasha and Kiazim Bey to lead the guerrilla struggle in Dagestan during 1919–20. Such men had, at the first opportunity, betrayed and executed precious cadres of local Communists. However, amongst the most dangerous of Ordzhonikidze’s errors was the trust he placed in Dzhalalutdin Korkmasov, ‘a former right-wing SR’ who, it was alleged, remained in contact even now with known counter-revolutionaries such as Gaidar Bammatov and Akhmed Tsalikov, and who was only awaiting a suitable moment to ‘plunge a knife into the back’ of, ‘if not the Soviet authorities [as a whole], then Ordzhonikidze himself’.²⁹ Lukashev ended his report by calling for Ordzhonikidze’s recall, a review of local boundary issues, and a purge of the local Cheka.

The response of Ordzhonikidze and Kirov to this form of attack on their regional policies was predictably explosive. Kirov saw the report as a provocation organized, as he warned, by ‘White Guard agents’ who had infiltrated the ranks of the Bolshevik party itself during its spectacular recent expansion. Sergo for his part entered into an intemperate personal correspondence with both Lenin and Stalin on the matter.³⁰ He fumed that Korkmasov, one of Vadim’s main targets, far from being a potential political turncoat, was instead one of the ‘brightest and most shining’ (*svetleishikh*) of mountaineer politicians – not an SR, as Lukashev alleged, but a ‘former anarchist’ who had ‘fought very boldly’ against both Bammatov and his clique, against the Turks, and against Islamists such as Gotsinskii.³¹ However, the Bolshevik party central committee which attempted to arbitrate this dispute in December 1920, whilst it rejected the great bulk of Vadim’s allegations, also continued to express ambiguity towards Korkmasov, reflecting the same uncertainty towards him as an individual that was later to be reflected in both Soviet and émigré historiography. Possibly, the committee admitted, Vadim’s warnings about Korkmasov were extreme, but no ‘obviously false’ facts concerning him had been expressed in his report. Moreover, Vadim had acted ‘in good conscience’, albeit without sufficient caution for ‘the good name’ of his comrades, and the *Kavbiuro* in turn was itself reprimanded for acting too hastily to condemn Lukashev whilst still being unacquainted with all the documents he had used.³²

The activities of the *Kavbiuro* overall remained sufficiently controversial meanwhile for its responsibilities on 28 February 1921 to be divided, with the creation of a new body, the South-East (SE) Bureau, that thereafter took administrative

responsibility for the Don, Kuban, Black Sea, Terek and Stavropol *gubernii*as, alongside Dagestan, the Mountaineer ASSR, and what later became the Kabardino-Balkar and Adygei autonomous *oblasts*. This new organization, headed for the majority of its existence by Anastas Mikoian, and with its administrative base in Rostov-on-Don, remained in place right up until May 1924, when it was replaced by a North Caucasus *kraikom*. The North Caucasus *krai* after October 1924 ultimately came to comprise 11 districts (*okrugs*) and four autonomous *oblasts*, and was itself symbolic of a broader, union-wide drive to create larger-scale regional administrations, its emergence paralleling the creation of a Siberian *krai*, a Northern *krai*, and a Lower Volga *krai*, amongst others.³³

The existence and activities of the SE Bureau forms a topic that appears to have escaped the notice of most Western historians of the Soviet Union and North Caucasus until now. The nature and role of the bureau reflected the desire of the Communist authorities to develop a more rationalized *economic* bloc out of the North Caucasus region, and to ensure the effective implementation of federal social and economic policies on the ground. Bolshevik policy from the very first was guided by two core principles epitomizing an underlying dynamic tension deep at the very heart of Leninist nationality policy – a firm belief in the right of nations and national groups to self-administration and extensive local autonomy, married to a profound faith in the virtue and efficacy of a large state as the single most economically efficient geographical unit under prevailing international conditions. Marxism-Leninism throughout the whole of its existence would retain a firm attachment to the principle that mass production alone created the economies of scale required by socialism, something that in turn demanded a large territorial unit with sufficient resources both to be self-sustaining and to guarantee a viable internal market. Lenin himself, who had spent most of the First World War studying Hegelian dialectics, had on this very basis navigated a masterly course throughout the whole course of the revolutionary, civil war and immediate post-war period, negotiating between the twin poles of revolutionary utopianism and an almost Bismarckian sense of *realpolitik*. Therefore he could both passionately defend the right of nations to administer themselves and be protected from what he labelled ‘Great Russian Chauvinism’, and yet in 1920 also unhesitatingly declare the physical capture of Baku by Bolshevik armies to be absolutely essential, recognizing that the Soviet state at that stage was simply not economically viable without access to the oil reserves of Azerbaijan.³⁴

The SE Bureau, as a vital intermediary administrative organ, was to inherit and implement this difficult political legacy of ensuring maximum possible local autonomy for an extremely large territory, whilst also regulating and implementing the economic policies of the centre. With the creation of just such mediatory apparatuses, the debate from a relatively early stage placed a third consideration into the equation. Between the needs and demands of local nationalities and local party secretaries, and the directives of the Moscow centre, there now also had to be considered the administrative purpose with which the SE Bureau was specially charged, namely the needs of the North Caucasus *krai* as a large, self-contained economic unit. *Economic* regionalization became a prime consideration from 1923

onwards, when, in pursuit of the aforementioned socialist economies of scale, the Urals and North Caucasus districts were singled out as the first territories to undergo the process of economic rationalization (*raionirovanie*), the Urals being treated as an industrial region, and the North Caucasus as a massive single, self-contained, agricultural unit.³⁵

Though the debates created by this process still lay just over the political horizon when it was first created, early debates between the SE Bureau's central committee, led by A. S. Bubnov, and local party secretaries in the Kuban and Don *oblasts*, reflected a regional dynamic of power contestation that went on to affect the administration of the whole territory to a far greater degree than traditionalist Western interpretations of a straightforward centre–periphery paradigm in Soviet policy-making would allow. Most controversial would remain the powers of the SE Bureau to appoint and rotate local party workers and direct the local Cheka. As early as November 1921, at a stormy conference between the SE Bureau's central committee and local party personnel, both the party secretaries of the Don and Kuban regions raised the possibility of abolishing the SE Bureau altogether. Kuban Party Secretary Tolmachev complained that 'political direction from the side of the SE Bureau doesn't exist; there has been only organizational and administrative direction, but this administrative direction was either too slow or insufficient'.³⁶ Though reprimanded by Voroshilov, the commander of the recently created North Caucasus Military District (SKVO), that 'whilst we [the SE Bureau] exist, you should be subordinate', Tolmachev received support from other representatives of the Don region, leading one conference participant to joke darkly that the stance of the Don and Kuban representatives coincided on this issue 'because you are Cossacks'.³⁷

Bubnov mounted a sustained counter-attack against what he perceived as a dangerous outbreak of regionalism – Tolmachev had spoken of 'flippant interventions' from the side of the SE Bureau – by emphasizing that his organization was not engaged in petty bureaucratic interference, but in political direction: 'maybe it is unpleasant to you, but it is direction'. Voroshilov rejoined that the Don and Kuban representatives were themselves failing to take into account the needs of the many other regions in the wider North Caucasus administrative district (*krai*) – the Dagestan and Mountaineer republics, for example – and added that the local administrative organs could never hope to tackle strategic problems such as the widespread banditry plaguing the region without the input of the SE Bureau and SKVO. Another participant at the conference, Seniushkin, then emphasized the role of the SE Bureau as a balancing organ between the wishes of the centre, the desires of local party organs, and the economic management of the whole administrative district. Though the Kuban party organization might be strong on its own merits, for example, he pointedly remarked that 'it is essential that the SE Bureau is here, since the Kuban has its own interests, *which compel its workers not to take into account the interests of the krai*' (emphasis added). Such charges provoked an outcry (unaccredited in the minutes) at the conference that Seniushkin was 'engaging in demagoguery', but Voroshilov again leapt to the defence, and in a final vote the proposals of Zhakov and Tolmachev to downgrade and ultimately abolish the SE Bureau were defeated, in favour of a motion to actually strengthen its establishment

via the enlistment of two specialists from Moscow, alongside the creation of a more permanent standing establishment.³⁸

The White–Green movement

Voroshilov's interventions at the November 1921 conference of the newly created SE Bureau reflected the highly unstable military-political situation that continued to grip much of the region. The immediate post-civil-war period in the North Caucasus was amongst the most unsettled and violent in its whole history. In Dagestan heavy military losses were incurred during the course of 1920–21 in repressing the rebellion of Gotsinskii and Said Bey, yet this failed to end wider sources of armed resistance to the new Soviet presence in the region. Following the evacuation of Denikin's forces from Novorossiisk to the Crimea, there had also been left behind in the Kuban, North Caucasus and Black Sea coastal strip an estimated 20,000 former soldiers of the White movement. Those left behind, particularly the officers, attempted to form underground resistance detachments to continue the struggle against Bolshevism, hoping for support from Wrangel in the Crimea, on the one hand, and from a newly forged Georgian-Polish alliance on the other. During the summer of 1920 in the Kuban, Stavropol and Terek districts alone there were calculated to be at least 124 active bandit-formations on the rampage, totalling some 5,000 fighters equipped with 86 machine guns, 2,797 rifles and a single artillery piece.³⁹ In July that same year, in one last throw of the dice, Wrangel dispatched diversionary detachments from the Crimea to make naval landings on the north coast of the Sea of Azov, a probing expedition which he then followed up on in mid-August, when a major White invasion force of over 10,000 men conducted large-scale coastal landings, in a bold but ultimately futile attempt to reconquer the whole of the Kuban.

Menshevik Georgia, meanwhile, in its ill-advised policy of continuing to pursue the creation of buffer states between it and Soviet Russia, openly harboured other enemies of Soviet power such as Sultan Kilich Girei and the former *Ataman* of the Terek Cossack Host, General Vdovenko. In Tbilisi there also operated a 'Committee for Aiding the Liberation of the Terek district from Bolshevism', headed by personal friends of Wrangel in the form of lieutenant-generals Prince Tumanov and Mel'nikov. In April 1920 Menshevik Georgia and Marshal Piłsudskii's Poland had also officially entered into a military alliance, under which Poland offered to supply arms and ammunition to the Transcaucasus states and simultaneously to provide military training for their officers.⁴⁰ This particular step marked the direct beginning of Piłsudskii's own personal moral-political crusade, the 'Prometheus' movement, the agenda of which, following his own later coup and seizure of power in Poland in 1926, sought to undermine the grip of Soviet rule in its vulnerable borderlands – a malign and covert intelligence war which would, in the process of its implementation, inflict untold misery upon thousands both by its endless political provocations and by the violent and often indiscriminate Bolshevik reprisals that followed. To these indigenous and external sources of unrest one should also add (as Lenin at the time himself recognized), the frequent mistakes and bureaucratic

anarchy that characterized Bolshevik policy at the time, particularly in the field of requisitioning supplies, as well as the inexperience and occasional excesses of the Red Army itself in conducting ‘small wars’ amongst the people.⁴¹

On 29 July 1920, order no. 1247 to Soviet forces operating in the Terek region had already decreed that all ‘bandits’ caught bearing arms were to be shot on the spot, and that any villages and settlements found actively participating in uprisings against Soviet power were to be dealt with ‘by the most decisive and merciless measures, up to and including their burning and complete destruction’.⁴² A subsequent order disseminated by the Cheka that August to the population of the Kuban and Terek districts, Stavropol *guberniia* and Black Sea coastal strip sanctioned the hostage-taking of insurgents’ relatives, as well as the mass execution of hostages in retaliation for prolonged resistance.⁴³ In a typical operation of the period, on 6 September 1920, the Cossack *stanitsa* of Suvorovskaia was surrounded and, having refused to surrender arms or turn over the whole male population between the ages of eighteen and fifty, was subjected to an artillery bombardment. Ninety-eight men were taken as hostages, of whom nineteen were subsequently shot for demonstration purposes, and six houses were also burnt to the ground, with only rain preventing the fire from spreading further.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding such severe repressive measures, the leadership of the *Kavbiuro* was so concerned about the general situation, and in particular the upsurge of ‘Green’ bands in combination with the threat from Wrangel’s forces, that they had already warned Lenin on 1 August that ‘we are at risk of temporarily losing the North Caucasus’.⁴⁵

The ‘Green’ label for Bolshevik opponents in the region was used throughout the civil war to refer to anarchistic peasant movements, which usually coalesced around a core of military deserters, and derived from their tendency to take refuge in forests. The highest number of active participants in the ‘Green movement’ in the Kuban and Terek districts was recorded in August 1920, when intelligence summaries put their fighting strength at 22,000–23,000 men. At least 3,000–3,500 fighters in this movement were even organized into a semi-formal army group near Maikop under the leadership of a key local Denikinite ‘stay-behind’, General Fostikov (1886–1966).⁴⁶ In August, Fostikov reported to Wrangel in the Crimea that he had built up three cavalry divisions, three dismounted Cossack *plastun* brigades of around 10,000 infantry, and ten artillery pieces, and requested in return the disembarkation of supplies in Tuapse to help equip them, to the tune of 24 field and mountain guns, 100 machine guns, 5,000 rifles, 4,000 cavalry carbines and 3 million rounds of ammunition.⁴⁷ Betraying his training as a regular army officer rather than a guerrilla leader, however, Fostikov initially organized an elaborate formal staff, then overplayed his hand by attempting to employ this ‘Army for the Regeneration of Russia’ in a conventional military campaign, leading to eventual collapse and retreat in the wake of pitched battles against the Red Army. Nonetheless even in the spring of 1921, when underground cells and passive supporters are taken into account, the ‘Green’ movement in the Soviet south-east was still calculated by Red Army intelligence estimates to stand at around 40,000 members – a credible figure, given that this still constituted less than 1 per cent of the total population.⁴⁸

On 29 May 1921, in response to this ongoing threat, there was officially re-formed the North Caucasus Military District or SKVO (a territory bearing this designation having first been formed, then abolished, between March and August 1920), comprising the Don, Terek, Kuban and Black Sea districts and Stavropol *guberniia*. In June–July that same year, according to the district staff's own intelligence reports, there were still twenty-five large bands of armed insurgents operating on its territory, numbering over 4,000 combatants. The most organized of these groups operated in Stavropol and the Kuban, and comprised underground resistance organizations led by White officers. However, underground units also operated in the southern districts of the Terek region, most notably scattered detachments of the so-called 'People's Army' of the North Caucasus under Colonel Serebriakov, which around May 1921 reportedly deployed 3,000 fighters.⁴⁹ The confused political nature of many of these movements was sharply reflected in microcosm in the interrogation notes of Kuban resident Vladimir Petrovich Orginskii, a 20-year-old participant in what his interrogators themselves labelled a local 'White–Green band'.

Orginskii related to his interrogators how, prior to his own capture, the leaders of his detachment, which had formed in February 1921, were politically deeply divided, with two potential political figureheads being 'outright monarchists', whilst by contrast Savitskii, both a former member of the Kuban *Rada* and the single most influential organizer, was a republican. The cause around which the group fought was, Orginskii maintained, to establish 'true Soviet worker-peasant power' under the slogan of 'down with the General-landowners, down with the Communists and the Cheka, let property be inviolable and allow free trade'. When the monarchists in the group had tried to raise a tricolour accompanied by the Tsarist slogan of 'Faith, Tsar and Motherland', an internal scandal had broken out, which led to the flag being quickly taken down. Savitskii, the real leader of the movement, nonetheless co-opted a Tsarist general to help give them a semblance of military organization, leading to this band immediately prior to its defeat and capture having formed into four cavalry regiments of 450 men, accompanied by an infantry 'battalion' of 90 men equipped with six machine guns.⁵⁰

Orginskii's interrogation notes reflected more generally the fact that the local White–Green movement was again on the rise: at the beginning of May 1921, 50 detachments numbering 1,756 bayonets and 2,774 sabres were registered in the Kuban and Black Sea coast region, and the registered numbers of insurgents increased rapidly thereafter, with 2,000 fighters soon registered in the Batalpashinsk area alone.⁵¹ At the end of June 1921 insurgents in the Kuban, many of them veterans of Serebriakov's now-disbanded 'People's Army', attempted to re-form into regular forces under General M. A. Przheval'skii, forming the approximately 4,000-strong 'Kuban Insurgent Army'. Przheval'skii, a First World War veteran, monarchist, and former commander of the Caucasus front between June and December 1917, had by this time fallen under the influence of the SRs, and helped raise a core force of around 650 sabres and 80 bayonets to attack and capture the regional capital of Krasnodar (as the Bolsheviks had retitled Ekaterinodar after December 1920).⁵² Though these forces experienced further military defeats at the hands of Budennyi's cavalry army in September which led to them again

scattering, Voroshilov undertook tough parallel retaliatory measures via the establishment of regional military councils (*kraevye voennye soveshchaniia*, or KVS). These were administrative bodies designed to conduct redoubled local political campaigns which, on the one hand, offered large-scale amnesties to those who surrendered their arms, but total destruction to those who continued any form of violent resistance on the other.

By 1 September, however, only around 1,000 insurgents had surrendered their arms, whilst terrorist acts against trains, railway lines and local grain depots had in fact increased. Rumours reaching the staff of the SKVO by the end of the summer of 1921 regarding a planned renewed uprising by Gotsinskii and his followers in Dagestan added to the growing sense of concern and general unease amongst Soviet commanders in the region. On 2 September, Voroshilov put into effect reinvigorated repressive measures, including the occupation of whole villages and districts, the summary execution of all individuals captured using arms in battle against the Red Army, and the redoubled seizure of local hostages. On 16 September meanwhile, the Mountaineer and Dagestan republics were formally incorporated into the SKVO, but subsequent attempts to enrol the local population into the Red Army had to be quickly abandoned because of the high desertion rate.

By the autumn of 1921, therefore, Voroshilov was deploying just over 23,000 men – 55 per cent of his available forces – in fighting this local war against ‘banditry’, with the number of active insurgents opposing him, given the recent expansion of his administrative boundaries, having actually increased. Insurgent numbers by this time were calculated to stand at around 95 bands, made up of around 4,500 mounted troops and 1,000 infantry, with 60–70 machine guns of various types. By 15 November these numbers had been reduced to roughly 79 detachments comprising 4,568 individual fighters (748 infantry and 3,820 mounted troops), with 69 machine guns. In December 1921, however, the responsibility for leading and continuing this local war against banditry was transferred to the Cheka, which nonetheless retained the right to continue to call upon the support of regular military forces.⁵³ This shift in policy came about at the urging of Voroshilov himself, who emphasized that the KVS organizations had not done all that they could, that the summary execution of some 3,000 civilians without trial or due process during this period was probably excessive, and that the struggle against banditry now had to be urgently ‘put on civilian rails’, since it was ‘impossible to lay everything on a military organization which will sooner foment rather than destroy the problem, given that banditry is now taking on other [economic] forms’.⁵⁴

Chechnia and the dilemmas of state reconstruction

Voroshilov’s warning over the counter-productiveness of relying purely upon military force alone reflected a more general Bolshevik recognition that many of their armed opponents in the devastated new Soviet borderlands increasingly took up arms for purely economic rather than political reasons, and therefore remained

highly biddable. In Turkestan, for example, Bolshevik official policy recognized fairly quickly that well-directed economic assistance constituted the single most critical instrument in turning the tide against the local bandit-type *basmachi* insurgency. The vast majority of *basmachi* were categorized as impoverished peasants, reduced to robbery and violence by economic circumstances rather than by fundamental political imperatives. Consequently, by 1923, it was already being stressed that 'without re-establishing the economy, it will be impossible to crush the *basmachestvo* by military methods alone'.⁵⁵ The head of the Cheka in the North Caucasus, K. I. Lander, reached a roughly similar conclusion regarding the situation there, which he outlined in a top-secret report to the Central Committee in Moscow in February 1922.

Lander believed that the flourishing levels of insurgency and banditry in the region had direct economic roots – here, blame was laid directly at the door of Georgia, through which hostile agents in the guise of speculators provided the mountaineers with a steady flow of goods, money and weapons in exchange for linen and meat whilst, on the other hand, the Soviet authorities, despite promises of land, food and manufactured products, 'are giving them nothing'. The failures of the local Soviet authorities in this area of economic competition for influence, their 'inactivity' and disorganization, alongside the 'incorrect and harmful' policy of Kvirkeliia, head of the local Terek *ispolkom*, were held by Lander to be the 'main reason' for the difficulties faced by Soviet forces in the region.⁵⁶

The phenomenon of organized banditry to some extent therefore simply reflected the fact that the Soviet authorities had inherited in the Caucasus a region that by 1920 was already economically devastated. In June 1922 Stavropol's overall population was reported to have declined by 100,000, with 600,000 of those who remained being officially categorized as starving.⁵⁷ A month earlier 63,000 cases of individuals officially categorized as starving had also been registered in Kabarda, whilst in North Ossetia 40 per cent of the total population were reported to be in the same condition.⁵⁸ Going by official figures, the overall population of Dagestan alone had also, between 1 January 1917 and the end of 1922, declined by 14 per cent. In individual districts, this drop was statistically even more savage – in Kizliar, going by censuses taken in 1917 and 1920, the population had dropped by 40 per cent, whilst in Khasaviurt district, between 1916 and 1922, it had similarly fallen by over 37 per cent. In what remained of Kizliar itself, this meant that by September 1920 there were only around 7,000 inhabitants, compared with a pre-conflict population of over 16,000, according to the 1916 census. Cultivated land in Dagestan overall had also declined dramatically, from 196,000 *desiatins* in 1916 to just 92,000 *desiatins* by 1923, and large domestic herds had shrunk by 57 per cent in this same period, cattle breeding as a whole having declined by 75 per cent. Overall, 60 urban settlements had been completely destroyed during the course of the civil war, including Kizliar, and in Derbent three-quarters of all buildings lay in ruins. Over and above losses inflicted by war and famine, the civil war itself was also calculated to have led between 1918 and 1920 to the migration abroad of some 14,000 Dagestanis, the majority of them associated with anti-Soviet activities. Soviet statisticians during the 1920s continued to see the grim

legacy of the civil war in terms of lower birth rates, large numbers of widows, lowered agrarian output, and weakened general resistance amongst the whole population to epidemic diseases such as malaria and typhus. By 1917 figures there were 97 women per 100 men in Dagestan, but by 1926 this ratio had already shifted adversely to 106 women per 100 men, and amongst the most naturally fertile age group – 25- to 29-year-olds – the ratio was even higher, with 113 women per 100 men.⁵⁹

A similar picture pertained everywhere else in the region – in Vladikavkaz and Groznyi some 500 houses had been completely destroyed, two-thirds of the town water-supply systems were in disrepair, and the local oil industry in Groznyi lay shattered. The Vladikavkaz railway was crippled by 152 destroyed bridges, and 576 steam engines lay in disrepair. In the Terek district as a whole, only 173,700 *desiatins* of land lay under the plough in 1920, compared with 344,000 *desiatins* in 1914. Chechnia itself, as a result of both the civil war and subsequent typhus epidemics, was calculated to have suffered at least a 30 per cent drop in its overall population.⁶⁰ Workers in Groznyi in 1921 struggled to subsist on a maximum of 2,238 calories of food a day, rather than the recognized essential norm of 3,200 calories. For their part, Soviet politicians in the region would go on, as we shall see, to blame economic deprivation across the region for fostering sharp land disputes, leading to a spike in local ethnic nationalism instead of more politically appropriate forms of class-consciousness.⁶¹ Shortages also bred a vicious cycle of hunger, banditry, and military indiscipline, which only greater human security and external financial investment could break. In 1922 Khuskivadze, the chairman of the Cheka in the Mountaineer Republic, reported that approximately 25,000 *desiatins* of land remained untilled because of banditry, both Chechens and Cossacks alike being too intimidated to venture more than 2 *versts* beyond their own front doors. The Red Army was not exactly angelic either, given that such circumstances inevitably also led local tax policies and regional state expenditures to collapse. In the same report Khuskivadze remarked that the Red Army's 28th Division, currently deployed within the territory, was starving and naked, some soldiers being in a state of such exhaustion that they carried a rifle with difficulty, whilst the cavalry units indiscriminately robbed any Chechen *auls* that they passed through and the infantry 'descended with a great "Hurrah" on the market stalls in Vladikavkaz and robbed them of bread'.⁶²

Bolsheviks of every rank and level were therefore aware of the need for urgent economic support and temporary compromises in the face of such overwhelming levels of economic deprivation. In Dagestan, Samurskii as late as 1925 supported retaining Muslim *waqf* land for the social welfare benefits it provided – *waqf* property financially supported not just 'mosques and mullahs, but bridges, ferries, roads and charitable organizations'. Attempts to annex *waqf* property to the state had already bred counter-productive results in Central Asia; it would therefore be altogether better in Samurskii's view to retain the *waqf* institution, but subordinate it to Soviet purposes instead, by instituting a stricter accounting mechanism on the dispensation of funds via rural committees, and using the funds themselves to help support secular educational facilities in addition to religious institutions and

local infrastructure.⁶³ Lenin himself, conscious of the economic disorder affecting the region, had meanwhile already ordered Ordzhonikidze in April 1920 to broadcast the fact that he intended to arrange economic aid worth around 200 million roubles. By December 1920 Chechnia had already received from the central regions of Russia thirteen train wagons of wheat seed, whilst Ingushetia during the whole of 1920 received economic assistance worth over 19 million roubles.⁶⁴ The linkage between aid and local stability was however perhaps never made more starkly explicit than in March 1922, when Ordzhonikidze and the SE Bureau together demanded a further 80,000 *puds* of agricultural assistance for Dagestan and the Mountaineer Republic, in light of the 'extraordinarily dangerous and serious' political situation prevailing there.⁶⁵

Recognition of the general need to stimulate an economic recovery in the countryside lay behind Lenin's adoption at the Tenth Party Congress of 1921 of the New Economic Policy (NEP). At least part of the reason for ongoing levels of high unrest in the Caucasus during 1921–22, however, lay in delays by local administrations in fully implementing the NEP there, together with the aggressive measures still sometimes employed to gather foodstuffs as a 'tax in kind' (*prodnalog*). In the North Caucasus in 1922 recalcitrant peasants still faced deportation to Arkhangelsk and the Donbas alongside confiscation of all their property, and in the Armavir district of the Kuban, *stanitsas* which failed to fulfil the new tax demands were forced to house Red Army military units as unwanted guests.⁶⁶ The effective disbursement of economic aid, however, also depended upon capable local administrative organs; here too, therefore, the economic question was inextricably interwoven with the implementation of the Leninist nationality policy of forging maximum acceptable levels of local autonomy. It was not long before representatives of the local Cheka were expressing grave doubts as to whether these two programmes could in fact be reconciled, given the low quality and dubious allegiance of many local party workers. Not by chance, this issue arose in one of its sharpest local forms during the emergence for the first time in history of an autonomous Chechen territorial unit.

In October 1922 Chechnia became only the third national unit (Kabardino-Balkaria in 1921 to early 1922 having been the first) to be territorially divided from the Mountaineer Republic, the latter itself having only been formally created in January 1921. The reasons behind the separation were laid out by Anastas Mikoian, by now secretary of the SE Bureau, in a note to the Central Committee in Moscow. The Mountaineer Republic, he remarked, was itself something of an anomaly in not being a true 'national republic', but a 'republic of nationalities', amongst them the Chechens, Ingush and Ossetians. This fact was unfortunately reflected in the wild disproportion of national representation within its governing organs. Whilst the Ossetians could boast of 600 party members per 100,000 head of population in the Mountaineer Republic, the Chechen and Ingush nationalities could claim only some tens of party workers each. Ossetians and Russians correspondingly dominated every organ of governance within the Mountaineer Republic, whilst not a single Chechen or Ingush sat on the local *sovnarkom*, and not a single Chechen was enrolled in the local party schools. In such circumstances, Mikoian

wrote, 'the Chechens and Ingush do not feel themselves truly in power, and they are offended to be in a republic administered by Ossetians and Russians – representatives of numerically smaller nationalities'. At the same time, Soviet party influence in Chechnia and Ingushetia was also noticeable by its almost complete absence – not only were existing administrative organs insubordinate, but representatives of local Soviet power could not even appear in Chechnia 'without risk to their lives'. The mountainous regions were in addition reportedly rife with rumours over the impending collapse of Soviet power, rumours abetted by freely circulating foreign propaganda generated both by Turkish emissaries and by groups linked with Tapa Chermoev in Paris. Such political agitation, when considered in conjunction with the reported presence of some 70,000 rifles and other armaments still at large amongst the local population, rendered both Chechnia and Ingushetia, in the eyes of the SE Bureau, into potentially dangerous tinderboxes of violent local unrest. Whilst proposing a military operation to disarm the local population (a task only finally undertaken in 1924–5), the SE Bureau also saw the need for an accompanying programme of political measures to attain greater regional stability than had been achieved to date. Such a programme included greater and better directed levels of economic assistance, the firing of incompetent local political workers, and a rectification of the existing ethnic imbalance amongst local administrators 'in accordance with actual population numbers, and independent of the actual number of party members amongst them'.⁶⁷ Within a matter of days of Mikoian's original report being delivered, a commission had been set up comprising Kirov, Voroshilov and Mikoian to investigate the possibility of establishing complete Chechen autonomy, a proposal accepted and carried forward on 10 November 1922. This critical act of course ironically also made these profoundly Soviet political figures the true founding fathers of the modern Chechen state.⁶⁸

With Grozny itself being transformed into an autonomous administrative unit separate from the now autonomous Chechen *oblast'*, the *revkom* of this new administrative district charged with restoring order and stability reflected in its very membership the altered emphasis given by the SE Bureau upon nationality over party affiliation. Of the eleven Chechen members of the new thirteen-man Chechen *revkom*, chaired from the very outset by T. E. El'darkhanov, only five were officially affiliated to the Communist party.⁶⁹ Mikoian on 24 February 1924 noted that in regard to Chechnia the Bolsheviks had departed further from 'pure' Soviet principles of governance than anywhere else in the country, up to and including the radical step of inviting representatives of the Islamic clergy into government. This had the virtuous side effect of an almost instant overnight *korenizatsiia* ('nativization') of the local governing organs – to the extent that, whilst in the Mountaineer Republic itself it remained the case that only 2 per cent of the central governing apparatus were Ingush or Ossetians, Chechnia had in one bound overtaken even neighbouring Dagestan, with 61 per cent of workers in its central apparatus now of Chechen nationality.⁷⁰ Such a shift dovetailed neatly with the broader political programme endorsed by the Twelfth Party Congress of April 1923, which had adopted *korenizatsiia* as a union-wide endeavour – a programme aimed both at acquiring greater political legitimacy, and at promoting local assimilation of the

new socialist order via national cultural growth. The local Cheka, however (renamed the GPU, then OGPU after February 1922), having already been highly critical of the level of party work being conducted within the Mountaineer Republic, soon became yet more critical and suspicious of this radical administrative experiment in Chechnia.

In regard to the Mountaineer Republic, the SE Bureau, fed by reports from the local Cheka, was already finding fault with the local administration, a bureaucracy which one contemporary report by a member of the SE Bureau characterized as riddled with illiteracy, indiscipline, drunkenness and – the greatest sin in Bolshevik eyes – careerism. Communists from Chechnia, Ingushetia and to some degree Ossetia as well were individuals who, it was reported, ‘consider themselves not as true members of the party, but rather as rendering it [the party] a service, for which, in their opinion, they should be rewarded’.⁷¹ In Chechnia, however, such criticism soon took on a darker tone, with the incompetence of local organs coming over time to be interpreted as a possible cover for more actively counter-revolutionary behaviour. During 1922 the chairman of the Mountaineer Republic Cheka, Khuskivadze, a man personally familiar with events in Chechnia on the run-up to the granting of its new autonomous status, was already warning the SE Bureau about a strengthening of ‘counter-revolutionary work’ by Turkish agents in the region, a phenomenon that had, he claimed, been greatly facilitated by the very policy line maintained by the recently departed El’darkhanov (head of the local Mountaineer Republic’s central committee before he was made head of the Chechen *revkom*). El’darkhanov’s own policy line at the time had represented, it was alleged, ‘a complete alliance with *kulaks* and mullahs’. Thanks to the ‘criminal work’ of El’darkhanov and his colleagues, who were now being transferred to administer the newly autonomous Chechen *oblast’*, Soviet power in remote mountain regions such as Vedeno and Shatoi had been completely unknown, leaving the local population to be swayed by counter-revolutionary figures such as Prince Dyshinskii and Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii.⁷² The cloud of suspicion which hung over El’darkhanov in the eyes of the local Cheka/GPU representatives therefore followed him from the Mountaineer Republic to the Chechen AO; here, by 1924, it became a full-blown scandal in connection with the case of Ali Mitaev.⁷³

As early as December 1922 the OGPU had already mounted a surveillance operation, code-named ‘Operation “Quiet” [*Tikhii*]’, over Sheikh Ali Mitaev, spiritual leader of the local Kunta Khadzhi sect, and a man who, on 12 April 1923, was additionally appointed a full member of the newly assembled Chechen *revkom*. A cleric who also claimed to be a socialist, Mitaev had acquired a creditable record as a peacemaker during the civil war; in March 1918, for example, when Chechen hotheads had almost opened fire on a delegation sent by the Terek People’s Council to investigate local Chechen–Cossack clashes in the region, Mitaev had reportedly ridden them down, striking the offenders with his *nagaika*.⁷⁴ However, such efforts did not fully earn the trust of the Soviet secret police since, though El’darkhanov and Mitaev had both been members of the Chechen National Council at the time, so too had known counter-revolutionaries such as Ibragim Chulikov. The OGPU reported that in fact the surveillance they had mounted from 1922

onwards had produced rapid results, with Mitaev reportedly having met in secret with Gotsinskii in March 1923, whilst also undertaking covert work in the same period to establish local sharia regiments personally loyal to him.⁷⁵

The threat of a Gotsinskii-led insurgency itself meanwhile remained a considerable source of concern for Soviet intelligence at the time, because the former self-proclaimed *Imam* had maintained links both with émigré groups in Turkey and with agents of French and British intelligence. In February 1924 the OGPU reported that two British intelligence agents in the guise of engineers had visited Gotsinskii's staff with pledges of support, whilst a British-backed shadow commercial firm in Constantinople was also uncovered in August that same year trying to smuggle 1,200 rifles, 200,000 cartridges and 1,065 metres of manufactures to Gotsinskii's supporters through the port of Batum. Gotsinskii himself was reported to have additionally met with a British 'Major Williams' in April 1925 in the Chechen village of Zumsoi, with a view to organizing a general uprising in Dagestan and Chechnia. Of perhaps even greater concern, however, were Gotsinskii's links to another OGPU target, the covert Pan-Turkish CUP legacy organization '*Ittikhad Islam*', this being a political movement which had first laid local roots in the Transcaucasus during 1918–20, when ex-Ottoman military advisers under Kiazem Bey and Nuri Pasha ranged freely around Dagestan and Azerbaijan, and which reportedly now operated out of Baku under the leadership of S. Efendiev. The *Ittikhad Islam* was believed by the OGPU to have established twenty-five underground 'rural committees' in Dagestan, with twelve men in each, subdivided into nine sections; these cells reportedly conducted nocturnal conspiratorial meetings, and had recruited 2,000 armed followers in 1921 alone.⁷⁶

Voroshilov meanwhile, visiting the newly formed Chechen AO in his capacity as military commander of the SKVO, was in January 1923 already beginning to express grave doubts of his own over its internal make-up to Stalin. The Chechens themselves, Voroshilov stated, were 'like all other mountaineer peoples, no better or worse'. The rule of mullahs and sheikhs was absolute, but on the other hand local social conditions also dictated that such an outcome was inevitable, and local Communists should in fact make greater efforts to co-opt the Muslim clergy to the Soviet cause. Ali Mitaev, however, with whom Voroshilov had spoken at length, he judged to be 'diabolically clever and cunning', whilst the local *revkom* was 'extremely weak, especially El'darkhanov'. Comparing the latter with all the other local party workers caused Voroshilov particular concern over the fate of the *revkom* and Chechnia's own future. El'darkhanov he characterized as 'without character, a hapless, stupid and boastful old man', a situation made all the worse given that there was no one obvious to replace him.⁷⁷ In July 1923, meanwhile, in the wake of his own separate visit to the region, military commissar N. Sokolov went even further than Voroshilov in his condemnation of the local administration. In Sokolov's view, in the wake of the declaration of Chechen autonomy, the personnel make-up of local *revkoms* had changed sharply for the worse between March and June 1923, with mullahs coming to dominate local administrative positions excessively. The present situation, whilst outwardly calm, was in his view also becoming increasingly dangerous, and demanded El'darkhanov's removal.⁷⁸ That same month, Mikoian

correspondingly wrote a warning note to the Chechen *revkom*, underlining the importance of combating counter-revolutionary bandit elements in the mountainous Veden and Shatoi districts, whilst also stressing the need to accelerate local road building – ‘I needn’t emphasize the enormous significance, agitation-wise, of this endeavour, in terms of influencing the Chechen masses.’⁷⁹

In October 1923 Mikoian as head of the SE Bureau then received a letter from Aznarashvili, the local Chechen party secretary, which appeared to confirm Voroshilov’s earlier assessment of El’darkhanov’s weak judgement. Aznarashvili noted that Ali Mitaev was an outwardly scrupulously correct character, and even admitted that the sheikh’s apparently positive attitude towards Soviet power had influenced both himself and El’darkhanov into initially inviting him to serve on the local *revkom*. However, as time went on, Aznarashvili claimed to have become sharply disillusioned with Mitaev, increasingly aware that he utilized his position only to augment his own authority, and that El’darkhanov himself had become ever more seduced by the influence and personal security that this alliance granted. The sheikh, Aznarashvili warned, had dragged El’darkhanov towards ‘nationalism and pan-Islamism’, a course which El’darkhanov, already aware of growing suspicion towards him in higher political circles, and fearing replacement, had become all too willing to follow, given that this personal alliance also entrenched his own power-base in Chechnia. Thus El’darkhanov had gifted Mitaev a Mauser pistol and *kinzhal*, which Mitaev had reciprocated by making a present to El’darkhanov of his favourite horse. Such personal exchanges appeared the prelude, in Aznarashvili’s view, to El’darkhanov’s attempting to entrench his own informal personal dictatorship – ‘there is created the impression that El’darkhanov is all that Chechnia requires’.⁸⁰ Mikoian, still aware of the sensitivity of the local political situation, appointed Magomet Eneev, a trusted Balkar politician, as secretary to the Chechen *orgbiuro* in December 1923, in order to more closely monitor the local situation within the *revkom*.⁸¹

At stake between El’darkhanov’s administration and the SE Bureau were a number of key disagreements over local governmental matters. Amongst the most critical of these was the local role to be played by the autonomous Groznyi party organization, which the SE Bureau expected to take on a vanguard role as a class-conscious proletarian core leading the enlightenment of the surrounding Chechen masses. Complicating this programme, however, was the strong local antipathy between Russian workers in Groznyi and the surrounding Chechen population – in October 1922, A. F. Nosov, head of the local party organization in Groznyi, admitted that the NEP had led to ‘alcoholism and disorder’ amongst local party workers, whilst continuing banditry from the side of the Chechens had also created a local nationalist tendency, one which voiced the view that the latter were merely ‘Asians who must be dealt with’.⁸² The local Communist Party, under guidance from the SE bureau, had battled with these ‘nationalist deviations’, most notably by issuing direct orders that any Groznyi militia uncovered treating Chechens badly during their visits to the local bazaar should be publicly and severely punished, whilst the ranks of the town militia should also be opened to Chechen recruits. Chechens were to be assured freedom of movement and access to housing within

Groznyi, and the local oil industry and trade unions were also directed to expand their Chechen representation.⁸³

By February 1924 Mikoian was able to boast that these measures had led to 800 Chechens now working in the local Groznyi oil industry, and underlined that such measures would further advance the Marxist evolution of the region – ‘to draw people from the unenlightened *auls* to the city centre, to the steam boiler, where they will develop, of course, much quicker, and apart from that, create a social base of advanced cultured [*peredovykh*] people – all of this has enormous significance’.⁸⁴ However, Mikoian also saw Groznyi as serving a particularly important role in terms of providing mentoring and leadership (*shefstvo*) for Soviet development in the Chechen countryside, a proposal which El’darkhanov’s *revkom* had rejected in June 1923. In July the SE Bureau had correspondingly pushed through an amendment, recognizing the right of industrial enterprises in Groznyi to adopt and mentor remote mountaineer *auls*.⁸⁵ Doubts over the Chechen *revkom*’s efficiency created by issues like this then became exposed in full during a two-day conference in February 1924, where there became apparent both external criticism of El’darkhanov’s policies to date, and the staggering degree of internal dissent that still affected the *revkom*’s work.

Probably aware of what was to come, El’darkhanov opened the February conference by mounting a robust defence of his achievements – above all, he argued, the Chechen *revkom*’s progress should be measured against what it had inherited from the Mountaineer Republic, which El’darkhanov himself judged to have been practically nil. Whilst acknowledging ongoing weaknesses in terms of illiteracy and weak local governmental organs, he took pride in the establishment of a local militia, where just ‘two or three nearly naked individuals’ with two–three rifles and no horses between them had been converted into a 150-strong mounted militia fully provisioned with rifles, ammunition and machine guns. Twenty-three new schools had been opened, and a few bridges repaired, and the main remaining delays on both the agricultural and educational fronts were, El’darkhanov argued defensively, being caused largely by slowness to disburse funds by the Soviet central authorities. Mikoian, who was next to speak, remained critical but tactful:

... you are going very slowly forward, but all the same forward. In what areas? Firstly, there is a kind of authority. It isn’t as good as Comrade El’darkhanov painted it, it still works very badly, but to ask for more given a year and the resources and general position of Chechnia is impossible.⁸⁶

Mikoian’s quiet warning, however, was overshadowed by the input of the next speaker at the conference, Mairbek Sheripov, the brother of the now-famous pro-Bolshevik Chechen martyr Aslanbek Sheripov. Mairbek launched a blistering attack on the *revkom*’s work, announcing that it could afford to reduce its establishment and diminish its running costs by 10 per cent, that land disputes remained dangerously unresolved, and that the Health Ministry was catastrophically inactive. The tirade of rebuttals that then followed was gently interrupted by Eneev, Mikoian’s recent appointment, who, whilst in an aside jokingly praising Sheripov for

managing to 'open everyone up' whilst somehow avoiding being subjected to direct criticism himself, also mildly pointed out that the main problem hindering the *revkom*'s work were the lack of a clear plan – 'here there are not even the elements of a plan' – and the absence of a sufficient spirit of collegiality: 'in three months there was not a single meeting where we sat for 10–20 minutes and judged any kind of serious report'.⁸⁷ Sheripov retaliated by accusing Eneev of inexperience with local conditions, and charged the OGPU with organizing political provocations against the *revkom*, but saved his most violent accusations for the following day.

The next day's events were opened by another *revkom* member, the Georgian Palavandashvili, who remarked that he did not wish to reignite the furore created by the previous day's meeting:

I found an abnormal situation emerging in our *revkom* amongst its members. People were whispering in corners and conspiring... here there is a tangle between El'darkhanov and Sheripov, and between others... There is, so they say, an 'El'darkhanov' group, a 'Sheripov' group, a 'Khamzatov' group... Provocative rumours swirl around everywhere.⁸⁸

Sheripov's riposte was that he had done no more than break what had become a dangerous collective conspiracy of silence within the *revkom* – the problem being that, in Chechen conditions, 'there has never been a free congress, where delegates would gather without pressure [and] freely and directly say what they think'. Such problems existed because of the ongoing clan-based nature of local politics; 'in many organs there are people who are there because they are allies of El'darkhanov'. Sheripov by contrast proudly proclaimed that he had not himself brought a single one of his relatives into the *revkom*.

Even Sheripov's own self-serving claim was rejected by another *revkom* member, however, who pointed out that the very problem of the *revkom* lay precisely in the fact that El'darkhanov, Sheripov and Khamzatov each *did* lead groups, and that 'the whole struggle amongst us proceeds exclusively on the grounds of each side appointing their own allies to various posts'. Divisions within the *revkom* also continued to reflect broader geographical disparities, with this same member also complaining that mountainous Chechnia was entitled to ask why they had no representatives on the *revkom* at a time when the plains-dwelling population boasted representatives on the board of the *revkom* from as far afield as Turkey. Undoubtedly alarmed by what he had witnessed, Mikoian drew the conference to a close by urging the need for a 'decisive struggle' against mutual distrust within the *revkom*, as well as directing more attention towards the need to avoid 'light-headed administrative appointments and loose conversations'.⁸⁹

Increasingly troubling external reports regarding El'darkhanov's administration across 1923 were meanwhile also paralleled by a growing wave of criticism from the side of the local OGPU, which pointed to corruption as the main threat to the economic reconstruction and stabilization of the region. As already mentioned, Ali Mitaev was compromised in the eyes of the local OGPU by alleged ties to Gotsinskii, as well as by rumoured links to underground Pan-Islamic parties such

as the *Ittikhad* movement in Azerbaijan. By April 1923 Mironov, head of the GPU for south-east Russia, had already begun calling for El'darkhanov's removal, claiming that the 'El'darkhanov experiment' itself was now completely discredited.⁹⁰ Approximately a year later, on 24 April 1924, Sheikh Gusein Efendi, under interrogation from the local OGPU, would testify that Mitaev's own men had been behind recent raids and robberies conducted against the local rail network.⁹¹ Though in many ways this merely confirmed pre-existing suspicions, the sheikh's confession was certainly politically convenient, since just a few days earlier, on 18 April 1924, Mitaev had been finally arrested and transported, first to Rostov-on-Don and then onwards to Moscow; eventually tried in January 1925 on charges of conspiracy and counter-revolutionary activity, he was initially sentenced to ten years in prison, but a review of his case in October that same year led to his execution.⁹²

From the very outset the OGPU defended this arrest by reference to Mitaev's dangerous influence in Chechnia. As Mironov informed the SE Bureau in April 1924, Ali Mitaev's activities had not merely failed to support the growth of Soviet authority amongst the people, but had actively hindered and undermined it.⁹³ In May 1924, however, El'darkhanov sprang to Mitaev's defence, alleging that the conspiratorial letters in Arabic supposedly intercepted between Gotsinskii and Mitaev by the OGPU were in reality the work of a well-known local forger.⁹⁴ Such activities only condemned El'darkhanov yet further in the eyes of the OGPU however, and that same month they issued a highly damning report into the expenditure of federal funds assigned for reconstruction by the local *revkom*. In the words of the report, the 'enormous allocation of resources from the centre' had led to a certain 'liveliness' in the work of the Chechen *revkom* from the very first. From the moment that a firm budget framework had been agreed, there had then begun a crisis 'in every aspect' of the *revkom*'s work, combined with growing internal dissent and division. The main problem, which had already led to a budget deficit of 400,000 roubles, was that the majority of workers in the *revkom* led a 'drunken, wild existence, with splendid bacchanalian celebrations', all of which created a 'deathly atmosphere of irresponsibility and inactivity'. The local land question meanwhile remained unresolved, which resulted in violent clashes that left large numbers of dead and wounded; the twenty-four new schools opened to date in 1923–24 did little good, since their teachers were recruited entirely from the *madrasas*; and the forestry service, a major local economic resource, remained in a 'catastrophic condition', and continued to provide far less revenue than in Tsarist times.⁹⁵

Mironov himself went yet further however in his own reports, by now openly and directly accusing El'darkhanov of conscious counter-revolutionary activity: the entire period of his service since the creation of Chechen autonomy, in Mironov's view, now clearly constituted a 'complete counter-revolutionary act'. In particular, Mironov charged that El'darkhanov's reign had led only to 'the enrichment of his own clan, expressed in the embezzlement of the lion's share of resources allocated by the centre for the construction of bridges'.⁹⁶ He was already compromised by his objections to the manner of Mitaev's arrest, and such allegations would ultimately lead to El'darkhanov's own removal as head of the Chechen

revkom on 27 September 1925.⁹⁷ The protocol of the Chechen *orgbiuro* announcing this change would remark that El'darkhanov had:

fallen in every way under the influence of his relatives and certain other elements, and being entirely seduced by them, was not able to conduct a correct and flexible line in his work, accordingly losing contact with the party and with party influence in Soviet work.⁹⁸

Significantly, however, the purge made of the Chechen leadership also involved the removal of El'darkhanov's most vocal critic at the February 1924 conference, Mairbek Sheripov, as well as A. Gaisumov, both men being condemned 'as collaborators with local anti-Soviet forces'.⁹⁹ This suggests a desire on the part of the Soviet authorities, via a clean sweep of the most prominent figureheads, to impose a genuine fresh start, rather than punish El'darkhanov alone; replacement appointments were also made from within the existing ranks of the *revkom*.

The shadow cast over Mairbek Sheripov's subsequent career by these events was destined to be a long one: although forgiven and permitted to finally join the local Communist Party in 1941, he would ultimately go on to change sides during the Second World War, becoming one of the most prominent local insurgent leaders in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR during the invasion of the North Caucasus by Nazi forces in 1942. The fact that, during the 1920s, the Soviet regime was more interested in administratively shaking up problematic local administrations rather than (as yet) actively physically eliminating troublesome, or even politically deviant, members is nonetheless underlined by El'darkhanov's own subsequent career. Like his contemporary Umar Aliev in neighbouring Karachai – an individual who, as we shall see, stood similarly accused, as early as 1922, of excessively indulging local nationalism – El'darkhanov in 1925 was merely transferred to an administrative post within the newly formed *Kavkraikom* in Rostov-on-Don, where he was left free to conduct cultural activity at the intermediate *krai* rather than local level until his eventual death from natural causes in 1934.¹⁰⁰

Growing concern over the stability of Chechnia meanwhile provided the context for the massive disarmament campaign which finally unfolded over the course of 1924–25. During the spring of 1924 an attempt to cleanse the local party apparatus of dubious and unreliable elements, via the holding of fresh, carefully rigged public elections to replace local *revkoms* with formal soviets, led instead only to a large-scale public boycott of the whole process. An initial disarmament campaign in response to local unrest led in turn to the handover of 2,900 rifles and 384 revolvers, and the arrest of 68 persons.¹⁰¹ This remained clearly inadequate given the scale of continuing banditry in the region however, and in the summer of 1925 it was resolved to finally mount a major campaign to disarm Chechnia. For this campaign, commanded by I. P. Uborevich as head of the SKVO and Efim Evdokimov as his OGPU counterpart, two rifle divisions and a cavalry division – in total 4,840 infantry and 2,017 cavalry, equipped with 130 heavy machine guns, 102 light machine guns, 14 mountain guns and 8 light artillery guns – were gathered under the pretext of conducting ordinary military manoeuvres. In addition,

341 OGPU troops with 11 machine guns, as well as 8 aeroplanes, and blocking detachments from the Caucasus Red Banner Army – the latter comprising 307 men and 10 machine guns – were enlisted to take part.¹⁰² As the forces formed up against their territorial start lines, the OGPU conducted a major purge of the central administrative apparatus of the Chechen AO, arresting and expelling a number of prominent individuals, amongst them Mairbek Sheripov. Military operations themselves began on 23 August, and were concluded by 25 September.

The assembled forces were deployed in four main groups and two detachments, with Chechnia itself for the purpose of the operation divided into six distinct districts of unrest. In broad outline, Soviet military detachments were assigned to advance simultaneously from designated concentration points along the northern, western and eastern borders of the Chechen *oblast'* on converging axes towards the centre of the district, disarming settlements and engaging bandits as they went, whilst blocking detachments sealed the southern border with Georgia. The campaign also bore an explicitly political character, the purge of the Chechen central apparatus being repeated at the local level by the military forces as they advanced, with fresh figures who were judged more sympathetic to Soviet authority being appointed. Without such measures, combined with economic aid, it was recognized that 'the military operation will be only a palliative and will produce only temporary pacification'.¹⁰³ *Auls* selected for disarmament were to be surrounded on all sides and presented with a demand to surrender all the weapons within the village within two hours. If these deadlines were ignored, the *auls* would then be subjected to ten minutes of artillery fire, with shells set to explode on a high setting in order to wound rather than kill. Lethal force was to be employed only in the event of active resistance.¹⁰⁴ Extensive propaganda and social welfare measures were also undertaken to help lessen any potential backlash which could otherwise have generated far greater levels of local resistance: around 50 to 70 Chechen villagers a day approached the medical units accompanying the Red Army for free aid, and the Chechen village of Shatoi also provided 100 volunteers who served as military support and as interpreters and interlocutors with the local population, persuading a number of armed bandits to surrender.¹⁰⁵

As the operation progressed, a number of notable surrenders were achieved. Nazhmutdin Gotsinskii, known to be in hiding in the Sharoevskoi district, surrendered on 5 September in the wake of 48 hours of artillery and aerial bombardment, during which time 22 pounds of bombs were dropped. Arrested on the spot and transported north to Rostov-on-Don, he was sentenced to death by firing squad on 15 October 1925, with his 16-year-old son and two daughters soon following in his wake.¹⁰⁶ On 2 September Sheikh Nurmagomed-Khadzhi Ansaltinskii likewise surrendered after the village of Dai was again subjected to artillery and aircraft bombardment. Overall meanwhile, the joint military–OGPU operation in Chechnia netted around 25,299 rifles, 80,000 rounds of ammunition, a machine gun, and 4,319 revolvers. Speed, surprise and overwhelming force meant that casualties on both sides were comparatively light – Soviet losses stood at 5 killed and 9 wounded, as well as 10 horses lost, whilst amongst the local population 6 civilians were officially recorded as being killed and 30 wounded, in addition to

12 bandits killed and over 300 arrested (of whom 105 were subsequently shot), and 119 homes destroyed.¹⁰⁷

In the wake of the successful operation in Chechnia, similar sweeps were made of Ossetia, Ingushetia and Dagestan. Operations in Ingushetia lasted between 23 September and 2 October 1925, and resulted in 105 arrests as well as the voluntary surrender of 6,275 rifles, 987 revolvers, and significant quantities of hand grenades and ammunition. In North Ossetia, where operations began on 24 September, 11,890 rifles and 2,175 revolvers were surrendered and 71 arrests made.¹⁰⁸ A delay was imposed, however, in the case of Dagestan by the military forces of the SKVO having both insufficient financial resources and the issue of imminent recruitment turnover to contend with, whilst both Korkmasov and Samurskii initially firmly resisted the proposed deployment of substantial military forces on their territory. Delayed until September 1926, the eventual operation in Dagestan nonetheless relied upon an overwhelming demonstration of force – around 16,000 men, over 30 guns, 6 armoured cars, an armoured train and 18 aircraft were employed. Dagestan as a result of this sweep, marked by much less public resistance than in Chechnia, ultimately surrendered some 39,000 rifles, nearly 20,000 revolvers, 563 grenades and 9 machine guns.¹⁰⁹ The Soviet authorities received the grudging support of the Islamic clergy during the Dagestani disarmament operation, the local mullah in the *aul* of Nakhtii, for example, directing the local population from the mosque minaret to hand over their arms or be cursed by Allah.¹¹⁰ Sheikh Ali Khadzhi Akushinskii, the Bolsheviks' most prominent local clerical supporter during the civil war in the region, remained dissatisfied by the campaign, but reportedly resolved not to actively obstruct it, and personally gathered and handed over nine boxes of rifle cartridges, fifteen boxes of mortar shells and three 3 inch artillery shells. The local OGPU however still suspected both his sons and relatives of nonetheless holding back considerable private stocks of military material.¹¹¹

By treating it in isolation, some historians have retrospectively somewhat mythologized the significance of the 1925 disarmament campaign in Chechnia – portraying it as a form of 'ethnocide', or as 'a turning point in the contemporary history of the Chechen and Ingush peoples' preceding the 'genocide of the Vainakh people and their traditional culture'.¹¹² Reading back events from what eventually occurred in 1944, however, does too much violence to the historical record of what was actually occurring in the mid-1920s. The Chechens were not the first people in the Caucasus to experience a compulsory military-led disarmament campaign: individual villages, regardless of nationality, were being disarmed as early as 1920, and a concerted disarmament campaign had already been conducted by Soviet military forces in the Karachai region as early as 1922, in order to help defuse Karachai–Kabard tensions.¹¹³ Locally raised military detachments, including a Chechen brigade and Ingush cavalry regiment, had moreover played a full participatory role in these earlier disarmament campaigns.¹¹⁴ Chechen physical and material losses were moreover broadly comparable to the losses experienced by other regions. Nor does the contemporary record support the notion of a specifically Chechen sense of resentment having been fostered by these events – on the

contrary, OGPU intelligence during the course of the disarmament campaign in Dagestan in 1926 recorded great satisfaction being expressed amongst the Chechen population that ‘the Soviet authorities are making everyone equal’, even as some Dagestani villages for their part cited fear of Chechen raids as lying behind their own reluctance to entirely surrender their arms.¹¹⁵

Soviet leaders were in fact also acutely conscious of the national resentments that such disarmament campaigns might provoke: as early as 1922 Mikoian had remarked that in Chechnia it was essential that such a campaign not be openly ‘punitive’ in character, but rather be primarily a political demonstration of strength, one accompanied by the construction of bridges, the digging of canals, the opening of nurseries, and the distribution of medals, awards and presents.¹¹⁶ During 1925 this advice appears to have been followed through at least in part in Chechnia, with the construction of a new electrical power station in Gudermes, the building of fifty *versts* of new roads, and the erection or repair of ten local bridges, alongside the additional disbursement of 1,500 roubles to Chechnia and 8,145 roubles to Ingushetia from the Soviet centre by the end of the year.¹¹⁷ In 1925, therefore, social transformation, in line with the more general attempt to create a new socialist order, still lay behind the disarmament campaigns in the North Caucasus in general; political repression, on a scale verging on cultural genocide, was to be the product of an altogether different era, one with very different sets of priorities.

6 Decossackization, demarcation, categorization

Creating the Soviet Caucasus, 1920–27

We are not building a country for mountaineers, or an Ingush state, or a Russian state – we are building a workers' state, and every nationality, however poor or unfortunate, will all the more so have an honoured place in building this new state. Consequently the first task before every honourable citizen is this – they must learn to love other nationalities.

(M. I. Kalinin, May 1923, in the Chechen village of Urus-Martin¹)

The disintegration of the Terek Cossack Host

One of the chief defining characteristics of Soviet policy towards the North Caucasus that continued to provoke extreme antagonism in this early period was the revival and expansion of the social war against the Cossacks. From the very outset the Bolsheviks had inherited and expanded upon the Provisional Government's own programme to abolish all social distinctions based on religion, nationality and territorial estate, levelling everyone to the category of 'citizens' in the new republic. This had entailed the Cossacks ceasing to exist as a judicial estate; however, during the civil war the Bolsheviks rapidly moved beyond this initial paradigm to viewing the Cossacks as a whole as an inherently counter-revolutionary class.² Forced migration in general meanwhile already had a long tradition in European history, but it echoed particularly strongly in the Caucasus, where, as we have seen, the nineteenth-century war against Shamil and its immediate aftermath had involved significant levels of forced and voluntary migration, culminating in the ultimate resettlement of around a million people.³

Bolshevik land policy was dedicated to reversing this particular Tsarist political-territorial legacy, embodied in the Terek region by the Sunzhenskoi line of military settlements between Vladikavkaz and Port Petrovsk. During 1918 the Terek People's Republic had already resolved upon a policy of forcefully uprooting elements of the Terek Cossack Host, leading to a revolt that had, in the process of its subsequent suppression, drained away much-needed military strength, and ultimately led to the Terek republic itself becoming easy prey for Denikin's troops in early 1919. In 1920, however, as Soviet power again expanded south of the Terek, this programme was once more revived.

On 20 April 1920 the Terek *revkom* had already created a new section on land and agrarian affairs headed by I. M. Datiev.⁴ An urgent task facing the *revkom* was the resolution of the local land question, given the onset of the spring sowing season. A first step forward on this matter came in the complete revocation of Denikin's former laws on land rights and land use: land was now to be redistributed via a 'land fund' from class enemies and large estates to landless or struggling mountaineers, *inogorodnie* elements and lower-class Cossacks instead. In April 1920 four *stanitsas* of the Terek Cossack Host, comprising some 17,000 people, were forcibly resettled, primarily to Vladikavkaz, with their former land, some 40,000 *desiatins* of territory, handed over to local mountaineers.⁵ Ordzhonikidze, after reviewing the land issue, found this redistribution still insufficient for satisfying mountaineer land hunger, however, and announced the need to resettle a further eighteen Cossack *stanitsas*. In May he explained this policy to a Terek Cossack congress as purely a means to finally end mountaineer–Cossack conflict; Cossack morale, however, understandably plummeted. In September 1920 several Cossack settlements went into open revolt, in a feeble repetition of the pattern of 1918, with less dramatic consequences; the main railway line in the region was cut, some bridges were blown, and train carriages were shot up.⁶ The Soviet authorities nonetheless punished with characteristic severity those they held responsible for the attempted rebellion; Ordzhonikidze in particular raged that the Kalinovskoi *stanitsa* should be burnt to the ground, and the land of four other *stanitsas* transferred immediately to 'the poor, landless population, and in the first place to the Chechen people, who have always been devoted to Soviet power'.⁷

The whole male population aged between 18 and 50 in the *stanitsas* of Kalinovskoi, Ermolovskoi, Romanovskoi, Samashkinskoi and Mikhailovskoi were thereafter deported on cattle trucks to perform compulsory hard labour, most serving in the coal mines of the Donetsk basin, but with the men of Kalinovskoi being especially singled out for deportation to distant Arkhangelsk. Later investigations uncovered that amongst the most arbitrary aspects of this policy was the degree to which it made absolutely no distinctions between those who had been for or against Soviet power: in Ermolovskoi alone, 246 deported families were subsequently identified to have been for Soviet power, many with sons in the Red Army, whilst in Samashkinskoi 426 such families were identified, and in Romanovskoi, 226.⁸ The overall human impact of these events was considerable. Taking into account three Cossack settlements which had already been attacked and destroyed during the civil war, and the resettlements conducted by the Soviet authorities in 1920, 6,661 homes, comprising 34,637 individuals, were arbitrarily displaced and thrown into abject poverty between 1917 and 1920.⁹ Those who did not fall within the aforementioned category for immediate punitive deportation – some 14,000 women, old men and children – were also forcibly resettled onto the left bank of the river Terek, into Mozdok *okrug* or (in the case of settlers from Ermolovskoi and Samashkinskoi) into the *stanitsa* of Kalinovskoi.¹⁰ Horses, bread, forage and carts from these settlements were requisitioned for the use of the Bolshevik authorities, whilst the *stanitsa* of Kalinovskoi itself was ultimately burnt to the ground, with every single material remnant of that former community physically obliterated.¹¹

The enfeebled Soviet state was in practice completely incapable of humanely administering forced migration on this scale, quickly leading to predictable chaos and disorder. The migrants for example were exempted from taxes and military conscription, and provided with oil and kerosene, but they were also forced to leave all non-moveable goods behind. Lists of goods were composed to provide the settlers with aid upon their arrival at their new destinations, including construction materials, but later investigation revealed that in fact none of the goods on these lists had in practice been provided. During the first wave of resettlement, moreover, the Chechens had allegedly been given liberty for eight hours to loot the abandoned Cossack farmsteads at will.¹² In November 1920, preparations were put in motion to resettle a further seven Cossack *stanitsas*, now not as a punitive measure, but as part of a far more ambitious programme to separate the Cossack community from the Terek region altogether. An ongoing lack of proper planning, however, led to yet further administrative chaos, which meant that these 'non-punitive' deportations differed little in their practical character from the earlier punitive ones. A lack of trains in particular led to massive loss of property and significant human suffering, as large numbers were forced to move on foot in the depth of winter.¹³ In December calls at last began to be made to halt the deportation of the Terek Cossacks. That month saw the setting up of a new commission under the chairmanship of party worker V. I. Nevskii to review the whole question, and on 16 February 1921 Nevskii himself arrived in Vladikavkaz, where he immediately met with Sergei Kirov.

Once set up, Nevskii's committee, which was comprised, apart from Nevskii himself, of an Ossetian, a Chechen, an Ingush, a Kabard, and three Cossack representatives, was tasked with reviewing statistics regarding population and land use in Chechnia, Ingushetia, Ossetia and the Cossack *stanitsas*. In March 1921 the committee divided fairly predictably along ethnic lines, with the mountaineer representatives calling for the complete removal of all Cossack settlements from the land of the newly emerging Mountaineer Republic, whilst the Cossack representatives called for a less radical policy of more equalized land use instead. The Chechen and Ingush representatives on the committee in particular proposed a massive resettlement of Cossacks so as to effectively 'liberate' some 340,000 *desiatins* of land. In deadlock over the matter, the committee passed its findings on up the chain of command to Moscow, but with Nevskii in his final report also emphasizing the economic disadvantages of forced Cossack resettlement, and personally urging that such compulsory migration be stopped. He was particularly critical of Ordzhonikidze's attitude to the whole issue, underlining what he saw as the unfairness of regarding all Cossacks as counter-revolutionaries, as well as the self-inflicted damage to local agriculture which had been generated by the rushed nature of the deportations. The local Soviet authorities were meanwhile also heavily criticized for having acquired excessive independence, and for in practice having worked hand in glove with local bands of robbers and murderers; far from increasing local security and stability, the very nature and conduct of the deportation campaign had actually undermined it.¹⁴ Nonetheless, by the time Nevskii made his report, tens of thousands of Cossacks had already been deported

from the old Sunzhenskoi line, many having been forced to move to land without homes or fields, and so were forced to live by begging in the open, entirely exposed to the elements, to fend off imminent starvation.¹⁵

In January 1921 a halt had finally been called to forced Cossack resettlement within the Mountaineer Republic. The impact of this whole movement upon the local Ingush community was nonetheless highly significant, given that, whilst in the past the Cossack line had divided and segregated mountaineers from the plains, impoverished Ingush mountaineers were now free to migrate to newly available lands on the valley floors. The overall population shift that followed as a direct consequence was dramatic – if, in 1882, 24.7 per cent of the overall Ingush population resided in the mountains, by 1924 just 2.1 per cent did.¹⁶ Cossacks trickled back to reoccupy some of the abandoned farmsteads in the region, but the Tsarist legacy of a densely populated line of military settlements had been effectively wiped off the map of the North Caucasus forever. The economic prospects and physical security of those who did return also continued to remain parlous, leading to bitter complaints that the bureaucrats of the Mountaineer Republic were deliberately not defending their interests. In an interesting reversal of the normally assumed power relationship between centre and periphery, repeated direct instructions from the Central Committee in Moscow to reverse course, by permitting local Cossack self-administration, came to be consistently ignored and disregarded by the central committee of the Mountaineer Republic.

Particularly resented by the Cossacks after 1921 were the taxes demanded under the recently introduced NEP, which they felt were implemented in practice in a shamefully discriminatory and arbitrary manner by the local authorities: the Cossack *stanitsa* of Arkhonskoi for January and February 1922 alone, for example, was forced to provide 1,133 carts. By March that same year, it was alleged, the Cossack *stanitsas* had fulfilled their tax obligations by 95–98 per cent, whilst neighbouring Ossetian *auls* had by contrast been permitted to meet only 35–40 per cent of their state obligations. At the same time, 250 head of horses were allegedly stolen from Cossack *stanitsas* in 1921 alone, with no punitive countermeasures being undertaken by the authorities.¹⁷ The Cossacks had therefore effectively become second-class citizens within the new Mountaineer Republic. A typewritten petition for justice and restitution from the Cossacks of Ermolovskoi, Samashkinskoi, Romanovskoi and Mikhailovskoi, dating back to August 1921, captures both the bitter sense of Cossack victimization as a result of these events, and a faint undertow of racial superiority, not dissimilar to that observable amongst white farmers in South Africa or Zimbabwe later in the century. The Cossacks boasted that by their agriculture they had in the past fed not only themselves but Groznyi as well, that they had metaphorically shed blood to harvest this soil, but that they were now being punished far too harshly, purely because of their social affiliation (which was true), even as their formerly productive lands, so generously transferred by the state to the mountaineers, now lay barren, looted, and untilled.¹⁸ Nonetheless only the disintegration of the Mountaineer Republic itself would finally permit the setting up of a self-administering Cossack national district in 1924, in the form of Sunzhenskoi okrug, whilst broader Soviet attitudes towards the Cossacks as a

class would not undergo serious review until the April plenum of 1925, when the sensitive topic of the 'Russian Question' as a whole was finally raised.¹⁹

The Rise and Fall of the Mountaineer ASSR, 1920–24

The Mountaineer Republic conducting these policies had itself meanwhile only begun to assume shape in the autumn of 1920. The concept of a unified mountaineer republic was fiercely resisted by local party workers in the Terek region at first, with the proposal to create such an autonomous territory initially being substantially rejected, in favour of complete unification with Russia instead; the final vote count registered just four votes in favour of the proposed autonomous status, versus eighteen against.²⁰ On 20 October 1920, however, Stalin held consultations that forced the issue through, leading on 17 November to an announcement being made by Stalin himself in Vladikavkaz regarding the formation of an Autonomous Soviet Mountaineer Republic. Stalin supported the project, both as a means for the mountaineers to finally administer themselves, and as a way to permanently administratively separate the mountaineer and Cossack populations. Recent mountaineer revolts (see Chapter 4) also led Moscow to promise the preservation of local legal codes based on sharia and *adat* laws in both the new Mountaineer Republic and neighbouring Dagestan.

On 20 January 1921 there was officially created the Mountaineer ASSR, comprising the Chechen, Nazran, Vladikavkaz, Kabard, Balkar and Karachai districts, with a population that was made up of Chechens, Ingush, Ossetians, Kabards, Karachai, Balkars, Cossacks and *inogorodnie* elements. From 24 March 1921 onwards, Vladikavkaz as the administrative centre of the new province was granted a legally independent administrative status, much as Grozny would later be.²¹ From the very outset, however, the Mountaineer Republic represented an anomaly within Soviet nationality policy as a whole, given the lack of a single dominant titular ethnic group within its borders; the only regional parallel to it in this regard was Dagestan or the Crimean ASSR established in October 1921.²² The Mountaineer Republic's party organization reflected the ethnic disparities that would soon lead to the 'Chechen experiment' of 1922 outlined in the last chapter: out of 1,200 overall members, 50 per cent were Russian, 32 per cent Ossetian, 7 per cent Ingush and 1.5 per cent Georgian, and the remaining 9.5 per cent were from other nationalities. For administering the republic's territory of six administrative national districts, eleven *narkoms* were established, of which six (including the justice and education portfolios) enjoyed autonomous status and answered to the republic's central committee, whilst the remaining five (including finance, supplies, and public works) were directly subordinate to corresponding *narkoms* of the RSFSR.²³

Underlying tensions produced by such disparities within the Mountaineer Republic led to its disintegrating the most rapidly out of all the post-civil-war Soviet administrative structures in the Caucasus. Subsequent Cold War-era Western accounts of the demise of the Mountaineer Republic traditionally attributed its disappearance to a deliberate 'divide and rule' policy on the part of the Bolsheviks, just as they ascribed the emergence of national republics in Central Asia to

Machiavellian designs by Moscow to undermine the possibility of Pan-Islamic unity in that region.²⁴ As late as 1993, Professor Stephen Blank, a student of Richard Pipes, still ascribed an overarching centralizing objective to what he labelled the 'Balkanization' created by Bolshevik policy in the Caucasus at the time:

'The subsequent gerrymandering of the region represented an effort to divide it and prevent its unity whilst exploiting each people's ambition, expressed through a few radical intelligentsia, to have its own autonomous homeland.'²⁵

Archival investigations have not been kind to this school of thought however, with the emergence of national republics in Central Asia having now been dramatically reassessed as primarily the outcome of local political factors, rather than heavy-handed manipulation by Moscow.²⁶ The archival record reveals similar local tensions, many of them in fact often actively in conflict with both Stalin and Moscow, to have been behind the slow but irrevocable disintegration of the Mountaineer Republic between 1921 and 1924. Far from being a deliberately conceived and executed neo-imperialist design to divide and subjugate the nationalities of the North Caucasus, the emergence of numerous national republics during the 1920s appears to have been a genuinely improvised response to sometimes violent interethnic unrest and violence. The case of Kabarda, the first autonomous *oblast'* to secede from the Mountaineer Republic, provides a stark initial example of this.

The Kabard *ispolkom* had announced its discontent at having being incorporated within the new Mountaineer Republic from as early as 21 March 1921, citing the absence of economic links between Kabarda and the other sections of the newly established Mountaineer ASSR. Backers of secession from the Mountaineer Republic on the Kabard side quoted Stalin as supporting their position, the latter having in general reportedly cooled his enthusiasm towards a Mountaineer Republic in the wake of Georgian accession into the Soviet Union (in February 1921).²⁷ The chairman of the Kabard *ispolkom*, Betal Kalmykov, was himself a powerful and charismatic local politician, unafraid to bluntly declare that the creation of the Mountaineer Republic without having taken into account local economic factors had been 'mistaken'. Kabard politicians also feared that the general policy of land redistribution in the region threatened Kabard interests in particular; in December 1920 a dispute had already arisen over proposals to satisfy land hunger in Karachai at the expense of Kabard land. At stake were 90,000 *desiatins* of land, of which only two-thirds were suitable for pasture and haymaking.²⁸ During the work of the Nevskii commission to regulate the local land question in the light of Cossack resettlement, a sitting on 7 March 1921 had also heard an Ossetian representative demand the clearing of the whole of 'Lesser Kabarda' in order to satisfy the land needs of Ossetia. The following day a further report clarified and emphasized the Ossetian position, demanding that the border between Ossetia and Kabarda be shifted to follow the line of the river Terek, removing all Kabard settlements on the left bank of the river in the process.²⁹

Such tensions over land use, and concern that Kabarda was about to become the victim of other nationalities' land hunger within the administrative boundaries

of the Mountaineer Republic, framed and contextualized Kalmykov's declaration on 21 March, no matter how much the language of Marxist-Leninist developmental economics may have been employed to justify Kabard secession. A report by the *Kavbiuro*, however, supported Kalmykov's broader developmental point, noting that Kabarda had a predominantly agrarian, grain-based economy, whilst other parts of the Mountaineer Republic possessed much more mixed economic infrastructure, including nomadic cattle herding. The question of Kabard secession was therefore also identified by it as essential, since otherwise Kabarda, if chained to other less advanced economies, would 'stop its cultural and economic development for several years, or even regress'.³⁰

The leadership of the Mountaineer Republic itself meanwhile reacted extremely negatively to Kabarda's request for secession, declaring that to allow this to happen would signify the beginning of the end of the Mountaineer Republic.³¹ Kazbek Butaev, a prominent local journalist and politician, protested strongly in public on 23 August 1921 against Kabard secession, citing it as an example of the broader dangers of revanchist nationalist separatism. The 'equalizing' (*uravnitel'nyi*) instincts of the socialist revolution, which had sought to correct an existing scenario where every Kabard had around 4 *desiatins* of land, whilst every Balkar enjoyed only 0.2 *desiatins*, had in his view been undermined and blocked by a coalition of 'Kabard *kulaks*', who pursued separatism as a means to evade their broader social responsibilities. Kabard autonomy in Butaev's view was therefore nothing less than the work of 'bourgeois-nationalist elements' now provoking a civil war between districts, and thereby conducting a covert counter-revolution behind a Soviet face. A true *communist* line by contrast would combat such phenomena, creating an international party cleansed of 'nationalist and colonialist elements', and in the process would also prove itself perfectly capable (in Butaev's opinion) of holding together nine different national groups, each admittedly with very different languages, cultures, and at very different levels of political development, within the bounds of a single territory. The nightmare alternative scenario he presented was that the separation of more and more territories would lead not merely to the collapse of the Mountaineer Republic, but to starvation amongst the proletariat in the local cities, since tax-gathering from the countryside would become impossible.³² Such local arguments failed to fully convince, however, largely because Moscow in its own considerations had already acknowledged privately just how weak the Communist Party still remained in many of these regions; the *Narkomnats* approved Kabarda's secession from the Mountaineer Republic on the very same day, with a Kabard AO then being legally brought into existence on 1 September that same year.

The decision on Kabard secession was undoubtedly genuinely popular locally: between 11 April and 13 June 1921 Kabarda had held a Congress of Soviets at which 140 delegates, only 28 of them Bolsheviks, voted overwhelmingly not merely to become an autonomous *oblast'*, but to also demand autonomous republic status. Stalin, in Nal'chik at the same time as the congress was being held, though too ill to personally attend, was in fact forced to talk Kalmykov down from applying for full republic status, pointing out that Russia itself did not contain a single republic

with a population of under 500,000, whilst the Crimean Republic, territorially the smallest, itself had a population of over a million.³³ If anything, therefore, Kabarda's emergence as an autonomous *oblast'* in fact represented a climbdown from the real demands being advanced at the local political level. Kabarda's final emergence therefore appears to have clearly come about through a combination of policy shifts on the part of the centre, most notably by Stalin, and local discontent which required active tempering and accommodation. Moreover, Stalin himself explicitly stated that he believed the Mountaineer Republic could certainly continue to exist without Kabarda, or even Karachai, which he admitted might also now secede; the territory which remained after all would still continue to encompass around a million people.³⁴ The capacity of local actors to create their own political momentum, however, would be yet further highlighted in the events that followed.

Despite Stalin's own belief in the limited impact of Kabard secession for the Mountaineer Republic, this act produced a chain reaction amongst the Karachai and Balkar peoples. As early as 2 June 1921, the chairman of the Balkar party bureau, M. Eneev, had raised the idea of Balkaria seceding from the Mountaineer Republic. By 9 January 1922 the decision to form a unified Kabardino-Balkar autonomous republic had been approved, whilst an addendum to the decision also approved requests made by workers of the Karachai district in May 1921 to form an autonomous Karachai district on the model already provided by Kabarda.³⁵ Growing calls for secession, meanwhile, and already seceded territories, also created a sharp rise in the number of territorial disputes for both the SE Bureau and the Mountaineer Republic to manage. Kabard secession in particular had both been provoked by, and further spurred, growing demands for a territorial redistribution of Kabard land, with Karachai requesting an additional 100,000 *desiatins* of their neighbour's land; Balkaria, 50,000 *desiatins*; and North Ossetia and Ingushetia together, 109,000 *desiatins*.³⁶ Karachai separatism also occurred against a background of growing ethnic tension with Kabarda, and in February 1922 the SE Bureau heard claims that the new Kabard *revkom* had dispatched a military detachment armed with machine guns and mortars to expel Karachai nomads from land claimed by Kabardino-Balkaria, confiscating several thousand head of cattle in the process.³⁷ Reports reaching the SE Bureau were blunt in declaring that the recently appointed head of Kabardino-Balkaria, Betal Kalmykov, was directly behind these attacks, with earlier clashes in January that same year having already resulted in the deaths of two Karachai and four Kabards. On 23 January, meanwhile, around 500 Karachai had also mounted a retaliatory raid on Kabarda, stealing cattle, horses and sheep, kidnapping people, and raping women in the village of Karmovo.³⁸

At stake here were reserve mountain pastures used in Tsarist times, when local politics had been considerably different; the Karachai claimed that these pastures had been exploited economically by their own people for herding 'since time immemorial', whilst Kabard claims to them by contrast could only be traced back to 1860, when these lands were seized for 'temporary use' by the politically better-connected Kabard nobility, before then being effectively annexed in 1889 by a

Tsarist commission headed by Kabard Prince Kodzakov.³⁹ Kalmykov retaliated that, far from being the aggressor in terms of property rights, his republic was in fact the constant victim of attacks by its neighbours, with 276 horses stolen in 1922 alone. His administration also claimed that overall, between 1918 and 1 December 1921, 2,399 horses, 1,433 large herds of cows and 23,088 sheep had been stolen from Kabarda.⁴⁰ Kabarda would nonetheless be ultimately driven to concede more land by a Moscow-appointed commission, which after a two-month investigation into the issue awarded the transfer of 10,000 *desiatins* of land to Balkaria (against the Balkar claim for 50,000) and 32,500 *desiatins* of land to Karachai (against an initial claim of 100,000). In all, even though North Ossetian and Ingush demands were rejected, Kabarda still ended up ceding 135,937 *desiatins* of its Tsarist-era landholdings to its neighbours under the new Soviet territorialization policy.⁴¹

Between 15 and 22 February 1922, meanwhile, three Red Army brigades were introduced into Karachai to mount a local disarmament campaign, as a means to help reduce local tension; 4,500 rifles, 500 revolvers, 400 sabres, 14 machine guns and over 1,000 cartridges were seized, and 100 already-identified local counter-revolutionaries arrested, of whom 32 were subsequently shot.⁴² Nikolaev, a member of the Karachai military soviet, noted that the Red Army troops themselves were not above individual acts of looting and indiscipline, but went on to lay the greatest weight of blame for the unrest which had required such an intervention upon the head of the local Karachai *revkom*, Umar Aliev, and his deputy, Khasanov. Together, it was alleged, their consistently 'anti-Communist line' and military mobilization orders had stirred up national feelings, inciting violence and pouring oil on the flames of local ethnic rivalries.⁴³ Aliev, whose fate, as already noted, in some ways presaged that of El'darkhanov in Chechnia after 1925, was removed as head of the Karachai *revkom* that same year, with criticism of his policies being continued by his immediate successor, Kurdzhiev. Kurdzhiev alleged that Aliev had repeatedly turned a blind eye to local banditry, to the extent of appointing known bandit leaders as heads of local militia detachments.⁴⁴ In analysing such reports, Mikoian as head of the SE Bureau was considerably more tolerant and lenient, noting that the main problem in Karachai, as in other regions, lay in its extremely weak and underdeveloped party apparatus – 'from 1920 to the present no kind of Soviet work has been conducted [there]'. Consequently the Karachai Communists were therefore (in his view unsurprisingly) almost universally marked by 'nationalistic tendencies...Asiatic hypocrisy [*vostochnogo litsemeriia*] and intrigue', against the backdrop of which Aliev was actually the most intellectually advanced of all of them, a point recognized 'even by his enemies'. Remarking that his general impression remained that there was in fact nothing 'especially serious' behind the charges levelled against Aliev, Mikoian nevertheless also concluded that, in the wake of the disarmament campaign, it was inconceivable to retain him in office there, and that on the whole it would be better to employ him elsewhere.⁴⁵

Whilst Kabard–Karachai tensions flared, the village of Lesken also became the object of dispute between Kabardino-Balkaria and the Mountaineer Republic,

with Kalmykov claiming that it had already been subordinate to Kabarda for over fifty years before being lost through the formation of the Mountaineer Republic in 1920. He went on to label the administrators of the Mountaineer Republic themselves 'thrice-cursed scum' for not dealing more severely with the problem of local banditry.⁴⁶ Nosov, secretary of the Mountaineer Republic's central committee, retaliated that Kalmykov related to the principle of autonomy extremely jealously, with the exaggerated passion at times of an 'extreme reactionary' ('Black Hundreder'). The chairman of the Mountaineer Republic's SNK, Said Mamsurov, simultaneously offered to provide investigators with documents proving that Kabard detachments had on several occasions attacked and physically invaded the Mountaineer Republic.⁴⁷ Moscow naturally sent investigators to try to unpick what soon proved to be an extremely complex and heated local dispute. Perfil'ev, one of the external investigators involved, was appalled by the spirit of illiteracy and parochialism he found within the Kabard administration; according to his later report, one key witness to the events in Lesken on the Kabard side, Beslineev (whose own oral testimony openly acknowledged that 'I have absolutely no education'), was by character 'a terrible nationalist, very rude and impudent', as well as being personally responsible for keeping dozens of people in jail without charge for months on end. Local Russian party workers, and indeed the whole local party organization, remained dominated by Kalmykov – 'no reasonable suggestion of any kind will be taken up if it conflicts with the spirit of Kalmykov'.⁴⁸ Other reports confirmed that the Kabardino-Balkar party organization was one of the weakest in the region, not least because it contained 224 illiterates, and '36 barely literate party comrades, of whom the majority can only write their name'.⁴⁹

The Mountaineer Republic had meanwhile also taken it upon itself to resolve the border dispute with the Kabardino-Balkar AO, setting up a small commission from the Mountaineer Republic's central executive committee on 11 February 1922 to regulate the issue, with input from representatives of Kabardino-Balkaria. Work within the commission progressed extremely slowly, however, and on 21 July 1923 Mamsurov announced that it had been found necessary to send a militia detachment of sixty men to Lesken purely to combat local banditry and 'restore revolutionary order'.⁵⁰ The OGPU however noted that in fact the only result of this intervention had been that those heavily armed inhabitants of the village who remained opposed to its absorption by the Mountaineer Republic took refuge in the nearby woods, whilst Mamsurov's own militiamen then committed excesses of their own by arresting supporters of Kabarda and destroying the local printing press.⁵¹ The violent and still unresolved nature of the dispute attracted the attention of Stalin, to whom Kabard representatives had already made a number of appeals, and from 26 July onwards there began to work a commission on the Lesken question incorporating members of the Moscow Central Committee. Amongst Moscow's first instructions was a direct order to the Mountaineer Republic's government to withdraw its own military forces from Lesken in order to defuse what threatened to become a highly embarrassing full-blown war between local Soviet administrations. In October that same year, meanwhile, the Mountaineer Republic's government calculated that, overall, out of 78,000 *desiatins* of disputed land that

it considered belonged to it by right, its claims to date had been recognised to only 29,209 *desiatins*.

At stake in Lesken, as elsewhere, was a contested narrative over the correct historical-economic affiliation of the territory. On 15 July 1924 twenty-seven households in Lesken submitted a petition acknowledging that whilst 'in old Nicholas's day' they had indeed been subordinate to Kabarda, in terms of both military recruitment and education they, as Ossetians, had always been closer to Ossetia.⁵² Just a few months before, however, on 16 November 1923, another correspondent from a different part of the same settlement warned that, in the event of territorial annexation to what he labelled the *Ossetian Mountaineer Republic* (emphasis added), the whole of the local population would rise up in arms, and the Mountaineer Republic's leaders would only ultimately acquire the land 'over our dead bodies'.⁵³ So bitter was the dispute over Lesken that it ended up outliving the Mountaineer Republic itself, with the upper half of the settlement eventually being annexed to North Ossetia, and the lower half given to Kabardino-Balkaria in 1925. Disarmament of the lower quarter of the settlement in June 1925 also still encountered armed resistance from twelve men, leading to a few dead and injured.⁵⁴

Disputes between Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia furthermore flared up later on in the 1920s, with the possibility of a further commission being raised in August 1927 over claims that the Kabard authorities were illegally annexing the settlement of Kazim-kom. A skirmish had already occurred between Balkar and North Ossetian militias in May that same year involving 800 Balkars armed with rifles and a Lewis machine gun, with the disputed area, some 7,000–12,000 *desiatins* of land, meanwhile again the subject of controversy over its historical alignment; the Kabard authorities claimed to have already been using the land concerned for thirty years, and Kalmykov himself, in a typically belligerent statement, remarked that the Ossetians were 'artificially' raising this question, and that 'we should be the ones raising it, since from us was illegally stolen 200,000 *desiatins* of land'. A subsequent official report noted that nobody in the past had denied the Kabards the use of this land, not even North Ossetia, until the Kabards began fortifying and openly settling the region.⁵⁵

Such growing territorial rivalry at the local level before 1924 meanwhile sapped the energy of the Mountaineer Republic, whilst simultaneously drawing continuous and often unfavourable scrutiny from the side of the SE Bureau. Moreover, ongoing discontent over the local land question, alongside lack of vigilance from Moscow regarding the local party organization, led to bureaucratic decay and stagnation within the Mountaineer Republic itself; in North Ossetia alone the local party organization during this time shrank from 700 to 400 members. In addition to being compelled to continue to employ Tsarist or even Denikin-era bureaucrats because of a lack of trained and loyal Soviet cadres, the republic also continued to run up considerable financial deficits, leading to its lower-ranking employees often going for months at a time without receiving their salaries.⁵⁶ New proposals continued to be raised as to how to best administer the region, including suggestions from workers of the Mountaineer Republic itself to create afresh a wholly separate North Caucasus federal republic. At least one of the advocates of this

motion presented it as a means to break the region free from the administrative grip of the SE Bureau, which he claimed was constitutionally unsuited to managing mountaineer territories – an allegation levelled because the demographic majority of the population within that latter's current administrative borders remained Cossacks and Russians.⁵⁷

Tensions between the SE Bureau and Mountaineer Republic continued to run high generally, particularly over the power of the former to tinker with the make-up of local cadres. In August 1923 a fierce dispute broke out regarding the SE Bureau's recall of twelve local bureaucrats, for which the Mountaineer Republic angrily claimed it had only been compensated by the dispatch of three fresh workers, one of whom was 'lazy, disorganized and a poor Marxist, as well as being nervous and snappy'.⁵⁸ The real cause of ill feeling, however, was the leaked report of a SE Bureau representative, Brailovskii, whose criticisms of the work of the Mountaineer Republic's party organization had been scathing. The SE Bureau itself countered such accusations by charging that the state of affairs within the Mountaineer Republic's bureaucracy was by now so bad that Russian workers were volunteering for other assignments in droves, 'just in order to leave the Mountaineer Republic'.⁵⁹ In a letter to the Central Committee in Moscow from this same period, the SE Bureau opined that the Mountaineer Republic itself would soon have to be finally broken up, purely as a consequence of the impossibly bad personal chemistry that had by now developed between it and the SE Bureau.⁶⁰ Relations between the SE Bureau and the party leadership of the Mountaineer Republic then further deteriorated at the end of 1923 over the decision of the SE Bureau to dispatch a commission to investigate agitation occurring within the Mountaineer Republic for an autonomous Ossetia. Sh. Abaev, secretary of the Mountaineer Republic's *obkom*, responded by accusing such high-profile SE Bureau representatives as Mikoian, Voroshilov and Gikalo of now openly favouring the break-up of the Mountaineer Republic.⁶¹

Far from moving smoothly along the rails set down by a Kremlin master plan, the slow slide towards complete dissolution therefore continued to be improvised in the midst of what remained a heated local debate. The two remaining indigenous national groups within the Mountaineer Republic after Chechen secession in 1922, the Ingush and North Ossetians, shared between them a history of territorial rivalry and antagonism stretching back to the late Tsarist period, and had also, (with the exception of the Ossetian 'Kermen' movement), largely fought on opposite sides during the civil war in the region. The decision made in 1922, within the boundaries of the Mountaineer Republic, to unify the Digor and Vladikavkaz *oblasts*, had then led to agitation within the Ossetian-dominated Digor *oblast'* to go still further and create a North Ossetian autonomous *oblast'*, though the majority of the population in the Vladikavkaz district in 1922–23 did not support the Digorian position, but still remained in favour of retaining the Mountaineer ASSR instead.⁶² Meanwhile I. Ziazikov, the leading representative of the Ingush party organization within the Mountaineer Republic at the time, considered Ingush independence to be possible only in the event of Ingushetia being united with Chechnia, but the question of Ingush separation also raised the thorny

issue of the fate of Vladikavkaz as an administrative centre. Meetings of Ingush Communists expressed concern that Groznyi was too far away to serve as a substitute administrative centre for Vladikavkaz, to which the Ingush were strongly economically linked, but they also recognized the possibility of increased Ingush–Ossetian tension over the matter.

In January 1924 a commission chaired by Ordzhonikidze, in which Mikoian as secretary of the SE Bureau and S. G. Mamsurov as chairman of the Mountaineer Republic's SNK also took part, then undertook a review of both party work in the Mountaineer ASSR and the autonomization issue. Faced with three potential policy options – preservation of the status quo, the complete break-up of the Mountaineer ASSR into Ossetian and Ingush districts (a position only Ossetians in the Digor district loudly supported), or a rearrangement of internal administrative boundaries – the commission adopted the third option, concluding that the Mountaineer Republic's constitution needed to be changed in order to create two autonomous internal *oblasts*, whilst nevertheless retaining both within the overarching structure of the Mountaineer Republic. This conclusion was arrived at primarily because there was no easy or simple way to divide Vladikavkaz between the Ingush and Ossetians.

In April 1924 the Mountaineer Republic's own central executive committee correspondingly developed a new constitutional project for transforming Ingushetia and North Ossetia into autonomous *oblasts*, with the committee then only to intervene to settle disputes between them. However, on 7 July 1924 this project was then finally rejected by the All-Union Central Executive Committee in Moscow as potentially creating more problems than it solved.⁶³ A non-party Ossetian mass meeting which had been held between 5 and 7 April 1923 for its part had meanwhile already singularly failed to achieve any consensus regarding the best future administrative-territorial division of the republic, and follow-up mass meetings and local investigations by Voroshilov and Mikoian in 1924 likewise only uncovered a complete lack of popular consensus.⁶⁴ Mikoian himself had also submitted a report on 24 February 1924, criticizing both the lack of *korenizatsiia* within the Mountaineer Republic's party apparatus (amongst the 1,404 workers of the ASSR's SNK and in the wider republican apparatus as a whole, there were only 151 Ossetians and 29 Ingush), as well as the glaring hole in the republic's own budget, with the level of unmet expenditure now reaching 72 per cent. This deficit he blamed exclusively on the high running costs of the *sovnarkom* and republican bureaucracy, organs which consumed 60 per cent of the state budget in 1922–23 and 55 per cent in 1923–24, generating in his view an extremely unhealthy political scenario where the upkeep of a governing apparatus that was 98 per cent Russian was impoverishing and holding back the republic as a whole. This led Mikoian to then rhetorically ask 'where is the self-determination here? Where are Ingushetia and Ossetia?' The fact that the Nazran and Vladikavkaz districts still retained those titles, rather than having been retitled 'Ingush' and 'Ossetian' respectively, he considered in this context to be a small but very telling detail. Ordzhonikidze meanwhile appeared more convinced that the political apparatus of the Mountaineer Republic had made good progress in maintaining inter-ethnic peace in the region,

and could be still further reformed along the lines of the SNK of the recently created Transcaucasus Federation, but likewise warned that, at present, Vladikavkaz was the only 'cement' holding the republic together, a role for which the town would prove 'insufficient' over the longer term.⁶⁵

The decision then reached by the Central Executive Committee in Moscow in July 1924, to in fact abandon the project of preserving a Mountaineer Republic with realigned internal governmental boundaries, implicitly took up the arguments that had first been raised by Mikoian – the dissolution of the Mountaineer Republic, and the establishment of two entirely new autonomies, would better meet the need to rapidly develop the 'class consciousness' of the nationalities in the region, and attract the largest possible number of local workers into party work – an implicit re-emphasis of Mikoian's call for greater *korenizatsiia*. At play, however, were also wider considerations, with 1924 witnessing the final formation, under the economic *raionirovanie* programme, of the North Caucasus *krai*. The establishment of such a regional *krai* apparatus (of which Mikoian was the first head), with responsibility for directing the political, economic and cultural development not only of the *krai* as a whole, but also of all the autonomous *oblasts* within it, rendered the proposed reorganization of the Mountaineer ASSR a merely superfluous further tier of bureaucracy in the eyes of many. With relations between military officers and politicians within the Mountaineer Republic having already become tense on occasion, Voroshilov in particular complained to Mikoian that, were such a reorganization to occur, 'the achieved results would be insufficient, and at the same time would bring even more confusion and complications for the *krai*'.⁶⁶

In practice, therefore, and again as a consequence of extensive discussion and debate rather than any preconceived Bolshevik master plan, the remaining territory of the Mountaineer Republic was dissolved, its property and political apparatus broken up and redistributed, and a freshly established border commission completed the task of delimiting the new administrative frontiers of North Ossetia, Ingushetia, the Sunzhenskoi *okrug* and Vladikavkaz by 25 December 1924. Vladikavkaz itself as a separate autonomous district remained in practice a 'shared' capital between North Ossetia and Ingushetia until 1933–34, when Ingushetia merged with the Chechen AO, and Vladikavkaz became North Ossetia's official capital; the earlier compromise position nonetheless fomented for the rest of the 1920s what local historians in retrospect labelled an era of ethnic 'parity' between the two sides regarding control of the city.⁶⁷

Such compromises failed to address other territorial disputes however, and also left unaddressed the wider issue of the apparent political incongruity of establishing an autonomous North Ossetia, whilst leaving South Ossetia, on the other side of the main Caucasus mountain range, as a subordinate part of the Georgian republic. In 1924, for example, arguments had already erupted between the North Ossetian and Ingush party apparatuses around the territorial affiliation of the Redantsko-Baltinskii district, with both sides using Tsarist-era maps and the work of the earlier Abramov commission, as well as political arguments regarding changes in local land use caused by the recent civil war, to advance their cause. The

Ossetian side claimed that the overall quantity of land left to Ossetia from recent territorial redistributions had allegedly fallen to 1.29 *desiatins* per capita; the Ingush by contrast rested their claims to the Redantsko-Baltinskii district on the charge that they had fought 'side by side with Soviet power' right up until 1920 to retain this region, at a time when a local Cossack–Ossetian alliance had been attempting to drive them out.⁶⁸ Renewed tension over this issue in 1926–27 culminated in North Ossetia losing its claim to the left bank of the Redantsko-Baltinskii district in favour of Ingushetia.

In July 1925, meanwhile, Mikoian as head of the North Caucasus *kraikom* had already announced that, whilst the petition of the Ossetian authorities to unify their two respective national districts was 'sensible', political difficulties rendered such a solution much more problematic, and would have to be judged at the central level.⁶⁹ With Ordzhonikidze voicing strong opposition to the idea of merging a unified Ossetian ASSR into the RSFSR, on the grounds of the unrest it would cause within Georgia over the loss of Tskhinvali, Mikoian presented a proposal to create a unified Ossetian ASSR within the boundaries of the Georgian SSR to Stalin, a man who could be expected, as a Georgian born in Gori near the border of South Ossetia (and allegedly also, according to some accounts, as the illegitimate offspring of an Ossetian father), to be sensitive to the issue.⁷⁰ Stalin initially favoured the proposal, but after further contemplation then comprehensively rejected it, warning that the breakaway of an Ossetian ASSR from the RSFSR could generate a dangerous domino effect, leading to the collapse of the RSFSR itself, whilst simultaneously stimulating calls for a ethnically Russian republic and inspiring Russian nationalism, the latter at this time still seen as the 'greatest danger' in Soviet nationality policy.⁷¹ South Ossetia therefore remained in legal terms a subordinate unit of the Georgian SSR, and then after 1991 a formally subordinate unit of the Georgian state, right up until August 2008, when the attempt of the Georgian authorities to fully annex it by military force provoked the Russian army to intervene to defend indigenous Russian passport holders, with the Russian government shortly thereafter recognizing South Ossetia as a legally independent state.

The remaking of Dagestan

Whilst the Mountaineer Republic rapidly disintegrated during the early 1920s, the newly emerging multi-ethnic Dagestan republic that formed its largest immediate territorial neighbour proved to be remarkably enduring. The autonomy of Dagestan in this period was decided early on, amidst a rush of military events connected with the suppression of Gotsinskii's rebellion. Samurskii was enraged to learn only on the night of 8 November 1920, whilst still on campaign against Gotsinskii's forces, of a proposed congress to be held the next day by Stalin and Ordzhonikidze in Temir-Khan-Shura to announce Dagestan's autonomy. In a telegraphed reply to the invitation to attend the congress, he entreated:

Before thinking about introducing autonomy in Dagestan, it is essential to become acquainted with the situation on the ground, and to review both

political forces and the economic and everyday conditions of Dagestan itself at the present moment. In recent days I have become absolutely convinced that the Dagestani poor think very little about autonomy; amongst them there is but one desire – the lightening of their heavy economic situation. An autonomous government also ought to have experienced and honourable workers, and do we have them in sufficient quantities? Absolutely not.⁷²

Samurskii ended by declaring that ‘in any other circumstance I would raise both hands for autonomy’, but maintained that discussion of the matter under present circumstances was premature. The planned congress itself did not take place on the 9th, meanwhile, and Stalin and Ordzhonikidze arrived instead early on the morning of 12 November. A small group of party workers then spoke out against an autonomous Dagestan, arguing – rather like their neighbours in the Terek region – that it would cut off Dagestan from Russia and bring no substantial benefit, but they were predictably outvoted. Stalin’s declaration of Dagestani autonomy smoothed over Samurskii’s principled disagreement over the timing of the congress by paying tribute to Samurskii, Gabiev and Korkmasov for having expended ‘both blood and soul for you [the Dagestani population] and your freedom’.⁷³

Samurskii, meanwhile, having helped repress Gotsinskii’s uprising, returned from the front to be greeted by Said Gabiev as a military hero. Gabiev himself, as previously noted, replaced Korkmasov as chairman of the Dagestan *revkom* between September 1920 and May 1921, and after feuding with the local Cheka went on between 1921 and 1926 to become both commissar of education and simultaneously commissar of finance and supplies in Dagestan.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, though both men could be prone to a similar awkwardness over official policy, Samurskii, like Gabiev, in fact remained highly valued, both as an outstanding party worker and as a military organizer in mountain warfare – his report to Ordzhonikidze, ‘on the political situation and on the construction of Soviet power in Dagestan’, generalizing on the lessons of the civil war, highlighted the importance of understanding local moral, social, psychological and cultural factors, as well as mere terrain. Many of Samurskii’s earlier warnings about employing inexperienced Red Army forces in trying to suppress Gotsinskii’s rebellion had retrospectively also proven to be painfully well founded. Samurskii furthermore went on to rapidly become every bit as much a critic of the SE Bureau as his colleagues in the Mountaineer Republic. Having become reconciled to autonomy, he then battled hard in subsequent reports, as head of the Dagestan central executive committee, for maintaining a truly Leninist line – recognizing local realities, proceeding slowly and cautiously, and executing a shift from the civil war model of merely giving orders to now attempting governance through a policy of persuasion and political propaganda amongst the local population.⁷⁵ Frustrated with the capacity of SE Bureau representatives to understand this, Samurskii on his own initiative at one point also came forward with proposals about forming a new North Caucasus *krai*, with its administrative centre in Grozny.

Not receiving an immediate response to such proposals, Samurskii and Korkmasov together kept up the struggle, blaming the SE Bureau for arbitrary, uninformed

decision making, and demanding in a note sent to the Central Committee in June 1924 that Dagestan should enjoy exactly the same right to autonomy as the Tatar and Bashkir republics, especially in view of the territory's political influence 'on the whole of the Near East' – a forceful reiteration of the borderland 'Piedmont Principle' popular in Soviet nationality policy at the time.⁷⁶ Finally, on 1 April 1925, the Dagestan central executive committee received what it wanted – withdrawal from the bureaucratic framework of the North Caucasus *kraikom* and a direct line of communication to Moscow itself.⁷⁷ Such an outcome again demonstrates that there was no Machiavellian Kremlin master plan regarding the Caucasus during the 1920s. The role of individual personalities could often be critical, and the outcome of disputes did not invariably favour those who might be termed 'centralizers'; demands for closer ties to the centre were in fact just as liable to come from the periphery itself, as a means to bypass the powerful intermediary administrative apparatuses which had emerged in the immediate wake of the civil war.

In the spirit of accommodating local practices, the Soviet authorities in Dagestan itself meanwhile also appointed to district sharia courts such noted local interpreters of Koranic law as Ali Kaiaev and Abusuf'ian Akaev, the leading figures in the pre-war Jadid drive in the North Caucasus. At the same time, the use of the more extreme Koranic punishments – such as the chopping off of a thief's hand, or the execution of a murderer – were strictly monitored and discouraged, and certain *adat* traditions, such as the blood feud (*krovnaia mest'*) remained prohibited. A local tradition of legal pluralism now re-emerged in this period, with 'people's courts' and local land commissions set up to operate in parallel with the sharia courts.⁷⁸ The spirit of accommodation with the Dagestani clergy, a legacy of the nature of the civil war in the region, also lasted longer here than elsewhere in the region; the 500 *madrasas* still operating in Dagestan in 1925 were reduced to 25 by 1929, but 2,000 mosques still operated as late as 1928, and not until April 1927 did the Dagestan central executive committee resolve to close sharia courts. By contrast sharia courts were first closed in North Ossetia in 1924, and were officially phased out in Adygai and Kabardino-Balkaria in January 1925 and closed in Ingushetia and Chechnia in January 1926.⁷⁹ Unlike its neighbour the Mountaineer Republic, meanwhile, Dagestan's territorial footprint actually grew rather than contracted in size over time, with the acquisition on 16 November 1922 of the Kizliar and Achikulaksoi districts, formerly parts of the Terek region. Here, too, a dispute erupted with the SE Bureau, which sought to reclaim the territory, but Dagestan ultimately again emerged as the clear winner from these bureaucratic battles.

The acquisition of these two districts, together with the completion in 1923 of the 'October Revolution' canal, irrigating tens of thousands of hectares of previously unused land, also allowed considerable internal resettlement to occur, and in 1924–27, on the plains of the Makhachkala, Achikulaksoi, Kizliar and Khasaviurt regions, twenty-four new settlements were set up, housing a population of 10,000 Lesgin, Lak and Dargin migrants. Migrants were encouraged by economic assistance from the Soviet authorities amounting to a free one-off subsidy of 125 roubles and credit worth 25 roubles, whilst the authorities also spent 50,000 roubles in

1923–24 and 154,000 roubles in 1924–25 building schools, wells, irrigation canals and housing to further facilitate the migration.⁸⁰ Samurskii's strategic plans were even more ambitious, however: with the migration question in the forefront of his mind as a 'political one', and now also convinced that Dagestan's mountain rivers could, through hydropower, transform it into 'an industrial proletarian centre in the East' (a goal conjoined in his mind with his aspiration for Dagestan to eventually gain full official SSR status), he foresaw electrification and the rapid development of industry as ultimately a far more powerful combination for undermining the Islamic clergy and sharia courts than even 'the cleverest anti-religious propaganda'. Documents drawn up by the Dagestani authorities at the beginning of the 1920s meanwhile identified a need to facilitate the migration of not merely 10,000 but rather 50,000 mountaineers down from the mountains to the plains, towards which end Samurskii himself requested a further 738,000 roubles to assist the migration of an initial tranche of 15,000 mountaineers from the Gunib, Andi and Avar districts in the west. Concern continued to be generated, however, by data which suggested that, owing to high birth-rates, three-quarters of the Dagestan population, or 560,573 persons, were still living in the less agriculturally productive mountain areas, whilst only 164,263 persons resided on the plains.⁸¹

Against this backdrop, Samurskii and the *narkom* for land redistribution, M. T. Akhundov, drew up in October 1927 an even more ambitious reform programme to relocate 49,500 families (around 200,000 people), 30,000 of whom were to physically move over the course of seven years, with the remainder then being given the option of either moving, or remaining in their homes in the mountains whilst cultivating and harvesting land on the plains, before potentially then also migrating after a period of preliminary acclimatization. Those expressing a desire to move were again to be further incentivized by a 350 rouble monetary grant, 195 roubles worth of it in credit to buy livestock and tools. The total number of families intended to be moved was before long reduced to 39,000, but even this still marked Samurskii's plan out as by far the most ambitious project mounted thus far to alter the relative demographic balance between mountains and plains in Dagestan. However, the project also involved the engagement by Samurskii of some of the most prominent (and before long amongst the most controversial) economists in the country, amongst them K. A. Timiriazev, N. P. Makarov and A. V. Chaianov. Makarov, Chaianov and their better-known colleague N. D. Kondrat'ev in particular were all by 1930 destined to be arrested and eventually shot or imprisoned as bourgeois 'deviationists', accused of undermining socialism by promoting economic theories favouring the development of large-scale capitalist firms.

During his time in Dagestan, in fact, Makarov in particular approached the land redistribution scheme in a manner that also eventually contributed to the charges later levelled against him, establishing a 'norm' in apportioning land rights for example that still left the wealthiest peasantry with larger land allocations than the poorest, on the basis that they possessed greater initial capital resources to cultivate such plots. Such proposals came under heavy criticism from local peasant representatives as early as November 1927 however, because of their failure to address or eliminate local feudal legacies in terms of land ownership, as well as their failure

to establish the conditions for the emergence of agricultural collectives rather than individual plots.⁸²

The perceived ideological flaws in Makarov's initial scheme led to the dispatch of a fresh commission of economists from Moscow in August–September 1928 which adopted a more openly class-orientated approach for eliminating the remnants of feudal landholdings in Dagestan by redistributing land; local *kulaks* and larger landholders were now calculated to enjoy an excess of over 250,000 hectares of land, and local mosques were also judged to possess an excess 10,000 hectares of land which could be more equitably redistributed. The majority of land which it was now proposed to redistribute – around 170,000 hectares – lay on the plains, with only around 87,000 hectares in the mountains. The party leadership of the Dagestan *obkom* was at the same time also censured, with Samurskii – by now accused by some of his colleagues in the local party apparatus of being, like Bukharin at the central level, a 'right-wing deviationist', soft on the *kulak* threat – abruptly removed by the end of 1928 from his post as head of the Dagestan central executive committee and transferred to Moscow. There he worked under a cloud for nearly five years in a variety of meaningless administrative roles within the central party apparatus instead, though remaining friends with Ordzhonikidze and Kalinin, and continuing to write books and articles in his spare time.⁸³

The ambitious resettlement project formulated in October 1927 meanwhile remained largely unfulfilled, in part owing to a contraction of funds assigned to it, and in part as well because of a corresponding freeze in new settlement building, with emphasis now also shifting to *kolkhoz* construction rather than individual landholdings. With the exception of one brief surge in 1926–27, the number of families migrating from the mountains to the plains within Dagestan therefore decreased rather than increased over time, in almost inverse proportion to the ambition of state schemes – 526 families migrated in 1924–25, 209 in 1925–26, 667 in 1926–27, but just 24 in 1927–28. Of the 500 households that it was intended to migrate in 1927–28, meanwhile, only 143, or 28.6 per cent of the plan target, actually moved, whilst of the 250 households scheduled for migration in 1928–29, only 82, or 33 per cent of the plan target, actually moved.⁸⁴ The reasons for the failure of these plans were multiple, but perhaps the most significant was the inability of preliminary infrastructure and irrigation work to keep pace with the rate of migration itself, which left the new settlers without adequate housing, wellheads or potable water upon their arrival. What water was available was then often wasted irrationally, causing the land itself to be flooded, whilst the soil also had to be worked by hand-held hoes because of shortages in livestock or technical equipment. This had a catastrophic impact on local agricultural productivity, a factor which, combined with the omnipresence of malaria, led many to abandon the new settlements altogether.⁸⁵

The Dagestan resettlement project nonetheless remains a striking example of the Bolsheviks' desire to radically reshape local societies, even in the 'pragmatic' years of the NEP, in ways that were held to offer a better route to modernization and economic equality than the Tsarist-era regional legacy of hopeless rural backwardness, poverty and neglect. Though a failure in its own terms at the time, the

broader resettlement project was also one that the local Dagestan authorities would return to again and again, and eventually – by the 1970s – they achieved a significant degree of success. Moreover, even by the end of 1920s, with the resettlement project an overall failure when judged against the plan targets, it remains appropriate to discuss a Dagestan which had been utterly ‘transformed’ compared with its Tsarist predecessor. Heavy extensions of state credit led to the incremental mechanization of local agriculture between 1925 and 1929, with the number of tractors available rising from 74 in 1926–27 to 104 by 1927–28. Local land rights meanwhile also remained utterly transformed by the reforms instituted from 1927 onwards, even if the liberated soil itself remained weakly settled, whilst the creation of local ethnographic museums and pedagogical institutions, in combination with widespread campaigns to combat illiteracy, had already also socially transformed everyday conditions in local society by the very eve of the first five-year plan.⁸⁶ Dagestan was by now set on a developmental course that not only transformed local cultural and governmental institutions, but led it to enjoy a very different and distinct evolution from neighbouring territories such as Chechnia and Ingushetia with which, as recently as the nineteenth century, it had outwardly shared many broad cultural similarities. The evolution that Dagestan underwent during this period would furthermore lay the groundwork for its own very distinctive subsequent path in the post-Soviet era.

7 Forging the proletariat

Women, collectivization and repression, 1928–34

Let's suppose war is declared. I'm sure we'd have to execute around half of your *stanitsas*. The Central Committee gave directives on 14 December and 5 January, such as the Central Committee never gave before, and even old Bolsheviks are talking, discussing, and kicking it around. And what if war comes?

(A. I. Mikoian to the Armavir Committee of the VKP(b), 19 January 1928¹)

The Soviet Union during the 1920s remained a predominantly agrarian country, underdeveloped and backward in many regions. Industrialization, the Bolsheviks' main developmental goal, was dependent upon increasing grain yields, in order to both feed the towns and factories, and generate a sufficient surplus to sell on the foreign exchanges. The New Economic Policy, pioneered by Lenin in 1921, specified grain as a tax in kind (*prodnalog*). By allowing private trade (with the incentive to sell surplus grain, rather than merely seeing it confiscated by the state), whilst simultaneously permitting the peasant freedom to hire and lease labour, the NEP facilitated a dramatic rise in harvest yields. However, it also produced sharp imbalances within the economy, exemplified by the so-called 'scissors crisis' of 1923, where higher prices on factory products led in turn to extensive grain hoarding by peasants in the countryside. By October 1923, industrial prices were three times higher, relative to agricultural prices, what they had been before the First World War.²

Bolshevik administrative measures in 1924 to tackle this problem, driving down prices on industrial commodities by cutting back state credit, delivered satisfactory results, largely because of the existence of a large quantity of untapped spare capacity in domestic industry coming online. However, the blades of the 'scissors' between the agricultural and retail pricing indexes then sprang open again during 1925 and 1926, and in 1927 the Bolsheviks attempted the same strategy that had been undertaken in 1924 for driving down industrial prices, but with far less satisfactory results. This in turn eventually precipitated a renewed food supply crisis. The failure of this second attempt to master the imbalance was largely related to the fact that Soviet industry, the majority of it still of Tsarist vintage, was now operating at much closer to full capacity. Greater numbers of products at reduced prices therefore could not be produced without a substantial new tranche of 'sunk cost'

investment to acquire fresh capital plant, machinery and engine stock. Consequently, credit cuts failed to bring about a corresponding upturn in the supply of manufactures at reasonable prices, producing instead only a 'goods famine' that placed the Bolsheviks' political credibility on the line.

If industrial investment in 1927 had for the first time exceeded the level achieved in 1913, the same therefore could not be said of the level of industrial production, or the technical structure of industry. Such mechanization as had occurred, with its associated reduced labour costs, also still failed to bring about the immediate reduction in factory gate prices anticipated by Bolshevik planners, partly because – as Stalin himself identified – wage earnings were still rising faster than real worker productivity. The moment of crisis foreseen by Evgenii Preobrazhenskii (one of the NEP's sharpest critics, and ironically a prominent ally of Trotsky) – namely, the need to implement 'primitive socialist accumulation', in order to generate a sufficient surplus to subsidize a qualitative technological breakthrough, and thereby induce rebalanced internal stability – had now arrived.³ Within a few years the 1927 crisis would therefore directly spur on a more general Bolshevik attempt to seize control of the 'commanding heights' of the economy and bring it under greater state control. This entailed abandoning any attempt at market equilibrium in the process by adopting price setting across the board, with an accompanying command-administrative model of development.⁴

The first 'scissors crisis' of 1923–24 had meanwhile already led the Bolshevik leadership to promote renewed slogans regarding the need to turn the party's 'face to the countryside', a mark of increasing anxiety regarding a potential rural counter-revolution. Such fears were only increased following the repression of a peasant-dominated rebellion in Georgia during August 1924. Post-uprising investigations disclosed that the Soviet apparatus in the Georgian countryside remained cripplingly weak, with barely 6,000 local party members, 47 per cent of whom had only joined the party since 1921. The Georgian peasantry also remained deeply unenthusiastic supporters of the new order, with only 28 per cent voting for Georgian Communist Party representatives during the 1923 village soviet elections, whilst 60.3 per cent voted for non-party candidates. Local rural soviets meanwhile were accused of being shamefully badly organized, of possessing a membership often devoid of even elementary knowledge or real authority, and of engaging in excessive forced taxation, arbitrary interference, and the often insensitive closure of churches.⁵

In the wake of the alarm raised by this rebellion, proposals were advanced by the leading Bolshevik thinkers Nikolai Bukharin and G. E. Zinov'ev to increase the representation of non-party peasant representatives in rural Soviet political institutions, allow them an independent press, and reduce repression. Whilst Stalin remained wary of forms of political liberalization that might eventually foster a multi-party system, 1925 nonetheless saw amnesties and political rehabilitations occur on a scale that significantly increased the overall number of enfranchised rural voters. In what became known as the 'Rykov amnesty', the number of rural representatives deprived of voting rights (*lishentsy*) in the North Caucasus *krai* shrank from a relatively high 2.4 per cent (compared with 'just' 1.6 per cent in the

RSFSR as a whole) down to 1.2 per cent of the population, and the number of non-party representatives in subsequent local elections shot up – in the Don region, for example, the number of ‘non-party’ *selsovet* chairmen grew from 13.5 to 45.6 per cent, and in the Stavropol district from 30.4 to 76.7 per cent.⁶ This liberalizing line quickly generated its own local backlash, however – in January 1926 Mikoian wrote to Molotov warning that political liberalization, in combination with recent territorial changes, stood in danger of reconsolidating the Cossacks in the North Caucasus as a political community with both vested interests and a relatively privileged socio-economic status. The *inogorodnie* for their part complained bitterly that far too many rights were being restored to the Cossacks, and recently demobilized Red Army men in the region were even heard shouting ‘Kill the Tsar and the Communists, defenders of the Cossacks’ when beating up local Bolshevik party workers.⁷

By August 1926 the OGPU already felt it necessary to conduct prophylactic measures in the Kuban region by arresting and deporting known former White–Green insurgents and veterans of the White movement, whilst Trotsky and Zinov’ev condemned the results of the 1925–26 elections nationwide as prefiguring the smothering of the dictatorship of the proletariat by renascent petty bourgeois cultural values. Concerned both by such criticism from the ‘Left Opposition’, and by fear that the unfolding situation in the countryside might genuinely lurch out of control, Stalin instituted a fresh policy turn which saw the Central Committee on 28 September 1926 again drastically cut back on rural voting rights. The percentage of those disenfranchised in the rural regions of the USSR rose from 1.1 to 3.6 per cent, and from 5.0 to 8.2 per cent across the towns, but with the North Caucasus singled out for particular attention – the number of those disenfranchised in the *stanitsas* of the region rose from 1.4 to 5.7 per cent, and in the towns from 4.3 to 8.7 per cent.⁸

Across the Caucasus as a whole, the early 1920s were also marked by extensive subsidies from the centre, in a bid both to avoid rebellions or unrest in other rural areas, and simultaneously facilitate the more general post-war recovery process, particularly in the light of further famines caused by droughts in 1922 and 1924. The relative success of this process should not be overshadowed by the fresh set of crises that followed thereafter. Between 1922 and 1925, Chechnia alone was allocated 3,611 *puds* of seed loans from the Soviet government, and Ingushetia 43,360 *puds*. By 1925 both republics had additionally received 77 tractors and 44,000 agricultural tools, and schools had also been established locally to train agronomists and tractor drivers. In 1922 the SE Bureau also allocated Karachai and Cherkesiia 44,200 *puds* of agricultural supplies, and by 1925 the total area of tilled soil in both of these districts had been restored to very near 1913 levels. North Ossetia received monetary assistance to the tune of 150,000 roubles in gold to help revive its maize industry, and was in receipt of 25 tractors by 1925; the area of sown soil there by that time also actually exceeded 1913 levels by 25 per cent. Eighteen bridges had been built over the Terek and its tributaries by 1926, roads were either being constructed or repaired, and the region as a whole had also acquired a 300 km telephone network.⁹

This recovery was nonetheless dogged by the fact that it failed to unfold evenly across all the newly established autonomous territories, with Ingushetia and Chechnia in particular continuing to lag economically behind practically all their nearest neighbours. In 1922–23 the Ingush state budget amounted to a miserable 50 kopecks per capita, and by 1926–27 it still stood at only 15 roubles 12 kopecks per capita. Not until 1927 did the area of cultivated land in Ingushetia reach 92 per cent of its 1913 levels, and not until 1932 would it significantly exceed them, despite the redistribution of land after 1920 having also allocated Ingushetia an additional 100,000 *desiatins* of soil. Spending on health and education also lagged behind neighbouring districts, with syphilis reportedly still affecting 16 per cent of the population, and tuberculosis and skin diseases 47 per cent.¹⁰ Only in Chechnia was the situation, if anything, even worse: there, as late as 1929, the budget still only amounted to 3 roubles 82 kopecks per capita, and general literacy still stood at only 4 per cent.¹¹

Chechnia and Ingushetia also continued to lag behind other parts of the region in one further area of the Soviet struggle for progress, namely the emancipation of women. Ever since the first establishment of Soviet power in the Caucasus, the women's section (*zhenotdel*) of the Communist Party had striven there, as in Central Asia, to educate and emancipate what it perceived to be the 'dark, unenlightened masses' of native women via propaganda campaigns and literacy drives. The hopes invested in this movement were reflected at the first Baku congress of 1920, where three women of Dagestani, Azeri and Turkish nationality were elected onto the presiding committee, in the spirit of promoting and hastening 'the emancipation of women in the East'.¹² In practice, however, the work of the *zhenotdel* in the region was afflicted by a lack of funding, by what one early report referred to as a 'lack of clarity regarding the party's mission amongst women there', as well as by a dearth of reliable local cadres, the demise of leading members in the movement from illness during its critical early years, and a lack of interest from the side of some local authorities, all of which produced wildly uneven results.¹³ In 1922, for example, reports from the Mountaineer Republic remarked that the local *zhenotdel's* efforts were still entirely confined to Vladikavkaz due to a lack of trained female cadres for conducting propaganda work in the countryside, and Mikoian that same year expressed concern over a lack of progress.¹⁴ As late as 1929–30, meanwhile, the nationality section of the VKP(b) received complaints that, whilst local courts in Kabardino-Balkaria were dealing with crimes affecting women (kidnapping, bride price, robbery and so on) with due diligence, and even in some cases with perhaps excessive severity, courts in the Chechen and Cherkessk districts devoted no special attention to such matters at all.¹⁵

If greater sexual equality in the eyes of the law made only grudging progress, however, Soviet universal literacy campaigns enjoyed far greater general success in the region as a whole – by 1924 there were already 2,373 centres for eliminating illiteracy (*likpunkty*) established in the North Caucasus, recruiting 13,000 mountaineers in the national districts, and by 1928 the number of such institutions had leapt to 3,500, enrolling and teaching nearly 80,000 persons, over 27,000 of them from the autonomous mountaineer regions alone. Soviet reports abounded with

accounts of girls and women in remote *auls* now spending up to half the night studying for their basic literacy courses, and by the end of the 1930s it was calculated that, across the Soviet Union as a whole, over 60 million people had been raised out of functional illiteracy, in the sense of now being able to perform basic reading, writing and arithmetic.¹⁶

The enlightenment of women also bore unforeseen consequences in the period of collectivization that followed however, namely in the degree to which women in general now took part in public political activity, even anti-Soviet activity, on an everyday basis. An anti-*kolkhoz* gathering in the village of Urakhi in Dagestan in June 1931, involving a crowd of around 10,000 protestors was, according to OGPU reports, dominated by women, all loudly shouting 'down with the *kolkhoz*!' The chairman of the local *ispolkom* was on this occasion forced to retreat to safety under a hail of stones.¹⁷ The military district staff of the North Caucasus meanwhile reported in February 1930 to Boris Shaposhnikov, chief of the Soviet General Staff, that '*kulak*' agitation in their district was conducted 'mainly amongst women, who are involved in provoking *seredniaks* [middling peasants] and *bedniaks* [poorest peasants] into open demonstrations'.¹⁸ The women in the 1928 'Baksan uprising' in Kabardino-Balkaria (which will be described in greater detail below) – a group accused, in OGPU reports, of concealing stolen firearms under their clothing – were therefore merely one symptom of a far broader social phenomenon, one in which the local female population in general now participated far more fully than ever before in the contested political landscape of the North Caucasus in the inter-war period.

In regard to the social make-up of the countryside in general, however, the Soviet government, as it had since Lenin's time, continued to identify only three broad classes of peasant, regardless of gender, nationality or ethnicity – the *bedniaks*, the *seredniaks* and the richest class, the *kulaks*, the latter permanently identified as an enemy of Soviet power, and categorized by their owning several fields and employing hired labour. The concern over the social role of the Cossacks outlined above centred on their economic stratification – in 1927 it was calculated that only 10–12 per cent of the total Cossack population fitted into the *batrak* (hired labourer) or *bedniak* category considered to be the natural rural allies of Soviet power.¹⁹ Debates over the dividing line between a *kulak* and a *seredniak* meanwhile never settled upon an exact definition either, but concern nonetheless remained that, under the NEP, the strength of the *kulak* class was in fact increasing. The head of the OGPU information department in 1928, for example, in a report regarding the North Caucasus in general, noted the growing power of what he regarded as *kulak*-dominated areas in the mountaineer districts, particularly in Chechnia, where he designated whole villages, such as Shatoi or Itum-Kale, as '*kulak nests*'.²⁰

The preservation of various 'national traditions', such as the Islamic ritual payment of *kalym*, or bride price, and the role of clan politics in even local Soviet administrations, also continued to sit ill at ease with the broader progressive goals of the Bolshevik higher leadership. Such concerns were compounded when, in 1927, on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the revolution, the Soviet Union was shaken

by a war scare that both underlined the relative military weakness of the state, and placed such concerns over internal stability into even sharper focus.²¹ Above all, the war scare exposed the fact that the relative backwardness of the state in relation to its most likely enemies had in fact accelerated since the end of the Tsarist era. The painful but real post-war recovery process, it was now apparent, had in practice entailed the country standing still compared with its nearest rivals. Shortfalls in the delivery of military equipment had grown from 7.5 million roubles in 1924–25 to 27.4 million roubles (15 per cent of the total programme) in 1925–26, whilst reserves of key strategic chemicals such as sulphuric acid, chlorine and saltpetre were also insufficient, as were supplies of petroleum and aviation fuel. The Soviet General Staff calculated that the first year of fighting, if it occurred, would require 32 million shells and 3.25 billion rifle rounds, but at the end of 1926 the armed forces in practice could only count on receiving 29 per cent of their requirement in rifle ammunition, and less than 10 per cent of their shell requirement. After several years of bureaucratic infighting, Stalin's Central Committee would resolutely attempt to address this discrepancy, ultimately producing a distinct distortion within the first five-year plan (the famous 'five-year plan in four years' of 1929–33) towards favouring the build-up of military industrial capacity.²²

In February 1927 the OGPU in relation to this same war scare complained of panic buying of essential goods such as salt, petrol and sugar, whilst simultaneously reporting the emergence of coalitions of negative class elements participating in local elections. In the North Caucasus the 1927 pre-election campaign was reportedly notable for the revived activity of *kulaks* forming blocks with other 'anti-Soviet' elements, most notably the Muslim clergy, with these groups then conducting agitation to create 'soviets without communists, *komsomoltsy* or *bedniaks*'. In OGPU eyes, such alarming phenomena were compounded by the still-ongoing 'clan struggle' occurring within local party apparatuses, a phenomenon particularly visible in Chechnia, where agitation continued to be conducted in a number of districts demanding the restoration of El'darkhanov to power.²³ Local ethnic tensions both within and between national republics in the region also continued to run high, as was highlighted when Grozny and Vladikavkaz in 1928 both lost their special independent administrative status.

Given local memories of the semi-sanctioned ethnic cleansing of Terek Cossack communities in 1918–21, Russian workers in Grozny voiced concern at the time that this administrative change would in practice lead to their being evicted by their mountaineer counterparts, with a corresponding sharp increase in ethnic Russian unemployment levels.²⁴ The aforementioned OGPU report from 1928 meanwhile also noted that pressure from the Chechen side to effectively 'annex' Grozny reflected a genuine sense of grievance on its part over perceived racial discrimination by the town's administration, with the local energy industry, Grozneft, still employing only 470 Chechen workers, whilst credit and housing there also remained difficult to come by for ethnic Chechens. This political agitation meanwhile also formed part of a larger movement calling for Chechen–Ingush unification, a cause which enjoyed support within both territories – from the Chechen deputy education minister Khalil Oshaev and deputy health minister Khamzatov

on one side, and on the Ingush side from an intelligentsia grouped around I. Mal'sagov, the clan politically most opposed to the currently sitting Ziazikov leadership.²⁵ When considered alongside ongoing agitation in neighbouring regions for a unification of North and South Ossetia (a merger supposedly to be immediately followed by their secession from the North Caucasus *krai* altogether), or simultaneous calls for a 'Great Cherkessia' amongst certain Adyghei intelligentsia, aimed at reclaiming historic lost territory in the Kuban, the overall picture from the OGPU perspective remained a disturbing one, where the legality of pastureland boundaries, and even the boundaries of ethnic sovereignty itself, appeared to remain in violent dispute, dividing local leaderships, and providing opportunities for new, covert anti-Soviet alliances to emerge. The overriding warning from the 1928 report was of the danger of new underground political coalitions emerging between disaffected members of the nascent local 'nationalist intelligentsias' and more overt anti-Soviet groups of *kulaks* and extremist mullahs.²⁶

Investigation statistics across the region in general meanwhile also appeared to point to a similarly worrying overall trend of rising social tension and internal conflict, a rise compounded of course by growing interventionist measures by the Soviet authorities to extract grain and prevent *kulak* 'sabotage'. If, in 1926, the OGPU claimed to have uncovered 91 'anti-Soviet' groups operating in the North Caucasus, with a total of 413 participants, then in 1927 these numbers leapt to 243 groups, totalling 1,293 participants, and the following year to 273 groups, involving 1,643 participants.²⁷ The North Caucasus in general, in fact, given its history of harbouring multiple anti-Bolshevik rural resistance movements in the early 1920s (SR-affiliated 'White-Green' bands; Denikinite stay-behinds; Gotsinskii's reactionary followers and collaborators; periodic Cossack rebellions) – a history which was also reflected in its much longer post-war transition towards Soviet 'normality' (the retention of *revkoms* for far longer than in other parts of the country; the use of hostage taking and military pressure in food requisitioning as late as 1924) – inevitably remained an object of deep ongoing OGPU suspicion and concern.

With the gradual re-emergence of a food supply crisis in 1927–28 as a consequence of the reopening of the blades of the 'scissors' between the industrial and agricultural pricing indexes, the OGPU and party organizations across the country meanwhile now also began to experiment, sporadically at first, with more forceful methods of extracting grain, usually by targeting and punishing '*kulaks*', 'saboteurs', and other identified grain-hoarders, as well as by conducting forced requisitions. Local OGPU forces that carried out such policies of greater vigilance and direct pressure repeatedly reported back to the centre that they bore beneficial results, and on 14, 24 and 28 December 1927 and 5–6 January 1928 the Politburo issued directives ordering the establishment of extrajudicial *troikas* across every region to supervise grain collection. Mikoian was sent to the North Caucasus to explain and supervise their organization there, and his sharp verbal warning to local party representatives provides the opening quote to this chapter. Such extrajudicial *troikas* had the right to make arrests and even to issue the death penalty, whilst by the beginning of 1928 Stalin himself had also begun urging broader

application of statute 107 of the Soviet Criminal Code (depriving those so convicted of both their freedom and personal property) to *kulaks* in Siberia, where the bread procurement crisis had become particularly acute. In the North Caucasus *krai* between January and March 1928 alone, 3,424 individuals were sentenced according to statute 107.²⁸ Pressure for increasing collectivization likewise grew, with the number of registered peasant *kolkhozes* across the country increasing dramatically between June 1927 and June 1929 from 14,800 to 57,000 holdings, in a chaotic process already accompanied by falsified production statistics and administrative disorganization.²⁹ However, it still took several years for these processes to assume any kind of set pattern nationwide, since not until 1929 would a discussion be held at the central level over the correct general line to follow, in the light of Stalin's own declared resolve to 'eliminate the *kulaks* as a class' and initiate the accelerated industrialization of the state.

At least three episodes unique to the North Caucasus on the run-up to and immediate aftermath of this turning point nonetheless both reflected in microcosm and interacted with the sharpening of the policy line at the national, union-wide level. The first of these was the 'Baksan' uprising in Kabardino-Balkaria in 1928; the second, a crisis in Chechnia in 1929–32, in the form of the worst local armed uprisings since the early 1920s; and the final critical juncture was reached in the treatment of local Cossack communities during the so-called 'Kuban Affair' of 1932.

The Baksan uprising

The immediate sequence of events in Kabardino-Balkaria, which subsequently came to be known as the 'Baksan uprising', received fairly detailed coverage in post-action Soviet investigations, and remains reasonably clear (though with significant ongoing lacunae) today, particularly since they unfolded across a time span of just three days. They also occurred, however, against a broader general backdrop of growing social tension, generated by an intensified Soviet political campaign to confiscate land and agricultural equipment from large landholders, close down mosques and *madrasas*, and extract bread from the countryside by tougher administrative measures – during the harvest campaign of 1928 alone, some 232 settlements in Kabardino-Balkaria were subjected to such requisitioning expeditions.³⁰

Alongside these other background factors, the internal redivision of land rights undertaken since 1922, designed to encourage collective farms, as well as create fairer conditions for widows and the poorest peasants, also generated territorial anomalies and a degree of resistance from larger landholders. In particular, despite attempts to create natural and contiguous new pastureland boundaries, new landowners sometimes found themselves separated from their assigned fields by as much as 60–100 km, which forced a degree of internal migration to occur. For a rural peasantry still deeply attached to the local soil where houses had been built by their own hands, and their ancestors were buried, such innovations bred suspicion and resentment. In April 1925 ninety households refused to migrate from the

village of Psygans, and twelve households which had already been sent forward to a new location refused to settle, and returned instead to their original homes.³¹ Agitation for collectivization in general meanwhile was often carried out by illiterate party workers, and social tension was increased yet further by pressure on rural communities to conduct unpaid ameliorative work in local infrastructure projects – the construction of the Baksan–Malka irrigation canal was undertaken by exactly these means in May–June 1928, with peasants dragged from their fields at the height of the harvest season. It was to be resentment generated by this obligation in particular which led many to participate in the disturbances later labelled the Baksan uprising.³²

On 10 June 1928, Kabardino-Balkaria's OGPU forces were drummed into action at eight in the morning to help stabilize Baksan, in response to reports that a large crowd had already stormed the police station there, liberating all the prisoners within, and seizing 3 machine guns, 227 rifles, and around 2,500 rounds of ammunition in the process. The root cause of the trouble had begun the previous day, when two peasants from the nearby village of Kyzburn-2 were arrested by local militiamen for refusing to participate in unpaid ameliorative work. En route to the jail at Baksan, both the militiamen and their prisoners had then subsequently passed by a large crowd of peasants engaged in this same work who, on enquiring why their two fellow villagers had been arrested, were reputedly told to 'fuck off' by the militia. An incensed crowd of around 300 had then descended on Baksan and liberated the two men, only for the head of the district that same evening to arrive and rearrest not only the two original offenders, but also all those now accused of being most involved in forcing their earlier release as well. This in turn led on the 10th to a crowd of between 2,000 and 3,000 people, including 500 horsemen, storming the Baksan jail, liberating those inside, and torturing the deputy chairman of the district *ispolkom* (slashing him with bladed weapons) in the process.³³

Whilst OGPU forces began to arrive in the immediate wake of these events on the morning of the 10th, the regional party chairman, Betal Kalmykov, accompanied by Mikhel'son, head of the Kabardino-Balkar OGPU, was already engaged in talks at the local bazaar with a crowd of around 2,000 people, encouraging the rioters both to surrender the stolen weapons, and turn over any escaped prisoners in their midst. The crowd proved restive, however, with shouts recorded of 'Kalmykov's lying', 'down with the Communists' and even 'kill Kalmykov, whilst he lives we won't have sharia'. Kalmykov was forced to retreat, and in his absence the meeting at the bazaar then continued, with a further five speakers reportedly only stirring up the crowd yet further, according to later OGPU reports. The crowd dispersed at around four in the afternoon of the 10th, having elected to hand over seven men and a small number of arms, but with most of the weaponry, according to the OGPU, remaining concealed and smuggled away 'under women's dresses'. That same day the man whom OGPU investigations would later blame for the majority of what followed, the local cleric Askhad Shogentsukov, reportedly met with a small group of fellow conspirators, and organized the dispatch of agitators to surrounding villages to attempt to dramatically escalate the level of unrest.

On the 11th Kalmykov and Mikhel'son visited Kyzburn-2 to again attempt talks with the local population and encourage the surrender of guilty parties, but once more departed after achieving only extremely limited results, though the chairman of the local *selsovet* was replaced. On the 12th a large meeting occurred in Kyzburn-2 with representatives from neighbouring villages now present, where fresh demands – for the establishment of ‘sharia rule’ and ‘Soviet power without Communists’ – were formulated. Askhad Shogentsukov and his allies promoted the creation of an organizational staff incorporating one member from each of the twelve villages represented at the meeting. At this point, however, in an event destined to cause further controversy in both Soviet and post-Soviet accounts of the uprising, an unidentified horseman reportedly arrived, declaring that Piatigorsk and Kislovodsk had already fallen to insurgent forces, and that the assembled crowd should now advance immediately on Baksan to seize arms before marching on Nal'chik.³⁴ Around 5,000 people, again including approximately 500 horsemen, then re-descended on Baksan singing hymns, and demanding the handover of weapons and the right to occupy the local *ispolkom* administrative building. Talks proceeded fruitlessly between the crowd and the local Soviet authorities from 1.30 to 4.30 p.m., after which the mob broke the deadlock by suddenly attempting to storm the barricaded doors of the *ispolkom* building, hurling rocks and attempting to seize the Soviet militia's machine gun in the process. Three volleys into the air initially dispersed this assault, but the mob then returned and Meshcheriakov, the militia commander in charge, now responding to six hostile shots fired, ordered independent return fire and the hurling of hand grenades to disperse the attackers. This had the desired effect, leaving seven dead and twelve wounded (two badly) on the ground in front of the *ispolkom* building. By nightfall on the 12th Mikhel'son had arrived with an additional machine gun and a mortar, and by the 14th Baksan had again been rendered fully secure by the arrival of Red Army reinforcements.³⁵

The Baksan events revealed a troubling picture for Soviet authority in Kabardino-Balkaria, particular given the prominent participation in these events of its own supposed natural political allies in the countryside. Amongst the dead in front of the *ispolkom* building on 12 June were three *bedniaks*, one of them a member of the *Komsomol*, and four *seredniaks*, whilst local youths and *komsomoltsy* were also reported to be widely represented in the front ranks of those that had attempted the assault. The whole rebellion had also accelerated, in the space of forty-eight hours, from a dispute purely over the arrest of two individuals, into what the Soviet authorities interpreted as a dangerous religious uprising, with links and contacts across at least twelve local villages. In the villages of Chegem-1 and Chegem-2 alone, large crowds gathered in support of the Baksan protest, with the 900-strong gathering in Chegem-1 presenting similar demands – for weapons to be surrendered, for the dissolution of the Communist Party's local sections, for permission to conduct private (home-based) education, and for pledges to be issued regarding the inviolability of mosques – even whilst the petitioners there also avowed themselves ‘for Soviet power and Kalmykov, but against the Communists’. Kalmykov was placed in the novel position of conducting negotiations with Chegem-1 over

the telephone before holding a public meeting there and finally, on 14 June, sending in the OGPU to make nine arrests.³⁶ By 22 June the chief OGPU representative for the whole of the North Caucasus, Efim Evdokimov, had begun an extrajudicial investigation into the uprising, with the power to make arrests and even carry out extrajudicial executions.³⁷

Evdokimov carried out a violent and arbitrary investigation, employing non-constitutional practices which he had already honed earlier that same year during the Shakhty trial against industrial 'saboteurs' in the North Caucasus coal-mining town of the same name. In connection with the Baksan events, 118 people were ultimately arrested, of whom 11 alleged male ringleaders – including the 60-year-old (in some accounts, 79-year-old) Askhad Shogentsukov – were shot that same August. Another 40 of the arrestees were extrajudicially sentenced to exile in Solovki, Siberia or other geographically remote convict camps for a period of ten years; 6 were exiled for seven years, 35 for five years and 25 for three years. Most of the 118 arrested stood accused of being class enemies – *kulaks* or former nobility – or of having aided the White movement in the past. Some, like Pshemurza Kotsev from the village of Kyzburn-3, stood accused of maintaining contact with relatives abroad, and others, like Guzer Gerandukovich Dymov, drew attention to themselves by their fluency in Arabic. Very few of these internally exiled men would ever see Kabardino-Balkaria again.³⁸

Armed rebellion in Chechnia

Nearly a year after the Baksan events, towards the end of 1929, Chechnia was rocked by armed disturbances which in turn compelled the first major Soviet military deployments across that territory since 1925. These disturbances began in exchanges of crossfire with local bandit groups, as well as in public demonstrations on 26 July in the village of Bachi-Iurt against the centrally imposed bread procurement plan. On 19 October the building housing the *selsovet* in the village of Goiti was destroyed by a large explosion, from which local party workers only escaped by chance, having been dispersed by the council chairman just minutes beforehand. On 11 November two peasants classified as *kulaks* were uncovered in the village of Zakan-Iurt with a weapons arsenal with which they were allegedly planning to assassinate the secretary of the local Communist Party cell. Matters finally came to a head, however, in the village of Shali on 7 December, when two Soviet militiamen, accompanied by local *komsomoltsy*, arrived at the house of a local *kulak* named Khasuev and attempted the expropriation of his property. A crowd of some seventy people, armed with rifles and revolvers and led by Shita Istamulov, the former war minister in Uzun Khadzhi's emirate of 1919–20, gathered in the street outside, forcing the Soviet militiamen to retreat into a nearby house where they were then quickly overwhelmed and disarmed, before being thrown out of the village.³⁹ Rumours of a major insurrection in the making caused the Soviet authorities to quickly rally 230 sabres, 150 bayonets and two armoured cars, whilst the village itself was visited by the first secretary of the Chechen party, the local Soviet military commander, and the local OGPU representative,

Kraft, with an ultimatum to fulfil the harvest plan and surrender those behind the recent disturbances.

On the evening of 9 December 1929, 6 rifles and 40 pounds of bread were handed over, but Shita Istamulov remained defiant, whilst news also began to be received that armed supporters of his cause were also filtering into Shali from Goiti, Artura and Serzhen-Iurt. At dawn on the 11th, Soviet forces amounting to 302 bayonets, 147 sabres, and a battery of mountain guns surrounded Shali and presented an ultimatum that Istamulov and his followers surrender by 11 a.m. At 10.55 a.m. Istamulov issued a 'rude refusal', at which point his house was surrounded and heavy shooting broke out on both sides, the rebels allegedly employing a machine gun which caused the Soviet troops to respond by pounding the house with artillery. After a few shells had been fired, fighting ceased, with six dead subsequently discovered inside the house, amongst them a well-known local bandit, whilst Istamulov himself was reportedly wounded and in hiding. A ring was then established around the village through which only women and children were allowed to pass unchallenged, and filtration of the local population proceeded in order to detain those judged politically suspect. By nightfall on the 15th between 150 and 200 arrests had been made, whilst casualties on the Soviet side from the whole operation were reported at three dead, five badly wounded, two lightly wounded, and two suffering from concussion.

Kraft, the local OGPU commander, was meanwhile conducting a similar operation around Goiti, which on the 11th had been surrounded by a force of 75 sabres and 150 bayonets, and presented with an ultimatum to surrender arms and rebel ringleaders. Here the fighting became somewhat more severe. The Red Army infantrymen involved were facing battle for the first time in a populated area, and had the accompanying unpleasant experience of coming under fire from four sides, whilst the artillery had also been accidentally left behind in Grozny. This resulted in the first storm of the village failing, and reinforcements amounting to a battalion of infantry with four machine guns and an artillery piece were called up from Grozny. The armoured cars were also unable to manoeuvre effectively along the muddy village streets, whilst their machine guns jammed after firing only a few rounds, rendering them unable to assist when the infantry came under fire from the direction of the local mosque. Fighting nonetheless drew to a close by the 15th, with 37 artillery rounds having been fired, leading to the destruction of 9 houses and extensive shrapnel damage to 10 others.⁴⁰

As serious as the operations around Shali and Goiti were, however, they soon came to be overshadowed by operations that unfolded around the village of Benoi, a mountain settlement of around 2,887 people, where the Chechen OGPU reported that the arrival of an armed gang of around 100 malcontents on the night of 17 December had led to the local cooperative store being robbed of goods to the value of 10,000 roubles, whilst local Communist Party workers were also put to flight. On 20 December operations against Benoi began, with the whole of the Vladikavkaz infantry school, alongside one mountain- and one field-gun battery, as well as over 620 bayonets and 138 sabres, being dispatched to advance from the direction of Khasaviurt on one side and Vedeno on the other. As before, once

the *aul* was surrounded, on the 22nd an ultimatum was issued to hand over both firearms and the guilty parties within the village within two hours. As extension was then asked for and granted, but upon the deadline expiring, machine-gun fire was directed upon the *aul*. Soviet troops entered shortly thereafter with minimal resistance, the bandits having apparently dispersed in the interim. Political meetings were then held inside the *aul* over the course of the following few days, engaging around 500 local residents, including 100 women, and by the 25th the Soviet forces had also received an offer from 150 locals to help track down and fight the bandits.⁴¹

None of the fighting around Shali, Goiti or Benoi in the winter of 1929–30 appears to have involved the levels of bloodthirsty local resistance, mass casualties, or victories won at ‘terrible cost’ later reported by Avtorkhanov to gullible Western commentators, and eagerly repeated by them practically verbatim in accounts thereafter as recently as 2006.⁴² Soviet post-combat reports at the time, which had no vested interest in underplaying the stubbornness of the fighting, given how this might adversely affect later requests for reinforcements, nonetheless still reported enemy casualties in dead and injured from the December 1929 fighting at around 60 persons, whilst their own overall casualties amounted cumulatively to just 43 men, of whom 21 were killed or subsequently died of wounds. Even by 10 April 1930, in the wake of a second major operation in Chechnia centred on Benoi, Soviet additional casualties amounted to around 36 persons, of whom 14 were killed – scarcely the catastrophic ‘loss of a whole division’ subsequently reported by Avtorkhanov.⁴³ By any measure, therefore, the scale and nature of this unrest hardly represented a return to the era of *Imam* Shamil. Truly large-scale fighting only threatened to occur in March 1932, when stability in the Benoi, Datakh and Nozhai-Iurt regions was reported to be again endangered by the activity of 1,500–2,000 fighters, leading the Soviet authorities to respond by mobilizing 800 OGPU troops, an army regiment with artillery, five aircraft, and an armoured train to meet the threat. However, Kashirin, the commander of the SKVO who conducted these military operations at the time, considered that the OGPU had greatly massaged the total enemy figures, judging the true size of the 1932 insurgency to be ‘300–400 persons (maximum)’. The centrepiece of this later rebellion was the attempted storm of a local Soviet garrison, and casualties on the insurgent side – their attacks being apparently noted for their religious fanaticism and stubbornness – were later calculated to be relatively heavy, at 333 dead and 150 wounded, in exchange for 27 Soviet dead and 30 wounded.⁴⁴

The 1929–32 operations, like the earlier Baksan events in Kabardino-Balkaria, were nonetheless significant from the Soviet perspective, not necessarily for their scale, but for altogether different reasons, many of which should still remain of considerable interest to the historian today – namely, the troubling political, social and military weaknesses that they uncovered in the Soviet army and rural apparatus, weaknesses which were also becoming reflected and repeated in disturbances across many other parts of the North Caucasus and Transcaucasus. The Giandzha, Nukhinskii, Zakatal’skii and Karabakh regions of Azerbaijan, for example, were also plagued by large-scale rebellions during 1930, in which significant numbers

of local party members were again recorded as taking part: in the Giandzha region alone, seventy Communist Party members, eighty-eight *komsomoltsy* and fourteen members of the local militia reportedly joined the rebels. Military excesses by Soviet forces there during the subsequent anti-bandit operations led to the 4th Rifle Regiment indiscriminately executing all the inhabitants of the small village of Chai-Abassy in the Giandzha region on 19 February 1930. Immediate post-action investigations of such recognized 'excesses' uncovered that fourteen children were amongst the dead, nine of them aged between two and six.⁴⁵ The Gudauta region in Abkhazia witnessed a similar groundswell of unrest during January–February 1931, during which time around 4,000 people allegedly took part, with local *selsoviets* again standing accused of being either passive bystanders or covert participants during the disturbances, whilst the local *Komsomol* organizations were again condemned as totally useless. The danger of an armed clash between the gathered crowd and the Soviet authorities was on this occasion peacefully averted by the local party chairman, Nestor Lakoba, though he was harshly criticized in some quarters at the time for having undermined Soviet power by excessive concessions, supposedly thereby neglecting the necessity of class struggle in the countryside.⁴⁶ The disturbances in Chechnia should therefore be understood less as part of some mythical and unique 400-year-long Chechen anti-colonial struggle, and more as generic symptoms of stress within a wider peasant society, one driven to the very edge of endurance by the harshness of the recent collectivization measures and sudden industrial modernization, with all the accompanying mistakes and administrative excesses that accompanied both policies.

In military terms the performance of Soviet forces during December 1929 in Chechnia had been less than dazzling – complaints abounded regarding a shortage of hand grenades, poor local intelligence, a lack of reliable local guides, poor tactical decisions, ineffective leadership, a shortage of communications equipment which forced at least one unit operating in the mountains to employ horseback dispatch riders (thereby creating communication delays for days or more), and a shortage of the requisite political training amongst the younger soldiers involved, many of whom had never fired a rifle in anger.⁴⁷ Possibly more troubling, however, were subsequent reports regarding the extreme weakness of the local Soviet apparatus in the areas involved, and the political mistakes which had led the campaign having to be undertaken in the first place. I. P. Belov, the head of the North Caucasus military district at the time, remarked that the 1929 operations had become necessary because of 'crude errors' by the local Communist Party apparatus in attempting total collectivization of even the mountain districts, errors which were then only compounded by the widespread deprivation of many eligible peasantry of their voting rights, and the overly mechanical 'administrative' closing of local mosques.⁴⁸ In the villages where the fighting had occurred, it had also often been near impossible to tell friends from foes: in Shali, for example, the fact that the majority of the houses had open windows had made it hard to tell where gunfire was coming from, the local *komsomoltsy* had proven completely unreliable, and the local party administration consisted of just seventy-five people, 90 per cent of whom were subsequently judged to be 'politically illiterate'.⁴⁹ In Benoi,

cultural work was 'completely absent', and the local *selsoviet* consisted of just thirty-nine people, of whom twenty-two were illiterate and one 'proved to be a bandit, and was arrested'. Anecdotal evidence also recorded that the local population in general meanwhile had become so cut off and ignorant regarding the regional government apparatus that letters from the latter requesting attendance at court, or to facilitate general inquiries, came to be treated as the inevitable prelude to an arrest, leading the default local reaction to the arrival of such missives being to purchase a rifle and go into hiding.⁵⁰

Taking into account these difficulties, and anticipating further resistance in the 1930 spring and summer harvest season to collectivization in Chechnia and Ingushetia, Belov in February that year presented Voroshilov, by now head of the Soviet Defence Ministry, with a shopping list of requirements for his 28th Rifle Division – now rapidly becoming an unofficial mountain warfare unit – to furnish them with, amongst other items, a mountain-gun battery, 135 mortars and 3,000 mortar shells, suitable carts and transport wagons, 20 heliograph stations, and 100 Thompson sub-machine guns.⁵¹ Such material reinforcement appeared doubly necessary in Belov's eyes in view of the wider social engineering project that he knew was now about to be undertaken by the OGPU – namely, the 'dekulakization' of the North Caucasus and Dagestan, a process which would reach its height during the 'Kuban affair' of 1932.

During 1928 Stalin at the central level had successfully outmanoeuvred Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky and other leaders of the so-called 'Right Opposition' – those within the party who remained opposed to finally ending the NEP or accelerating industrialization via higher-tempo collectivization. Accordingly 1929 saw increasing pressure being brought to bear on grain-producing regions, such as the North Caucasus, which were felt to be still under-fulfilling their harvest quotas, though a decision of February 1930 also condemned as mistaken, and banned for the moment any further attempt at, 'total' collectivization of mountainous tribal regions such as Chechnia.

Stalin's suspicion that local loyalties remained divided, and that local party-political work was blighted by short-sightedness and incompetence, then became further reflected in the fact that during 1929–30 a full 10.6 per cent of party workers in the North Caucasus *krai* were relieved of their posts. OGPU pressure also increased, with 370 'underground groups' in the North Caucasus, comprising 3,736 participants, uncovered during ten months in 1929 alone, whilst overall around 4,200 people were arrested in connection with such activities. During that same year A. A. Andreev, the chairman of the whole North Caucasus *krai*, reported to Stalin that around 30,000–35,000 properties in the North Caucasus had been expropriated, around 20,000 arrests made, and 600 executions carried out. During June–December 1929 alone, meanwhile, the number of collectivized properties in the ten grain-producing regions of the *krai* also reportedly rose from just over 105,000 (or 7.3 per cent of the total number) to 446,700 (35.1 per cent of the whole), increases again only achieved through extensive pressure, the too-thin dispersal of available technological resources, and statistical falsification.⁵²

The strained reality behind such campaigns, with increasing rural resistance, was revealed in confidential OGPU reports which noted in December 1929, for

example, that the large *kolkhozes* in the Kuban and Armavir regions had yet to deliver a single quintal of grain, that only 223 out of 300 tractors in the Stavropol *okrug* were actually functioning due to a shortage of spare parts, and that the massive sale and slaughter of livestock caused by the expropriation campaigns had also led to the price for a workhorse in the Terek *okrug* plummeting to 10–15 roubles, and the cost of a cow to 10–20 roubles.⁵³ Just a month earlier, on 7 November 1929, Stalin had published his famous article declaring 1929 the year of the ‘Great Breakthrough’, claiming that the *seredniak* was now supposedly ready and willing to participate wholesale in the *kolkhoz* movement; the November plenum of the party then also marked the triumphal implementation of this ‘general line’ by demanding the complete collectivization of the country’s grain-producing zones.

Despite warnings and concerns raised relatively early on, this policy in individual regions, once implemented, nonetheless very rapidly reached a near insane extreme: in Kabardino-Balkaria by 1 March 1930, for example, 83.9 per cent of properties were suddenly listed as collectivized, higher than the *krai* average of 77.5 per cent and the Russian level of 53.5 per cent. Local resistance to collectivization meanwhile continued to find expression in the accompanying massive slaughter of large livestock herds, with their absolute numbers in Kabardino-Balkaria declining from 263,000 head in 1928 to 143,600 by the beginning of 1931. A distinct lack of local enthusiasm was further reflected in the campaign’s near collapse in the wake of Stalin’s warning on 2 March that the collectivization campaign was in danger of becoming ‘dizzy with success’. By 1 May 1930, in relation to this perceived backtracking by the Kremlin, the number of registered collective farms in Kabardino-Balkaria had collapsed back to 13.6 per cent, even lower than the number previously registered as collectivized on the eve of the campaign’s launch in October 1929. It thereafter took a further wave of massive pressure and effort to bring the number of officially registered collectivized landholdings in Kabardino-Balkaria all the way up to 93.2 per cent by 1933.⁵⁴

In February 1930, meanwhile, in fulfilment of Stalin’s famous corresponding demand to ‘eliminate the *kulaks* as a class’, it was also proposed to deport from the North Caucasus and Dagestan some 20,000 individuals. These families were to be deported to the Urals, far north, and other distant regions of the country, in conditions of the utmost haste and disorganization, despite OGPU chief Genrikh Iagoda quickly reducing the initial quota of deportees from 20,000 to 10,000, and extending the period for carrying out this particular operation until the end of April. On 9 February 1930 there was nonetheless carried out the deportation of 14,551 *kulaks* from the North Caucasus *krai*.⁵⁵ This intensified the social chaos now unfolding across the countryside as a whole. Whilst those designated as *kulaks* sought escape into the hills or shelter with relatives in neighbouring regions, *kolkhoz* construction accelerated, and local administrations were now also bombarded by requests from *bedniaks* and *batrak* peasants to enlist in the Communist Party. The cities also became flooded by refugees from this massive upheaval, which precipitated in turn a housing crisis, as well as providing the industrial shock workers for Stalin’s new factories, oil refineries and steel mills. The population of Grozny alone

more than doubled between 1926 and 1933, from 97,000 inhabitants to 215,300.⁵⁶ From the very end of the 1920s, OGPU reports subsequently confirmed the deportation of 10,595 families (51,577 *kulaks*) from the North Caucasus *krai*, of whom the vast majority were of Russian or Ukrainian (Kuban Cossack) nationality. Their conditions of transit also led to shockingly high death-rates – in what must be taken to be a representative example, of the 10,185 ‘special settlers’ deported from the North Caucasus to Novosibirsk, 341 persons, or 3.3 per cent of the total contingent, were recorded as having died en route.⁵⁷ In a ‘second wave’ of collectivization, deportations to NKVD work camps then continued in 1932–33, with the numbers of those deported from the North Caucasus out of Krasnodar *krai* (in the Kuban) alone on the boundary between those two years reaching an estimated 63,500.⁵⁸ The most striking feature of this new policy in the North Caucasus *krai* therefore became the manner in which it eventually came to be applied to the Kuban Cossacks.

The ‘Kuban affair’ of 1932

The ‘Kuban affair’ came at the height of the main crisis period of the Soviet Union’s collectivization drive, at a time marked by the malevolent combination of the government’s wildly overambitious production targets, administrative disorder, and a sharp change in natural meteorological conditions. Following a temporary retreat after March from mass collectivization, 1930 as a whole had still seen the largest harvest recorded since 1917, at 83.5 million tons, a result quickly presented by Stalin and the party as a triumphant vindication of the policy’s merits. However the grain production targets for 1931, guiding the autumn 1930 and spring 1931 sowing seasons, and mechanically increased by state planners (in line with the steadily expanding area of land being brought under the plough) to forecast a harvest of 97 million tons, then came to be affected by administrative delays, livestock losses, and inadequate ploughing. This sharply reduced potential yields, and was then compounded by drought and scorching winds in the Ukraine, epidemics of weed growth and wheat blight in the North Caucasus, and deluges of rain in the central and lower Volga.⁵⁹ By the end of 1931 both the Ukraine and the North Caucasus were on the verge of catastrophic famine. The difficulties that accumulated as a consequence of this led both to greater repression (in the Kuban, 331 members of a Cossack ‘counter-revolutionary’ organization were arrested, 27 of whom were subsequently executed, in June 1931 alone), as well as to the introduction of the infamous law in defence of collective property of 7 August 1932, which threatened with either execution or ten years’ imprisonment anyone uncovered stealing even minimal quantities of grain.⁶⁰

Against the backdrop of this accelerating crisis, and having already rejected in August a request by Boris Sheboldaev, the North Caucasus party secretary, for a reduction in his region’s grain quota, the Politburo on 22 October 1932 then dispatched Lazar Kaganovich as head of a special commission to the *krai* in order to oversee the autumn sowing season there. Mikoian as a leading economic minister at the time and Iagoda as head of the OGPU also served on this commission, with

Mikoian being no less verbally brutal than Kaganovich over the need to meet the assigned production plan targets. Upon arrival in November, Kaganovich immediately convened public meetings in Rostov-on-Don at which he warned that 'saboteurs' would be meted out the same punishment as the Terek Cossack Host had received in 1920–21. Kaganovich's general attitude at the time was in fact encapsulated in an anecdote recounted by Sheboldaev at one public meeting. Recalling an earlier incident where their car had nearly run over a chicken in the road, causing it in shock to rise up into the air and fly, Sheboldaev recorded Kaganovich on that occasion as remarking that the villages in Sheboldaev's region could likewise be shocked into combating *kulak* sabotage and forced to 'fly'.⁶¹ Interpreting difficulties in local grain collection as the result of an active counter-revolutionary conspiracy, Kaganovich's commission itself drew up a 'black list' of *stanitsas* held to be particularly responsible for obstructing fulfilment of the harvest plan, with those on this list then effectively boycotted by being denied state credit and the right to either trade or buy products from either the state market or neighbouring settlements. The three Kuban Cossack *stanitsas* of Novo-Rozhdestvenskaia, Medvedovskaia and Temirgoevskaia were the first settlements entered on this list for collective punishment.⁶²

With settlements condemned to either meet the plan or starve, production in several *stanitsas* rose dramatically over the short term as a direct consequence, but other villages during December continued to underperform in meeting the assigned quotas, which led to the creation of a second central commission being formed on 10 December, headed by Molotov, which reviewed the whole progress of grain collection in both the Ukraine and North Caucasus. The resolution of this commission, so severe that it was not published in the open press of the time, ordered the deportation of the inhabitants of the Poltavskoi *stanitsa* in the North Caucasus to the northern regions of the country. Local Communists held responsible for aiding or covering up *kulak* sabotage were likewise expelled from the party and increasingly deported, with a particular example being made of N. V. Kotov, a party worker in the Tikhoretskoi *raion* who had already been found guilty of issuing the local *kolkhoz* workers a greater quantity of seed than was officially permitted. For this offence he and three colleagues had originally been arrested and given ten-year prison sentences. The Kaganovich commission ordered Kotov's case to be reviewed, however, in the wake of which both he and two colleagues were shot. Mikoian condemned the Kotov case as 'symptomatic' of the pro-*kulak* tendencies of the region, whilst Kaganovich pronounced Kotov a 'provocateur'.⁶³ This marked the beginning of a large-scale repression campaign, in the course of which the OGPU arrested 16,000 persons across the whole of the Kuban, many of whom were subsequently executed. Of the 24,969 members of the Communist Party in the Kuban, 10,689, or 42.8 per cent, were subsequently expelled from the party, whilst the North Caucasus *krai* as a whole lost 45 per cent of its rural representatives in the course of party control commissions conducting trials or verification procedures that ended in either expulsion or repression.⁶⁴

By 26 December meanwhile, eleven *stanitsas* had been placed on the Kaganovich commission's 'black list', with their continued underperformance now leading them,

like Poltavskoi, to be selected for full-scale deportation. Poltavskoi, a settlement of some 20,000 inhabitants, was the first to undergo deportation at the hands of OGPU and Red Army forces over the course of ten to twelve days in December 1932. Further deportations in early January 1933 of *stanitsas* in the Armavir *raion* in particular led to a total of some 63,500 Cossack and peasant farmers then being deported to the far north of the country within the space of just a few weeks. All the deportees travelled in sealed train carriages whose unsanitary conditions caused a high death toll amongst the very young and old, and dozens of corpses were buried en route.

By mid-January 1933 the grain target for the North Caucasus *krai* as a whole was, at the cost of much blood and suffering, finally fulfilled, but this victory also soon proved truly pyrrhic in nature. Stripped of even their minute reserve supplies of grain, hundreds of *stanitsas* and villages across the Kuban now fell into the grip of famine, with 44 of the North Caucasus *krai*'s 75 *raions* ultimately being so affected. Morale and productivity correspondingly collapsed across the vast majority of the local *kolkhozes*, with 800 horses recorded as dying in January–February 1933 alone in the Tikhoretskoi *raion*, whilst 467 of the 475 available tractors were additionally reported to be in need of repair.⁶⁵ News that refugees were now also fleeing famine regions in both the Ukraine and North Caucasus led Stalin and Molotov on 22 January 1933 to issue a joint telegram condemning the abandonment of *kolkhozes* as an act of desertion, a warning which led to the establishment of cordons and block posts in the affected regions. Travellers in the North Caucasus had their papers scrupulously checked, and large numbers of would-be migrants were detained in railway stations across the region. The epidemics of typhus and other diseases that resulted then led to urgent emergency sanitation measures and to the construction of special detention centres. The now-evident catastrophe unfolding across the countryside meanwhile now also led to urgent appeals by the local authorities for food aid from Moscow, with relief for the most badly afflicted regions thereafter slowly beginning to arrive, albeit in still inadequate amounts, whilst grain targets across most regions were correspondingly already being reduced piecemeal by the end of 1932. Hot meals were arranged to save malnourished children in local schools, whilst 35 top-secret Politburo and Sovnarkom decrees between February and July 1933 authorized the dissemination of 320,000 tons of grain as food aid, and by 15 March blacklisted areas in the North Caucasus had also been restored to their normal legal status.⁶⁶

The chaos and suffering unleashed by collectivization has left historians debating for decades whether some alternative, kinder path to modernization and military security was available. The toll in human mortality rates – some 5.7 million excess civilian deaths union-wide from the famine of 1932–33, of which some 2 million were incurred in the Ukraine alone – was, by any objective measure, far too high, even if it also remains very far from the 7 to 10 million premature deaths in the Ukraine alone currently claimed by some modern nationalist politicians.⁶⁷ The constant zigzagging of official policy, the Chekist proclivity for uncovering large-scale ‘conspiracies’ behind every local disturbance, coupled with administrative arbitrariness at the regional level, simultaneously both increased the

human cost of collectivization itself unnecessarily, and foreshadowed a pattern that would come to be tragically repeated during the later purges of 1936–38. Yet at the same time, the arguments of Bukharin and his allies – for continuing the NEP, and attempting industrialization in a more gradual way, avoiding the use of force or coercion – failed to answer the pressing issue of immediate military security. Stalin's repeated urging by 1930 that the state was fifty or one hundred years behind its enemies, and that it had to catch up with them in ten years or face going under, looked prophetic in hindsight.

The Soviet Union's geopolitical position was in this sense also unique, a fact which renders the retrospective alternatives frequently proposed for rapid modernization – paths such as that followed by Japan, South Korea or the United States, for example – inappropriate. Whilst *already*-industrialized countries such as the United States or United Kingdom enjoyed the additional geopolitical benefit of the distance generated by maritime frontiers, and could comfortably shift from peacetime to wartime production during the course of war itself, the Soviet Union was cursed with long, open frontiers contiguous with multiple potential enemies, and faced the concomitant challenge of fighting high-intensity industrial warfare from a 'standing start' – its territory immediately imperilled, and with much of its industrial capacity already under direct threat. The main lesson of the First World War had been that only a large modern standing army and an already mobilized industrial base offered even the remotest hope for offsetting such a threat.

Even here, collectivization and the industrialization that accompanied it remained far from a panacea, and unquestionably created as many problems as it resolved, with many of these issues also carrying longer-term legacies. However, the wisdom granted by hindsight also remains dangerous – nobody at the time had any clear image of how a socialist economy should work, and Stalin and his immediate entourage between 1928 and 1933 were often pulling blindly at the levers of state, observing their whole society career wildly between what at times appeared to be a genuine breakthrough and the threat of cataclysmic collapse. The breakthroughs eventually achieved were very real – economic growth shot up to 5.3 per cent per year between 1928 and 1940, a ratio comparable with the post-war East Asian economic miracle, whilst education and health services expanded even more rapidly, at 12 per cent per year – but these advances still remained a mixed blessing overall.⁶⁸ In the field of longer-term unforeseeable consequences, the Soviet Union by the early 1930s was producing tens of thousands of tanks and aircraft that by 1941 would be on the brink of technological obsolescence. The opening battles of the Second World War would therefore bear little resemblance to the doctrinal 'war of destruction', or lightning campaign, fought out predominantly on enemy territory, which had been prophesied by the Soviet military's own most ardent advocates of hyper-industrialization, Marshal Tukhachevskii amongst them. The fighting of 1941–42 would instead more closely resemble the brutal 'war of attrition' predicted by Tukhachevskii's much-criticized pre-war intellectual opponent, the old Tsarist veteran General Svechin, as the country's more unfortunate but unavoidable destiny. If industrialization therefore enabled the Soviet Union to survive the cataclysm of modern warfare in a way that the Tsarist Empire had not,

fate and human error also meant that such steps failed to radically foreshorten the conflict, or reduce its human cost.

The Soviet system of collectivized agriculture also remained inefficient, and went on to prove stubbornly resistant to effective reform in subsequent decades. The state remained disproportionately dependent on private plot holders to make up for the shortcomings of the large collective farms, and by the late 1970s the country as a whole had also become a net importer rather than exporter of grain. Equally significantly, by then the Soviet Union was also openly advising its less advanced Third World allies and clients to avoid too rigidly following the USSR's own earlier developmental path, and thereby risking a repeat of their own earlier mistakes.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, meanwhile, the manner by which collectivization was imposed also of course dramatically increased the number of internal opponents faced by the ruling regime in both the Caucasus and elsewhere – from amongst those condemned in their tens of thousands to the labour camps, from amongst the ranks of those arbitrarily arrested or harassed, from amongst those who had witnessed the expropriation of their hard-earned possessions, or from amongst those who had seen friends or relatives either die of starvation, or be executed by the Red Army or OGPU firing squads. This created a complex security threat by 1941 from the potential wartime interaction of enemy governments, ethnic diaspora politicians, and these same internal foes: a natural and tragic formula in fact for further bloodshed and indiscriminate repression, as the period 1941–44 in the North Caucasus would amply demonstrate. With all this said, however, the economic choices facing the Soviet government at the turning point of 1927 were also remarkably stark and limited. The apparently common-sense argument that the country's overall grain production before Stalin's 'Great Breakthrough' was not actually in crisis, and that the state itself only needed to compete with the (rising) private trading price of grain if it wanted to increase its overall market share, overlooks the extremely narrow income base of the state itself at the time. The fact that the state's main income derived from agricultural exports raises the obvious question of how it was meant to be able to afford more grain at higher prices, if it did not itself have more grain to export in the first place. Similarly, the argument that collectivization actually failed in its main ostensible purpose – to generate a capital surplus – given that living conditions for urban workers scarcely improved, whilst the accelerated delivery of tractors and other machinery also had to keep pace with the catastrophic loss of livestock, overlooks both the very real rise in urban living standards that occurred during this period, and the massive parallel build-up in the military sector, a very considerable outlay indeed.⁶⁹

When looking back at the whole era, therefore, one remains struck not merely by the scale of the human tragedy that occurred, but also by the vicious internal logic of the period, the low starting point of the Soviet economy itself, the acute shortage – due to political considerations, alongside Great Depression-era realities – of either domestic or foreign capital, and the corresponding absence of any truly convincing better means to attempt hyper-industrialization in order to render the country militarily more secure. It was the savage necessity of modernization

under these conditions, executed by a government attempting a brutal and frequently misjudged economic balancing act, which then led events to unfold in the tortured, chaotic and painful manner that they did across the country's main agricultural regions. With the North Caucasus being, outside of the Ukraine, one of the country's most significant grain-producing zones, it also experienced these convulsions in a particularly violent form, demonstrating yet again the centrality of the region to the Soviet Union's own overall socio-economic and political evolution.

8 Dreams of unity, myths of power

The Caucasian diaspora

Every war has both winners and losers; in the case of the Caucasus, however, the diaspora community that emerged following the conclusion of the civil war in 1921 was marked both by its ethnic and political diversity, and by the role it continued to play in interwar politics. Following the expulsion of their respective governments from the Caucasus by Soviet power, the various representatives of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus achieved a brief unity ironically altogether lacking earlier. In Paris on 10 June 1921, Avetis Agaronian (Armenia), Akaki Chkhenkeli (Georgia), Ali-Mardan Topchibashev (Azerbaijan) and Tapa Chermoev signed a memorandum of understanding, declaring the need for a close ‘brotherly’ union amongst all of them.¹ The first formal political organization of émigrés then appeared some two years later in Prague, under the title of the ‘Union of Caucasian Mountaineers’, with Akhmed Tsalikov as its president after April 1924, and some Cossack representatives initially participating as well.² Near simultaneously, on 7 October 1924, there sprang up in Istanbul a ‘Caucasian Independence Committee’ (Kafkas Kurtuluş Komitesi, or KKK), led by two veterans of, respectively, the Mountaineer Government and the Azeri Democratic Republic, Alikhan Kantemirov and Dr Khosrov-bek Sultanov.³ This organization, despite support from the side of the British consulate-general, was eventually forced, under pressure from the Turkish authorities in the wake of the signing of the 1925 friendship pact between Ankara and Moscow, to shift its base of operations to Paris in 1926.

The rise of Piłsudski to power in Poland, meanwhile, and the implementation, with substantial funding, of his ‘Prometheus’ intelligence project thereafter, in conjunction with the death of Tomas Masaryk in Czechoslovakia, led to a realignment of the Caucasus diaspora population’s administrative centres and political motivations. In November 1926 in Warsaw, under the leadership of *Imam* Shamil’s grandson Said Bey, there was set up the ‘People’s Party of Caucasus Mountaineers’ (henceforward PPCM), which went on to become the living embodiment of the hopes and divisions of the mountaineer diaspora community. Under Polish mentoring, this organization merged the membership of the Prague group with ex-members of the Caucasian Independence Committee originally based in Istanbul, and went on to count amongst its members Akhmed Tsalikov, Ibragim Chulikov, Barasbi Baitugan, and Akhmed-Nabi Magomaeu, the last of whom eventually became head of the Nazi-funded North Caucasus Committee in Berlin during the Second World War.⁴

Essential to the nature of the diaspora's own dialogue with itself meanwhile were the myths that then became attached to the earlier TerDag, to the supposedly inherent and inviolate nature of mountaineer unity, and to the consequent alleged treachery of the Bolsheviks both in overthrowing the Mountaineer Government, and in seeking to destroy such unity by the creation of individual nations. A not uncommon example of the degree to which diaspora writers attempted to obfuscate and mythologize the recent political past was the claim, made in 1926, that the Bolsheviks in the North Caucasus after 1917 had merely 'aided the Cossacks and thus here continued the old policy of the Tsarist Government'.⁵ These became common themes amongst many diaspora thinkers and writers, threaded throughout their writings, right up until the 1970s. During the 1920s the country rendering easily the single greatest amount of material aid to such an ideology was Poland; many diaspora writers accordingly also became unofficial advisers to the Polish intelligence services. The Polish Prometheus project of the interwar years aimed to sever a belt of territory stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea from the Soviet Union, and thereby create a geographical buffer strip of Polish puppets and allies out of the peoples of the Ukraine, Georgia, the North Caucasus, Armenia and Azerbaijan. This political project gained its greatest momentum between 1926 and 1932, following Marshal Piłsudski's establishment of a near absolute personal dictatorship in Poland. As one prominent diaspora writer, Barasbi Baitugan, put it, in a confidential brief displaying truly remarkable levels of supplication and flattery to his new sponsors in 1932:

In the search of external forces willing to aid the desire for freedom of the Mountaineers, the [PPCM] must first of all rely on Poland, as a state which is interested only in the decline and weakening of Russia, and not in pursuing, apart from that basic mission, any kind of egoistic or avaricious objectives.⁶

Baitugan himself held it as axiomatic that the PPCM represented the continuation of a narrative of mountaineer resistance begun by *Imam* Shamil and the Murid movement of the nineteenth century. Though he condemned division within the diaspora community, Baitugan's own views on mountaineer political development remained permanently frozen in May 1917 – in his eyes, the emergence of the Union of Mountaineers had demonstrated decisively both that the North Caucasus mountaineers constituted a 'single nation', and that 'the North Caucasus must be independent'.⁷ He argued that the customary law of *adat* had long served as a unifying force amongst all mountaineers, since 'a mountaineer from Adygei who found himself in Chechnia or Dagestan... felt himself nonetheless as if at home, because he saw around him the same social etiquette, the same way of life that he was used to.' Faced with the fact that *Imam* Shamil in the nineteenth century had waged a relentless war to supplant *adat* with sharia law, Baitugan then engaged in torturous intellectual manoeuvrings to argue that Shamil had not been against *adat* itself, but was rather waging a war against 'the destructive influence of the feudal order'.⁸ The complete collapse of all attempts to forge a stable Mountaineer Government in 1917–19 was then in turn explained away as an

accident of historical timing; the relatively small numbers and narrow social base of the mountaineer intelligentsia, and correspondingly their weak links with the masses, meaning that 'for the North Caucasus, the world war and revolution occurred somewhat earlier than was desirable'.⁹ Conveniently elided by such explanations was both the Mountaineer Government's singular inability during its own existence to resolve the local land question, and also the wider issue of how an independent North Caucasus republic was meant to be economically and politically viable.

Arguments about the universal nature of 'mountaineer' identity received perhaps their fullest exposition, however, in the work of Baitugan's close contemporary Balo Bilati, who argued that lack of a common language was '[t]he sole inconvenient condition in front of... North Caucasian national unity', one that would be 'easily' solved by broader elements of national identity such as 'a common sentiment and purpose, a spirit which disguised within itself a common historical past, and a will on the common destiny'.¹⁰ Another writer in the émigré publication *Gortsy Kavkaza* in 1933 sought to overcome the problem of the lack of a common language, however, by more practical measures, via a large-scale gathering and unifying project that would entail translating the languages of the region into the Latin script, before then finally resolving and settling the question of an official common language. However, his own subsequent proposal for the development of an entirely new language as the last stage of this process, one influenced by Esperanto, ran into severe criticism from amongst his contemporaries. Akhmed Tsalikov, for example, had earlier already opined that the mountaineers upon gaining independence would have no option at first but to use Russian or Turkish as their own official language, whilst another writer in the émigré journal *Severnyi Kavkaz* the following year then promoted the use of Adygei as a common language. Though talks on the issue continued, the 'Commission for the Languages of the North Caucasus', established in Warsaw, soon settled on Kumyk as the future state's official language, with plans also laid down to unify the North Caucasian languages via a 47-letter Latin alphabet. A Polish–North Caucasian dictionary with 2,000 basic words in each language had already been published along these lines by 1938.¹¹

The Polish and Turkish intelligence services – the so-called Polish 'Second Department', Dwojka, first formed in October 1918, and the Milli Emniyet Hizmeti (or, using the Arabic typography still employed at the time, MAH), founded in 1926 – took a close interest from the very outset in the Caucasian diaspora, not least since Turkey playing a significant role in Polish war plans, as a potential arms transit point for Polish-backed Caucasian mountaineers to re-enter the Caucasus in the event of a wider Polish–Soviet conflict. It had been a Polish initiative that in 1925 saw the formation in Istanbul under Said Bey's chairmanship of a 'Federal Committee' of Caucasus émigrés. Colonel Khorashkevich of the Polish General Staff was specially tasked with the role of binding up the political splits and ideological rifts that divided the Caucasian diaspora, liaising with Rasul-Zade, Araratuian (representing Armenia), Nakashidze (Georgia) and Shakmanov (representing the mountaineer community). This work, in conjunction with the

formation of the PPCM the following year, then led in 1928 to the formation of the émigré movement based in Warsaw officially labelled 'Prometheus'.¹²

Said Bey himself meanwhile was from the very outset a major player in this process, with Soviet intelligence reporting as early as 1926 that the Polish military attaché in Ankara had established firm personal links with Said, and that the latter was now providing intelligence on events in the Caucasus in exchange for a monthly salary of 200 lira, together with a special operational fund to cover the running costs of deploying agents there.¹³ If the Polish and Turkish intelligence services remained the main early players in courting the Caucasus diaspora however, the German government had also already been approached as early as June 1927 by a Georgian representative, who requested extensive financial and infrastructural support, whilst promising large-scale commercial concessions in return if they helped both to overthrow Bolshevism, and bring to life a unified Caucasus federation with its main political centre in Tbilisi.¹⁴

Rivalry projects within the Caucasian diaspora were in fact to become one of the main characteristics of its interwar existence, continually threatening to fracture the fragile illusion of unity. The most organized and longest-lasting splinter faction within the diaspora became the group '*Kavkaz*', based in Paris under Gaidar Bammatov (himself by now an honorary Afghan citizen), with this organization from the very start being to some degree a stepchild of Japanese military intelligence. Japan's interest in the Caucasus dated back to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, when its intelligence service had first helped organize the shipping of arms to revolutionaries in Georgia, and the growing threat after 1930 of border clashes with the Soviet Union in the Far East served to again revive Tokyo's interest in diversionary sabotage operations in the Soviet Union's southern borderlands. Bammatov's own initial differences with the 1934 'Brussels Pact', meanwhile, the latter an agreement hammered out with the involvement of the Polish Foreign Ministry, and signed between the Caucasian Independence Committee (itself first established in Paris in 1928) and Azeri and Georgian representatives, related at least initially to his increasing antagonism towards the Georgian Mensheviks (whose socialism in general clashed with Bammatov's increasingly explicit nationalist and pro-fascist agenda). He nonetheless soon extended the parameters of this disagreement to include criticism of Rasul-Zade and the Azeri *Musavat*, alongside Said Bey's PPCM as well.¹⁵

In January 1934 Bammatov, by now in receipt of financial support from the Japanese, began the publication in Paris of the journal *Kavkaz*, with an initial print-run of 700 copies. Commentary on international affairs within the journal was notably pro-Japanese from the outset, covering Far Eastern events in detail, and presenting Japan as the premier anti-Bolshevik force in the international arena. Bammatov's new organization meanwhile also ran in parallel with another Japanese project aimed at realigning the Georgian émigré movement under the leadership of Salva Karumidze, embodied by the creation in June 1933 in Berlin of a 'Georgian National Union' with its own accompanying publication *Klde* ('The Cliff').¹⁶ Participants in Bammatov's group included Zurab Avalichvili, earlier the Georgian Republic's diplomatic representative in Berlin during 1918, as well as

fellow Mountaineer Government veteran Alikhan Kantemirov and General Kvinitadze, one-time commander of the Georgian armed forces. The organization caused controversy in émigré circles, however, by its resolve to recognize Soviet-era borders in the Transcaucasus in return for obtaining guarantees of benign Turkish and Iranian neutrality; other Georgian and Armenian national groups by contrast still aspired to revise these borders in order to reclaim Kars, Batum and Turkish Armenia. The latter elements formed an Armenian–Georgian Union in May 1936 with a view to cultivating Mussolini's influence as a counterweight to Turkey in the Mediterranean, with their representative in Rome even offering to help form a military legion to assist the Italians in their war in Ethiopia.¹⁷

The rise of Bammatov's *Kavkaz* group after 1934 therefore marked both the decline of the very idea of generating a future Caucasus federation – Armenian and Georgian émigré groups as a rule now broke away, and began to work in isolation from the Azeris and North Caucasians – and the rise of alternative poles of influence to the traditional main players of Poland and Turkey. By 1935 even Said Bey had begun to break with Polish intelligence, and started to court the newly elected fascist government in Germany. The Poles, Said complained, had completely wrecked the diaspora movement's political base in Turkey, whilst their whole Prometheus project was also chronically disorganized and excessively dominated by Georgians (the latter being an error in personnel policy which he also accused the Germans of committing).¹⁸ In the wake of the summer 1936 Berlin Olympics, to which Caucasus diaspora representatives were invited for behind-the-scenes talks, the signing of the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact in the autumn of 1936 therefore provoked further splits, and finally led to a major renaisance of the Prometheus project under German auspices.

The main German thinker on the planned future redivision of the Soviet Union, Alfred Rosenberg (who after 1941 became Reich minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories), after examining the leaderships of the various Caucasus diaspora movements, settled, perhaps at Japanese suggestion, on Bammatov's group as the force most suitable for immediate German co-option.¹⁹ The *Kavkaz* group thereafter came under increasing attack, both from the side of Rasul-Zade's *Musavat* (who succeeded in getting the German edition of Bammatov's journal banned in Turkey) and within the pages of the émigré journal *Kartlossi*, the Paris-based main publicity organ of a pro-Mussolini Georgian group favouring a revision of the borders imposed by Turkey in 1921. Polish intelligence also became concerned by the emergence of a pro-German faction within the Caucasus diaspora, and in August 1937 a leading worker within the Polish General Staff's Dwójka, Vladislav Pel'ts, was dispatched to Paris to reorganize the work of the Prometheus organization in that city. Pel'ts noted in passing both the growth of interest in the émigré movement amongst competing foreign intelligence services (including, citing as evidence for this Robert Seton-Watson's recent 1937 publication *Britain in Europe*, increasing engagement from the side of England) and simultaneously a classic generational rift now emerging within the diaspora community itself, between older pro-socialist émigrés of the Second International era, and a younger, more openly nationalistic generation. The main role of Polish intelligence was now, in

his view, to try to draw away the younger generation from the kind of nationalism represented by Bammatov's *Kavkaz* group and by Salva Karumidze's Berlin-based Georgian National Union, and also make it 'to the maximum extent possible' independent of German or Italian ideology, readopting instead the 'realism' of a 'united front' under Polish tutelage first propagated by Marshal Piłsudski himself.²⁰

Last-ditch Polish efforts to revive their influence within the Caucasus diaspora community were symbolized by reports that reached Stalin through the NKVD in May 1937 of talks occurring between Polish intelligence and the Turkish authorities regarding the possibility of the former obtaining permission to store a large quantity of weaponry near the joint Turkish–Soviet border.²¹ These arms were intended to equip the partisan movement which the Poles anticipated would soon inevitably spring up in the Caucasus upon the outbreak of war between the USSR and Hitler's Germany. Colonel Khoroshkevich meanwhile was again enlisted to attempt to patch up differences within the Azeri diaspora leadership living in Warsaw, particularly addressing growing divisions between Rasul-Zade and his rivals, but with increasingly ineffective results; from 1936 onwards, in fact, both Said Bey and members of the Azeri *Musavat* party were more and more openly courting the Germans. The Turkish government meanwhile had for its own part already decided in January 1937 that in the event of war and the weakening of Soviet forces in the Transcaucasus region, or the fall of Stalin's government, it would annex Batum in Georgia and the town and district of Leninakana (Aleksandropol) in Armenia, and also establish a protectorate over the whole of Azerbaijan. To this end, in February 1937 it commissioned and heavily subsidized Gaidar Bammatov to conduct pro-Turkish propaganda amongst the Caucasian diaspora, with a view to also establishing a shadow government ready to be installed and prepared to acquiesce in Turkish actions.²² The Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939 however then created a lull in these manoeuvres, though during this time the Polish, British and French intelligence services collaborated heavily with diaspora representatives in potential anti-Soviet projects.

Soviet intelligence reported on a meeting in September 1939 between Georgian Menshevik representatives in Paris on one side, Noi Zhordaniia amongst them, and representatives of the Polish, British and French intelligence services on the other. Whilst Poland fell to combined Soviet and German attack that same September, 'Agent 59' of the Georgian Menshevik circle (according to some theories, 'Agent 59' was none other than Mikhail Kedia, a Georgian émigré nationalist successfully 'turned' into a double agent by Soviet intelligence) was meanwhile dispatched to the Middle East to liaise with General Weygand in Beirut, Marshal Fevzi Chakmak of the Turkish General Staff, and Nuri Pasha, the half-brother of Enver Pasha who had already played such an adventurous role in the Caucasus in 1918–20.²³ With Turkish military intelligence now unofficially onside, on 26 December 1939 there was then formed in Istanbul an affiliated section of the 'Brussels Pact' group, comprising (alongside 'Agent 59'), such veteran figures as Vasan-Girei Dzhabagiev and Dr Khosrov-bek Sultanov.

Anglo-French war plans to attack the Soviet Union through the Caucasus also reached their peak during this period in the scheme of RAF Air Commodore John

Slessor to bomb Baku, the infamous 'Operation Pike'. Baku had assumed particular significance during this period because of the quantity of oil, lubricants and metallurgical products being shipped to Germany under the terms of the Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact, with the refineries and rail network around Baku being correctly identified as a potentially vital choke point in this process. Between 23 March and 5 April 1940, an MI6-owned twin-engine Lockheed 12A aircraft, heavily modified for covert high-altitude flying and aerial photography – making it effectively the immediate technological predecessor of the famous American 'U-2' spy planes of the later Cold War period – conducted specially commissioned reconnaissance overflights of both Batum and Baku from British bases in Iraq, photographing the layout of both towns extensively in order to facilitate subsequent bombing runs against the local oil facilities. Initial assessments of the operation were highly optimistic; it was calculated that the combination of closely packed refineries and oil-soaked soil would lead to the refinery network at Baku burning uncontrollably in the wake of a four-hour air raid, with damage cumulatively inflicted on a scale which it would take between nine months and two years to fully repair.²⁴ Weygand meanwhile remained particularly interested in organizing complementary sabotage operations by human teams on the ground against pipelines, railways and other infrastructure in Azerbaijan.²⁵ The fall of France however then led to the collapse of the Paris-based end of the 'Brussels Pact' group before any of these plans to pursue an Anglo-French-funded, and Turkish-based, subversion campaign against Soviet energy facilities in the Caucasus, in coordination with air raids, could be executed.

Whilst Said Bey and the 'Brussels Pact' group flirted with the British and French, meanwhile, Bammatorov in private was by this time an open pro-fascist; he was subsequently recorded as remarking that although, thanks to the September 1938 Munich agreement, the British and French had 'unfortunately' postponed a war which would end in both their defeat and that of the USSR, open conflict remained inevitable, and the German government correspondingly still remained the best guarantee of 'liberating' the Caucasus.²⁶ In September 1939, French counter-intelligence recorded its belief that Bammatorov was also being employed by Japan to reconnoitre the possibility of conducting sabotage operations against Baku and Grozny. The origins of this intelligence related both to a failed covert expedition by three Georgians across the Soviet-Iranian border into the Nakhichevan region of Azerbaijan in July 1938, and to a more successful probe across the Soviet-Turkish border in September that same year by two Georgian emissaries affiliated with General Kvinitadze.²⁷ After reporting on Soviet troop numbers around Batum, the latter two agents were compelled to leave Turkey under threat of arrest, whilst by the end of the year the majority of the *Kavkaz* group had meanwhile also definitively relocated from Paris to Berlin, with Bammatorov himself taking up residence in Switzerland.

By July 1940, however, the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact led Bammatorov to briefly make enquiries with Georgian organizations in Rome about forming a new pro-fascist organization between them, though in the event these negotiations broke down over Georgian insistence that Bammatorov could not be leader of the

group. By 1942 Bammatov was therefore back in Berlin, participating with Alikhan Kantemirov and Zurab Avalichvili in a famous conference in the Hotel Adlon on the future direction of Third Reich policy towards the Caucasus.²⁸ He eventually returned to Switzerland, bitterly disappointed by Nazi policy towards the North Caucasus, and went on to become the Afghan diplomatic representative resident in Switzerland between January 1943 and 1950, before ultimately abandoning political life altogether in favour of writing, during the last decade or so of his life, on Islamic culture. In the interim, however, his main pre-war agents and followers had become, during the Second World War, full-blown active collaborators in the Nazi wartime effort to destroy the Soviet Union, with Kantemirov recruiting starving Soviet POWs to serve in the pro-Axis North Caucasus Legion, whilst also editing the Nazi-funded wartime propaganda journal *Severnyi Kavkaz* at the same time. The interwar intelligence work of the fragmented civil-war-era Caucasian diaspora, by collaborating so closely and so frequently with the Soviet Union's most deadly enemies, was destined in general to weave a terrible regional legacy of distrust and final retribution during 1942–44 for the peoples of the region.

9 The purges and industrial modernization

The Soviet Caucasus in the 1930s

I admit that the chekists do exaggerate here and there – it's in the nature of their work to allow for certain exaggerations – but I do not in any way doubt the sincerity of their work. Still, they could get carried away.

(Stalin, Plenum of the Central Committee, 23 February 1937¹)

During the early 1930s the triumvirate most closely associated with the emergence and establishment of Soviet power in the North Caucasus between 1917 and 1924 dramatically unravelled. Since the end of the civil war, Stalin, Sergei Kirov and Sergo Ordzhonikidze had remained close associates throughout their mutual rise to power. As with many other Bolsheviks, common experience acquired during the civil war in the Caucasus was reinforced, once the conflict was over, by frequent mutual holidays and 'rest cures' there, the warm springs and natural baths in the region soon becoming a favoured destination for the often over-stressed Bolshevik higher leadership. Kirov was one of the very few that Stalin felt comfortable enough to undress in front of in the *bania*, the traditional Russian steam-bath; Ordzhonikidze for his part was one of the few men that he physically wrestled with. One of the best-known photographs of the younger Kirov meanwhile shows him sitting on Ordzhonikidze's knee, one arm draped around his shoulder, and in later life both men still kept signed photographs of each other in their offices.² Some have argued that Stalin's ascension to supreme authority after 1928 nonetheless marked the beginnings of a long-term fracture in their close three-way relationship.

Kirov and Ordzhonikidze in the early 1930s remained particularly close, and during the later Khrushchev thaw of the 1950s, rumours circulated that Ordzhonikidze's apartment had become the centre of a secret plot in 1934 to remove Stalin from the post of General Secretary and promote Kirov in his place. Stalin's learning of this plot has been alleged by some to be one of the key reasons behind Kirov's death and the subsequent great purges of 1937–38. Ordzhonikidze and Kirov also maintained close contacts with regional leaders in the Caucasus and Transcaucasus, acting as their patrons and defenders in bureaucratic struggles at the central level. Both men, whilst just as firmly committed as Stalin to the radical economic restructuring of the country, also favoured less coercion and more realistic developmental tempos. Ordzhonikidze in particular possessed a fiery

temper and a patriarchal, protective approach towards his immediate subordinates, especially within his own Commissariat of Heavy Industry (NKTP, founded 1932), an attitude that fuelled occasional sharp disputes with 'the boss' over the correct implementation of economic policy in the country as a whole.

Stalin's own behaviour during such disputes was, interestingly, traced by some contemporaries back to his own 'Caucasian blood', an interpretation perhaps influenced by Trotsky, who was amongst the first to speculate on the negative implications of Stalin's alleged 'Asian' nature. Bukharin reiterated the slur by reputedly once categorizing Stalin as 'a Chinggis Khan who had read Marx',³ whilst Stalin himself is well known for having reportedly jested with German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop in 1939 that the Japanese defeat at Nomonhan had been an exemplary display of force, 'the only language these Asiatics understand... After all, I am an Asiatic too, so I ought to know.'⁴ Contemporaries in general therefore soon came to attribute at least some of the reasons for Stalin's peculiarly relentless and merciless vendettas to his own Georgian ancestry. However, the relentless pace of Soviet industrialization during the first and second five-year plans, with the many delays and accidents that occurred as a consequence, also created an atmosphere ripe for seeking scapegoats, spies and saboteurs. As newly available documents now make clear,⁵ Stalin himself was a hesitant authoritarian, not resolving firmly until 1937 upon a full-scale purge of the Bolshevik party ranks. Though he then went on to personally sign tens of thousands of death warrants, the purges would not have assumed the tragic scale that they did without the complementary synergy of a system built upon a web of competing informal social networks – one which, after 1937 in particular, also attempted to exceed set quotas of purged party personnel with the same revolutionary zeal with which it had recently sought to surpass centrally set industrial targets ('the five-year plan in four years').

The official end of the Stalin–Ordzhonikidze–Kirov circle, and the starting gun (quite literally) for a new era in the nature of the Soviet revolution, both in the Caucasus and elsewhere, came with the assassination of Kirov in Leningrad in 1934. By that year the titanic national struggle for the collectivization of agriculture was largely over, and the Bolshevik party, greatly relieved, was taking stock. Aware that collectivization itself had been accompanied by enormous excesses and arbitrary violence, the party was on the cusp of introducing greater legal safeguards, scaling back on repression, and easing in a more formalized and centralized governmental system, a shift which Stalin himself personally appeared to back. During 1933 the Soviet prison population was reduced from 800,000 to 400,000 persons, and on 8 May that year an unpublished secret instruction, signed jointly by Stalin and Molotov, stated clearly that it was time to rein back on indiscriminate repression.⁶ In September that same year the office of the procurator of the USSR, with, in legal terms, administrative authority over all judicial and punitive organs (including the secret police), was set up. The following year a loyal and unrepentant lifelong Stalinist such as Lazar Kaganovich would comment, with apparent total sincerity, that the reform of the secret police (via the creation of the NKVD), 'means we are now in more normal times, [that] we can punish through the courts and not resort to extrajudicial repression as we have until

now'.⁷ In addition, from 1931 to 1934, owing to the illness of its official leader, Viachislav Menzhinskii, the OGPU/NKVD was in practice headed by Ivan Akulov, an old Bolshevik with no prior affiliation to or connections within the Soviet security service, but also a vocal critic of the 'excessive resort to shooting' which had characterized the earlier period of collectivization.⁸ Such an appointment might easily be interpreted as a classic bureaucratic manoeuvre, aimed at deliberately engineering a clean break with the immediate past; one eyewitness later recalled that the greatest legacy of Akulov's own tenure in fact was a renewed stress upon political education amongst the Chekists. Not until 1934 was Akulov replaced by his intriguing deputy, the long-term insider Genrikh Iagoda, though many Chekists themselves apparently hoped that Anastas Mikoian might become their new chief.⁹

A spirit of optimism and increasing legalism meanwhile was remarkably still evident as late as December 1936, when there was signed into effect a new Soviet Constitution, guaranteeing freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, the inviolability of personal correspondence, protection against arbitrary arrest, and freedom of speech. The purges which were even then already under way, however, soon made this legal document one of the bitterest jokes of human history, with one of its principal drafters – Nikolai Bukharin – also becoming perhaps the single most prominent victim of the 'Great Terror' of 1937–38. Indeed, the very liberality of the constitution itself may ironically have magnified the grotesque scale of the subsequent purges, with many local party secretaries voicing concerns that these wholly new constitutional arrangements, granting universal adult suffrage, would lead to a great swathe of previously disenfranchised groups – deported *kulaks*, former White officers, known oppositionists and former landowners – suddenly acquiring the right to a secret ballot in the upcoming elections to the newly created Supreme Soviet. In a move symptomatic of the paranoiac policy zigzagging which characterized the period, on the very same day that the regulations were published outlining these new constitutional arrangements, Stalin disseminated a private telegram ordering all local party organizations to round up 'anti-Soviet' elements and rapidly conduct tens of thousands of mass executions.¹⁰

Kirov's earlier murder therefore played a critical contributory factor in fatally interrupting and helping to unhinge what appears to have been a genuinely intended planned transition, and would eventually help trigger excesses even greater than those that had occurred in the immediately preceding period. Nevertheless it also remained only one component in a far broader, more complex and anarchic process. Above all, the purges would be shaped by conflicts between informal networks of patronage, of which the Kirov–Ordzhonikidze circle was just one. The establishment of new institutions and administrative structures in the early 1930s failed to sublimate the earlier personal networks which had made it easier to establish and enact Soviet power at the local level in the borderlands. Indeed, in this regard it would appear that no organization was in fact more prone to internal 'clan' politics than the NKVD itself.¹¹ This would have particular resonance in the Caucasus, where the key informal NKVD networks revolved around the figures of Lavrentii Beria (1899–1953) and Efim Georgievich Evdokimov (1891–1940).

The particular details of Kirov's murder have since become well known. Late on the afternoon of 1 December 1934, whilst walking towards his local party office in Leningrad, the man probably more responsible than any other for the foundation of the Terek People's Republic in 1918 was killed instantly by a shot to the back of the head from the gun of one Leonid Nikolaev. Though many attempts have since been made to implicate Stalin in the murder, none has ever presented final, damning proof. Internal investigations conducted both during the Khrushchev era and under Gorbachev in the late 1980s failed to disclose any direct link connecting Stalin with Kirov's murder, or any explicit NKVD complicity in his death, despite the establishment of just such a link being undoubtedly eagerly desired both by Khrushchev and by Aleksandr Iakovlev, the arch-ideologue of Gorbachev's later policy of *glasnost'*.¹² All later truly objective reinvestigations have by contrast come back unrelentingly to the same conclusion: namely that Kirov's murderer, Nikolaev, was a deranged epileptic loner, whose personal diary revealed that he acted in isolation, motivated by a combination of delusions of grandeur and a petty persecution complex. One early defector from the NKVD, G. S. Liushkov, wrote in Japanese exile as early as 1939 that Stalin had played no direct role in Kirov's murder, though he also went on to condemn Stalin's subsequent political use of the crime – a contemporary, but only recently uncovered, statement that nonetheless corroborates more recently released Russian archival materials.¹³ Equally evident to all scholars since, however, has been the extent to which Kirov's murder became a convenient cover under which Stalin went on to initiate massive purges and repressions within the Bolshevik party against the so-called 'Zinov'ev–Kamenev bloc'.

Ordzhonikidze himself was personally shattered by Kirov's death; one of his colleagues in the NKTP noticed that he 'had turned gray and aged noticeably. He often seemed lost in thought, with a face heavy from grief.' In the days leading up to Kirov's assassination, during a tour of the Caucasus, Ordzhonikidze had already suffered intestinal bleeding and acute stomach pains, presaging a serious heart attack – health difficulties which invalidate later rumours regarding supposed conspiratorial meetings between the two men. Recuperation in Tbilisi in fact led to Ordzhonikidze missing a last chance to meet Kirov during the latter's brief stay in Moscow at a Central Committee meeting; by the time he was able to return to Moscow, Kirov had already gone back to Leningrad to meet his fate at the hands of Nikolaev.¹⁴ During 1936, Ordzhonikidze's health continued to decline, and the arrest of his brother in November that year directly induced a second heart attack. Late on the evening of 17 February 1937, Sergo was said to have entered into a heated argument over the telephone with Stalin, during which both sides hurled violent insults at each other in both Georgian and Russian. On the 18th, Ordzhonikidze stayed in bed all day writing, and that same evening he shot himself through the chest with a small-calibre pistol. The next day Soviet newspapers released a fabricated account of his death, attributing it to natural causes (heart failure). Such a blatant cover-up was undoubtedly considered absolutely essential (and does not necessarily imply a suspicious death), given that suicide at the time was widely interpreted as an implicit and highly political critique of the system itself.

As is again well known, Kirov's murder had in the interim created the conditions for a country-wide witch-hunt, which was begun on 18 January 1935 with the issuing of a Central Committee directive ordering the setting up of investigative organs for the uncovering and elimination of all 'Trotskyites' and other enemies of the people. The Bolshevik party subsequently went through a round of massive purges to expel undesirables from its ranks, although over time these actually slowed rather than accelerated towards any kind of natural climax – roughly 264,000 members were expelled in 1935, and 51,500 in 1936. New archival evidence supports the view that the purges at this time remained erratic and locally driven, rather than carefully planned. Contrary to the portrayal of Stalin demonically orchestrating events, the General Secretary publicly criticized excessive repression in June 1936, and simultaneously supported A. A. Zhdanov's calls for errant party members to be retrained and nurtured rather than expelled. Furthermore, dismay within the Politburo that local party secretaries had been able to deflect so rapidly the political pressure generated by Kirov's murder downwards, indiscriminately expelling large numbers of inactive or personally troublesome lower-ranking cadres, whilst simultaneously preserving their own local patronage networks, would both lead to calls to curb the scale of expulsions, and critically frame the next round of attacks – on these local party leaders themselves.¹⁵

1936 marked a turning point in personnel appointments, with the steady rise of Nikolai Ezhov to replace Iagoda as head of the NKVD by September. Thereafter, the new NKVD chief's mass operations up until his own fall from power and arrest in 1938–39, under charges of being a Polish spy, would lead to the alternative name sometimes given by Russians to the Great Terror – the *ezhovshchina*. This implied focus on Ezhov as a key player in the 'terror' that followed still looks fairly well founded. One NKVD insider later recalled that when veteran Chekists expressed their dismay at Ezhov's personal emphasis on brutal physical interrogation techniques to extract confessions, they were themselves swiftly arrested and repressed, even as Ezhov's own personnel policies simultaneously flooded the security apparatus with ill-trained 'yes-men' as new subordinates.¹⁶ Ezhov himself would later boast of having purged 14,000 Chekists, and the final number of those repressed within the NKVD and affiliated organs alone in the wake of the *ezhovshchina* ran at somewhere around 20,000.¹⁷

Official figures now available also make it very clear that the height of Ezhov's reign in 1937–38 also coincided with the peak of repression, with the NKVD arresting 1,575,259 people across the whole of the USSR – a figure nonetheless still *nowhere near* the 7 million arrests for 1937–38 even quite recently cited by Robert Conquest.¹⁸ In 1937 some 353,074 arrestees were subsequently executed, and 429,311 imprisoned, whilst in 1938 these monstrous proportions were reversed slightly, with 328,618 shot and 204,964 imprisoned. The scale and highly abnormal nature of this phenomenon may be judged from the fact that in 1936 'only' 1,118 Soviet citizens had been arrested and subsequently sentenced to death, and the year before 'only' 1,229. Executions on the scale seen in 1937–38 had in fact only occurred once before – in 1930, when, at the height of collectivization, 20,201 state executions had been sanctioned. Moreover, after 1938, there would be only

one wave that came anywhere close to repeating state executions on such a massive scale – the first two years of the war, when 23,786 and 12,589 Soviet citizens were sentenced to death in 1941 and 1942 respectively.¹⁹

The ‘terror’ itself also remained a multi-layered phenomenon, ultimately claiming the highly abnormal number of victims that it did partly as a result of the fact that it was the product of not one but three separate, overlapping, sets of operational instructions.²⁰ The ‘purge’ of the political party revived in earnest at the February–March plenum of 1937 (where Bukharin was condemned) continued, leading to both executions and imprisonments, but during this same period the process also came to be supplemented by two fresh sets of directions from Ezhov in July and August respectively – NKVD orders 00447 and 00485. The first of these aimed primarily at a final decisive round of dekulakization and the execution of hostile social elements; the second, at foreign espionage. Purges for ideological deviations within the party therefore remained far from the key killer in 1937–38, with this dubious distinction falling instead on the ‘mass operations’ against ‘anti-Soviet’ social elements first unleashed by NKVD order 00447. This one wave of activity alone against former ‘*kulaks*’ and other internal ‘class enemies’ ultimately accounted for 386,798 executions (54.1 per cent of the total for 1937–38), although during the espionage-related national operations unleashed by order 00485, relative lethality rates were actually *proportionately* higher – 247,157 of those rounded up under this premise were executed, or in other words 73.7 per cent of the total number arrested in connection with such charges.²¹ Both of these two (until recently) less well known orders, and their particular implications for the Caucasus, will be explored below.

Ezhov published NKVD order 00447 in July 1937, ordering the round-up and execution of thousands of ‘*kulaks*, criminals and other anti-Soviet elements’, with the famous system of ‘quotas’ established – each region was to render up a random number of victims in the ‘first category’ for immediate execution, alongside those placed in the ‘second category’, entailing imprisonment for between eight to ten years. Local party secretaries were consulted during this process, with some amongst them particularly bloodthirsty from the very outset, requiring intervention and moderation by the centre. R. I. Eikhe, for example, himself shortly about to fall victim to the ‘political’ terror sweeping the party, insisted upon the physical extermination of 10,800 inhabitants of the West Siberian *krai* (subsequently moderated to 5,000). Stalin’s own ultimate successor, Nikita Khrushchev, likewise demanded the execution of 8,500 denizens (subsequently moderated to 5,000) of the Moscow *oblast*.²² Within the North Caucasus, the NKVD of Chechnia-Ingushetia also had to be reined in, with the number of projected executions of ‘socially hostile’ elements there dropping from an initially planned 1,417 to a still-terrible, but far more moderate, 500 by the end of July.²³ As some of these local party secretaries and NKVD administrations then themselves became victims of the purges, the figures continued to change, adding a factor of anarchy to a process that was already the height of statistical arbitrariness. In Dagestan, as we shall see, the quotas set for those condemned to the ‘first category’ – immediate execution – underwent revision twice (each time upwards) in the course of 1937 alone.

Amongst the regions ultimately hit hardest by order 00447 were the Ukraine (with 64,288 executions), the Far East (25,000 executions), Omsk (15,431 executions), Krasnoïarsk *krai* (11,850 executions) and the East Siberian *krai* (14,500 executions). The North Caucasus escaped relatively lightly by comparison, but Beria in Georgia had already arrested over 12,000 people in connection with this instruction by 30 October 1937, and over 8,000 were ultimately shot there in relation to this campaign, considerably exceeding an initially projected local killing 'limit' of 4,500 for 1937–38.²⁴

The Stalinist 'terror' of the 1930s was also the product of the international environment of the time, with the purges occurring within a context in which the Soviet Union perceived its external enemies to be readying themselves to launch an imminent attack.²⁵ Consequently one side effect of the increased sense of insecurity and paranoia which facilitated the terror's occurrence – a phenomenon caused as much by dramatic changes in the international as in the domestic political environment – was the increasing targeting of 'unreliable' nationalities on the basis of ethnicity. Nationalities who corresponded to the 'Piedmont Principle' – that is to say, those who constituted a Soviet diaspora from hostile foreign states outside the actual borders of the Soviet Union itself – were particularly vulnerable to the charge of being 'fifth columnists' and active wreckers of the Soviet system. NKVD order 00485 of 9 August 1937, which became a model for others that followed, highlighted the need to combat 'the subversive activity of Polish intelligence' on Soviet soil, and the subsequent targeting of Poles, Latvians, Germans, Estonians, Finns, Greeks, Iranians and Chinese, amongst others, led to the Great Terror also steadily evolving 'into an ethnic terror'.²⁶ Unlike order 00447, no 'limits' were imposed in this campaign, a fact which appears to have contributed to its relatively greater overall lethality. The Polish Communist Party organization itself was completely annihilated as a result of this process, and between this individual order's initiation, in August 1937, and the last days of its implementation, in November 1938, 140,000 individuals had been arrested on charges of ties to Polish intelligence, of whom approximately one-third were of non-Polish nationality. Out of all of those arrested, 111,091 were subsequently executed, and the lives of countless others ruined, with the central regions of Leningrad, Moscow and the Western districts being the most heavily affected.²⁷ Within the Caucasus this wave of insecurity regarding ethnic minorities in the borderlands was most obviously reflected in the Transcaucasus, where 1,325 Kurds were deported from the border regions of Azerbaijan and Armenia into the depths of Central Asia in July 1937, followed just over a year later by the deportation of 2,000 Iranian families (6,000 individuals) from Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan.²⁸

As recently uncovered intelligence files have extensively documented, this growing paranoia on the part of Soviet intelligence was also far from unfounded. Japan and Poland in the interwar period engaged extensively in espionage against the Soviet state, and ran joint programmes to debrief and recruit thousands of defectors and refugees who crossed the Soviet frontiers as potential future agents and saboteurs. Subversion and sabotage campaigns, facilitated by enlisting local nationalities into entire networks of covert agents, played a prominent role in the

anti-Soviet war planning of Poland, Japan, the Baltic states, Finland and Germany throughout the whole of the 1930s.²⁹ Nonetheless the purges themselves were unquestionably also a crude and ineffective instrument to try to combat this threat: most obviously, order 00485 itself came with no detailed directions on how to identify agents of Polish intelligence, which led local NKVD officers to engage in indiscriminate population sweeps, deportations, and mass arrests of whole communities. The Polish population of Belorussia alone declined from 119,881 in 1937 to 58,380 by 1939 as a direct consequence.³⁰ The North Caucasus again actually came off relatively lightly in these 'national operations', occupying third place in the country as a whole alongside (regionally) Azerbaijan. Georgia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus as a whole were in general notable as regions where the figures of those who fell victim to the 'political purges' in fact exceeded the average across the country as a whole, whilst by contrast the intensity of the 'terror' unleashed by order 00447 in July, as well as the 'national operations' that followed from August onwards, remained average or below average in union-wide terms.³¹

Against this multi-layered background, then, events in the North Caucasus quickly took on the same arbitrary, dramatic aspect as everywhere else, but also came to be additionally shaped by the local patronage networks and ruthless inclinations of Evdokimov and Beria. Efim Evdokimov, an anarchist and SR terrorist who had converted to Bolshevism after 1917 out of expediency, was also a famous Chekist whose reputation had largely been made in the North Caucasus. He served as special OGPU plenipotentiary representative (*polpred*) there for the whole of 1923–29, becoming in the process the first Chekist to be awarded four orders of the Red Banner. His operations from the civil war onwards were also marked by a clear and consistent preference for large-scale extrajudicial executions. Under his watch, the North Caucasus accounted for 852 of the 1,900 executions carried out in the USSR in 1924, as well as 1,076 of the 1,755 carried out in 1925. Moreover, after he returned from a brief sabbatical, it again accounted for 597 of the 1,620 executions carried out across the whole of the USSR in 1927.³² However, although personally supported by Mikoian and Voroshilov at the central level, Evdokimov was also a bitter rival of Genrikh Iagoda, and this rivalry led (in official accounts) to his being disciplined for conspiring behind Iagoda's back, and subsequently dismissed from the NKVD altogether by 1934; he then took up a new role as party secretary for the whole of the North Caucasus *krai*. The informal links he maintained with NKVD workers, however, also led to Evdokimov's own 'clan' or 'team' within the NKVD to retain the unofficial label of the 'North Caucasians'.³³

The steady return to favour after 1934 of Evdokimov and his 'team' was directly linked to Ezhov's own rise to power and the bureaucratic overthrow of Iagoda. Evdokimov's deputy in the 1920s, for example, M. P. Frinovskii, went on to become Ezhov's first deputy in 1937–38, and personally wrote the operational instructions for NKVD order 00447. It has consequently been most recently argued that Evdokimov was in fact Ezhov's 'mentor and guide' regarding security issues, to the extent that the *ezhovshchina* might just as easily be retitled the *evdokimovshchina*.³⁴ Certainly part of the explanation for what happened nationwide in 1937–38, where extrajudicial *troikas* played such a significant role, might be interpreted in part as

a consequence of the application of certain forms of near-arbitrary Soviet 'frontier justice', which may have been intermittently appropriate for a region as unsettled as the North Caucasus was in the 1920s, to all regions of the country indiscriminately, in a wave of collective hysteria and mass paranoia.

In Dagestan, having been temporarily exiled to Moscow after 1928 under a cloud of suspicion over his approach to collectivization, Nazhmutdin Samurskii had returned to his former local prominence in 1934, when he was appointed first secretary of the Dagestan *obkom* with the task of reviving the stagnating local economy. However, the situation he returned to had also again changed administratively – from 1931 onwards, the Dagestan ASSR was once more subordinate to the North Caucasus *kraikom* under Evdokimov, whose regional headquarters were in Piatigorsk. During the 1930s as a whole, in fact, the drive to establish larger administrative-territorial, as opposed to strictly ethnically defined, units in the Caucasus would reach its greatest extent, with the whole of the North Caucasus *krai* divided in 1934 into the Azov-Black Sea *krai* (with its administrative centre in Rostov-on-Don), and the North Caucasus *krai*, whose initial centre in Piatigorsk would eventually be transferred to Ordzhonikidze (Vladikavkaz) in 1936. In 1937 the Azov-Black Sea *krai* would be then further divided into Krasnodar *krai*, with its regional centre in Krasnodar, and Rostov *oblast'*, with its administrative centre in Rostov-on-Don.³⁵ Samurskii himself would be unable to challenge, and ultimately escape the grip of, the intermediary party apparatuses generated by such reforms in the manner that he had the SE Bureau during the 1920s since, following Kirov's assassination, the political tenor of the times had also changed dramatically across the whole country.

In April 1935 Evdokimov summoned Samurskii and introduced him in Piatigorsk to one of his security 'clan', as well as the man who would ultimately become Samurskii's own nemesis, *narkom* of the NKVD V. G. Lomonosov.³⁶ Within two weeks of his subsequent arrival in Dagestan, Lomonosov had directed the arrest of a string of prominent local party functionaries, including the deputy director of the Scientific Institute of National Culture, Georgii Lelevich, whom he labelled a counter-revolutionary Trotskyite enemy of the people. Lomonosov's input on the quota-setting for the anti-*kulak* NKVD order 00447 of July 1937 would also lead to his demanding a higher than average level of local repression.³⁷ Political divisions within the Dagestan *obkom* between Samurskii and chairman of the local *sovnarkom* (and ex-head of the Dagestan Cheka) Kerim Mamedbekov may also have played a significant role in what followed, with one contemporary eyewitness (and future Dagestani first secretary) later recalling Samurskii's 'ambitious, egoistic' nature, as well as contemporary rumours regarding the formation of two informal ethnic 'camps' of supporters – Samurskii's amongst the Lesgins, and Mamedbekov's amongst the Azeris and mountain Jews. This generated an unhealthy atmosphere in local political life then compounded by the general problem of 'people with dubious pasts, self-seekers and careerists, of whom there were quite a few in Dagestan'.³⁸

The authority of the NKVD in Dagestan increased yet further in May 1936 when, against Samurskii's wishes, another outsider, M. Sorokin, was appointed

second secretary within the Dagestani *obkom*. Aware of Samurskii's antipathy towards him, Sorokin formed an opportunistic alliance of fate with Lomonosov that then went on to devastate the local Dagestani political scene. That same September the Dagestan party apparatus came under sustained attack from Evdokimov, who accused it of being the only *obkom* in the *krai* to ignore recent calls for greater vigilance against internal enemies. Suitably intimidated by both local and national political currents, Samurskii quickly released announcements in the press and in public about the need for greater Bolshevik vigilance and intensified class struggle in Dagestan. Lomonosov and Sorokin nonetheless continued to act in a manner that increasingly isolated Samurskii, persecuting and expelling 4,000 individuals from the local party, including some of his closest former associates. Samurskii himself meanwhile was again tarred by the suspicion first attached to him in the late 1920s – that of being a covert member of the so-called 'Right Opposition' – this time because, in August 1934, he had granted the request of Central Committee member Mikhail Tomskii to visit Dagestan for a rest cure. In August 1936 Tomskii, by then ensnared in the judicial process under way in Moscow against Kameney, Zinov'ev and Piatikov, had shot himself. The Soviet press treated his death at the time as the act of a counter-revolutionary who preferred suicide to having his conspiratorial activity against Stalin publicly uncovered. The association with Tomskii therefore automatically became instant additional political ammunition in Sorokin's private war against Samurskii.³⁹

Having been attacked in the local press on 24 February 1937 for driving on economic development to the neglect of party work, Samurskii in early March met Stalin for a half-hour talk, during the course of which it was made clear to him that he would henceforward be judged by his capacity to bring to justice and execute known counter-revolutionaries. Deeply unnerved, Samurskii returned to Dagestan and won re-election as first secretary, despite continuing public attacks from Lomonosov. However, at the beginning of August, Sorokin wrote to Ezhov requesting Samurskii's arrest. Again looking in vain for higher intervention to come to his defence, Samurskii was driven to write to Stalin defending his political record, even claiming as his own achievement the 'dekulakization' of Dagestan in 1935–36, as a consequence of which 1,050 persons had been displaced – an accomplishment which in reality was largely the work of Evdokimov, Lomonosov and Sorokin. Towards the end of August, meanwhile, Lomonosov both arrested Samurskii's rival Mamedbekov, and moved decisively against the Dagestani old guard of 1917–20, arresting as 'bourgeois nationalists' such respected local political figures as the chairman of the central executive committee, Dzhalalutdin Korkmasov, Mokhammad Dalgat, Alibek Takho-Godi and Said Gabiev. The evidence brought against such men dated back to 1922, when Korkmasov, Dalgat and Takho-Godi had jointly written to the Central Committee in Moscow protesting against appointment decisions being made at the time by the SE Bureau. This 'evidence' was then supplemented by notes from a plenum of the *Dagobkom* in 1924, a document subsequently labelled the 'Platform of the 43'. All those whose signatures were recorded on this document and who were still alive as of October 1937 were systematically arrested as enemies of the people.⁴⁰

On 24 September there was published a damning article in *Pravda*, the main Soviet newspaper, on the 'putrid situation in the Dagestan *obkom*'.⁴¹ Samurskii read the article on the same day as a telegram from Moscow arrived bearing news of the birth of his first and only son. Two days later he wrote to Moscow, requesting that the entirely arbitrary target quota allocated Dagestan that same July by NKVD order 00447, dictating the arrest of 600 persons as 'anti-Soviet elements' in the 'first category' – i.e., those to be tried by *troika* and immediately shot – be raised to 1,200. Samurskii's suggested revision was approved that very same day, as was his request to raise the number to be arrested in the 'second category' from 2,479 to 3,300.⁴² Greater visible personal zeal in the witch-hunt against internal enemies was not to save the first secretary, however, since on 30 September Samurskii himself was expelled from the Communist Party and put under arrest, his place taken by Sorokin. By 7 October he was charged, under the infamous Article 58 on 'Counter-revolutionary crimes' of the 1934 Soviet Criminal Code, with being a conspirator and ideologue of a bourgeois-nationalist counter-revolutionary organization.

Beaten so badly during two months of subsequent interrogation sessions, in which Lomonosov himself allegedly took part, that his front teeth were knocked out and his face swelled from bruising, Samurskii signed a prepared confession on 5 December 1937. The final court sentence read out against him, in May 1938, ludicrously declared that he had been the leader of an underground anti-Soviet bourgeois-nationalist terrorist organization in Dagestan since as far back as 1920. Samurskii's life path thereafter followed that already taken by thousands of others: a final hearing in August 1938 at the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court in Moscow (during which, in his last publicly recorded words, he denied all charges laid against him) was followed by a brief thirty-minute consideration of his case, sentencing and execution, with the subsequent confiscation of all his personal property by the state.⁴³

As noted above, such eminent Dagestani revolutionaries as Dzhalalutdin Korkmasov and Alibek Takho-Godi had already preceded Samurskii to this grim fate. Takho-Godi, the pre-eminent Bolshevik historian of the 1917 revolution in Dagestan, was arrested on 22 July 1937 in Moscow and, having likewise been brutally tortured into signing a confession, was shot on 9 September. Just as with Samurskii some eleven months later, his last recorded words protested his innocence. His wife was arrested in December 1937 but escaped execution; she was released in 1942 and officially amnestied in 1953.⁴⁴ Both Korkmasov and his wife, Maria Skokovskaia, a leading figure in Soviet counter-intelligence in interwar Poland, were arrested and sentenced to death by the end of 1937, however – Maria on 10 December and Dzhalalutdin even earlier, on 27 September.⁴⁵ The inability of the 59-year-old Korkmasov to withstand the torture of his NKVD interrogators prior to his execution led to a falsified confession to counter-revolutionary conspiracy which went on to seal the fate of others. In the wake of Samurskii's arrest, meanwhile, the execution 'limit' on 'anti-Soviet' elements in Dagestan was raised yet a third time, by local request, in December: a further 800 were condemned to state execution, raising the total death toll there from NKVD order 00447 to 3,000.⁴⁶

During this hurricane of public hysteria, denunciation, torture and murder, Said Gabiev somehow escaped the bleak fate of his most prominent contemporaries, probably because he lived long enough to be tried at a closed court session rather than by Evdokimov's favoured system of extrajudicial *troika*. In one sense this was truly remarkable, given that hostile OGPU reports had been filed against Gabiev as far back as 1920; one might have thought such an ideologically imperfect Communist-Islamist would have been a natural sacrifice during a period such as the purges. At his trial, however, one witness allegedly remarked that Gabiev was Dagestan's 'Karl Marx', and this, taken in conjunction with his point-blank refusal to confess, may have facilitated his subsequent release. Gabiev himself during his later years of enforced retirement would remark that he had merely been lucky.⁴⁷

In a kind of brutal justice, in the immediate wake of the *Ezhovshchina*, the key torturers masterminding this process were themselves prosecuted and ultimately shared the fate of their victims, with Evdokimov's local 'North Caucasian' clan of the NKVD being wound up during the course of Ezhov's own fall from grace at the central level. The first public signs of a turning point in this internal NKVD 'clan' struggle came in August 1938, when Beria replaced Evdokimov's old aide Frinovskii as Ezhov's first deputy.⁴⁸ By 17 November, sensing that the bureaucratic juggernaut which they had unleashed was again running violently out of control, the Politburo itself was voicing concerns over 'major deficiencies and distortions' that had become apparent in the work of the NKVD, as well as the 'mass, unjustified arrests' carried out by the turncoats and hirelings of foreign intelligence who had allegedly managed to infiltrate the NKVD apparatus itself.⁴⁹ Evdokimov had already been arrested on 9 November 1938, just a week before the party and state leadership began to condemn NKVD methods, and by December Lomonosov in Dagestan was also in jail; both men were eventually tried and shot for treason between September 1939 and February 1940. The increasingly unstable Ezhov meanwhile resigned on 23 November, and was arrested personally by Beria on 10 April 1939, before being likewise eventually executed as a traitor in early 1940. Frinovskii, having been transferred out of the NKVD when Beria replaced him, managed, like Ezhov, to remain at liberty slightly longer than either Lomonosov or Evdokimov, but was eventually also arrested in April 1939, and shared the common fate of nearly all of the 'Ezhov team' – state execution for counter-revolutionary crimes.

Events in Chechnia-Ingushetia (as a consequence of yet more territorial-administrative tinkering, the two territories had finally been unified into an autonomous *oblast'* on 15 January 1934, then officially recategorized as an ASSR on 5 December 1936) closely paralleled events in Dagestan, but remain understudied. According to the account of the Chechen émigré historian Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov (whom most Western scholars to date have unhesitatingly followed in this regard), in Chechnia-Ingushetia itself, beginning on the night of 31 July–1 August 1937, nearly 14,000 people were rounded up and arrested, before then being either shot or deported, devastating the local Soviet apparatus by the end of the year.⁵⁰ However, regarding both the scale and manner of the purges, Avtorkhanov is today increasingly recognized as a serially unreliable witness. Putting to one side

for a moment his later collaboration with Nazi Germany, during the early 1930s he had himself worked within the Chechen party apparatus, helping to implement the very policies he was later to so vehemently condemn. Avtorkhanov furthermore spent the critical years 1933–37 in Moscow, which disqualifies him (contrary to how he was often later portrayed) from serving as any kind of ‘eyewitness’ to events in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.⁵¹ Whilst presented by Avtorkhanov as a peculiarly Chechen tragedy, the purges in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR also need to be set in a broader context of what we now know occurred union-wide. The very fact that, according to MVD statistics, in neighbouring Dagestan, the *total* number of repressed persons there across the *whole* period from the 1930s to 1950s stood at 14,000 individuals, would seem to put in doubt Avtorkhanov’s claim of some 14,000 shot or imprisoned in the space of just a few months in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.⁵² Fortunately more accurate statistics are now available on a region-by-region basis which confirm such suspicions, and raise even graver question marks over Avtorkhanov’s account.

According to the single most authoritative statistical study of the purges to date, 7,159 people were arrested in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR during 1937 – a still hideously high figure, but nowhere near Avtorkhanov’s oft-quoted tally of around 14,000.⁵³ Arrests in this period unquestionably devastated the Chechen-Ingush party apparatus, with over 200 prominent bureaucrats arrested in the first half of 1937, and 30 out of 76 member and candidate-members of the local party *obkom* undergoing arrest over the whole period 1937–39.⁵⁴ Purges continued on a smaller scale in the years leading up to the war, and only in 1939–41 would party membership in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR again restabilize at 1934 levels.⁵⁵ However, once again, nothing is gained from excessively exaggerating the figures. Undoubtedly inspired by the same Cold War-era imperative to portray things as ‘the worse the better’, and now under closer examination similarly easily dismissed, becomes Avtorkhanov’s claim that, between 1936 and 1938, NKVD *troikas* shot around 80,000 citizens in the Chechen-Ingush republic. This would have been a remarkable feat, considering that the total number *arrested* there in 1937–38, at the very height of the most violent period of the purges, amounted to 9,446 individuals.

The Chechen-Ingush ASSR was moreover one of 21 regions across the country which (unlike Dagestan) did *not* file any requests after July 1937 to increase the quota ‘limits’ imposed by the anti-*kulak* order 00447 – the limits of which for Chechnia-Ingushetia were set at 500 executions and 1,500 imprisonments. In a republic with an overall population at the time of 659,838 (of whom 430,090 were Chechens and Ingush), this meant that the proportion of almost randomly targeted regime ‘enemies’ in Chechnia-Ingushetia amounted to only 0.3 per cent of the population, compared to (for example) Dagestan, where 0.6 per cent of the population were targeted, or Western Siberia, where 0.7 per cent of the population were affected. The local NKVD itself appears to have submitted comparatively low figures because of ‘our poor *agentura* and insufficient intelligence networks’, and subsequently reported itself unable to fill even the initial quotas it submitted, owing to local resistance.⁵⁶ More recent data for Chechnia-Ingushetia in general meanwhile points in reality to around 2,000 actual executions in 1937.⁵⁷

In this instance the historian could of course be accused of callousness regarding the death or imprisonment of 'only' several thousand, rather than several tens of thousands, of people in one particular region. However, the role of the historian is to search for truth: to re-examine oft-touted statistics on the scale or nature of the purges in Chechnia-Ingushetia is not to deny that a brutal and chaotic struggle had been unleashed by Stalin and Ezhov across the whole of the Soviet Union, one which then either ended or ruined the lives of hundreds of thousands of often entirely innocent people. But Avtorkhanov was a fascist collaborator, one who spent his later years selling his services to the highest bidder, latterly usually the United States, for Cold War propaganda purposes. His writings should therefore be treated with considerably greater caution than they have been to date, and in fact probably disregarded altogether by all future serious historians of the interwar North Caucasus. The actual nature of purges in Chechnia-Ingushetia meanwhile is also revealing, since they expose a pattern, already evident from collectivization, in which the local Communist Party continued to lack concrete intelligence on, or have a significant presence in, the countryside itself, and consequently struggled to penetrate the parallel clan-like structures which continued to operate there – a phenomenon which contributed to the predominantly 'political' nature of the local purges, which targeted and devastated the 'known quantity' of the local party structures and urban centres instead.

If Evdokimov's influence lay heavily over the course and nature of the purges in the North Caucasus, the course of the purges in the Transcaucasus were marked from the very outset by the very particular role played there by Lavrentii Beria, ex-head of the Georgian OGPU, head of the Georgian party from 1931, and head of the Trans-Caucasian party organization from 1932 onwards. A Mingrelian Georgian who fervently courted Stalin's attention and favour, Beria would eventually rise to national prominence after becoming Ezhov's replacement as head of the NKVD in November 1939. At one and the same time a ruthless sadist, a depraved womanizer, and a brilliant if callous administrator, he would of course also ultimately manage the most important, ambitious and secretive of all post-war state construction projects, the design and trial of the first Soviet atomic bomb. However, even prior to this, Beria's influence cast a large shadow over both the purges in the Transcaucasus and the later wartime deportations of the Chechen, Ingush, Karachai and Balkar peoples in 1944.

Beria's influence in Georgia alone during 1937–38 is reflected in the fact that, by some calculations, the level of repression conducted there along the lines of pure 'political' repression (rather than the 'mass operations' invoked by orders 00447 and 00485) placed it in the lead amongst the Soviet regions in terms of proportionate arrests and executions per head of population: 30,512 citizens underwent arrest, and between March 1937 and September 1938 some 3,486 individuals were sentenced to death, which placed Georgia in third place nationally behind Moscow *oblast'* and the Ukrainian SSR, and even higher if one takes into account the per capita percentage of the overall population affected.⁵⁸ These figures, however, were also shaped by the eagerness with which Beria persecuted former colleagues who were already working outside the Georgian ASSR, and by the particular policy

line he took towards Abkhazia. Beria's attractiveness to Stalin as a fellow Georgian in fact may well have been increased by his drive to covertly expand the borders and influence of the Georgian state, under the pretext of implementing Soviet nationality policy – a facet of his personality very visible in both 1936–38 and 1944. As the historian Georgi Derluguian has commented, when dealing with 'Georgian issues of national faith', both Stalin and Beria 'could behave as true nationalists, though we need not speculate [as to] whether their motives were affectionate or manipulative'.⁵⁹

By 1936 a deep enmity certainly already existed between Beria and the diminutive (and almost completely deaf) chairman of the central executive committee of Abkhazia, Nestor Lakoba, a man who had deliberately held back collectivization in his own territory on the grounds that '*kulaks*' as a class did not exist there. Lakoba had also built his career to date on careful political manoeuvring, manipulating the fact that the subtropical coast and scenic mountain slopes of Abkhazia were a prime choice for Bolshevik 'rest cures'. Both Stalin and Trotsky had at various times been his guests, with the local party chairman personally responsible for their security and comfort. An independent SSR between March 1921 and February 1922, Abkhazia had signed a special 'union agreement' with Georgia under pressure from Stalin and Ordzhonikidze in 1922, but had thereafter retained a considerable degree of latitude in internal decision making, a status affirmed in the unique legal designation of the territory becoming a '*dogovornaia*' ('pact') SSR. The 1927 Georgian constitution underlined that Georgia was a federal state, and the 1925 Abkhaz constitution that Abkhazia was a sovereign state.⁶⁰ In February 1931 however, Abkhazia was downgraded from an independent SSR to an autonomous republic, whilst being simultaneously incorporated into the Georgian SSR, where it would remain until 1991.

Sharing the suspicions of many of his fellow Abkhaz regarding Georgian 'imperialism' (the memory of events in 1918–20 was still fresh), Lakoba resisted this trend, and by 1936 was raising with Stalin the possibility of merging the Abkhaz ASSR into the RSFSR instead. In December that same year, Beria launched his own counter-offensive, meeting Lakoba in Tbilisi to unveil proposals for large-scale Georgian migration from western Georgia into Abkhazia. Lakoba reputedly responded that this would only occur 'over my dead body'. That very same day, in one of the most controversial episodes of the period, Beria apparently poisoned Lakoba; the latter certainly died at 4.20 a.m. on 28 December 1936, having staggered in agony out of a theatre performance which he had been attending with Beria just the previous evening.⁶¹

Compared with the ambiguity that still surrounds Kirov's murder, Lakoba's death from publicly announced 'natural causes' can be much more straightforwardly reinterpreted in the light of what happened posthumously, both to his family and to his political reputation. Successfully defaming him as an 'enemy of the people', Beria between 1937 and 1941 went on to both beat up and torture to death Nestor's beautiful 34-year-old wife, and to execute all three of their teenage children. In a stark reflection of Soviet justice at the time, all three boys were formally tried and convicted as 'dangerous terrorists', the oldest being just fifteen when first arrested, the

youngest only seventeen when finally executed. This personal vendetta was accompanied by the mass arrest of Lakoba's closest former associates, in the wake of which all the leading governmental posts in Abkhazia were stuffed with Georgians. As one of his closest collaborators later remarked, when carrying out his version of the purges in this region, Beria acted like a traditional oriental despot, physically obliterating not only personal enemies but whole families.⁶² He would repeat this malevolent display of fiefdom-building at the national level after taking over Ezhov's post as head of the NKVD at the end of 1938, bringing with him trusted Georgian cadres to replace large numbers of purged Ezhov-era personnel, and thereby establishing his own union-wide security 'clan'. By 1939, in the estimate of one writer, 'the whole of the USSR could be said to be controlled by Georgians and Mingrelians'.⁶³

The repression of Lakoba and the Abkhaz leadership coincided with Georgia, like other Soviet republics, preparing its first official history. All these 1930s history texts strove without variation to provide deep historical justification for the borders and ethnic hierarchies that had been created by regional Soviet administrations since 1917, with the Georgian version that surfaced stressing that ever since the tenth century Georgia had been a unitary state, within which the Kingdom of Abkhazia was represented as 'no more than a title for Georgian kings', whilst the ancestors of the Abkhaz themselves were described as a Georgian tribe with a Georgian dialect. The Georgian historical school that emerged in the Stalin-Beria era underwent severe criticism after 1953, but experienced a dramatic revival during the 1980s, and remains at the core of Georgian nationalist formulations today.⁶⁴ The simmering legacy of this episode, meanwhile, and the resentments it bred regarding the physical presence of Georgian settlers colonizing Abkhaz land, would re-erupt in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-93, which ran on sporadically as a form of 'frozen conflict' right up until Russian recognition of Abkhaz independence in August 2008.

A further element politically justifying the purges at the time, as we have seen, was the universal Soviet belief in the imminence of all-out war, a belief which both blessed the breakneck pace of industrialization, and also generated, in a shockingly short space of time, an atmosphere in which even the smallest of infractions came to be interpreted as evidence of deliberate treachery and sabotage, punishable by death. Against this chaotic pre-war background, the outbreak of the Second World War itself re-emphasized the growing strategic importance of the Caucasus to the Soviet Union.

The three successive five-year plans instituted from 1929 onwards, which formed the institutional background for both the purges and the earlier era of violent mass collectivization, also saw significant industrial and infrastructural development occur not just union-wide, but within the Caucasus itself. The naval ports of Novorossiisk, Tuapse and Makhachkala were completely reconstructed; the railway stations of Malgobek, Gudermes and Grozni became significant transport hubs in the region; new pipelines and electric power stations were constructed; a beginning was made on road modernization; and by the start of the 1930s nearly 2 million tons of oil products, raw or refined, were being exported

from Groznyi. Chechnia and Ingushetia alone generated 397 million kilowatts of electrical power between them in 1940, compared with just 37 million kilowatts in 1928, and the number of workers in heavy industry there had also shot up from just 6,425 persons in 1913 to 17,537 by 1940. The Groznyi oil industry itself played a substantial contributory role within the first five-year plan, providing 36 per cent of all oil output in the country as a whole during those years, a contribution second only to Baku.⁶⁵

In Kabardino-Balkaria, meanwhile, the largest hydroelectric power station in the whole of the North Caucasus was built in Baksan, and was coming online by September 1936 to provide 25,000 kilowatts of power. In that region too – officially promoted, like Chechnia-Ingushetia and North Ossetia, to full ASSR status in 1936 – there sprang up dozens of factories, including the largest regional meat-processing plant, the latter employing 12,700 workers by 1940, with such developments simultaneously transforming the local capital, Nal'chik, beyond all recognition from its pre-1917 days.⁶⁶ The Caucasus as a whole meanwhile provided 93.5 per cent of all Soviet oil and fuel reserves through three critical choke points: 58.5 per cent passed through Batum and Baku in the south, and another 27.5 per cent passed through Groznyi. Some 91 per cent of the Soviet Union's entire fuel reserves were also refined at these three key sites.⁶⁷ Thus, whilst the Caucasus for much of the First World War had been something of a strategic sideshow, the revolution wrought by both the Soviet social experiment and Henry Ford's mass-produced internal combustion engine rendered the oil wells there by 1939 a key military and resource objective for all the Soviet Union's main potential enemies.

Perhaps no institution better reflected the full diversity of what had been both suffered and accomplished in the Caucasus when war again broke out, however, than the Red Army (RKKA) itself. Like their Tsarist predecessors, the Soviet authorities had initially been wary of recruiting Caucasus mountaineers in large numbers into the army, but during the 1920s there nonetheless remained a real enthusiasm for establishing regional 'national forces', which generated units raised and serving locally on a largely voluntary basis: these formations provided 65,000 men, or 10 per cent of the Red Army as a whole, by the spring of 1925. A law of that year to introduce universal conscription contained no formal exemptions on the basis of nationality, but the Caucasus nonetheless escaped any definitive implementation of this obligation until 1928, when there was carried out a preliminary census of those liable to serve. Only 516 Ossetians, 5,218 Georgians, 2,194 Azeris and 4,748 Armenians were serving in the ranks of the RKKA as of 1926.⁶⁸ Military service for mountaineers remained largely confined to small cavalry formations, whilst during the famine years of 1930–33 many inhabitants of the North Caucasus Military District were also exempted from conscription on the basis of potential political unreliability – some 15 per cent were so exempted in 1932 alone.

During the 1930s, however, in line with the pace of crash modernization and rising fear of imminent all-out war, 'national formations' came to be abandoned, in line with the new constitution of 1936, with a corresponding shift – after 1938 – towards an 'all-union' national army, within which the language of command

would be Russian, and where recruits, under the new extraterritorial system, would be deliberately relocated outside their home territories. In 1939 wide-scale recruitment on this basis was initiated in the North Caucasus and Transcaucasus for the first time in their collective history, in line with a general nationwide build-up which saw the Red Army more than double in size (from 2 million men to just over 5 million) by the time war broke out in June 1941.⁶⁹ This 1939 intake drew from the recruitment pool of those born in 1917–19: those individuals, in other words, who had grown up under Soviet power, and who had known no other life.

In the Caucasus the general standard of education and health amongst such recruits would have staggered earlier Tsarist administrators – from the Transcaucasus, recruits with secondary education approached 27 per cent, and only 1 per cent were graded as illiterate, though 16 per cent remained barely literate. Amongst recruits from the North Caucasus, literacy rates ran at 80–85 per cent, with only the Chechens and Ingush lagging behind at a still-impressive 68–70 per cent. Levels of secondary and higher education also lagged behind general Russian trends, but still represented advances unthinkable in Tsarist times – for every 1,000 recruits amongst the Adygei and Cherkess, 53.9 per cent had secondary and 2.1 per cent higher education; amongst the Kabardins the figures were 31.2 per cent and 1.1 per cent respectively, and amongst Dagestanis, 20.8 per cent and 0.9 per cent respectively. Ossetians maintained their pre-1917 regional hegemony in terms of education, with 99 per cent per 1,000 having secondary education, whilst Chechens again lagged behind the rest, with only 8 per cent having secondary education, but the rapid educational advances made by nationalities situated on the arc between these two extremes was unmistakable.⁷⁰

This immensely expanded army however, made up of recruits whose standards of education and literacy were historically unprecedented, also relied heavily upon thousands of poorly trained reservists, and was still immensely scarred structurally by the earlier purges – the higher leadership cadres in particular were savaged, with 34,000 army and air-force commanders having been dismissed, and 20,000 arrested, in 1937–41. In November 1937 the Transcaucasus military soviet, having complained that its forces were poorly trained, was brusquely rebuked by one military specialist by being told that this was an unavoidable consequence of the recent appointment of so many ill-prepared new leaders; the Armenian rifle division alone was commanded by a captain who had never controlled even a regiment or battalion before, whilst the Azeri division was led by a major with absolutely no field experience, having previously only served as a teacher at a military school.⁷¹ Whilst the 1939 call-up would provide the front-line manpower for the battles of 1941–42, the manpower reserves of the Caucasus also represented a more mixed picture, with less than a quarter of reservists in the Transcaucasus district being both healthy and having had sufficient serious military training to serve in the ranks.⁷² The manpower input of the Caucasus in the fighting of 1941 nonetheless eclipsed that of 1914–17, with recruits from there serving predominantly under the extraterritorial system in the soon rapidly overrun western border districts – a fact which would lead to hundreds of Chechens, Ingush, Karachai and

Balkar soldiers participating in the epic defence of the Brest fortress in Belorussia in June–July 1941 for example. The Transcaucasus dispatched 85,561 recruits and 212,721 reservists by the end of July 1941, and the North Caucasus 29,937 recruits.⁷³ The war which was now to come, however, was to provide the final and perhaps cruellest examination of all regarding the success and relative merits of Stalinist-era nation building and modernization in the Caucasus.

10 Dealing with ‘bandits’

War, ethnic cleansing and repression in the Soviet Caucasus, 1941–45

Either I get the oil of Maikop and Grozny, or I must put an end to this war.
(Adolf Hitler, 1 July 1942¹)

External threat, internal unrest

Stalin, frustrated by the failure to consolidate an anti-fascist collective security pact in Europe during the 1930s, signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact of 1939 as a means of buying the Soviet Union precious space and time for a war he still regarded as inevitable – a policy reversal correctly interpreted by all the leading commentators at the time as an act of pure political cynicism. When war itself came, however, the Soviet Union remained horrifically underprepared to repel the massive Axis force (nearly 4 million men had been assembled) which smashed across the western frontier along three main axes in June 1941. Even though the Soviet Union itself by then possessed the largest standing tank park in the world, with a paper strength of 11,000 machines in its western border districts alone, the hectic pace of peacetime expansion and industrialization, taken in conjunction with swinging political purges within the pre-war armed forces, also rendered these raw figures alone deeply deceptive. If the pace of modernization and industrialization achieved by the Soviet Union after 1928 had been historically unprecedented, it was also in many ways still a remarkably fragile achievement, as the Red Army of 1941 found itself condemned to demonstrate.

The reality behind the headline figures was that, when war began, the vast majority of Soviet tanks remained poorly maintained, lacking in experienced commanders or trained crews, and were often simply technologically obsolete – being too thinly armoured, underpowered or even additionally hampered, in the case of several of the heavier models, by a 1930s Soviet design fondness for multiple gun-turrets. The recently expanded western border districts themselves lacked both concrete fortifications and sufficient quantities of barbed wire, and the combat logistic chains remained in a shockingly ramshackle state. When war began, the tank forces in three of the key western districts therefore had access to only six to fifteen days’ worth of fuel between them, leading to the vast majority of their

vehicles simply being abandoned shortly after the fighting began.² This degree of unpreparedness renders farcical allegations raised both at the time, and occasionally reiterated ever since, alleging that Hitler's attack was in some sense pre-emptive. Axis forces certainly possessed far fewer tanks – some 4,000 machines in all – and also lacked any significant ground-based technological superiority, with German tanks in June 1941 being small, lightly armed and thinly armoured, compared with some of the latest models beginning to roll off the Soviet production lines. Nonetheless German tank crews remained superbly trained and – as soon proved even more critical – the mechanized Panzer units were fully coordinated by radio, giving German combined arms operations a coherence that translated into a far greater degree of relative combat effectiveness.³ The Germans of course also enjoyed the incalculable further benefit of having honed this tactical edge to a fine art during dazzling campaigns in Poland, France and the Balkans.

Soviet difficulties meanwhile were further compounded by the fact that the air force, many of whose pilots in the first few weeks of the war still flew in biplanes without radios, *was* technologically inferior in both speed and manoeuvrability compared with its Axis counterparts, with the majority of its machines also being destroyed whilst still on the ground.⁴ This lethal combination of shortcomings meant that the spectacular defeats experienced by the Soviet Union during the opening stages of 'Operation Barbarossa' are without parallel in history – within three weeks of the war's outbreak, the Red Army had incurred losses of some 2 million men, 3,500 tanks, and over 6,000 aircraft. Such events naturally also spurred a sharp rise in internal unrest in traditionally unsettled territories such as the North Caucasus, regions which now also became critical wartime rear staging areas for the main battle-fronts.

Resistance to collectivization in the Caucasus, having rumbled on during the run-up to war, received an additional spur in the spring of 1940 when the local authorities had drastically cut back on agrarian private property, sometimes eliminating altogether – in violation of the actual law on the matter – entire individual plots. In Chechnia-Ingushetia, where literacy rates continued to lag behind the rest of the region, lack of social mobility and resistance to the Soviet system continued to be expressed via both covert and open resistance. Although 99.8 per cent of Chechen peasants were officially registered in collective farms as of 1939, in the Itum-Kale district that year alone, 91 per cent of all cattle and 94.4 per cent of the land remained farmers' private property, whilst 30.9 per cent of the farmers had also not worked a single day for the local collective farm during the whole of the previous year. Soviet agricultural infrastructure as a consequence also remained extremely weak. On 1 January 1939, for example, 53 per cent of local collective farms did not have any livestock sections, 68.2 per cent had no dairy farming, and 75.3 per cent had no sheep ranching. Furthermore, during 1937–40, across both Chechnia and Ingushetia, 1,535 alleged guerrillas and bandits had also either been killed or arrested by the police.⁵

Local party representatives meanwhile, still traumatized by the earlier purges, likewise remained deeply unenthusiastic supporters of Moscow. During the first eight months of fighting in 1941 alone, roughly two-thirds of the first party

secretaries in the twenty-four *raions* of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR deserted their posts. In August–September 1942, as the Axis armies continued to sweep relentlessly forward, the NKVD chief in Grozny reported to Moscow that a further eighty members of the local Communist Party had abandoned their positions entirely and simply fled.⁶ Conscription into the Red Army in October–November 1941 meanwhile provoked a further uprising in the mountain districts of Chechnia, and out of 14,000 Chechens liable to conscription, only 4,395 were successfully enlisted, of whom 2,365 subsequently deserted.

One of the largest protests against mobilization occurred on 28–30 October 1941, in the village of Borzoi. There, a band led by Asuev Umar-Khadzhi provoked a general armed uprising in which around 800 people took part, and the intervention of three Soviet air wings was required for its repression – 19 people were killed, 4 wounded, and 5 arrested, with around 70 weapons confiscated during the course of subsequent mopping-up operations. On 30 October a similar uprising in the village of Nikaroi-Kii led to 16 Red Army men being disarmed and then executed in cold blood, before Soviet reinforcements were able to intervene and suppress the rebellion. Nowhere else in the North Caucasus did local resistance and desertions occur on this scale, though they nonetheless still occurred in significant numbers – out of 25,000 Kabards initially drafted into the Red Army, 5,506 fled their units. Overall desertion rates in the North Caucasus were also proportionately greater than in other parts of the country: between June 1941 and June 1944, 62,751 men deserted or evaded the draft there, compared with 128,527 in the Ukraine, 4,406 in Belorussia and 149,849 in Central Asia – each of the latter districts, of course, being considerably more densely populated areas, two of which were also rapidly overrun by the Nazi invaders.

Concerns expressed by one Soviet officer to a Western newspaper correspondent as early as July 1942, regarding the real dedication of many peoples in the North Caucasus and Transcaucasus to defending the Soviet motherland, were to some extent also corroborated in subsequent casualty returns. The proportion of fatalities amongst Armenians and Georgians during the whole war was less than the average toll across the USSR as a whole by a third; in Azerbaijan the same proportion was half less, whilst Chechens and Ingush sat at the bottom of this bleak league table of absolute losses at 2,300 men, barely a twelfth of the all-union average as a proportion of the 1939 population. Chechnia-Ingushetia, however, also came to have a far less creditable ultimate record to show than even its immediate neighbouring republics in terms of men per capita killed or missing in action fighting against the Third Reich. Compared to the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, Dagestan lost 2.8 times as many men; Kabardins and Balkars, 3.6 times; Ossetians, 6.0 times; and Georgians, 7.7 times.⁷

NKVD units during the whole course of the conflict consequently continued to pursue an ever more vindictive and extreme private war behind the lines against groups classed as guerrillas or bandits, although the data now available continues to suffer from important lacunae, terminological issues, and chronological overlaps. Over the whole course of the war in the North Caucasus in general, NKVD forces, in cooperation with the military, local militia forces and 'destruction battalions'

(the latter composed of trusted local Communist Party cadres established to guard key strategic infrastructure), arrested some 17,648 bandits and killed a further 7,488. In the areas around four major towns alone – Groznyi, Ordzhonikidze (Vladikavkaz), Makhachkala and Derbent – 12,000 Soviet citizens were detained for violating the rules of the front-line regime, and 9,406 for abandoning defensive works. The peak of these activities came in 1942, when the NKVD conducted 43 independent operations, eliminating 2,342 bandits.⁸ Against this regional backdrop, between November 1941 and June 1943 the 141st NKVD Security Regiment deployed in Chechnia reported that it had killed 973 and captured 1,167 'bandits', whilst also arresting 1,413 'insurgents' – a grand total of 3,553 affected individuals. Other figures from slightly later in 1943 present a slightly higher overall total, with 3,665 arrested or killed by November 1943, 'amongst them 2,690 Chechens and Ingush'. Between June 1941 and January 1945 as a whole, it was later claimed that, across the territory of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR alone, 232 professional bandit groups (*band kadry*), comprising 1,263 persons, had been eliminated, alongside 1,815 individual band members and 1,714 band supporters, producing a total for the majority of the war of 4,792 individuals captured or executed for such activities; 18,046 weapons, including rifles, mines, mortars and machine guns, were also confiscated during this same period.⁹

NKVD actions themselves, however, may have partly contributed to the frightening scale of this phenomenon – in August 1943 the deputy head of the NKVD unit for combating banditry, Rudenko, noted with concern both the lack of effective party-propaganda work in the mountain regions of the republic, and NKVD errors which had led to 'massive arrests, and the murder of persons who were not on operational lists, and on whom there was no compromising material'. In support of this latter charge, he noted that of the 213 people killed between January and June 1943, only 22 had any prior criminal record according to the NKVD's own extant 'operational lists'.¹⁰ Economic conditions, meanwhile, only beginning to improve thanks to massive peacetime state investments, and already hamstrung by a sharp disproportion between industrial and consumer products, worsened dramatically in wartime, further increasing sources of internal unrest. Official statistics recorded a patriotic war effort in terms of industrial production, with the 1940 plan targets for oil and gas extraction in Groznyi overfulfilled by 135.1 per cent, whilst production of aviation fuel also leapt up 220 per cent in July 1941 compared with the first six months of the year, and again by 262 per cent in August. In the autumn of 1942, however, whilst visiting the republic, deputy commissar of the MVD Ivan Serov was driven to report that the mountain districts had for a long time been starved by the local authorities of essential everyday goods such as matches, kerosene, soap and salt, which created massive price inflation and growing unrest in those areas. The local administration, devastated by earlier desertions, also remained poorly informed over the true state of affairs in the countryside, and local chairmen and other party functionaries continued to be removed and replaced at a dizzying pace.¹¹ In an existential struggle for the very survival of the state itself, excesses in this internal campaign against banditry therefore frequently occurred, particularly during the summer and autumn of 1942,

as Axis forces again broke through the fragile but recently restored front lines and swept down into the North Caucasus, to the point where they appeared poised to reach Baku.

The overall military situation had remained grim for Soviet forces right up until the very end of 1941, by which time their total casualties stood at some 4 million soldiers (dead or captured), at least 7,000 aircraft lost, and some 14,900 tanks captured or destroyed.¹² However, having held and beaten off the German armies at the very gates of Moscow in December 1941, Stalin at the outset of 1942 then became overconfident, and ordered a general counter-offensive at multiple points along the nearly 2,000 mile long front line that by then stretched from Leningrad to the north to the Sea of Azov in the south. Each of these counter-offensives during January–March 1942 brought some initial success, but then shuddered to a halt in freezing snow and mud, with the Soviet units involved quickly becoming crippled by inadequate resources in almost every area – food, gunsights, ammunition, air cover, modern tanks and trained men. To highlight just one telling example of the ongoing effect of colossal earlier losses, large masses of horsed cavalry were used as a substitute for tanks in order to conduct the planned breakout and exploitation phases of many of these offensives.¹³ Particularly mismanaged and catastrophic were Soviet attempts to break through along the Kerch peninsula to relieve the besieged fortress of Sebastopol on the Crimea. Marking the first attempt at employing formations dominated by North Caucasus and Transcaucasus nationalities on a large scale (48,000 Transcaucasians were present), these operations, despite a Soviet numerical superiority, were mishandled logistically, poorly led, and brutally punished by Axis air power; by May 1942, in the face of murderous Axis counter-attacks, Soviet losses there had mounted to 176,000 men, over 3,000 guns and 347 tanks, with the majority of the Transcaucasus divisions simply ceasing to exist.¹⁴

Having repulsed the January–March counter-offensives in sometimes desperate fighting, German planners then in turn caught Stalin by surprise during the summer of 1942 by switching their attention from the deep salient of the central front to the oilfields of the south instead, in the offensive designated 'Operation Blau [Blue]'. In the south a new theatre command under Marshal Budennyi, labelled 'the North Caucasus Front', would eventually be established to meet this attack, in July 1942. Budennyi's forces remained critically short of food, shells and ammunition, however, and at the time of this front's creation, only 74 working tanks remained in operation to cover an area of operations around 600 miles in length. By the beginning of August, after attempting a fighting retreat, Budennyi would be forced to report that he had just 24,000 men left, supported by only 94 aircraft and not a single tank.¹⁵ The front commander, an authentic civil-war-era cavalry hero, though unquestionably courageous, had also already proven his inadequacy in earlier directing and commanding the actions of modern forces during the defence of the Ukraine in 1941, and these further reverses led to his eventual replacement as Caucasus front commander by September 1942.

In terms of available reserves to back up Budennyi, the Soviet high command could initially only look to the forces of the Transcaucasus Front under General

I. V. Tiulenev, whose formations were at first pinned down by the threat of a potential attack from Turkey. As early as 30 July 1942, Tiulenev was nonetheless ordered to reorient his forces northward in order to take up the defence of the whole central and south-east Caucasus. He accordingly quickly drew up a plan demanding the construction of a main defence line that would run west from the Caspian along the line of the Terek river, before then turning south to follow the natural wall of the main Caucasus mountain chain, and then finally meeting the Black Sea coast midway between Tuapse and Sochi. This line enjoyed the dual merit of both immediately defending Grozny and Ordzhonikidze, and simultaneously covering the main approaches to Baku and Tbilisi. Even so, the forces of the Transcaucasus Front in the summer of 1942 were initially in little better condition than Budennyi's command, consisting of just twenty rifle divisions and brigades, three cavalry divisions and three tank brigades, formed into three overall army groups. The military equipment of all of these units was again near obsolescent, with the 202 tanks which were initially available comprising such archaic or ineffective models as the T-26, the T-60 scout tank, and the flame-throwing KhT-133 light tank. There was also a painful shortage of battalion mortars and anti-tank artillery, and only 164 immediately available working aircraft.¹⁶

The Soviet high command nonetheless rushed to dispatch engineer forces to help implement the defensive plans drawn up by Tiulenev and endorsed by the beginning of August, and by early September the Transcaucasus Front had six times the engineer forces initially available on 1 August, with 63,686 men deployed in all. On 16 September 90,000 members of the local population were also mobilized and put to work to help construct new defensive lines around Makhachkala, Derbent and Baku. Military reinforcements were also shipped across from Astrakhan to Makhachkala from 6 August onwards, in total two guards corps and eleven individual rifle brigades, but tanks and air power remained in short supply. The Soviet defence of the Caucasus in 1942 would therefore predominantly be fought and won by operations founded on the rather traditional triad of infantry, artillery and engineers: 534 miles of trenches had been constructed by the beginning of August, alongside 332 miles of anti-tank obstacles and 2,791 examples of other types of engineering work.¹⁷

The catastrophe that so rapidly swept over Budennyi's men further to the north meanwhile began to unfold on 28 June, when Operation Blau was launched along the main part of the southern front. Hitler's military commanders, having regrouped and resupplied their depleted armies to generate a strike force of 167,000 soldiers, 1,130 tanks, 4,540 guns and mortars, and around 1,000 aircraft, punched forward to quickly cross the river Don and capture Rostov, the gateway to the North Caucasus, by 23 July.¹⁸ In the Crimea, the imposing concrete artillery fortifications of Sevastopol, pounded since 30 October 1941 by massive rail-mounted German siege guns, also finally fell to Romanian and German assaults on 4 July 1942, following twenty-seven days of bloody and ferocious hand-to-hand fighting, which inflicted cumulative losses on the Red Army of some 95,000 prisoners and 11,000 dead. This added to the already heavy toll inflicted on Soviet forces during the mainland German advance towards Rostov, during the course of which

much of the Soviet 62nd Army group had become encircled in the Donbass region, leading to the capture of 57,000 prisoners. In the wake of Rostov's capitulation, which occurred despite NKVD units fighting a desperate last stand with grenades and machine guns in the city streets, the 1st Panzer Army then wheeled fully south to plunge forward across the Kuban plain, overrunning Krasnodar to seize Maikop by 10 August. The fall of Rostov and its accompanying defensive canal line prompted the inevitable abandonment of the whole of the Kuban, which entailed a fallback to Tiulenev's envisaged new defence line astride the main Caucasus mountain range to the south and east.¹⁹ By the height of the summer, Field Marshal Wilhelm List's German Army Group A was therefore rapidly approaching the foothills of the Caucasus mountains, having advanced over 300 miles in less than two weeks, in a breakthrough whose sheer scale and speed appeared for a while set to repeat the disasters of 1941.

The German army at the outset of this campaign demonstrated that it remained a formidable, though increasingly strained, war-fighting machine. Stuka dive-bombers provided powerful close air support to the well-trained panzer units which advanced across the seemingly endless Kuban plains amidst clouds of dust, in day-time temperatures which sometimes reached 42 degrees in the shade. Daily Luftwaffe air reconnaissance from improvised or captured airfields provided constant intelligence to the ground forces, correcting the Germans' often outdated Tsarist-era maps of the region. Ground-air cooperation on the German side was for this reason later judged by Axis participants to be amongst the most effective achieved during the whole course of the war. Whilst Budennyi's men sought to delay the enemy advance by blowing up numerous bridges and reservoirs, German combat engineer units were invariably also swiftly on hand to effect repairs, provide emergency crossings, and neutralize minefields and other obstacles.²⁰ Consequently the increasingly critical situation unfolding across the whole of the southern front was soon underlined by the arrival of the most trusted members of Stalin's own personal entourage – Kaganovich joined the military soviet of the North Caucasus Front on 28 July, Malenkov was dispatched to Stalingrad in mid-August, and Beria to the North Caucasus on 21 August.²¹ Beria himself was also accompanied by a large contingent of NKVD troops, amongst them his deputy Ivan Serov, as well as by a large cadre of General Staff officers under the command of the operations specialist Lieutenant-General P. I. Bodin; the latter was shortly thereafter reappointed as chief of staff to the Transcaucasus Front, where he was eventually killed in the fighting that followed.

The input of Beria's group was particularly critical for a front line where the immediate military threat, high rates of desertion, Nazi subversion tactics, and political banditry appeared to be combining in a crippling fashion. Beria himself undertook intense activity along two simultaneous lines of responsibility – as *narkom* of Internal Affairs for combating banditry, desertion, sabotage, and securing rear lines of communication, and as a representative of the country's highest governing organ, the State Defence Council (GKO), with a direct line to Stalin. His intervention lent the Soviet defence in the Caucasus a peculiar quality never repeated on any other Soviet front during the war – the unprecedented subordination of army

field commanders to the NKVD, and the large role played by NKVD forces themselves in much of the fighting that followed. An initial flurry of activity saw military commanders that Beria judged inadequate rapidly replaced – although, interestingly, practically none were arrested or repressed. The most prominent casualty of this process was Budennyi himself. On 31 August, the Stavka in Moscow had finally resolved upon amalgamating the North Caucasus and Transcaucasus fronts, with the diminished and exhausted North Caucasus Front troops now renamed the 'Black Sea Group of Forces' and reassigned to defend the foothills covering the approaches to Tuapse, Batum and Tbilisi on the Transcaucasus Front's left flank. Stalin initially proposed Budennyi as overall commander of this new combined front, with Tiulenev as his deputy, but Beria replied bluntly that Tiulenev should be made overall commander instead, Budennyi's authority 'having [now] fallen considerably, not to mention the fact that, since he is only semi-literate, he will unquestionably only make a mess of the whole thing'.²²

Similar summary dismissals were meted out by Beria, or under Beria's and Tiulenev's joint signatures, to the front chief of staff, A. I. Subbotin; the head of the front rear area, Major-General Ishchenko; the head of front intelligence, Colonel Simakov; and the commanders of the 9th, 46th and 47th Army groups.²³ In appointing replacements Beria laid heavy emphasis across the board upon individuals he trusted within the local Communist Party apparatus, as well as upon his own NKVD troops; the first secretaries of the Georgian and Azeri Communist parties joined the military soviet of the Transcaucasus Front, and two NKVD men – Serov and A. N. Sadzhaia – were appointed to command the 3rd Rifle Corps in the 46th Army group. The most important sections of the front were also removed from army command and subordinated to the NKVD, with a directive of 14 August dictating the construction of the aforementioned special defensive zones around Grozny, Ordzhonikidze, Derbent and Sukhumi. After 26 August a specially created 'Operational Group' commanded by NKVD Major-General I. A. Petrov also bore sole responsibility for the defence of the mountain passes through the main Caucasus mountain range. The majority of these newly created defensive zones were prepared by MVD troops, who were forbidden to retreat without direct permission from Beria himself. The overall number of NKVD troops covering the forward mountain zone leading to the critical passes into the Transcaucasus reached 80,000 during the war. These defensive zones both secured the army's rear areas, and contributed highly motivated reinforcements during critical later moments in the conflict. During the fighting on the approach to Ordzhonikidze in November for example, the NKVD threw a rifle division, two brigades, a tank brigade and nine artillery regiments into the battle, whilst in the wake of the German repulse, five regiments of NKVD troops were also donated to replenish the best fighting forces in the Soviet 'Northern Group' of forces, namely the 10th and 11th Guard Corps.²⁴

Subsequent opinion has always been divided over the true value of Beria's contribution to stemming the tide of the Nazi advance during August–September 1942. Soviet military officers generally loathed the NKVD chief's abrasive, foul-mouthed style of command – mannerisms which they regarded as very much their own prerogative – and also held him personally responsible for the torture and

execution of many talented senior commanders in 1937–38. Additionally resented came to be the fact that the post-war medals distributed to the General Staff for defence of the Transcaucasus were issued by the MVD rather than by the War Ministry, and correspondingly bore Beria's signature. Tiulenev's post-war memoirs, eventually published during the Khrushchev era in 1960, pointedly dismissed Beria's contribution to the campaign. Those within the military whose own rise was felt to have been brought about by too close an association with Beria himself – most notably First Deputy Chief of the General Staff S. M. Shtemenko, who was effectively demoted after 1953 – likewise joined in the subsequent Khrushchev-approved tidal wave of denunciations, railing against the malevolent influence of the now-executed former security commissar.²⁵ Nonetheless, although the divided lines of command and communication which Beria created undoubtedly complicated the situation on the Transcaucasus Front, and led to individual instances of insubordination which truly infuriated Tiulenev, the contribution of MVD forces overall appears to have been critical in a region where the Soviet military themselves enjoyed no particular preponderance of strength.

War in the age of oil

Between September and November a growing shortage of fuel, stiffening Soviet resistance, and natural physical obstacles in the form of the now heavily defended mountain passes blunted Field Marshal List's southern thrust, even as Hitler and the German high command were becoming increasingly distracted by the protracted fighting unfolding further to the north, in what had originally only been conceived of as an auxiliary covering operation to seize the town of Stalingrad. Having directed his two main army groups (designated 'A' and 'B') on the southern front into advancing along steadily diverging rather than converging operational axes, Hitler had also unwittingly committed an error destined to tip the whole future balance of the war. The challenges of the force-to-space ratio facing Army Group A were always particularly daunting given that, even at the outset of operations, 21 infantry divisions, 6 panzer divisions, 5 motorized divisions and 435 tanks were being asked to conquer and dominate a steadily expanding operational salient very nearly the size of France.²⁶ The increasing overstretch of List's Army Group A was exacerbated by the steady departure of troops and combat air support to assist the Stalingrad front, a problem then further compounded by the dispersal of in-theatre effort required to maintain three diverging lines of advance (south-eastwards towards Grozny, Ordzhonikidze and the Terek valley, south through the Caucasus mountain passes towards Sukhumi, and south-westwards for clearing operations along the Black Sea coast before moving on towards Batum and Tbilisi).²⁷ This dispersal of effort was then made still worse by increasingly exhausting and inconclusive local battles, as Tiulenev's new defence line began to demonstrate its worth.

A prelude of these increasing difficulties came when Army Group A failed to make a clean sweep of the Black Sea coast, despite the powerful initial momentum achieved by the Rostov breakthrough. Whilst the two main inland towns of

Krasnodar and Maikop fell, the port of Novorossiisk to the west remained a thorn in the Axis armies' left flank throughout the whole of the remainder of the German occupation of the Kuban, whilst the equally critical port of Tuapse was destined to remain permanently out of reach. Three German infantry divisions, accompanied by the Romanian Cavalry Corps and 64 tanks and assault guns, were assigned to capture Novorossiisk itself which, by 18 August, had also received its own orders from the Stavka to create a special defensive zone, manned by 36 tanks and roughly 15,000 men of the Soviet 47th Army group. The German 5th Corps began a final assault on 1 September, and although it was able to seize the town centre and port facilities by the 10th, fighting ground to a halt around the cement factory just south of the town the next day. The front line thereafter did not move again until late December, when the Germans began abandoning the whole of the Kuban region in line with broader developments further to the north-east around Stalingrad. Whilst casualties amongst the Soviet defenders at Novorossiisk were undoubtedly higher, the German attackers during this offensive also incurred losses of 14,000 men, 47 tanks, and 95 guns and mortars, resources which were in increasingly sharp demand elsewhere.²⁸

A similar story unfolded further east, along the narrow valley approaches towards Malgobek in north-west Ingushetia during September, where dense networks of Soviet anti-tank weapons, particularly anti-tank guns and rifles, devastated attacking German armour, a factor which, in combination with relentless Soviet counter-attacks, reduced the final thrust towards Grozny to a crawl. In five days of fighting along this axis of advance, the elite 'Viking' mechanized SS units were fought to a virtual standstill, with the loss of 90 tanks, 20 guns, and over 2,000 men.²⁹ By 9 September, Hitler had already become so frustrated by the increasingly slow progress of Army Group A that he dismissed List, and for a short period of time took on personal command of the entire front. A renewed attempt to achieve the elusive final breakthrough was then directed at Ordzhonikidze in October–November 1942, in an offensive under the command of the blitzkrieg veteran General von Kleist. This climactic unsuccessful thrust saw vicious see-saw battles then occur around the outskirts of the town, with the increasingly exhausted local Axis forces ultimately losing 140 tanks, 2,000 vehicles, and 5,000 German and Romanian dead.³⁰

The Axis's growing fuel-supply difficulties in the Caucasus during 1942 meanwhile were in large part the handiwork of the brilliant young Azeri-Russian oil specialist Nikolai Baibakov (1911–2008), who was summoned before Stalin in July and personally charged with destroying or evacuating the Soviet oil industry in the south. Warned by Stalin that he would be shot if the oil facilities fell intact into enemy hands – but likewise shot if these selfsame facilities were blown up too hastily, prematurely depriving the fighting front of desperately needed fuel – Baibakov, accompanied throughout by Beria's deputy V. N. Merkulov, fulfilled this mission with such skill and nerve (despite being almost captured when his plane nearly landed on the Armavir airfield at the very moment that it was being overrun by German tanks) that he was appointed a people's commissar in 1944, and went on to head Gosplan in the 1950s.³¹

Stalingrad's overall importance to the course of what followed meanwhile – as a major pivot of the fighting front, and arguably of the whole course of the Second World War itself – stood in massive inverse proportion to its actual physical scale. Though undoubtedly a key administrative and industrial centre sitting astride the Volga river, the town itself, with a pre-war population of just 445,000, was still a considerably smaller urban conurbation than Rostov which, having been outflanked, had fallen just a few weeks earlier.³² The battle around the town nonetheless also put Soviet supply lines in the south in a difficult position since, denied the use of the railway through Rostov-on-Don or the Volga river, oil from Baku had to be shipped by a circular route across the Caspian through Krasnovodsk, and then by rail across Central Asia. The Caspian Sea Flotilla, its two main Tsarist-era gunboats the *Kars* and *Ardagan* having both been renamed and converted only just in time during 1937–40 into powerful modern anti-aircraft platforms, served as vital convoy escorts along this route, which by the autumn of 1942 was within range of German medium bombers. Baku itself meanwhile surpassed all of its own previous production records during the war, with its fields supplying more than 75 million tons of oil (of which 23.5 million tons, over two-thirds of national production at the time, were delivered in the first year of war alone), whilst 17 million barrels of refined fuel were also shipped across the Caspian in 1941–45. The Baku fields met about 76 per cent of the Soviet army's overall fuel requirements during the war, and more than 96 per cent of its aviation fuel needs, an effort only accomplished by abolishing vacations and rest days within the oil industry at the war's very outbreak, recruiting female workers on a large scale, and transitioning from twelve- to eighteen-hour standard work shifts.³³

This extraordinary effort came, however, at the cost of the town's own long-term prosperity – older wellheads were reopened and exploited to the maximum possible extent, 764 wells were sealed during the war out of fear of imminent capture, and after the conflict was over the near exhausted local oil industry slid into sharp decline, its remaining reserves no longer easily extractable with the immediately available post-war drilling technology. Output in 1945 was 11.5 million tons compared with 23.5 million tons in 1941, and by the early 1980s Baku's overall oil output had dwindled to a meagre 3 per cent of total Soviet production. The Second World War therefore marked the absolute peak of Azerbaijan's contribution to Soviet domestic oil production, in almost exactly the same way that it also marked the absolute peak (and subsequent steady decline) of the United States's own overall contribution to global oil supply.³⁴

Baibakov himself meanwhile was again involved in this massive logistical shipping effort, which required substantial deception measures and considerable technological innovation – the need to transport oil in bulk became so pressing that it generated a 'floating railway', involving filled cisterns being towed by steam tugs along shipping lanes in a continuous circuit between Baku and Krasnovodsk. He also personally oversaw, via a new process of more variegated and widely dispersed exploratory drilling, the accelerated opening-up of new oil wells, dubbed the 'Second Baku', further to the east, between the Volga and the Urals, fields which provided critical additional resources to the overall war effort. This latter operation

again involved truly heroic efforts, and considerable human suffering, the workers involved having to live in holes dug in the ground rather than in houses when they initially arrived, with the relevant equipment and personnel also having to be transported en masse from Baku.³⁵ The Second World War therefore both highlighted the geopolitical criticality of the Caucasus as a source of energy, and yet also marked the region's gradual eclipse in that regard, with Grozny by the early 1980s experiencing the same steady decline in returns on investment as Baku. The new fields opened by Baibakov during the war itself by contrast pointed the path to the future, when from the 1960s onwards the vast oil- and gas fields of Siberia would come to replace the central position Grozny and Baku had once occupied in the Stalinist industrial firmament.

War and insurgency: the Nazi subversion campaign

The front in the Caucasus had again more or less stabilized by September along Tiulenev's new defence line, but internal stability in the Soviet rear areas during the same period understandably became of ever greater concern. In the midst of such terrifying developments on the military front, for example, five villages were destroyed in the Cherek valley in Balkaria during November 1942, and up to 1,500 people killed. In one of these villages, Verkhnaia Balkaria, where 310 people were killed, 20.3 per cent of the victims were children aged between one and five years, and another 15.5 per cent were children aged between six and ten. As late as 2001 some Russian historians still attributed all deaths in this area entirely to the Nazis.³⁶ However, the truth was altogether grimmer: in the wake of the murder of several Soviet soldiers in the area by deserters, the 11th NKVD Security Division had been ordered by the headquarters of the 37th Army 'to raze the village of Srednaia Balkaria to the ground'. Shikin, the commander at the time of the NKVD division involved, subsequently congratulated his subordinate with the reassurance that 'the soldiers have performed outstandingly. If you cleanse Srednaia Balkaria of the bastards who betrayed the motherland instead of defending it and became bandits, you will complete a mission of great importance.' Subsequent Soviet investigations identified that the NKVD unit involved had in reality 'killed many innocent civilians who had no contact with the bandits'. In the village of Sautu, later NKVD investigators uncovered the blackened bodies of civilians stacked up to sixty deep in their houses, a consequence of the terrified local residents having stampeded indoors before then being dispatched by hand grenades tossed through the house windows.³⁷

Wartime excesses of this type were a product of the peculiarly fraught and terrifying nature of the struggle in the North Caucasus from the perspective of the Soviet defenders. Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union had almost immediately unleashed a complex parallel panoply of violent and chaotic 'civil wars' within Soviet borders, with the Nazi entry into the Ukraine alone bringing in its wake a host of fellow travellers already familiar to Stalin and the Bolsheviks from 1917–20 – amongst them former Tsarist officers, supporters of Hetman Skoropadskii, and relics of Petliura's army.³⁸ The Nazi regime similarly sought the help of Tatar émigrés to provide it with a political front in the Crimea, whilst in regard to the North

Caucasus, it had already cultivated during the 1930s such prominent surviving political exiles and ex-Ottoman veterans as Gaidar Bammатов and Nuri Pasha.³⁹ The head of the official German intelligence service (*Abwehr*) between 1935 and 1944, Admiral Canaris, had also personally cultivated the advice of university professor and reserve *Oberleutnant* Theodor Oberlander (1905–98), an expert on the Russian Civil War and the peoples of the Caucasus, as well as a prominent future member of two post-war West German coalition governments. Oberlander had studied oriental languages since his youth, and in 1930–34 repeatedly visited the USSR, including Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. In conjunction with an older cadre of German officers who had served in the Georgian Democratic Republic in 1918, Oberlander believed passionately in the advantages of creating a special pro-Nazi elite military unit of Caucasus peoples, subsequently dubbed the 'Bergmann' (mountaineer) battalion, in order to further Hitler's own longer-term war aims there.

In advocating this course, Oberlander himself attributed Denikin's earlier failure in 1918–20 to the Russian general's inability to address the land and nationality questions in the Caucasus, and felt that, for Hitler to succeed where Denikin failed, a critical role could be played by a vanguard battalion of Caucasian natives trained for forward insertion into the future battle-front, in order to help provoke a general uprising against Soviet rule in the region. An enthused Canaris appointed Oberlander commander of the Bergmann special task unit of 1,500 men which came into existence during the autumn of 1941, composed from émigré volunteers and Soviet prisoners of war, and which was then deployed to the Caucasus by the summer of 1942. No fewer than 300 German officers, NCOs and soldiers were selected from the Wehrmacht's elite mountain rifle divisions to help train and lead this unit, which it was anticipated would be parachuted in to seize critical passes along the strategically vital Georgian Military Road.⁴⁰ The battalion was made up of five rifle companies kitted out with German uniforms and equipment: the first company was composed of Georgians and Germans; the second, a mix of North Caucasian nationalities; the third, Azeris and Germans; the fourth, Georgians and Armenians; and the fifth, Georgian émigrés, Germans, and an elite thirty-man section of Armenian mountain troops.⁴¹ In 1941–42 the strategic interest of German intelligence in this field became further formalized with the setting up in Berlin of a North Caucasus Committee for recruiting spies, diversionary agents and soldiers from amongst the ever-growing concentration camps of starving Soviet prisoners.

In parallel with Canaris's efforts, during March 1942, already impressed by the impact of the Soviet partisan movement in causing problems for Axis forces, as well as by preliminary experiments in recruiting pro-German agents from amongst the now-numerous masses of Soviet POWs, SS leader Heinrich Himmler ordered the creation of a special sabotage, intelligence and espionage organization for the eastern front, a programme code-named 'Zeppelin'. Having set up training schools in Berdiansk and Sandberg to inculcate recruits in the art of sabotage, propaganda and radio transmission, with a view to then launching waves of 'mass infiltration' attacks into the Soviet Union, this organization was soon also attempting

to establish semi-formal links with any separatist movements operating in the Soviet rear areas.⁴² On 22 February 1942 there had also begun the formation of the pro-Nazi North Caucasus legions, which ultimately absorbed some 28,000 recruits.⁴³ In Berlin the North Caucasus Committee headed by Akhmed-Nabi Magomaev facilitated all these efforts, incorporating such émigré figures as Alikhan Kantemirov, Barasbi Baitugan and Sultan Kilich-Girei. These émigrés were before long joined by high-profile Soviet defectors, amongst the most prominent of whom was Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov, who went on to edit the committee's two main journals. The key banner line running above both his publications at the time proclaimed that 'Allah is above us, Hitler is with us'.⁴⁴

The Nazi military offensive in the North Caucasus gained at least part of its devastating impact and momentum directly from the extensive use made of just such specially organized diversionary and sabotage units trained by the *Abwehr* and SD (the *Sicherheitsdienst*, the German Security Service). The most significant such 'special task unit', the 'Brandenburg-800' division, of which the Bergmann battalion evolved as a sub-element, comprised a potent mix of German officers and east European troops, and was employed extensively during the summer of 1942 to sow fear and discord across the Soviet rear areas in the Caucasus. First set up in October 1939, with its base and training school near Warsaw, the division as a whole was the brainchild of a German officer, Theodor von Hippel, whose extensive experience in German East Africa during the First World War had persuaded him of the utility of 'professional partisans' to capture or destroy strategic objects deep in an enemy's rear areas. Originally developed only to recruit and deploy linguistically adept Germans as a 'fifth column' in enemy countries, the unit quickly expanded its activities to enlist and train pro-Nazi foreign nationals, and remained in existence in this form until December 1944.⁴⁵

Brandenburg-800 teams played a prominent role in the 1942 fighting in the North Caucasus, being repeatedly deployed at the very forward edge of the German advance. Dressed in Red Army uniforms, thirty Georgians from the second battalion of the Brandenburg-800 division parachuted into the area around Mineral'nye Vody in September 1942, and blew up the railway bridge connecting Mineral'nye Vody and Piatigorsk. In August that same year the sixth company of the same battalion, reinforced by Armenians and Azeris from the Bergmann battalion, and again dressed in Red Army uniforms, had also seized the river bridge at Maikop, and held up the advance of Red Army units until their commander was killed and the entire company captured. The commanders of the 46th Infantry and 76th Caucasus divisions of the Red Army likewise died as a result of terrorist-style attacks conducted by Brandenburg-800 men, whilst Maikop itself fell in part because of a skilful ploy by yet more German diversionary forces. A commando unit of some 62 Baltic and Sudeten Germans, fluent in Russian, and led by the Baltic German Baron Folkersam, infiltrated behind Soviet lines dressed as NKVD troops. During the main German attack on Maikop, Folkersam's men were then able to knock out the main Soviet communications centre with explosives and, by occupying the main telegraph office in the city, quickly capitalized on the subsequent confusion to provoke a retreat by loudly announcing an urgent general evacuation. However, they

were unable to prevent the destruction of the wellheads and oil refinery in the Maikop area, and the German failure to seize these intact played a significant role in slowing down the subsequent general advance. Between January and November 1942 in the North Caucasus, as a result of the threat posed by these units and others like them, the NKVD fought a vicious covert war behind the immediate frontlines against diversionary troops and saboteurs, during which time they subsequently claimed to have 'rendered harmless' no fewer than 170 *Abwehr* agents.⁴⁶

German diversionary activities were destined to be nowhere more controversial subsequently than in Chechnia-Ingushetia. It should be noted that Nazi diversionary units were parachuted in all across the Caucasus throughout 1942–44, with 42 parachutists caught between August and November 1942 in Dagestan alone, 105 enemy parachutists captured in Georgia in 1941–42, and 29 parachutists arrested in Azerbaijan by the end of 1942. From the outbreak until the conclusion of hostilities, in fact, Brandenburg-800 and 'Zeppelin' formations airdropped in over fifty sabotage and diversionary groups across the whole of the North Caucasus and Transcaucasus.⁴⁷ As part of a scheme entitled 'Operation Shamil', however, eight German diversionary units, numbering 77 men in all, were parachuted into the Chechen-Ingush ASSR during the course of the war, in two distinct batches: five groups of 57 men in total during August–September 1942, followed by 20 men in three groups during August 1943. Men from the second company of the *Abwehr*'s Bergmann battalion were withdrawn and retrained for this mission by the 'Zeppelin' organization, and eventually formed a *Sonderkommando* ('special task unit') subdivided into three teams – the first commanded by Lieutenant Reichert, the second by *Oberleutnant* Lange, and the third, a radio section, by NCO Schäffer.⁴⁸ In terms of overall ethnic make-up, the 77 men parachuted in across this period comprised 15 Germans, 3 Kabards, 13 Chechens, 2 Georgians, 21 Ossetians, 16 Ingush, 5 Dagestanis, a single Russian and a Kazakh.⁴⁹ The first groups dropped in August–September 1942 – Shamil-I, Shamil-II and Shamil-III – were dispatched to assist the general German offensive; the second contingent, dropped in August 1943, to hinder the Soviet counter-offensive being launched at that time.

So sensitive was the topic of Nazi–Chechen collaboration associated with this campaign, especially in the light of the deportations that followed, that most Western historians in recent years have continued to barely even mention, never mind examine, the facts.⁵⁰ In particular, it is striking to find a Western text first published as recently as 1998 making the clearly inaccurate assertion that 'German soldiers never set foot in Chechnia.'⁵¹ Western silence over this matter remains counterproductive for historical understanding, however, particularly since acknowledging relatively organized and large-scale Chechen collaboration with agents of German intelligence could scarcely be interpreted as morally justifying the deportation of the whole population that eventually followed, any more than Pearl Harbour justified the subsequent wholly indiscriminate wartime treatment of Japanese nationals in America. Nonetheless it remains a fact that the Germans were unquestionably coordinating their activities with what at the time was a mounting internal insurgency: if in November 1941, for example, the number of identified insurgents in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR did not exceed 5,000, then from the summer of 1942

onwards this figure more than doubled, with 6,540 insurgents recorded in just twenty Chechen *auls* alone by February 1943.⁵²

The three most active groups parachuted into Chechnia-Ingushetia during this period were those led by *Abwehr* Lieutenant Reichert, *Oberleutnant* Lange and 'Colonel' Osman Gubbe. Of all the group leaders, Gubbe was the most prominent native representative – born Osman Saidnurov in 1892, he had served in the Dagestani cavalry regiment of the North Caucasus 'Wild Division' in 1914–17, before going into exile abroad and then being recruited for the *Abwehr* in 1937 by Gaidar Bammатов. He was ordered shortly thereafter to change his name, and his military title was a purely honorary one, granted on the very eve of his flight into Chechnia in order to bolster his prestige in the eyes of the local population. Parachuted in with two Dagestani and two Chechen accomplices on 25 August 1942, and provisioned with explosives, machine pistols, 500 Turkish lira and 50,000 roubles, Gubbe's group landed safely and went into hiding. However, although he managed to make contact with disaffected bureaucrats within the local Chechen party apparatus, as well as with local insurgents such as Khasan Israilov, Gubbe was eventually surrounded and arrested in early January 1943. Whilst his own group had only been able to engage in one successful bridge-blowing operation, his subsequent interrogation notes with his NKVD captors provide an invaluable insight into the German subversion campaign in the Caucasus.⁵³

Altogether more active, successful and fortunate – in relative terms – than Gubbe's group was the much larger contingent associated with *Oberleutnant* Lange. 'Shamil-II', Lange's team of ten Germans and fifteen North Caucasians from the Bergmann battalion who parachuted into the immediate vicinity of Grozny on the night of 25 August, were from the very outset notably better equipped, being the first German diversionary unit provisioned with silenced firearms and night sights, alongside Alpine gear and short-range radios.⁵⁴ Tasked with both linking up with local insurgents, and facilitating the general ground offensive of the German army on Grozny which was then under way, the group attacked and overcame the guards around Grozny oil refinery, losing 60 per cent of their own strength in the process, but receiving aid from local insurgent bands which allowed them to maintain a defensive perimeter until news eventually arrived of the failure of the main German offensive on the town. This information – in combination with the fate of the 'Shamil-I' team under NCO Schäffer, parachuted in at around the same time, but decimated by ground-based machine-gun fire before it even touched the ground – led Lange to mount a tactical retreat. His unit nonetheless gained refuge amongst local Chechen insurgents, and was able to establish contact with Khasan Israilov, the most prominent local insurgent leader. The radio sets of Shamil-II, by transmitting the geographical coordinates of anti-Soviet insurgent groups, also facilitated improved coordination between the German high command and the Chechen insurgent leadership, with the *Luftwaffe* during this period airdropping in around 300 rifles, 5 machine guns, and plentiful supplies of hand grenades and ammunition to Chechen insurgent groups. Lange was eventually able to mount a breakout through the main Soviet–German front line to regain the safety of Axis-occupied territory, bringing with him as future recruits several

hundred deserters from the Red Army, alongside insurgents of Azeri and North Caucasian nationality.⁵⁵

The two most prominent local insurgent leaders on the Chechen side, with whom the Germans at this time attempted to coordinate their efforts, were Khasan Israilov (1903–44) and Mairbek Sheripov. Israilov, a graduate of the Communist University of Workers of the East (KUTV), had been employed in the immediate pre-war period as a legal advocate in Shatoi *raion*; he first underwent arrest in 1935 on charges of political dissidence before then being freed in 1939 after his own persecutors were, in their turn, arrested. In 1940, however, citing the example provided by Finland of a small nation defending its liberty, he formally broke completely with Soviet power, establishing the 'Unified Party of Caucasian Brothers' (OPKB), later renamed the 'National-Socialist Party of Caucasian Brothers' (NSPKB). In February 1940 he and his brother established a guerrilla base in south-eastern Chechnia which came to boast 5,000 armed guerrillas and at least 25,000 sympathizers by the summer of 1941.⁵⁶ Five insurgent strongholds were established, and radio contact set up with the German high command from transmitters hidden in the woods of Shali region.⁵⁷ Israilov's organization set as its self-proclaimed goal the liberation of the North Caucasus from 'Bolshevik barbarism and Russian despotism', via a general mass uprising. Initially planned for the autumn of 1941, the Moscow counter-offensive delayed the timing of Israilov's own insurrection until 10 January 1942.

This particular insurgent movement also benefited further from direct links with covert collaborators within the Chechen-Ingush party apparatus itself. In the wake of what they subsequently uncovered, the NKVD calculated that 24,970 men had been ready to rise up on Israilov's orders. Amongst these alleged collaborators was the very head of the NKVD in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, Albogachiev, alongside the head of the section for combating banditry, Lieutenant-Colonel Aliiev, both of whom were subsequently interrogated. In August 1942, meanwhile, the head of the Staro-Iurtskii section of the NKVD, El'murzaev, together with a co-conspirator and four local militiamen, reportedly seized eight rifles, robbed the local bank, and crossed sides to join the insurgent underground, making contact with German parachute teams in the process.⁵⁸ From 1942 right through to 1945, Israilov's band launched a string of attacks and terrorist atrocities against Soviet institutions in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, shooting up transport columns, and engaging in ongoing skirmishes with local NKVD forces. A high point of tension was reached, however, when it appeared that Israilov's fighters might be about to unite with those of Mairbek Sheripov.

Sheripov, whose political record, as we have seen, was already marked by his fierce disputes with El'darkhanov during the 1920s, finally became a full member of the Communist Party in 1941, only to then break with the authorities in November that same year, declaring that he now foresaw the collapse of Soviet power to be just as inevitable as when his late brother, Aslanbek Sheripov, had foreseen the fall of the Tsar. Sheripov's insurgent organization, like Israilov's, went on to change its title several times, finally morphing into the 'Chechen-Mountaineer National-Socialist Underground Organization' (ChGNSPO). In August 1942

Sheripov's band mounted their single largest attack, surrounding the village of Itum-Kale with an estimated 1,500 fighters and attempting to seize it, an attack which failed with the arrival of Soviet reinforcements who drove them into flight. The NKVD meanwhile skilfully undermined local support for Sheripov by artfully spreading rumours that he was in fact a Soviet double agent, a propaganda coup accomplished by having the wives of arrested members of Sheripov's group learn from meeting their husbands (and then widely propagate the tale) that their arrests had in fact been facilitated by information provided by Sheripov himself. This sequence of reverses culminated in Sheripov's death on 7 November 1942, in the wake of which his entire group was completely eliminated.⁵⁹

Whilst Khasan Israilov's group remained at large, assisted by the contacts it had made with Lange, *Abwehr* Lieutenant Reichert's 'Shamil III' group of around twelve men, parachuted into Chechnia in early October, enjoyed less luck in its alliance with another local insurgent leader, Rasul Sakhobov. Reichert was able to radio in military support to Sakhobov's group of 400–500 men, arranging the airdrop of over 500 rifles, 10 machine guns and ammunition, but their subsequent uprising was repressed by the NKVD, which also utilized the blood feud between Sakhobov and another local insurgent leader, Ramazan Magomadov, to engineer the end of the threat from this direction. Promised amnesty for services rendered, Magomadov apparently killed Sakhobov in October 1943, whilst Reichert also died in a skirmish shortly thereafter, and his two German companions were subsequently arrested. The arrest of *Abwehr* Senior Lieutenant Leonard Chetvergas and the radio operator Hans Schäffer, in yet another elaborate NKVD counter-intelligence operation in December 1943, then marked the final collapse of the security threat posed by German–Chechen collaboration.⁶⁰

This insurgency nonetheless had a very real impact on the actual course of military operations, placing additional pressure on Soviet defenders in the Caucasus at a critical time. As early as October 1942 Tiulenev had noted that banditry in the theatre was a real drain on military resources, with eighteen infantry companies and two reinforced rifle battalions being detached from the front line to counter bandit activity in the rear – an inconvenience then compounded by the need on every military roadway to maintain reinforced garrisons, the arms and equipment of which had to be provided at the expense of the fighting front. With the arrival of 10,000 reinforcements, the number of NKVD troops assigned to combat banditry in the region meanwhile rose to 18,000 by 1943.⁶¹ The final repression of the insurgency in Chechnia–Ingushetia itself over the course of 1943 also absorbed by far the lion's share of NKVD and Red Army resources devoted to this problem. Although between January and 10 October 1943 the Chechen–Ingush ASSR came in third place regionally in terms of the number (57) of anti-bandit operations conducted there (Krasnodar *krai* came in first place with 98 operations, and Georgia second with 79), Chechnia–Ingushetia and Kabardino–Balkaria between them dominated the casualty lists, with 256 dead bandits recorded in Chechnia–Ingushetia and 151 in Kabardino–Balkaria, as against 109 in Krasnodar *krai* and just 30 in Georgia. In terms of the corresponding number of NKVD troops killed during this same period, Chechnia–Ingushetia also came in a close second behind the

Karachai AO, with 45 NKVD men killed there, versus 60 in the Karachai region.⁶² Operations against Khasan Israilov himself continued until December 1944, when, largely abandoned by his followers and now desperately seeking a political amnesty, he was finally hunted down and killed.

Turning the tide: recruitment, repression, deportation

Whilst anti-bandit operations came to the fore in 1943–44, as a consequence of Soviet forces in the Caucasus now advancing and recapturing increasing amounts of territory, the existential threat that the conventional Axis armies posed to the Soviet state by their drive on Baku had, by that stage, also already been largely eliminated. At dawn on 19 November 1942 a massive Soviet artillery barrage by 3,500 guns opened the path for two mechanized columns, totalling 804 tanks and over a million men, to advance in a circular pincer movement around the Nazi besiegers at Stalingrad. By 23 November the two wings of this encirclement had met amidst wild rejoicing in the snow-covered steppe, and some 275,000 German, Italian and Romanian troops suddenly found themselves permanently trapped within an area some 25 miles wide and 31 miles deep. By 1 February 1943, when an exhausted and broken Field Marshal Paulus finally emerged from the rubble of Stalingrad to surrender, the Soviet army had rounded up 91,000 prisoners, the balance of Axis forces contained within this territorial pocket having in the interim either been killed in the fighting, or died from exposure, disease or starvation.

The Stalingrad counter-offensive, an operation dubbed 'Uranus' by its planners, and unleashed in November with such devastating ultimate effect, itself came just a fortnight after the last frantic effort by Axis forces further south to break through to Baku. The increasing manpower strain on local Axis forces by this time was reflected in the running-down of the Nazi subversion campaign in the Caucasus: between October and December 1942 practically all the units of the Brandenburg-800 division were reassigned to front-line tasks, with the Bergmann battalion transferred from *Abwehr* jurisdiction to the army high command, and pressed into service in a normal infantry role supporting conventional operations.⁶³ The natural consequence of this was that pro-Axis Caucasus forces now on occasion occupied trenches directly opposite their pro-Soviet opposite numbers, which led to an intermittent and predictable stream of desertions in both directions.⁶⁴ Having lost 18,700 men and 384 tanks trying to break through along the critical valley approaches to Grozny in September, Axis efforts in the south during October–November 1942 shifted to the Ordzhonikidze–Baku axis of advance, via the weakly defended Nal'chik section of the front. On 1 November a massive German air attack on Ordzhonikidze shattered the Soviet command and control network in the area, killing the Transcaucasus Front's chief of staff, Lieutenant-General P. I. Bodin, in the process. By 11 November, however, this offensive had again ground to a halt amidst stubborn fighting around Soviet block posts, with the aforementioned heavy losses. Army Group A over the whole course of its offensive in the North Caucasus was in fact subsequently calculated to have lost over 100,000 men, and the 1943 campaign season between January and October then came to be dominated

by a succession of Soviet counter-offensives that rolled back the German army and liberated the North Caucasus, killing a further 275,000 Axis troops and destroying 890 tanks in the process.⁶⁵

With the ending of the immediate German conventional threat to the Caucasus, the Soviet regime could then also take stock of the overall performance of local administrations in the region. The course of the war had seen the Soviet command in the Caucasus itself having to fall back as never before on that territory's own manpower reserves, a policy entailing the revival of the pre-1936 policy of forming pure 'national' formations. In 1942, through a combination of conscription and redistribution, eleven rifle divisions were created of predominantly Armenian, Azeri or Georgian nationality, formations characterized at the time as 'national in form and international in spirit'.⁶⁶ All of these formations, however, suffered from continuous problems with training, logistics, officer quality and linguistic barriers, which led them to be predominantly held back from the immediate fighting front as a manpower reserve. When eight new rifle divisions were then mobilized by the Transcaucasus Front in August–September 1942, orders also went out on the basis of this experience to utilize Slav ethnic groups – Ukrainians, Belorussians and Russians – in their composition to the maximum possible extent.⁶⁷ Sheer lack of manpower reserves prevented these instructions from being fully implemented, however, whilst the Transcaucasus divisions, despite their acknowledged weaknesses, also enjoyed high-profile patronage and mentoring. The first party secretary of Azerbaijan, M. Bagirov, took a personal interest in the fate and performance of the Azeri national divisions, whilst in 1942 Beria himself also devoted personal attention to the composition and assignments of the 242nd, 276th and 351st Rifle divisions, each of which contained a large quantity of non-Russian personnel, with the 276th eventually coming to be considered a Georgian division.⁶⁸

Perhaps most troubling throughout, however, had remained the persistent problem of desertion, with 49,362 deserters (not including those who evaded the draft in the first place) recorded as at large across the whole of the North Caucasus during 1941–44.⁶⁹ During the course of 1941–42, desertion became such a concern that a series of top-secret instructions were issued actually calling a halt to recruitment in the North Caucasus altogether, beginning with an order given to the Transcaucasus Front on 19 September 1941 to both cease recruitment and to expel certain nationalities from the ranks.⁷⁰ By March 1942 all serving Chechens and Ingush were recalled to the reserve, and the subsequent July 1942 call-up of the 1924–25 generation came accompanied by explicit secret instructions to exclude from this cadre men of Chechen, Ingush, Kabard, Balkar and Dagestani nationality. These were radical measures in a time of crisis since, had these exclusions on the grounds of nationality not been imposed, the North Caucasus military district alone (not taking into account North Ossetia and Dagestan) would have been officially liable as of 1 February 1942 to render up over 75,000 additional recruits.⁷¹

These unusual instructions reflected the fact that previous call-ups had been actively sabotaged, and that the Soviet authorities feared the reinforcement that waves of armed deserters brought to insurgent groups operating in the region. In addition to local unrest caused by army requisitioning policies and increasing

economic hardships, the State Defence Council also suspected that gross incompetence on the part of several regional administrations was actually worsening the situation. On top of the already-noted criticisms made of Chechnia-Ingushetia, for example, investigations by Beria and his subordinates into Dagestan during September 1942 exposed widespread corruption, man-made famine and bureaucratic incompetence, and led to the removal on 16 September of the Dagestani first secretary, N. I. Linkun.⁷² The most immediate corrective measures taken by the central authorities, against the above-mentioned backdrop of imposing exclusions on further enlistment on the basis of nationality, came in radical steps to try to ease the situation by more effective propaganda, the offering of widespread amnesties to insurgents and deserters who surrendered, and tax cuts paralleled by better targeted economic aid. This overall shift in policy was encapsulated by Beria's reported comment at the time that 'it is not always necessary to use guns to talk with bandits'.⁷³

The nationality bar on recruitment was meanwhile eventually also extended, once the tide of conflict had decisively turned, to the Transcaucasus and Central Asia, with an order of 9 October 1943 barring not only the North Caucasus nationalities from the next call-up, but males of Central Asian, Azeri, Georgian and Armenian nationality as well. This latter directive may well have been generated by wider considerations than simply concerns regarding the loyalty and military capability of the Transcaucasus formations, however – though their uneven quality remained a source of considerable acrimony between General Maslennikov, commander of the Caucasus front's 'Northern Group' of forces (who blamed the failure of his attack against opposing Axis forces in December 1942 on the low combat quality and high rates of desertion amongst his Transcaucasus divisions), and the military soviet of the Transcaucasus Front. Amongst other considerations at play, the proportion of Transcaucasian and Central Asian nationalities in the Soviet armed forces by mid-1943 was in fact coming to considerably exceed their overall proportion within the pre-war population, judged against the 1939 census, making the demographic losses being inflicted on them by this stage verging on the dangerously disproportionate. The manpower resources of the Transcaucasus were therefore nearing a natural tipping point in any event – both verging on physical exhaustion, and experiencing a growing shortage of sufficiently educated cadres – which generated a very different dilemma, for example, from that present in Chechnia-Ingushetia, whose manpower reserves were by contrast never fully exploited because of desertion, language barriers, and doubts over their political loyalty. From a pre-war population of nearly 500,000 the Soviet government, despite persistent efforts throughout the conflict, was only ever able to conscript 17,500 Chechens and Ingush in total, of whom many subsequently deserted.⁷⁴ The Transcaucasus 'national' divisions by contrast continued in existence despite growing manpower exhaustion for the remainder of the war, morale and unit cohesion being steadily improved both by better logistics (which provided the ordinary soldiers with adequate uniforms and warm food on a regular basis) and by more careful political propaganda work within the ranks, guided by new directives from the Red Army's main political directorate after September 1942. Some of these

units – the 416th Azeri or 89th Armenian Rifle divisions, for example – went on to occupy an honoured place in the Soviet military pantheon, even participating in the final battle for Berlin.

The early abandonment of formal recruitment in the North Caucasus, however, was also accompanied by a revived emphasis on voluntary military formations, by which the final loyalty of nationalities in the North Caucasus to the Soviet regime would ultimately come to be judged. The Adygei Cavalry Regiment was a particular success in this regard, as was the 115th Kabardino-Balkar Cavalry Division raised in 1942; the contemporaneous 114th Chechen-Ingush Cavalry Division, however, had to be scaled down to a regiment – the 225th Cavalry Regiment – because of a lack of volunteers and massive desertion, and continued even thereafter to suffer heavily from defections. Both the 115th Cavalry Division and 225th Cavalry Regiment then suffered catastrophic losses during the summer fighting of 1942, which led to both being effectively disbanded by the autumn.⁷⁵ However, the subsequent volunteer campaign for February–March 1943 in Chechnia-Ingushetia and Dagestan in particular appears to have played a key role in the very different fates eventually meted out to both republics.

Despite the Soviet propaganda effort now extending to the mosques and village elders, with the local Islamic clergy now formally encouraging volunteers, the 1943 recruitment campaign in Chechnia-Ingushetia bore disappointing results. This was all the more damaging since, despite the 'voluntary' rhetoric behind this effort, there was also a clear quota to fulfil, with the Chechen-Ingush ASSR being tasked to provide 3,000 men for the 30th Cavalry Division. On the back of disappointing initial results, rougher administrative measures (hostage-taking, armed round-ups) quickly came into play, but the Chechen-Ingush ASSR still ended up only managing to dispatch 1,850 men to the 112th Reserve Rifle Regiment and 30th Cavalry Division.⁷⁶ Dagestan by contrast was able to demonstrate far more impressive results, with 8,255 volunteers recorded by mid-March 1943, the majority of them young, and over 3,000 of whom spoke Russian. The new leadership duo in Dagestan of First Secretary A. Aliev and his deputy, A. Daniialov, therefore passed the test set by Moscow, with the chairman of North Ossetia during the war, K. D. Kulov, later recording that when Beria had returned to visit the North Caucasus in 1944, he singled out the Ossetians and Dagestanis for particular praise as truly active participants in the war effort.⁷⁷

If Dagestan therefore largely escaped the fate that was now about to befall the Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachai, Crimean Tatars and Kalmyks, ambiguity nevertheless continues to exist regarding the exact rationale for the deportations that followed, and as to whether the fate of Chechnia-Ingushetia by mid-1943 had in reality already been decided. A meeting of the Politburo on 11 February 1943 had apparently already resolved upon dissolving the Chechen-Ingush ASSR altogether, with Molotov, Zhdanov, Voznesenskii and Andreev in favour of its immediate dissolution, and Khrushchev, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Kalinin and Beria in favour of merely postponing such an action until the Germans had been decisively repulsed, with only Mikoian voicing concern regarding the possible international repercussions.⁷⁸ Though follow-up documents regarding this issue do not appear

so far to have entered the public record, 96,073 NKVD troops were assigned to carry out the Chechen and Ingush deportation, of whom 41 per cent were already located in the Caucasus, and Beria had begun to locally concentrate the remainder, some 37,125 personnel (of whom around half had already gained relevant experience from managing the deportation of the Karachai and Volga Germans), in December 1943.⁷⁹ The punitive campaign then mounted in the North Caucasus as a whole would culminate by February–March 1944 in the deportation of 708,866 individuals to the Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz SSRs – amongst them some 496,460 Chechens and Ingush, 69,267 Karachai, and 37,714 Balkars.

The officially announced explanation for the deportations emphasized these nationalities' poor contribution to the overall war effort, and widespread instances of banditry and collaborationism. Taken in the round, such accusations were also not necessarily completely without foundation – the North Caucasus in 1941–43, according to the statistics of the NKVD's own unit for combating banditry, accounted for 32.5 per cent of the overall number of individuals liquidated in the course of anti-bandit operations conducted union-wide during those years.⁸⁰ However, it is also clear that the individual scale of banditry, collaborationism and criminality within the national groups concerned varied widely, that accusations of banditry and collaborationism inevitably did not tell the whole story regarding even those republics where this constituted a real and undeniable problem, and therefore that considerations wider than pure banditry alone also came into play when selecting those groups ultimately targeted for deportation as against those who were not.

To begin to break down the sources of causation behind what followed, the Karachai, amongst the first groups to be deported, in October 1943, probably exhibited banditry and collaborationism on a scale equal to Chechnia-Ingushetia in relative terms, whereas by contrast the Kalmyks – the next group to be deported wholesale, in December–January 1943–44 – represented the other extreme of the spectrum, instances of banditry and collaborationism amongst them appearing in general to have been grossly exaggerated. In the Kalmyk republic, banditry had remained a low-level phenomenon, with just 64 guerrillas killed during the course of the entire conflict, 381 arrested, and 341 amnestied. The conscription of Kalmyks had also borne far more impressive results during the course of the war in proportional terms than it had, for example, in Chechnia-Ingushetia – some 23,000 soldiers had been drafted into the Red Army from the Kalmyk republic by 1943.⁸¹

The Stavropol *krai*, of which the Karachai AO was an intrinsic part, was by contrast more like Chechnia-Ingushetia, in being far more troubled by desertion, and had also been targeted by the German subversion campaign to almost the same degree. Even at the very start of the war the NKVD had been fighting 12 local bandit groups, and subsequently became aware of hostile measures by 302 enemy parachutists, of whom around 200 were of Karachai nationality. Unlike Chechnia-Ingushetia, the *krai* was also actually overrun, and the Germans during their occupation of the Karachai AO between August 1942 and January 1943 managed to establish a Karachai National Committee (KNK) which set about raising pro-Axis forces and disassembling Soviet collective farms and infrastructure.⁸² The situation within the wider Stavropol *krai* also remained tense, and by April 1943, when

the whole territory was again under Soviet control, the NKVD resolved to deport from the Karachai AO 'the families of band-leaders and active bandits', the planning of which produced an initial target figure of 673 persons, later reduced by voluntary surrenders and amnesties to 472.⁸³ Re-establishing order in the territory continued to prove difficult, however, and order 115–136 of the Supreme Soviet on 12 October 1943 then announced that the whole Karachai population was to be deported from its homeland to the Kazakh and Kyrgyz SSRs, as punishment for the fact that

many Karachai during the German occupation conducted themselves in a traitorous manner, many participated in German detachments to combat Soviet power, betrayed to the Germans honourable Soviet citizens, accompanied and acted as guides for German forces and, after the expulsion of the occupiers, opposed the Soviet authorities, and concealed and abetted enemies of the state and German agents.⁸⁴

This pronouncement served as the justification for the deportation in November 1943 of 69,267 people in conditions of the utmost deprivation, without sufficient food or medical precautions. In April 1945 the total number of relocated Karachai in Central Asia was subsequently calculated at 62,529 persons, which bears eloquent testimony to the intervening attrition rate during transportation and resettlement amongst the very young and very old.⁸⁵ Anti-bandit operations against deserters and German-backed insurgents in Karachai itself meanwhile continued even in the wake of the deportation, with 362 enemy parachutists airdropped into that territory at the start of 1944.⁸⁶

Banditry and collaborationism in Karachai, as in Chechnia-Ingushetia, neither represented the whole story, nor morally justified the brutality of the deportations that followed. Whilst political banditry certainly existed as a genuine problem, Karachai citizens during the war had also worked to erect defensive fortifications in their territory, raised money to support both an air fighter wing and a volunteer cavalry unit, and also served in the armed forces – amongst those deported were eventually included, during 1944, some 2,543 Karachai who up until then had been serving in the ranks of the Red Army.⁸⁷ In Chechnia-Ingushetia the picture was likewise much less black and white: over 5,000 members of the local Communist Party apparatus departed for the fighting front when war broke out, and two multinational divisions (the 242nd Mountain Rifle and 317th Rifle divisions, composed of Russians, Chechens, Ingush, Ukrainians and Georgians, amongst others) were formed in 1942 and saw repeated action, with the 317th participating in both the battle for Berlin and the defeat of the Kwantung Army in Manchuria. Over 6,000 Chechens and Ingush also served in the 17,000-strong 'people's militia' formed after 14 July 1941, and during 1941–42 the republic had also furnished the war effort with, amongst other goods, 41,643 kilograms of meat, 8,319 kilograms of fish, 2,914 kilograms of cheese, and 17,819 litres of milk, with Red Army soldiers receiving during this same period collective aid parcels from the republic worth 807,750 roubles in total.⁸⁸ If weaker than in other regions, the support provided to

the Soviet war effort by Chechnia-Ingushetia and by other regions subsequently targeted by the 1943–44 NKVD deportation campaigns was nonetheless real, and serves to counterbalance the picture one might otherwise draw of territories wholly dominated by banditry and desertion.

More determinative therefore of the fate shared by the Chechens, Ingush, Karachai and Balkars than the simple fact of banditry alone appears to have been the relative performance of the local Communist Party apparatuses in each region. In this regard, the resolution to punish Chechnia-Ingushetia, for example, appears to have been prompted less by the 4,792 actual cases of individuals captured or executed for bandit or insurgent-related activities during the war, and more as a consequence of NKVD reports regarding the unreliability of the local party cadres, and of the readiness of a reported 24,970 armed sympathizers and covert supporters to back men such as Khasan Israilov. Doubts regarding the local party apparatus were planted by investigations launched during the war into the performance and behaviour of the head of the Chechen-Ingush NKVD, Albogachiev, who stood accused of entering into correspondence with Israilov and of having relatives amongst the insurgents; Beria had Albogachiev recalled to the reserve in September 1943. Equally troubling would have been the interrogation notes of Osman Gubbe, who remarked that he had found willing collaborators amongst the Chechens and Ingush 'without difficulty'.⁸⁹ The whole Chechen and Ingush population was therefore exposed to collective punishment less for *actually* recorded crimes, than for the suspicion that sympathy for local insurgents was widespread, that problems with conscription and desertion reflected an endemic lack of Soviet patriotism, and that the local party apparatus was inefficient, infiltrated by potential traitors, and wholly unreliable.

Though never explicitly articulated as a reason for the subsequent deportations, this consideration acquires even greater implicit weight if one compares Chechnia-Ingushetia with Dagestan, where the problem of banditry in general was arguably just as serious, but where the local leadership was reorganized during the war, and was able thereafter to demonstrate loyalty and efficiency during 1943 by providing volunteers for the war effort. Dagestan had a far more creditable ultimate fighting record than Chechnia-Ingushetia, with over 180,000 Dagestanis eventually conscripted or volunteering from a 1939 census population of 930,416 (nearly 20 per cent of the overall population, compared to around 4 per cent of Chechens and Ingush). However, Dagestan's record on internal stability at the start of the war had also been poor: NKVD data estimated that 4,000 'bandits' were active there during August–November 1942 alone, whilst 190 bandits were also killed there between July 1941 and 20 September 1942, 543 persons were arrested for bandit-related activities during that same period, 3,935 declared criminals were amnestied, and 1,625 draft-dodgers or deserters were arrested.⁹⁰ What therefore appears to have spared Dagestan from Chechnia-Ingushetia's fate was wartime change in the local political apparatus, an overall more successful conscription record (combined with the aforementioned response to the 1943 volunteer drive), and the fact that banditry itself was also visibly and decisively driven into decline by more effective and locally directed security and propaganda measures across the course of 1943.

On 23 February 1944, meanwhile, the secret plans drawn up by one of Beria's subordinates to deport the Chechens and Ingush were finally put into effect, with the local Communist Party apparatus, the most prominent and respected local Islamic clergy, and 6,000–7,000 Dagestani and 3,000 North Ossetian citizens co-opted to help maintain calm locally and reduce sources of resistance. Difficulties during the execution of the operation were experienced mainly in remoter mountain regions cut off by snow, with reports lodged at the time, and never fully corroborated since, of Chekist excesses in wiping out isolated villages. By 28 February, however, the operation was largely complete, with some 493,269 Chechen and Ingush civilians crammed onto unheated, insanitary and overcrowded train wagons, where typhus, dehydration and malnutrition then wreaked further havoc during their subsequent transportation to Central Asia. As had happened with the Karachai, in their wake followed Chechens and Ingush from neighbouring republics, captured bandits, the inmates of local prisons, and representatives of these nationalities demobilized from the ranks of the Red Army. With fatalities en route during the deportation of the Chechens, Ingush, Karachai and Balkars between 1943 and 1949 later collectively calculated at 184,556 souls, the mortality rate amongst the Chechen and Ingush 'special settlers' would appear to have been particularly severe, running at first at an even higher rate in relative terms than amongst the Karachai or Balkars; only 405,900 Chechens and Ingush were still registered on the 'special settlement' records kept by the NKVD in Central Asia as of October 1945.⁹¹

The deportation of the Balkars meanwhile sat at a causation point somewhere between the three cases outlined above, bearing some comparison to that of the Kalmyks in terms of its overarching injustice, even measured against the criteria of the time, whilst other aspects of their particular case also underlined the under-performance of local party organizations as a significant unspoken additional consideration. Military performance was initially better than in Chechnia-Ingushetia or the Karachai AO, with the 115th Kabardino-Balkar Cavalry Division a successfully formed and fully equipped volunteer unit, whilst over 12,000 soldiers from Kabardino-Balkaria were ultimately to be awarded medals of various kinds for their part in combating the fascist aggressors, and seven Balkars in particular went on to become Heroes of the Soviet Union.⁹² Desertion as well had only become a significant issue during the retreat of the Red Army during June–September 1942, and though five *raions* of the republic were then occupied by Axis forces between August 1942 and January 1943, and banditry thereafter became a significant problem (with 44 groups, comprising 941 persons, on the NKVD's operational lists by May 1943), the scale of banditry prior to the German occupation had also been considerably lower, with just 9 groups, totalling 286 persons in all, recorded before August 1942. The approach of the German army, however, had provoked desertions within the local party organization on a scale comparable with Chechnia-Ingushetia, with 46 party workers in the Chechenskii, Cherek and El'brus *raions* alone defecting to join insurgent bands.

Restoring order in reoccupied territory also subsequently proved almost as difficult as in Karachai: 188 terrorists were amnestied, 60 arrested, and 20 killed, but 800 insurgents still remained at large by mid-1943, with some groups still led by

diversionary agents trained by German intelligence, whilst local NKVD workers then also came under suspicion as unreliable, much as Albogachiev had done in Chechnia-Ingushetia. The problem was then further complicated by a fresh wave of ten German parachute groups, totalling 74 men in all, being airdropped in between 4 June and 3 August 1944. Between 18 and 25 June 1944, NKVD operations managed to arrest 42 insurgents and 11 enemy parachutists, as well as confiscate 116 weapons and 4,506 rounds of ammunition, but the situation remained highly tense and unstable, even though by this stage the majority of Balkars had already suffered deportation. The whole nation had already been blamed by Beria in a note to Stalin on 25 February 1944 for collaborating on a widespread scale with the fascists, as well as for conspiring with Karachai insurgents; Beria noted that 1,227 people had already been arrested, of whom 186 persons were local Communists or *komsomoltsy*, and that 362 people had also fled with the German army during its retreat. For this reason he proposed that, with the imminent completion of the Chechen-Ingush deportation, it would therefore be 'expedient' to use the local NKVD and army forces already concentrated on hand, as well as the same logistic arrangements, to conduct a follow-up deportation of the Balkars.⁹³

Discussion regarding the deportation of the Balkars in general certainly appears to have occurred on a much later basis than with the Karachai, Chechens, or Ingush, with the issue only first being raised within the State Defence Council in January 1944, and only finally approved after Beria's follow-up reports on 26 February. When Beria arrived in the region in late February to oversee and report on the deportation of the Chechens and Ingush, he then informed local party workers of a further, entirely novel, geographical reason for deporting the Balkars – that this would facilitate transferring Mount El'brus to Georgia, the latter republic now apparently being judged to deserve, in the light of recent wartime experience, a new defensive frontier on the northern side of the main Caucasus mountain range.⁹⁴ On 8 March 1944 the deportation operation began in the same conditions of haste, overcrowding and brutality as experienced in Chechnia-Ingushetia, with Beria reporting by 11 March that 37,107 Balkars had been successfully deported in fourteen echelons by rail eastwards to the Kazakh and Kyrgyz SSRs. Of the 37,714 Balkars eventually reported to be in transit by 14 March 1944, followed by around 340 individuals subsequently rounded up between 1945 and 1948, only 33,100 were recorded as still serving in the NKVD's special settlements as of October 1945, with this figure declining further, as deaths continued to outnumber births, to 32,645 by the end of the 1940s.⁹⁵

The deportation of whole nationalities from the North Caucasus in 1943–44 was undoubtedly brutal, but it was also, alas, a far from isolated occurrence during this period. Whilst to some degree marking the natural culmination of pre-war Soviet campaigns against the Terek Cossacks, Iranians, Greeks, or Koreans in the Far East, deportation and ethnic cleansing by 1945 were also becoming a contemporary pan-European trend, and one increasingly accepted in Allied eyes to help entrench the immediate post-war order: Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt all took the Greek-Turkish Lausanne treaty of 1923 as a viable model for the ethnic reshaping of post-war Eastern Europe.⁹⁶ Whilst the deportations of the Chechens, Ingush,

Balkars, Crimean Tatars, Karachai and others unquestionably represented the height of amoral arbitrariness, and were accompanied by mass suffering through neglect, they were also not a deliberate genocide – in terms of being a consciously planned, complete physical extermination – in the manner that the Nazi death camps were. They moreover possessed the relative merit of at least being very deliberately organized and centrally directed, even if minimally resourced. Whilst those who experienced it would justifiably question the benefit to this, the millions of Germans who experienced a disorganized and near-spontaneous ethnic cleansing from Eastern Europe during the closing years of the war would have been able to comment on the difference. At least 700,000–800,000 Germans were ruthlessly cleansed from Poland, and the same number from Czechoslovakia, in the immediate prelude to the Potsdam conference that began in July 1945. Half a million Germans probably died as a consequence of the deportations from Poland; at least twice as many died there as a result of ethnic cleansing, whilst tens of thousands also died during the deportations from Czechoslovakia. In contrast to Soviet policy towards the North Caucasus, ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe often took on a spontaneous, decentralized character, and bore many of the characteristics of simple revenge against perceived traitors and racial enemies, with the accompanying excesses of mass rapes, beatings, arson, murder, and mass suicides. According to Czech statistics, some 5,558 Germans committed suicide there in 1946 alone.

In a not uncharacteristic individual example of this process, some 30,000 Germans were forced out of their homes in Brno in Czechoslovakia on 30 May 1945, and were then made to undertake on foot a massive 'death march' to the Austrian border, during the course of which around 1,700 of their number died from beatings and exhaustion.⁹⁷ Great sadism, alongside the twin killers of disease and malnutrition, were also evident in the labour camps for Germans set up by the Czech and Polish authorities, which left the local German population in the unusual position of turning to the Red Army as its only guardian against brutal torture, depredation and murder. Hungarians in Czechoslovakia were placed in a similar position, with the Czechoslovak authorities continuing to expel Hungarian nationals until they were explicitly ordered to stop doing so by Soviet commanders.⁹⁸ In the wake of what had begun as a largely informal campaign, German cultural artefacts and historical legacies were then formally and consciously wiped from the map of post-war Poland and Czechoslovakia no less thoroughly than Chechen, Ingush or Tatar cemeteries and monuments were obliterated in the post-war Soviet North Caucasus. The inherently savage nature of the conflict had produced a thirst for ethnocentric 'total solutions' amongst all the participants of the Second World War, and if Stalin's crimes in this regard were both brutal and unforgivable, they were also sadly far from unique, or even the worst examples of their type.

11 The final structural crisis of the Soviet state, 1953–91

The high tide of the command economy

Twentieth-century Soviet Communism proved a relatively effective political system for fighting high-tempo industrial warfare or for rebuilding a physically shattered state, but for complex reasons largely related to changes in the wider global economy, it proved steadily less effective at increasing group prosperity under prolonged peacetime conditions. Here the long shadow of the Second World War cannot be ignored: the wiping out of over a decade's worth of industrial investment, combined with the demographic blow inflicted by the demise of 28 million Soviet citizens (with an accompanying estimated shortfall in births of 11 million) carried painful longer-term consequences, which arguably did not become fully apparent until the 1980s. Having against tremendous odds nonetheless succeeded spectacularly in the immediate post-war years in again providing full employment, modern housing, raised living standards and universal general health care, Marxism-Leninism then found it lacked the critical levers of pressure available to capitalism (state-sector lay-offs, reduced social welfare spending, internal competition and corporate takeovers) on the scale increasingly required to ensure competitiveness within a more and more globally structured peacetime consumer economy.

The limitations of the existing command economy had already become evident during the 1930s. As we now know, Lavrentii Beria in the interim after Stalin's death in 1953 had already come forward with plans to liberalize the regime, advocating greater lateral freedom of movement in economic decision making, whilst releasing thousands of political prisoners in the process. His execution shortly thereafter during internal Politburo power struggles curtailed this debate, but others within their own thinking continued to identify the need for serious and sustained structural reform. The zigzagging of the official policy line between repression and liberalization and between regionalization and centralization which had characterized early Soviet rule during the 1920s, whilst temporarily stilled by the onset of Stalin's dictatorship, therefore gently resumed again after his death. Under Gorbachev in the 1980s the pendulum of reform would ultimately again swing violently once more, though this time in a manner that ultimately destroyed the state rather than consolidated it. At first, however, more gradual reform continued to look genuinely viable, but such a course was neither consistently supported, nor delegated to the people best qualified to implement it.

In 1966 the Andrei Kosygin-instituted Commission for Economizing State Resources identified enormous areas of wastage and inefficiency within the existing system of Soviet economic planning. From as early as 1964, Prime Minister Kosygin himself had supported the principle of plurality in property and means of management, arguing with Brezhnev over this (as well as many other) matters. Having historically employed a mixed economy during the 1920s, and only adopted the state-dominated command-economy model following the global crisis of capitalism after 1929, the Soviet Union certainly had no obvious reason during the 1960s not to regain a degree of economic dynamism by re-invoking that earlier model. Returning to a system Lenin himself had approved would hardly have constituted ideological treason, and might even have been sold to the remaining diehard Stalinists in government (of whom there were then admittedly still very many) as a dialectical 'temporary retreat'. Yet this famously did not occur, at least in part because the ministerial bureaucracy was by now too entrenched to allow it. Kosygin's 1965 innovation of introducing performance-linked wages and financial incentives for better-quality output within individual small- and medium-scale enterprises yielded promising results in terms of real growth, and consumer goods overtook the production of capital goods for the first time in Soviet history during 1966–70. The clarity and effectiveness of Kosygin's analysis and proposed solutions were also to win the grudging admiration, decades later, from even the most extreme of Russia's free-market reformers.¹ Yet the experiment was nonetheless quickly stifled at the time by the existing bureaucracy, in parallel with Kosygin's own slow personal political eclipse during the 1970s.

In accordance with conventional Soviet economic orthodoxy, consumer prices therefore continued to be unrelated to the actual costs of production, being set centrally instead for five-year periods, albeit now by increasingly employing extraordinarily sophisticated computerized mathematical modelling. Baibakov, Stalin's energy specialist and economic point man in the North Caucasus during the Second World War, having personally benefited from Brezhnev's rise by being reappointed head of Gosplan, now began to note the emergence by the early 1970s of disturbing imbalances within the Soviet economy, not least over the efficient distribution of resources. By 1975 these financial imbalances, having increased in the agricultural sector in particular in the wake of three near-successive droughts, led Gosplan to warn the Politburo that state expenditures were now outstripping real resources – an alarm bell which nonetheless appears to have been comprehensively ignored at the time.² The repression of perceived heresy meanwhile found its clearest expression not within the Soviet Union itself, but in the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, in the wake of the so-called 'Prague Spring'.

In Czechoslovakia Professor Ota Šik, one of Alexander Dubček's most prominent policy advisers on economic liberalization, and a firm advocate of relaxing price controls and promoting private enterprise, had himself been profoundly influenced by the writings of one of Kosygin's key reform advisers, the Soviet economist Evsei Liberman. However, Šik's dismissal and complete exile from Czechoslovakia also constituted one of the key policy objectives of the subsequent Soviet intervention to restabilize the state.³ Thus the irony remained that,

for a supposedly 'totalitarian' system able to impose its will on the population at a whim, the Soviet regime after Stalin's death also proved remarkably indecisive in implementing coherent unilateral reforms, with the policy-forming process remaining hostage instead to a host of competing interest groups.

A significant new factor creating this stasis was the steady bureaucratization of the whole state apparatus, a new generation of managers having grown up in the post-war years increasingly confident in their abilities, and no longer threatened by the sweeping purges that had characterized the Stalin era. Given that the tragedy of the Soviet experiment was that its radical developmental goals continuously ran roughshod over its own democratic and egalitarian political ideals, this was perhaps a predictable outcome. Intra-party democracy had been relentlessly crushed by Stalin in the 1930s, with the dictator repeatedly ranting that the Politburo or local party organizations were threatening to descend into mere 'parliaments', 'discussion clubs' or 'talking shops', heresies which supposedly hindered the hard decision making required to implement the industrialization programme.⁴ After the massive psychological and physical damage inflicted by the purges of the mid-1930s, very few remained alive who either remembered, or were brave enough to attempt to revive, the earlier Leninist tradition of developing policy by a negotiated process of discussion and open debate: the personal behaviour of the Politburo upon Stalin's death, for example, illustrated vividly in microcosm the complete absence of a legal, normalized framework to manage the succession process, a problem that would continue to dog the party until its political eclipse in the 1980s.

Without the dynamism and opportunities for *managerial* talent generated artificially by such sweeping purges, meanwhile, and with pensions under-resourced by the state, the administrative elites now also stagnated as a consequence of existing office-holders clinging on to power. The new *nomenklatura* class at the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy coalesced into an immensely powerful self-perpetuating elite, effectively emasculating the supposed primacy of the Communist Party itself – a phenomenon Moshe Lewin has aptly described as leading not to a 'one-party' state, but rather a 'non-party' state. This bureaucratic 'superstructure suspended in the air', first constructed at such immense social cost and effort during the late 1920s and early 1930s, now attained massive proportions, but also remained an increasingly self-perpetuating, inefficient, apolitical (in some ways even parasitic) and remarkably rootless leviathan.⁵

This phenomenon was ironically most clearly reflected on the political plane by the explosion in party membership. Both Lenin and Stalin had been justifiably wary of the political implications of unconstrained expansion for a party intended to represent an ideologically engaged 'revolutionary vanguard', one truly committed, via the unquestioning fulfilment of centrally assigned 'social combat tasks', to steering and managing the ship of state effectively.⁶ Both men had accordingly sought in their own way to regularly purge the party ranks of careerists and undesirables. Under Brezhnev after 1964 however, such well-founded fears became forgotten amidst the luxury of prolonged peacetime development and bureaucratic cronyism, and by 1988 the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had swollen to more than 19 million members across the country, a full 8 per cent of the population. Such

massive physical expansion was not a sign of ideological health, however; the 'vanguard party' had instead degenerated into a mere political machine for the redistribution of power and resources.⁷ Such expansion was also particularly corrosive in terms of political corruption since, in legal terms, the Communist Party also remained above the law, as it continued to be at the discretion of the party itself whether to investigate and prosecute (or not) economic malfeasance by its members.

Spectacular economic and social achievements after 1953 in general undoubtedly bred a degree of complacency that facilitated this later process of neglect and ideological decay. The aforementioned bureaucratic stagnation was very far from becoming immediately obvious, and the 1950s themselves constituted the 'golden decade' of the Soviet command economy. Overall economic growth was amongst the strongest in the world, whilst infant mortality rates fell dramatically as health care both spread and improved, and urbanization became a norm for the majority of the population for the first time, even as the Soviet Union also sent both the first man and the first woman into space. Under the skilful guidance of a generation of accomplished pre-war economic planners, who had first come to full maturity under Stalin, the massive advances made in that decade under Communism both paralleled and easily equalled West Germany's capitalist 'economic miracle' during the same period.⁸ These very successes, however, also meant that the Soviet Union domestically went on to face a new and wholly unexpected series of more complex social and economic challenges, for which the next generation of more cowed and cautious economic managers struggled to find effective answers.

From the 1960s onwards, the consequences of not having conducted deeper and more thorough structural and economic reforms became ever more evident, as very steep Khrushchev-era economic growth veered sharply into Brezhnev-era stagnation. As Victor Zaslavsky, looking back from the 1990s, acutely analysed the position:

Having fostered a specific type of state-dependent worker as its major social base, the Soviet system created its own 'grave-diggers' – huge masses of people who loathed competition and craved stability, who were hostile to innovation or productive work...Resistance to change and a general lack of the innovative spirit characterized behaviour on all levels in the Soviet social system.⁹

During the 1970s, average consumer living standards within the Soviet Union first flatlined at levels already achieved by most Western economies during the 1920s, and then slowly stagnated across a number of sectors as both raw materials and cheap mobile labour (a victim of more general demographic decline) came to be in steadily shorter supply. Both factors meant that the 'storming campaigns' first mounted during the 1920s and 1930s to radically transform the state now no longer constituted the effective administrative levers they might once have been – even had growing levels of political apathy not also served as an additional brake upon increasing productivity. The Stalinist Stakhanovite model of rapid economic development, based upon the massive exploitation of labour, capital and natural resources, had now exhausted itself. With the Soviet Union facing the need to shift

in macroeconomic terms from an 'extensive' to an 'intensive' model of development, the spectre of growing technological backwardness now also suddenly loomed alarmingly on the horizon once more. Heavy military spending had meanwhile distorted the consumer economy, with none of the spin-off side benefits, or 'military Keynesianism' that occurred within its American counterpart. Instead, 'guns or butter' trade-offs to acquire some of the most sophisticated military platforms in the world meant that Soviet consumers suffered from chronic shortages of such basic items as toothpaste, toilet paper and light bulbs, and endured poor-quality cars, frequently shoddy furniture, and heavy and defective refrigerators.

The broader and more complex challenge facing Soviet economic planning then also became truly critical as, from the 1960s onwards, the advanced global economy also moved remorselessly and universally onward from an industrial towards a post-industrial age. The very consumer items which the Soviet economy struggled to produce competitively became one of the major motors behind global economic growth, whilst the traditional mass-production and energy-intensive heavy industrial sectors – car manufacturing, coal, iron, concrete and steel production – came to be hollowed out by devastating cutbacks and bankruptcies during the West's own oil-shock-related 'restructuring' in the 1970s and early 1980s. This global shift within the heavy industrial sector soon left as burnt-out shells such formerly famous Henry Ford-era single-sector industrial centres as Detroit, Sheffield, Pittsburgh, Manchester and Leeds, whose massive monolithic production lines suddenly fell silent, victims of their own inbuilt inflexibility. The Soviet Union during the 1970s meanwhile was catching up with, and in some areas beginning to surpass, the United States in the production of coal, steel, pig iron, cement and oil, yet the biggest areas of global economic growth, as a consequence of these wider patterns outside the Soviet heartland, increasingly lay in electronics, advanced communications technology, silicon and specialized chemicals.¹⁰

An increasingly globalized electronic and print media exposed this widening developmental gap to an ever greater degree, a factor that became further reflected in a stark change in generational viewpoints. The interwar years had produced a generation sincerely committed to the Communist system, aware of its excesses, but with complete faith in its ultimate benevolence. Abdurakhman Daniialov, the first party secretary of Dagestan from 1948 onwards, would later poignantly recall the terrible spring of 1921, when all three children in his family, orphaned and on the verge of complete starvation, had been saved only by the opening of a Soviet nursery in a nearby village.¹¹ The brilliant oil engineer and post-war state planning head Nikolai Baibakov likewise recalled in his memoirs his schooldays during the 1920s with deep retrospective nostalgia, as an era where 'Russians, Armenians and Azeris sat together as one family, completely oblivious to the so-called "national question"'.¹² This faith and zeal in socialism failed to carry across to the next, rather more privileged, generation; a clear cultural generation gap instead emerged as early as the 1960s, as one Soviet journalist at the time bitterly noted:

Our youth is alienated. They want to think over their problems without consulting us. They are introverts compared to us. We were extrovert. We started

with the Spanish Civil War and we had the war against Hitler. We knew which side we were on. This generation acts as if ideology were irrelevant. They have not had any catalysis. They are not engaged. They are not committed.¹³

Soviet economic planning during the 1970s attempted to parry growing consumer discontent with cheap internal long-distance air travel and higher wages, alongside heavily subsidized oil, gas and electricity. As a policy decision, this was made possible at the time by the high global oil prices generated by the 1973 oil shock, and the consequent increased external income derived by the Soviet economy from oil sales. After 1986, however, when Saudi Arabia, in response to tensions within OPEC, flooded the global oil market with 5 million barrels per day, causing world oil prices to collapse (and contributing, eventually, to a parallel crash in the Iraqi economy that, by 1990, had provoked Saddam Hussein to invade neighbouring Kuwait in a doomed bid to settle his war debts), the lack of sustainability in such an approach became apparent. The oil price crash, which led the global market price to bottom out at \$10–20 a barrel between 1986 and 1990 (a 70 per cent drop from where the market was before), inflicted fixed income losses on the Soviet economy of approximately \$20 billion a year. With Gorbachev by this time already spending far greater sums in practice than many of his predecessors had done, ironically in a drive to jump-start the economy and simultaneously render it more efficient, the increasingly fragile economic balance was at last broken, with expenditure now radically outstripping government revenues almost overnight. Soviet finances suddenly staggered into a period of sharp inflationary crisis, during which time external debt shot up alarmingly from zero to \$120 billion.¹⁴ The East European satellites (where living standards were still higher than in the Soviet Union itself), most notably Poland, had themselves meanwhile already engaged during the 1970s in a reckless spending spree on foreign technology and consumer goods, which racked up a considerable burden of debt within the international banking system when interest rates eventually rose again. Polish foreign debt by 1980 stood at \$23 billion, and the increasingly inescapable dilemma of whether to continue heavily subsidizing basic products, or alternatively unilaterally raise all prices to more realistic levels, directly triggered the internal crisis that then followed in that country.

The last years of the Soviet Union meanwhile also saw men from the Caucasus once again rise to dominate the national political stage, in a manner that had not occurred since the time of Stalin and Kirov. Khrushchev was a Russian peasant born near the border with the Ukraine, and his wholly arbitrary gift of the Crimea to the Ukraine in 1954 remains amongst the most controversial of his political legacies today. Rumours have also long circulated that Brezhnev himself was born an ethnic Ukrainian, albeit one who had very rapidly become strongly Russified. But Andropov and Gorbachev were both men of the Caucasus – natives of Stavropol province, home to the pre-war gymnasium from which so many of the mountaineer intellectuals of the earlier revolutionary period had first sprung. When Andropov, the son of a Don Cossack who had grown up in the Terek region, had earlier (whilst still head of the KGB) visited Gorbachev in Stavropol, both men would

allegedly engage in good-natured singing competitions to see who could recall the greater number of local Cossack songs.¹⁵ The two men by all accounts enjoyed a good personal relationship, though Andropov shortly before he died reportedly still harboured reservations regarding Gorbachev's political maturity – concerns which later proved well founded.¹⁶ Gorbachev nonetheless began his career within central government very much as Andropov's protégé. It was a deep irony of history that the death-pangs of the Soviet Union would be ultimately presided over (excluding the already-decrepit Chernenko) by men from the same region that had already played such a critical role in its initial birth.

Following his rise to power in 1985, Gorbachev famously attempted by a policy of *glasnost* ('openness') to expose local corruption and reinvigorate the whole socialist system from within, but this only stoked ethnic and nationalist tensions, as well as increasing local *nomenklatura* resentment. Gorbachev himself was crippled from the very outset by the lack of a clearly formulated and articulated reform plan, and was correspondingly a continual victim of circumstances; as a result events accelerated to a giddy pace as both new crises emerged and successive initiatives were introduced. A relatively modest initial Andropov-style attempt at restoring 'administrative socialism', characterized most prominently by a clumsily executed crackdown on alcoholism which pointlessly destroyed many of the best vineyards in Azerbaijan, had by the beginning of 1987 already been abandoned and replaced by a programme of *perestroika*, or 'restructuring'. This latter programme, however, only steadily divided, undermined, and ultimately destroyed the remaining authority of the Soviet Communist Party itself.

None of the slogans associated with Gorbachev's internal reform programme were themselves conceptually new by any means. The initial programme of 'quickening' (*uskorenie*) harked back to the rhetoric of Stalinist modernization ('the five-year plan in four years'), whilst the concept of *glasnost* itself was also at least as old as Khrushchev's 1950s programme of de-Stalinization, and as a label had also been used to describe key Tsarist administrative reforms of the 1860s. *Perestroika* or, as it was sometimes termed, 'socialism with a human face', was in many ways also no more than an attempted re-enactment of Alexander Dubček's 1968-era 'reform socialism', as one Gorbachev adviser admitted in 1987, whilst the phrase itself again also harked back to earlier Stalinist rhetoric.¹⁷ Much of Gorbachev's whole reform programme therefore reflected a chain of thinking that had first been articulated, but which had then also become clearly stalled, since at least as far back as the 1960s – in the acute summation of one scholar, it was 'as if Sleeping Beauty had awoken after a twenty-year nap'.¹⁸ What was radically different, however, was the chaotic contemporary context surrounding these reforms' attempted near-*simultaneous* implementation, as unintended consequences rapidly multiplied. This forced even such a skilful political manager as Gorbachev into making ever sharper policy turns and apparent compromises in order to maintain his dazzling political balancing act, while lurking in the background was always the threat that the party itself might at some point dethrone him, as they had Khrushchev in 1964.

In reviewing this period, one must also grant some credence to the notion put forward by Communist conservatives that Gorbachev was spectacularly badly

advised by his closest liberal adviser on culture and ideology, Aleksandr Iakovlev – a man whose own post-1991 writings make it abundantly clear that he personally apparently always desired to destroy the Soviet Union rather than save it. *Glasnost*, the cultural aspect of Gorbachev's programme with which Iakovlev was most closely associated, ended up either by design or default placing excessively heavy emphasis on the purely negative aspects of Soviet historical experience. Iakovlev himself in his later writings would also quite suddenly and bluntly equate Communism with fascism, alleging that in fact nothing differentiated the two, and his post-1991 writings demonstrated an extraordinary loathing not only for Communist ideology, but for the Russian national character itself.¹⁹ By contrast it is inconceivable that Andropov, a man whose own previous career as head of the KGB led him to be thoroughly acquainted with every aspect of Soviet dissident thought, with an accompanying acute awareness of just how far it might best be used instrumentally to stimulate change, would have employed such a figure, or approved such cardinal errors on a similar scale. Just such errors, as Communist conservatives noted with increasing alarm, now fostered in practice a growing wave of criticism that ultimately undermined rather than supported reform of the whole Soviet project.²⁰ Between 1988 and 1991 Gorbachev himself however, by now caught between just such pressures, rushed through not just one but three major new policy shifts, abandoning Eastern Europe entirely, and fatally destabilizing the internal political balance within the Soviet Union itself by the end of 1989 in the process.²¹

Gorbachev himself appears to have continued to have felt during all of this that he could still dialectically navigate the growing rifts that were emerging both within the Politburo, the party, and the wider country as a whole; during his last two years in office, however, this meant in practice that he was increasingly reacting to and attempting to 'manage' change rather than directing or controlling it. Gorbachev was also no Lenin, not least due to his own rather opaque ideological beliefs, and his extreme personal reluctance to ever employ force to repress even illegal or violent dissent or internal rebellion. His policy line became increasingly erratic and indecisive as a consequence, with his growing number of enemies soon concluding that the emperor had no clothes. Asked by a journalist towards the end of 1990 whether he was now embarking on a policy shift to the right, he famously remarked, albeit in jest, 'actually, I'm going in circles'.²²

Part of Gorbachev's purge against perceived local corruption meanwhile also produced, as a direct by-product, unprecedented structural instability and uncertainty within the sclerotic Brezhnev-era regional political system. During his first year in office alone, the General Secretary saw to it that Baibakov (still head of Gosplan), four of the fifteen republican chiefs, and close to a third of the regional party secretaries were completely replaced. Between 1985 and 1989 practically every regional party secretary was ultimately removed and replaced by Gorbachev-approved candidates, the latter often spectacularly inexperienced liberal technocrats with *Komsomol* backgrounds.²³ This produced regional discontent as early as 1986, when the replacement of the Kazakh first secretary, Dinmukhamed Kunaev, by a Moscow-backed outsider (and ethnic Russian) provoked riots on the streets

of Almaty. Kremlin-backed journalistic investigations into regional corruption meanwhile would later lead one local official to bitterly remark: 'We knew that a newspaper can be used to smash a fly, and now we saw that a newspaper can also smash a man.'²⁴

Such changes bore particularly painful unforeseen results in areas such as the Transcaucasus, largely because of the very fact that an increasingly striking and critical aspect of the post-war settlement had been the extent to which Stalinist-era *korenizatsiia* policies had been revived, accompanied by a substantial devolution of real decision-making power at the local level. During the 1970s, for example, Baku, under the leadership of the businesslike Andropov-style party secretary (and local ex-KGB chief) Gaidar Aliiev, had steadily evolved into an ethnic Azeri enclave; further to the west, the historically multicultural Tbilisi increasingly became a mono-ethnic capital city. In Georgia by 1970, the local Communist Party was 76.1 per cent ethnic Georgian, despite Georgians themselves representing only 66.8 per cent of the republic's overall population. National affiliation itself had become an increasingly important consideration in accessing power and resources at the local level during the Brezhnev era as a result, even as class affiliation itself became correspondingly increasingly degraded; in 1974 the very designation of an individual's class, so critical to Soviet identity politics of the 1920s and 1930s, had been eliminated as a legally required category in Soviet passports.²⁵

Against the background of this subtly more nationalized context, Gorbachev's campaign in fact represented a desire to reorient power around the Moscow centre, eliminating the bureaucratic stagnation and local clan-style political corruption which had increasingly gripped the Soviet system since Stalin's death. However the broader contradictions inherent in Gorbachev's reform programme, which would lead eventually to disillusionment, political fragmentation and despair, were evident in this particular initiative from the very start. It bore particularly painful consequences in areas of growing ethnic conflict such as Nagorno-Karabakh. There, increasing local tensions were if anything exacerbated in 1987 by Gorbachev's dismissal of Gaidar Aliiev from the Politburo, which deprived the Azeri Communist Party apparatus of its main representative at the central level, and generated a significant degree of further disorientation. In an ironic twist of fate, which demonstrated just how far Gorbachev and his closest followers underestimated some of the Brezhnev-era republican cadres, Aliiev, written off by some as a 'Communist dinosaur', would go on to reinvent himself in his native Azerbaijan as a nationalist politician: he was elected president of that eventually independent state in 1993 before, in neo-feudal fashion, then finally transferring power to his son upon his own death in 2003.²⁶

As a deliberate policy choice at the time, meanwhile, Gorbachev's cadre policy in fact signified nothing less than effectively attempting to make the Politburo again the driving engine of national political life. As events accelerated, however, even this neo-traditional recentralizing drive ran out of control, with the increasingly frantic attempts by Gorbachev and a narrow clique of liberal advisers to micro-manage events reaching the point where even foreign affairs became the

narrow purview of the General Secretary alone. Highly experienced advisers on such sensitive issues as 'the German question' were deliberately discarded, to the point where, in the caustic summation of one historian (whose privileged access to the Russian presidential archive qualifies his observation):

the fashionable practice of 'meeting without suits' in picturesque places was translated in the Gorbachev variant into meetings without bureaucrats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As a result the most important documents on the foreign policy of the USSR in its last years are simply missing from the national archives.²⁷

The General Secretary's increasingly erratic, highly personal and maverick model during all of this undoubtedly remained Khrushchev rather than Stalin. Gorbachev had in general terms undertaken a 'peace offensive' in terms of foreign policy, in parallel with internal bureaucratic reform; the *physical* elimination of opponents was moreover never contemplated. His aim, like Khrushchev's, was therefore undoubtedly to both tame and hopefully transcend the 'cultural alienation' that had tainted the Soviet Union since its creation and, to a significant degree, even the Tsarist Empire before it.²⁸ Like Khrushchev, therefore, Gorbachev nevertheless also risked (and eventually suffered) a tremendous backlash if his dramatic personal shake-up of the system failed to produce correspondingly radical social and economic improvements. It also left his increasing indecisiveness, the lack of any clear plan or ideological discipline, and the accompanying sense of growing strategic paralysis dangerously exposed when local crises dramatically multiplied instead. As both the Berlin Wall fell and the Transcaucasus descended into ever greater interethnic anarchy, the increasingly bitter complaint from local men on the spot (such as the future Russian president Vladimir Putin, at that time a KGB operative embedded in East Berlin) became 'Moscow was silent.'²⁹

By recentralizing power and placing himself (and by proxy the party, though in practice he disempowered it utterly) at the core of the grand task of reforming Communism, Gorbachev therefore either wittingly or unwittingly also made himself a lightning rod for every failure and reverse, just as Khrushchev had, but with infinitely more disastrous consequences for the regime. As a result, the same now-alienated local Soviet *nomenklatura* class was ultimately driven by Gorbachev's own campaign to pursue alternative, more nationalist avenues of expression, in a desperate bid for personal political survival as Communism itself became increasingly discredited under the multiple blows of economic hyperinflation, strategic humiliation in Eastern Europe, and the one-sided, repetitive, and very deliberate Iakovlev-led domestic programme of shocking cultural 'revelations'.

An inevitable collapse?

Given the speed of Communism's collapse, scholars have very naturally often speculated as to whether such a turn of events was historically inevitable. In fact, though facing serious challenges, Communism itself was perfectly capable of

perpetuating itself with more graduated, phased, cautious and pragmatic reform in certain key areas, such as agriculture (ironically Gorbachev's own original area of supposed greatest expertise). The planned shift to a more mixed economy in the light of the more complex emerging strategic challenges would arguably also have stood a far greater chance of success had not the world economy itself during the 1980s been only tentatively emerging from a more general economic depression. This broader malaise was the clearest symptom of a longer-term 'secular downturn' from which, in macroeconomic terms (and despite technological and financial 'bubbles', and even the migration surge of cheap East European labour after 1991), the Anglo-Saxon model of free-market capitalism has itself not yet in fact fully emerged.³⁰ This strategic environment meant that available sources of potential external investment shrank dramatically, at exactly the very moment when sudden internal disasters – the Chernobyl nuclear incident in 1986 and Armenian earthquake tragedy of 1988 – brutally imposed further crippling body-blows upon the Soviet economy.

The need for greater caution in the light of such considerable external and internal strategic challenges appears to have eluded Gorbachev entirely. Andropov in this sense was probably the last great lost hope, whilst the only other figure of sufficient stature and roughly similar instincts, the teetotal, ideologically committed disciplinarian Egor Ligachev, was by contrast too indecisive and too frequently outmanoeuvred by Gorbachev. The only programme which carried any real promise of tiding over immediate difficulties and generating breathing room – an Andropov-style prospectus of real ideological revival, public criticism, the energetic prosecution of wrongdoing, and calls for discipline – was first misapplied, then quickly abandoned by Gorbachev, in favour of his more liberal advisers' technocratic and social-democratic utopias; the latter formula then generated only greater and greater levels of anger as it failed to deliver on even the basic necessities of life.³¹ The Soviet Union itself, as both a great power and a social safety net, ironically still possessed profoundly attractive features for many of its citizens right up until the very end, although by the end intra-union relations were also undeniably becoming distinctly strained. In March 1991, in what was by then practically a free vote, 78 per cent of the electorate – 113.5 million people – voted for the retention of the Soviet Union in a reformed structure (although the total boycott of the referendum by the Baltic states, Moldova, Armenia and Georgia also illustrated perfectly where tension was greatest at that moment).³² However, it was ironically also Gorbachev's own very personal desire to reform and improve the system wholesale in a revolutionary Leninist way (without meanwhile properly reading or really understanding Lenin), a desire which, married to the full sweeping informal dictatorial powers granted him as General Secretary, he then ended up executing *indecisively*, which ultimately led to systemic collapse instead.

Neighbouring China, and the very different policy-decisions taken there by Deng Xiaoping from 1979 onwards – ironically with far more coherent and unflinching levels of totalitarian resolution – demonstrated that the total collapse and eclipse of the Communist Party state and its related apparatus was not necessarily

inevitable. Gorbachev by contrast remained mercurial even when he episodically *did* direct Soviet security organs to repress local dissent; his own zigzagging in this regard arguably only served to sharpen nationalist tensions in areas such as Georgia and the Baltic states even further.³³ In the case of China, however, ruthless repression of internal dissent also serendipitously combined with the willingness of the enormous Chinese diaspora to invest in their motherland, a phenomenon which would undoubtedly have been difficult to fully replicate elsewhere. The Chinese economy itself also remained less industrialized, and therefore far less complex, than its Soviet counterpart at the beginning of the 1980s: consequently an 'extensive' rather than 'intensive' model of development remained a viable option, even if this leap forward were to be pump-primed by massive external capitalist investment.³⁴ Gorbachev, by contrast, as a democratic socialist idealist, rested his own hopes for salvaging the more complex Soviet economy upon substantial Western reciprocal aid and investment, support that in practice never came on the requisite scale. Economic aid was instead delayed, refused, or used in brutal power-games of geopolitical leverage, with the Soviet leader, for example, being eventually accused in some circles of having 'sold out' East Germany in return for a West German food aid and financial loan package of some 15 billion deutschmarks.³⁵

Negotiating with Western opposite numbers whom he now increasingly regarded as friends and allies, the man appointed the last Soviet president in 1990 also remained apparently oblivious to the fact that many of these external actors were now only awaiting with ever increasing eagerness the day when they could both vastly expand their own political and military spheres of influence, and also execute their own private 'victory marches' over the grave of the Soviet Union in Red Square.³⁶ Dreaming as well that he might spark the birth of a new 'democratic socialist' wave in Eastern Europe, the moment for which had arguably already passed by the late 1960s (revealingly, by 1989, although highly respected, a rehabilitated but still avowedly socialist Alexander Dubček was regarded as a rather quaint political anachronism even by many of his fellow Czechoslovaks), Gorbachev instead witnessed an outpouring of Western triumphalism and free-market reforms as the Berlin Wall fell. By the end of 1991, with the critical state functions of tax gathering, customs revenues and even traditional military conscription now effectively nullified by spiralling bureaucratic chaos, and with the spectre of a devastating mass famine looming for the first time since the early 1930s, the Soviet Union's last leader was therefore left shell-shocked and alone amidst the rubble of his own grandiose ambitions, increasingly despised by all sides of the domestic political spectrum.

The North Caucasus in the late Soviet period

The Caucasus reflected in microcosm the wider challenges facing the Soviet system; regional leaders there likewise confronted the dilemma of either backing and imitating Gorbachev, or rejecting his reform agenda for some still-amorphous new alternative. Though the August putsch of 1991 put these issues into stark

relief, pressure had also been building at the local level for some considerable time. As I shall discuss at greater length in the next chapter, the hectic pace of Gorbachev's reforms, which had spun out of even his own control by the end of 1989, appear in the Caucasus to have almost unplugged a cork in local intellectual history, which led certain patterns already witnessed elsewhere under different circumstances to now replay themselves at whirlwind speeds. At the same time, however, the Soviet legacy continued to powerfully exert itself in both the manoeuvring and manner of action of local elites, even as outward rhetorical discourse underwent enormous changes.

As already discussed, Gorbachev in his wider reforms was in many ways merely seeking to finally implement a socialist programme of which many aspects had already been explored and formulated during the 1950s and 1960s, but the optimum moment for which, tragically, had in many ways already passed. But in the Caucasus and other regions of the Soviet south, the passing of Communism by the early 1990s unleashed in turn a tsunami of further structural discourse which, although relatively new to these regions, had (again) already swept other parts of the globe between the 1950s and 1970s. Because the global moment for many of these movements had already passed, their own dominance after being experimentally adopted by local elites was inevitably often rather short and artificial.

The aura of artificiality and short-lived character of many of these patterns in the post-Soviet space undoubtedly reflected both the shock surrounding the ending of the Communist experiment, and the absence of any thoroughly developed and viable conceptual alternatives. The final decline of the Soviet system, far from being the inevitable outcome of grassroots civil dissidence, or of some primordial 'revenge of nationalism', had after all begun as an entirely classic, albeit horrifically mismanaged, 'revolution from above' (although this did not of course prevent certain local elites, Western commentators and other interest groups later trying to portray it in exactly the opposite terms).³⁷ However it was in the Caucasus that the effects of this 'revolution from above' first bore violent social consequences, with members of a nascent local civil society responding to Gorbachev's initiatives by 'mobilizing from below' in unforeseen ways.

The Nagorno-Karabakh crisis which unfolded from June 1988 onwards between Armenia and Azerbaijan in this context quickly became one of the most serious regional challenges faced by Gorbachev's fatally incoherent reform programme. The political crisis there was particularly dangerous because of the rapidity with which it both escalated along ethnic lines, and undermined the constitutional unity of the state as a whole. Azeri political actors interpreted Moscow's initial largely lethargic response as evidence of the extent to which Armenians had penetrated the higher echelons of the Communist Party apparatus, which led Azeri public opinion to become disenfranchised, and in the process thereby undermined Moscow's role as an impartial arbiter in its eyes. Armenian political actors for their own part meanwhile also became radicalized unusually rapidly in the wake of the Sumgait 'pogrom', in which Armenians in the industrial town of Sumgait just north of Baku were targeted and ethnically cleansed during March 1988.³⁸ The result was that by 23 September 1989, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan had already enacted

a new constitutional law, running in several of its features in direct contradiction to the constitution of the USSR as a whole, and entrenching the sovereign rights of Azerbaijan itself to resolve all questions regarding the political, social and economic development of the republic. This act was a direct prelude to the 'parade of sovereignties' that followed in 1990, and marked the beginning of a chain reaction which contributed directly to the eventual sundering of the Soviet state. Armenian political radicalization meanwhile in turn also overtook the Armenian Communist Party, which led, on the back of local calls both to end the political monopoly of the Communist Party, and to abolish Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution,³⁹ to its having effectively already lost power in local government by the summer of 1990. In this way a seemingly small-scale, but long-running, territorial dispute in the Transcaucasus ended up contributing a legal precedent for the final break-up of the Soviet Union as a whole.⁴⁰

The two most significant social processes to occur in the Caucasus following Stalin's death in 1953 meanwhile had been the return of the Chechens, Ingush, Karachai and Balkars to their territorial homelands (all of them beneficiaries of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization programme), and the more general ongoing migration of mountaineer peoples to the plains. As we saw in Chapter 1, during the mid- to late eighteenth century, the migration of mountaineer tribes to the plains, itself caused by profound changes in the local agrarian economy and accompanying population growth, had produced rising inter-ethnic tension and social pressures which framed and contextualized both the subsequent 'Long Caucasus War' or 'Peasant War' of the nineteenth century, and aspects of the 1917 revolution in the region. During the 1950s and 1960s, certain aspects of this pattern risked being repeated, as the massive wave of modern urbanization which swept the whole of the Soviet Union led, in the case of the Caucasus, to ethnic mountaineers again migrating to the plains. However, it would be the re-exposure to the currents of global world trade initiated by Gorbachev's reform programme (exposing the Caucasus to a wave of new goods and influences which had last penetrated it with similar force in the sixteenth century via the Mediterranean) that caused this nascent crisis to then culminate in levels of anarchy mirroring the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the Soviet Union re-entered the global market, capitalism inevitably wreaked great swathes of 'creative destruction' across what had previously been practically a closed economy, creating a sharp spike in unemployment and social distress. Out of 1.9 trillion roubles' worth of industrial fixed assets in 1989, the Soviet authorities themselves had after all estimated approximately 40 per cent to be completely worn out, conditions which promoted a truly Darwinian struggle for survival in the wake of the central government's collapse.⁴¹

If the deportations conducted in the North Caucasus during the Second World War had been far from unique at the time, meanwhile, they were nonetheless distinctive in at least one regard, in that they did not last as a final settlement. The blizzard of ethnic cleansing that occurred in Eastern Europe evolved to become the dirty secret at the heart of the new and more peaceful post-war order, culminating in the benignly self-regarding liberal 'soft power' of the EU. In Eastern Europe the mass death of thousands of innocent civilians, alongside Nazi fellow

travellers, also permanently removed the ulcer of large diaspora populations which had torn Central and Eastern Europe apart for decades. After 1989 there was consequently, generally speaking, no appetite (Yugoslavia aside) to revisit or reignite historic grievances or ancient ethnic hatreds. In the North Caucasus, by contrast, the territorial settlements established in the wake of the Stalinist deportations were strikingly artificial and unsuccessful, and unravelled within a few years of Stalin's own death in 1953.

In 1944 the Chechen-Ingush ASSR had been replaced on the map by a redistribution of its territory to Dagestan, North Ossetia and Georgia, as well as by the foundation of the so-called *Groznyi oblast'*. The latter, created after March 1944, existed for just thirteen years, and absorbed eight of the twenty-four rural *raions* of the former Chechen-Ingush ASSR alongside segments of four others; to this territorial legacy were added six *raions* of the Stavropol *krai* and the town of Kizliar, all of which had no previous history or affiliation with Chechnia-Ingushetia at all. The *Groznyi oblast'* was therefore in effect a completely new social-economic and political-territorial entity, one aimed almost purely at maximizing the extractive capacity of the *Groznyi* oil industry. The loss of Chechen and Ingush workers from the latter had also been less than crippling, given that the republic's industrial facilities had only been employing 1,077 workers of those nationalities on the eve of the deportations in 1944, down from 4,200 in 1940.⁴² Agriculture, by contrast, the traditional occupation of the former indigenous population, now fell to the lot of new waves of inexperienced and often disorientated migrants, and consequently entered catastrophic and almost uninterrupted decline, with the 1948 harvest plan fulfilled by just 61 per cent.

In addition to the *Groznyi oblast'*, migrants were drafted in from the Stavropol *krai* (8,000 families), the Dagestan ASSR (5,000 families) and the North Ossetian ASSR (500 families) in order to populate the lands that those territories had acquired as a result of the abolition of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Dagestani migration was particularly rapid and enthusiastic, and in February 1946 it was noted that 16,740 households (61,000 persons) had migrated from there to the newly annexed territories, as opposed to the 6,800 households officially planned for in March 1944.⁴³ The reaction of the Ossetians was broadly similar, with the land they acquired serving as a seeming resolution to long-simmering Ingush–Ossetian territorial conflict. Ossetian migrants built 2,200 new homes on former Ingush land, and between 1944 and 1956 the total amount of land being tilled in the newly annexed territories actually increased from 50,092 to 65,302 square hectares.⁴⁴ Migration from the Ukraine and RSFSR to the newly established *Groznyi oblast'* by contrast remained slow and unenthusiastic, heightening that particular region's own broader economic stagnation; of 30,484 homes emptied by the deportations, only 15,584 had been reoccupied as of February 1945.⁴⁵

Lack of resettlement, however, also characterized other regions affected by the deportations. In north-western Dagestan, regions cleared of indigenous Chechens by the deportations were largely concentrated in the main grain-producing regions of the country, namely Babaiurt and Khasaviurt. In the Babaiurt *raion* by the start of 1945, as a direct consequence of the Chechen departure, only 1,725 occupied

settlements remained, compared with 3,170 in 1940, and the number of effectively functioning *kolkhozes* had also contracted by 64 per cent.⁴⁶ By July 1948, in all the rural areas formerly populated by Balkars, not one complete village settlement remained standing. In even the two best preserved settlements, only 214 out of 269 and 61 out of 97 formerly occupied dwellings remained standing. Both Karachai and Balkar territory in fact remained, broadly speaking, weakly resettled, with predictable economic consequences. In 1948 it was reported that on Balkar land, where 33 *kolkhoz* farms had formerly operated, only four now remained functioning.⁴⁷ By the mid-1950s, when the potential return of the Chechens, Balkars, Ingush and Karachai to their native lands first began to be raised, the *obkoms* of Dagestan, North Ossetia and Grozny used the economic stagnation of the region as an argument against allowing this, on the grounds that local conditions were now unfavourable for the mass resettlement of the exiles, even as they also complained that 'part of these groups, both in the past and at present, have not exactly recommended themselves'.⁴⁸

Khrushchev, however, apparently heavily guided by Mikoian, insisted on the right of these exiled mountaineer communities to return, a decision implemented on 24 November 1956, with the intention of organizing a controlled resettlement programme over the course of three–four years, beginning in 1957. In reality, however, an almost uncontrolled wave of returning migrants came close to overwhelming the administrative authorities, with 140,000 persons, rather than the planned for 70,000, arriving in the re-established Chechen-Ingush ASSR in the space of just nine months.⁴⁹ The territory they returned to had meanwhile yet again changed its administrative boundaries, in a manner that further exacerbated local tensions; three predominantly Cossack and Nogai *raions* of the Stavropol *krai* were annexed to the Chechen-Ingush republic, but the Prigorodnyi *raion* populated up until 1944 by the Ingush remained annexed to North Ossetia, even as Georgia and Dagestan surrendered the territories that had previously been assigned them. Chechen settlers were also prohibited from returning to certain *raions* of Dagestan which they had densely populated before the war. Around 28,000 rehabilitated Chechens overall nonetheless returned to Dagestan, only to encounter almost total apathy from the side of the local authorities. Despite the issuing of credit by Moscow to the sum of over 2 million roubles, a government investigation in 1963 uncovered farm buildings and factories still only being constructed extremely slowly, electrification and irrigation projects in a state of neglect, and around 1,000 Chechens unemployed in the Khasaviurt *raion* alone – social conditions that correspondingly fostered drunkenness, robberies and hooliganism.⁵⁰

The Chechen-Ingush *obkom* had earlier also been similarly heavily criticized by Moscow for failing to take sufficient administrative steps to make things easier for the returning nationalities, notably by failing to pressurize local *kolkhoz* farms and other institutions into providing sufficient work opportunities for them. In the regions formerly annexed to North Ossetia and Dagestan, returning Chechens and Ingush created additional problems by demanding their houses back, threatening, beating and occasionally murdering members of the local population in the process. There was no love lost between the returnees and the Dargin, Avar, Ossetian and

Russian population, with rumours circulating before the former had even arrived that 'bandits are coming; if we let them in, we'll have to leave'. Strikes, petitions of protest, the abandonment of farms, and mass migration out of the republic constituted the predominant responses of the local population to the return of the Chechens and Ingush, further complicating the territory's already tenuous economic situation.⁵¹ In June 1957, in the face of mounting ethnic tension, the Soviet authorities then even attempted to temporarily delay the tidal wave of incoming migrants from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, an act which only heightened uncertainty and irritation. In August 1958 tension finally exploded in the town of Groznyi itself, where a crowd, infuriated by the murder of a 23-year-old Russian worker by two Chechens, actually stormed the offices of the local Communist Party apparatus. From there they then held Moscow to ransom for three days, demanding the renaming of the republic 'Groznyi oblast' and the imposition of numerical limits on Chechen-Ingush remigration.⁵² Soviet military forces eventually had to be sent in to repress this 'Russian uprising', which led to 32 deaths and 57 arrests. Crime and social unrest over the longer term however continued to plague the republic, with a KGB report from February 1973 noting the high unemployment rate in the republic, the continuous revival of territorial disputes between Ingush and Ossetians, and a crime rate that had led to 115,455 arrests or, in other words, to one in every six of the local population being indicted for some criminal act between 1958 and 1972.⁵³

The violent circumstances of Chechen and Ingush repatriation, as well as the economic decline and rise in ethnic tension that continued and even accelerated after their return, nonetheless stands in marked contrast to the experience of other deported nationalities. Amongst other repressed nationalities such as the Balkars, feelings of grievance ran equally strong, but repatriation and rehabilitation would also appear to have consistently run considerably smoother. In part this seems to have resulted from the far more pragmatic attitude of the local party leadership, and the reduced challenge of managing lower overall numbers probably also made a difference, but one cannot entirely exclude potentially significant cultural differences either. Between May and December 1956, over 4,500 Balkars returned home to what was again soon to become the Kabardino-Balkar ASSR, in a mass movement every bit as spontaneous as its Chechen counterpart, but one also broadly accepted by the first secretary of the Kabard *obkom*, V. I. Babich. By contrast to feelings in the Groznyi oblast', the local population also broadly welcomed the Balkar return. The next stage of repatriation was relatively well organized and occurred in two stages, in the spring of 1957 and 1958, with the first trainloads of returning Balkars met by welcoming crowds of Russians, mountain Jews, Kabards, and already present Balkar relatives. The period 1957–59 overall saw the return of 35,274 Balkars, whilst 64 million roubles was also expended by the state to construct the medical centres, cultural institutions and *sovkhoz* and *kolkhoz* farms⁵⁴ necessary to accommodate them – though later investigation again uncovered that not all the assigned funds had been spent effectively. Tax relief was provided however, and 2,000 new homes built, alongside the opening of a section on Balkar language and literature in the local university. By 1959 over 500 Balkars already

occupied various positions in the republic's governmental apparatus, whilst newspapers in the Balkar language were being printed from as early as 1957 onwards, and a Balkar drama theatre had also been opened.⁵⁵

The case of the Balkars demonstrates that the rehabilitation of formerly exiled peoples did not lead invariably to heightened ethnic tensions, and could in fact be carried out relatively successfully. When, in the 1990s, a brief movement of Balkar separatism sprang up against a backdrop of ongoing grudges surrounding the full legal rehabilitation of the Balkar people, events took a far different, and altogether less dramatic, turn than in the neighbouring Chechen-Ingush republic, despite the presence of a charismatic separatist leader in the shape of the retired Soviet military veteran – and ethnic Balkar – Sufian Beppaev. That Lieutenant-General Beppaev was not destined to follow in the footsteps, or achieve the prominence or infamy of his Chechen counterpart General Dzhokar Dudaev, can in part be ascribed to differences of personality between the two men, but it can also be partly ascribed to a rehabilitation process which was far from uniform across the region, and which appears to have played out far more successfully in Kabardino-Balkaria (in relative terms) than it ever did in neighbouring Chechnia.⁵⁶

The returning nationalities also came back to increasingly urbanized societies. Urbanization and industrialization had themselves of course earlier been regarded by the Bolshevik party elite as essential criteria for the production of an educated proletariat, a class capable of rising above the fetish of nationalism towards an outlook of socialist internationalism – a position that would facilitate the eventual achievement of full communism. The 'national republics' created in such numbers during the 1920s had therefore been visualized in this sense purely as temporary way-stations along the path to communism, designed instrumentally only to accelerate the natural Marxist historical process amongst remote minorities, the majority of which, when the 1917 revolution unfolded, had still not developed any strong indigenous national identity. Creating a 'unified people' in regions such as Dagestan proved particularly difficult, however, since practically every mountain valley sheltered a different linguistic group. During the 1920s Samurskii and his comrades in Dagestan had accordingly made persistent efforts to encourage migration from the mountains to the coastal plains, where urbanization and industrialization were intended to 'proletarianize' hitherto radically diverse tribal peoples into a single, more modern communist social class. Each attempt had been thwarted by the malaria endemic to Dagestan's coastal regions, however, until, during the 1950s, with malaria finally effectively suppressed, the development of new irrigation networks on the plains effectively expanded available arable land, allowing extensive human resettlement. According to the 1970 census, some 200,000 peasants (or 40,000 households, the exact figure settled upon by the wildly ambitious – but unrealized – plans first formulated under Samurskii in October 1927) were resettled by this process, which led to the establishment of 76 new *auls* in north-western Dagestan.⁵⁷

The case of Dagestan illustrates how this general wave of urbanization and migration, whilst common to all, affected different societies in the region in dramatically different ways, substantially blunting the probability of an immediate

general structural crisis such as had earlier occurred from the 1780s onwards. Dagestan, for example, had also gained from the 1920s onwards a model of successful ethnic balancing in governance that remained unique to that territorial unit alone. This created a formula for stability altogether absent in neighbouring Chechnia, where the nation-building experiment had hit repeated obstacles, before then being completely destroyed and abandoned after 1944. Dagestan, though just as devastated in its native cadres as every other member of the union had been by the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, nonetheless continued to enjoy an uninterrupted line of competent indigenous local party secretaries from 1948 onwards, a continuum begun by the Avar Abdurakhman Daniialov (1948–67) before continuing under the Dargin Magomed-Salam Umakhanov (1967–83), the Avar Magomed Iusupov (1983–90), and the Avar Mukhu Aliiev, right up until the liquidation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1991.⁵⁸ The resilience of such cadres was underlined not only by the ability of the system to absorb and defuse the nascent threat posed by the emergence, here as elsewhere during the 1990s, of violent patriotic ‘conflict entrepreneurs’, but by Mukhu Aliiev’s own subsequent election to the newly created post of president of Dagestan in 2006. In the words of one recent study, in Dagestan after 1991 Soviet institutions not only survived, ‘but also became the core around which Dagestani statehood [was] constructed’.⁵⁹

Political stability within the republic was in particular assured by the manner in which the three most important Soviet governmental posts had traditionally rotated between the three dominant local nationalities, foreshadowing the form of ‘consociational democracy’ subsequently fostered in Dagestan by the new constitution of 1994. This social and political history generated an enduring shadow structure of fundamental social stability altogether lacking in neighbouring Chechnia, where the very territory itself only reappeared on the map in 1958, where the higher organs of power were seized only very late by indigenous local actors, and where power itself was constructed on a much more fragile pyramid, or power vertical, with consequently ‘no room for any kind of separate or opposing groupings within the system of power’.⁶⁰ The Chechen nation, such as it was, reflected and retained the deep developmental scars created by the savage disjuncture of 1944, and as late as the 1990s remained rooted in an endemically conflict-prone system of clans (*teips*), these being the only way in which the Chechens themselves had been able to retain any sense of social identity during their long exile from their territorial homeland. The continued existence right down to the modern period of more than 150 *teips* created a chronically fragmented society, ripe for radicalization because of the internal proliferation of potential leadership figures. This perhaps unsurprisingly therefore then led Chechnia and Dagestan to respond in profoundly different ways to the broader structural crisis of the late Soviet period, despite the otherwise superficially similar geographical, historical and cultural features shared by the two territories (mountainous terrain and the role of Islam and *jihād* in the nineteenth-century resistance movement), similarities occasionally also highlighted by Western journalists.

During the post-Soviet economic collapse that came in the wake of general economic decay and decline of the 1970s, the North Caucasus as a whole was

inevitably profoundly affected – industrial production in Dagestan alone fell by 80 per cent between 1991 and 1998, and agricultural productivity declined by 65 per cent in this same period.⁶¹ Yet Dagestan, though wracked by growing violence and social discontent towards the end of that timeframe, also avoided the fate of Chechnia, substantially because of the very different political and social evolution experienced by the two regions since 1944. The Dagestan electoral system after 1994 was designed and rigged to ensure the representation of all national groups, with legal safeguards to prevent draft laws passing without a two-thirds majority, and a structure which prevented candidates of different nationality competing against each other at the local level. This simultaneously continued and enhanced the Soviet legacy of ethnic balancing, and also stole the thunder of any political opportunists promoting separatism – a vote over increased sovereignty in April 1991 having already underlined to the Dagestani authorities that ‘independence’ in their case would lead in practice only to a bloody spiral of ethnic conflict and territorial disintegration.⁶² The gulf between Dagestan and its neighbour in terms of both evolution and social memory was also underlined by a public opinion poll survey of 1,001 respondents conducted in March and April 2000 in Dagestan. In this poll, under 11 per cent of respondents expressed a desire to live in an Islamic state, whilst over 63 per cent articulated a clear preference for returning to a socialist state.⁶³

Soviet institutions consequently also proved much more resilient in Dagestan than in neighbouring Chechnia, even in the face of the mass Islamicization experienced by both republics after 1991. Local soviets continued to operate in north-west Dagestan right up until 1994, whilst the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* agricultural settlements proved even more enduring. In a general Dagestani referendum on 28 June 1992, 83.7 per cent of those who voted came out against the breaking up of *kolkhoz* lands into private plots, and during a re-registration process in 1992–94, 580 out of the existing 634 Dagestani *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* settlements resolved to retain their previously registered status. Political polls also confirmed a strong and consistent nostalgia for the Soviet era, with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation receiving over 50 per cent of the vote in Dagestan between 1993 and 1996 in both local and national elections.⁶⁴ The territory of *sovkhos* and *kolkhoz* settlements during the 1990s nevertheless began to change, but the divisions that emerged ran along the lines of earlier *jama’at* societies that characterized the pre-Soviet era in Dagestan – thereby merely replacing the internal border delimitations of a socialist-era collectivist tradition with those of a pre-revolutionary one, rather than widely embracing Western-style market economics and private landholdings.⁶⁵

The capacity of *jama’ats* to coexist within the same territorial and cultural space as Soviet-era collective farms had already been noted by Soviet scholars regarding Chechnia-Ingushetia as late as the 1930s, where it had been noted that *kolkhozes* often continued to remain the land of an individual collective *teip*, with the same territorial space merely being given a new designation.⁶⁶ This local coexistence had been destroyed by the Stalinist deportations of 1944 however, so that whilst in Dagestan the *jama’at* tradition could remain rooted in the native soil

under a Soviet face, the *teips* that returned to Chechnia in 1958 did so as rootless and embittered semi-criminal clans. This significant deviation in post-war experience between *some* amongst the former ‘punished peoples’, on the one hand, and those who had remained behind, on the other, was to have a particularly profound impact on Chechnia in particular, as an explosion of violence there during the 1990s subsequently thrust that territory itself towards the very centre of both Russian and global media attention.

12 Three dystopias of the post-Soviet Caucasus, 1991–2008

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

(Karl Marx, 1852¹)

National liberation: Chechnia and the myth of a 300-year-long war

The Soviet Union, like the wooden matryoshka doll which, after the peeling away of each layer, reveals yet another identity, had, during the course of its development, acquired multiple layers of governance alongside concentric rings of territorial units. Most informal of all had been the array of ‘buffer states’ of Eastern Europe acquired after 1945 – Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Albania, the GDR, Romania and Czechoslovakia. The majority of these countries, though not official parts of the union at all, had become heavily institutionally percolated by Soviet security officials during the Cold War. The abandonment of this layer of buffer states, left to their own devices after 1989, nonetheless raised awkward questions around the ability to retain what remained, particularly on a consensual basis. The Soviet Union proper consisted of fifteen independent union republics, whilst right at its very core lay the massive, multi-ethnic, enigmatic proto-state of the RSFSR, which incorporated the whole of the North Caucasus. Historically, full union republics enjoyed, because of their external borders, the constitutional right to secede from the Soviet Union; autonomous territories such as Chechnia-Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria however, as subunits of the RSFSR, did not. Had the spirit of territorial nationalism run wholly rampant, however, the RSFSR would have been no less vulnerable than the Soviet Union, containing as it did 128 registered nationalities in the 1989 census, many of whom already had the bare initial trappings of sovereignty, in the form of official capitals, local government buildings, and demarcated territorial frontiers. The disintegration of the Soviet Union was therefore seen by many to potentially open the door to the destruction of the RSFSR itself, in a horrific and potentially endless spiral of bloody ethnic factionalism and violence. Gorbachev himself consequently warned Yeltsin at the time that ‘our state is held

together by two rings. One is the USSR; the other is the Russian Federation. If the first is broken, problems for the other will follow.²

The legal waters in this debate were further clouded when, in 1990, Gorbachev attempted to underline his verbal warning by hastily forcing through a potential constitutional time bomb, in the form of new legislation declaring that all autonomous territories possessed the same levels of legal sovereignty as union republics. Yeltsin and his followers proved uninterested in saving the union however, with the inevitable repercussion that the very model of secession and ‘national liberation’ of union republics which steadily emerged in the wake of the union-wide ‘parade of sovereignties’ of 1990 also came to be seen as a legitimizing precedent by some of the titular autonomous republics of the RSFSR itself.

One of the most immediately popular of the new and hastily adopted ‘alternate discourses’ in the Caucasus consisted of a kind of hypertrophied ‘Third Worldism’, best embodied there after 1991 by the figure of the Chechen General Dzhokar Dudaev (1944–96). Dudaev himself marked the first attempt at a ‘post-Soviet’ break with the immediate past in Chechnia, his immediate predecessor, Doku Zavgaev, having only just taken power as first secretary of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1989, on the back of a largely Gorbachev-style campaign of artificially generated mass demonstrations and public anti-corruption drives. Zavgaev, although the first native Chechen to gain high office in his home republic since the interwar period, employed a discourse of a still entirely recognizable late-Soviet type, and vacillated like many other local leaders over which side to support when the August 1991 putsch eventually occurred.³ His power, like that of Gorbachev’s at the national level after 1989, rested upon an increasingly tensely stretched web of tactical alliances – he sided with the Chechen National Front on some occasions, and with the representatives of the local Russian-speaking population on others, whilst all the while more or less consistently pursuing a general liberalizing line. His term in office was consequently marked by the same type of frictions that Gorbachev experienced at the national level, but also by remarkable breakthroughs – the building of hundreds of mosques on Chechen-Ingush territory, the opening of two Islamic institutes, and the undertaking of the *hajj* by thousands of Chechens and Ingush for the first time in Soviet history.⁴

In sharp contrast to Zavgaev’s liberalizing, managerial approach, Dudaev after seizing power in 1991 employed a fiercely confrontational anti-colonial rhetoric of national liberation that, in its worship of violence as the only way to stimulate the awakening of the masses, contained echoes of Franz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre. In Algeria, where events had followed their ‘natural’ historical course, the collective embrace of ‘Third Worldism’ as a political agenda and discourse had developed, evolved and then slowly eroded and unravelled over the course of decades. Important milestones along this path included the initial liberation from French rule in 1962, the death of the Egyptian spiritual father of the whole movement, Gamal Abdel Nasser, in 1970, and the development thereafter of gradually growing discontent towards the prevailing order amongst ‘sub-proletarians’ within the new urban society, all of which culminated in the Algerian case with the Islamist revolution of 1992–98.⁵ In Chechnia, however, such events were fantastically

accelerated. Dudaev, a semi-charismatic military leader typical of such movements, may have gained general popularity in 1991, but he had also largely lost the support and following of most indigenous Chechen intellectuals by 1994, leaving his base of support purely with the 'sub-proletarians'. He thereafter became in practice little more than an empty figurehead prior to his own assassination by a Russian missile strike in 1996. A process that had evolved over decades in Algeria effectively took root, grew, and then dramatically culminated and unravelled in Chechnia in the space of less than six years, with the intellectual vacuum left in its wake quickly occupied by radical jihadist extremists, just as had ultimately occurred in Algeria.

The initial embrace of a type of Third Worldism by some political demagogues reflected a second and broader, more union-wide movement during the last years of the USSR's existence, a period which also saw eight of Ukraine's thirteen political parties in 1991 suddenly begin to refer to Ukraine as 'an exploited country'.⁶ Economic stagnation in these last years interacted with decades of Soviet nationality policy, the results of which had produced a union-wide *Homo ethnicus* rather than the utopian *Homo sovieticus* intended by the Communist Party, i.e., social groupings with a mantric attachment to territory as the possession of a titular ethnic group, but with only a rapidly diminishing, if any, attachment to broader Communist ideals. A period of steady economic decline therefore naturally heightened such potential centrifugal forces within the Soviet state, thanks again to the agitation of local 'national' intelligentsias. The Transcaucasus in particular highlighted this phenomenon, with September 1989 already witnessing a series of articles published in the Azeri press on the parlous state of the Azeri SSR's economy, a condition blamed by local activists on excessive expropriations and 'exploitation' by the Soviet centre.⁷ Initially one of the most popular general political discourses in the last days of *perestroika* therefore became the rhetorical transformation of the Soviet Union itself into the 'last empire'.

Eagerly leaping on the bandwagon of some right-wing Western rhetoric (particularly, and most ironically, the writings of Robert Conquest),⁸ and undoubtedly inspired by the declarations of sovereignty that became suddenly fashionable in 1990, a number of regional leaders within the Soviet Union therefore suddenly began proclaiming that they had been living under 'colonial oppression' for decades common. Such a discourse naturally simultaneously ignored how the Soviet Union had in fact 'created' national identities during the 1920s (a process accompanied by the deep and long-lasting effects of the state's literacy campaigns, female emancipation, and *korenizatsiia* policies), the mechanics of the federal system itself, and the actual economic relationships prevailing within the Soviet state by the time of its demise. To take just one example, the very reason that Central Asian leaders before 1991 were so keen in reality to preserve the union structure lay in their heavy dependence on Moscow subsidies – the absolute reverse of the normal 'colonial' centre–periphery relationship. Looking at trade figures from across the Soviet Union as a whole from 1988, only Russia and the Turkmen SSR could in fact boast an official surplus rather than a deficit in either external or intra-union trade.⁹ Yet despite such painful economic realities, once the Communist Party itself

became increasingly discredited, amidst conditions of general economic crisis, the door was nonetheless also thrown open in 1990 by the union-wide ‘parade of sovereignties’ for the national republics to seize ever more symbols of real statehood for themselves.

This opportunity was first embraced in the Central Asian case from as early as March 1990, when First Party Secretary Islam Karimov was suddenly elevated to the newly created post of president within what was then still officially only the Uzbek SSR. Only over a year later, on 1 September 1991, would the Uzbek SSR be formally renamed the Republic of Uzbekistan, in the wake of Karimov unilaterally declaring it an independent nation-state. The sudden adoption of a ‘colonized’ underdog discourse after 1991 may therefore appear starkly contradictory, but it might also best be interpreted as the articulation of local resentment over sudden shifts in the Moscow centre, combined with the very real fear of being left behind by others. In Moscow it had after all been the common perception amongst Yeltsin and his own policy advisers that the Russian Federation was artificially subsidizing and maintaining the southern periphery which made them so keen in practice to break all links and dissolve the union entirely. Destroying the union, it must be remembered, also served to shatter Gorbachev’s last remaining political base, advancing Yeltsin’s own cause significantly in the personal power struggle between the two men. The sudden rhetorical adoption of an underdog discourse by a faithful lifelong Communist apparatchik such as Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan was therefore simultaneously both a spiteful riposte to the new terms of reference suddenly being created by Yeltsin and his entourage in Moscow, and a desperate political survival strategy to mobilize support from below – from amongst a population who suddenly found themselves ‘independent’, but who were also denied the very historical ‘national resistance’ narrative which would normally otherwise have helped frame and contextualize such a dramatic sundering of former ties.¹⁰

For the RSFSR’s North Caucasus autonomous republics witnessing this process, the Chechen revolution embodied, framed, and contextualized all of the alternative political discourses unleashed by *perestroika* which then made the 1990s such a tumultuous decade, not least since it formed the closest thing to a true ‘national revolution’ in the region. For all its immediate neighbours it quickly served as a symbol of both the new horizons that had been revealed, and the new dangers emerging during and immediately after the Soviet collapse. One of the earliest areas of legitimate public mobilization and protest under *perestroika*, here as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, had been over environmental issues. During 1988 the first popular front to emerge in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was the National Front (NF), orientated around publicly resisting proposals to create a biochemical plant in Gudermes.¹¹ Local history also became an area of significant contestation, in particular the ‘official’ Soviet version of history propagated by V. B. Vinogradov from the 1970s onwards. Vinogradov had become the most vocal and prominent local proponent of the ‘voluntary joining of peoples’ thesis, a process publicly commemorated by an academic conference held in Grozny on 2–3 October 1979.¹² Studies were sponsored and articles written celebrating this process to coincide with the year 1982, which Vinogradov and another local academic personally selected to

mark the 200-year 'jubilee' of the first Russian-Chechen friendship pact. Such a decision was given added urgency by the fact that North Ossetia had already held similar celebrations in 1974, whilst Kabardino-Balkaria and Cherkessia had both staged identical celebrations as long ago as 1957, with each occasion witnessing a considerable inflow of funding from the Moscow centre to help mark the event.¹³ Vinogradov's own thesis meanwhile represented an undeviating discourse which was, by any objective standard, highly censored and selective. The nineteenth-century 'Caucasus War' between Shamil and the Tsarist state was dismissed as a myth (Shamil being presented as a puppet of external forces), and all mention of Stalin's 1944 deportations was completely absent; Vinogradov himself made no public mention of the deportations at all before 1989. His personal intentions, by stressing such 'positive' aspects of North Caucasus history as the natural attraction and cooperation of the local mountaineers and Russians towards each other, and their mutual wars against 'external enemies', to the complete neglect of other more negative phenomena, was deliberately instrumental, and characteristic of an undoubtedly well-intentioned desire to promote local ethnic harmony. However, it also went on to provoke a powerful backlash within local 'social memory'.

Vinogradov's version of history between 1980 and 1988 enjoyed official support at the regional level, being taught in both secondary and high schools as well as at the Chechen-Ingush university and local colleges. Vinogradov himself was also elevated to becoming an informal censor of the local scholarly community via his post as an adviser in ideology and humanities within the Chechen-Ingush *obkom*, a factor that undoubtedly created considerable resentment within an intellectual stratum in local society whose own career prospects could be negatively affected by his admonitions.¹⁴ *Perestroika* and in particular *glasnost'*, however, created the facilitative conditions for a local intellectual backlash, first in a series of articles published by Dagestani historians in 1987, and then in openly expressed dissent at an academic conference in Makhachkala on 20–22 June 1989.¹⁵ By the end of 1989 a Congress of the Chechen People was demanding that Vinogradov be deprived of his citizenship, as well as stripped of all awards and professional titles, whilst a popular rally held outside his house also declared him 'an enemy of the Chechen people'.¹⁶

Before long, local reaction against Vinogradov's thesis would produce an equally extreme counter-discourse – one positing the existence of a 'three (or in some formulations, four)-hundred year war', which had allegedly continued, uninterrupted, between Chechens and Russians up until the present.¹⁷ This new agenda, whose crude simplicity quickly offended the very scholarly elites who had criticized Vinogradov's ideologically censored version of history in the first place, first gained public support during the crisis years of 1989–92. This was the rhetoric and ideology seized upon by Dudaev, the former Soviet air force officer who had returned to enter local political life in the republic, having just been made a general in 1990. When in 1991, in the wake of Zavgaev's dismissal following a violent Dudaev-led coup, the Russian parliament subsequently declared the approaching elections in Chechnia unconstitutional, Dudaev in retaliation not only denied Moscow's jurisdiction, but demanded as a first step the conclusion of a peace treaty with Russia

instead, to end what he described as ‘the Three Hundred Years War between the Russian Empire and Chechen people’.¹⁸

Dudaev’s blend of nationalistic messianism and violent political activism reflected both his personal impressions of how the national struggle had been conducted in Estonia, whence he had only recently returned, and the broader background influence of ‘Third World’ political ideologies. The Estonian ‘singing revolution’ therefore became re-enacted in Chechnia in the enactment of loud public *zikh* displays at local political rallies, whilst documents produced by the Dudaev-led National Congress of the Chechen People in 1990 also appeared to be merely photocopies of documents recently produced by political movements in the Baltic states, complete with the original spelling mistakes, and with the term ‘Chechen Republic’ crudely inserted on top.¹⁹ Dudaev’s own political language meanwhile eerily echoed that of a Nasser or Sukarno; his first instinct when he eventually became president himself was to nationalize all of Chechnia’s natural resources rather than privatize them, following the pattern of state-centric autarkic developmental politics first trail-blazed during the 1960s and 1970s by Algeria, Egypt and Indonesia.

For Dudaev, Chechnia’s natural destiny was to become a ‘second Kuwait’, and in the process develop a ‘true socialism untainted by bureaucrats and petty greedy scoundrels’.²⁰ Scientific evidence of declining returns from the local oil industry (by the 1980s only 7.5 million tons of oil, or in other words just 1.5 per cent of the USSR’s total annual oil production, were being extracted from Grozny every year) were therefore impatiently dismissed, in favour of wildly exaggerated claims that Chechnia sat astride a ‘sea of oil, in which 40 submarines could navigate for ten years without any risk of colliding with each other’.²¹ Dudaev’s tendency to delusion and paranoia also fostered a new ‘Vainakh’ national myth, leading him to announce on one occasion that Islam had first taken root not in Saudi Arabia, but in the ‘garden of Eden’ that was Chechnia, whilst on another occasion he proclaimed that the Chechens themselves were the only pure and direct lineal descendants of Noah’s Ark.²² One Western journalist who met him at first hand therefore very aptly later described him as most closely resembling ‘a Third World tin-pot dictator, a sub-Ghaddafi’.²³

What was so striking in all of this, however, was the profoundly secular outlook of Dudaev and his supporters, at least at the outset. Dudaev himself was in some ways the living embodiment of ‘Soviet man’, a deracinated military professional who had not lived in Chechnia for many years, who barely spoke the local language, and who had married a Russian. His political programme, meanwhile, so far as he ever had one, continued to reflect more the instincts of an individual exposed to a classic Soviet education, rather than a *madrassa* upbringing. The new rebel leader, it appears, had initially little clue as to how many prayers a Muslim was expected to perform every day, nor even which day of the week the Muslim holy day fell. The rhetoric and practices of jihad were an adopted rather than a spontaneous indigenous phenomenon, with one of Dudaev’s most devoted younger followers, Shamil Basaev, later visiting Afghanistan several times in 1992–94 in order to train in mujahedin guerrilla camps there. The initial shape and nature of the rebellion

in Chechnia therefore also entirely contradicted decades of Western academic analysis regarding the Soviet Caucasus and Central Asia, a discourse which during the 1970s and 1980s had invested great time and energy in the belief that the 'Islamic menace', and more specifically underground Sufi brotherhoods, constituted the most likely regional threat to the Soviet regime.²⁴ In 1989–94, however, the Sufi brotherhoods played next to no real political role in the Chechen revolution; far more significant locally was the presence of large bodies of unemployed and restless youth, a 'sub-proletarian' class who were to provide the vital fuel for mass mobilization, rather than mere civil disobedience, to occur.²⁵

High birth-rates in Chechnia – one of the poorest regions in terms of overall socio-economic development – since 1958 had also fuelled exceptionally high levels of unemployment, with some 40 per cent of Chechens of working age compelled to become migrant workers (*otkhodniki*). From the Brezhnev era onwards, between 20,000 and 40,000 men left each spring to find work on building sites or in agriculture as itinerant workers in the Soviet Union's 'black economy'. However, the broader collapse and paralysis of that economy during 1989–90 created a bottleneck in these traditional annual migration routes, storing up a dangerous mass of young, alienated and idle individuals within the borders of Chechnia itself. For the first time the latent local circumstances which had facilitated such massive social unrest in the 1780s risked being recreated under modern conditions. The clan-centric social networks created or reinforced by just such long-distance labour migrations also provided exactly the type of micro-organizations of loyalty and bribery that could easily be transferred into other forms of activity, such as organizing guerrilla movements. Chechen men, like all other Soviet males, were moreover subject to universal military draft laws, and therefore possessed an already latent familiarity with arms. The final component in this dangerous social cocktail came in the disastrous transfer of weaponry from Soviet garrisons in Chechnia into the hands of the local population, during the withdrawal of military forces in early 1992. This crime of neglect facilitated a reprisal of social violence on a scale not seen since 1917–20, the key causative factor in both cases being the complete collapse of the country's political centre, in parallel with a catastrophic *simultaneous* economic meltdown.

Paralysis in Moscow was countered by very clear and persistent calls from Dudaev for full independence, and after February 1992 the incoming Russian defence minister, Pavel Grachev, effectively capitulated by ordering the division of the remaining Soviet arsenals in Chechnia between Russia and the new Chechen regime. Some 42 T-62 and T-72 tanks, as well as 76 BMP-1, BMP-2, BTR-70 and BRDM armoured vehicles were left behind for Dudaev's forces, alongside an astounding 28,139 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 533 Dragunov sniper rifles, 67 mines, 67 mortars, 138 rocket-propelled grenades, 110 training aircraft, 3 MiG-17s, 2 MiG-15s and 2 Mi8 helicopters. From this juxtaposition of large numbers of unemployed youth and the sudden anarchic dispersal of significant arms stocks, Dudaev was able to rapidly muster an irregular standing army of 12,000–13,000 men.²⁶ What occurred in Chechnia thereafter thus ironically remained much closer to Marx's analytical model of mass mobilization as a product of cataclysmic

economic crisis, or Hobbes's vision of man and the state, rather than Western orientalist notions of a primordial 'clash of civilizations' generated by Sufi underground cults.²⁷

Chechen success in the subsequent 1994–96 Russo-Chechen conflict, whose causes need no lengthy reiteration here, marked both the high tide and moment of eclipse of the Chechen national liberation movement. Dudaev's popularity was ironically already waning by the summer of 1993, the liberationist political dream having not survived contact with the ugly reality of rocketing unemployment, rampant criminalization, and a stagnating oil industry increasingly abandoned by thousands of migrating Russian technicians and specialists; the effects of all of this were then compounded by endemic, crippling corruption. Some 2,000–3,000 recorded murders took place in Chechnia between 1991 and 1994, whilst the robbery of passenger and goods trains by armed bands became an everyday occurrence. During 1993, along the Grozny line alone, 559 trains were attacked, with 4,000 wagons of goods, valued at over 11 billion roubles, being wholly or partially robbed; the following year 450 trains were attacked between January and August.²⁸ In June 1993 Dudaev, facing a democratic vote of no confidence, dispersed the Chechen parliament and introduced martial law and a curfew on the streets, which led to at least 50 deaths, and the replaying (again in accelerated form) of the disastrous slide into pure military dictatorship followed by the Algerian revolutionaries in the wake of liberation from France.²⁹

The intervention into Chechnia of Russian federal forces just over a year later, in December 1994, followed months of stalemated negotiations, and the humiliating failure of a Russian-backed covert operation to topple Dudaev by his internal Chechen opponents, but the subsequent campaign itself also never truly recovered from the initial disastrous attempt to storm Grozny on New Year's Eve. On that occasion, Russian armoured columns drove into the centre of Grozny straight off the line of march, rather as Soviet forces had entered Budapest and Prague during the 1950s and 1960s. They found themselves brutally repulsed by Dudaev's highly motivated fighters however who unlike the Czechs or Hungarians, possessed lightweight and effective anti-tank weapons, and operated in well-disciplined hunter-killer teams. In the first armoured wave that entered the city, 20 out of 26 Russian tanks and 102 out of 120 BMPs were destroyed in a matter of a few hours. The weaknesses that would dog Russian forces throughout the whole of the subsequent war – appalling communications, badly maintained or defective equipment, poor logistics and, above all, the handicap of large, ramshackle batches of demoralized young conscripts, hurled piecemeal into an urban battle for which the overwhelming majority were never properly trained – became evident within the very first few hours of fighting. Such factors contributed significantly to the appalling overall casualty toll amongst federal forces throughout the subsequent conflict. In the wake of the disastrous first few attacks, Grozny was flattened by nearly three months of Russian air and artillery bombardment, but even after abandoning their capital, Chechen fighters in 1995 again repeatedly seized back the initiative, outmanoeuvring their Russian opponents on multiple critical fronts – psychologically, politically, and militarily.

The campaign, fought in the media spotlight, also brought to prominence young fighters such as Shamil Basaev who, in June 1995, barricaded himself and his men into Budennovsk hospital with nearly 1,600 hostages, and then, in a televised stand-off, forced Moscow to engage in political negotiations with the rebels. The war itself was ended in part by Dudaev's own death, his execution by a Russian missile strike in 1996 bringing to prominence a new generation of rebel leaders temporarily dominated by Aslan Maskhadov – another ex-Soviet military professional, but one who, at that time at least, also proved an altogether more rational political negotiator. A preliminary peace treaty, the Khasaviurt Accords, was signed in August 1996, with Yeltsin, intimidated by his shrinking re-election prospects, and displaying what was for him altogether typical rhetorical opportunism and intellectual cowardice, capitulating to the Chechen nationalist fantasy that this marked the conclusion of '400 years' of Russian–Chechen hostilities. Maskhadov's election to the Chechen presidency in January 1997, however, also caused the first ideological splits to emerge within the Chechen separatist movement. Maskhadov's opponents in the elections, including Movladi Udugov, Zelimkhan Iandarbiev and Shamil Basaev, would subsequently coalesce to form a parallel alternative party of power, advocating the violent Islamist liberation of the whole of the North Caucasus, whilst Maskhadov himself would be the object of several unsuccessful assassination attempts in 1998–99. The extreme Chechen nationalist discourse of a 400-year unfinished war had wielded a powerful influence over events, therefore, but it also remained only one of a number of competing historical discourses that emerged in the Caucasus with the demise of Communism, one itself ironically destined to be eventually eclipsed by the earlier much-prophesied, if inaccurately diagnosed, spirit of Islamic jihad. This very jihadism itself, however, was also more of a profoundly modern phenomenon than a primordial medieval throwback of the undying type predicted by Western analysts before 1991; intimately tied to Al Qaeda as a whole, it would itself ultimately become a jihad promulgated by the mobile phone, the Internet, the satellite dish, and the propaganda video, as well as becoming a jihad more profoundly informed by Saudi Wahhabite doctrines than indigenous Sufism.

The myth of a pre-Soviet golden age, and the failure of the political dissident movement in the post-Soviet Caucasus

During the fateful summer of 1989, as the economic and political implications of Gorbachev's programme of *perestroika* increasingly shook the Soviet Union, there also emerged regionally an informal Confederation of Mountaineer Peoples of the Caucasus. On 4 November 1990, in Nal'chik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria, this body voted to establish a formal Confederation of North Caucasus Mountaineer Peoples, comprising sixteen nations, and presided over by local academic and political dissident Musa Shanibov – a man whose path in life to date had ironically first been shaped by the earlier wave of more open criticism permitted by Khrushchev and Kosygin in the 1960s.

Itself an extraordinary throwback to the Union of Mountaineers that had emerged in May 1917, the confederation represented yet another profoundly idealistic

attempt to reinterpret history in the wake of the new wave of ‘openness’ created by Gorbachev-era *glasnost*. The romantic ethnic idealism associated with such an enterprise was reflected in its very choice of nomenclature, wherein even the very term ‘mountaineer’ (*gorets*) was still assumed to be a recognizably unifying and integrating common characteristic – this, amongst peoples who in the main no longer lived in isolated villages in the mountains but, thanks to the Soviet experiment (and in particular the urbanization wave of the 1950s and 1960s), resided mainly in industrialized towns and cities, provisioned with clean drinking water, gas, electricity, secular educational facilities and modern housing. Finding an explanation for such a peculiar political metastasis, one which without further analysis might easily be dismissed as simply the inevitable revenge of deathless primordial nationalism over the Soviet political experiment, requires a substantial analytical diversion into the ‘political underground’ that had developed in the Caucasus as well as in other regions of the Soviet Union from the period of Khrushchev’s 1950s ‘Thaw’ onwards.³⁰

The history of the immediate past in the Soviet Union was never a politically neutral subject. For Gorbachev, the reform of Communism had meant both the rejection of Stalinism, and the revival of a purer, ‘Leninist’ tradition (permitting dissent and open debate, as well as the return of ‘factions’ within the party, and also seeking inspiration from the past, both in the thought of Nikolai Bukharin, and more broadly from the interwar period of the NEP, when the market economy within the Soviet state had operated with a considerably greater degree of freedom). Gorbachev’s own attempts to revive socialist democracy by spurring back into life the activity of regional soviets was in this sense the instinctive Khrushchev-like urge of a true believer. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, dissidents within the Soviet state and their supporters in the West had by contrast begun attempting to much more radically rewrite the history of the February and October revolutions by demonizing Lenin himself. Within this dissident paradigm a number of factions that had sprung up during 1917–21 – the ‘Mountaineer Government’ of the Caucasus, the *Musavat* party of Azerbaijan, the Georgian Menshevik government, Petliura’s Ukrainian Directory – became symbolically transfigured from what they had been in reality (self-centred political factions fighting in a sea of equally and very often more valid and effective political alternatives) into political martyrs, who somehow instead represented a more ‘legitimate’ lost alternative than the Bolsheviks themselves.³¹

History in retrospect became more comforting if the Bolsheviks could be transformed in representational terms from being a faction which at the time became both the most popular and ultimately the most effective political grouping in 1917–21 into, instead, somehow ‘illegitimate’ demonic oppressors (the question of ‘legitimacy’ within the context of a violent revolution being however, at the very least, a problematic one). By this transformation the Bolsheviks could then be portrayed as having repressed ‘legitimate’ expressions of national will. Such a reinterpretation of events of course required substantial doses of selective amnesia (common to almost all modern nationalist formulations), but this discourse also offered a catch-all political solution to the developmental problems which increasingly gripped the Soviet Union itself from the 1970s onwards.

Encouraged both by samizdat literature and by limited access to a number of Western historical works on the revolutionary period, this dissident paradigm turned Bolshevism itself into the *only* significant problem. Its removal and replacement by modern-day successors to the 'legitimate' institutions that had emerged in 1917–20 consequently naturally appeared to be the most appropriate remedy. Beginning from 1989, dissident factions within the Soviet Union began trying to implement this political programme in practice, convinced of the harmonious outcome that would result from a return to the utopian 'correct path' allegedly begun (but not properly followed through) in March 1917. What then played out in reality, however, was, ironically, in many ways only a disastrous and tragic replay of the factionalism and infighting which had characterized political life in the Caucasus between 1917 and 1921, a phenomenon which also merely served to demonstrate exactly why the earlier Bolshevik rise to power had been welcomed by so many (the Azeri Democratic Republic, for example, having in reality collapsed in 1920 with barely a shot fired).

After 1991, however, no new political grouping or faction emerged with the vision, political acuity or ability to absorb former opponents that the Bolsheviks had demonstrated in 1917–20. With an alcoholic and inept Yeltsin an increasingly ineffective and incapable leader at the federal centre, the result was an explosion of messy ethnic conflicts, from which no new collective narrative discourse could successfully emerge. The frozen conflicts of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, the Ingush–Ossetian border, and Nagorno-Karabakh, alongside the ongoing 'hot' war in Chechnia, ultimately left both history and collective memory within the Caucasus during the 1990s an area of both significant contestation and ongoing bloodshed.

Few figures better symbolized the futility and failure of the wider dissident paradigm to somehow rewrite history and begin anew from some mythical pre-Soviet 'golden age' than the neo-fascist Georgian dictator Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939–93), himself the son of a writer already famous for his novels about medieval Georgia. Georgia in the wake of Stalin's death and Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policies (which produced violent local protests in which a young Gamsakhurdia had himself participated) had undergone a curious evolution – one in which, by the 1960s, Communism was effectively dead in the eyes of the majority of the population, but where an unofficial 'black economy' in high-value consumer goods, paralleled by mafia-like criminal structures, boomed instead. This led to the paradox that, whilst republics such as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia officially remained amongst the poorest in the USSR by 1989, this also remained strictly relative, with all three republics still enjoying a significantly higher per-capita level of income than any of their immediate non-Soviet neighbours.³² Zviad himself meanwhile was the perfect embodiment of the radical wing of the contemporary Georgian dissident movement, the so-called 'irreconcilables', having already begun his political activities whilst still a teenager. The 'irreconcilables' themselves represented that wing of the dissident movement for whom, in the words of one recent study, 'the realization of Georgian independence [was] more important than certain principles like human rights, democracy, or the political stability of Georgia'.³³

However this was not the face, for understandable reasons, that such dissident groups presented to their external Western sponsors at the time.

Following a classic path, Zviad had become the first Georgian member of Amnesty International in 1974, and co-founded the Georgian Helsinki Group in 1976, before going on to be nominated by supporters in the United States Congress for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1978 (he lost out, however, to another American favourite, the Egyptian President Sadat, the latter ironically also the ideological gravedigger of Nasser's earlier anti-imperialist agenda). A senior research fellow in the Georgian Academy of Sciences, Gamsakhurdia also engaged simultaneously in numerous covert and overt literary activities. Whilst using his state-supported and funded official post to translate foreign works of literature, he also printed on the side the banned samizdat literature – the touchstone symbolic activity required of any self-respecting dissident in the 1970s to demonstrate their membership of that particular intellectual elite. When Gamsakhurdia took power in 1991 as Georgia's first president, however, one of his very first acts was to abolish the autonomous status of South Ossetia, a decision that led rapidly to a violent war erupting between irregular forces arrayed on both sides. Violent conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia were in fact destined to become the main legacy of his presidency.

As part of Khrushchev's thaw in the 1950s, Abkhaz party leaders had been able to reverse the legacy of Georgian political dominance created by Beria in 1936–53, though not the physical footprint of Georgian settlers. Whilst the population of Abkhazia by 1989 was therefore only 17.8 per cent ethnic Abkhaz, 67 per cent of republican ministers, and an even greater proportion of lower-level officials, were of Abkhaz ethnicity.³⁴ This made Gamsakhurdia's nationalist demagoguery of 'Georgia for the Georgians' particularly explosive locally. On 18 March 1989 a mass gathering of Abkhaz separatists had already demanded the restoration of Abkhazia's 1925 constitution, by which means it would be upgraded once more to a formal SSR and effectively secede from Georgia; Abkhazians also boycotted the elections that led to Gamsakhurdia's taking office. Gamsakhurdia himself had meanwhile ridden to power on the back of a nationalist movement that declared all legal documents signed after 7 May 1920, the date of the last official treaty between the Georgian Democratic Republic and Soviet Russia, illegal.³⁵ The Abkhaz and South Ossetian populations rapidly took offence at Gamsakhurdia's regime, not only because of his own self-declared ethnic policies, but also because, as they correctly pointed out, the newly restored Georgian flag from the 1918–21 period 'reminded them of their ancestors killed under that flag', when the Georgian Menshevik government had brutally repressed these same national minorities with military force.³⁶ The Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992–93 that followed produced a minimum of 10,000–15,000 casualties, and culminated in the rout of Georgian military forces at the hands of a loose coalition of Abkhaz fighters, ethnic Russian forces, and North Caucasus militia bands attached to Musa Shanibov's Confederation of Mountaineer peoples – the role of the latter being an illustration in microcosm of the dangers of replaying the regional dynamics of 1917–20.³⁷

Personally propagating a bizarre Rudolph Steiner-inspired cult of anthroposophy, Gamsakhurdia during his brief reign meanwhile also proposed a 'blood test' for Georgian identity, and sought to revoke the entire Soviet developmental experience by recasting Georgia according to his own mythological interpretation of its deep medieval and classical roots. Never happier than when discussing the role of the Holy Grail in Georgian folklore, the 'Kartvelian or Iberian race' that allegedly once stretched 'from the Pyrenees to India', the deeper significance of Rustaveli's 'The Knight in Panther's Skin' to Georgian and Western culture, or the unique Christian 'spiritual mission' of Georgia in human history, Gamsakhurdia in practice presided over ever escalating levels of anarchy, ethnic violence and societal breakdown, which culminated in his own ignominious dethronement and exile by December 1991. No force better symbolized the self-defeating impracticality of attempting to revive a mythical medieval past across a modern territory – a territorial space also suddenly and savagely deprived after 1991 of the broader economic superstructure which until then had rendered the state itself viable – than the phenomenon of the Mkhedrioni. Paramilitary groups based around Soviet-era shadow networks of organized crime and drug smuggling, the Mkhedrioni emerged during the Gamsakhurdia era as full-blown paramilitary units, modelling themselves on a medieval myth of Georgian honour and masculinity. Led by a former bank robber turned playwright, the Mkhedrioni went on both to facilitate Gamsakhurdia's rise to power, and to play a significant role in his subsequent dethronement.³⁸ In the case of Georgia, therefore, efforts to return to a wholly mythical medieval 'European' past led (entirely appropriately) to a very real descent into total anarchy and neo-feudal urban warlordism. The dissident president whose own policy vision generated this outcome subsequently died under obscure and mysterious circumstances in 1993, probably by his own hand, after returning to Georgia in September that same year to mount a miserably unsuccessful counter-coup against his successor and arch-rival, Edvard Shevardnadze (a man who, as a prominent ex-Soviet foreign minister, also strikingly symbolized the very legacy and heritage that Gamsakhurdia so despised).

Though handicapped by his own ham-fisted prosecution of the disastrous war against Abkhazia that he had inherited from Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, who had spent many years as a thoroughly pragmatic and compromising Soviet *chinnovnik*, did restore a degree of order and calm to Georgian national life. Making use of his rich previous experience (as both Georgian interior minister in 1965–72, and as head of the Georgian Communist Party apparatus in 1972–85), Shevardnadze tapped into local political networks to strengthen the Interior Ministry, revive the police force, and disband and politically neuter the Mkhedrioni by 1995.³⁹ His close affiliation with the more recent past, however, also remained a bitter pill for the extreme romantic wing of the Georgian nationalist movement to swallow, and his subsequent peaceful overthrow by a well-mobilized and American-backed civil dissidence movement in 2003 caused the pendulum in Georgian politics to again swing back to its more radical earlier extremes. Despite Gamsakhurdia's appalling governmental and human rights record, Shevardnadze's political replacement, the American-trained-and-backed lawyer Mikhail Saakashvili, then chose to almost

immediately publicly rehabilitate the first Georgian president by transferring his body from Grozny, its initial resting place (Dzhokar Dudaev having personally sympathized with and sheltered Gamsakhurdia), to ritualistically rebury him in Tbilisi, deliberately praising him in the process as a ‘great statesman and patriot’.⁴⁰

Saakashvili himself then went on to personally ally himself closer with the United States, most notably by sending Georgian troops to serve in Iraq, whilst simultaneously representing himself domestically in messianic terms as the man who would eventually ‘restore’ Georgia to its supposedly rightful historical position in Europe, even as he increasingly cracked down on domestic opposition protests with tear gas and baton charges. Heavy external funding from the United States in pursuit of its own geopolitical projects in the region – Georgia during these years became the single largest beneficiary of US foreign aid after Israel – came to be funnelled domestically into a reckless build-up of the Georgian army, with Tbilisi’s defence budget soaring from \$36 million to \$990 million between 2003 and 2008. The Georgian president in 2008 then went yet further, however, in demonstrating his own personal sympathy for Gamsakhurdia’s toxic brand of ethnic nationalism when, after months of provocations on both sides, and having failed to sway South Ossetian public opinion by staging public rock concerts or by promoting his own preferred Ossetian leader on Georgian soil, he assembled 12,000 American-trained Georgian troops for ‘manoeuvres’ in July, and then launched a devastating attack on Tskhinvali on the night of 7 August.⁴¹ This full-scale military assault on the South Ossetian capital, employing heavy tank columns, cluster-bomb munitions, and massed artillery, led to the murder of Russian peacekeepers in cold blood and the indiscriminate massacre of innocent civilians with Grad rocket attacks, and also turned over 24,000 South Ossetians into refugees overnight. It ended only when a crushing large-scale Russian response through the Rokskii mountain tunnel from North Ossetia, begun on the morning of 8 August, drove the Georgian army back in catastrophic disarray to the very gates of Tbilisi itself, in the course of just five days of decisive fighting.

The very fact that many South Ossetians had become Russian passport holders, preferring even the uncertainties of the Russian Federation’s flawed but dynamic market economy to the ongoing slow-motion disaster of the agriculturally stagnating, and foreign-investor-dependent, Georgian economy, rendered this Russian military intervention inevitable.⁴² Yet bizarrely, whilst Russian forces, exercising extraordinary strategic restraint, then left Tbilisi unscathed and unoccupied, and Saakashvili himself still in office, many in the West initially appeared to regard the conflict as a reason to accelerate Georgia’s own American-backed entry into NATO. Georgian extremists for their part meanwhile again loudly denounced, through both the global media and Internet, the illegitimacy of South Ossetian claims to ‘Georgian land’, and Georgia’s own 2,000-year-old ‘historical right’ to ethnically cleanse South Ossetia and rename it under the medieval title of ‘Samachablo’. Such acts and publicly expressed sentiments suggest that many Georgians today, not least Saakashvili himself, have yet to fully come to terms with the ethnic anarchy and destruction that inevitably accompanied Gamsakhurdia’s attempted neo-fascist return to some mythical ‘golden age’ before the immediate Soviet past.

The reinstated Union of Mountaineers after 1991 became a similar victim of wildly anachronistic ethnic romanticism colliding with harsher contemporary political realities. With the flare-up of war in Chechnia by 1994, the Union of Mountaineers was practically undone, foundering motivationally upon the rocks of the revived Ingush-Ossetian territorial conflict, the 'freezing over' of the Abkhaz conflict, and the loss of political supporters within Yeltsin's central government. Shanibov's successor as head of the union, Iusup Soslambekov, attempted to find a new role as a political interlocutor between Moscow and Grozny, but ended up shot in the head at close range outside his Moscow apartment on 27 July 2000; Shanibov himself meanwhile had by then already returned to private academic life. In nearby Azerbaijan, Elçibay, the closest thing to a Gamsakhurdia-like dissident within the local political spectrum (as a relatively obscure orientalist academic now turned Pan-Turkic political demagogue, who also deployed supporters of the neo-fascist and pro-Turkish 'Grey Wolves' youth movement within the Azeri Interior Ministry), likewise experienced a highly accelerated and unsuccessful career of barely a year's duration. Elected in June 1992 he was however rapidly outmanoeuvred and replaced by Gaidar Aliev by June 1993, in almost exactly the same manner that the Soviet political veteran Shevardnadze had replaced Gamsakhurdia in Georgia by 1992. The legacy of the dissident movement in the Caucasus after 1991 was one of ashes; its historical role was predominantly destructive rather than constructive.

The re-Islamicization of the North Caucasus and the delusions of jihad

So far this chapter has considered two out of three prominent attempts at creating an 'alternative discourse', a new narrative paradigm of modernity, within the Caucasus during and beyond the last years of the Soviet Union. Urbanization and rapid population growth provided the same admixture of elements in a modernized form that had generated a local social crisis in the 1780s, but intervening developments in each new national region caused them to respond to the crisis in often dramatically different ways when it finally unfolded. The developmental crisis that gripped the Soviet south during the period of general economic decline that began in the 1970s, reflected in periodic urban riots by a newly emerging 'sub-proletarian' class of underemployed youth, provided the human resource base that all three movements sought to tap into. The Third World-style 'liberation' option, particularly in Chechnia, was itself tied into and related to a more general discourse of the Soviet Union having been an oppressive colonial empire in the strict European tradition. Freedom from a 'colonial yoke' was presupposed to help herald entry into paradise on earth, and also served as a cover to revive several rather more discreditable local 'national traditions' – a political trend very visible in Estonia and the Ukraine, where fascist fellow-travellers from the Second World War were suddenly reinvented by some as authentic national heroes, to whom public memorials could now be raised.

Within the Caucasus itself, however, the rhetoric of this type of group, though ostensibly anti-Soviet, was itself ironically also profoundly shaped and initially

conditioned by the common experience provided by the Soviet education system, rather than by any more traditional Islamic discourse. Even the personal revolutionary iconography adopted by certain leaders within this movement reflected far more the contacts and views engendered by the Soviet educational establishment than other less secular, less accessible, or less politically orthodox influences. Shamil Basaev, the initial Dudaev supporter who was later destined to so strikingly evolve into a violent Wahhabite extremist, and who would ultimately die pursuing the establishment of an Islamic caliphate across the whole of the North Caucasus, began his career as a failed student of a Moscow agronomy institute. Given the treasured photograph he chose to subsequently preserve from his meeting with Cuban visitors during his time there, he was probably far more influenced during the early years of his subsequent military-political career by Che Guevara than by the memory of *Imam Shamil*.⁴³

The full Islamicization of such actors only occurred considerably later, during the bloody interregnum of 1996–99, when it became apparent that the Dudaev-era agenda of a brave new nation-state was a cruel delusion, and that by contrast Saudi Arabian Wahhabite extremists constituted one of the few sources of external finance upon which Chechen separatists could rely. Not coincidentally, the main social phenomenon visible during this later period was the effective demodernization of the state, most visible in the rise of warlordism, an explosion in hostage-taking, and the local revival of human slavery as a normal economic enterprise. As early as 1994 the Reuters news service reported the case of a 44-year-old Russian man from Novosibirsk forced into slavery in Ingushetia, who had been threatened that he would be ‘shot like a pig’ if he ever tried to escape.⁴⁴ The Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaia gazeta* then reported in 1998 the discovery by Russian forces of a man, 174 cm tall, but weighing only 35 kilos and dressed in rags, who had been kidnapped and kept in slavery for three years.⁴⁵ In May 2000 police in Dagestan during one raid alone also freed fifteen men held in a small local village, some of whom had been enslaved for four years. All were being forced to work in wood felling and log sawing by the family holding them captive. These slaves were treated ‘not as a commodity but [purely] as a workforce’.⁴⁶ On 15 March 2002 the BBC news service related the story of Vladimir Yepishin, a 50-year-old Russian lured to Chechnia by the prospect of work, who had been stripped of his documents and kept in human slavery for thirteen years, and who was severely beaten if he ever tried to escape. The BBC also noted in passing several similar recent cases, including those of two men, aged forty-two and fifty-two, freed in April 2000 after eleven years of captivity, and six men freed in January 2001 after between seven and ten years of captivity.⁴⁷ Against this backdrop of the refeudalization of the state, Chechen warlords meanwhile formed personal pacts with foreign Islamist extremists, which by 2000 had led to their fighters receiving an estimated \$6 million a month from extremist organizations based primarily in the Persian Gulf.⁴⁸

In 1989–91, as recounted above, there also emerged from amidst some of the liberal middle-ranking and particularly academic intelligentsia associated with the 1970s-era Soviet dissident movement a desperate attempt to initiate a return to some kind of ‘golden age’, which was presumed to have come into full bloom

immediately after March 1917 – as though the simple act of again raising the Georgian or Azeri national flag from 1918–21, or reconstituting an organization such as the Union of Mountaineers, would somehow allow history to pick up from where it left off and transition to a happier future. This agenda too also soon proved so deeply ahistorical as to be entirely insufficient for the purposes for which it was intended in most cases, although naturally some local political actors realized this fact far more rapidly than others. Nonetheless the general inadequacy of such a programme was demonstrated by the universal fall of all its main promoters, no matter what their particular local context. The fact that, by the end of the 1990s, figures such as Elçibay in Azerbaijan, Gamsakhurdia in Georgia, and Musa Shanibov in Kabardino-Balkaria were all either dead, or had returned to relative local obscurity, suggests a broader political dynamic at work, one far more powerful than immediate local circumstances. That their successors were also men both born into and thoroughly inculcated in the Soviet-era intra-union bureaucratic traditions of plea-bargaining, political horse-trading and compromise – men such as Shevardnadze in Georgia, the ex-KGB General Gaidar Aliev in Azerbaijan, or even the Soviet-trained military professional Aslan Maskhadov, who briefly held out the prospect of stability and peace in Chechnia after 1996 – is also suggestive. By the late 1990s ‘normal politics’ in the Caucasus had largely resumed, the dissident ‘civil society’ movement having demonstrated that, whilst the late Soviet leadership may have faced considerable difficulties in grasping and resolving the developmental problems posed by a post-industrial age, dissident thought in the face of such challenges was, if anything, even more decayed, stagnant and irrelevant. Over and above all of this, however, and so far touched upon only in passing, Islam in the Caucasus suddenly also underwent its own moment of radical revival and ‘globalization’, leading to a violent institutional conflict between the Soviet legacy and new, externally funded currents, the effects of which are still playing out even today.

The collapse of the Soviet state had also brought with it the collapse of the four spiritual boards for religious cults, institutions created by Stalin in 1943 to administer to the spiritual needs of Muslims. These boards had revived a model of ‘state Islam’ first pioneered in the Russian Empire by Catherine the Great, and each had been headed by a *mufti*, a title whose original meaning in Arabic referred only to one who had the right to issue fatwas (judgements based on sharia). However, such boards in practice had appointed and removed *Imams* in the mosques, and issued judgements designed to support the domestic policies of the Soviet authorities – by announcing that work was permissible on official Islamic holidays, for example. Amongst these four boards, the main Spiritual Board of Muslims of the North Caucasus (DUMSK) had been based in Dagestan, initially in Buinaksk and subsequently in Makhachkala. By May 1989, however, the head of DUMSK, Makhmud Gekkiev, had already left his post under pressure from the local Muslim community, having been accused of taking bribes and cooperating with the KGB. After the Soviet collapse, both new states and autonomous territories within the RSFSR alike then rushed to replace these Soviet-era institutions with their own individual religious boards, each headed by their own *muftis*.⁴⁹ An explosion in mosque building also affected every Muslim territory of the former Soviet Union, with Dagestan’s

27 mosques in 1988 mushrooming to over 2,000 in a dozen years. The total number of students studying Islam in Dagestan by 2004 amounted to 14,000, whilst the number making their pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) accelerated steadily from about 1,200 in 1991 to 13,268 by 1998.⁵⁰

The Dagestani authorities quickly sought to regain control of this potentially explosive social force via the reinstatement of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Dagestan (DUMD). The most influential figure in appointing individuals to the post of *mufii* in the DUMD became Sheikh Said-Afandi Chirkeiskii, an Avar from the village of Chirkei in the Buinaksk *raion*. The fact that after 1992 Avars came to dominate the DUMD, at a time when Dargins, represented by Mogomedali Magomedov, dominated the republic's secular Supreme Soviet, has often been cited as an example of the informal 'ethnic balancing' that under Soviet rule became typical of Dagestan, home to some thirty nationalities. Battles over control of the DUMD were also closely fought, however, due to the enormous revenues generated by the DUMD's monopoly over organizing tourist services for pilgrims to Mecca. Financial intrigues have accordingly often been speculated to have been behind the death in August 1998 in a car-bomb explosion of the *mufii* Seidmukhammad Abubakarov, a murder officially blamed on Wahhabi extremists.⁵¹

At around this same time indigenous, explicitly Islamist political parties also began to emerge, the first and most famous being the all-Soviet Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) formed in 1990. The IRP was chaired by a Dagestani Avar, Akhmed-Kadi Akhtaev, and the programme of the party in its early years sought an ideological compromise between religion and Communism, being explicitly opposed both to the disintegration of the USSR, and later to the potential implosion of the Russian Federation.⁵² The Dagestani branch of the IRP however was initially led by Bagauddin Kebedov (who later renamed himself Bagauddin Mukhammad), a charismatic preacher noted for his uncompromising attitude towards the official clergy, owing to their collaboration with the Soviet authorities, as well as for his theological attachment to the stricter Saudi doctrine of Salafism. This doctrine, whose spiritual forefather was of course the eighteenth-century Arab theologian Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab (hence the movement's followers often being labelled 'Wahhabis'), remains the official school of Islam in Saudi Arabia today, and is notable for its scathing criticism of non-Islamic ritual, including impermissible innovations (*bid'a*), and 'heresies' such as Sufism. This ideology led Bagauddin's followers, who distinguished themselves physically from others by shaving their moustaches, growing beards, and often tucking their trousers into their socks, to not merely abstain from religious practices commonly followed elsewhere in Dagestan, but to also actively take measures to hinder others from performing them. Customs that they considered offensive included the 'heathen ritual' of *ziyaura* (the visitation of holy sites such as sheikhs' graves), which Bagauddin's followers sought to combat by destroying or vandalizing local grave-stones and prayer markers.

Bagauddin's more radical political line accordingly led to increasing tension between him and Akhtaev, still the IRP's official leader, which led the party to ultimately declare self-dissolution in August 1992. Akhtaev went on to found and

lead a cultural and educational institute, 'Al-Islamiya', until his sudden death in 1998, whilst Bagauddin became the leader of the radical wing of Dagestan's small Salafist community.⁵³ This community according to local polling amounted to just 3 per cent of Dagestan's 2.1 million strong population as of March 1999, but they were also well armed and encompassed a specific social demographic.⁵⁴ Bagauddin's followers were in the main young unemployed males from predominantly prosperous rural villages in the west-central mountains and foothills of Dagestan, the territories traditionally inhabited by Avars, Dargins and Dagestan's indigenous Chechen-Akkins. The primary attraction of Wahhabism for such individuals lay in its austere puritanism. In the conditions of the immediate post-Soviet economic collapse, the Salafis' call for extravagant traditional funeral and wedding rituals to be rejected held great social appeal, as did their attacks on criminality, corruption and the general moral decline of society.⁵⁵

The emergence of the Salafist movement in Dagestan was fiercely resisted by followers of traditional Islam, which was itself undergoing a strong simultaneous revival in exactly the same geographical areas. The reconstituted DUMD led this counter-offensive by closing Salafist mosques and banning its leaders from preaching. In 1996 armed clashes occurred in Kiziliurt between Sufi traditionalists and Salafist extremists, marking the start of a slow escalation in physical hostilities between the two sides. The emergence of a so-called 'Islamic *jama'at*' on the territory of the three villages of Karamakhi, Chabamakhi and Kadar then provided the Salafist movement in Dagestan with a concrete physical base for the first time. Local police were expelled by Bagauddin's men, and in August 1998 the territory very dramatically became a self-declared independent Islamic enclave, where only sharia operated. This community almost overnight thereby constituted an open military-political challenge to the Dagestani authorities, with the Kadar zone becoming a centre of political propaganda (complete with its own TV transmitter), and the *madrasa* in Karamakhi serving as a centre of military training and jihadist indoctrination for Dagestani Salafis.⁵⁶

Events in neighbouring Chechnia also provided a strong fillip for the Dagestani Islamists since, as already mentioned, Maskhadov's authority as president of Chechnia was increasingly challenged after 1996 by a radical clique of jihadists centred around his increasingly insubordinate prime minister, Shamil Basaev, but also incorporating such men as Zelimkhan Iandarbiev, Movladi Udugov, and the Jordanian mercenary Khattab. The last-named individual encapsulated the new local role of the international mercenary jihadist in the post-Soviet Caucasus. Born on the border between Saudi Arabia and Jordan in 1969, Khattab had participated as a foreign mujahedin in Afghanistan in 1987, joining Islamic insurgents in post-Soviet Tajikistan, before then finally settling down in Chechnia in 1995 and marrying a woman from the village of Karamakhi in Dagestan. He brought with him around 300 followers in an 'Islamic International Brigade' that then became allied closely with Shamil Basaev. On 23 December 1997 forces led by Khattab carried out an audacious raid deep into Dagestan, attacking a Russian military unit stationed in Buinaksk. An agreement to provide mutual military assistance between Bagauddin's *jama'at* and the Chechen field commander Salman Raduev was also

widely publicized at around the same time. In April 1998 the ‘Congress of Peoples of Ichkeriia (Chechnia) and Dagestan’, headed by Shamil Basaev, was set up as a political instrument to help facilitate the organization of a broader general jihad in the North Caucasus. Its declared goal was to ‘unite the Muslim peoples of Dagestan and Chechnia in one free state’.⁵⁷

The intervention of Chechen formations in Dagestan in 1999 failed to bring about the general wave of revolution in which its founders invested all their hopes, however, whilst in the intervening years since 1996 the Russian armed forces had also been far from idle. The Russian General Staff, seeking to recover from an unquestioned military defeat, conducted studies of past counter-insurgency campaigns in the North Caucasus, encompassing both the Soviet period and the war against Shamil, in a general review which then helped shape military reforms conducted from 1997 onwards, not least in the administrative reordering of the military district system. The head of the General Staff’s operational planning department now placed emphasis upon General Ermolov’s nineteenth-century campaign strategy of slow and steady encirclement and attrition via fortifications and other fixed positions, utilizing technological superiority wherever it existed to exercise maximum asymmetric advantage at every opportunity, and thereby ‘achieving victory with minimum casualties’.⁵⁸ Russian forces sent into Chechnia from November 1999, in the wake of the defeat inflicted on Basaev and Khattab’s forces in Dagestan by a combination of local militias and federal forces, advanced slowly but firmly, and in overwhelming force (150,000 troops were arrayed against an estimated 20,000 Chechen fighters). They also deployed the latest forms of armoured personnel carrier and combat helicopter (the Ka-50 ‘Black Shark’), and made full use of massive, precision-directed firepower, particularly air strikes, rocket batteries and artillery fire, to annihilate Chechen formations at long range, a tactic against which the Chechens themselves had no adequate response. Chechen strong points were meanwhile surrounded and bypassed, which allowed the advance to continue largely unhindered until the highly symbolic second siege and fall of Grozny.⁵⁹

Chechen fighters fared better in the guerrilla war which followed, largely because, whilst able to apply technological advantages asymmetrically under certain conditions, much of the Russian army nonetheless remained inadequately modernized and poorly trained. Russian combat pilots still had less than 14 hours’ annual flying experience on average, rising to only 28 hours’ by 2003, compared with a minimum in the Soviet period of 100–150 flight hours a year. In addition, aircraft and helicopter airframes were typically 15–20 years old, with roughly 70 per cent of the entire military helicopter fleet reported in early 2004 to be in need of repair. During the first 6 to 8 months of the war, at least 6 to 8 Russian helicopters a day experienced combat damage, and 36 helicopters were shot down in the first three years of the conflict alone, killing hundreds of soldiers in the process. Command and control systems also remained in a pre-digital age, breakdowns and the scavenging of parts remained endemic, and even the most advanced Russian helicopters lacked any all-weather night-time capability. Spectacular Chechen successes in ambushing and knocking down Russian aviation and air transport with SAMs (surface–air missiles), anti-tank rounds and barrages of heavy machine-gun fire

also periodically threatened to have a critical immobilizing effect upon the whole course of the campaign, not least because of the persistent inability of the Russian ground forces to be able to count on safe roads.⁶⁰ In regard to the latter problem, military mine-clearing teams, denied access to the latest robotic remotely operated deactivation devices, were severely challenged by new generations of Chechen improvised explosive devices (IEDs) employed along Chechnia's twisting road network, most notably enormous remotely detonated bombs manufactured from unexploded shells, as well as 'daisy chain' multiple explosive charges capable of disabling or destroying almost any type of vehicle. The overstretched and under-appreciated Engineering Forces reportedly had to contend with over 6,000 such threats, ranging from conventional mines to IEDs and booby-trap devices, in the first 11 months of the war alone.⁶¹

Despite tactical successes, the Chechen Islamist movement nonetheless failed to fully recover a decisive political-psychological momentum in the manner that it had in 1994–96, largely because of the repeated beheading of its top political leadership by Russian covert action. Shamil Basaev lost a foot to a Russian mine whilst trying to slip out of Grozny in early 2000, and after masterminding the atrocities of the *Nord-Ost* theatre siege in Moscow and the Beslan school siege in North Ossetia in 2004, he was then killed in a massive truck-bomb explosion in Ingushetia in July 2006, allegedly whilst attempting to execute an Al Qaeda plot to attack the G-8 meeting of world leaders being held in St Petersburg.⁶² The Arab Islamist Khattab died even earlier, the victim in March 2002 of a letter tainted with a poisonous and fast-acting nerve agent by the Federal Security Service (FSB). Maskhadov meanwhile was killed resisting arrest in March 2005, whilst Zelimkhan Iandarbiev was assassinated abroad in Qatar in February 2004, the victim of a car bomb planted by Russian military intelligence.⁶³ Against this backdrop, Russian military efforts in Chechnia itself achieved a slow and bloody form of stabilization, shaped in the main by four overarching characteristics – the appointment of relatively more effective local administrators at the federal district level, an inflow of money from the federal centre (with more than 70 billion roubles disbursed to Chechnia between 2001 and 2005), growing local combat fatigue, and massive repression.⁶⁴

The election of the passionately anti-Wahhabite former chief *mufti* Akhmad Kadyrov to the post of Chechen president in October 2003, followed, in the wake of his assassination in 2004, by the steady political ascendance of his son Ramzan to the point where he too assumed the presidency in March 2007, also pointed to a deliberate Moscow-backed 'Chechenization' of the conflict, with all the corresponding complications of corruption, blood feuds and clan politics that would have been familiar to a Soviet administrator such as Anastas Mikoian in the 1920s.⁶⁵ The immediate visible political impact of this, however, was also the almost complete sidelining of Salafist ideas as a potent social mobilization model within Chechnia, a fact which may yet lead to the Russian government viewing the benefits from backing figures such as Kadyrov as outweighing the attendant frictions and costs. The attempted banning of Danish citizens from the republic in connection with the publication abroad of offensive cartoons of the prophet Mohammed in 2005, the construction in Grozny of the largest mosque in Europe

(with the assistance of Turkish engineers), and the declaration of a jihad against Wahhabism each marked coherent successive steps, aligning the younger Kadyrov with a tightly state-controlled and pro-government vision of Islam which represented a potentially potent blend of the Communist and immediate post-Communist eras. Whilst terrorist violence began to again peak in 2009, becoming particularly visible in a stream of high-profile assassinations across both Dagestan and Ingushetia, and in the spectacular bombing of a police station in neighbouring Ingushetia in August 2009, growing evidence also indicates that the problem is now increasingly domestic rather than foreign-sponsored, with Al Qaeda having switched its focus predominantly to the battlefields of Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Pakistani tribal areas. The lure of Wahhabite jihadism proved to be as much a failed dystopia in the North Caucasus as Dudaev's primitive Third-Worldism or Gamsakhurdia's romantic neo-medievalism, leaving the problems of stabilizing the region to lie once again largely at Russia's door as it struggled to re-establish a viable regional security complex.

Afterword

The North Caucasus as a regional security complex – Vladimir Putin, pipelines and the rebuilding of the Russian federal state

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a natural rush amongst startled Western historians and scholars to write a detailed post-mortem over the still-warm corpse. For most of the Western school of Sovietologists, this discourse amounted in the main to an outcry of triumphalism; the Communist demon was dead, and the states of the former Soviet Union could now return to what many in the West characterized as ‘normality’. This view of what was ‘normal’ for the region, however, was founded upon the belief that every new state that had emerged in the 1917–20 time period was a legitimate entity, somehow suborned purely by Bolshevik cunning and military force. Such a belief explicitly demanded both a necessarily hazy and romanticized recollection of the actual sequence of events in 1917–20, and complete amnesia regarding the importance of the Soviet project for border-drawing and cultural evolution in the 1920s and 1930s. As the actual course of events in 1917–20 in fact first demonstrated, however, the reality of what again re-emerged much closer resembled a complicated product of broader geopolitical contestation and the often disproportionate role of individual ideologues. History after 1991, despite Francis Fukuyama’s prognostications, remained untidy.

The ‘death’ of the Soviet Union at least at first, however, also appeared to permanently sanctify generations of scholarly orthodoxy arguing the case for Soviet ‘exceptionalism’. According to this analysis, the Communist colossus was an aberration of human history, doomed by its own natural internal contradictions to failure. Some of the older school of Western Kremlin-watchers even went so far as to argue, contradicting both analytical logic and the actual chronology of events, that the collapse of the USSR was brought about by underlying and deathless primordial nationalism, amounting to a ‘triumph of nations’.¹ Relatively few at the time saw in the collapse a fundamental reason to question their own past analysis, though the failure to predict the suddenness of the end itself constituted something of an embarrassment for orthodox viewpoints. Unlike their orientalist colleagues, Western Sovietologists were and often chose to remain sheltered, both by the conditions of the Cold War and by the manner that it ended, from more deeply questioning or re-examining many of their own fundamental assumptions and beliefs. The Soviet Union had been the ‘Other’ for decades, its fundamentally ‘alien’ condition reinforced by the mantric attachment of both sides to 1917 as a fundamental turning point in human history. In 1991 this story had reached its natural conclusion when

'the West' was judged to have finally 'won'.² Within American policy-forming circles in particular, just such a paradigm created a powerful sense of 'imperial hubris', which then dramatically played itself out during the first and second administrations of President George W. Bush.

This same school of analysis also informed much academic discourse on how to 'correct' post-Communist societies. Communism itself was treated as a malaise, something akin to measles or smallpox, from which those unenlightened masses that had lived under it would have to be 'cured'. Stereotypes that confused Soviet power with some form of Russian 'empire' also became deliberately promulgated and entrenched on all sides, facilitated again by highly selective memory loss over both the role played and the very real individual contribution made by whole generations of non-Russians (Mikoian, Samurskii, Korkmasov, Takho-Godi, Said Gabiev and their various descendants across the whole former Soviet space) in shaping the Soviet project. Classifying the Soviet Union in retrospect as a somehow purely 'Russian' form of totalitarianism of course also became a convenient recourse for the non-Russian regional *nomenklatura* class to suddenly start reinventing itself as nationalist leaders, men who had somehow always covertly aspired towards European civilization. Growing levels of arrogance and hubris meanwhile also characterized the attitudes not only of the United States, but of the bureaucrats of the European Union; in January 2006 for example, a resolution by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe bluntly equated Communism with fascism, a highly problematic argument.³

Fairly representative of the emerging neoliberal political consensus were the views of one scholar who believed that the Soviet Union was a historical aberration precisely because it had entrenched and preserved the worst aspects of European 'peasant' societies. In this argument, by diverging into Communism when it did, the Soviet Union in its southern borderlands bypassed the market economy, and consequently the 'natural course' of human history that was supposedly responsible for 'the disappearance of feudal and clientelist practices in the West'.⁴ This was a striking example of ascribing clearly observable symptoms to the wrong disease. Rather than anthropologically proceeding from an analysis of local social, cultural and ethnic conditions (conditions which could also be found in capitalist Italy as well as in many other even more advanced states on the Mediterranean rim), more rational diagnoses were instead bypassed in favour of a purely *political* explanation for human behaviour (ironically mirroring in complete reverse some of the more rigid pronouncements of Marxism-Leninism itself).

Communism according to such an approach therefore became a historical dead letterbox, in which a whole range of other societal ills could be neatly filed; this was also of course a comfortable and convenient typology, since the end of Communism itself implied that these other symptoms could then also be simply and painlessly eradicated under enlightened Western mentoring. Another scholar who unhesitatingly preached the need to, as it were, 'inoculate' post-Communist societies against further dangerous mental aberrations (what he himself referred to, with a remarkable lack of tact, as 'idiotization'), believed that the Soviet Union was simply doomed from a moral standpoint. In his eyes the abolition of private

property in the Soviet state also severed the natural human link with 'a sense of responsibility and order', effectively 'destroying' the human personality itself. Free-market capitalism in such forms of analysis became a *moral* good, something that would have to be prescribed under a 'liberal peace' to the ailing populations of the post-Communist world in powerful, health-giving doses.⁵

In fact, however, to assume that capitalism itself *per se* has an intrinsically *moral*, self-correcting and inevitably progressive character in its unregulated functioning is as dangerously flawed as to assume that Soviet Communism did; under closer examination, the free market is often no more inherently 'moral' than the Stalin-era command economy was. Nations in general meanwhile have also proven stubbornly resistant to the Whig view of history, with unique internal dynamics instead creating an ongoing dialectical tension of continuous friction and change, which renders the possibility of one political order evolving to exactly resemble another just as scientifically unlikely as it would be for a single pound of sugar to exactly mirror another at the submolecular level.⁶ Whilst the global financial crisis of 2008, created by unscrupulous trading and the classic capitalist overproduction of credit and other financial products, considered together with the rather diverse responses the crisis produced, underlined many of these points, there was also plentiful prior evidence of moral irregularity amongst capitalist regimes during the Cold War itself – not least in South America and South Africa, about which, again, most Western governments frequently display rigid levels of collective mass amnesia. In addition, very little in the course of world events since 1991 has served to justify either Ronald Reagan's famous claim in 1980 that, without the Soviet Union, there would be no 'hot spots' in the world, or the prophecies of those neoliberal economic thinkers who after 1991 advocated rapidly implemented democratic elections and IMF and World Bank-directed economic shock therapy as the universal cure for all ills.⁷

Beyond their global aspirations, the actual implementation of these pro-free-market policies with regard to both Russia and by default the North Caucasus and Transcaucasus led in practice, in the assessment of one acknowledged American expert on Russia, to the unfolding of the greatest catastrophe in US foreign policy since the Vietnam War.⁸ Russians who actually experienced first-hand the physical effects of free-market reform under Western tutelage in the early 1990s soon had good reason to question the actual wisdom behind such moralizing views. Industrial production dropped by 50 per cent between 1990 and 1995, investment shrank to nothing, and the currency became so undependable that in some areas there was a return to systems of barter. The collapse of the union-wide economy at the time also destroyed even the possibility of acquiring collateral by the primitive export of raw materials.

The Russian oil industry, which had seen its central focus shift from Azerbaijan to Siberia and the Urals under Brezhnev and Baibakov, and its output also pushed to a precarious peak through intensive capital investment during the 1970s and 1980s, flatlined in the 1990s because of a critical mass of productive wellheads then suddenly falling offline or into disrepair. This phenomenon was caused largely by the abrupt cut-off of the ancillary support network provided by the

machine-tool and manufacturing plants of Azerbaijan. Baku, which since the 1960s had itself faced a steady terminal decline in oil production, nonetheless retained until 1991 a privileged position within the overall Soviet economy in terms of technical support. After 1991, however, these services ceased to be bartered at greatly devalued prices in exchange for other goods, with the Azeri government instead now demanding hard currency transactions – dollars – a commodity in increasingly short supply in Moscow.

The economic woes in the energy industry during these years paled in comparison with the scale of the wider human crisis however. Between January 1992 and June 1994 the death rate in Russia itself rose by over 30 per cent, to a level previously unknown in countries not suffering from either war or famine. Homicide and suicide rates were amongst the highest in the world, and male life expectancy fell from sixty-four years in 1989 to fifty-nine in 1994. Members of the Russian State Duma began to bitterly refer, not without foundation, to Yegor Gaidar's rabidly free-market structural reforms as economic genocide against the Russian people.⁹

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, most Russian politicians, after more than a decade of infuriatingly patronizing sermons from both West European and American non-governmental organizations, political scientists and politicians, came both to resent such catastrophic attempts at tutelage, and to seek answers to the challenges of modernity from within their own collective national traditions once more. In 2008 Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov identified Russia's goals as far as 2020 as the creation of a 'socially oriented national economy' to improve the living standards and quality of life of the Russian people.¹⁰ Thus, the 'double movement' first uncovered by Karl Polanyi in regard to the late nineteenth century now repeated itself on the cusp of the twenty-first. In the wake of sweeping neoliberal free-market reforms, imposed as a supposedly essential precondition for further relations by those best placed to exploit the weaker states in the global marketplace, a sense of savage exploitation led inevitably towards greater measures of protectionism amongst those who felt themselves to be the greatest victims of this assault.

Russia under President Putin after 2000 remained more open to investment than many other states, notably via an extremely favourable tax regime. Nonetheless, key strategic industries – most notably oil and natural gas – were now increasingly renationalized as the only means by which to rebuild the state and raise it from the catastrophic disorder into which the free-market offensive had thrown it, even as what were now dubbed the 'colonial' contract arrangements of certain transnational corporations in Russia also came to be reneged upon. Putin's economic decision to rebuild a strong state based upon controlled market mechanisms may have raised hackles in the West, but it also represented a strategy and a mindset that would have been familiar to Trotsky or Bukharin in the 1920s, or for that matter to Tsarist finance ministers such as Mikhail Reiter or Sergei Witte in the nineteenth century.¹¹ Western NGOs and governmental think tanks such as the American neoconservative group Freedom House in turn counter-attacked such impudent intellectual rebellion by upping the rhetorical ante, demoting Russia from the patronizing label of 'Partly Free' down to the even more demeaning and meaningless status of 'Not Free', as though freedom itself were simply another quantifiable

market product. Russia was consequently placed at a single stroke into the same category as the Congo, with the corresponding implication that it no longer deserved to be treated as a sovereign entity with legitimate national interests.¹²

Despite the increasing ludicrousness and futility of such a 'dialogue', very few in the West before 2008 felt the need to question the more underlying fundamental assumption behind their own paradigm: namely, that Western capitalist societies were themselves 'different', since they alone had been blessed in finding the true key to modernity. Though the surface rhetoric had changed, Anglo-Saxon arrogance in this sense mirrored and continued the disastrous views of early twentieth-century utopian idealists such as Woodrow Wilson, who famously declared after 1918 that American principles were also immutably 'the principles of mankind, and must prevail'.¹³ Most Western neoliberal economic discourse over the end of the Soviet Union also tended to ignore historical contextualization – namely that the decline of the Soviet Union itself marked, in Russian terms, the end of the second great *indigenous* cycle of economic modernization undertaken in that country since the seventeenth century. After the massive modernization first embarked on through geopolitical competition with Sweden, the second great wave, in many ways the most epic, had begun during the 1850s, in response to defeat in the Crimean War. This second phase then itself lasted from the 1850s until the 1970s, with Stalin's victory over Germany in 1945 symbolizing 'success in this cycle as surely as Alexander I's victory over Napoleon had done in the first'.¹⁴ By the early 1980s Soviet military planners were nevertheless becoming increasingly aware that their sprawling tank armies, in a computerized age of precision-guided munitions, were in growing danger of becoming lumbering anachronisms. A desire to avoid the fate of Nicholas I's armies in the Crimea therefore led the Soviet General Staff in the mid-1980s to initially back Gorbachev's ambitious reform programme. Gorbachev himself of course then initiated a third great cycle of modernization, but his own 'revolution from above' proved almost as mismanaged as Stalin's agrarian collectivization drives, with results that were this time rapidly exploited by the state's enemies, and also percolated out from the economic and social spheres to spread very rapidly across the whole political spectrum, destabilizing the state itself.

Gorbachev's own critical indecision throughout his reign, when considered in parallel with the remarkably listless August 1991 coup bid by his most hard-line conservative opponents, reflected in microcosm the broader realities of a deeply divided and increasingly disorientated political elite, a factor which probably did more than anything else to hasten a collapse that otherwise appeared very far from inevitable. Yeltsin, himself little more than a self-publicist and effective destroyer of institutions, famously profited most of all from this disarray. Not until the reign of President Putin from 2000 onwards in fact would the Russian intellectual and administrative elites again begin to re-coalesce around an agreed programme of 'sovereign democracy' in order to meet the new challenges of the modern age. Probably the single most significant shift Putin himself made was to correct the most visible and harmful excess of Western-inspired tutelage in the 1990s – to the universal praise of ordinary Russians, he set about attempting to eliminate or dilute the status of Yeltsin-era oligarchs as a political class.

The effects of such restabilization after 2000, combined with unexpected additional benefits brought about by sky-high world energy prices in the wake of America's disastrous invasion in 2003 of Iraq (the latter itself the natural culmination of much of the Anglo-Saxon 'crusading moment' of the 1990s), saw Russia begin to reassume its natural role on the world stage. Under Putin foreign debts were paid off, GDP growth maintained a steady 6–7 per cent per year and the Russian budget entered a period of surplus, with a stabilization fund of some \$157 billion established by the beginning of 2008 for any possible future downturn in world oil prices. The end of Putin's second term saw the Russian Federation poised to initiate the biggest planned round of internal investment and technological modernization undertaken since the 1930s. Putinite 'national projects' shortly before he left office envisaged the expenditure of \$480 billion by 2020 on expanding indigenous electrical capacity, \$400 billion by 2030 on modernizing and expanding the rail network, \$30 billion on airports, and \$5 billion to create a Russian Nanotechnology Corporation, intended to kick-start an indigenous modern high-technology sector. Staggering ongoing levels of bureaucracy and corruption, however, posed the single largest potential obstacle to such ambitions, a phenomenon of which Putin himself was personally well aware: on assuming the post of prime minister in 2008, he publicly warned that it would be necessary to purge the now-dominant governmental party, United Russia, of careerists and undesirables.¹⁵

Russian strategists overall therefore aimed to make the country one of the world's top five economies by 2020. In the Caucasus the investment centrepiece of Russian economic resurgence was unquestionably the coastal town of Sochi, currently destined to host the 2014 Winter Olympics. In the Transcaucasus, however, American policy since the early 1990s has been focused on supporting a countervailing 'New Silk Road Project', with Professor Ariel Cohen in 1997 roundly declaring that the Caucasus and Central Asia had ceased to be in the Russian sphere of influence with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and that American strategy should accordingly be focused on encouraging privatization, the entry of American companies into the local energy market, and the fostering of pro-American orientations in the Georgian, Armenian, Azeri and other governments in the region. The Caspian Sea's estimated reserves of '100 billion to 200 billion barrels' of oil were also held up by Cohen and his associates as a means to break American energy dependency on the Middle East, as well as developing 'lucrative markets for U.S. goods and services'.¹⁶

The centrepiece of this grand neo-imperial geopolitical design was the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline, whose construction was undertaken after the signing of the so-called 'deal of the century' between Azerbaijan and a Western-dominated energy consortium in 1994, with the pipeline itself finally completed and opened in 2006. In fact, the construction and direction of the pipeline ultimately occurred for political rather than commercial reasons – Armenia was deliberately geographically bypassed, which denied it the possibility of reaping any transit fees from Azeri oil, whilst the proven exhaustion of Azerbaijan's own reserves (the main commercial stakeholder in the project, BP, wildly overestimated Azerbaijan's untapped potential) rendered the line commercially unviable without Kazakh

participation. The mother-lode of '100 to 200 billion barrels of oil' allegedly merely awaiting Western investment in the Caspian Sea was also a mirage, the proven oil reserves of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan between them being closer to 46.8 billion barrels – rendering the Caspian a closer approximation of the now already near-exhausted North Sea (16.3 billion barrels of reserves) rather than the much-hoped-for new Persian Gulf. High construction costs, security risks, and the uncompetitive transit fees associated with the 1,770 km long route further serve to undermine arguments for the line's commercial viability.¹⁷ The whole rationale of the project was therefore clearly not to service market forces, but an attempt to break the Transcaucasus and Central Asian states out of Russia's geopolitical orbit – a sphere of influence which Cohen and his associates at the very outset had already loudly declared did not exist. This political agenda has become even more transparent with the promotion of the commercially even riskier 'Nabucco' gas pipeline project, a line designed both to deliberately bypass Russian pipelines in Central Asia, and compete with Russia's own 'South Stream' underwater pipeline project (which, starting from Russia's Black Sea coast, is designed both to bypass the Ukraine, and to supply Turkey, Italy and the Balkans with natural gas). Officially backed by both the United States and the EU, the Nabucco gas pipeline project's main supplier would be Turkmenistan, an unreformed Central Asian dictatorship which is arguably already heavily overextended by existing contracts with Russia, China and Iran.

Despite such Western efforts in the Transcaucasus, however, the resurgence of the Russian economy overall has also already made it again a natural economic magnet for the region – in 2004, average salaries in Russia were three times higher than in Armenia and Georgia, and two and a half times higher than in Azerbaijan. The growth of immigration into Russia from the Transcaucasus has consequently already been considerable, with the population of the North Caucasus (where most of these migrants in fact settle) having increased as a consequence, from 13.2 to 17.7 million, between 1989 and 1998.¹⁸ The dependency of the North Caucasus on the Russian federal budget meanwhile also continues to be striking: in 2005 over 88 per cent of the Ingush state budget was covered by Federal subsidies, whilst in Dagestan this portion stood at over 81 per cent, in Chechnia at over 79 per cent, and in Kabardino-Balkaria at over 73 per cent.¹⁹ Russian revival in the North Caucasus nonetheless continues to be challenged by some rather old problems – terrorism, ethnic conflict, stagnating and underfunded agriculture, bureaucratic corruption, and the migration of ethnic Russians out of the region on a demographic scale. The demise of the egalitarian Communist experiment also opened the door to extremist nationalism within the Russian Federation, exemplified by the Russian skinhead gangs who target and frequently murder North Caucasian and Central Asian migrant workers in Moscow and other major cities, a negative and dangerous social trend against which the Kremlin has so far failed to take sufficiently decisive action. At least part of the challenge for President Mikhail Saakashvili's Georgia however also remains that, no matter how much it may strive towards Euro-Atlantic integration, along a path that would entail it becoming in practice an economic satrap of Israel and the United States, its overall economy will never

truly prosper without Russia. Despite adhering even longer and closer than most in the region to the free-market 'shock' doctrines espoused by Western neoliberal institutions, the Georgian economy in 2009 continues to run a substantial trade deficit, with its four main exports remaining ferroalloys, gold, scrap metal and used cars.²⁰ In 2004 one objective Western observer was driven to remark regarding the overall situation that:

if the influx of migrants continue, if Russian business investment grows in the neighbouring states, if regional youth continue to watch Russian TV and films, purchase Russian software, CDs and DVDs, and other consumer products... Russia will achieve the economic and cultural predominance in Eurasia the United States has in the Americas.²¹

In terms of the North Caucasus, the subject of this book, understanding this cyclical pattern in Russian history is equally important in terms of understanding local patterns of stability there, which have themselves fallen into two clearly discernible cycles. Not coincidentally, both these cycles overlapped with the broader Russian cycles of economic modernization outlined above. Thus, though it may therefore be increasingly fashionable to write histories of many regions within Russia's traditional sphere of influence without any reference to Russia itself, such an approach is also highly problematic. The whole history of the Caucasus is that of a regional security complex, its history immutably intertwined with Russian fortunes as a result – a factor which the supposed wonders of globalization will do nothing in reality to significantly alter.

It is hoped this book has effectively summarized the long-term cycles of stability and instability in the Caucasus, and their linkages with Russia itself. During the eighteenth century, sharp regional demographic growth in the Caucasus overlapped with a growing Russian economic presence and the reshaping of the existing social order, to produce something resembling an archetypal Hobbesian structural crisis. This ferment reached a peak in the Long Caucasus War of the nineteenth century, during which time large-scale social mobilization and even a form of primitive state formation occurred. Demographic losses and the economic exhaustion of local resources then led the crisis to subside temporarily, but with the underlying demographic and associated resource allocation issues having never been fully resolved. Local stasis emerged in part as well because of the remarkably decentralized, indecisive and devolved nature of imperial rule itself, which rendered the views and whims of individual viceroys of critical importance. The Russian revolution of March 1917 provided the opportunity for this largely agrarian modernization crisis to again fully explode, local resentment over issues of land use having festered and begun steadily building again in the immediate pre-war period. The Soviet regime then provided a radical new framework for resolving this crisis via new, large-scale territorial demarcations and 'affirmative action' nationality programmes. Whilst it would be mistaken to underestimate the success of this programme, particularly in the case of states such as Dagestan (where in fact it laid the framework for a model of ethnically balanced stability that continues to

the present day), this set of policies eventually also became brutally distorted by the large-scale ethnic deportations of whole nationalities in 1943–44. Social stability in the region thereafter became hostage to the question of when and how effectively these deported nationalities would eventually be rehabilitated territorially, socially, politically and economically.

The Khrushchev and Brezhnev regimes after 1957 undertook genuine efforts to rehabilitate those nationalities that did return, but the Chechen demographic explosion which formed the particular local response of that national group to what was perceived as attempted genocide against it also created unforeseen social difficulties, which then became dangerously interwoven with the more general economic stagnation and decline experienced by the Soviet Union after 1970. The collapse of the USSR between 1989 and 1991 then provided the same opening for the burgeoning local crisis in the Caucasus to explode as the March 1917 revolution had, with weaponry and heavy military equipment suddenly becoming anarchically disseminated amongst local actors along almost exactly the same lines as before. Resolution of this crisis thereafter again became dependent on the capacity of Russia itself to economically reintegrate the region and regenerate a stable and dependable local social order. Whilst it is inherently dangerous for a historian to make predictions regarding the future, there are, as I have already implied above, some burgeoning signs of hope in this regard, as well as many ongoing sets of problems for which the Communist period carries a surprising number of lessons as well as warnings. Above all, if the Russian Federation is to survive as a multi-ethnic space, something akin to the Soviet-era ideology of a ‘friendship of peoples’ (*druzhba narodov*) will have to be resuscitated, proof positive that concrete material conditions will always demand that certain intellectual ideas be either invented or even reinvented. The Russian Federation will also at some point have to re-address the neo-feudal and clientalist practices re-emerging in the region today which were already a visible part of early Soviet governmental experience in the 1920s – in particular, perhaps, the ‘invention’ of a modern Chechen culture under Ramzan Kadyrov which has entailed, in practice, the terrorizing of civilians and (perhaps even more strikingly and extraordinarily) the social re-oppression of women via a growing insistence on public veiling.²²

The reason that the Caucasus and the wider Russian Federation as a whole now lies at a potential turning point, however, also has as much to do with immediate military fortunes as it has with a potential longer-term economic revival. Though fought with a sometimes brutal disregard for human rights, and a degree of military incompetence on occasion, the first and second Chechen conflicts saved the Russian Federation in an immediate sense: for it not to have fought these wars would unquestionably have caused the federation to go the way of the Soviet Union. In addition, both conflicts in one sense also ironically underlined the continuing vitality of Russian military power since, in the face of substantial demographic challenges, Russia demonstrated itself still quite capable, in defence of clearly identified national interests, to ‘exact levies of blood from its own population, and with the support of electors’ – a facility most European countries appear to be on the verge of losing.²³ Against this backdrop, the greatest challenge and lesson of the

subsequent 2008 war between Georgia and Russia was the clear divisions it revealed within Europe over how best to respond to a renascent Russia. With EU policy itself clearly divided between a 'Mediterranean Dialogue' sponsored by France in 2007, and aimed at embracing North Africa, and a Polish-sponsored 'Eastern Partnership' programme – launched in 2009, and designed to implicitly re-enact, via EU 'soft power', the old Piłsudski programme of embracing Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Ukraine and Georgia – European policy in general has already reached a seemingly unbridgeable impasse.²⁴

Russia is now fully engaged in its third great cycle of modernization meanwhile, the goal of which might be generally summarized as the establishment of a 'liberal economic empire', though carried out in practice by a horizontally rigid and balanced democratic political system with a clearly established power vertical. In this regard it is revealing that the current main centrist party, United Russia, has consistently identified one possible inspirational role model as the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party, which, as is well known, held office almost uninterruptedly in that democratic state since 1955, its power base founded upon a coalition of political and business interests. In parallel with this, the creation of a 'Eurasian Economic Space' as an alternative path towards modernity, reflecting the peculiarities of what many Russians continue to interpret as the unique social, cultural and historical traditions of their region, offers a potentially powerful new magnet to benignly reintegrate the North Caucasus as well as other regions.

Seen through this prism, Soviet Communism, though critical as an ideological component in this period, was in retrospect ironically (and quite unwittingly) subordinate to two much wider economic cycles of modernization. Marxism-Leninism was consequently neither the path to an ultimate utopia preached by its most ardent followers, nor the historical dead-end or path to 'idiotization' proclaimed by its harshest Western critics. It provided a very real immediate answer to a structural crisis that emerged after 1917, and though the system itself thereafter stagnated and suffered well-known agonies under Stalin, it left behind it a sufficiently rich scientific, cultural and sociological legacy to facilitate (though not guarantee) a third great drive towards an economically and socially stable human future, not only in the North Caucasus, but for the Russian Federation as a whole. Other parts of its legacy meanwhile, in particular the advances it made towards furnishing a social safety net, as well as enforcing and policing greater social and racial equality, are also arguably goals that even an economically revived Russia needs to strive harder to return to even today. The efforts of Lenin and his followers then, in a multitude of ways that they themselves could never have foreseen, were not only not in vain, but actually continue to hold lessons for the present.

Notes

Introduction

- 1 There is no agreed periodization of modern warfare, with terms such as ‘fourth generation warfare’ or (in the case of air warfare) ‘fifth generation fighters’ bandied about fairly freely. The three generations implicitly assumed here are: mechanization, the nuclear age, and the development of computerized strike mechanisms that emerged from the late 1970s onwards (the targeting complex now known under the abbreviation for computers, control, command, communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance as C4ISR).
- 2 Populist works on the Chechen conflict include: Sebastian Smith, *Allah’s Mountains. The Battle for Chechnya*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2000; Carlotta Gall, *Chechnya. A Small Victorious War*. London: Picador, 1997; and Moshe Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear. Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule*. London: C. Hurst, 2006. The most outspoken case for Chechen independence has been made by Tony Wood: *Chechnya. The Case for Independence*. London: Verso, 2007.
- 3 The Russian ethnographer Valerii Tishkov is scathing about the lazy primordialist narratives used as intellectual shorthand in all too many Western (and even Russian) accounts to portray the Caucasus: V. A. Tishkov, *Obshchestvo v vooruzhennom konflikte. Etnografiia Chechenskoi voyny*. Moscow: Nauka, 2001, pp. 42–6.
- 4 Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom. A History of the Caucasus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 210; Vicken Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus. Russia’s Troubled Frontier*. London: Hurst, 2008, p. 167.
- 5 T. M. Simonova, ‘Strategicheskie zamysly nachal’nika pol’skogo gosudarstva Iuzefa Pilsudskogo. Prometeizm vo vneshnei politike Pol’shi v 1919–23gg.’ *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 11 (2001), pp. 42–8; ‘Prometheism’, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prometheism/> [accessed 12 January 2010].
- 6 Tara Bahrapour, Howard Schneider and William Branigin, ‘Rice Gets Georgian Approval of Cease-Fire, Demands Russians Withdraw’. *Washington Post*, 15 August 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/15/AR2008081500621.html> [accessed 12 January 2010].
- 7 The key text welcoming the dawn of a hegemonic ‘liberal peace’ after 1991 undoubtedly remains Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: The Free Press, 1992. It remains to be seen whether Fukuyama’s work proves prophetic or is set to become a fascinating period piece.
- 8 For the kind of nuance I am driving at, see, for example, the comparative study of Stephen Wheatcroft: ‘The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930–45’. *Europe-Asia Studies* 48/8 (1996), pp. 1319–53. Wheatcroft concludes that Stalin *purposely* killed around 1 million people in one highly specific time period; Hitler *purposely* killed somewhere in the region of 5 million as part of a general policy line.

- 9 Miroslav Hroch, 'Lessons from Bohemia'. *New Left Review*, July/August 2009, 58.
- 10 Key early examples of the Western Cold War approach were: Walter Kolarz, *Russia and Her Colonies*. London: George Philip, 1952, and Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire. The Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism*. London: Macmillan, 1953. For examples of the more recent reassessment, see: Will Myer, *Islam and Colonialism. Western Perspectives on Soviet Asia*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002; Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–23*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations. Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005; Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; and Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001. The work of Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nations*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, represents an interesting but ultimately unsatisfactory amalgam of the 'old' and 'new' schools, being hampered by a sharp lack of archival research, which is then reflected in a sometimes excessive reliance on the older works of Alexandre Bennigsen's 'French school'.
- 11 His key text remains: A. Avtorkhanov, 'The Chechens and the Ingush during the Soviet Period and Its Antecedents', in: M. Bennigsen-Broxup (ed.), *The North Caucasus Barrier. The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World*. London: Hurst, 1992, pp. 146–94.
- 12 Gammer, *Lone Wolf*, chapter 12; John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya. Roots of a Separatist Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, chapter 2, tellingly labelled simply 'Soviet Genocide'.
- 13 A. Avtorkhanov, *Memuary*. Frankfurt: Posev, 1983, p. 527.
- 14 O. B. Mozokhin, 'Statistika politicheskikh repressi, 1918–53 gg.' *Voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv* 6/42 (2003), p. 51.
- 15 Stalin had the chief statisticians of the 1937 census shot for falsification: their figures reflected the impact of famine in 1932–3 and the still delicate state of the overall economy. Their figures nonetheless remain useful, both because they are in all likelihood accurate, and because they place in context the gap between vaunting ambition and social reality – Stalin believed that the total population *should* have grown by 3 million a year since 1926, resulting in a population total of 180 million by 1937.
- 16 For a key text alleging the opposite, see: R. J. Rummel, *Lethal Politics. Soviet Genocide and Mass Murder since 1917*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1990. Most accounts which lay emphasis on the lethality of the Soviet regime in this period add to their tallies hundreds of thousands of 'excess deaths' due to famine (where responsibility is much more difficult to assign), alongside deprivation in wartime and immediate post-war conditions (typhus being a particularly lethal mass killer in this period). In some studies these figures are then further inflated by statistically projecting forward the additional demographic losses from 'the unborn'. For a useful sober study of one of the most mythologized episodes of this whole period, see: R. W. Davies and S. G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger. Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- 17 My own views concerning natural cycles in state-centred economic practice have become influenced by the concept of the natural 'embedded' economy espoused by Karl Polyani: *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon, 2001.
- 18 David Lockwood, *The Destruction of the Soviet Union. A Study in Globalization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, remains a key text on this process.
- 19 Georgi M. Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus. A World-System Biography*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 119–20.
- 20 Turkmenistan presents a famous example of this phenomenon. See: Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation. The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, and Roy, *New Central Asia*.

- 21 The reference is of course to Alfred J. Rieber's groundbreaking study of Stalin as Georgian revolutionary: 'Stalin, Man of the Borderlands'. *American Historical Review* 106/5 (December 2001), pp. 1651–91, but for a comparative generation of leaders, see: Erik-Jan Zürcher, 'The Young Turks. Children of the Borderlands?', in: K. Karpat and R. W. Zens (eds.), *Ottoman Borderlands. Issues, Personalities and Political Changes*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003, pp. 275–85.
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- 2 N. A. Aristov, *Anglo-indiiskii 'Kavkaz'*. *Stolknoveniiia Anglii s afganskimi pograničnymi plemenami*. St Petersburg: V. Ts. Meshcherskii, 1900.
- 3 E. F. Kisriev, *Islam i vlast' v Dagestane*. Moscow: O.G.I., 2004, p. 21.
- 4 Christian Dettmering, 'Reassessing Chechen and Ingush (*Vainakh*) Clan Structures in the 19th Century'. *Central Asian Survey* 24/4 (2005), pp. 472–7.
- 5 Moshe Gammer, 'Elements of Democracy in Dagestan on the Eve of the Russian Conquest', in: Yaacov Ro'i (ed.), *Democracy and Pluralism in Muslim Eurasia*. London and New York: Frank Cass, 2004, pp. 31–8.
- 6 M. M. Blied and V. V. Degoev, *Kavkazskaia voina*. Moscow: Rosset, 1994, pp. 11–16.
- 7 N. G. Volkova, *Etnicheskii sostav naseleniia Severnogo Kavkaza v XVIII–nachale XX v.* Moscow: Nauka, 1974, p. 143.
- 8 Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*. London: Verso, 1996.
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- 11 N. Ia. Danilevskii, *Rossiiia i Evropa. Vzgliad na kul'turnye i politicheskie otnosheniia slavianskogo mira k germano-romanskomy*. Moscow: Eksmo, Algoritm, 2003, p. 46.
- 12 V. O. Bobrovnikov, *Musul'mane Severnogo Kavkaza. Obychai, pravo, nasilie. Ocherki po istorii i etnografii prava nagornogo Dagestana*. Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, RAN, 2002, pp. 24–5.
- 13 Blied, *Rossiiia i gortsy*, p. 18.
- 14 F. V. Totoev, 'Razvitie rabstva i rabotorgovli v Chechne (vtoraia polovina XVIII–pervaia polovina XIXv.)', in: A. Kh. Magomedov (ed.), *Sotsial'nye otnosheniia u narodov Severnogo Kavkaza*. Ordzhonikidze: Severo-Osetinskii gosudarstvennyi universitet im. K. L. Khetagurova, 1978, pp. 65–8.
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- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 84.
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- 21 Z. Kh. Ibragimova, *Chechenskaia istoriia. Politika, ekonomika, kul'tura. Vtoraia polovina XIX veka*. Moscow: Evraziia+, 2002, p. 15.

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- 23 Duniushkin, *Iug Rossii*, p. 19.
- 24 Ibid., p. 24.
- 25 On this, see in particular: N. I. Pokrovskii, *Kavkazskie voyny i imamat Shamilia*. Moscow: Rosspen, 2000, chapters 3 and 7. For the original thesis, long since disputed by early modern historians, see: Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927.
- 26 Anna Zelkina, *In Quest for God and Freedom. Sufi Responses to the Russian Advance in the North Caucasus*. London: Hurst, 2000, pp. 203–25; Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan*. London: Frank Cass, 1994, pp. 225–35.
- 27 Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, p. 14; Charles King, 'Imagining Circassia. David Urquhart and the Making of North Caucasus Nationalism'. *Russian Review* 66 (April 2007), pp. 238–55.
- 28 A. D. Kalmykov [Kalmykov], *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat. Outposts of the Empire, 1893–1917*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971, p. 3.
- 29 Paul B. Henze, 'Fire and Sword in the Caucasus. The 19th Century Resistance of the North Caucasian Mountaineers'. *Central Asian Survey* 2/1 (1983), pp. 34–5, and his 'Circassia in the Nineteenth Century. The Futile Fight for Freedom', in: Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, Gilles Vinstein and S. E. Wimbush (eds.), *Turco-Tatar Past. Soviet Present*. Paris: Peeters and École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1986, p. 273. Shamil himself had earlier engaged in population transfers in order to create a zone of 'scorched earth' between himself and the Russians: Gammer, *Muslim Resistance*, p. 150, and John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*. London: Curzon, 1999, pp. 444–5. A dissertation dedicated to this whole subject is that of Marc Pinson, 'Russian Expulsion of Mountaineers from the Caucasus, 1856–66, and Its Historical Background. Demographic Warfare – An Aspect of Ottoman and Russian Policies, 1854–66.' Unpublished PhD diss., Harvard University, 1970. See also V. V. Popov, 'Imperator Aleksandr II. "...Delo polnogo zavoevaniia Kavkaza blizko uzhe k okonchaniuu"'. *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 6 (1995), pp. 71–7; Alan Fisher, 'Emigration of Muslims from the Russian Empire after the Crimean War', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 35 (1987), pp. 356–71; and Brian Glyn Williams, 'Hirja and Forced Migration from Nineteenth-Century Russia to the Ottoman Empire. A Critical Analysis of the Great Tatar Emigration of 1860–61'. *Cahiers du Monde russe* 41/1 (2000), pp. 79–108.
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- 33 Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, p. 25.
- 34 Popov, 'Imperator Aleksandr II', pp. 73–4.
- 35 Z. Kh. Ibragimova, *Chechnia posle Kavkazskoi voyny (1863–1875gg.)*. Moscow: Maks, 2000, pp. 113–14.
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- 40 Ibid., p. 40. On the German colonists, see: Tamara Gumbatova, *Zhizn' nemtsev-kolonistov za Kavkazom*. Baku: Evangelicheskoi-liuteranskaia obshchina i Evangelicheskoi-liuteranskaia tserkov' Spasitelia g. Baku, 2005.
- 41 Gumbatova, *Zhizn' nemtsev-kolonistov*, pp. 136, 144–55.
- 42 On these sectarian communities, see: Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers. Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus*. Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2005.
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- 76 Kisriev, *Islam i vlast'*, p. 34.
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- 167 Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 46–56.
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- 171 A. V. Kvashonkin, ‘Sovetizatsiia Zakavkaz'ia v peripiske bol'shevitskogo rukovodstva 1920–22 gg.’ *Cahiers du Monde russe* 38/1–2 (January–June 1997), pp. 170–80.
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- 178 Kadishev, *Interventsiia i Grazhdanskaia voina*, p. 362.
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- 180 Kvinitadze, *Moi vospominaniia*, pp. 271–2.
- 181 Kazemzadeh, *Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 324.
- 182 On the 1922 'Georgian Crisis', see: Smith, *Bolsheviks and the National Question*, ch. 7.

5 Insurgency, corruption and the search for a new socialist order, 1920–25

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- 2 The classic Western text alleging Soviet duplicity in nationality affairs is Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union. Communism and Nationalism 1917–1923*. Rev. edn. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964.
- 3 J. Smith, 'Soviet Nationality Policies from Lenin to Gorbachev', in: G. N. Sevost'ianov (ed.), *Tragediia velikoi derzhavy. Natsional'nyi vopros i raspad Sovetskogo Soiuzu*. Moscow: Sotsial'no-politicheskaiia mysl', 2005, p. 524.
- 4 Aslanbek Sheripov's Turcophilia became a taboo subject for later Soviet biographers in the aftermath of Stalin's rise to power. The sympathetic biographical study of the Trotskyite Abkhaz politician Efrem Eshba remains the only study to explore it: Efrem Eshba, *Aslanbek Sheripov. Opyt kharakterisiki lichnosti i deiatel'nosti A. Sheripov v sviazi s narodno-revoliutsionnym dvizheniem v Chechne*. Sukhumi: Alashara, 1990, pp. 7–8.
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6 Decossackization, demarcation, categorization: creating the Soviet Caucasus, 1920–27

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7 Forging the proletariat: women, collectivization and repression, 1928–34

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9 The purges and industrial modernization: the Soviet Caucasus in the 1930s

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- 61 *Ibid.*, pp. 111–14.
- 62 *Ibid.*, pp. 120–1.
- 63 Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen*, p. 345.
- 64 Vicken Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus. Russia's Troubled Frontier*. London: Hurst, 2008, pp. 64–5.
- 65 Ibragimov, *Vlast' i obshchestvo*, pp. 105–8, 113.
- 66 G. Kh. Mambetov and Z. G. Mambetov, *Sotsial'nye protivorechiia v kabardino-balkarskoi derevne v 20–30-e gody*. Nal'chik: KBNTs RAN, 1999, pp. 16–17.
- 67 Wilhelm Tieke, *The Caucasus and the Oil. The German-Soviet War in the Caucasus 1942/3*. Winnipeg: J. J. Fedorowicz, 1995, pp. 2–4.
- 68 A. Iu. Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza i Krasnaia Armia 1918–1945 gody*. Moscow: Veche, 2007, pp. 135–6.
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 70 *Ibid.*, pp. 145–6.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- 73 *Ibid.*, pp. 150–1.

10 Dealing with ‘bandits’: war, ethnic cleansing and repression in the Soviet Caucasus, 1941–45

- 1 N. K. Baibakov, *Neftianoi front*. Moscow: GazOil, 1995, p. 9.
- 2 David Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus. The Red Army on the Eve of World War*. Kansas: University of Kansas Press 1998, pp. 151, 178.
- 3 On the emphasis given by the German army to ‘radio operations’, even during peacetime manoeuvres, see: Robert Citino, ‘Beyond Fire and Movement. Command, Control,

- and Information in the German Blitzkrieg'. *Journal of Strategic Studies* 27 (2004), pp. 324–44.
- 4 Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus*, pp. 192–203; Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East. The Nazi-Soviet War, 1941–1945*. London: Hodder Arnold, 2005, pp. 26–8.
 - 5 Alexander Statiev, 'The Nature of Anti-Soviet Armed Resistance, 1942–44. The North Caucasus, the Kalmyk Autonomous Republic, and Crimea'. *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6/2 (Spring 2005), pp. 290–1; Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples. The Deportation and Fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1978, p. 46.
 - 6 Jeffrey Burds, 'The Soviet War against 'Fifth Columnists'. The Case of Chechnya, 1942–44'. *Journal of Contemporary History* 42/2 (2007), p. 291.
 - 7 Alexander Werth, *The Year of Stalingrad. An Historical Record and a Study of Russian Mentality, Methods and Policies*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1946, p. 153; Statiev, 'Nature of Anti-Soviet Armed Resistance', pp. 292–3; Vladimir Logionov (ed.), *Kavkazskie orly*. Moscow: Mistikos, 1993, p. 9; A. Iu. Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza i Krasnaia Armia 1918–1945 gody*. Moscow: Veche, 2007, p. 191.
 - 8 A. Iu. Bezugol'nyi, "'Tovarishch Beriia i komanduiushchii frontom prikazali..." Uchastie narkoma vnutrennikh del, chlena GKO L. P. Beriia v rukovodstve oborono Kavkaza v avguste–sentiaebre 1942g.' *Voенno-istoricheskii arkhiv* 3/27 (2002), p. 79; Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza i Krasnaia Armia*, p. 167.
 - 9 Logionov, *Kavkazskie orly*, p. 14; A. F. Strel'tsov, 'Kavkaz v otechestvennoi voennoi istorii'. *Voенno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 3 (2002), p. 45; Statiev, 'Nature of Anti-Soviet Armed Resistance', p. 294; Eduard Abramian, *Kavkaztsy v Abvere*. Moscow: Iauza, 2006, p. 129.
 - 10 N. Bugai (ed.), 'Dos'e "Vostoka" 20–40-e gody. Tragediia narodov'. *Vostok oriens* 2 (1992), p. 128.
 - 11 N. F. Bugai and A. M. Gonov, *Kavkaz. Narody v eshelonakh (20–60-e gody)*. Moscow: Insan, 1998, pp. 138–9.
 - 12 Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, p. 87.
 - 13 Ibid., p. 122; John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad. Stalin's War with Germany*. London: Panther, 1985, p. 372.
 - 14 Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza i Krasnaia Armia*, pp. 203–5.
 - 15 A. A. Grechko, *Bitva za Kavkaz*. Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1971, p. 67; Bezugol'nyi, 'Tovarishch Beriia', p. 70.
 - 16 Bezugol'nyi, 'Tovarishch Beriia', pp. 71–2.
 - 17 Grechko, *Bitva za Kavkaz*, pp. 105–6, 109.
 - 18 Bezugol'nyi, 'Tovarishch Beriia', p. 69.
 - 19 Werth, *Year of Stalingrad*, p. 159, for a contemporary view.
 - 20 Wilhelm Tieke, *The Caucasus and the Oil. The German-Soviet War in the Caucasus 1942/3*. Winnipeg: J. J. Fedorowicz, 1995, pp. 32, 45, 49.
 - 21 Bezugol'nyi, 'Tovarishch Beriia', pp. 74–5.
 - 22 Ibid., p. 82.
 - 23 Ibid., p. 81.
 - 24 Ibid., pp. 87–96, footnote 79.
 - 25 S. M. Shtemenko, 'Pochemu ia dokladyval Beriia?' (Publikatsiia Iu. V. Rubtsova). *Voенno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 1 (1995), pp. 26–30; I. V. Tiulenev, *Cherez tri voiny*. Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstvo oborony Soiuza SSR, 1960, pp. 196–7.
 - 26 The German conquest of France in the summer of 1940 was accomplished with 136 divisions, of which only 10 were Panzer divisions, 7 motorized and 1 cavalry.
 - 27 Grechko, *Bitva za Kavkaz*, pp. 110–11.
 - 28 David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *To the Gates of Stalingrad. Soviet-German Combat Operations, April–August 1942*. Kansas: Kansas University Press, 2009, pp. 445–6.
 - 29 Tiulenev, *Cherez tri voiny*, p. 191.

- 30 Grechko, *Bitva za Kavkaz*, p. 211.
- 31 N. K. Baibakov, *Ot Stalina do El'tsina*. Moscow: GazOil, 1998, p. 64. Baibakov died in April 2008 at the grand age of ninety-seven. Head of Gosplan for over two decades, he was effectively forced out of office by Gorbachev in 1985.
- 32 Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*, p. 160.
- 33 Baibakov, *Neftianoi front*, p. 5. Vagif Agayev, Fuad Akhundov, Fikrat T. Aliyev and Mikhail Agarunov, 'World War II and Azerbaijan', http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/32_folder/32_articles/32_ww22.html [accessed 10 October 2009].
- 34 Tadeusz Swietochkowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan. A Borderland in Transition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 179; Daniel Yergin, *The Prize. The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power*. New York: The Free Press, 2008, pp. 375–7; Baibakov, *Neftianoi front*, p. 25.
- 35 Baibakov, *Ot Stalina do El'tsina*, pp. 74–5.
- 36 T. M. Balikoev and E. O. Medoev, *Natsional'naia politika sovetskogo gosudarstva na Severnom Kavkaze v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny (1941–1945gg.)*. Vladikavkaz: Ministerstvo obrazovaniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Severo-Osetinskii gosudarstvennyi universitet im. K. L. Khetagurova, 2001, p. 75.
- 37 Statiev, 'Nature of Anti-Soviet Armed Resistance', p. 295.
- 38 Skoropadskii and Petliura were both pretenders to power in the Ukraine during the Russian Civil War. Skoropadskii was a German-supported puppet governor of the so-called Hetmanate between April and November 1918; his successor, Petliura, overthrew him and continued to rule, exchanging German for Polish support, until the invading Polish army was driven out of the Ukraine by Bolshevik forces in the summer of 1920.
- 39 On this broader phenomenon, see: Alfred J. Rieber, 'Civil Wars in the Soviet Union'. *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4/1 (Winter 2003), pp. 129–62.
- 40 Abramian, *Kavkaztsy v Abvere*, pp. 81–5.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 42 Perry Biddiscombe, 'Unternehmen Zeppelin. The Deployment of SS Saboteurs and Spies in the Soviet Union, 1942–45'. *Europe-Asia Studies* 52/6 (2000), pp. 1115–17, 1125–6.
- 43 V. P. Galitskii, 'Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina 1941–45gg. "...Dlia aktivnoi podryvnoi diversionnoi deiatel'nosti v tylu u Krasnoi Armii."' *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal* 1 (January 2001), p. 19.
- 44 A. V. Kazakov, 'Nekotorye aspekty deiatel'nosti organov VChK-NKVD Severnogo Kavkaza po presecheniiu razvedyvatel'no-diversionnykh i terroristicheskikh aktsii v 20–40-kh gg. XXv.' *Istoricheskie chteniia na Lubianke 1997–2007*. Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, 2008, pp. 164, 170.
- 45 I. A. Kosikov, 'Diversanty "Tret'ego Reikha"'. *Novaya i noveishaia istoriia* 2 (1986), p. 221.
- 46 Tieke, *Caucasus and the Oil*, pp. 57–60, and Sergei Chuev, 'Severnyi Kavkaz 1941–45. Voina v tylu. Bor'ba s bandformirovaniiami.' *Obozrevatel'*, 2 (2002), p. 108. Tieke's account differs from Chuev's by insisting that the Brandenburg unit that seized the river bridge around Maikop held out successfully until reinforcements arrived.
- 47 Kazakov, 'Nekotorye aspekty', p. 165; Abramian, *Kavkaztsy v Abvere*, p. 90; GARF, f. 9478, op. 1c, d. 320, l. 26; f. 9478, op. 1c, d. 297, l. 103.
- 48 Abramian, *Kavkaztsy v Abvere*, p. 119.
- 49 Galitskii, 'Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina', p. 24.
- 50 See, for example: Moshe Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear. Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule*. London: C. Hurst, 2006, p. 165; Emil Souleimanov, *An Endless War. The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 74. Symbolizing the bias of most Western texts, Souleimanov devotes exactly twenty-five pages to the nineteenth-century Caucasus war against Shamil, but barely one page to the events of the Second World War.
- 51 Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains. The Battle for Chechnya*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, p. 63.

- 52 Abramian, *Kavkaztsy v Abvere*, p. 116.
- 53 V. P. Galitskii, 'Dokumenty i materialy. "Obiazaius'...pomoch' germanskoi armii.' *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal* 3 (2000), pp. 42–9.
- 54 Abramian, *Kavkaztsy v Abvere*, p. 120; Kosikov, 'Diversanty "Tret'ego Reikha"', p. 223.
- 55 Abramian, *Kavkaztsy v Abvere*, pp. 120–4.
- 56 Burds, 'Soviet War', pp. 294–5; Galitskii, 'Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina', pp. 21–2. Chuev accredits Israilov with an even more violent pre-war criminal career, including bank robbery, terrorism and exile to Siberia: Chuev, 'Severnyi Kavkaz', pp. 104–5.
- 57 Chuev, 'Severnyi Kavkaz', p. 106.
- 58 Ibid., p. 109; Gammer, *Lone Wolf*, pp. 161–2; Galitskii, 'Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina', p. 18.
- 59 Galitskii, 'Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina', pp. 19–20; Logionov, *Kavkazskie orly*, p. 14; Burds, 'Soviet War', p. 297.
- 60 Galitskii, 'Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina', p. 24; Burds, 'Soviet War', pp. 301–3.
- 61 Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza i Krasnaia Armia*, pp. 167–8; M. M. Ibragimov, *Vlast' i obshchestvo v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny (na primere natsional'nykh respublik Severnogo Kavkaza)*. Moscow: Prometei, 1998, p. 301.
- 62 Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza i Krasnaia Armia*, p. 170, table 2.
- 63 Abramian, *Kavkaztsy v Abvere*, p. 149.
- 64 Iu. N. Semin and O. Iu. Starkov (eds.), 'Kavkaz. 1942–43 gody. Geroizm i predatel'stvo'. *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal* 8 (1991), pp. 35–43.
- 65 Grechko, *Bitva za Kavkaz*, pp. 199–205, 225, 446.
- 66 A. Iu. Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza v vooruzhennykh silakh SSSR v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny 1941–1945gg. S predisloviiem Nikolaia Bugaia*. Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2005, pp. 126–7.
- 67 Ibid., p. 134.
- 68 Ibid., p. 135–6, 145–7.
- 69 Balikoev and Medoev, *Natsional'naia politika*, p. 89.
- 70 Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza i Krasnaia Armia*, p. 158.
- 71 Ibid., p. 160.
- 72 Ibid., pp. 165–6.
- 73 Ibid., p. 167.
- 74 Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza v vooruzhennykh silakh*, pp. 89–93; Statiev, 'Nature of Anti-Soviet Armed Resistance', p. 293. M. M. Ibragimov cites a figure of 18,500 Chechens and Ingush serving in the Red Army, but clouds the issue by stating that 'two thirds' of this number volunteered, and not mentioning the desertion rate: Ibragimov, *Vlast' i obshchestvo*, p. 160.
- 75 Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza v vooruzhennykh silakh*, p. 132.
- 76 Bezugol'nyi, *Narody Kavkaza i Krasnaia Armia*, p. 181.
- 77 Ibid., pp. 181–2.
- 78 Aleksandr Nekrich, 'Nakazannye Narody'. *Rodina* 6 (1990), p. 32.
- 79 V. P. Sidorenko (ed.), "'Dlia vyseleniia chechentsev i ingushei napravit' chasti NKVD." Dokumenty o provedenii spetsoperatsii po deportatsii narodov ChI ASSR. 1943–44gg.' *Istoricheskii arkhiv* 3 (2000), p. 67.
- 80 V. V. Trepavlov (ed.), *Rossia i Severnyi Kavkaz. 400 let voiny?* Moscow: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 1998, p. 31.
- 81 Statiev, 'Nature of Anti-Soviet Armed Resistance', 304–5.
- 82 Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, p. 122; N. F. Bugai, *L. Beriia–I. Stalinu. 'Soglasno vashemu ukazaniiu...'* Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1995, p. 58.
- 83 Bugai, *L. Beriia–I. Stalinu*, p. 61.
- 84 Ibid., pp. 61–2.
- 85 Ibid., pp. 62–3.
- 86 Balikoev and Medoev, *Natsional'naia politika*, p. 78.
- 87 Bugai, *L. Beriia–I. Stalinu*, pp. 57, 63; Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, p. 129.

- 88 M. M. Ibragimov (ed.), *Istoriia Chechnii s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*. Tom 2: *Istoriia Chechni XX i nachala XXI vekov*. Grozny: GUP, 2008, pp. 486–92, 516.
- 89 Bugai, *L. Beriia–I. Stalinu*, pp. 92–5.
- 90 S. I. Suleimanov, *Iz istorii chekistkikh organov Dagestana. Dokumental'nye ocherki istorii 1920–1945gg*. Makhachkala: Iupiter, 2000, pp. 105–6.
- 91 Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, pp. 146–53; Bugai, *L. Beriia–I. Stalinu*, p. 115.
- 92 Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, p. 156.
- 93 Bugai, *L. Beriia–I. Stalinu*, pp. 120–8.
- 94 *Ibid.*, pp. 122–3.
- 95 *Ibid.*, pp. 136–7, 140.
- 96 Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 110.
- 97 *Ibid.*, pp. 118–19.
- 98 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

11 The final structural crisis of the Soviet state, 1953–91

- 1 Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire. Lessons for Modern Russia*, trans. A. W. Bouis. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007, pp. 74–5.
- 2 N. K. Baibakov, *Ot Stalina do El'tsina*. Moscow: GazOil, 1998, pp. 172–80.
- 3 Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century*. London: Verso, 2005, pp. 249, 330–3; David Lockwood, *The Destruction of the Soviet Union. A Study in Globalization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 81.
- 4 Paul R. Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism. Evidence from the Soviet Secret Archives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 51–2, 60–1, 64–5.
- 5 Lewin, *Soviet Century*, pp. 348–51. On the ‘superstructure suspended in the air’ analogy, see: Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System. Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia*. New York: New, 1994, pp. 260–6.
- 6 On this whole phenomenon, see: Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder. The Leninist Extinction*. California: University of California Press, 1992.
- 7 Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. London: University of California Press, 2007, p. 86.
- 8 G. I. Khanin, ‘The 1950s. The Triumph of the Soviet Economy’. *Europe-Asia Studies* 55/8 (December 2003), pp. 1187–1212.
- 9 Victor Zaslavsky, ‘The Soviet Union’, in: Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen (eds.), *After Empire. Multiethnic Societies and Nation Building. The Soviet Union and Russian, Ottoman and Habsburg Empires*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997, p. 82.
- 10 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes, 1914–1991*. London: Abacus, 1995, p. 247.
- 11 Abdurakhman Daniilov, *Vospominaniia*. Makhachkala: Dagestanskoe, 1991, pp. 121–4.
- 12 Baibakov, *Ot Stalina do El'tsina*, p. 30.
- 13 Robert Harvey, *Comrades. The Rise and Fall of World Communism*. London: John Murray, 2003, p. 194.
- 14 Alex Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–1991*. London: Penguin, 1992, p. 405.
- 15 Roi Medvedev, *Andropov*. Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2006, p. 349.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 356.
- 17 Dmitri Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*. London: HarperCollins, 1998, p. 452; Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted. The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 70.
- 18 Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, p. 70.
- 19 See, for example: Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia*, trans. A. Austin. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2002. The most extreme accusation made against Iakovlev, dating from his earlier unofficial

- exile as Soviet ambassador to Canada, was of course that he was an undercover CIA agent.
- 20 On Andropov's interest in, and desire to utilize instrumentally, Soviet dissident thought in order to help facilitate reform, see: Lewin, *Soviet Century*, pp. 257–64.
 - 21 O. N. Smolin, 'Radikal'naia transformatsiia obshchestvo v SSSR i Rossii. Problema periodizatsii'. *Voprosy istorii* 12 (2005), p. 40.
 - 22 Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, pp. 91–2.
 - 23 Georgi M. Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus. A World-System Biography*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 176.
 - 24 Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer*, p. 178.
 - 25 R. G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past. Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, pp. 111–21, 181, footnote 42.
 - 26 The Aliiev phenomenon remains understudied. For the nearest thing approaching an objective biographical study, see: Nikolai Zen'kovich, *Geidar Aliiev. Zigzagi sud'by*. Moscow: Iauza, Eksmo, 2007.
 - 27 P. G. Pikhoia, 'Pochemu raspalsia Sovestkii Soiuz?', in: G. N. Sevost'ianov (ed.), *Tragediia velikoi derzhavy. Natsional'nyi vopros i raspad Sovetskogo Soiuza*. Moscow: Sotsial'no-politicheskaia mysl', 2005, p. 417.
 - 28 Alfred J. Rieber, 'How Persistent Are Persistent Factors?', in: Robert Legvold (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, pp. 249–50.
 - 29 Vladimir Putin and Nataliya Gevorkyan, Natalya Timakova, Andre Kolesnikov, *First Person*. London: Hutchinson, 2000, p. 79.
 - 30 On this, see: Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*. London: Verso, 2005.
 - 31 Ligachev's memoirs form an important source on the period: Y. Ligachev and S. Cohen, *Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin. The Memoirs of Yegor Ligachev*. New York: Westview, 1996.
 - 32 Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union. The Mind Aflame*. London: SAGE, 1997, p. 50.
 - 33 James Hughes, *Chechnya. From Nationalism to Jihad*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, p. 167.
 - 34 Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, pp. 180–1. China also never engaged in the massive competition in sophisticated military technology with which the Soviet Union found itself confronted by facing NATO. Instead, owing to a continuing faith in Maoist 'People's War', the Chinese PLA, although massive in size, remained well into the 1980s an infantry-heavy force wedded to, at best, 1950s-era military technology – though the Third Indo-Chinese War of 1979 also decisively demonstrated the enormous flaws and drawbacks of such a model. Only in more recent years have Chinese military budgets consistently risen year on year in the drive to acquire more sophisticated technologies. On the critical military turning point, highlighting the increasing ineffectiveness of the Maoist military model, see: Edward C. O'Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War*. London: Routledge, 2007.
 - 35 For a good discussion on this, see: Tuomas Forsberg, 'Economic Incentives, Ideas, and the End of the Cold War. Gorbachev and German Unification'. *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7/2 (Spring 2005), pp. 142–64.
 - 36 See, for example, the memoirs of Robert Gates, later US secretary of defence, at the time director of the CIA: *From the Shadows. The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
 - 37 See, for example: Helene Carrere D'Encausse, *The End of the Soviet Empire. The Triumph of Nations*. New York: Basic, 1994. Whilst I agree with much of Professor D'Encausse's work on Soviet nationalization policies in the 1920s, I disagree passionately with her interpretation of how the Soviet Union ended. By contrast, on the end of the Soviet Union as a failed 'revolution from above', see: David Kotz and Fred

- Weir, *Revolution from Above. The Demise of the Soviet System*. London: Routledge, 1997, and Gordon M. Hahn, *Russia's Revolution from Above. Reform, Transition and Revolution in the Fall of the Soviet Communist Regime, 1985–2000*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 2002.
- 38 On the events in Sumgait, see: Vicken Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus. Russia's Troubled Frontier*. London: Hurst, 2008, pp. 97–111.
 - 39 Article 6 of the 1977 Soviet Constitution guaranteed the political dominance of the Communist Party as 'the leading and guiding force of Soviet society'.
 - 40 Z. A. Stankevich, 'Sootnoshenie natsional'nogo i politicheskogo faktorov v protsesse razrusheniia soiuzs SSR', in: G. N. Sevost'ianov (ed.), *Tragediia velikoi derzhavy. Natsional'nyi vopros i raspad Sovetskogo Soiuzs*. Moscow: Sotsial'no-politicheskaia mysl', 2005, pp. 433–46. On this whole period from the Azeri perspective, see: R. Agaev and Z. Ali-Zade, *Azerbaidzhan. Konets vtoroi respubliki (1988–1993)*. Moscow: Granitsa, 2006.
 - 41 Lockwood, *Destruction of the Soviet Union*, p. 136.
 - 42 V. G. Shnaider, 'Osvoenie territorii upravdennykh natsional'nykh avtonomii Severnogo Kavkaza (seredina 1940-kh–seredina 1950-kh gg.)', *Kavkazskii sbornik* 4/36. Moscow: Russkaia panorama, 2007, pp. 127–8; N. F. Kovalevskii (ed.), *Rossia i Severnyi Kavkaz. Istoriia i sovremennost'*. Moscow: Akademicheskii proekt, 2006, p. 264.
 - 43 Shnaider, 'Osvoenie territorii', pp. 131–2.
 - 44 Ibid., p. 135.
 - 45 Ibid., p. 131.
 - 46 T. M. Balikoev and E. O. Medoev, *Natsional'naia politika sovetskogo gosudarstva na Severnom Kavkaze v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny (1941–1945gg.)*. Vladikavkaz: Ministerstvo obrazovaniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Severo-Osetinskii gosudarstvennyi universitet im. K.L. Khetagurova, 2001, p. 110.
 - 47 Shnaider, 'Osvoenie territorii', p. 138.
 - 48 Aleksandr Liakhovskii, *Zacharovannye svobodoi. Tainy kavkazskikh voyn. Informatsiia. Analiz. Vyvody*. Moscow: Detektivpress, 2006, pp. 176–7.
 - 49 Ibid., p. 178.
 - 50 Mikhail Prozumenshchikov (ed.), '"Natsionalisticheskie elementy postoianno provotirovali vystupleniia". Kak nakalialas' obstanovka v Checheno-Ingushetii.' *Istochnik* 4 (1995), p. 59.
 - 51 Ibid., pp. 48–52.
 - 52 Liakhovskii, *Zacharovannye svobodoi*, pp. 181–3.
 - 53 Prozumenshchikov, 'Natsionalisticheskie elementy', p. 62.
 - 54 *Sovkhoz*: a state farm, typically set up on land gained from the confiscation of what were previously giant private estates, and which recruited workers from landless rural labourers, as opposed to a collective farm (kolkhoz) created by the amalgamation of smaller individual farms.
 - 55 Kh. M. A. Sabanchiev, *Byli soslany navechno. Deportatsiia i reabilitatsiia balkarskogo naroda*. Na'chik: El'brus, 2004, pp. 78–87.
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- 63 Robert Bruce Ware, 'Mythology and Political Failure in Chechnya', in R. Sakwa (ed.), *Chechnya. From Past to Future*. London: Anthem, 2005, p. 85.
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Afterword: the North Caucasus as a regional security complex

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