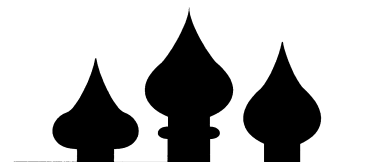




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Occasional Paper #289  
Myths and Mysticism:  
Islam and Conflict in the  
North Caucasus: A  
Longitudinal Perspective

Michael A. Reynolds



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**Myths and Mysticism: Islam and Conflict in the North Caucasus:  
A Longitudinal Perspective  
by Michael A. Reynolds**

The question of whether or not there is a causal relationship between Islam and violent conflict is currently one of the most controversial and hotly debated topics among scholars, policymakers, and pundits alike throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> It is a question of particular relevance to contemporary Russia, where self-described *mujahidun*, or Muslim “holy warriors,” and Russian government forces are the primary combatants waging war in Chechnya.<sup>2</sup> The theme of Islam and conflict is not a new one for scholars and observers of the North Caucasus. Among historians and contemporary analysts, there exists a strong consensus that Islam has been and continues to be a fundamental factor driving conflict between the indigenous Muslims of the North Caucasus and the Russian state.<sup>3</sup> Both historians sympathetic to indigenous resistance to Russian rule, such as Alexandre Bennigsen, Marie Broxup, and Anna Zelkina, as well as pro-Russian historians, such as M. M. Bliev and V.V. Degoev, have pointed to Islam as a fundamental motive for resistance.<sup>4</sup>

Yet anyone interested in the relationship between Islam and conflict in the North Caucasus should recognize two potential sources of difficulty. The first is the general paucity of studies of North Caucasian history. The second is that, of the studies that do exist, a vastly disproportionate number address one limited period of the region’s history, namely, the Caucasian Wars of the nineteenth century, in which the native mountaineers fought desperately, and for a

time successfully, against the might of an expanding world empire.

Two factors further exaggerate the salience of the Caucasian Wars in the region’s image, namely, their place in Russian literature and their high international geopolitical profile. Before the first modern histories of the North Caucasus were even written, Russian writers such as Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tolstoy had made the North Caucasus a vivid and lasting fixture of the imaginations of Russians and readers of Russian literature, rendering the mountaineers bigger than life and romanticizing their love of freedom, seeming lawlessness, and passion.<sup>5</sup> Second, the wars marked the southward expansion of the Russian Empire and implicated, if perhaps only tangentially, the geopolitical preoccupations of several great powers. Pitting native mountaineers against the largest army in the world, their “David versus Goliath” character and cast of truly colorful personalities such as Imam Shamil made compelling theater and attracted popular attention in Europe and even America. In short, these wars have exerted an inordinate influence upon our understanding of the relationships among Islam, the North Caucasus, and Russia.

Whereas comparative historians have almost wholly ignored the North Caucasus, some have placed the Caucasian Wars in the context of other more or less contemporary struggles of Muslims under the rubric of the “Revolt of Islam.”<sup>6</sup> This cross-regional or “latitudinal” perspective identifies those wars as separate parts of a wider struggle of Islam

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Michael A. Reynolds is a Fellow at the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University. He thanks Mark Katz and the members of the Kennan Institute workshop on conflict in the former Soviet Union, John Colarusso, Victor Friedman, Thomas Grant, and Robert Ware, for their comments on this and earlier versions of this paper. The paper was prepared for the workshop “Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Conflict in the Former Soviet Union,” Kennan Institute, Washington, D.C. The author is responsible for all errors.

against European colonial powers, and it notes certain similarities between the doctrines and forms of resistance adopted by indigenous Muslims. Thus it identifies the teachings of the South Asian sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi and the Kurdish sheikh Mawlana Khalid and the structure of the Naqshbandi *tariqat*,<sup>7</sup> or Sufi brotherhood as determinative factors for explaining the course of events in the North Caucasus in the nineteenth century. It accordingly portrays the Sufi brotherhoods of the Caucasus as parts of transnational networks that transmitted ideologies of resistance, personnel, and supplies between disparate Muslim populations.<sup>8</sup> Given the nature and extent of the involvement of foreign and radical Islamic ideas and organizations from the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere in the current Chechen conflict, the parallels between this interpretation and contemporary events appear striking.

To better evaluate the merits of such a latitudinal perspective, however, we need also to examine the relationship between Islam and conflict in the North Caucasus across time, that is, through a longitudinal perspective. Toward this end, this paper provides a broad survey of Islam and violent conflict in the North Caucasus in the period beginning with the introduction of Islam up through the current conflict in Chechnya. This paper does not, of course, attempt to cover such an extensive history in depth or comprehensively. Rather, it questions some of the conventional historical assumptions about the relationship between Islam and violent conflict in the North Caucasus that observers commonly adopt in their analyses. Among these assumptions are the decisive nature of Islam or Muslim identity as a source of conflict; the fundamental and intractable alienation of Muslim North Caucasians and Russians from each other; and the binary categorization of Islam into its mystical, or

Sufi, aspects and its legal, or sharia-based aspect, a categorization often invoked to explain the dynamics of contemporary conflict in the North Caucasus.

## **RESISTING ISLAM: THE ARAB INVASION OF THE CAUCASUS**

The North Caucasus was among the earliest lands that Islam touched. In 642–3, just ten years after the death of Muhammad, Muslim Arabs under the command of Suraqa bin Amr reached the city of Derbent in southern Dagestan.<sup>9</sup> Sweeping up from the south, the first generation of Muslims had conquered the whole of Persia in a mere ten years, and they now stood ready to burst north into the Eurasian interior. Reflecting Derbent's strategic location between the eastern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea, the Arabs dubbed the city Bab al-Abwab, or "the Gate of Gates."<sup>10</sup> Sayings from the period that attribute the founding of the city to the angel Gabriel, declare its liberation a divine dictate, and affirm that anyone "who fights and struggles in the way of God in that sacred place [Bab al-Abwab] will be forgiven all the sins he has committed in his life" all suggest the importance that the Arabs ascribed to Derbent.<sup>11</sup>

Despite their fascination with Derbent and the military prowess they displayed so impressively in Arabia, Persia, and elsewhere, the original Muslim warriors failed to secure the Caspian city and its environs. Indeed, quite the opposite was true. Suraqa lamented the ceaseless attacks on his forces in and around Derbent. The ferocity of the local tribesmen convinced Suraqa that it would be best to forgo the conquest of Dagestan. And so with the Caliph Omar's approval, he sent his lieutenants to wage war in the region of Tiflis instead. Several years later, Omar directed the Muslim armies again to attempt to subdue Dagestan. But this time

the mountaineers of Dagestan dealt the invading Muslims an even sharper defeat and slew the Arabs' commander on the battlefield in 652.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, the Muslims never managed to establish firm control over Dagestan or any other part of the North Caucasus. Although from time to time Arab armies did manage to mount successful punitive expeditions into the region they called "language mountain" in amazement at its astounding linguistic diversity, and to win some local rulers over to their faith, they remained incapable of guaranteeing the borders and exerted influence on the North Caucasus only through surrogates. Indeed, tribesmen from time to time mounted devastating raids from Dagestan into the southern Caucasus. Dagestan, in short, proved to be a difficult place to rule: geographically isolated, topographically rugged, and hostile. The Arabs and their chroniclers repeatedly expressed exasperation with the warlike North Caucasian infidels. Suraqa bin Amr described the torment of fighting the mountaineers in verse, and al-Masudi's angry description of a local Dagestani chieftain as a "host of robbers, brigands, and malefactors" similarly highlights the Muslims' frustration.<sup>13</sup>

Although they failed to impose their rule over the North Caucasus or even alter the region's fundamental political structure, the Arabs did leave an important legacy—their Islamic faith. They had succeeded in converting the people of Derbent to their faith, and they thereby made the city a northern outpost of Islam. The spread of Islam from Derbent to the northern, central, and western parts of Dagestan and beyond, however, took centuries, because the Caucasian mountaineers violently resisted it—or, more precisely, those who espoused it. The Muslims of Derbent thus found themselves just as embattled as the original Arab

Muslims, as when the people of Sarir (believed to be the forerunners of the Avars of today) inflicted a heavy losses upon Derbent's Muslim garrison in 971.<sup>14</sup>

It would be wrong, however, to ascribe too much of a religious character to these conflicts waged by local potentates. Knowledge of formalized religion was limited, especially in the interior, and alliances shifted often. The Muslim *Amir* of Derbent, for example, would at times request assistance from the pagan Slavs to the north of the Caspian who had begun raiding the Dagestani coast in the tenth century.<sup>15</sup>

From the records left by the Arabs, we can already identify a number of factors that have distinguished the dynamics of conflict in the Caucasus ever since. The first is the strategic nature of the region as a gateway between the Near East and the Eurasian steppes. The second is the rugged nature of its topography, which made the maneuver, command, and control of large fighting forces difficult. Third, and perhaps most significant, is the equally rugged and fierce nature of the region's inhabitants. These latter two factors combined to exact a forbidding cost upon any power that might attempt to subdue the North Caucasus. The Arabs, who had overrun the Persian Empire in a mere ten years and would go on to phenomenal conquests elsewhere, were stunned by the truculence of the mountaineers. Their propensity for raids and banditry further infuriated the original Muslims. Finally, the linguistic and ethnic complexity of the region also impressed the Arabs. All these traits would impress the later, non-Muslim conquerors as well.

## **THE MONGOLS, TIMUR, AND THE OPENING OF THE NORTHWEST**

The next great upheaval in the Caucasus



came in the form of the Mongols in the thirteenth century. As they did elsewhere, the Mongols brought devastation to the Caucasus. They swiftly occupied the coastal section of the northeastern Caucasus and captured Derbent in 1233. The residents of the Caspian city held out for ten desperate days before despairing with grim valiantry, “no solution but the sword remains, it falls to us to die with honor.” Nonetheless, for all their awesome might, the Mongols proved as unsuccessful as the Muslim armies in pacifying or subduing the mountaineers in the interior. Indeed, the mountaineers did not merely resist the Mongols but also eventually turned to raiding them, and succeeded in compelling the scourges of Eurasia to send gifts and delegations in exchange for halting their attacks.<sup>16</sup>

At the end of the fourteenth century, the famed “Crusher of Kings” Timurlenk (Tamerlane) invaded the Caucasus, taking Dagestan in 1395–6 and ravaging Georgia in 1386–7 and again in 1403–4, but he also failed to establish any lasting presence in the North Caucasus. The Mongol and Timurid invasions did, however, indirectly affect the political culture of the northwest Caucasus by ending the isolation of the Circassian tribes. In an unusual form of exchange, the Mongols and Tatar Khans of Crimea began sending their sons to be raised among the Circassians while taking a yearly tribute of slaves and auxiliary forces. The Mongol influence also facilitated the spread of Islam among the Circassians, despite the latter’s regular rebellions. Islam spread slowly, however, and knowledge of Islam among the Circassians remained superficial well into the seventeenth century. Like the northeast Caucasus, the northwest Caucasus lacked any unifying political structure and remained “in a climate of permanent anarchy.”<sup>17</sup>

Although the Ottoman and Safavid

empires laid claim to parts of the northeast Caucasus during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their authority was nominal. The princes of Dagestan preserved their independence easily enough by playing the Ottomans against the Safavids, who represented a more proximate threat to the mountaineers. Banding together in temporary alliances proved sufficient and effective for driving out any outsiders, and indeed in 1712 the Ghazi-Kumuk of Dagestan even dared to take the city of Shamakhi from the Safavid Persians.

The Russians made their first substantial foray into the North Caucasus in 1722 when Peter the Great marched southward along the Caspian coast to Baku, taking Derbent, Tarku, and Kuba along the way. Pressures on the empire elsewhere, however, compelled Peter to withdraw his forces, and just ten years later Russia ceded its claim to Dagestan to Persia. The sovereign of Persia, Nadir Shah, was a brilliant ruler and commander who had rejuvenated his empire. Historians dubbed him the “Napoleon of Persia” in recognition of his martial achievements. Having vanquished Persia’s foes on several fronts, Nadir Shah resolved to assert Persia’s dominance over Dagestan in 1742. It was a mistake. The mountaineers refused to bend to the Persians, and they met force with force. In just three years, they forced Nadir Shah to withdraw from the North Caucasus in defeat. Following his death later that same year, Dagestani mountaineers even began to mount raids into Safavid territory.

The patterns first observed during the Arab invasions of the region thus repeated themselves in the period leading up to the Russian conquest. The mountaineers vigorously opposed all attempts by outsiders to impose their rule and proved to be indomitable. Islam played little role in the mountaineers’ resistance (given the still relatively weak knowledge of Islam among the

majority of mountaineers beyond the littoral of Dagestan, this is not very surprising in any event). Although the Dagestanis' Sunni affiliation may have facilitated their cooperation with the Sunni Ottomans against the Shia Persian Safavids, it was not determinative in any sense, for the Ottomans remained distant.

Instead, three interrelated factors—the difficult terrain, the mountaineers' pugnacity, and the lack of a central government—put a decisive stamp on the form of conflict in the North Caucasus. The harsh nature of the terrain tired and confounded invading armies even as it encouraged the mountaineers to hold out against invaders. The multiplicity of tribes and the lack of any central authority denied would-be hegemon the option of defeating and subduing a local sovereign. Subjugating the tribes one by one was the only option. At most, such outsiders could achieve indirect control, and even this was nominal.

The geography, in addition to sheltering the mountaineers from outside rule by raising the costs and lowering the benefits of intervention, also fostered the development of a culture that prized such attributes as athletic prowess, physical courage, and self-reliance; that is, martial virtues. As John Baddeley wrote when discussing the influence of geography of the North Caucasus on its people, "The people of the Caucasus owe it not only their salient characteristics, but their very existence. It may be said without exaggeration that the mountains made the men."<sup>18</sup> The Ottoman historian Ahmed Cevdet Pasha noted the relationship between the geography of the North Caucasus and the mountaineers' love of freedom, "Since their land is steep and difficult, they do not submit to a government."<sup>19</sup>

Hence, in addition to making the assertion of political control physically difficult, the region's topography also encouraged

the cultivation of the qualities of self-sufficiency and independence among the mountaineer clans, thus adding a sociocultural obstacle to the geographic challenges. Thus the mountaineers' ethics, norms, and social organization rendered them allergic to central control. These same factors acted to block local sovereigns as much as outside hegemon from uniting and centralizing the region. Because ad hoc coalitions of local leaders proved sufficient for withstanding outside invasions, up until the nineteenth century there was neither much incentive nor a sociocultural basis for the formation of a state or other political-administrative structure that would embrace the North Caucasus as a whole.

### **ISLAM AS A CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATION FOR STATEHOOD**

A conceptual and intellectual foundation for state building was at this time, however, gradually spreading across the North Caucasus in the form of Sunni Islam. The classical Sunni understanding of Islam as a religion contains much more than a theological doctrine concerning God and the relationship of the individual to the divine. The divinely mandated law, the sharia, regulates fundamental aspects of the individual's relationship to others in addition to questions of the individual's ritual obligations to God. Drawing upon the Quran and the *hadiths* (compilations of the sayings and deeds of Muhammad), as its sources, the sharia provides an extensive, codified body of law to regulate human social relations. Moreover, inherent in the sharia is the concept of *dawlah*, the state, as the enforcer of law. To study classical Islam means to study and think about the law and the state as well as about God. The flowering of classical Islamic scholarship that was taking place in Dagestan thereby inevitably stimulat-

ed the development of a legal culture.<sup>20</sup> Thus, concurrent with the spread of Islam was the diffusion of the notions of formalized law and the state. As we shall see, it would be in this capacity that Islam would play an important role in the mountaineers' confrontation with Russia.

### **THE RUSSIAN CONQUEST AND THE MOUNTAINEERS' STRUGGLE TO PRESERVE THEIR INDEPENDENCE**

Cooperation, not conflict, motivated the first diplomatic contact between the North Caucasian mountaineers and the Muscovite state. In 1555, a delegation of North Caucasians, including some allegedly Christian Chechens, traveled to distant Moscow, where they asked Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible) for protection against the depredations and raids of the Crimean Tatars and Ottomans.<sup>21</sup> The growth of Russian power and the advance of the Russian state southward to the Caucasus under Catherine the Great, however, ensured a clash. In 1763, the Russians built the fort of Mozdok, and thereby initiated a fourteen-year war with the Kabardians. In 1783, the famous General Suvorov expelled the Noghais from the region to the north of the Kuban. Two years later, St. Petersburg established the post of governor general of the Caucasus. Pressed by growing population and scarcity of land, a steady stream of Cossacks, Slavs, and other Christians began pushing southward looking for land to settle.

This latest Russian advance constituted a qualitatively different threat to the peoples of the North Caucasus. This time, the outside power was not looking merely to exact tribute from the local princes or to establish nominal political hegemony over the region but sought to subdue the region and its inhabitants. It posed a demographic

threat in addition to the merely military one, as a flow of settlers southward drove the natives of the Caucasus region into the mountains, and upset the local economy. Saint Petersburg's policies for undermining Islam and converting its subjects to Russian Orthodox Christianity added a cultural and spiritual dimension to the threat as well.

This new threat provoked new patterns of behavior among the North Caucasians. The Circassian tribes in the northwest began to cooperate more closely with each other and with the Ottomans.<sup>22</sup> The mountaineers in the northeast similarly began to stir. In 1783, the same year Russia annexed the Crimea, a Chechen religious leader known as Sheikh Mansur Ushurma emerged. Preaching the need for the mountaineers to unite against the Russian threat, Mansur called upon them to participate in a *ghazawat*, or jihad, against the Russians. Mansur attracted a circle of political and religious leaders from throughout the region as far as Shirvan, and he managed to gather a sufficiently large force to inflict several defeats upon the Russians before falling prisoner to them during the storming of the Ottoman fort at Anapa in 1791.

Mansur's success was impressive, but the breadth of his appeal should not be exaggerated. Most Dagestanis, for example, refused to back him. Legend has it that Mansur belonged to the Naqshbandi sufi brotherhood. Making the most of this legend, some historians have depicted Mansur as the first in a line of militant Naqshbandi sheikhs who strove to awaken the Muslims of the North Caucasus.<sup>23</sup> No substantial evidence, however, has ever been found to support the legend. The attempt to draw such a connection attaches an unwarranted importance to Sufism as a militant force in its own right, and it gives the false impression that the nearly four decades between the capture

of Mansur and Ghazi Muhammad's claim to the title of imam of Dagestan saw a North Caucasus without religious leadership languish passively like a rudderless ship.

In fact, those decades were hardly quiet. In 1818, all the princes of Dagestan but one rose in revolt against the infamous Russian commander in the Caucasus, General Yermolov. Yermolov's ruthlessness knew no bounds. He did not hesitate to wage total war on whole populations through deportation, scorched earth tactics, and starvation to compel them to submit to Russian rule. Even Yermolov's own sovereigns, Tsars Alexander I and Nicholas I, felt the need to criticize his methods. But the general brushed criticism aside, asserting, "Gentleness in the eyes of Asiatics is a sign of weakness, and out of pure humanity I am inexorably severe."<sup>24</sup>

The decentralized nature of the North Caucasus in general, and of Chechen society in particular, reduced the effectiveness of Yermolov's methods, if not their painful effects. Because the North Caucasians' lacked a common ruler, Yermolov had to contend with multiple princes at once and force them to submit one by one. This difficulty of dispersed leadership was especially acute in the case of the Chechens, who lacked a sovereign that could compel his subjects to obey his word. Chechen society was organized on the basis of clans (*teips*), which in turn composed larger federations (*tukhums*).<sup>25</sup> The only centralized institution the Chechens had was the *Mekh Kel*, an egalitarian assembly of clan heads, and its authority was limited in cases when unanimity was lacking.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Chechen society on the whole was strongly, even radically, egalitarian. The Chechens had no aristocracy and did not recognize any distinctions of social class. Every Chechen male was an *uzden*, or "freeman." It is only a slight exaggeration to say that every Chechen was

in effect free to act as he saw fit within the bounds of the Chechen code of behavior, which admired courage and resistance as much as it disdained weakness and submission. Yermolov's strategy of intimidation was far less effective against such a decentralized and resilient society.<sup>27</sup>

In 1824, a Dagestani religious scholar known as Mullah Muhammad emerged among the Chechens. He declared himself a divinely chosen imam who would lead the Caucasians against the Russians. A prominent Chechen known as Beibulat (Taimazov) acted as his military commander, and the two succeeded in rallying a mixed group of Kabardians, Kumuks, Ossetians, Chechens, and some Dagestanis against the Russians. A little more than a year after it began, however, the revolt fell apart from within.

Several years later, another Dagestani religious scholar known as Ghazi Muhammad came forth to announce himself imam of Dagestan. Ghazi Muhammad was a *murid* (literally, one who wants or seeks, in this case a seeker of esoteric knowledge), a follower of the Naqshbandi sheikh Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Ghazi Ghumuqi. Among his first acts was to declare a comprehensive holy war, that is, a struggle against not just the infidel Russians but also against the un-Islamic practices and customs of the mountaineers as well. Ghazi Muhammad's declaration of cultural warfare against mountaineer society conformed to the Naqshbandi Sufi tradition, which is distinguished by its spiritual sobriety and its rigorous insistence upon the fulfillment of the exoteric demands of Islam as codified in the sharia. Mysticism is to be pursued only in addition to the sharia, not as a substitute or alternative to the holy law and its strictures.<sup>28</sup>

Ghumuqi belonged to a subset of the Naqshbandi known as the Naqshbandi-Khalidiya after an Ottoman Kurdish sheikh,

Mawlana Khalid. The weakness of Muslim political structures and the consequent encroachment of the European powers had troubled Mawlana Khalid. In 1809–10 he traveled to the Indian subcontinent. There he was initiated into the Naqshbandi brotherhood and exposed to the teachings of Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624).

The things that concerned Sirhindi seem to have been the same that worried Mawlana Khalid. Theologically lax syncretism, the arrival of Christian colonial powers, and a rebounding Hinduism—all in the context of weakening Mughal political power—threatened the position of Islam on the subcontinent in Sirhindi’s time. Sirhindi sought to reverse these trends and claimed to be the *mujaddid-i alf-ithani*, the “renewer of the Second (Islamic) millennium.” Sirhindi saw the answer to this crisis in the combination of a sober mysticism with an unbending insistence on the importance of sharia and Sunni orthodoxy. Unlike those Sufis who counseled detachment from the affairs of this world, Sirhindi believed in the efficacy and need for political power, and he urged others to do the same.<sup>29</sup>

During the time that elapsed between Sirhindi and his intellectual heir Mawlana Khalid, another powerful Muslim revivalist movement emerged. In 1744, an Arab religious scholar named Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab initiated a revolt against what he denounced as the corrupting rule of the Ottomans. ‘Abd al-Wahhab advocated a “return” to what he claimed was the more pristine form of Islam that the Prophet Muhammad and his followers had practiced. Like Sirhindi, he held that theological laxity had corrupted Islam and weakened it, and that Islam needed to be cleansed to return the *umma*, or Muslim “nation,” to spiritual and political health.

Wahhabism and the revivalist

Naqshbandi differed sharply on a number of fundamental theological questions. Most obviously, Wahhabism categorically rejects the very essence of Sufi brotherhoods, mysticism and spiritual sheikhs, as corrosive innovations that crept into Islam after the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Nonetheless, the two movements did share a common emphasis on the need to complement more active resistance to non-Muslim powers with a more exacting application of the sharia and its norms. Their similarities are too great for us to dismiss the timing of their emergence as coincidence, or to regard them as wholly separate phenomena.<sup>30</sup> Sirhindi, ‘Abd al-Wahhab, Mawlana Khalid, and Ghumuqi all lived in Muslim societies that they perceived as weakened and in danger, and all sought to reverse this condition through greater religious zeal.

Khalid embraced Sirhindi’s teachings. After his return to the Ottoman lands, his own disciples transmitted Sirhindi’s ideas to the Caucasus and to the person of Sheikh Muhammad al-Yaraghi, who initiated Ghumuqi. Ghumuqi in turn initiated Ghazi Muhammad and Shamil as his murids in the Naqshbandi order, and al-Yaraghi would play an important role in legitimizing and supervising the establishment of authority in the murids’ movement. Although it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that an Indian sheikh who lived two centuries earlier served as the intellectual architect of the North Caucasian resistance, the assertion that Sirhindi’s teachings did exert some influence is plausible.

The story of the Caucasian Wars is well enough known, and the details need no recounting here.<sup>31</sup> As was mentioned above, the ghazawat upon which Ghazi Muhammad embarked aimed not merely at the liberation of the North Caucasus from Russian domination but also at the transformation of

mountaineer society into a sharia-based society. Indeed, although Ghazi Muhammad and Shamil favored a war against the Russians, their mentor Ghumuqi opposed it in favor of concentrating efforts on the reform of mountaineer society from within.

In 1828, Russia went to war with the Ottoman Empire and emerged victorious the following year. The mountaineers sat out that war passively, but Russia's further expansion into the South Caucasus now spurred some mountaineers to act while their own lands were still free and before Dagestan's Avar rulers reached an accommodation with the Russians. After being selected as imam of Dagestan, Ghazi Muhammad declared a jihad against the Russians in 1829.

Ghazi Muhammad led the mountaineers for roughly three years before he fell in battle in 1832, abandoned by most of his supporters. His successor as imam, Hamza Bek, was assassinated just two years later by Avar notables opposed to the imam and his new anti-Russian Islamizing movement.<sup>32</sup> The third imam of Dagestan was Ghazi Muhammad's friend and a fellow initiate of Ghazi Ghumuqi's, Shamil. Shamil would lead the impoverished mountaineers against the largest empire and army in the world for twenty-five years, from 1834 to 1859.

Historians and more contemporary analysts both sympathetic and antagonistic to the mountaineers' resistance routinely emphasize the fundamental importance of Islam in the Caucasian Wars, arguing (or assuming) that religion served as the prime motivation in the mountaineers' resistance against the Russian infidel. In effect, they cast the natives' struggle against the Russian Empire as a spiritual clash of civilizations.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, these authors tend to assign a potent explanatory value to the specific form of Islam dominant in the North Caucasus, that is, Naqshbandi Sufism.<sup>34</sup> In their inter-

pretations, the mountaineer metamorphoses into a murid. He ceases to be a native fighting for his land and way of life and becomes a militant monk, striving in the way of God against the Russian enemy in this world and the spiritual foe of the next. The allegedly populist tendency of Sufism is also sometimes invoked to explain the mountaineers' ferocious resistance and indomitable character.<sup>35</sup>

There is no doubt that Islam played a multifaceted role in Shamil's struggle against the Russians and exerted profound effect upon the dynamics of the mountaineer resistance. But its significance lies less in its ability to motivate resistance than as a guide for how the resisters should organize their communal lives. Islam may certainly have provided a gloss of divine sanction to the mountaineers' struggle against the Russians and spurred some mountaineers to fight harder, but as we have seen from earlier episodes, the mountaineers had no need for Islam as an incentive to fight outside forces.

Islam in its mainstream classical, as opposed to peculiarly Sufi, form performed two key functions in the North Caucasian resistance. First, it served as a marker of identity that both differentiated the Muslim North Caucasians from the tsarist regime<sup>36</sup> and linked the ethnically diverse and isolated mountaineers together as a single community with a common identity facing a common threat. The shared identity thereby facilitated Shamil's efforts to forge a united front from the disparate groups of mountaineers.

Second, Islam, and the sharia in particular, provided the mountaineers with a source of concepts and ideas for building a centralized state. To hold out against one of history's greatest empires near its height, it was imperative for the mountaineers to create a standing army and the requisite bureaucratic apparatus to support it. But the establishment of a bureaucracy demanded more

than the mobilization of resources and the application of sophisticated organizational skills. It required above all a change in the mindset of the mountaineers and the displacement of the norms of collective responsibility in favor of those of individual responsibility.

Accomplishing such a fundamental task could not be easy. Over the centuries, the mountaineers of the North Caucasus had developed their own elaborate codes of customs and traditions to regulate social interaction.<sup>37</sup> Borrowing from Arabic the word meaning “customary law,” they called these codes *adat* to distinguish them from the doctrinal law of Islam, *sharia*. *Adat*, unlike *sharia*, rested on the notion of collective responsibility. The mountaineer’s code did not hold individuals responsible for their transgressions, but rather their clans.<sup>38</sup>

*Adat*, therefore, had no place either for the individual as a morally sovereign actor or for a state authority that would supplant the clans as the locus of justice. The Caucasian *Naqshbandis* believed that *adat* had to be overcome, not only because it was un-Islamic but also because it obstructed the unification of the mountaineers and sapped their collective efforts by sanctioning things like blood feuds. Imam Mansur, thus, sought to set an example of righteous Muslim conduct by publicly forgiving the murderer of a blood relative of his. This pardon amounted to a flagrant violation of *adat*, and Mansur’s boldness impressed the mountaineers. Shamil likewise put a priority on banning blood feuds, seeing them as both contrary to Islamic morality and law, and as a divisive threat to his efforts to build a unified state.

Indeed, although Shamil broke with his spiritual mentor by deciding to wage war against the Russians while simultaneously pursuing the “shariatization” of mountaineer society, he nonetheless prioritized the latter

struggle at the outset. Thus Shamil opened his campaign not with violent defiance of St. Petersburg but instead with pleas of loyalty as he sought first to concentrate his forces and eliminate sources of opposition within mountaineer society to his program of Islamization. Substantial segments of mountaineer society, however, were hostile toward expanding the influence of the *sharia*. The Russians accordingly sought to exploit mountaineer antipathy to the *sharia* and undermine Shamil by promising to accommodate *adat* in their administration. They enjoyed some success in exploiting this split among the mountaineers.<sup>39</sup>

As part of his efforts to reform mountaineer society and centralize it for the purpose of fighting the Russians, Shamil used the structure of the *tariqat* to serve as a backbone for a quasi-state. As imam, Shamil stood at the top of the state structure, and he was the supreme authority on matters military, political, and spiritual. Shamil’s civil administration was geographically organized, with a *naib*, or deputy, in charge of each district.<sup>40</sup> Each *naib* in turn was responsible for guarding the borders of the state that lay in his district.<sup>41</sup> To protect the integrity of the central structure, Shamil preferred to appoint outsiders to a given district, rather than rely on local figures. In addition to a voluntary militia, Shamil maintained a rudimentary regular army.<sup>42</sup> In a pattern common to governments dependent on a certain degree of popular support for the maintenance of their armies, Shamil’s state also possessed a social welfare system to look after widows and orphans.

Shamil’s power, however, was not absolute. The mountaineers’ predilection for defying authority outside the clan remained strong, and resentment toward Shamil was often not far from the surface, among the Chechens as well as others. When, for exam-

ple, Shamil replaced his Chechen naib, Tasho Hajji, the Chechens killed the replacement and compelled Shamil to reinstate Tasho Hajji.<sup>43</sup>

The nineteenth century thus witnessed not merely an extended violent confrontation between the native mountaineers and the forces of the Russian Empire but also a radical effort to transform and Islamize the mountaineer societies of the Caucasus. This latter process impressed the mountaineers of the time at least as much as, and perhaps even more than, the former. They referred to Shamil's era not as "the time of the Great War against the Russians" or as "the time of Shamil" but rather as "the time of the sharia."<sup>44</sup> Although Shamil's ghazawat ultimately failed to defeat the Russians and completely displace adat with the sharia, his efforts and those of his fellow Naqshbandis to inculcate and enforce the normative and legal values of Islam did meet with success. Even contemporary Russian observers, their distaste for the faith of Islam notwithstanding, noted what they perceived as the sharia's positive influence on the mountaineers' morality.<sup>45</sup>

The proliferation and growth of Islam as a source of norms could not prevent Shamil's ultimate defeat, and in fact it might have contributed to it as alternative interpretations of Islam were introduced. After close to a quarter-century of relentless warfare against the vastly wealthier, more numerous, and stronger Russians, the mountaineers' commitment to ghazawat began to waver. In the late 1850s, a Chechen shepherd named Kunta Hajji returned to the Caucasus after completing the pilgrimage to Mecca and becoming an initiate in the Qadiriya tariqat in Baghdad.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to Shamil's message of ghazawat as a religious obligation, Kunta Hajji preached a quietist form of Islam and advocated nonresistance to the Russians. His

teachings found a receptive audience among the war-weary mountaineers, and began to sap the war effort. Shamil ultimately felt compelled to expel the itinerant Chechen from the North Caucasus. Nonetheless, the mountaineers' exhaustion was all but complete, and in 1859 Shamil surrendered. Ironically, only a few years later the Russians would imprison Kunta Hajji and the Qadiriya would spearhead rebellions against oppressive Russian control.

Although Shamil had been St. Petersburg's greatest foe in the Caucasus, his capture did not end the war. It would take another five years before the Russians succeeded in subduing the Circassian tribes in the northwest Caucasus. Unlike the northeast Caucasus, where Dagestan had become a major center of Islamic scholarship, the northwest Caucasus possessed no such center of Islamic learning. The Circassians remained Muslim largely in name only. Shamil had attempted to integrate them into his pan-mountaineer war, but the Circassians' tribal structure impeded such efforts. Nonetheless, the Circassians carried on their own decentralized fight for against the Russians for five more years until the tsarist forces overwhelmed them with superior arms, technology, and numbers.<sup>47</sup>

The significance of Islam in the Caucasian Wars lies not in its being a first cause of resistance nor in the concept of ghazawat. Many, if not most, of those mountaineers who fought were "simple peasants who had the barest conception" of what Sufism was.<sup>48</sup> And among those who were expert on it were many who refused to join in the fighting. As was noted above, Ghazi Muhammed and Shamil's own spiritual mentor, Jemal al-Din al-Ghumuqi, opposed the war effort. It should also not be forgotten that during the wars, several North Caucasian religious leaders actually backed



the Russians, and that the aforementioned Kunta Hajji's espousal of spiritual indifference to politics in the name of Islam helped undermine Shamil's war effort.

Rather, Islam's significance lies in its role as a source of conceptual architecture for the creation of a centralized state. Islam provided two critical elements for such a form of political organization. First, it furnished a common identity that could unite the mountaineers across ethnic and clan lines against the Russians. Second, in the form of the sharia, it provided the moral norms and legal concepts necessary for a bureaucratic state. No less important, the sharia's divine origins provided an imprimatur to which Shamil and his predecessors could appeal in their struggle to supplant adat. Aside perhaps from the formal structure that the tariqat provided, Sufism as a body of mystical teachings and practices seems to have had little influence upon the political-military struggle against the Russians. In sum, the Naqshbandi-Khalidiya's significance lay not in its esoteric doctrines but rather in precisely the opposite: its strict emphasis upon the rigorous observance of the sharia.

#### **THE UNION OF ALLIED MOUNTAINEERS: NORTH CAUCASIAN REBELS OR RUSSIA'S LOYAL SONS?**

With the exception of the years 1877–8 and 1905, the North Caucasus was relatively quiet and stable from 1864 until the Russian Revolution. Even during the cataclysm of World War I, the North Caucasus failed to erupt in rebellion despite the hopes of the Germans and Ottomans. Western scholarship has paid little or no attention to the North Caucasus in the immediate wake of the Russian Revolution, preferring instead to skip from the time of Shamil to the mountaineers' struggles against first the counter-revolutionary forces of Denikin and then

against the Bolsheviks. It thereby leaves the erroneous impression that the mountaineers as a whole remained unbowed in their opposition to Russian rule. Soviet scholarship, conversely, preferred to focus on the role of Bolshevik and pro-Bolshevik actors in the North Caucasus, and it gave short shrift to other movements and trends. It thereby implicitly suggested that, beyond the select revolutionaries, there existed in the North Caucasus only obscurantist religious figures and agents of foreign influence.

The reality appears to have been quite different. Shortly after the fall of the tsar, a number of leading mountaineers from throughout the North Caucasus formed an organization they called the Union of Allied Mountaineers of the North Caucasus (Soiuz ob'edinennykh gortsev severnogo kavkaza, or UAM). The UAM was a pan-mountaineer movement that included representatives from Dagestan on the Caspian across the North Caucasus to Abkhazia on the Black Sea. The leadership was composed of North Caucasians who primarily, but not exclusively, had been educated in Russian institutions of higher education or had served in the Russian civil or military bureaucracy. Despite this profile, the leadership managed to recruit significant popular support at congresses held at Vladikavkaz, Andi, and elsewhere.<sup>49</sup>

The UAM held as its goal not the separation of the North Caucasus from Russia so much as inclusion of the region as the homeland of the mountaineers within Russia. The UAM sought to unify the mountaineers, but not on the basis of ethnicity or language (criteria that of course fractured the mountaineers), or even on the basis of religion. Rather, it sought to build upon a shared mountaineer culture that included all the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus. It reached out to the Orthodox Christian Cossacks, typically portrayed as the

Muslim mountaineers' irreconcilable enemies. The UAM's leadership was aware of the profound challenge posed to their small peoples by the immigration and settlement of outsiders into the North Caucasus, and it explicitly acknowledged the need for all to work together in the face of this common threat.

At the same time, the UAM believed that the future of the North Caucasus lay with Russia. Contrary to the stereotype of the illiterate and religiously fanatical mountaineer, the leaders and rank-and-file members of the UAM did not detest all that was Russian. Like virtually all the regional movements in the Russian Empire in 1917, the UAM desired to remain part of a united and democratic Russia. Though UAM members condemned the excesses of the tsarist autocracy and paid homage to Shamil's struggle against tsarism, they explicitly distinguished between the old regime and Russia and the Russian people, and they expressed no animosity toward the latter.<sup>50</sup>

The UAM leadership saw Russia not merely as a source of oppression but also as a window to the advanced societies of Europe and the wider world. They were products of Russian education, and though fierce patriots and partisans of the Caucasus, they believed that their people stood to could gain through inclusion in a single state with Russia. Integration with Russia offered access to education, technology, and other aspects of modernity that the mountaineers needed if they were to develop into a prosperous society. Although Robert Seely's assessment that the "overwhelming impression of Russia's colonial adventure in the northern Caucasus is one of failure"<sup>51</sup> accurately summarizes the conclusion of the existing secondary historical literature, it quite arguably does not reflect the history itself so accurately. Russia's colonial adventure had not been a total fail-

ure, and it had even produced a class of mountaineer patriots who identified the best interests of their people with remaining part of Russia.

The Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917 from the Provisional Government radically changed the situation in the North Caucasus and elsewhere. The UAM—opposed to Bolshevism but lacking the ability to defend the North Caucasus on their own against the Red Army—began to reach out for allies. They first turned their attention to Tiflis, the capital of the Transcaucasian Federation. Arguing that a divided Caucasus could not stand, they proposed the formation of one greater, independent Caucasian Federation. The Transcaucasians, however, were too disoriented to act. Like the North Caucasians, they wished to remain part of a united and democratic Russia and were hostile to the Bolsheviks, but unlike the North Caucasians they refused to recognize that the Bolsheviks had already taken Russia. They were confused by the collapse of the democratic Russia to which they had pledged their allegiance and were also under pressure from the Ottoman Empire to declare their independence from Russia and sign a peace treaty, and so simply did not know how to react.<sup>52</sup>

Left with little choice, the UAM then approached the Ottomans. A common geopolitical interest united the two sides. The UAM sought outside support to keep the North Caucasus free from Bolshevik rule, while the Ottomans were eager to exploit Russia's temporary weakness and chaos to establish one or more independent buffer states in the Caucasus before the war's imminent end. The existence of a relatively large number of Ottoman subjects of North Caucasian heritage in the Ottoman intelligence service facilitated the formation of an alliance between the two. Thus, after recog-

nizing the existence of an independent Mountaineer Republic on May 11, 1918, the Ottomans sent a small force of several hundred volunteers into Dagestan that June. After a larger army succeeded in liberating Baku and handing it over to the newly created government of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan in September 1918, the Ottomans sent a detachment of Ottoman and indigenous soldiers northward from Baku into Dagestan to dash up the Caspian to drive the Bolsheviks out of Derbent and Petrovsk (today's Makhachkala).<sup>53</sup>

One might expect that a common Islamic identity would have served as a basis for the Ottoman–North Caucasian alliance. Though it undoubtedly facilitated relations, it was by no means a primary factor. The North Caucasians first had repeatedly appealed to the predominantly Christian Transcaucasians to form a unified Caucasian state. In their internal correspondence, the North Caucasian leaders expressed their preference for a closer alliance with Germany, because Germany was more powerful and wealthier than the Ottomans.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, true to their earlier declarations of intent to establish an inclusive North Caucasian state, the North Caucasians secured the participation of an Orthodox priest and a Jewish rabbi in the public ceremony establishing the return of their government to Derbent after its liberation from the Bolsheviks.<sup>55</sup>

The same held even for those who explicitly advocated the establishment of an imamate. Indeed, Nadzhmuddin Gotsinskii, a wealthy and educated *alim*, or scholar of Islam, who sought the title of imam of the North Caucasus, greeted the Ottomans with gunfire, not open arms. He accepted Ottoman leadership only after the better-armed Ottomans outgunned his men in a firefight.<sup>56</sup>

In November 1918, the victorious

Allied powers compelled the Ottomans and Germans to withdraw all their forces from the Caucasus. The mountaineer government initiated contacts with British military personnel in the Caspian in the hopes of obtaining support and diplomatic recognition. Although local British officers were sympathetic, London had committed to backing the counterrevolutionary forces of General Denikin against the Bolsheviks. The subsequent British withdrawal from the region in any event left the mountaineers on their own.

Whereas existing accounts tend to portray the mountaineers as more or less united in their successful struggle against General Denikin and their subsequent and failed struggle against the Bolsheviks, the fact is that at this point the mountaineer movement began to fragment. The Bolsheviks, playing to mountaineer opposition to Denikin's program of restoring tight central control in a unitary Russian state, wooed several influential sheikhs with promises of full autonomy under Bolshevik rule. Loyalty to Russia, however, remained strong among some sectors of the mountaineers. Several former tsarist army officers occupying key posts in the Mountaineer Republic's government decided to throw in their lot with their former comrades in arms, preferring the reestablishment of the old tsarist order to the promises of Bolshevism. The anti-Denikin mountaineers, however, contributed greatly to the defeat of the counterrevolutionary Volunteer Army by mounting repeated attacks on its rear, denying his army any security or sanctuary.

The elimination of Denikin enabled the Bolsheviks to concentrate their might against the mountaineers in the spring of 1920. In an influential article, Alexandre Bennigsen has characterized this struggle as one waged by "conservative Sufi sheikhs fighting for the glory of God" and asserts

that it “was the Sufi leadership that gave the Daghestan-Chechen revolt its unique character.”<sup>57</sup> Marie Broxup reiterated the same emphasis on Islam and the Naqshbandi tariqat as the key factors in the mountaineer resistance in a later article.<sup>58</sup>

This assessment, while making for an undeniably romantic and appealing portrait of implacable Caucasian resistance to Russian tyranny, gravely distorts the dynamics of the struggle. To start with, the revolt was not widespread. Rather, it was limited in its geographic scope almost exactly to that of the territory held by Shamil at the end of his imamate: the central mountainous regions of Dagestan and the mountainous southeast of Chechnya. In other words, the revolt was centered in the most mountainous and least accessible area of the North Caucasus, the home of the most combative and proud mountaineers, the highland Avars and Chechens. Moreover, the rebels had even less success than Shamil in spreading the revolt to the Northwestern Caucasus.

Field reports from the Red Army and Cheka (the forerunner to the KGB) depict a variegated resistance movement. Red Army intelligence officers identified different tendencies among the mountaineers, and they distinguished between that small number committed to reviving the Mountaineer Republic, those seeking an Islamic state, those engaged in ordinary banditry, and those groups acting out of a mix of ideological and pragmatic motives. Although it would be tempting to dismiss the charges of banditry as biased or self-serving Bolshevik propaganda, this would be wrong. Combating *abrechestvo*,<sup>59</sup> the mountaineer tradition of brigandry, had been a priority of the UAM, and the mufti, and later self-proclaimed imam, of the North Caucasus Gotsinskii emphasized the need for sharia to suppress it.<sup>60</sup> The Red Army officers noted that the *abreks*' looting

and pillaging alienated many mountaineers from the rebels.<sup>61</sup> As even Bennigsen concedes, the Bolsheviks succeeded in pitting the Kumuks, Lezghins, and Darghins against the Avars and the Ingush against the Chechens.<sup>62</sup>

Firsthand accounts in Turkish of the mountaineer struggle also undermine the thesis that Sufism exerted a special influence on the fight against the Bolsheviks. Indeed, one Ottoman Circassian who traveled in the North Caucasus in 1920 singled out the Naqshbandi sheikhs not for their steely determination to fight the Bolsheviks but instead for their soporific teachings on the need to forsake the affairs of this world and concentrate on those of the next world.<sup>63</sup> Sufism, in short, acted as a depressant, not as a stimulant, upon the mountaineer will to fight.

A more general description of the struggle as a religious war cannot hold up either. There were numerous religious figures in the North Caucasus who opposed fighting the Bolsheviks, or even actually supported them. For example, the Chechen Sheikh Ali Mitaev, Sheikh Ali of Akusha, and the Andi sheikhs Hassan and Habibullah Hajji remained on good terms with the Bolsheviks.<sup>64</sup> To be sure, some of these figures, such as Ali of Akusha, whom the Bolsheviks executed in 1926, must later have regretted their decision not to have joined the revolt. And there is no denying the extraordinary courage and tenacity of the anti-Bolshevik rebels, many of whom, women included, preferred to kill themselves than fall into the hands of the Red Army. But to describe their struggle as popular and widespread throughout the North Caucasus is mistaken, no matter how attractive an image it might create.

## THE SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET PERIOD

Upon consolidating their rule over the Caucasus, the Bolsheviks reneged on their promises of autonomy and instead asserted tight control over the region, and instigated a severe crackdown on Islam. A campaign to disarm Chechnya and Dagestan in the mid-1920s led to another round of rebellion. Communist repression in the North Caucasus reached its apogee in February 1944, when Joseph Stalin<sup>65</sup> ordered the mass deportation of the Muslim Chechens and Ingush to Central Asia and Siberia, less than a year after the deportation of the Buddhist Kalmyks from northern Dagestan to the Volga region. The deportations were brutal in the extreme, killing from one-third to one-half of the Chechen population. Shortly after the death of Stalin in 1953 Chechens began making their way back to their homeland, often bringing with them the bones of their relatives for burial. Finally, in 1957, Khrushchev officially permitted the Chechens and Ingush to return. Nonetheless, the Soviet authorities persisted in maintaining tight control on the North Caucasus and in suppressing the practice and study of Islam.

Although some Western scholars speculated about the existence of a vast and thriving underground Sufi network in the North Caucasus, the reality is that the antireligious policies of the Soviets, although they failed utterly to efface Islam as a source of identity, did in fact succeed in reducing both the knowledge and practice of Islam.<sup>66</sup> Whereas Muslim identity remained relatively strong, knowledge of Islam grew weak.<sup>67</sup>

The spiritual and cultural vacuum created by Soviet policies opened up opportunities in the post-Soviet period for outside proselytizers to move in and introduce their interpretations of Islam with relatively little

intellectual resistance. Advocates of the Salafi<sup>68</sup> version of Islam, commonly known as Wahhabism,<sup>69</sup> enjoyed a special advantage in this environment. A central tenet of Salafi Islam is that it is the proper, pure form of Islam to the exclusion of all others. This claim, especially when packaged with clear formulations of the practice and meaning of Islam as a creed, found a special resonance among an uninformed audience eager to find precisely such a straightforward exposition of authentic Islam.<sup>70</sup> The common description of a struggle between Salafi Islam and “traditional” Sufi Islam was thus something of a misnomer, for the explosion of the numbers of mosques, mullahs, and *madrasahs* (Islamic schools) was on a truly revolutionary scale.<sup>71</sup> Popular knowledge of Islamic practices, doctrines, and texts was so thin that initially there simply was no coherent tradition of “indigenous” Islam capable of refuting on theological grounds the Salafi claim to be the sole legitimate interpretation of Islam.

Salafi Islam found its first toehold in the Caucasus in Dagestan, from whence it spread to Chechnya.<sup>72</sup> Although the exponents of Salafi Islam failed to become a major force in Dagestan or to gain any significant popular support in either Dagestan or Chechnya, they did manage to exert significant, even decisive, influence over Chechen politics in the aftermath of the first Chechen War. There are three reasons worth mentioning in the context of this paper for the success of the Salafis in gaining power in Chechnya.

The first is that, in addition to a simple and clear-cut exegesis of “pure” Islam, Salafi Islam provided a moral framework that purported to make sense of the Russo-Chechen conflict by portraying it in more vivid, larger than life terms as one part of an epic struggle between Islam and its enemies.<sup>73</sup> The Chechens have always taken

great pride in their martial nature, and Salafi Islam's unabashed embrace of violence in the defense of Islam held added appeal. And for Chechens facing yet another Russian army indifferent to and perhaps even supportive of atrocities perpetrated by its personnel, the message of militant struggle in defense of Islam and Muslims could not but find a receptive audience.<sup>74</sup>

The second reason is that the Salafis possessed access to a transnational network of likeminded proselytizers and missionary organizations backed by significant funds. The supply of volunteers and money from Islamic activist organizations validated the Salafi message of Islamic solidarity.<sup>75</sup> And at the same time, the example of the Chechens provided a validating myth to the Salafi message, living proof that a small but pious people could defeat great powers with little more than courage and faith in God. The Chechen resistance became a celebrity cause among Islamic activists, who saw it as an example of Muslim battlefield success, not Chechen, and were quick to take credit for Chechnya's victory.<sup>76</sup>

A third, and largely overlooked, reason for Salafi Islam's appeal was that it offered a means to overcome Chechen clan identities and divisions and provide a semblance of order to the postwar chaos reigning in Chechnya.<sup>77</sup> Whereas a more Sufi-influenced interpretation of Islam could accommodate Chechen society with its multiple social divisions and its traditions, Salafi Islam radically opposes all distinctions except that between Muslims and infidels.<sup>78</sup> Thus some Chechens, such as onetime Chechen president and *intelligent* Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, found Salafi Islam attractive in part because they saw it as the only practical way to transcend clan divisions in Chechen society and create a centralized Chechen state.<sup>79</sup>

The inability of Chechen president

Aslan Maskhadov to overcome such divisions contributed substantially to the failure of his government to establish any effective order between 1996 and the 1999.<sup>80</sup> The Salafis, among whom many if not most were ignorant about all but the rudiments of their belief and among whom were notorious criminals such as Arbi Baraev, fomented division by deliberately insisting on the unconditional acceptance of their interpretation of the sharia, and they also contributed to chaos by participating in the rash of kidnappings and crime that ravaged Chechnya and its neighbors.<sup>81</sup> To the extent that the Salafis pointed to their version of the sharia as the solution to the problem of clan cleavages and crime in Chechnya, they resembled Imams Mansur, Shamil, and Nadzhmuddin from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Whether or not their divisive and criminal activities were part of a conscious plan to seize power in Chechnya is unknown, but to some North Caucasians it looked like that at the time.<sup>82</sup>

The views of another prominent Chechen, Khozh Akhmed Nukhaev, sharply diverge from the received view of Islam as a route to the creation of a Chechen state and are worth noting. Nukhaev also identifies the inability of the Chechens to adapt their clan politics to the model of a centralized state as a fundamental problem. But rather than seeking to change Chechen political culture, Nukhaev advocates rejecting the modern state as a form of organization.<sup>83</sup> Given that neither he nor the Chechens are capable of effecting the displacement of the state as the fundamental unit of international politics, Nukhaev's proposal is impotent. Nonetheless, his diagnosis of the Chechen dilemma as being the difficulty of reconciling Chechen political culture with the centralized structure of the modern state is instructive as it is the same diagnosis of those who, from

Sheikhs Mansur and Shamil onward, have pointed to Islam as the remedy to the Caucasian mountaineers' tendency to defiance of the law and forms of authority outside the clan.

Nonetheless, as was noted above, Salafi Islam never acquired great popularity in Chechnya. The fractured nature of Chechen society following the 1994–6 war, however, enabled the Salafis to establish a foothold in Chechnya. Khattab opened a training camp in Chechnya where male youths from throughout the Caucasus and elsewhere were indoctrinated in Salafi beliefs and trained to handle weapons. With a considerable number of armed followers, Chechen and foreign, and financing from outside, the Salafis and their Chechen allies such as Shamil Basaev were able not only to challenge Maskhadov with impunity but also to compel him to attempt to enforce Islamic law.<sup>84</sup> Ultimately, the Salafis under Khattab's and Basaev's leadership invaded Dagestan in August 1999 in a bid to drive the Russians entirely out of the Caucasus and establish an Islamic state.<sup>85</sup> That invasion triggered a large-scale Russian response and thereby precipitated the second Chechen War that continues to this day.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of Islam as a primary motive for conflict in the North Caucasus should not be overstated. An inordinate focus on the Caucasian Wars of the nineteenth century, a latitudinal perspective that attempts to connect the dynamics of those wars with other local anti-imperial struggles of Muslims elsewhere, and a strong tendency to romanticize mountaineer resistance to Russia have all contributed to an exaggerated emphasis upon Islam. The fact that both opponents and proponents of Russian influence in the Caucasus have sought to use this interpretation does

not make it more convincing.

A broader, longitudinal perspective reveals that a more fundamental factor in conflict between Russia and the mountaineer peoples of the North Caucasus has been the nature of mountaineer society—which, in part due to the unique geography of the North Caucasus, has remained resistant to centralized rule of any sort. The mountaineers resisted Muslim armies as fiercely as Russian ones. The origins of the mountaineers' martial traditions are independent of Islam.

Although Islam has not been the primary cause of conflict, classical Sunni Islam shaped the contours of conflict in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by giving the mountaineers a common identity that was tied to an ethical-legal basis for state building found in the sharia. Yet at the same time that Islam assisted in the organization and consolidation of mountaineer resistance, shariatization also polarized mountaineer society. The emergence of a quietist interpretation of Islam in the form of Kunta Hajji and the Qadiriya tariqat indeed contributed to the collapse of the mountaineer resistance. The subsequent transformation of the Qadiriya tariqat into a vehicle for rebellion against Russian rule and the periodically quiescent behavior of Naqshbandi sheikhs only underscores the futility of identifying Islamic doctrines or brotherhoods as primary causes of violent conflict.

During the Russian Revolution and Civil War period from 1917 through 1921, the sharia was again invoked as the proper antidote to crime and to the more centrifugal tendencies of the mountaineers. Although Imam Gotsinskii led the anti-Bolshevik resistance, other prominent sheikhs espoused either neutrality or joined the Bolsheviks. In the post-communist North Caucasus, militant Salafi Islam managed to become a dominant political force due to the peculiarities of

war-ravaged Chechnya, where its crude but straightforward exposition of the Muslim faith, its message of militancy, and its supplies of arms and funds found a receptive audience among young Chechens who were eager for more knowledge about their faith, bitter toward Russia, and without other prospects. The willingness of the Salafis to embrace criminals lent them a powerful dual capacity to intimidate opponents and strengthen their case for the uncompromising application of the sharia as the only viable solution to social disorder and strife.

The same long-standing patterns of social organization and attitudes toward political authority that have supported the mountaineers' resistance against outside powers for centuries have also served to inhibit the consolidation of stable formal political institutions in Chechnya and elsewhere in the North Caucasus. This dynamic, rather than Islam, will continue to be the fundamental source of conflict and disorder in the North Caucasus under current conditions of globalization, wherein regions lacking reliable and predictable political institutions are deprived of productive economic investment yet nonetheless subjected to the vagaries of the global economy.

Moreover, the substantial opportunities presented by the global economy in the gray and black markets are most easily exploited by elements in societies with strong, local cleavages of identity, such as those in the North Caucasus, and thereby further undermine local governance. The fact that mountaineer norms and social patterns are experiencing rapid change—and nowhere more quickly than in today's Chechnya—provides little cause for optimism. The destruction of older forms of social order and relations does not necessarily bring in its train the creation of new ones more conducive to the construction of stable polities. Although the contemporary Russian state has

exhibited a substantial capacity in Chechnya for destruction, there is, tragically, little evidence that it has any real capacity for supporting the emergence of social norms and relations that might nurture the emergence of a stable and productive society in Chechnya. Given Chechnya's location and the size of its population, the absence of a peaceful and productive Chechnya will necessarily remain a substantial threat to the already strained stability of the North Caucasus as a whole.<sup>86</sup>



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The literature on this debate is now voluminous. To start, see Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: Modern Library, 2003); and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), especially his thesis about “Islam’s bloody borders.” For a contrary view, see John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to several individuals of remarkable courage there exists in English a number of firsthand accounts of the recent wars in Chechnya. For the first war, see Khassan Baiev with Ruth and Nicholas Daniloff, *The Oath: A Surgeon under Fire* (New York: Walker, 2003); Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Thomas Goltz, *Chechnya Diary* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2003); and Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998). For the second, and ongoing, war, see, in addition to Baiev’s extraordinary narrative, Andrew Meier, *The Black Earth* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003); Anne Nivat, *Chienne de Guerre* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001); and Anna Politkovskaya, *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). These accounts of the second war succeed in relating the complex and horrendously destructive nature of the current conflict in Chechnya.

<sup>3</sup> The prominence that both partisans and opponents of Russian rule assign to Islam is often reflected in the very titles of their works. See, e.g., Alexandre Bennigsen, “Muslim Guerrilla Warfare in the Caucasus (1918–1928),” *Central Asian Survey* 2, no. 1 (July 1983): 45–56; Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1985); Leslie Blanch, *The Sabres of Paradise* (New York: Viking Press, 1960); Marie Broxup, “The Last Ghazawat: The 1920–1921 Uprising,” in *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World*, ed. Marie Broxup (London: Hurst, 1992), 112–45; Moshe Ganner, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994); N. A. Smirnov, *Miuridizm na Kavkaze* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo AN SSSR, 1963); Paul Murphy, *The Wolves of Islam: Russia and the Faces of Chechen Terror* (New York: Brassey’s, 2004); Sebastian Smith,

*Allah’s Mountains: Politics and War in Russia’s Caucasus* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1998); M. I. Qandour, *Miuridizm: Istoriia Kavkazskikh vojn, 1819–1859* (Nal’chik: El-Fa, 1996); and Anna Zelkina, *In Quest for God and Freedom: The Sufi Response to the Russian Advance in the North Caucasus* (London: Hurst and Company, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> M. M. Blied and V. V. Degoev, *Kavkazskaia voina* (Moscow: Roset, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> For a study of the special relationship between Russian literature, the Caucasus, and empire see Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Bernard Lewis, “The Revolt of Islam” in Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 95–114.

<sup>7</sup> For the sake of reader accessibility, Arabic words in the text are transliterated in a simplified fashion.

<sup>8</sup> Hamid Algar, “A Brief History of the Naqshbandi Order,” in Marc Gaborieau, Alexandre Popovic, and Thierry Zarcone, *Naqshbandis: Historical Developments and Present Situation of a Muslim Mystical Order* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1985), 34–6. See, in the same volume, Algar’s “Political Aspects of Naqshbandi History,” 123–2. Also see Blied and Degoev, *Kavkazskaia voina*, 186–7; Ganner, *Muslim Resistance*, 39–40; Albert Hourani, “Sufism and Modern Islam: Maulana Khalid and the Naqshbandi Order,” in Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 75–90; Zelkina, *In Quest for God and Freedom*, 75–99.

<sup>9</sup> The reader should be aware that the use of the term “Dagestan” here is anachronistic. Composed of the Turkic word for mountain, *Dagh*, and the Persian word for country or land, *stan*, the word emerged in the fifteenth century to refer to the area occupied by the Republic of Dagestan.

<sup>10</sup> D. M. Dunlop, “Bab al-Abwab,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954) vol. 1, 835.

<sup>11</sup> Seraffedin Erel, *Dagistan ve Dagistanlilar* (Istanbul: Istanbul Matbaasi, 1961), 58–9.

<sup>12</sup> Erel, *Dagistan*, 60–1.

<sup>13</sup> Erel, *Dagistan*, 42 n. 103, 61. For a lively description of the Arab invasion of the North Caucasus, see D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), 41–88.

<sup>14</sup> Erel, *Dagistan*, 71.

<sup>15</sup> The Slavs also raided the Muslim peoples; Dunlop,

*History of the Jewish Khazars*, 210–12. Two other useful sources for the early history of the Northeast Caucasus are V. F. Minorskii, *Istoriia Shirvana i Derbenda X-XI vekov* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1963), and Mirza A. Kazem-Beg, *Derbend-Námeh* (Saint Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1851).

<sup>16</sup> Erel, *Dagistan*, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Chantal Lermercier-Quellejey, "Cooptation of the Elites of Kabarda and Dagestan in the Sixteenth Century," in *North Caucasus Barrier*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London: Longmans, Green, 1908), xxi–xxii.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmed Cevdet Pasa, *Kirim ve Kafkas Tarihçesi* (Kostantiniye: Matbaa-yi Ebüzziya, 1305 [1897]), 54. See also Ismail Berkok, *Tarihte Kafkasya* (Istanbul: n.p., 1958), 13–16.

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, so closely tied were the concepts of religion and state for the Ottomans that they employed the words for each together as a formula, "*din ü devlet*." Ahmed Cevdet picked up on the significance of the spread of Islamic education and norms in the Caucasus, observing, "Until recent times most of these tribes did not know what religion and state are." Cevdet Pasa, 54.

<sup>21</sup> Samil Mansur, *Çeçenler* (Ankara: Sam Yayinlari, 1993), 43.

<sup>22</sup> For details of such cooperation see Ali Arslan, "Rusya'nin Kirim ve Gürcistan'i Ilhakından Sonra Osmanli Devleti'nin Çerkes Kabileleri ile Münasebetleri (1784–1829)," *Kafkas Araştırmaları*, vol. 1 (1988); Mirza Bala, "Çerkesler," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 383; Mustafa Budak, "1853–1856 Kirim Harbi Baslarında Dogu Anadolu-Kafkas Cephesi ve Seyh Samil," *Kafkas Araştırmaları*, vol. 1 (1988), 53.

<sup>23</sup> Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars*, 8, 32. Algar, "Brief History of the Naqshbandi Order," 35. Many currently practicing Naqshbandis have assimilated the portrayal of the brotherhood as the vanguard of the North Caucasian resistance to Russia. See Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *The Naqshbandi Sufi Way: History and Guidebook of the Saints of the Golden Chain* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Gammer, *Muslim Resistance*, 34.

<sup>25</sup> For more on teips and tukhums, see Ian Chesnov, "Byt' Chechentsem: lichnost i etnicheskie identifikatsii naroda," in *Chechnia i Rossiia: Obshchestva i gosudarstva*, ed. D. Furman (Moscow: Polinform-Talburi, 1999), 69–71, 95–9. The *wird*, a religious congregation of sorts in which membership is largely but not entirely determined by blood, is another important social insti-

tution in Chechen life. It has not, however, been studied sufficiently. See also Anna Zelkina, "Islam and Society in Chechnia: From the Late Eighteenth to the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7 no. 2 (1996): 240–2.

<sup>26</sup> Saidan Mohmadan Ibrahim, "Meyx-Qiel" (translated from the Chechen to Turkish by Tarik Cemal Kutlu), *Kafkasya yazıları* 8 (2000): 32–4.

<sup>27</sup> The fact that Chechen settlements were made of wood also undermined the effectiveness of Yermolov's destructive forays. The Chechens could abandon and rebuild their villages with relative ease, in contrast to the Dagestanis, who tended to live in stone dwellings. Gammer, *Muslim Resistance*, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Algar, "Brief History of the Naqshbandi Order," 3–44.

<sup>29</sup> For more on Sirhindi and his thought, see Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Hamid Algar cautions against attempts to link the two movements too closely, because their theological differences were unbridgeable; Algar, "Brief History of the Naqshbandi Order," 30–31. Bernard Lewis, however, writes that the Indian Muslim leader Ahmad Brelwi was both a Wahhabi and a Naqshbandi initiate; Lewis, "Revolt of Islam," 100.

<sup>31</sup> In English, the best accounts are Baddeley's and Gammer's.

<sup>32</sup> For details, see Zelkina, *In Quest for God and Freedom*, 164–8.

<sup>33</sup> For an incisive critique of this approach, see Alexander Knysh, "Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm: The Issue of the Motivations of Sufi Movements in Russian and Western Historiography," in *Die Welt des Islams* 42, no. 2 (2002): 139–73. Knysh's general argument is persuasive, but he does not do justice to the real scholarly achievements of Moshe Gammer, whose work is more nuanced than Knysh presents, or even Anna Zelkina, whose work on Islam in Chechnya before the Russian conquest is pioneering.

<sup>34</sup> Sufism, or *tasawwuf*, is a word used to describe the body of doctrines, practices, and organizations in Islam that related to the pursuit of mystical enlightenment. The precise etymology of *tasawwuf* is unknown. The most common theory is that it was derived from the Arabic word for wool, *suf*, in reference to the coarse undergarments that the early mystic ascetics of Islam wore as part of their effort to inure themselves to the blandishments of the material world in their quest for

spiritual enlightenment and knowledge of the divine.

<sup>35</sup> According to this view, Sufi sheikhs are much closer to the people and far more capable of rousing the faithful masses to armed violence because, unlike the ulema, the formally trained scholars of the Quranic sciences, they do not rely upon their formal knowledge of the Quranic sciences but rely instead upon their spiritual charisma.

<sup>36</sup> It should not be assumed that the mountaineers' Muslim identity precluded their voluntary accession to the Russian Empire. Other Muslim communities had made their peace with the tsarist regime, and indeed the Russians dispatched a number of Tatar and other Muslim authorities to the North Caucasus to appeal to the mountaineers to cease their resistance to the tsar.

<sup>37</sup> Because these codes varied from mountaineer community to mountaineer community, it would perhaps be more proper to speak of *adat* in the plural.

<sup>38</sup> Zelkina, "Islam and Society in Chechnia," 243–6.

<sup>39</sup> For a critical and nuanced treatment of the relationship between *adat* and sharia, see V.O. Bobrovnikov, *Musul'mane Severnogo Kavkaza: obychnai, pravo, nasilie* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2002), 110–41.

<sup>40</sup> Beneath the *naib* was another layer of bureaucracy. The number of *naibs* and the complexity of the bureaucracy varied with time, and the geographical extent of Shamil's power, from four to thirty-three. For more on the structure of Shamil's quasi-state, see Gammer, *Muslim Resistance*, 225–47.

<sup>41</sup> This is as outlined in article six of Shamil's *nizam*. Cafer Barlas, *Düniü ve Bugünü ile Kafkasya Özgürlük Mücadelesi* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayinlari, 1999), 199.

<sup>42</sup> Zelkina, *In Quest for God and Freedom*, 209–12.

<sup>43</sup> Gammer, *Muslim Resistance*, 244.

<sup>44</sup> "Uchenie 'zikr' i ego posledovateli v Chechne i Argunskom okruge," in *Sbornik svedenii kavkazskikh gortsakh* vol. 2 (Tiflis, 1869), 4.

<sup>45</sup> Gammer, *Muslim Resistance*, 235.

<sup>46</sup> For more on Kunta Hajji, see V. Kh. Akaev, *Sheikh Kunta Khadzhi* (Groznyi: NIIGN Chechenskoi respubliki, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> Paul Henze, "Circassian Resistance to Russia," in Broxup, *North Caucasus Barrier*, 98–9.

<sup>48</sup> K. M. Khanbaev, "Miuridizm v Dagestane v XIX—nachale XX vv," *Islam v Dagestane* (Makhachkala: Dagestanskii Ordena Druzhyi Narodov Gosudarstvennyi Univesitet, 1994), 35.

<sup>49</sup> For more on the UAM, see Michael A. Reynolds, "The Ottoman–Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908–1918: Identity, Ideology, and the Geopolitics of World Order," Ph.D. dissertation (Princeton University, 2003), 515–97.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, "Otkrytie 1ogo s'ezda gorskikh narodov Kavkaza" 1.5.1917, in *Soiuz ob'edinennykh gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana (1917–1918 gg.)*, *Gorskaia Respublika (1918–1920 gg.)*, ed. M. D. Butaev (Makhachkala: Institut istorii, arkheologii i etnografii DNTs RAN, 1994), 26.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict 1800–2000: A Deadly Embrace* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 20.

<sup>52</sup> The single best treatment of the Transcaucasus in this period remains Firuz Kazemzadeh's *The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917–1921* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951).

<sup>53</sup> For more on the Ottoman role in the North Caucasus in 1918, see Ismail Berkok, "Büyük Harpte Simalî Kafkasyadaki Faaliyetlerimiz ve 15. Firkanin Harekâti ve Muharabeleri," *Askeri Mecmua*, no. 35 (Eylül, 1934); and Nâsir Yüceer, *Birinci Dünya Savasi'nda Osmanli Ordusu'nun Azerbaycan ve Dagistan Harekâti* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basim Evi, 1996).

<sup>54</sup> "Pis'mo diplomaticheskogo predstavitelia Gorskogo pravitel'stva G. Bammatova predsedateliu pravitel'stva A. Chermoevu o politike Germanii i Turtsii v otnoshenii Kavkaza i Rossii," 31.8.1918, in *Soiuz ob'edinnennykh gortsev*, 152.

<sup>55</sup> Berkok, "Büyük Harpte," 73.

<sup>56</sup> Berkok, "Büyük Harpte," 31.

<sup>57</sup> Alexandre Bennigsen, "Muslim Guerrilla Warfare in the Caucasus (1918–1928)," *Central Asian Survey* 2, no. 1 (July 1983): 46, 48.

<sup>58</sup> Marie Broxup, "The Last Ghazavat: The 1920–1921 Uprising," in Broxup, *North Caucasus Barrier*, 113–45.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of *abrechestvo* in historical context, see Bobrovnikov, *Musul'mane*, 79–97.

<sup>60</sup> "Poslanie Muftiia N. Gotsinskogo k mullam i prikhozhanam Severo-Kavkazskogo Muftiata," 4.11.1917, *Soiuz ob'edinennykh gortsev*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv, fond 39247, opis 1, delo 1, list'180, "Kratkaia Ob'iasnitelnaia Zapiska," 25.4.1921.

<sup>62</sup> Bennigsen, "Muslim Guerilla Warfare," 53.

<sup>63</sup> See, in particular, Mustafa Butbay, *Kafkasya Hatiralari*, ed. Ahmet Cevdet Canbulat (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1990), 23, 56, 80, 101.

<sup>64</sup> Broxup, "Last Ghazavat," 123.

<sup>65</sup> As Anatol Lieven observes, it is worth remembering that neither Stalin nor Lavrentii Beria, the NKVD chief who oversaw the operation, were Russian, and that the deportations were a Soviet rather than particularly Russian act; Lieven, *Chechnya*, 319.

<sup>66</sup> Numerous Chechens, at times in sense of embarrassment, have explained to the author how in the Soviet era they were unaware of even such basic norms of Islam, such as the prohibition of alcohol. Parents capable of reading Arabic often refrained from passing such knowledge to their children out of fear for themselves or their children.

<sup>67</sup> Soviet nationality policies arguably did serve to dilute Muslim identity vis-à-vis ethnonational identities. This can be observed in Dagestan. For a concise analysis of Islam and ethnicity in Dagestan in the post-Soviet period, see Moshe Gammer, "Walking the Tightrope between Nationalism(s) and Islam(s): The Case of Dagestan," *Central Asian Survey* 21, no. 2 (2002): 133–42.

<sup>68</sup> I am using the term "Salafi" here because that is the term that many of those fighting in Chechnya apply to themselves and their beliefs. See also Vincenzo Olivetti's polemic, *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences* (Birmingham, U.K.: Amadeus Books, 2002). For a vigorous polemic in defense of Salafi Islam, see Haneef James Oliver, *The 'Wahhabi' Myth: Dispelling Prevalent Fallacies and the Fictitious Link with Bin Laden* (n.p.: Trafford Publishing, 2003).

<sup>69</sup> For a critique of Wahhabism written from the perspective of a practicing Sunni Muslim and historian, see Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta, N.Y.: Islamic Publications International, 2002). See also the works cited in the preceding footnote. For more on "Wahhabism" in the former Soviet Union, see Sanobar Shermatova, "Tak nazvyvaemye vakhkhabyty," in *Chechnia i Rossiia: Obshchestva i gosudarstva*, ed. D. E. Furman (Moscow: Polinform-Talbury, 1999), 399–425; and V. O. Bobrovnikov, "Mif o 'Severokavkazskom Islame': Strakhi i nadezhdy," in *Kavkaz i Tsentral'naiia Aziia na sovremennom etape*, ed. V. A. Mikhailova (Moscow: Sotsium, 2003), 115–23.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Anna Matveeva, "The Islamist Challenge in Post-Soviet Eurasia," in *Political Islam and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia*, ed. Lena Jonson and Murad Esenov (Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 1999), 37–8.

<sup>71</sup> Whereas in 1988 in Dagestan there were just twenty-seven mosques and not even a single madrasah, a mere ten years later there were 1,670 mosques, 670 schools attached to the mosques, twenty five

*madrasahs*, and nine higher Muslim schools. Amri Shikhsaidov, "Islam in Dagestan," in Jonson and Esenov, *Political Islam*, 60. Even assuming that some mosques or *jamaats*, congregations, functioned underground in the Soviet period, there is no doubt that the increase in the number of Islamic institutions is nothing less than explosive.

<sup>72</sup> Mikhail Roshchin, "Fundamentalizm v Dagestane i Chechne," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, no. 5 (2003); Enver Kisriev, Werner J. Patzelt, Ute Roericht, and Robert Bruce Ware, "Political Islam in Dagestan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 2 (March 2003); See also Georgi Derluguian, "Che Guevaras in Turbans," *PONARS Working Paper* (October 2003).

<sup>73</sup> The converse is also true. Many supporters of Russian actions in Chechnya have embraced the notion that the Russians are fighting one battle in a larger, common war against militant Islam. This theme gained greater currency in the international arena following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Contrary to the assertions of some, this was not a mere by-product of U.S.–Russian cooperation. For example, French officials have repeatedly cited ties to Chechnya in their investigations of radical Islamists. See Marlise Simons, "Europeans Warn of Terror Attacks in Event of War in Iraq," *New York Times*, January 29, 2003; Jim Boulden, "France Opened Moussaoui File in '94," December 11, 2001, at <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/12/06/gen.moussaoui.background/>.

<sup>74</sup> For an example, see Meier, *Black Earth*, 127–33.

<sup>75</sup> The number of volunteers from outside the Caucasus likely never exceeded more than a few hundred. The amount of money that indigenous and foreign jihadists raised through contributions and crime within and without Russia was sufficient, however, to give them a clear superiority over other armed groups within Chechnya. E.g., the Chechen government of Aslan Maskhadov failed to suppress them and was effectively co-opted by them. For an insider's account of the role of volunteers in Chechnya, see Aukai Collins, *My Jihad* (Guilford, Conn.: Lyons Press, 2002). The most famous of these volunteers was the charismatic and ruthless Khattab. He was poisoned in March 2002.

<sup>76</sup> Examples of such literature abound; for one, see al-Sayyid Muhammad Yûnus, *al-Muslimûn fî Jumhûriyat al-Shâshân wa Jihâduhum fî Muqâwamat al-Ghazw al-Rûsî* (Mecca: 14:15[1994]) (*The Muslims in the Chechen Republic and their Jihad in the Resistance to the Russian Invasion*). Salafi internet sites gave prominent attention to Chechnya from the mid-1990s onward.

77 For illustrative examples of the clash between state institutions and disintegrating clan and other loyalties, see Baiev, *Oath*, 224–30; Politkovskaya, *Small Corner of Hell*, 138, 180.

78 Hence Chechen Salafis, in total disregard for even the most basic conventions of Chechen culture, refuse to stand when their elders enter a room.

79 The metamorphosis of Yandarbiev from a nationalist poet with a profoundly Soviet outlook into an Islamist activist who traveled through the Middle East and South Asia to establish relations with radical Islamists is worthy of further study. For his earlier views, see Zelimkhan Iandarbiev, *V preddverii nezavisimosti* (Groznyi: Groznenskii rabochii, 1994) and *Chechniia—bitva za svobodu* (L'vov: n.p., 1996).

80 For an overview of radical Islam in the interwar period, see Vakhit Akaev, "Religious–Political Conflict in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria," in Jonson and Esenov, *Political Islam*, 47–57.

81 The Avar Bagauddin Kebedov justified the taking of hostages by citing the example of the Prophet Muhammad at the Battle of Badr. Author's interviews with members of the Congress of Peoples of Dagestan and Chechnia, Istanbul, December 1999. See also Vakhit Akaev, *Sufizm i Vakhkhabizm na Severnom Kavkaze* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii RAN, 1999), 10.

82 Magommedkhan Magommedkhanov, "Current Trends and Tensions in Dagestan and Chechnya," paper presented to the conference, "Conflict in the Caucasus: Yesterday and Today," Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., May 9, 1998.

83 Nukhaev cites, among other examples, the Chechens refusal to submit to Shamil's "state sharia" as historical evidence of the innate inability of Chechen society to conform to the demands of statehood. Khozh-Akhmed Nukhaev, *Vozvrashchenie varvarov* (Moscow: Mekhkh Kkhell, 2002), 147–8. Although Nukhaev rose to prominence as an underworld figure and not as an intellectual, his critique of the modern state and its incompatibility with Chechen sociocultural norms is provocative and filled with insight. See also Nukhaev, *Vedeno ili Vashington?* (Moscow: Arktogeia-tsent, 2001).

84 To be sure, Maskhadov's resort to sharia courts was in part very likely motivated by the realization that only Islamic law had a chance of attaining effective, if not popular, legitimacy among the Chechens.

85 Following the invasion's failure, its protagonists attempted to portray it as an act of self-defense on behalf of the Salafi communities on the

Dagestani–Chechen border. Interview with Adollo Ali Muhammed in *Abreklerin Günlüğü*, (November 1999). Given the publicly expressed intent to unify the North Caucasus as an Islamic state and the preparations for warfare undertaken by the Congress of the Peoples of Dagestan and Chechnia prior to the invasion, this claim is at best only technically correct.

86 On the relative stability of Dagestan, see Edward W. Walker, "Russia's Soft Underbelly: The Stability of Instability in Dagestan," *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series*, winter 1999–2000. Cf. Enver Kisriev, Werner J. Patzelt, Ute Roericht, and Robert Bruce Ware, "Stability in the Caucasus: The Perspective from Dagestan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 50, no. 2 (March–April 2003).