

# ISLAM IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

## The Example of Chechnia

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### Brief Biographic Summary

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### PART ONE - THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### Geography and Demography

The main Caucasus range, which extends over 600 miles northwestward from the shores of the Caspian to the Black Sea, rises to 18,471 feet in Mount Elbruz in Balkaria. It represents a formidable barrier to travel and transport, especially at its western end, where the first through road along the coast was constructed after World War II. The only practical central route through the mountains is up the valley of the Terek into the Daryal Gorge and over the Jvari Pass from where the Georgian Military Highway leads down the valley of the Aragvi to Tbilisi. The region to the south of the crest of the mountains is termed Transcaucasia and consists today of the three independent republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The lands on the northern side of the mountains--the North Caucasus--have continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union to form part of the Russian Republic.

Ethnographers classify more than 30 indigenous peoples and languages in the North Caucasus, the boundaries of which are controversial but are sometimes extended northeastward to include the Kalmyk Republic, inhabited by a Buddhist Mongol people who migrated from Chinese territory westward in the 17th century. Most North Caucasians are of Paleocaucasian (sometimes called Ibero-Caucasian) stock whose ancestors have lived in the region since the dawn of history. Chechens, of whom almost million were counted in the 1989 census, are the most numerous of these, followed by Kabardans, Avars, and several other Dagestani nationalities as well as the Circassians. Until the great migrations of the latter half of the 19th century, Circassian peoples dominated the western portion of the North Caucasus. They were decimated in Russian offensives against them which continued from the 1830s into the 1860s and over million were killed or emigrated to the Ottoman Empire after they were defeated.<sup>[1]</sup> Soviet ethnographers stressed subdivisions among the Circassians who remained: Adygei, Kabardan, and Cherkess. The Abkhaz, who live on the south side of the mountains along the Black Sea coast and have been historically linked to Georgia, are sometimes classified as Circassians, but are actually a separate Paleocaucasian people. A hundred thousand of them--well over half of their population at the time--migrated to the Ottoman Empire after Russian conquest. Four major North Caucasian nationalities (Kumyks, Nogays, Karachays, & Balkars) are Turkic, descendants of waves of migration from the Central Asian steppes extending back 1500 years, and one, the Ossetes, who number more than half a million, are an ancient Iranian people.

Following the principle of ethnic structuralism applied during Soviet rule (which, in effect, became a more refined application of the tsarist policy of *divide et impera*), the North Caucasus was divided into ethnic administrative units of various levels. Boundaries and the status of territories were changed over and over again during the 70 years of Soviet authority. Since the

Soviet Union's collapse, all ethnic entities have declared themselves republics of equal status and further ethnic fragmentation of territories has occurred. The Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, for example, has split in two with the Ingush recognized as a separate republic within the Russian Federation. The larger Chechen portion declared its independence in August 1991.

Though its independence was not recognized internationally or by Russia, Moscow tolerated Chechen separatism until the fall of 1994 when a covert effort to subvert the Chechen leadership failed and was followed by an open military assault on the breakaway republic. This extraordinarily brutal and destructive military campaign has been condemned by many groups in Russian society, including prominent military officers. Though the Chechen capital, Grozny, has been destroyed, the Chechens have continued a spirited resistance and the poor performance of the Russian military has become a serious embarrassment.

For purposes of this essay, the term North Caucasus is used to include the following republics, from west to east: Adygei, Karachay-Cherkess, Kabardino-Balkar, North Ossetian, Ingush, Chechen, and Dagestan. Indigenous peoples accounted for almost 80% of the population of this region in the last Soviet census (1989) and Russians and other Slavs (including Cossacks) for most of the remainder.<sup>[2]</sup> The titular nationalities were in a majority in only four of the original (i.e. Soviet-designated) ethnic units. In three others they were outnumbered by Slavs, with the Adygei region having the lowest percentage of the native nationality--22%. All of the North Caucasian nationalities have displayed a higher rate of natural increase than the Slavs. In addition, outmigration of Slavs, which was increasingly apparent during the last two decades of the Soviet period, has accelerated since the Union's collapse. Naturally, no comprehensive new statistics are available, but it is apparent that the proportion of indigenous peoples in the North Caucasian republics is rapidly increasing.

## **Historical Background**

The Arabs penetrated into the Caucasus during their great initial wave of expansion in the 7th and 8th centuries. Awed by the variety of peoples living there, they called it Jebel al-Asan--the Mountain of Languages. The Georgians and Armenians, who live south of the main Caucasus range on the West, had been Christianized in the 4th century and had links to the Byzantine Empire. They were successful in resisting conversion to Islam. Farther east, and still south of the crest of the mountains, lay Caucasian Albania, also a Christian kingdom but with closer ties to Persia. It was here, and northward into Dagestan, that the Arab invaders were most successful in effecting conversions to Islam. By the end of the 8th century, the entire eastern Caucasus was part of Dar-ul-Islam. It continued, at least nominally, to form part of the Persian Empire until the early 19th century. Other invaders from the north and east, such as the Seljuk Turks who arrived in the 11th century and the Mongols in the 13th, were absorbed into Persia and the World of Islam.<sup>[3]</sup>

Persia exercised only intermittent control over Dagestan ("Land of Mountains"), the rugged region on the upper western side of the Caspian Sea and it remained Sunni. This area exceeds all other all parts of the Caucasus in ethnic and linguistic variety. Filling a need for a lingua franca, the Arabic language became well established there. By the Middle Ages, Dagestan had become a major center of Islamic learning. It later played a role in Islamizing the rest of the North Caucasus--with influence flowing generally from east to west. Though Azerbaijan and Dagestan were predominantly Islamic from medieval times onward, pockets of Christians and Jews survived.

In the central and western regions of the North Caucasus, Islam had to compete with strong and ancient religious traditions which had absorbed elements of Christianity from Georgia and Byzantium. The Circassians, the Abkhaz, and other peoples living along the coast and hinterland of the Black Sea included Christian communities well into the Middle Ages and were also in regular contact with Genoese and Venetian traders who built forts at many places along the coast.<sup>[4]</sup> The Ottomans, after conquering Trebizond in 1461, extended their sovereignty over the entire coast and inland into Circassia and Kabarda. In these areas, the local aristocracy adopted Sunni Islam but the mass of the population was only lightly converted. Russian pressure on the North Caucasus gave impetus to accelerated Islamization among the Chechens, the Ingush, and the Circassian peoples.

After Kazan and Astrakhan fell to Ivan the Terrible in the mid-16th century, Russia exploited the Volga-Terek route to extend trade routes southward and challenge the Ottoman and Persian empires for control of the Caucasus. Moscow's first systematic, official efforts to penetrate the Caucasus were through Dagestan. Several Russian missions made temporary alliances with local Dagestani rulers and moved on to make contact with Georgian princes.<sup>[5]</sup> Russia was already interested in developing Christian Georgia as an ally, but little came of these efforts during the next century and a half. Dagestani tribesmen, who were supplied with weapons by Turkey and Persia, frustrated Russian attempts to make permanent advances.

Peter the Great mounted an expedition against Persia which captured the great Dagestani commercial center and fortress of Derbent in 1723 and continued into Azerbaijan to take Kuba and Baku. Persia sued for peace and granted Russia control of the western and southern shore of the Caspian, but to maintain it was beyond Russia's capabilities and the entire region reverted to Persia after Peter's death in 1725. It remained subject to Persia for the better part of the next century.

Meanwhile Russia was making slower but more solid gains in Kabarda and was beginning to penetrate lowland Chechnia. Russia also made contact with the Ossetes, whose territory lies directly west of that of the Chechens and Ingush and, therefore, west of the Terek-Daryal route across the main Caucasus range. The Ossetes had ancient connections with Georgian Christianity. Zeal to spread Orthodox Christianity was a motivating factor in Russian expansion and missionaries worked to revive Christianity among the Ossetes.<sup>[6]</sup> The Russians encouraged religious conversion and co-optation of tribal aristocracies as a device for extending control in Kabarda. Ivan the Terrible married the daughter of a Kabardan prince, Temryuk, who took the name Maria Temryukovna on conversion to Orthodoxy. Russian utilization of Christianity as a device for imperial expansion encouraged those opposed to Russia to utilize Islam as a counterforce.

The first Russian contact with the Chechens occurred initially through Cossacks. While in effect the Cossacks were one of the most important agents of Russian imperial expansion, this was not their original intention or purpose. Cossack bands formed of men who had escaped government control and exploitation--legally they were often outlaws--by fleeing to frontier regions and organizing themselves. Ethnically they were often very mixed. Many married women from the tribal groups with whom they came in contact. Early Cossack contacts with the Caucasian peoples were by no means entirely hostile, for Caucasians sometimes enlisted Cossack help against rival tribes and factions. In common with similar processes of colonial penetration in other parts of the world, most of the Caucasian mountaineers at first perceived the Cossacks as merely another element in the age-old competition for trade, land and influence over neighbors. As the Cossacks became conscious instruments of Russian expansion and Russian armies began to penetrate into the North Caucasus, attitudes on both sides shifted and hardened.<sup>[7]</sup> By the reign of Peter the Great (first quarter of the 18th century) most Chechens and many of their neighbors had come to regard Russians as enemies. The preferred Russian policy

of co-opting the aristocracy among subject peoples made it difficult for them to find supporters in democratic-patriarchal societies like that of the Chechens.

Most of Chechnia was originally covered with thick deciduous forests, with evergreens at higher altitudes. The Chechens were settled agriculturalists from early times, growing grain in river valleys and maintaining large herds of cattle and sheep.<sup>[8]</sup> They lived in large, well-built, compact villages. Two or three villages usually formed the basis for a clan, called a taip, whose members regarded themselves as descending from a common ancestor. Their society was democratic in a primitive sense with elders, rather than hereditary rulers (as among the Kabardans), exercising leadership.<sup>[9]</sup> Ingush society was very similar to that of the Chechens, but the Ingush were even more lightly influenced by Islam.<sup>[10]</sup> Among both peoples, as well as among the Ossetes and many other Caucasian highlanders, many traditional religious beliefs and practices survived into the 19th century.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Sheikh Mansur

A Chechen named Ushurma born in 1732 in the aul of Aldy on the river Sunja north of the site of the future Grozny grew up to become the first great leader of resistance against the Russians in the name of both Islam and the cause of freedom for the mountain peoples. As a boy he showed a strong interest in religion and received religious training first in his home country and then in Dagestan. Returning to Chechnia as a mullah with close links to the Naqshbandi Sufi brotherhood (tarikat), he saw himself destined to persuade his people and, indeed, all Caucasian Muslims, to unite to resist the advancing Russians. He took the name Sheikh Mansur (Victor) after the population of his home village elected him imam, attracted thousands of followers and proclaimed gazavat--holy war--to drive out the invading infidels. In 1785 in the Battle of the Sunja River his forces destroyed an entire Russian brigade.

Following up on this victory, as a result of which he captured heavy guns and supplies, Sheikh Mansur rallied North Caucasian tribesmen from Dagestan through Kabarda to Circassia to his banner and captured several major Russian fortified settlements. His army swelled to more than 20,000. The Black Sea coast was at this time still in possession of the Ottoman Empire. The Turks were equivocal about Sheikh Mansur, for their aim was to end rivalries among the competitive Circassian princes and consolidate Sunni Islam among the population.<sup>[12]</sup> Turkish failure to support his gazavat deprived the Sheikh of the resources and clear-cut status that might have brought stronger support in Kabarda and among the Circassians. The Sheikh's religious puritanism had less appeal to the Circassians than to the peoples of the Central Caucasus. Nevertheless he continued to inflict serious losses on the Russians while seeking Turkish support. He happened to be in the Turkish fortress of Anapa when Tsarist forces laid siege to it in 1791. When after 61 days it fell, he was captured, treated as an outlaw, taken to St. Petersburg, and imprisoned in the fortress of Schlüsselburg where he died in 1794.<sup>[13]</sup>

Though he left no clear line of succession, Sheikh Mansur's impact on the peoples of the North Caucasus persisted long after his death. He remained a hero among the Chechens. Among the Circassians he became a legend inspiring their long anti-Russian struggle which gained momentum during the 1830s and continued into the 1860s. He came, in fact, to be seen as a messiah with a mission extending far beyond his home territory or his original apparent purpose. An account by one of the Englishmen who was sent to help the Circassians in the 1830s demonstrates how the Sheikh's tradition had already persisted for nearly 40 years, had been expanded and embroidered, and had generated remarkable expectations:

Elijah Mansour, with an energy almost superhuman, quickly succeeded in uniting the whole of the tribes...in one common interest, elevated the spirits of the desponding inhabitants and formed them into a force which proved ultimately too powerful for the invaders. He breathed into them renewed vigour and a hatred of Russian rule which has continued to exist in all its animosity to the present day. Hence Elijah Mansour...may with truth be termed the regenerator of the Caucasian races over whom he continued to exercise an authority only inferior to that of a sovereign and to defeat the Russians in almost every engagement till he unfortunately fell into their hands at Anapa. This singular man conceived the vast enterprise of uniting the whole of the Tartar races, and of founding a new Tartar empire; he also intended to give, like Mahomet, a new religion to his followers, whom he also resembled in the circumstance of centering in his own person the trifold character of priest, warrior and prophet. The creed, however, of the prophet of the Caucasus was said to have been based more upon the Christian than the Mahometan doctrines, and to have been divested in great part of the absurd superstitions engrafted upon the latter; while the tolerant feelings with which he regarded all systems of faith, had the effect of conciliating alike Jew, Christian and Mahometan, and contributed in no inconsiderable degree to swell his ranks. He was regarded...[as] invulnerable and invincible; and not a few, even in the present day, look forward to his reappearance.<sup>[14]</sup>

The contention that the Sheikh favored Christianity and aimed to establish a new religion based on an amalgam of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam has no basis in known fact. It may represent the hopes of an idealistic young Englishman, but it could also be a reflection of Sheikh Mansur's espousal of Naqshbandi Sufism which probably occurred during his early training in Dagestan. The Naqshbandi tarikat was founded in Bukhara by Sheikh Baha-ud-din Naqshband in the 14th century and spread both eastward and westward. It reached Dagestan in the 18th century. Its basic message was well suited to the temper of the time in the North Caucasus:

The predominance of the Naqshbandiya over other [Sufi] brotherhoods may be explained by several factors. First, [it] has a double character, at once elitist and popular...[and] has numbered among its adepts rulers, wealthy merchants, military leaders, intellectuals, landlords, and poets... Secondly, it has a unique ability to adapt to changing political and social conditions... Thirdly, [it] is linguistically accessible to everyone... In the Caucasus it assumes an Arabic character in addition to its Persian and Turkic forms. Fourthly, [it] gained immense prestige [by] providing leadership in holy wars... Fifthly [it] is a highly decentralized order which maintains its unity only through a community of purpose and the practice of a simple ritual--what we would today call, anachronistically, "a common ideology"... Finally, this order embodies what we might think of as doctrinal liberalism, in that it excludes fanaticism and radicalism.<sup>[15]</sup>

Sheikh Mansur was the first Caucasian freedom fighter to attract the attention of Europeans, but neither statesmen nor scholars understood the complex of motivations which inspired him. Newspapers reported his victories and defeats and a spate of legends arose which persisted even in scholarly literature into the 20th century. Eminent historians such as Baddeley, Allen, and Muratoff took seriously the allegation that he was a renegade Italian monk in Turkish pay, a tale that Soviet historians revived to try to discredit him.<sup>[16]</sup>

Sheikh Mansur, and Sheikh Shamil who followed him more than forty years later, were religious leaders, it is true, but their motivation was not simply religion. Their familiarity with and devotion to the basic principles of Islam cannot be questioned, but they were also skilled in using religion as a political tool. They exploited Islam to rally the North Caucasian mountaineers to defend themselves against Russian imperial encroachment. A combination of three interrelated factors: (1) the ethno-linguistic fragmentation of the North Caucasus, (2) age-old habits of clan and tribal feuding, even within ethnic entities, and (3) social cleavages, especially among peoples with a hierarchical class structure and a native aristocracy, gave the

Russians rich opportunities to penetrate, divide, and confuse these societies, heightening internal tensions, and setting them against each other.

For the leaders of the anti-Russian resistance, Islam provided an ideology based on social equality and unity of purpose, transcending tribalism, narrow ethnic particularism, and class differences. Sufi Islam was not diametrically opposed to official Ottoman-inspired Sunni Islam, but Sufism had a more practical appeal for the great majority of North Caucasians for whom the Ottoman Empire was a distant and not well understood political structure. Though the Ottoman commanders and officials were always eager to rally Caucasian Muslims to support their efforts to stem Russian advances, they were equivocal about Sufism. They were often content with conversion of elites and made little effort to understand the profound differences that sometimes separated one Caucasian ethnic group from another. Some Ottoman officials regarded Sheikh Mansur as a heretic and competitor rather than as an ally.

For peoples such as the Chechens, Kumyks, and Avars, as well as most other Dagestanis, the fine points of religious doctrine were less important than the fact that Sheikh Mansur was rallying people to resist Russian intrusion into their lands. They wanted to avoid disruption of their societies, imposition of an alien way of life, and economic subjugation to distant masters. For them Sufi Islam was a framework within which these widely accepted aims could be pursued. At the same time it was tolerant of local customs. These attitudes have remained functional in the North Caucasus to the present day.

### **Sheikh Shamil and the Caucasian Freedom Struggle**

Sheikh Mansur was later universally regarded as the precursor of the greatest and most renowned of all Caucasian resistance leaders, the Imam Shamil, who was active from the 1830s until his final defeat by the Russians in 1859. Shamil was an Avar from Dagestan. He consolidated his leadership by undermining and then destroying the aristocratic Avar ruling family. His movement was a far more coherent and organized version of the jihād Sheikh Mansur had led to unite North Caucasian Muslims against the Russian advance. It was also inspired by the egalitarianism of Naqshbandi doctrine. It rested on an even broader base than Sheikh Mansur had been able to create, for Russian pressure on the Caucasus had meanwhile continued unabated. The fortress of Grozny was established in 1818. The name-- meaning "the Frightful" or "the Terrible"--was deliberately selected to remind the Chechens that Russia intended to spare nothing in its efforts to subdue them.<sup>[17]</sup> Chechens were among Shamil's most ardent supporters and supplied thousands of the murids--warriors dedicated to North Caucasian independence in the name of Islam--who made up his armies.

Shamil's long struggle attracted the admiration of Americans and Europeans<sup>[18]</sup> as well as Turks, but Shamil received little outside help, even at the time of the Crimean War, when British and Turkish support for the Caucasian mountaineers might have had a decisive effect.<sup>[19]</sup> Shamil and the Circassians, who were at least as fierce in their determination to resist the Russians, never succeeded in coordinating their operations. In both its positive and negative features, the 19th century freedom fight of the North Caucasians had some of the characteristics of the late 20th century resistance of the Afghans--except for the outcome. The Afghans, in spite of their internecine rivalries, emerged victorious because the Soviet Empire itself faltered and collapsed. The Tsarist Empire in the mid-19th century had greater residual strength. Much of Chechnia was laid waste as Russian armies extended their operations deep into wooded foothills and gorges on the north side of the main Caucasus range. Shamil was pushed back into the mountains of Dagestan and forced to surrender in 1859.<sup>[20]</sup> Afterward Russia was able to

concentrate its forces against the Circassians. They continued to fight into the middle of the next decade.

## Continued Resistance

Following Shamil's submission to the Tsar, large numbers of Chechens emigrated to the Ottoman Empire. A fifth of the population is estimated to have left by 1865.<sup>[21]</sup> They formed a minor proportion, however, of the vast flood of emigrating North Caucasians which reached its crest in the late 1860s but continued into the 1890s. Most numerous among those leaving were the Circassians, almost all of whom left. Muslim Ossetes, Ingush, Abkhaz, and Dagestani peoples also emigrated, but in proportionately smaller numbers. Up to the time of this emigration, the Circassians were by far the most numerous of the North Caucasian peoples. Following it the Chechens moved into first place and have held it ever since.

Russian conquest had no negative effect on the expansion of the influence of Islam. It seems, in fact, to have encouraged it as a form of passive resistance. A Russian monograph on the Chechens published in 1894 admitted that they could still not be regarded as "fully pacified" and said that many still looked across the border to Turkey where they dreamed of emigrating,<sup>[22]</sup> the majority clung tenaciously to their native territory. Birthrates remained high, so population losses were quickly made good. Village communities preserved traditional customs and practices, including councils of elders and clan courts. These communities often formed the building blocks of Sufi religious brotherhoods. To Naqshbandi influence, other Sufi currents were added.

The Qadiri tarikat, originating in Baghdad in the 12th century, spread from there to Central Asia. It came to the Caucasus in the decade before the defeat of Shamil. It was introduced by Kunta Haji Kishiev, a Kumyk from Dagestan, who at first preached non-resistance to evil and acceptance of infidel domination, ideas that had appeal to war-weary elements in the population. But as the movement gained influence, murids, warriors who had fought with Shamil, became a majority among Kunta Haji's followers. These men found it difficult to reconcile themselves to Shamil's surrender. They mounted a rebellion against the Russians in Chechnia in 1862-63. The Russians arrested and deported Kunta Haji and many of his followers in early 1864. He died in 1867 in a Russian prison. The movement then became known as the Kunta Haji Brotherhood and split into several branches,<sup>[23]</sup> while gaining further strength. Leadership in both the Qadiri and Naqshbandi brotherhoods was primarily hereditary.

Qadiri/Kunta Haji adherents favored a more centralized form of organization than Naqshbandis and placed more stress on the role of individual sheikhs. This kind of organization had distinct advantages in the decades following the defeat of Shamil. To the Russians, who understood little about them and regarded them all with suspicion, Sufi brotherhoods seemed secretive and potentially subversive. As time passed, the majority of Chechens and Dagestanis did not see them primarily in this light, but looked upon them as instruments for the consolidation of Islam and diffusion of Islamic principles in their societies. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the population rallied to rebel leadership as each generation brought a new burst of resistance to Russian domination most often led by men with religious status.

There were significant rebellions again in the late 1870s, in the first years of the 20th century, and after the 1917 Russian revolution. Russian attitudes carried over into the Soviet period. In a study remarkable for its insights and thoroughness, Bennigsen and Wimbush noted in the mid-1980s:

"Sufi brotherhoods are not secret societies comparable to Freemasonry, nor do they represent, as Soviet sources insist, a "parallel Islam" in the sense that it constitutes a religious alternative. Nowhere does Sufism reject the Shariat, the law of Islam. Rather Sufism is a deeper form of Islamic belief: a Sufi adept is not a "better Muslim", and he can never be a "different" Muslim, but he frequently is a more responsible and more fervent Muslim. He has chosen to deepen his knowledge of Islam by more rigorous study and to observe Islam's moral precepts through more rigid self-discipline."<sup>[24]</sup>

With the discovery of oil around Grozny at the end of the 19th century, Chechnia became a major focus of Russian economic activity. Private Russian and foreign capital financed oil exploration. By 1910 the Grozny fields ranked second only to those around Baku in petroleum production within the Russian Empire.

## **PART TWO - THE 1917 REVOLUTION AND THE SOVIET PERIOD**

### **Response to the Bolshevik Revolution**

The March 1917 revolution in Petrograd unleashed a situation reminiscent of 1991-92, but with a stronger religious coloration, in the North Caucasus. In August 1917 a congress of Muslim religious leaders held in the aul of Andi in Dagestan elected the Naqshbandi sheikh Najmuddin of Hotso<sup>[25]</sup> Imam of Dagestan and Chechnia, in effect a successor to Shamil. In close alliance with another Naqshbandi sheik, Uzun Haji, he proceeded to establish a religious monarchy encompassing Dagestan and Chechnia. By 1918 they had assembled an army of 10,000 murids, the best fighting force in the North Caucasus. For a period they were inclined to cooperate with the Bolsheviks, who professed sympathy with the desires of the mountaineers for autonomy and welcomed their efforts against General Anton Denikin's White forces, but these were defeated in the summer of 1919.

That autumn Uzun Haji proclaimed Chechnya and northwest Dagestan a "North Caucasian Emirate". One of Shamil's grandsons, Said Beg, was declared head of the state, though he seems to have remained only a figurehead. Some Bolsheviks had hoped to make Uzun Haji an ally, but the extent to which it was desirable for communists to cooperate with religious elements was a source of contention. In any event, cooperation soon proved impossible, for Uzun Haji was an anti-modernist who aspired to restore the region to a kind of theocratic state. He was genuinely and intensely religious and is cited as declaring: "I am weaving a rope to hang engineers, students and in general all those who write from left to right."<sup>[26]</sup>

### **Imposition of Soviet Rule**

Uzun Haji's apparently natural death in May 1920 had little immediate effect on the widespread popular resistance that had developed to Bolshevik efforts to consolidate control over the North Caucasus. Imam Najmuddin of Hotso continued to inspire mountaineer resistance well after the Red Army had conquered Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, but his movement began to fragment. Bolsheviks exploited the relatively milder attitudes of Qadiris who were less

uncompromising than the Naqshbandis by co-opting some of their leaders. By early 1922, widespread resistance had waned, but isolated instances of anti-Bolshevik action continued for several years in Chechnia and Dagestan.<sup>[27]</sup>

An initially positive aspect of Bolshevik strategy was the attempt to turn tendencies toward unity among the mountaineers in a more modern political direction and create a political structure that could mitigate the consequences of ethnic particularism. The Autonomous Mountain Soviet Socialist Republic was decreed in January 1920 with its capital at Vladikavkaz. It brought together seven North Caucasian nationalities: Kabardans, Chechens, Ingush, Circassians, Ossetes, Balkars and Karachay. No comprehensive administrative structure was created, however, and by September 1921, when the Kabardans were given an "autonomous" district (*avtonomnaya oblast'*--AO), the Mountain Republic began to disintegrate. The Bolsheviks--quickly embracing the "divide and rule" principle--were concluding that the North Caucasian peoples could more easily be brought under Soviet control by dealing with each separately. In January 1922 the Balkars were joined to the Kabardans while the Circassians (Cherkess) and Karachay were combined in another AO. In December 1922 the Chechens were given their own AO which left only the Ossetes and the Ingush remaining in the Mountain Republic. It ceased to exist in July 1924 when both these peoples were given separate AOs. In 1926 the Karachay-Cherkess AO was divided in two. In January 1934 the Ingush were merged with the Chechens in a single AO. In December 1936 the Ossetian, Kabardino-Balkar and Chechen-Ingush AOs were raised to level of "autonomous" republics (ASSRs). In spite of the persistence of "autonomous" designations, self-administration remained a myth. In fact, all the North Caucasian nationalities were subjected to progressively tighter control and were in reality administered from Rostov, seat of the Executive Committee of the North Caucasian region (*kray*) until 1934, when the administration was shifted to Orjonikidze (Vladikavkaz). The continual revision of administrative arrangements and ethnic regions reflected the difficulties Moscow faced in establishing Soviet administration.

Stalinist economic and social engineering made a strong impact on economically important parts of the North Caucasus. The Chechen capital, Grozny, had a population of only 13,000 in 1913. It grew to 97,000 in 1926 and by 1939 was approaching 175,000 as a result of heavy investment in the nationalized petroleum industry and development of petroleum refining facilities and petro-chemical plants. Almost all of Grozny's population growth resulted from influx of Russians. Chechens did not flock in to accept the menial jobs open to them. Chechens and Ingush counted for fewer than 10% of the oil workers in "their" republic in 1936. The oil industry remained a Russian-colonial enclave. Collectivization of agriculture, with its attendant suppression of the most able and prosperous farmers, took a heavy toll on the still predominantly agricultural indigenous population. Russians, including Cossacks, became chairmen of most of the newly established collective farms in lowland Chechnya. In the mountain regions resistance to collectivization was intense. Religion was systematically suppressed in the 1930s, mosques closed, and religious education forbidden.

## **The Situation on the Eve of World War II**

While Soviet propaganda claimed that enormous strides had been made in enabling Chechens (and other North Caucasian peoples) to administer themselves under socialism and modernize and secularize their society, the real effect was to accentuate long-standing tendencies to turn inward to resist communism and Russian rule, which were seen as identical. Religion went underground. The religious brotherhoods expanded their influence and reinforced Chechens' determination to preserve their customs and traditions. When highlanders were forced to organize collective farms, these became fronts for the preservation of village and clan

structures. Repeated efforts to recruit Chechens into the communist party to staff the republican administrative structure fell far short of goals set in Moscow. In spite of claims of the flowering of the Chechen language, Russian predominated everywhere in administration and economic activity. Chechen-language newspapers and journals had extremely small circulation and little influence. A sizable proportion of the native cadres that had been brought into the communist party and local administration were dismissed or exiled during the Great Purges in the late 1930s, a development which undermined the entire concept of cooperating with the Soviet authorities.<sup>[28]</sup>

Reality among the Chechens on the eve of World War II was very different from the picture of the thriving, happy, socialist society Moscow propagandists and occasional Western visitors claimed existed. It is undoubtedly true that infrastructure in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR had been expanded. Schools, libraries, theaters and hospitals had been built too. Official claims of progress avoided making a distinction between (1) development and construction for the benefit of the native inhabitants, which was minimal, and (2) facilities that served the Russian working class and communist administrators and facilitated exploitation of local resources according to priorities set in Moscow.

Comparisons with the situation in European colonies were a favorite theme of Soviet propagandists and Western admirers of communism in the 1930s and 1940s. They downplayed the fact that all but the most negligent and oppressive forms of European colonialism produced expansion of infrastructure, just as the Soviet system did. European colonialists usually avoided massive, compulsive social engineering and ideological indoctrination. Like the peoples of India, Indo-China, and Indonesia, the Chechens considered themselves colonized, only more so. Unlike most other peoples living under European imperialism, they had to endure a continuous assault on the most basic features of their style of life and their religion. It is hardly surprising that they, along with several other North Caucasian nationalities, took advantage of the flight of Russian communist officials and the retreat of the Red Army before advancing German forces in 1942 to attempt to regain some measure of the freedom they had lost almost a century before.<sup>[29]</sup>

## **Deportation and Exile**

From praise of the contribution of the Chechens and the Ingush to the war effort, including citations of individuals' heroic conduct in military operations, the Soviet official stance shifted to denouncing these and several other nationalities en masse as traitors and disloyal tools of the Nazi invaders to justify uprooting them from lands they had occupied for millennia.<sup>[30]</sup>

The deportation of the Chechens and Ingush was so meticulously prepared that it had to have been planned well in advance of Red Army Day, 23 February 1944, when men were invited to meetings at village Soviet buildings throughout the republic. When all were gathered, Studebaker trucks (supplied through U.S. lend-lease) rolled up accompanied by armed troops. The decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet announcing deportation of all Chechens and Ingush for treason and collaboration with the enemy invaders was read and loading of men and their families, with only 20 kilograms of baggage permitted per family, began. Within a few days the entire Chechen and Ingush population--approximately 425,000 people--was en route to Central Asia in boxcars. Chechens and Ingush resident elsewhere in the USSR, including those serving in the Red Army, were also arrested and deported in the weeks following the emptying of their home republic.

Word of the deportation leaked out slowly and, like accounts of the murders of Polish officers at Katyn, was long ignored or treated with willful disbelief in the West. Inside the Soviet Union the deported peoples were systematically wiped off the administrative, journalistic and historical record. Decrees on dissolution of the Crimean and Chechen-Ingush ASSRs published in *Izvestia* in June 1946 provided the first official confirmation of the deportations. New maps showed that all the deportees' former territorial units had been partitioned. A western, Ingush-inhabited portion of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was given to the North Ossetian ASSR. Much of the remainder became part of a greatly enlarged Grozny province which included the Terek delta and an extensive Caspian seacoast. New editions of standard reference works omitted all mention of the punished peoples. All remaining Islamic religious sites, including tombs which had continued to be maintained and revered, were destroyed. Islamic cemeteries were bulldozed and tombstones hauled away to be used in building projects. So comprehensive an effort to eliminate entire ethnic groups from history is unprecedented in modern times.

## **Survival and Return**

The death of Stalin and consolidation of Khrushchev's power eventually led to rehabilitation of the deported peoples. Criticism and pressure from abroad played no part in this process. It resulted from Khrushchev's pragmatic desire to undo some of the most odious features of Stalinist rule. In a deeper sense, it was a manifestation of the healthy and humane undercurrents in Russian life which even the long domination of Stalin had not been able to obliterate. It was also the result of the stubborn will of the Chechens (and other deported peoples) to survive, in spite of the appalling loss of life deportation had caused and the hardships they had to endure in exile.

Most Chechens had been sent to Kazakhstan, Moscow's great dumping ground of peoples. The Kazakhs themselves had suffered the loss of perhaps 1/3 of their population during collectivization in the 1930s.<sup>[31]</sup> Some felt sympathy for fellow Muslims from the Caucasus and helped them. The deportees were not systematically oppressed, simply neglected. In 1955, references to the Chechens began to appear in the Kazakh press. Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956 gave impetus to a rehabilitation process. In this famous speech, which soon became known abroad but remained unpublished and unpublicized in the USSR, Khrushchev condemned all the deportations in principle but referred specifically only to the Karachay, Balkars and Kalmyks.

A Supreme Soviet Presidium decree which followed in April 1956 lifted the "special settlement restrictions" on the above three plus the Meskhetian Turks and Crimean Tatars. Omission of the more numerous Chechens and Ingush was not accidental. They were the subject of a dispute within the upper levels of the Communist Party. While some members of the hierarchy favored their return to the Caucasus, others argued that they should be spread throughout the whole country to destroy their ethnic cohesiveness. Another proposal was to give them an autonomous republic in Central Asia.

As early as 1954 a few Chechens found their way from Central Asia back to Caucasus. Some were arrested and sent back to Kazakhstan, but more came in 1955. Following Khrushchev's speech, 25-30,000 had returned by the end of 1956. When they were prevented from reoccupying their old homes, they made temporary shelters, rehabilitated cemeteries and repaired religious shrines. Feeling they had nothing to lose, they defied the Soviet system and won. A CPSU Central Committee decree of 24 November 1956 finally set a four-year time period for orderly repatriation of the Chechens and Ingush, 1957-60. On 11 February 1957, by Supreme

Soviet decree, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was restored along with the territorial units of the other deported North Caucasian peoples, including the Kalmyks.

Chechens and Ingush returned at a far faster pace than communist officials desired. Once committed to rehabilitation, Moscow authorized what in Soviet circumstances amounted to significant credit and financial concessions. Nevertheless, because large numbers of Slavs had settled in the region after 1944 and 77,000 people from Ossetia and Dagestan had also moved onto lands emptied of Chechens and Ingush, there was serious friction in the countryside as Chechens and Ingush reclaimed ancestral homesites. Serious clashes between Chechens and Russians occurred in Grozny in 1958.<sup>[32]</sup>

Having restored the Chechens and Ingush to their native lands, Moscow undertook a systematic effort to make them into good Soviet citizens. They had experienced little social or economic development during their Central Asian exile and education had been neglected. Of 8,997 specialists in secondary and higher education in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1959, only 177 were Chechens and 124 Ingush. Of 14,150 people with secondary education in the same year, only 403 were Chechen and 248 Ingush. 18% of school-age children were not attending school.<sup>[33]</sup> The 1960s and 1970s were an era of intense social engineering. Chechens took advantage of Moscow's program to transform them into models of the "New Soviet Man" to gain education and access to professions in which they had previously taken little interest. Some were thus enabled to move into the Grozny petroleum industry. Others entered the armed forces.

The man who led Chechnia in declaring independence and became its president in the fall of 1991, Jokhar Musaevich Dudaev, is a good example of both the success and failure of this effort. Born in early 1944 and deported as a babe in arms, he spent his first 13 years in Kazakhstan, attended evening school after returning to Chechnya, managed to make his way into flying school and graduated as a pilot from the Tambov Higher Military College. He served in Siberia and Ukraine and retired as commanding general of the Soviet Air Base at Tartu in Estonia. Though he rose to high rank in the Soviet military establishment, he lost none of his feelings for his people or his religion.

Employment opportunities in Chechnia were limited and many Chechens were no longer content to lead the life of farmers. Some remained in Kazakhstan and a few went back after returning to Chechnya. Migration to both nearby and more distant regions to seek employment became common during the 1980s. Chechens took jobs in the expanding Siberian oil and gas fields. Many more took seasonal work in nearby areas of southern Russia as cattle herders and laborers on state farms.<sup>[34]</sup> Others, capitalizing on their experience of living semi-legal lives in distant regions during exile and relying on ethnic and clan solidarity, became active in the Soviet underground economy and criminal pursuits, extending their operations to Moscow and other cities in European Russia where they became and remain notorious as a criminal mafia.

## **The Importance of Islam**

Not only did the enforced exile of the Chechens and Ingush bring to a halt the struggle for atheism, reverse the decline in religious fanaticism, and preserve the influence of the Islamic religion and sects, it considerably strengthened the influence of religion. And what, after all, could the deported peoples turn to, if not religion? Certainly the authorities had left them in the position of pariahs. Cultural and educational work came to a complete stop--there were no newspapers, no books, and no motion pictures in the native languages. All this created exceptionally favorable conditions for the increased influence of religion, an influence which historically had been to a certain extent both anti-Russian and anti-Soviet.<sup>[35]</sup>

After the return of the Chechens to their native territory, Soviet atheistic propaganda and efforts to discourage practice of Islam were stepped up but had little effect. Though mosques and medreses were not permitted to reopen, Chechens became accustomed in Central Asia to relying on informal and often secret meeting places where brotherhoods held zikr ceremonies--prayer, sermons, and silent meditation among the Naqshbandis; group singing and dancing among the Qadiris. The strong social structure with emphasis on family solidarity and clan loyalty assured continuity of religious practice among the younger generation. Native party officials abetted these arrangements. While activity in Sufi brotherhoods had been confined to men before the revolution and there was little change before World War II, women became directly active during the 1960s and special women's groups were established in Chechnya and Dagestan, especially among Qadiris. Qadiri offshoots--the Batal Haji and Vis Haji brotherhoods--whose influence spread rapidly in exile and continued after the return--placed special emphasis on recruiting female adherents.<sup>[36]</sup>

Another feature of Chechen religious life which Soviet authorities were unable to suppress after the return, was reverence for holy places and observances connected with them. Chechens remembered all such sites that had been desecrated and restored them. Some new sites were activated. Most such sites are tombs (mazar), some are the location of massacres and executions. People make pilgrimages to them at all times of the year. Some are believed efficacious for infertility or personal problems. Some are the scene of annual gatherings which attract tens of thousands of faithful. Such occasions are easily transformed from religious to political manifestations.<sup>[37]</sup> Most holy places are served by religious devotees, sometimes women, who function as caretakers, lead religious observances and teach young people. Some shrines have accumulated substantial wealth from material and monetary gifts.

During the 1970s and early 1980s religion, ethnic pride, anti-communism, and anti-Russian feelings became so strongly interlinked and mutually reinforcing among Chechens that it is impossible to separate one attitudinal strand from another. The Gorbachev era of glasnost' and perestroika permitted this thriving amalgam of religious, social, and political life that is the dominant feature of Chechen society to come to the surface and burst into the open. A number of political movements began to form and intellectuals became active in writing and publishing.<sup>[38]</sup>

Chechen intellectuals and budding political activists joined representatives of several other North Caucasian peoples to organize the First Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus in the Abkhaz capital, Sukhumi, in August 1989. A Second Congress was held in Nal'chik, capital of the Adygei region, in September 1990. The initial objective of most of these activists, at least as publicly declared, was only to broaden their freedom of action within the Soviet system. Abkhaz intellectuals, however, had developed many grievances against Georgia. Some sought incorporation into the Russian Republic. This aim conflicted with the desire of most of the North Caucasians for loosened links to Moscow. At this early stage there was no need to resolve contradictory objectives. Since most of the North Caucasians were Muslim, religion provided a unifying factor, but remained in the background. Two of the peoples involved, the Abkhaz and the Ossetes, are predominantly Christian.

During the same period an All-National Congress of the Chechen People formed and held its first meeting in Grozny in November 1990. It was attended by almost a thousand delegates elected at village assemblies throughout Chechnia and from the Chechen diaspora in other parts of the Soviet Union. General Jokhar Dudaev, still commanding the Soviet air base in Tartu, Estonia, was invited to the congress as a guest. The congress adopted a declaration of sovereignty of a specifically Chechen Republic whose relationship to the USSR would be defined in a new union treaty. Dudaev was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee created by the Congress. The Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR adopted a separate

declaration of sovereignty but refused to approve a split with the Ingush, though an Ingush group had already declared for separate status. These developments marked the beginning of a complex political process which reached its culmination the following year.<sup>[39]</sup>

## **PART THREE - THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE**

### **The Collapse of Soviet Power and its Aftermath**

#### **August to November 1991**

The political temperature in Chechnia rose steadily during 1991. Several political groupings, including the Islamic Path Party<sup>[40]</sup>, supported formation of the Executive Committee of the Chechen National Congress. Ingush-Ossete tension rose over the Prigorodny Rayon of North Ossetia and an Ingush congress proclaimed a separate Ingush Republic within the Russian Federation on 20 June. Dudaev retired from the Soviet Air Force, came to Chechnia, and laid plans to challenge the conservative Communist Party establishment in Grozny.

The August coup against Gorbachev in Moscow gave Dudaev an opportunity sooner than he could have anticipated. His Executive Committee immediately declared its opposition to the coup while demonstrators in Grozny demanded the resignation of the Chechen Communist Party leaders whom they accused of supporting it. On 22 August demonstrators gathered in Lenin Square, toppled Lenin's statue, and renamed the square after Sheikh Mansur, placing a pole with a Chechen flag<sup>[41]</sup> on the pedestal of the statue and installing a huge floodlit portrait of Sheikh Mansur on the facade of a building facing the square. The nearby square on which parliamentary offices, the Kavkaz Hotel and the 15-story former communist party headquarters--which became the Presidential Office Building--are situated was renamed Freedom Square.

A National Guard formed under the authority of the Executive Committee, which included armed units made up of members of the Islamic Path Party, took over most public buildings in Grozny. The Executive Committee declared the Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet disbanded on 1 September and on 6 September, seized the building where it was meeting, and forced it and the Party Chairman, Doku Zavgayev, to flee. Meanwhile there had been intense but confusing exchanges with Moscow, for Russian leaders there were preoccupied with other post-coup problems and could not focus consistently on Chechnya. The Chechen Acting Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, who sided with Yeltsin in the coup, initially appeared to support Dudaev.

As time passed and Yeltsin consolidated his position in Moscow, attitudes of the Russian leadership became more equivocal and Khasbulatov withdrew from direct involvement in affairs in Grozny. Vice President Rutskoi characterized the situation in Chechnia as "banditry". The Executive Committee suspected KGB maneuvers against it and had the National Guard occupy the KGB's Grozny headquarters. In spite of high tension, almost no blood was shed. Meanwhile Dudaev scheduled elections on 27 October for the presidency and a new parliament. The Ingush did not participate. The Executive Committee announced on 30 October that 77% of eligible voters had voted and 85% of those had voted for Dudaev.<sup>[42]</sup>

Newly elected President Dudaev proclaimed the "state sovereignty"--in effect the independence--of Chechnia on 1 November 1991. He sent a message to Yeltsin saying that he was convinced that the Chechen Republic and the Russian Federation would build future

relations in accordance with the civilized norms of international law. Dudaev was strongly supported by the Third Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, now claiming to represent 14 ethnic groups, which convened in Sukhumi on 1-3 November. It endorsed the concept of full independence for all the peoples of the North Caucasus and Abkhazia. Dudaev proceeded with his inauguration on 9 November. Dressed in full military uniform, he took his oath of office on a Koran and accused Russian leaders of fomenting tension in the republic. He vowed that the Chechens would never give up their struggle for freedom and self-determination.<sup>[43]</sup>

The inauguration was fraught with high drama, for in Moscow on 8 November 1991 Russian President Boris Yeltsin had issued a decree declaring a state of emergency in the Chechen-Ingush Republic and ordered a thousand soldiers to fly in to restore order. The decree accused Chechen leaders of "attempting to seize power from lawful state bodies" and "stirring up mass unrest through the use of violence." The decree banned all demonstrations and meetings throughout the republic, imposed controls over entry and exit, and ordered confiscation of firearms. Yeltsin was, in effect, siding with the conservative Chechen communist leaders who had supported the August coup in Moscow--his own opponents. It is doubtful that he had a clear understanding of what had been happening in Chechnia.

In any case, the decree achieved the exact opposite of what was intended. It intensified the Chechen spirit of resistance and determination to go their own way. It unleashed full-scale rebellion. Though the Chechen capital, Grozny, may have still had a Russian majority, local Russians remained passive. The Chechen mayor and head of the Islamic Path Party, Gantamirov, organized Chechen militiamen to defend the city. Islamic Path fighters blockaded a 640-man Spetsnaz unit at the military airport at Khankala, forced it to depart, and took control of the airport. Planes ferrying in troops were forced to land at Vladikavkaz, the capital of nearby North Ossetia. The commanders of these troops showed no eagerness to rush their men into Chechen territory where they would have faced strong armed resistance.<sup>[44]</sup>

Key members of the Russian parliament appreciated the gravity of the situation, which could have led to a full-scale Caucasian war. Meeting in a special session on Sunday, 10 November, the parliament refused to endorse Yeltsin's decree, but was unable to agree on steps to be taken to resolve the crisis. Khasbulatov recessed the session. The crisis was well covered by television and radio, with both Dudaev and Russian Republic spokesmen airing their views. Gorbachev was able to combine principle and opportunism by joining his Interior Minister, Viktor Barannikov, in calling for a peaceful solution to the conflict and implying criticism of Yeltsin's use of military force. Russian legislators voted 177 to 4 on 11 November to reverse Yeltsin's decree and called for the situation to be settled "not by applying emergency measures but by political means." After the parliament's action, Yeltsin saved face by having his press spokesman declare that "the Russian President had never advocated the settlement of this conflict at all costs--only by political methods, only through negotiations, no matter how difficult they may be."<sup>[45]</sup>

## **Islamic Dimensions of the Chechen Revolt**

Though some journalists and political figures in Moscow raised the specter of an Islamic fundamentalist uprising in Chechnya and accused Dudaev and his supporters of planning creation of an Iranian-style Islamic Republic, there is little evidence of radical Islamic motivation or extremist Islamic content in the events of 1991 or their aftermath. The Islamic Path Party appears to have operated fully within the framework of the Executive Committee led by Dudaev. Clerical figures, though undoubtedly present during the demonstrations in Grozny,

played no significant role in directing them. Dudaev and others associated with him welcomed the support of the Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, but this support was at best an extremely marginal factor in the revolt in Chechnya and it was not exclusively or even primarily Islamic in character.<sup>[46]</sup>

More immediately valuable to Dudaev in 1991 was support from Georgia, a country whose ancient Christianity is deep-rooted and a major component of its national identity, which underscores the contention that ethnic alliances are more important than religious solidarity in Caucasian politics. In the spring of 1991, a meeting between then Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Dudaev was arranged in Kazbegi (in Georgian territory, along the main highway to Vladikavkaz) by Arslan Abashidze, President of Georgia's Ajarian Autonomous Republic. Gamsakhurdia had already been in contact with the Ingush, for he saw them as natural allies against the Ossetes, who in Georgia's South Ossetian Autonomous Region were agitating for separation from Georgia and unification with North Ossetia.<sup>[47]</sup> Though going their separate ways, Ingush and Chechens never fell into a situation where serious mutual hostility developed between them, so the Georgians had no difficulty in also supporting the Chechens on the basis of mutual hostility to Russia and to communism.

At the Kazbegi meeting, and perhaps in subsequent communications, Gamsakhurdia assured Dudaev that he would abet no hostile action against him. The two envisioned future cooperation in establishing "a Caucasian commonwealth of free and independent states."<sup>[48]</sup> On 16 October 1991, before the elections in Chechnya, Gamsakhurdia (who was already embroiled in a serious fight against internal opposition) made a television appeal to all Georgians living in the Chechen-Ingush Republic to vote for Dudaev, calling Dudaev "a true patriot fighting imperial forces."

Caucasian politics have always been, and continue to be, rich in contradictions. During 1992 Dudaev found he had entangled himself in awkward cross-currents generated by his simultaneous involvement with Gamsakhurdia and the Congress of Mountain Peoples. After a military confrontation which inflicted severe damage on the center of the city, the besieged Gamsakhurdia fled Tbilisi in early January 1992. Dudaev gave him asylum in Grozny. He proved to be an embarrassing guest. For at the same time Dudaev permitted Chechnya to be drawn into military operations against Georgia in Abkhazia through the participation in the pro-Abkhaz initiative of the Congress of Mountain Peoples. Young Islamic Path fighters formed several small units during 1992 that went to Abkhazia to fight against Georgian forces. By autumn of that year, some had returned disillusioned by the confusion in Abkhazia, complaining that the Abkhaz, who were not Muslim, were doing less fighting than they were, and embarrassed by the fact that the pro-Russian Abkhaz, numerically a small minority in their republic, were entirely dependent on Russian military support.

Gamsakhurdia while President of Georgia had adamantly opposed both Ossetian and Abkhaz separatists. The deteriorated situation in Abkhazia was one of the most difficult problems Eduard Shevardnadze faced on returning to Georgia in March 1992. Involvement in Abkhazia put Chechnya at cross purposes with Georgia for no apparent gain. There are no contentious territorial issues between Georgia and Chechnya, so the two are natural allies.<sup>[49]</sup> By the end of 1992, Dudaev appeared to have recalculated the potential gains and losses from these involvements and decided to reduce involvement with the still loosely organized Congress of Mountain Peoples. Taking advantage of a visit to Azerbaijan, Dudaev met with the new Georgian leadership. Meanwhile he had succeeded in making arrangements for utilizing Azerbaijan as a channel for marketing Chechen oil embargoed by Russia.

The size of a country in area or population has no relationship to the scale of political problems with which its leaders must deal.<sup>[50]</sup> Chechnya, emerging from more than a century and a half of Russian and Soviet colonialism, had more than its share, and little progress was made

toward solving them before the Russian military attack at the end of 1994. Neither were its economic problems. Interesting as it would be to analyze both sets of problems further, the scope of this essay permits only an assessment of the relationship between politics and Islam in the self-declared independent Chechen Republic, largely on the basis of my own observations as a head of an international observer mission which visited the republic in late September and early October 1992.

## **Politics and Religion in Post-Soviet Chechnia**

After the withdrawal of Soviet/Russian forces from Chechnya in November 1991, there were none on Chechen territory until 1994. Chechens proudly pointed out that theirs was the first territory that formed part of the Warsaw Pact that was entirely freed of its forces. Forces which Russia brought into North Ossetia and nearby Caucasian territories to deal with violence between Ingush and Ossetes over the Prigorodny Rayon have for the most part avoided trespassing on territory Chechens regarded as theirs--though a detailed delineation of the boundaries between the Chechen and Ingush Republics was never undertaken. Internally Chechnya administered itself. A comprehensive state structure was rapidly worked out during the first part of 1992. There was nothing distinctly Islamic about it. The flag of the Chechen Republic to which reference has already been made, is Islamic green, but carries neither crescent nor star. The seal of the republic features a recumbent, alert gray wolf facing west under a full moon, symbolism which is more Turkic than Islamic. Ministries and government offices in Grozny had signs in Chechen and Russian: Noxcijn Respublika, Chechenskaya Respublika. The Latin alphabet was usually used for signs in the Chechen language, though a timetable for an official shift from Cyrillic to Latin does not seem to have been set.

**The Constitution** Chechens adopted in 1992 is entirely free of ethnic or religious particularism. It avoids the citizenship problem that bedevils the Baltic republics by simply stating that all residents of the republic who desire citizenship are citizens. There are no Islamic references in the constitution. It is proclaimed in the name of the "Allmighty" [Russian: Vsevyshni]. It consists of 116 articles grouped into eight sections. It provides for a parliamentary form of government with division of powers between three branches of government. Citation of passages (translated from the Russian text) that bear on religion, ideology, social justice, and human rights provides a good measure of this liberal-spirited document:

**[Preamble:]** According to the will of the Almighty the people of the Chechen Republic, reflecting the aspiration of the Chechen people, guided by ideas of humanism and by the aim of building a socially just society, acting out of a high sense of responsibility before the present and future generations of our compatriots, respecting the rights and interests of all nations and nationalities, declaring the Chechen Republic an independent, sovereign state, and acknowledging it to be an equal member in the system of the worldwide commonwealth of nations, adopt the present Constitution and consider it henceforth the Basic Law of the society and the state.

.....

**Article 3.** The human being constitutes the highest value and main aim of state policy. The Chechen Republic respects and protects human rights, secures equal opportunities for the free development of the individual, and guarantees social justice and the protection of the individual.

Human rights in the Chechen Republic are secured in accordance with generally recognized principles and norms of international law.

.....

**Article 4.** The state, its organs, and functionaries serve the whole society and not some separate part. It encourages the consolidation of all social classes and groups, nations, and nationalities of the Chechen Republic on the basis of social justice, civil harmony, and peace. Democracy in the Chechen Republic is implemented on the basis of political and ideological pluralism.

No ideology can be established as an official ideology.

Parties and other public organizations are created and operate within the framework of the Constitution. Political parties and other public organizations which propagate racial, national, social, religious, or class hatred are forbidden as well as those which appeal to violence and overthrow of the constitutional structure.

.....

Religious organizations are separate from the state, administer their affairs autonomously, and operate independently from state organs. The state supports socially useful activity of religious organizations.

The requirements for registration of social and religious organizations as well as political parties and movements are specified by law. Political parties and movements and social and religious organizations which have been registered legally possess the rights of juridical persons, may freely utilize and dispose of equipment, other property and funds belonging to them.

.....

**Article 6.** In its external policies the Chechen Republic, respecting the laws and freedom of peoples, is guided by commonly recognized principles and norms of international law. It strives for universal and just world based on common human values; and for close, effective and mutually beneficial cooperation with all countries.

.....

By early 1992 more than 50 **associations, movements, organized groups, and political parties** were in existence in the erstwhile Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Though available data are incomplete and some of these organizations appear subsequently to have split, recombined, or atrophied, a brief analysis of the 53 on which Muzaev and Todua provide information<sup>[51]</sup> gives the following picture: Seven were exclusively Ingush in character and another four were Cossack organizations. At least twelve were exclusively Chechen. The rest, at least initially, represented both Chechen and Ingush interests, though with the passage of time Ingush adherents may have withdrawn or separated off. Only six of the total had a specifically Islamic character. These include: the Supreme Islamic Council of Chechnia, the Chechen branch of the Islamic Renaissance Party (active in several other ex-Soviet republics), the Islamic Path Party (mentioned above), a "Committee of the Social Movement for the Defense of Iraq" (organized in December 1990), the Sheikh Mansur Society<sup>[52]</sup>, and the Chechen-Ingush League of Islamic Youth.

At least eight other groups in addition to the Islamic Path Party called themselves parties or had characteristics of nascent political parties. These include: the Vainakh Democratic Party, the Daimokkh (Fatherland) Movement, the Movement for Democratic Reform, the Green Movement, the Popular Front, the Republican Party, the Justice Party, and the Chechen National Congress and its Executive Committee. The last-named organization, Dudaev's governing group, functioned as a coalition which included several of the others (as well as the Islamic Path). Except for Islamic Path, none of these groups advocated an Islamic state or set specifically Islamic objectives. Islamic Path had no timetable for introduction of an Islamic Republic. No group, of course, was declaredly anti-Islamic. Islam does not appear to be a contentious issue in Chechen politics. Some of these groups welcomed other nationalities resident in the republic, including Russians, though the sizable Russian population in Chechnia, on the whole, refrained from political activity.

Dudaev expressed the view in the fall of 1991 that Islamic fundamentalism in Chechnya represented no danger, but maintained that hostile actions by Russia could push Chechen nationalism onto a more extremist, Islamic path. Many aspects of Dudaev's performance as leader of Chechnya have been questioned, both by outside observers, and by Chechens, who continued habits of lively political debate and utilized their comparatively free press for expression of all manner of views. Dudaev himself displayed no inclination toward Islamic militancy.

The international observer mission to Chechnia which I headed in September/October 1992 (sponsored by the London-based NGO, International Alert) included a Tunisian Muslim as well as a liberal Swedish feminist. It was invited to survey the situation in Chechnya by Valery Tishkov, then head of Goskomnat (the State Committee on Nationalities) in Moscow. We were encouraged to interview a wide range of officials and private individuals in Grozny and traveled extensively in the Chechen countryside. We also met with Russian government officials (including a session with the the KGB in the Lyubyanka) and parliamentarians in Moscow, and Caucasus specialists at the Russian Academy of Sciences. We produced a long, unanimous report on return to London.<sup>[53]</sup> Excerpts from the section entitled "The Cultural and Political Role of Islam" form an appropriate conclusion to this essay, for, on the basis of available information, they appear to have remained valid through 1994:

### **Conclusion: On-the-Ground Assessment**

...Because Islam remained strong in the underground during the entire period of Soviet domination in Chechnia, what happened from the late 1980s onward is not so much Islamic revival as re-emergence into open public life. Islamic clergymen, maintaining an existence in the shadows, were widely known and respected, so it was easy for religious leaders to become active... Chechens at all levels of society are eager to reassert their Islamic heritage. After the declaration of independence, a Grand Mufti was elected by the ulema (council of religious elders) to serve for five years and the Islamic religious establishment launched an energetic program of mosque-building and community services. New mosques, often solidly constructed of brick with bright aluminum or silver sheathed minarets, are an increasingly prominent sight in the countryside. Several neighborhood mosques are functioning in Grozny and three large mosques are under construction. The most impressive Islamic construction project in the capital is the Islamic University, half completed in a modern architectural style more reminiscent of contemporary Islamic architecture in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf than the more conservative classic mosques and medreses of Turkey and Egypt. Nine Islamic educational training schools

already have over 600 students who are studying Arabic and traditional religious subjects. Islamic pilgrimage sites, which the Soviet authorities were never able to suppress, are flourishing.

When we met with Grand Mufti Mahomad Beshir Haji Arsanukaev<sup>[54]</sup>, he underscored his support for democracy and freedom of religious choice. He said he listened to Saudi radio broadcasts and expressed gratitude for Saudi support for pilgrims of whom 2300 had gone on the Hajj in 1992. Missions had come from both Turkey and Saudi Arabia, he added, but promised financial support from these countries had not materialized:

We would like to have the help they promised to build schools, but we are not going to remind them. We refuse to beg.

The Islamic Renaissance Party, present in many Muslim regions of the ex-Soviet Union, is not active in Chechnya, the Mufti said, "and we do not want it to be. We do not believe in political activity by Muslims as Muslims." On the other hand he said he felt an important responsibility for education of young people and described their weekly Thursday evening radio and television programs and educational activity.<sup>[55]</sup>

When asked about the clergy's attitude on the position of women in society, the Mufti replied:

We believe women are very important to our society. The woman has heavy responsibilities as the bearer of purity in society--more than the man. She must therefore not be exposed to the temptations that men experience. She must remain clean--both from the religious and from the practical point of view. She must be protected, but not isolated. Islam forbids the suppression of women. The Chechen woman favors Islam, like the rest of our people.

We noted that on Chechen TV women announcers always appeared with a headscarf and with arms covered at least to the elbows. Otherwise they dress stylishly and wear jewelry. Most women in public places also wear head coverings, but there is no veiling either in cities or in the countryside.

Asked about conflict between shariat and adat (i.e. between religious law and traditional custom, a perennial problem in the history of Islam in the Caucasus), the Grand Mufti contented himself with a simple reply: "It is not adat if it is in conflict with shariat." To a direct question on this subject, a pious religious leader could hardly answer differently, but the answer oversimplifies and distorts reality. A leading Chechen journalist, Abdallah Vatsuev, editor of the republic's leading newspaper, Golos Chechenskoi Respubliki, gave a much more complex view but confirmed the Grand Mufti's basic judgment that the danger of Islam taking over the state is not very great in Chechnia:

In real life we Chechens are guided more by the rules of adat than by shariat. Chechens accepted Islam no more than 3-400 years ago. It is not yet in our blood. As long as religious leaders keep within the area of their traditional responsibilities, they cause no problem and there is no problem with them. If they are recognized as a political force in a democratic system, they--or people who want to exploit them by claiming to represent them--could insist on participating in politics for reasons that have little to do with religion. Nevertheless, it is perhaps better to have them participating--because then we can know their political strength. Religious leaders are not restricted on TV and radio here. But people with an unclean past could try to take advantage of their opportunities for communication. They might not get very far. TV and radio broadcasts begin with the national anthem and the cry of the wolf. That has nothing to do with Islam. That is adat.

We asked this same man: "Dudaev was sworn in on the Koran--does this give Islamic political leaders encouragement?" He gave an interesting answer:

They could be encouraged, and the action may have been meant to serve this purpose. When the president was inaugurated, there was a general euphoria among the people. Everyone was blind to his...shortcomings. Some Muslim leaders regard the president as a prophet. But everybody noticed one shortcoming of his: a head of state should not take an oath on the Koran--otherwise he will be an oath-breaker. A leader cannot govern without breaking some of his promises.

On the whole, the Chechen approach to politics and religion impressed us as closest to the modern, moderate Turkish pattern. A few Chechens bristled when we made this comparison, however, with comments such as: "We are not following anybody else's model--we know what we want and we are developing our own approach." Nevertheless we conclude that the comparison is valid. Chechens are Sunnis. Islam is an important part of their identity but, only a part. Ethnic traditions and customs--adat--are at least as important. We heard no Chechen express interest in Iran from either a religious or political viewpoint...

In discussing Islam in the Caucasus, Russian ethnologists in Moscow stressed the fact that Islam first became entrenched in Dagestan. Sunni religious leaders there always feared encroachment by Shiite Iran. These attitudes, they maintain, still incline Dagestanis to favor association with Russia as the protector of their religious status against Iran. Whether this is wishful thinking remains to be seen, but it is a fact that there is no political or social base for an Iranian orientation in either Dagestan or Chechnia. It could perhaps be created--but then only shallowly--by political opportunists.

More politically oriented and less knowledgeable Russian officials expressed generalized fears of the spread of "fundamentalist Islam" in Chechnia and throughout the North Caucasus. In part these fears struck us as genuine, but with many who express them they appear to be a tactic to discourage Western interest in, and support for, Caucasian strivings for greater freedom and/or independence. Chechens (and no doubt other Caucasians) are not immune to playing this game either. Yusup Soslambekov, Chechen Secretary-General of the Congress of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus...declared that Western failure to recognize Chechen independence and back North Caucasian strivings could lead to an upwelling of Islamic fundamentalism, permanent rejection of the West, and a decisive political turn toward Iran. He was not very convincing...

Washington, DC

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## Notes

[1] Paul B. Henze, "Circassian Resistance to Russia", in Marie Broxup (ed.), *The North Caucasus Barrier, the Russian Advance towards the Muslim World*, Hurst & Co., London, 1992, pp. 62-111.

[2] For more detailed statistics and analysis see Paul B. Henze, "The Demography of the Caucasus according to 1989 Soviet Census Data", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 10-1/2, pp. 147-170; and Paul B. Henze, *Ethnic Dynamics and Dilemmas of the Russian Republic*, N-3219-USDP, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 1991.

[3] Unlike the Kalmyks, who first arrived four centuries later, the Mongols led by Chingis Khan and his sons were animists who converted easily to Islam, establishing the Ilkhanid Dynasty in Iran and the Empire of the

Golden Horde among the Tatars and Bashkirs of the Volga-Ural region. For a brief summary of the origin of the Azerbaijani Turks, the most numerous of all Caucasian Muslim peoples, see Chapter I in Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks, Power and Identity under Russian Rule*, Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA, 1992, pp. 1-14.

[4] Impressive ancient churches at Gagra and Pitsunda on the coast of Abkhazia were restored by the Russians in the 19th century.

[5] W.E.D. Allen (ed.), *Russian Embassies to the Georgian Kings (1589-1605)*, The Hakluyt Society, Cambridge, 1970, 2 vols.

[6] See Michel Tarran, "The Orthodox Mission in the North Caucasus - End of the 18th, beginning of the 19th Century" in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 10/1-2 (1991), pp. 103-117.

[7] For a good summary of the formation of Cossack groups in the North Caucasus and their relations with the indigenous peoples see W.E.D. Allen, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 1-36.

[8] The name Chechen is derived from a large aul (village) on the Argun River. The Russians began to use the term for the entire people in the 18th century. The Chechens call themselves Nokhchii (sing. Nokhchuo) and use the term Vainakh ("Our People") collectively for themselves and the closely related Ingush.

[9] "Chechentsy" in *Narody Kavkaza*, Akademia Nauk SSSR, Moscow, 1960, pp. 345-374.

[10] The name Ingush was also taken by the Russians from a village, Angush, and applied to the entire people. They were originally high mountain pastoralists who began to settle in lower country in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Ingush call themselves Galgai, the name of an important sub-tribe. Early Russian writers and 19th century European travelers called the Ingush Kistentsy or Kists. See "Ingushi" in *Narody Kavkaza*, Moscow, Akademia Nauk, 1960, Vol. I, pp. 375-390.

[11] Mary L. Henze, "The Religion of the Central Caucasus: an Analysis from 19th Century Travellers' Accounts", *Central Asian Survey*, 1/4 (April 1983), pp. 45-58.

[12] The late Alexandre Bennigsen examined documents from Ottoman archives on Sheikh Mansur's activity and summarized his findings in "Un mouvement populaire au Caucase au XVIIIe siecle", in *Cahiers du Monde russe et sovietique*, V/2, 1964, pp. 159-197. A recent Turkish work provides a detailed analysis of Ottoman Caucasus policy: Cemal Gokce, *Kafkasya ve Osmanli Imparatorlugu'nun Kafkasya Siyaseti*, Istanbul, Has-Kutulmus Matbaasi, 1979. A lengthy biography of the Sheikh and chronicle of his movement based on both archival sources and oral traditions was completed before the collapse of the Soviet Union and published in Grozny in late 1991 by the Chechen-Ingush Publishing Consortium "Kniga": Sh. B. Akhmadov, *Imam Mansur (Narodno-osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie v Chechne i na Severnom Kavkaze v kontse XVIII v.)*.

[13] Anapa was returned to Ottoman control in 1792 by the Peace of Jassy and remained in Turkish possession until 1829.

[14] Edmund Spencer, *Travels in Circassia, Krim-Tartary, etc.*, London, Henry Colburn, 1839, Vol. II, pp. 379-381. Sheikh Mansur continued to serve as an inspiration for Caucasian resistance to Russia during the 20th century. A reputed descendant of the Sheikh published a biography of him in Russian in Istanbul in 1924. It has recently been translated into English as "The Life of Mansur, Great Independence Fighter of the Caucasian Mountain People" in *Central Asian Survey*, London, Vol. 10, #1/2, 1991, pp. 81-92. A new biography appeared in Turkey in 1987: Tarik Kutlu, *Imam Mansur*, Istanbul, Bayrak Yayimcilik, 1987.

[15] Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars, Sufism in the Soviet Union*, Hurst & Co., London, 1985, pp. 8-9.

[16] John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, Longmans, Green & Co., New York, 1908; W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields*, Cambridge University Press, 1953, p. 47. For a recent examination of the genesis of the Mansur myth in Italy, see Franco Venturi, "The Legend of Boetti Sheikh Mansur" in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, #1/2, 1991, pp. 93-101.

[17] Though tens of thousands of place names were changed during the Soviet period, including that of Vladikavkaz ("Ruler of the Caucasus") which was first renamed for the Georgian Bolshevik Orjonikidze and then given the Ossetian name Dzaujikau (it has now reverted to Vladikavkaz), the Chechens were never given the satisfaction of having their capital receive a less offensive name. When the Chechens declared their independence in 1991, Grozny was designated Solja Ghali--"Sunzha City"--in publications and signs in the

Chechen language but its Russian name continued to be widely used.

[18] Including Karl Marx, who was a great admirer of the struggle of the Caucasian mountaineers. See Paul B. Henze, "Marx on Muslims and Russians", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 6/4, 1987, pp. 33-45.

[19] For a concise summary of the main features of Shamil's struggle see Paul B. Henze, "Fire and Sword in the Caucasus: the 19th Century Resistance of the North Caucasian Mountaineers", *Central Asian Survey*, II/1 (1983), pp. 5-44.

[20] Shamil's exploits have attracted considerable interest among Western historians and generated a great deal of controversy among those in the USSR. For an up-to-date bibliography see Moshe Ganner, "Shamil and the Murid Movement, 1830-1859: an Attempt at a Comprehensive Bibliography", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 10/1-2, 1991, pp. 189-247. Ganner's detailed history of Shamil's movement, a University of London dissertation, *Shamil and the Moslem Resistance to the Russian Conquest of the Northeast Caucasus*, 1989, was published as a book in 1994, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, Frank Cass, London. Among Soviet historians interpretation of Shamil's struggle generated enormous controversy, especially after World War II. See Paul B. Henze, "The Shamil Problem" in Walter Z. Laqueur, *The Middle East in Transition*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958, pp. 415-443; also Lowell Tillett, "The Shamil Controversy" in *The Great Friendship, Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities*, Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1969, pp. 130-147. Two Russian historians recently published a comprehensive revisionist history of Shamil's movement: M.M. Blied & V.V. Degoev, *Kavkazskaya Voina*, "Roset", Moscow, 1994.

[21] Walter Kolarz, *Russia and her Colonies*, London, George Philip & Son, Ltd., 1952, p. 186. The Chechen population was variously estimated between 100,000 and 200,000 in the mid-19th century.

[22] E. Maksimov and G. Vertepov, *Chechentsy*, Vladikavkaz, 1894, as cited in Kolarz, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

[23] See Bennigsen & Wimbush, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-11.

[24] Bennigsen and Wimbush, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

[25] He is commonly called Gotsinsky in Russian writings.

[26] Bennigsen and Wimbush, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

[27] See Marie Broxup, "The Last Ghazavat: the 1920-21 Uprising" in Broxup (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 112-145.

[28] For a summary of the period by a Chechen who experienced it firsthand, see Abdurahman Avtorkhanov, "The Chechens and the Ingush during the Soviet Period and its Antecedents" in Broxup (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 146-194, and for a more extensive account, the same author's *Memuary* (in Russian), Possev-Verlag, Frankfurt/Main, 1983.

[29] Hitler's armies did not occupy Chechen territory, though for a considerable period Soviet authority seems to have virtually collapsed. With the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the advent of freedom of expression and new opportunities for historical research among its peoples, we may at last be able to gain a balanced picture of attitudes, actions, and political forces in the North Caucasus during the German advance and subsequent Soviet reoccupation of the area in 1942-43. Facile characterization of Chechens and other North Caucasians who anticipated assistance from the Germans as actual or would-be "Nazi collaborators", always a standard feature of Soviet historiography (and in the first years after WWII widely echoed in Western writing) is a tendentious oversimplification of a politically and psychologically complex situation.

[30] Two carefully researched sources are particularly useful for background on developments preceding the deportation as well as the deportation itself and its consequences: Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers*, London/New York, Macmillan/St. Martin's, 1970, and Alexander M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples*, New York, Norton & Co., 1978. The second book originated as samizdat inside the USSR.

[31] See "Central Asia and the Kazakh Tragedy" in Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*, Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 189-198.

[32] In the 1959 census Chechens and Ingush accounted for 41.1% of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR's population in comparison with 58.4% in 1939. Slavs still constituted 49% of the republic's inhabitants in 1959 but their proportion had fallen 29% by 1979. The area of the republic was substantially enlarged at restoration by the addition of three districts from the Stavropol Krai totalling 5,200 sq. km. that had long been settled by Cossacks. The purpose appears to have been to create a counterweight to potential Chechen predominance in the restored

republic. Many Cossacks remained and have recently made demands for autonomy and/or secession. A different kind of territorial issue was created when the Prigorodny rayon (district), 978 sq. km. in area and inhabited largely by Ingush, was left in North Ossetia. It has been a subject of bitter controversy ever since.

[33] The statistics are from Nekrich's account of the rehabilitation of the Chechens and Ingush, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-166.

[34] At the time of the 1989 Soviet census, 71,295 Chechens lived in other parts of the Caucasus, while an additional 81,634 lived in elsewhere in the Russian Republic and in other parts of the USSR.

[35] Nekrich, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

[36] Bennigsen and Wimbush, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-73.

[37] The most celebrated holy place in Chechnia is the tomb of Uzun Haji in the aul of Dyshne in Vedeno district. It is visited by Muslims from all parts of the Caucasus, for he has become the "patron saint" of all mountaineers after the manner of Sheikh Mansur nearly two centuries ago. An almost equally prestigious holy place is the tomb of the mother of Kunta Haji, also in Vedeno district. Several tomb-sites commemorate men who served Shamil, e.g. one of his Chechen naibs, Sheikh Tasho of Indiri, in the aul of Sayasan. Many sites honoring Chechens "guilty" of anti-Soviet offenses became popular in the 1970s and 1980s, e.g. Ali Mitaev who was executed for "counterrevolutionary activity" in Rostov in 1924; 20 sons and grandsons of Batal Haji who were killed in battle or executed between 1920 and 1940; and Salsa-Haji Yandarov who was executed for "economic sabotage" in 1929.

[38] During the final years of the Gorbachev era the Chechen-Ingush Scientific Research Institute of History, Economics, Sociology, and Philology under the Council of Ministers of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR began to publish material that only a few years before would have been inconceivable. Examples include two symposia, each containing contributions of more than half a dozen authors, which deal openly with a broad range of historical and political topics: *Checheno-Ingushetia v Politicheskoi Istorii Rossii i Kavkaza v Dorevolutsionnom Proshlom*, Grozny, 1990; and *Sotsial'no-Politicheskie Protssessy v Dorevolutsionnoi Checheno-Ingushetii*, Grozny, 1991. The Institute, renamed the Chechen Institute of Humanitarian Studies after the declaration of independence, has continued publication of erstwhile samizdat research and translation of Western research relating to the Caucasus. Other new publications include a large collection of Vainakh legends and myths and a study of Caucasian resistance to Tamerlane's incursions. Akhmadov's biography of Sheikh Mansur has already been noted in Footnote 14 above. The Institute organized an international conference on Sheikh Mansur in May 1992 in which Turkish, Israeli, and British scholars specializing in Caucasian history participated and immediately published a summary of proceedings: *Sheikh Mansur i Osvoboditel'naya Bor'ba Narodov Severnovo Kavkaza v Poslednei Treti XVIII Beka*.

[39] The best brief accounts of this period are Timur Muzaev and Zurab Todua, *Novaya Checheno-Ingushetia, "Panorama"*, Moscow, May 1992; and Ann Sheehy, "Power Struggle in Checheno-Ingushetia", Report on the USSR (RFE/RL, Munich), 15 November 1991. The independent Moscow newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* also carried good running reporting during late 1991 and early 1992.

[40] According to Muzaev and Todua, *op. cit.*, the Islamic Path Party was organized in the spring of 1990 by a group of Chechen "entrepreneurs" and elected the mayor of Grozny, Bislan Gantamirov, as its head. It, the Vainakh Democratic Party (anti-communist and pro-independence), and the Green Movement (which, dating from 1988, was the first major political grouping to form in Chechnia) became the dominant components of the Chechen National Congress. Islamic Path favored a fusion of shariat (Koranic law) and adat (customary law), formation of an Islamic state, and establishment of relations with Islamic countries of the Middle East. While its dominant members appear to have been Chechen "businessmen", it also included radicals who envisioned violent action to achieve political ends.

[41] A green banner with a lower band made up of a narrow red stripe edged by a white stripe on each side.

[42] Some Chechen political groups questioned the procedures employed in determining the eligibility of voters and verifying results of the elections. There seems little reason to doubt that Dudaev enjoyed wide popularity at this time, though for many reasons he was only a few months later attracting increasing criticism from Chechen journalists and political activists and escaped an assassination attempt in July 1993.

[43] The Chechen leadership subsequently issued a collection of proclamations, speeches, interviews, and press reports relating to these developments: *Ternisty Put' k Svobode* ["The Thorny Path to Freedom"], "Kniga", Grozny, 1992.

[44] The small number of troops flown in, who departed in less than a week, could not possibly have subdued

Chechen resistance. If they had been sent into action they would undoubtedly, as Dudaev claimed, have been quickly overwhelmed.

[45] The preceding account is based in part on Western and Russian press reporting, Radio Liberty reports and analysis, and Muzaev and Todua, *op. cit.*.

[46] All available information indicates that this loosely organized group was motivated to a greater extent by sense of ethnic grievance, anti-communism, and a desire to reduce or eliminate dependence on Russia than by religion *per se*.

[47] Ancient rivalries and resentments among peoples of the Caucasus, rooted in ethnic consciousness and territorial claims, were only suppressed, not mitigated, by communism. In some instances they were intensified. They re-emerged with a vengeance as Soviet power waned and collapsed. Though religion sometimes plays a role in these, it is almost always a subordinate factor.

[48] Ann Sheehy, *loc. cit.*, p. 25. I was able to confirm most of Sheehy's detailed analysis of events in (and relating to) Chechnia in 1991 during my own visits to Chechnia and Georgia in 1992. Much of the information and analysis in this and subsequent sections of this essay derives from firsthand conversations and interviews in the region.

[49] Though a large section of mountainous southern Chechnia was transferred to Georgia after the 1944 deportation, few Georgians came to settle there. Those who came left in the 1960s and the area has not been a source of contention since its reincorporation into Chechnya. Georgia has made no territorial claims on Chechnya and Chechnya has made none on Georgia.

[50] The area of the Chechen-Ingush Republic as reconstituted in the 1960s was 7,450 sq. mi. Chechen authorities calculate the present area of their republic at approx. 6,675 sq. mi. Chechnia is thus somewhat over half the area of Belgium and almost the same size as Slovenia. In American terms it is larger than the state of Connecticut but somewhat smaller than New Jersey. The total population of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1989 was 1,270,429, of whom 734,501 were Chechens and 163,711 Ingush, the rest mostly Russians.

[51] Muzaev & Todua, *op. cit.*.

[52] The international observer group which I headed visited the village of Aldy, Sheikh Mansur's birthplace on the edge of Grozny, where we were directed to a compound where a 7th-generation collateral descendant lived. This man, about 50, had been born in Kazakhstan. He welcomed us warmly to his comfortable house and insisted we stay for a meal, spoke English and Arabic, and had returned only in February 1992 from three years in Syria as a member of a six-man Soviet petroleum advisory team. He quietly proud of his distinguished ancestry, but in no sense a Muslim extremist.

[53] Chechnia, a Report of the International Alert Fact-Finding Mission, International Alert, 1 Glyn Street, London SE11 5HT, November 1992.

[54] More than a dozen of his associates, mostly older men in traditional garb, joined in this meeting which was held, at the Mufti's wish, in an unfinished room in the new Islamic University. A few young Muslim clergymen were also present.

[55] A lengthy interview with Grand Mufti Mohamad Beshir Haji in the Grozny newspaper Svoboda of 26 September 1992 confirms much of what he said to our mission and provides many additional details about his own background, attitudes, and approach to his responsibilities. Among other things, he set high standards for moral behavior and expressed strong condemnation of Chechens who engage in violence and illegal activities.