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## Native Sons: Post-Imperial Politics, Islam, and Identity in the North Caucasus, 1917–1918\*

Accounts of the North Caucasus in the wake of the Russian Revolutions of 1917 convey a picture of primal violence and intense anti-Russian sentiment fueled by sharp ethnic and religious antagonisms.<sup>1</sup> There is little reason why this grim picture of the North Caucasus should surprise the casual reader. It does not appear exceptional. Turmoil and bloodshed buffeted the whole of Eurasia and the Middle East during this period. Indeed, the themes of revolutionary violence and ethnic conflict in imperial borderlands have received only increased attention in recent years.<sup>2</sup> The historiographies of the North Caucasus in the preceding imperial and succeeding Soviet periods, moreover, routinely emphasize the chasm of cultural difference and enmity that separated the mountain peoples from Russia.<sup>3</sup> They consistently relegate the mountaineers to the roles of rebels and Islamists,<sup>4</sup> fighting against Russia for the sake of Islam and the Muslim world.

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<sup>1</sup> ALEXANDRE BENNIGSEN, CHANTAL LEMERCIER *Islam in the Soviet Union*. New York 1967, pp. 73–74; ALEXANDRE BENNIGSEN *Muslim Guerrilla Warfare in the Caucasus 1918–1928*, in: *Central Asian Survey* 2 (1983) pp. 45–56; MARIE BENNIGSEN BROXUP *The Last Ghazawat. The 1920–1921 Uprising*, in: *The North Caucasus Barrier. The Russian Advance toward the Muslim World*. Ed. by Marie Bennigsen Broxup. London 1992, pp. 112–145; RICHARD PIPES *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923*. Revised edition. Cambridge, MA 1997, pp. 93–98; RICHARD HOVANNISIAN *Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918–1919*. Berkeley, CA 1971, pp. 367, 370; MOSHE GAMMER *The Lone Wolf and the Bear. Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule*. London 2006, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> ERIC LOHR *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During WW I*. Cambridge, MA 2003; JOSHUA A. SANBORN *Unsettling the Empire: Violent Migrations and Social Disaster in Russia during World War I*, in: *Journal of Modern History* 77 (2005) pp. 290–324; MARK VON HAGEN *The Great War and Mobilization of Ethnicity in the Russian Empire*, in: *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building*. Ed. by Barnett Rubin and Jack Snyder. New York 1998, pp. 34–57; DANIEL R. BROWER *Kyrgyz Nomads and Russian Pioneers. Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Turkestan Revolt of 1916*, in: *JBfGOE* 44 (1996) pp. 41–53. See also MARK LEVENE *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State*. New York 2005; DONALD BLOXHAM *The Great Game of Genocide. Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*. Oxford 2005; DAVID GAUNT *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors. Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I*. Piscataway, NJ 2006.

<sup>3</sup> MICHAEL KHODARKOVSKY *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800*. Bloomington, IN 2002, p. 6; GARY HAMBURG *War of Worlds*, in: *Russian-Muslim Confrontation in the Caucasus. Alternative Visions of the Conflict between Imam Shamil and the Russians, 1830–1859*. Ed. by Thomas Sanders, Ernest Tucker, and Gary Hamburg. New York 2004, p. 187; AUSTIN JERSILD *Orientalism and Empire. North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917*. Montreal 1992, pp. 36–37; ANNA ZELKINA *In Quest for God and Freedom. The Sufi Response to the Russian Advance in the North Caucasus*. London 2000.

<sup>4</sup> The term “Islamist” is used herein to refer to those actors who espoused the rigorous application of Islamic principles and doctrines to the organization of North Caucasian society, including political and public life.

Yet this consistency, however, sooner indicates a weakness in North Caucasian historiography than robustness. The period of the Great Caucasian Wars remains the only period of North Caucasian history explored in depth. As a result, its tropes of native resistance and opposition, be it heroic or fanatic, to Russian rule dominate the literature. A recent assessment of the field put it aptly, “[t]he study of the North Caucasus is marred by thin stereotypes and one-sided perspectives.”<sup>5</sup>

The sterility of these stereotypes is laid bare in the years of 1917–1918, a crucial period of post-imperial politics that provided a brief and confused yet real moment of freedom wherein the mountaineers of the North Caucasus were able to assert their own positive political ambitions. This article, using a wide range of sources including local and Ottoman ones, examines the political mobilization of the mountaineers of the North Caucasus in 1917–1918. The most important political organization to emerge in this period was the Union of Allied Mountaineers (UAM), a broad based pan-mountaineer movement established in 1917 by a nascent native intelligentsia that was a product of the two preceding decades of Russian rule.

This article contends that the conventional portrayal of the mountaineers as intractable rebels and Islamists is misleading. It argues that a cogent sense of self-interest rather than reflexive opposition to Russia and Russians drove the mountaineers. The UAM’s members were native sons committed above all to securing the physical and cultural survival of the indigenous mountain peoples. This goal consistently informed their behavior and led them more often than not to pursue cooperative policies, policies sharply at odds with the existing historiography’s emphases on violent conflict and resistance as the essential themes of North Caucasian politics.

To support this contention, the article explores the record of the UAM and its members in three areas. The first is relations with Russia and Russians. Far from acting as uni-dimensional purveyors of anti-Russian violence, the UAM acted to balance the interests and needs of the mountaineers in several areas and strove to maintain close relations with Russia and the Russians. This desire for accommodation with Russia should not be understood as the product of an incomplete or compromised sense of identity but in fact nearly the opposite: a conscious and acute sense of self-interest.

At the core of mountaineer concerns was a painful awareness that the world beyond Russia was rapidly changing in the twentieth century. Not unlike the Muslim Jadids of Central Asia, whom historians had long mistakenly presented as a phenomenon of opposition to Russia, UAM members had become convinced that their constituents’ future prosperity would ultimately depend on the assimilation of modern modes of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Those peoples who failed to master the new ways risked long-term impoverishment if not extinction. They believed that the real threat was greater than Russia, and therefore regarded Russia not solely as a colonial oppressor but also as a source of the educational and economic opportunities their peoples’ prosperity required.

Relative underdevelopment was not the mountaineers’ only vulnerability. Their small numbers was another, mandating both pan-mountaineer unity and the maintenance of cooperative relations with all of their neighbors. Attaining mountaineer unity within a democratic Russia was their first preference as such an outcome would afford them access to the benefits of Russia while permitting them to defend effectively their particular interests inside a democratic polity. Only following the Bolshevik seizure of power did the

<sup>5</sup> WILLARD SUNDERLAND *The Caucasian Tangle*, in: *Kritika* 7 (2006) pp. 111–122, here p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> ADEEB KHALID *Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*. Berkeley, CA 1998.

UAM decide to break from Russia. Keeping in mind their small numbers, they worked to join with their anti-Bolshevik neighbors, Christian and Muslim alike, in the north and south Caucasus.

The second area to be investigated is the nature and impact of Islam on mountaineer politics. Existing accounts greatly overstate both the rigidity of the shaykhs' and ulema's understanding of Islam and the extent of their influence over the mountaineers. The conventional image of North Caucasian religious leaders as dogmatists fanatically opposed to Russian influence and modernity owes more to the propaganda of Socialist contemporaries than to the historical record. Far from being trapped by classical understandings of Islam, they were adept at inverting those concepts for mundane purposes. They readily acknowledged the need to learn, borrow from, and even cooperate with the Russians. And whereas scholars have peremptorily dismissed the UAM as a group of ineffectual liberals who lacked the popular support and authority of the religious authorities who insisted on the implementation of the *shari'at* and the restoration of Shamil's Imamate, the reality is that at critical junctures the liberals prevailed over their Islamist rivals.

The third area of investigation is that of the UAM's relations with its neighbors in the Caucasus and with the Great Powers, in particular the Ottoman Empire and Germany. The UAM's decision to break with Russia following the Bolshevik invasion of their homeland did not precipitate a general reversal in the UAM's cooperative orientation. Recognizing the limited viability of an isolated North Caucasus, the UAM sought to establish unions with their anti-Bolshevik neighbors first in the North and then in the South Caucasus alike. When these efforts proved unproductive, the UAM looked to outside powers for aid. They turned to their Ottoman co-religionists not for reasons of shared identity but because the Ottoman Empire was the only regional power capable of delivering military support to expel the Bolsheviks from the North Caucasus. To be sure, ties of religion and ethnicity did facilitate cooperation, but they never determined the course of relations, and the UAM downplayed the importance of those ties in public and in private. Far from imagining themselves as an inalienable part of a greater Muslim world, they focused more modestly on their own predicament and sought to obtain the backing of Germany and later Britain, and strove to prevent, and even reverse, the spread of Muslim-Christian antagonism from Anatolia and the South Caucasus.

### *Historical Background*

The North Caucasus, as the name implies, refers to the northern slopes and foothills of the Caucasus Mountains bounded by the Caspian Sea to the east and the Black Sea to the west. Islam reached the North Caucasus in 642–643 during the Arab Conquests when invading Muslims captured the coastal city of Derbent. From the coastline Islam gradually penetrated into the Northeast Caucasus, while successive later waves of Turkic and other peoples brought Islam to the Northwest Caucasus. By the time the Russian Empire began expanding to the region in the eighteenth century it encountered a native population that was predominantly, but not exclusively, Muslim.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century St. Petersburg sought to consolidate its control of the Caucasus, and undertook a massive military effort to subdue the mountain peoples of the North. Many of the mountaineers chose to resist, most famously by rallying in the name of Islam behind Imam Shamil, the third and last of three Naqshbandi shaykhs who had proclaimed themselves imams of Dagestan and Chechnia. Shamil led indigenous

Muslims in a strenuous struggle against the Russian Empire for twenty-five years until his surrender in 1859. Although his base of support was in the highlands of Dagestan and Chechnia, Shamil succeeded in forging a shared identity and memory of common struggle among Muslims across the whole North Caucasus.<sup>7</sup>

Within the next five years Imperial Russia completed its subjugation of the Caucasus by stamping out the last resisters among the Adyghe tribes of the northwest. The Russians then proceeded to expel *en masse* these and other mountaineers to the Ottoman Empire, depopulating much of the northwest. Tsarist authorities encouraged Slavs and other Christians to settle in the North Caucasus. The Cossacks seized much of the mountaineers' land, and the better parts of it. In the Terek region, for example, the Cossacks came to possess 60% of the fertile land, and by 1913 the average Cossack held 13.57 *desiatins* of land compared to 6.05 for the average mountaineer. Because yields in the mountainous regions were just half of those in lower areas, in order to survive many mountaineers had no option but to rent land from wealthier Cossacks. The land question was a source of great friction throughout the North Caucasus, but particularly in the Terek region where the most impoverished mountaineers, the Chechens and Ingush, resided.<sup>8</sup> By 1914, the population of the Kuban, Terek, and Dagestan *oblasts* and the Black Sea and Stavropol *gubernii*s had reached over 6.6 million, over 70% of whom were Slavs. Only in the Dagestan *oblast*, with a population of slightly more than 750 000, did the autochthonous peoples retain clear demographic dominance at close to 90% of the population.<sup>9</sup> Taken together, these developments put the long-term survival of the indigenous mountain peoples in doubt.<sup>10</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, Islam still maintained a powerful presence in mountaineer life in the northeast Caucasus. Dagestan had close to 40 000 trained religious authorities, and boasted some 2300 mosques and 743 religious schools with 7500 pupils. Arabic, alongside Russian and Azeri Turkish, functioned as a common language. According to the 1897 census, 9% of the population was literate, and of these 75% were literate in Arabic. From 1913 to 1918 a weekly Arabic-language newspaper was published in Dagestan.<sup>11</sup> Arabic was used widely for documentation, and an effort by the Tsarist authorities in 1913 to make Russian the sole language of administration sparked a popular and ultimately successful protest movement (the *antipisarskoe dvizhenie*). The claim of a Dagestani scholar that "nowhere in the Muslim world did religion have as deep roots as it did in Dagestan" is not wholly exaggerated.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> On Shamil's struggle see MOSHE GAMMER *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar. Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Dagestan*. New York 1994.

<sup>8</sup> I. BORISENKO *Sovetskie respubliki na Severnom Kavkaze v 1918 godu*. Tom 2. Rostov na Donu 1930, pp. 16–18, 22; PIPES *The Formation of the Soviet Union* pp. 94–96.

<sup>9</sup> V. M. KABUZAN *Naselenie Severnogo Kavkaza v XIX–XX vekakh*. S.-Peterburg 1996, p. 207; cf. ANDREAS KAPPELER *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*. Trans. by Alfred Clayton. New York 2001, p. 292.

<sup>10</sup> On the transformations of mountaineer society following Russian occupation, see JERSILD *Orientalism and Empire*, pp. 127–144.

<sup>11</sup> E. F. KISRIV *Islam i vlast' v Dagestane*. Moskva 2004, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> M. A. MAGOMEDOV *O nekotorykh osobennostiakh Oktiabrskoi revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voyny na Severnom Kavkaze*, in: *Otechestvennaia istoriia* no. 6 (1997) pp. 81–90, here p. 82.

*The North Caucasus in the Wake of Revolution  
and the First Congress of Mountain Peoples*

Following the Russian conquest, the mountaineers sporadically rose in rebellion, most significantly during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Small armed groups, spurred by various motives, continued to clash with the imperial authorities up until 1914, giving the Caucasus the character of an “unpacified” borderland.<sup>13</sup> Precisely because the North Caucasus appeared to be a seething cauldron of anti-Russian religious sentiment, German and some Ottoman war planners in 1914 believed it fertile ground for rebellion against Russian rule.<sup>14</sup> Contrary to such speculation, however, the North Caucasus remained quiescent throughout the war. Those North Caucasians who fought did so not against but inside the Russian Army, serving in the so-called “Savage Division,” a unit made up exclusively of Muslim Caucasians. The mountaineers distinguished themselves in combat – against the Austrians and Germans.<sup>15</sup>

The shock to imperial rule in the North Caucasus came not from the periphery but from the center when Tsar Nicholas II stepped down from the throne on 2 March 1917 in response to unrest in Petrograd. The Tsar’s fall precipitated an empire-wide crisis, yet the mountaineers reacted to the news neither by rising in revolt nor by waiting in callow passivity.<sup>16</sup> Rather, they began forming councils of various political orientations at home and dispatching delegates to the congresses of Russian Muslims in Moscow and Baku.<sup>17</sup> It was a moment of political opening and opportunity. The end of Russia was not yet visible.

<sup>13</sup> S. M. ISKHAQOV “Kristallizatsiia” gorskogo osvoboditel’nogo dvizheniia. Razmyshleniia B. Baitugana ob istorii musul’man Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana, in: *Voprosy istorii* (2001) 5, pp. 3–31, here p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> SADIK SARISAMAN Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında İran Elçiliğimiz ile İrtibatlı Bazı Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Faaliyetleri [Some Activities of the Special Organization in Connection with our Iranian Legation During the First World War], in: Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi [Journal of the Ottoman History Research and Application Center of Ankara University] (1996) 7, pp. 209–218, here p. 209. For an Ottoman analysis skeptical about the likelihood of success of the revolutionary strategy, see Askerî Tarih ve Stratejik Etüd Başkanlığı Arşivi [Military History and Strategic Studies Archive, hereafter ATASE] Klasör 241, Dosya 2–1001, Fihrist 54: Report to the War Ministry on the Situation in Russia, 16 Eylül 1330 [29.9.1914]. For a study of German policies toward the Caucasus as a whole, see WOLFGANG DIETER BIHL *Die Kaukasus-Politik der Mittelmächte*. 2 Bände. Wien 1975. For a comparative study of the revolutionary strategy in British and German policies, see DONALD MCKALE *War by Revolution. Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I*. Kent, OH 1998.

<sup>15</sup> FARMAN MURUVVAT OGLY KULIEV Politicheskaia Bor’ba na Severnom Kavkaze v 1917 godu (fevral’–oktiabr’). Piatigorsk 2004, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> The Bolshevik Sergo Ordzhonikidze dismissed non-Bolshevik activity and made the charge of passivity. SERGO ORDZHONIKIDZE God grazhdanskoi voiny na Severnom Kavkaze, in: *Stat’i i rechi*. Tom 1. Moskva 1956, p. 74.

<sup>17</sup> SALAVAT ISKHAQOV Rossiiskie Musul’mane i revoliutsiia. Vesna 1917 g. – leto 1918 g. Moskva 2004, pp. 158–203; KADIRCAN KAFLI Şimalî Kafkasya [The North Caucasus]. Istanbul 1942, p. 132; MUSTAFA BUTBAY Kafkasya Hatıraları [Caucasian Memoirs]. Ed. by Ahmet Canbulat. Ankara 1990, p. 6; R. KH. GUGOV Sovmestnaia bor’ba narodov Tereka za Sovetskuiu vlast’. *Nal’chik* 1975, p. 117; A. L. NAROCHNITSKII (ed.) *Istoriia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza (konets XVIII v. – 1917 g.)*. Moskva 1988, p. 565; A. A. TAKHO-GODI Revoliutsiia i kontr-revoliutsiia v Dagestane. *Makhachkala* 1927, pp. 2–4; A. R. ISMAILOV Noveishaia istoriia Dagestana XX vek. *Makhachkala* 1997, pp. 12–13; HAIDAR BMMATE *The Caucasus Problem*. Berne 1919, p. 16; B. O. KASHKAEV *Ot Fevralia k Oktiabriu: natsional’noe-osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie v Dagestane*. Moskva 1972, p. 34;

The most important of the local meetings took place on 5 March in Vladikavkaz where several prominent mountaineers gathered. They included the Chechen oil-magnate Abdul-medzhid Tapa Chermoev, the Dagestani *Kniaz* Rashidkhan Kaplanov, the Kabardian horse breeder Pşimaho Kosok (Pshemakho Tomashevich Kotsev), the Ingush bureaucrat Ibragim Dzhabagiev, and the Balkar attorney Bas'iat Shakhanov.<sup>18</sup> Despite their ethnic diversity these men took pride in the common identity of "mountaineer." They decided to form a political movement to defend the interests of the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus and to name it the "Union of Allied Mountaineers of the Caucasus" (*Soiuz ob"edinennykh gortsev Kavkaza*). They resolved to hold a general congress of mountain peoples in May. Sharing the commitment of the broader imperial intelligentsia to the ideals and practices of democracy, they called upon all the mountain peoples of the Caucasus to organize elections in which women as well as men aged twenty years and older were to vote and select one delegate for every five thousand mountaineers.<sup>19</sup> The act was a radical innovation in the political history of the North Caucasus.

On 1 May over three hundred delegates representing virtually the entire spectrum of mountain peoples from Dagestan in the east to Abkhazia in the west duly crowded into a school in Vladikavkaz for the "First Congress of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus." Hundreds more gathered as observers and spectators.<sup>20</sup> The congress lasted nine days and was dominated by the theme of unity and multi-confessional ecumenism.

The congress chairman, Shakhanov, set the tone with his opening address. After paying homage to the memory of Shamil, he credited the Russian people with the overthrow of the Tsar and advised those assembled that the building of a democratic life for all the mountaineers from the Caspian to the Black Sea required not only unity among themselves but also unity with the Russian people.<sup>21</sup> The delegates greeted with loud applause declarations that the Ossetians, an indigenous but mostly Orthodox Christian people whom imperial authorities had often pitted against the Muslims, were mountaineers too. They gave an enthusiastic reception to M. A. Karaulov, the Ataman of the

Vystuplenie R. Kaplanova ob organizatsii Soiuz Ob"edinennykh Gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana, 2.5.1917, in: *Soiuz ob"edinennykh gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana (1917–1918 gg.)*. Gorskaiia Respublika (1918–1920 gg.). Ed. by M. D. Butaev. Makhachkala 1994, p. 34 [hereafter SogSKiD]. On the Moscow Congress of Muslims, see also PIPES *The Formation of the Soviet Union* pp. 76–77; S. M. DIMANSHEIN *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nyi vopros*. Tom 3. Moskva 1930, p. 383; YUSUF HIKMET BAYUR *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi* [History of the Turkish Revolution]. Cilt 3, kısım 4, p. 290; NADIR DEVLET 1917 Ekim İhtilâli ve Türk-Tatar Millet Meclisi [The 1917 October Revolution and the Turk-Tatar National Congress]. Istanbul 1998, pp. 87–106.

<sup>18</sup> The transliteration of proper Muslim names presents insoluble problems. I have opted to transliterate names of Muslims from either their Russian spelling according to the U.S. Library of Congress system or from Ottoman Turkish according to modern Turkish orthography depending on the individual's imperial affiliation (e.g. Nadzhmuddin, İsmail). For those that authored published works I have used their authorial names (e.g. Haidar, Kosok).

<sup>19</sup> Pis'mo vremennogo predsedatelia Soiuz Ob"edinennykh Gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza B. Shakhanova, 8.4.1917, in: SogSKiD p. 23; GUGOV *Sovmestnaia bor'ba* p. 118; KAFLI *Şimali Kafkasya* p. 130; NAROCHNITSKII *Istoriia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza* p. 565.

<sup>20</sup> The counts of participants range from 340 delegates to over nine hundred. The inclusion of spectators of various kinds probably account for the differences. *Otkrytie I s"ezda gorskikh narodov Kavkaza*, 1.5.1917, in: SogSKiD p. 26; AHMET HAZER HIZAL *Kuzey Kafkasya Hürriyet ve İstiklal Davası* [The Question of North Caucasian Freedom and Independence]. Ankara 1961, p. 57; KAFLI *Şimali Kafkasya* p. 130. Aside from several Chechen women observers, all present were male. *Na s"ezde ob"edinennykh gortsev*, in: *Kaspîi*, 8 (21) May 1917.

<sup>21</sup> *Rech' predsedatelia B. A. Shakhanova*, in: SogSKiD pp. 27–28.

Terek Cossacks, the Muslim mountaineers' long-time rivals, when he spoke and called for closer cooperation between the two groups.<sup>22</sup>

Karaulov's sympathy toward the mountain peoples was not feigned. In 1914 he had pointed to the mountain peoples' relative economic deprivation, not their different religion and ethnicity, as the source of tension between them and the more prosperous Slavs.<sup>23</sup> Karaulov's observation required no great insight. Following the Russian conquest, the mountaineers witnessed the expropriation of their best land, the influx of settlers, and, with the emergence of oil boomtowns first in Baku and then Grozny, the initial impact of industrialization. The change was swift, disorienting, and destructive, and left the mountaineers impoverished as never before. More frightening, as the mountaineer intelligentsia recognized, was the reality that the forces buffeting their society were the products not simply of Tsarist government policies, but of the same socio-economic processes upending colonized societies all over the globe. As one UAM member, the Chechen Aslanbek Sheripov, warned, "the power of European capital will be the ruin of the peoples of the Caucasus [...] Before us must stand the terrible, warning example of the fate of the American Indians, which Anglo-Saxon capital destroyed."<sup>24</sup> Economic change could destroy the mountaineers, but it could not be resisted through fighting. The only real option was to adapt and acquire those skills necessary to survive in the new conditions.

It therefore should be no surprise that education was a primary concern of those gathered at the first mountaineer congress. The congress established a special committee on education under Said Gabiev, who issued a report emphasizing the need for a comprehensive education system with schools at the elementary, secondary, and higher levels. Schools were to serve the "true goals of progress" by not only educating students in the spirit of true humaneness" but also teaching them "skills useful for practical life" with specialized facilities for training in the fields of "agriculture, crafts, and industry." In line with the congress' determination to preserve the mountaineers' cultural identity, instruction from the first grade on was to be done in native Caucasian languages using a modified Arabic alphabet to provide orthographic unity. Arabic, Russian, and Turkish would be added in the following years of elementary school.<sup>25</sup>

The desire to preserve and promote a distinct cultural identity notwithstanding, the mountaineer delegates in speech and text repeatedly avowed their solidarity with the Russian people and their commitment to the defense of Russian democracy. Russian was designated the language of state. The platform adopted at the congress defined the UAM's fundamental goal to be the union of "the mountaineers of the Caucasus for the defense and consolidation of the freedoms achieved by the [Russian] revolution" and participation in the Russian Constituent Assembly to establish a "federative democratic" Russian republic in which the North Caucasus would participate on a footing equal to that of all the other constituent parts of the republic.<sup>26</sup> The mountaineers affirmed their intention to

<sup>22</sup> Na s"ezde ob"edinennykh gortsev, in: *Kasp'ii*, 16 (29) May 1917; Na s"ezde ob"edinennykh gortsev, *ibidem* 14 (27) May 1917; *Privetstvennoe slovo Voiskogo Atamana*, in: *SogSKiD* p. 32; *Vystuplenie Kaplanova*, *ibidem* p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> RICHARD DOUGLAS KING *Sergei Kirov and the Struggle for Soviet Power in the Terek Region, 1917–1918*. New York 1987, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem* p. 295.

<sup>25</sup> Na s"ezde ob"edinennykh gortsev, in: *Kasp'ii*, 8 (21) May 1917; TAKHO-GODI *Revoliutsiia i kontr-revoliutsiia* pp. 153–155.

<sup>26</sup> *Politicheskaia platforma i programma Soiuzu ob"edinennykh gortsev Kavkaza*, in: *SogSKiD* pp. 47–50.

participate in the proposed all-Russian constituent assembly, and pledged their allegiance to the Provisional Government in Petrograd and to continuing the war against Germany, Bulgaria, Austro-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>27</sup> The mountaineers' stance was not unusual. Throughout the empire lands other popular congresses and meetings embraced much the same goals. The North Caucasians were demonstrating themselves to be part of a more general imperial phenomenon, not a cultural or regionally peculiar one.

Even as the empire continued its slide into political anarchy and economic collapse over the summer and into the fall of 1917, the UAM remained loyal to Russia and committed to its support for Russian democracy. On 3 October 1917 more than 1500 delegates gathered in Vladikavkaz for the UAM's second official congress. They adopted a constitution that provided for the establishment of a bicameral legislature and a supreme court to ensure constitutionality of laws passed by the legislature.<sup>28</sup> In the meantime, Petrograd's continued paralysis and inability to provide any form of security or order required the congress to fill the vacuum. It provided for a system of "military-shariat" courts to deal with urgent public threats and authorized the Central Committee to establish an army and prohibit the export of basic goods.<sup>29</sup> Despite this assertion of effective sovereignty, the UAM continued into November to affirm the necessity "to preserve federative Russia as united, indivisible, and great" and to prepare the population to participate in the elections to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly.<sup>30</sup>

The Bolsheviks' seizure of power in November in Petrograd, however, compelled the UAM to rethink its relationship to Russia. The Bolsheviks held no attraction for most mountaineers. Their talk of workers and factories meant nothing to the average mountaineer, and their militance gave little promise for the democratic federacy that most of the intelligentsia favored. The Bolsheviks' most fervent supporters inside the North Caucasus had been packs of radicalized Russian deserters who, passing through on their way home from the Anatolian front, ransacked auls and beat up mountaineers at railway stations.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, the UAM leadership (not unlike the Transcaucasians), hesitated to break with Russia. Then in January a joint Bolshevik-Cossack force invaded the North Caucasus. It drove the UAM government from Vladikavkaz and threatened to expel it entirely.

According to two accounts written by UAM members after the fact, the UAM Central Committee in response to the invasion declared on 13 January 1918 that the North Caucasus would not participate in the drafting of a new constitution for Russia, that it had seceded and now existed as an independent state, and that Russia could not interfere in its affairs. These accounts, however, appear to be post-hoc attempts to present the act as a decisive one. Contemporary published sources are ambivalent and refer only to a "decla-

<sup>27</sup> GUGOV *Sovmestnaia bor'ba* p. 133; TAKHO-GODI *Revoliutsiia i kontr-revoliutsiia* pp. 158–160.

<sup>28</sup> BMMATE *The Caucasus Problem* pp. 20–21; KAFLI *Şimalî Kafkasya* pp. 132, 135. Kaflı assigns the decision to establish a supreme court to the first congress, but this is likely mistaken. There is no mention of the courts in the constitution adopted at the first congress. See SogSKiD pp. 50–53. For the constitution adopted at the second congress see DIMANSHEIN *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nyi vopros* pp. 377–379.

<sup>29</sup> KHADZHI MURAD DONOGO (ed.) *Polkovnik Magomed Dzhafarov. Makhachkala 2005*, p. 72.

<sup>30</sup> *Pis'mo okruzhnym i narodnym komitetam*, in: SogSKiD pp. 66; *Gorskaia Zhizn'*, *ibidem* p. 68; *Deklaratsiia o sozdanii ob"edinennogo pravitel'stva*, *ibidem* p. 87; TAKHO-GODI *Revoliutsiia i kontr-revoliutsiia* pp. 165–166.

<sup>31</sup> ISKHAKOV *Krystallizatsiia gorskogo osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniia* p. 19; *KOSOK Revolution and Sovietization*, in: *Caucasian Review* (1956) 3, p. 47.

ration [...] of mountaineer autonomy,” something less than full sovereign independence.<sup>32</sup> The UAM would refrain from making an unambivalent declaration of independence until 11 May 1918.

The emergence of a Bolshevik-Cossack alliance highlighted one of the UAM’s major failings, namely its inability to resolve the so-called land question. Past expropriation of land and its present unequal distribution constituted the greatest source of tension in the North Caucasus. Much of the UAM’s support came from land-impooverished mountaineers who expected the UAM to achieve a redistribution of the expropriated land. Paradoxically, it was fear of land redistribution that propelled the Cossacks to align initially with the UAM. On their own territories, the Cossacks faced hostility from both the urban populations and from the non-Cossack peasants who were calling for nationalization of the land.<sup>33</sup> The UAM, by contrast, had refrained from making any immediate demands for land redistribution, preferring instead at the second congress to defer to the Russian Constituent Assembly on that matter.<sup>34</sup> A *modus vivendi* between mountaineer and Cossack appeared possible.

On 2 November, the mountaineers and the lowland Turkic peoples<sup>35</sup> accepted an invitation from the Southeastern League, a union of Cossack hosts in the Caucasus and surrounding areas, to form the “Southeastern League of Cossack Hosts, Mountaineers of the Caucasus and Free Peoples of the Steppes.” Outside of the small group of radical socialists who regarded the Cossacks as bulwarks of the Tsarist system and thus inherently anti-revolutionary, the mountaineer leadership favored this idea of rapprochement. By drawing the Cossacks closer to themselves and away from the Russian center, the mountaineers would effectively enhance their own political weight within Russia.<sup>36</sup> With its joint government based in Ekaterinodar, the league aspired to “the rapid formation of a Russian Democratic Federal Republic” that would respect the internal autonomy of the league members. It declared its support for “the central government authority in its struggle against the external enemy, in the concluding of a dignified peace on the basis of the self-determination of the peoples, in the establishment of law and order in the country, and in the struggle with anarchy and counter-revolution.”<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> “*provozglashenie [...] gorskoi avtonomii.*” This is a choice of words that suggests something less than full sovereign independence. Privetstvennaia telegramma Nogaitsev Achikulakskogo raiona, in: Vpered, 31.12.1917 [13.1.1918], in: SogSKiD p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> PIPES The Formation of the Soviet Union p. 97; PETER KENEZ Civil War in South Russia, 1918. Berkeley, CA 1971, pp. 125–126.

<sup>34</sup> KASHKAEV Ot Fevralia k Oktjabriu p. 229.

<sup>35</sup> GEORGE A. BRINKLEY The Volunteer Army and Allied Intervention in South Russia, 1917–1921. Notre Dame, IN 1966, p. 13. The treaty defined the Cossack hosts as the Don, Kuban, Terek, and Astrakhan hosts as well as the Kalmyks, who were tied to the Astrakhan Host. The mountaineers of the Caucasus consisted of all the peoples of Dagestan (Avars, Dargins, Laks or Kazi-Kумыks, Kiurintsy, Kумыks, Tabasarans and others) as well as the Lezgins of the Zakatel’skii district; all the mountain peoples of the Terek region (Kabardians, Balkars, Ossetians, Ingush, Chechens, Kумыks, and Salavatvtsy); the Terek (sic) peoples of the Kuban (Karachais, Abazins, Cherkess, Nogais, and others); the mountain people of Sukhumi (Abkhazians); the Steppe peoples of the Terek (Nogais, Karanogais) and of the Stavropol guberniia (Nogais and Turkmen).

<sup>36</sup> BMMATE The Caucasus Problem p. 22; TAKHO-GODI Revoliutsiia i kontr-revoliutsiia pp. 34–35. The Socialist Group, a small circle of Socialist mountaineers, bitterly condemned the decision to join with the Cossacks. KASHKAEV Ot Fevralia k Oktjabriu pp. 232–233.

<sup>37</sup> Soiuzyi dogovor Iugo-Vostochnogo soiuza Kazach’ikh voisk, gortsev Kavkaza i vol’nykh narodov stepei, 20.10.1917 [2.11.1917], reproduced in: TAKHO-GODI Revoliutsiia i kontr-

Ekaterinodar successfully pressured the Terek and Kuban Cossacks to agree to concede territory. These concessions ameliorated inter-communal tensions, but only for a time. Those Cossacks who lived along the Sunzha river and whose territory abutted that of the mountaineers openly resented both the concessions as well as the inclusion of such “disastrous elements” as the Ingushs and Chechens into the League.<sup>38</sup> Thus although news of the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd on 7 November reverberated in the Caucasus by driving the mountaineer and Cossack leaders closer to one another, it failed to bring the rank and file of the communities together. Fearing that their Ataman was selling them out to “Asiatics,” the Terek Cossacks forced their Ataman Karaulov to resign. They then kicked out Karaulov’s successor when he, too, pursued the same policy of warm relations with the mountaineers. The so-called *frontoviki*, Cossacks who had been radicalized by the experience of total war, were especially hostile toward the mountaineers, whom they identified as counter-revolutionaries. They sought an alliance with Bolshevized soldiers and non-Cossack peasants to fight the mountaineers.<sup>39</sup>

Small clashes between mountaineers and Cossacks had been occurring since the summer of 1917, especially in Ingushetia. Then in January 1918, spurred by rumors of an imminent Ottoman invasion, elements of the Terek Cossacks joined with Bolshevik forces advancing from battles on the Don and Kuban and attacked the mountaineers. The UAM managed to put together an army of sorts using the officer lists of the Savage Division, and this makeshift detachment engaged in pitched battles with the Bolshevik and Cossack forces. The match was uneven. Due not least to a lack of ammunition, the mountaineers had to surrender Vladikavkaz and then Port-Petrovsk and Derbent shortly thereafter. Fleeing before the Bolshevik onslaught, the UAM Central Committee moved first to Nazran and then to Temir Khan Shura.<sup>40</sup>

Despite this violent break in relations, the UAM leaders as late as the fall of 1918 never relinquished hope for reestablishing good relations with their Cossack neighbors. The

revoliutsiia pp. 164–166; Obrashchenie tsentral’nogo komiteta Soiuz gortsev Kavkaza ko vsem narodam Kavkaza, 9.12.1917 [22.12.1917], in: SogSKiD pp. 97–98. The Ural Cossack Host joined the union eleven days later. KASHKAEV Ot Fevralia k Oktiabriu pp. 230–231.

<sup>38</sup> In December the Central Committee of the Union of Allied Mountaineers defined the territory under its jurisdiction to be the whole of the Dagestan *oblast’* (province), the six mountainous districts (*okrugi*) and the Karanogai sector of the Terek *oblast’*, and the lands of the Nogais and Turkmens of the Stavropol’ gubernii. Rather ambiguously it claimed authority in national-cultural and political matters over the Zakatal’ and Sukhumii districts, yet affirmed that the popular councils of those two areas possessed the final word as to whether they would enter the North Caucasian government or the Transcaucasian government. Vypiska iz protokola zasedaniia Tsentral’nogo komiteta Soiuz ob”edinennykh gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana o territoriiakh Gorskoi respubliki, 3.12.1917 [16.12.1917], in: SogSKiD p. 93.

<sup>39</sup> Soobshchenie o zasedanii Tsentral’nogo komiteta soiuz ob”edinennykh gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana po voprosu formirovaniia Iugo-vostochnogo soiuz, 12.11.1917 [25.11.1917]; Deklaratsiia vremennogo Tersko-Dagestanskogo pravitel’sva po voprosu ob organizatsii vlasti v krae, in: Vpered, 5.12.1917 [18.12.1917]; Obrashchenie Tersko-Dagestanskogo pravitel’sva k naseleniiu, 8.12.1917 [22.12.1917], in: SogSKiD, pp. 83–84, 93–96; KOSOK Revolution and Sovietization p. 48; KING Sergei Kirov pp. 186–188, 220.

<sup>40</sup> ISKHAQOV Rossiiskie musul’mane pp. 400–401, 459; İSMAIL BERKOK Askerî Mecmua’nın Tarih Kısmı: Büyük Harpte Şimalî Kafkasyadaki Faaliyetlerimiz ve 15. Fırkanın Harekâtı ve Muharabeleri [Military Journal’s History Section: Our Activities and the 15<sup>th</sup> Division’s Operations and Battle’s in the North Caucasus During the Great War]. Ankara 1934, p. 6.; BMMATE The Caucasus Problem pp. 26–27; KASHKAEV Ot Fevralia k Oktiabriu p. 240; VASSAN-GIRAY JABAGI Revolution and Civil War in the North Caucasus, in: Central Asian Survey 10 (1991) pp. 119–132, here p. 122.

UAM's chief executive, Chermoev, in September 1918 wrote to the Ataman of the Kuban Host to explain that the mountaineer government regarded the clashes between the mountaineers and the Cossacks as Bolshevik provocations. Chermoev expressed his continuing friendship with the "Kuban Cossack Host and those in the army who are loyal," the latter being a reference to the so-called "White" or anti-Bolshevik officers of the former Tsarist army. He emphasized too that the mountaineer government sought good relations with all the nations that lived on its territory.<sup>41</sup> Chermoev's words were not mere public posturing, the products of expedient diplomacy. In a private letter written to a fellow mountaineer several weeks later, Chermoev acknowledged that the mountaineers had "domestic problems" with the Cossacks, but insisted, "I am certain that they can be resolved peacefully."<sup>42</sup>

Chermoev had reasons for hope. Elements of the Cossacks were bitterly anti-Bolshevik, and the UAM in 1918 supplied refuge to Cossacks fleeing the Bolsheviks and even reserved seats in their government for the Cossacks.<sup>43</sup> The UAM did manage to restrain the mountaineers and contain outbreaks of fighting. Indeed, Bolshevik agitators lamented that "bourgeois elements" among the mountaineers "paralyzed" their efforts to incite mountaineer attacks against the Cossacks throughout the summer of 1918.<sup>44</sup> Clashes between Cossacks and mountaineers certainly occurred, but they were neither as pervasive nor systematic as some have argued.<sup>45</sup>

Remarkably, the UAM did not change its attitude toward ethnic Russians after its declaration of independence or even after the entrance of Ottoman units into Dagestan in the summer of 1918. Following the recapture of Derbent by a joint UAM-Ottoman force a ceremony was held in front of that city's town hall at 10:00 am on 13 October to celebrate the re-establishment of the North Caucasian Republic. The President Chermoev and the other major figures present all delivered speeches to the crowd. They hoisted the republic's flag and students read poems. As a symbol of the UAM's ecumenical good will, Russian and Georgian priests and a Jewish rabbi as well as a Muslim imam all participated in the ceremony and provided their public blessings to the republic.<sup>46</sup>

The following day Chermoev underscored the UAM's commitment to maintaining a liberal political order. In his first decree he declared that two principles would serve as the basis of the North Caucasian Republic:

<sup>41</sup> Pis'mo predsedatelia pravitel'stva Gorskoi respubliki A. Chermoeva Atamanu Kubanskogo kazach'ego voiska i predsedateliu Kubanskoi kraevoi rady o granitsakh Gorskoi respubliki, 10.9.1918, in: SogSKiD pp. 159–160.

<sup>42</sup> Pis'mo predsedatelia Soveta ministrov Gorskoi respubliki A. Chermoeva vremennomu diktatoru Dagestanskoi oblasti N. Tarkovskomu o politike Bicherakhova i turok, 25.10.1918, in: SogSKiD p. 169.

<sup>43</sup> Pis'mo A. Kantemira G. Bammatovu (January 1919), reproduced in: Gorskaia Kontrrevoliutsiia i interventy, in: Krasnyi arkhiv 68 (1935) pp. 125–153, here pp. 140–141.

<sup>44</sup> BORISENKO Sovetskie respubliki p. 168.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Kenez, for example, writes, "By the end of 1917 the Chechen and Ingush had already started an indiscriminate war against all Russians." This is highly inaccurate. (KENEZ *Civil War* p. 124).

<sup>46</sup> SÜLEYMAN İZZET Askerî Mecmua'nın Tarih Kısmı: Büyük Harpte 15 Piyade Tümeninin Azerbaycan ve Şimali Kafkasya'daki Hareket ve Muharebeleri [Military Journal's History Section: The 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's Operations and Battles in Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus During the Great War]. Ankara 1936, p. 147; MEHMED TEVFIK [BIYIKLIOĞLU] Askerî Mecmua'nın Tarih Kısmı: Şimali Kafkas Muharebeleri [Military Journal's History Section: North Caucasian Battles]. Ankara 1927, pp. 150–157; BERKOK Büyük Harpte p. 73.

"1. Justice without regard to religion and nationality for all who will respect the right of the mountaineers to build their national existence according to the principle of national self-determination; 2. The absence of hatred toward the peoples who inhabit the Caucasus, [and] toward the nations for what they have done up until now; and the most warm relations with Russians, especially with those who wish to remain where they are."<sup>47</sup>

Chermoev's decree, like the installation ceremony, reflected the tension between the mountaineers' desire for a state of their own, which they believed was required for their future survival of their constituents as peoples, and their understanding of the need to maintain good relations both with their neighbors and with the minorities of non-mountaineers living among them. Notably, the decree contained no references to Islam, and it also stressed the contractual and legal, as opposed to fraternal, nature of Ottoman assistance, even explicitly comparing that assistance to Germany's aid for other newly independent entities of the former Russian Empire such as Ukraine and Georgia.

It would not have been remarkable had the UAM initiated or encouraged ethnic cleansing of Russians following its split from Bolshevik Russia. Although Bolsheviks and Russians, of course, were not synonymous, the fact is that the Bolsheviks' best supporters in the North Caucasus were often Russians. The Russians, moreover, tended to side with non-Muslims. When the Colonel Lazar Bicherakhov, a Tsarist officer of mixed Ossetian and Cossack heritage, and his men withdrew into Dagestan from Baku ahead of the advancing Ottoman army in the summer of 1918, local Russians swung to his side. Bicherakhov was a staunch believer in a centralized, great Russian state (and therefore an opponent of the UAM). He was also a fierce anti-Bolshevik. Yet even this did not deter the local Russian Bolsheviks from rallying to him.<sup>48</sup> Despite the open suspicion and hostility of the Russian population, Chermoev and the UAM refrained from targeting the Russians, or any one else, as a group and instead sought to maintain good relations and to stamp out inter-communal conflicts when they did emerge. It is perhaps worth noting that UAM representatives in Tiflis routinely provided consular support to non-Muslim citizens of the mountaineer republic seeking to transit Georgia and pursue other matters abroad.<sup>49</sup>

### *Islam and Its Limits*

The tendency to see the mountaineers of the North Caucasus as Muslims first and last has not been unique to Tsarist-era Russians. The tradition among scholars of invoking Islam to explain the history of the North Caucasus is longstanding, regardless of whether they saw religion as a positive force of anti-Communism and resistance to Russia or the opposite.<sup>50</sup> Religious authorities and the rhetoric of Islam did figure prominently in North

<sup>47</sup> Prikaz predsedatelia pravitel'stva Gorskoi respubliki A. Chermoeva o vstuplenii turetskikh voisk na territoriiu Dagestana i o deistviiakh naseleniia, 14.10.1918, in: SogSKiD pp. 162–163; G. A. ALIKBEROV *Revoliutsiia i grazhdanskaia voina v Dagestane*. Makhachkala 1962, p. 106.

<sup>48</sup> Pis'mo vremennogo voennogo diktatora Dagestanskoi oblasti N. B. Tarkovskogo predsedateliu Gorskogo pravitel'stva A. Chermoevu o polozhenii v Dagestane, in: TAKHO-GODI *Revoliutsiia i kontr-revoliutsiia* pp. 71–72 and in: SogSKiD pp. 160–161; ATASE K. 5288, D. 3, F. 25: To the Turkish Commanders and Officers, 24.9.1334 [24.9.1918]; BERKOK *Büyük Harpte* pp. 20, 31, 50.

<sup>49</sup> See the consular correspondence in the Georgian Archive, Houghton Library, Harvard University, box 24, reel 79.

<sup>50</sup> For a related critique see ALEKSANDR KNYSH *Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm. The Issue of the Motivations of Sufi Movements in Russian and Western Historiography*, in: *Die Welt des Islams* 42 (2002) pp. 139–173.

Caucasian society and politics in 1917–1918. More problematic, however, are the descriptions of the North Caucasus as an area “where Moslem orthodoxy was still deeply rooted in popular consciousness” or even a “center of extreme religious fanaticism.”<sup>51</sup> Contrary to the portraits presented by Bolshevik chronographers, later Soviet historians, and their western counterparts, Islam’s impact upon politics in the North Caucasus was not determinative. Even those individuals identified as the most “orthodox” or “fanatic” exponents of Islam proved quite innovative in their interpretations of Islam and restrained in their religious worldviews.

The importance of Islam was readily apparent at the first mountaineer congress in Vladikavkaz. References to the faith, to the struggle of Imam Shamil, and to Muslim unity peppered many speeches, even as the delegates reached out to the non-Muslim Ossetians and Cossacks. The congress established a “religious section” made up of qualified religious leaders to deliberate and rule on the future role of Islam in the mountaineer state. The well-known religious authority Nadzhmuddin Gotsinskii was a member both of this section and of the UAM Central Committee.

The religious section declared as a matter of principle that the *shari’at*, Islamic law, would regulate interaction between Muslims. Such a ruling nominally fits with classical Islamic teaching and practice, although it does not address the crucial question of what exactly constitutes the *shari’at*. Many of the section’s other decisions sit less comfortably within Islamic tradition. The North Caucasian clerics decided that not only could women participate in public life, but they were eligible to hold office, too.<sup>52</sup> They wanted a Shaykh ul-Islam, but not the Ottoman one who from Istanbul nominally presided over the whole of Sunni Islam. Rather, they urged that Russia appoint its own Shaykh ul-Islam to oversee the spiritual affairs of all of Russia’s Muslims, and that the North Caucasus select a mufti with regional responsibilities to serve under him in a bureaucratic hierarchy of Muslim religious authorities.

To be sure, there were tensions between some of the religious authorities and the liberal nationalists of the UAM. The Avar *’alim* Nadzhmuddin Gotsinskii in particular unsettled some. As a direct descendant of one of Shamil’s closest *nā’ibs*, or deputies, and as a noted religious authority and prominent personality in his own right, Nadzhmuddin enjoyed a high profile. He flirted with the idea of reviving Shamil’s Imamate with himself as imam, and he hoped to co-opt the UAM toward this end. Before the end of the first UAM congress, Nadzhmuddin successfully prevailed upon the UAM leadership to select the remote *aul* of Andi in the Dagestani highlands as the site for the second congress, arguing that a highland village was an especially appropriate setting for mountaineers to deliberate. Nadzhmuddin’s real reason for favoring Andi was that it lay in the region where his influence was strongest, and so presented the environment best suited for imposing his will on the mountaineer movement.<sup>53</sup>

Encouraging him was an Avar shaykh of the Naqshbandi order, Uzun Khadzhi from the village of Salta near Gunib, who had returned to the Caucasus in 1916 from Siberian

<sup>51</sup> PIPES *The Formation of the Soviet Union* pp. 20, 96.

<sup>52</sup> IMANUIDIN KHABIBOVICH SULAEV *Musul’manskoe dukhovenstvo Dagestana i sovetskaia vlast’. Bor’ba i sotrudnichestvo (1917–1921)*. Makhachkala 2004, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> SogSKiD p. 5; ŞEREFEDDİN EREL *Dağıstan ve Dağıstanlılar [Dagestan i Dagestanis]*. Istanbul 1961, p. 174.

exile.<sup>54</sup> He began rallying support for Nadzhmuddin in the area surrounding Andi three weeks ahead of the congress. Before the Central Committee members could make it to Andi at least five thousand likely supporters of Nadzhmuddin from the Dagestani highlands and Chechnya had already packed the town.<sup>55</sup> Confronted with a *fait d'accompli*, the Central Committee decided to hold the second congress at a later date in Vladikavkaz but to proceed to Andi to address those gathered. The Islamists Nadzhmuddin and Uzun Khadzhi were mounting their best challenge to the liberal intelligentsia for control of the North Caucasus.

Yet it was not the UAM liberal intelligentsia who suffered defeat at Andi, but the advocates of a revived Imamate. Despite Nadzhmuddin's and Uzun Khadzhi's efforts to fix the outcome, those present rejected the proposal to name Nadzhmuddin Imam. Such an act, they feared, would alienate the Christian Georgians and Armenians as well as the Shi'i Azeris, incite conflict, and sunder any hopes for a unified Caucasus. After heated debate, the proponents of an Imamate agreed to withdraw the motion. As a consolation prize of sorts to Nadzhmuddin, they endorsed him to oversee religious affairs in the North Caucasus. The subsequent UAM congress in Vladikavkaz ratified the decision, and Nadzhmuddin adopted the less elevated title of mufti.<sup>56</sup> Even the highland mountaineers of Dagestan and Chechnya revealed themselves at Andi to be not blind advocates of a militant Sunni theocracy, still less proponents of religious war. Despite the allure of reviving Shamil's legacy, they demurred, recognizing that such a move would produce bloodshed and prove counter-productive.<sup>57</sup> The liberal intelligentsia had beaten the Islamists on the Islamists' own turf.

As might befit a holder of the title of Mufti of the North Caucasus, Nadzhmuddin in the following months took it upon himself to order the village mullahs of the North Caucasus immediately to begin providing instruction in the fundamentals of Islam, such as how to pray, fast, and give alms correctly. He regularly declared that *shari'at* was to be the supreme law of the land.

This insistence on Islamic law led Nadzhmuddin's Socialist rivals and later historians to depict him as an unthinking reactionary trapped in classical religious concepts. This is inaccurate. It is worth noting that Nadzhmuddin claimed legitimacy as mufti not on any religious basis nor on his status as a direct descendant of a *nâ'ib* of Shamil but rather on his having been chosen by the "will of the mountain peoples." He stood as a candidate for election to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, meaning that he had not renounced Russia or ties to Petrograd.<sup>58</sup> And even as he sought to revive the Imamate at Andi he had

<sup>54</sup> SULAEV Musul'manskoe dukhovenstvo Dagestana p. 8. Uzun Khadzhi was a short man, hence his moniker "Uzun," meaning "tall."

<sup>55</sup> Kosok and Borisenko claim that twenty thousand mountaineers had gathered in Andi. KOSOK Revolution and Sovietization p. 47; BORISENKO Sovetskie respubliki p. 40. The commander of the local Russian garrison reported up to seven thousand. (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv [RGVIA] f. 1300, op. 1, d. 6, l. 52: Raport nachal'nika Botliskhogo garnizona ob agitatsiakh Uzun Khadzhi [23.8.1917]). A local newspaper wrote that five thousand Chechens had gathered. (Soobschenie v gazete 'Vremia' o sozyve II s'ezda gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana v sel. Andi, 30.8.1917 [12.9.1917], in: SogSKiD pp. 62–63); SULAEV Musul'manskoe dukhovenstvo Dagestana pp. 20–22.

<sup>56</sup> EREL Dağıstan ve Dağıstanlılar p. 174; KAFLI Şimalî Kafkasya p. 135.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. BENNIGSEN Islam in the Soviet Union pp. 73–74; KENEZ Civil War p. 124; PIPES The Formation of the Soviet Union p. 96.

<sup>58</sup> ISKHAKOV Rossiiskie Musul'mane p. 310.

urged the assembled mountaineers to refrain from any violence against Russian soldiers and others.<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere he instructed his followers in the same message, “Do not harm or injure people of other faiths, Georgians, Russians, and Jews.”<sup>60</sup> More importantly, Nadzhmuddin was no prisoner to the dictates of the established codes of the *shari’at*, but instead demonstrated a cunning knack for interpreting the holy law to serve other ends. As mufti, he bolstered the UAM’s popular legitimacy with the argument that its policies did not violate the *shari’at* because its goals were the same as those of the *shari’at*, namely “to raise the political and cultural level of our peoples and to defend their rights at the present time.”<sup>61</sup> The idea that the imperatives of progressive social development and assertion of national rights can obviate the requirements of the *shari’at* owes more to political expediency in the twentieth century than to the foundations of classical Islam jurisprudence.

Expressions of support for the *shari’at* were virtually ubiquitous in 1917–1918. One source of the *shari’at*’s popular appeal was its status as a synonym for a just order, if not merely a rudimentary order. The collapse of imperial authority and institutions had sparked a surge in crime, exacerbated by the mountaineers’ own native tradition of banditry, known as *abrechestvo*.<sup>62</sup> The UAM regarded *abrechestvo* as a major problem because it weakened mountaineer unity from the inside and provoked conflict on the outside with the mountaineers’ neighbors.<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, the UAM declared the “struggle with banditry” a priority.<sup>64</sup> Nadzhmuddin called for an “active struggle against *abreks*” and formed a special unit to fight them.<sup>65</sup> He ordered the local mullahs to choose from their communities “God-fearing people” who would “implacably enforce all the rules of the *shari’at* to their fullest extent in the struggle with thieves, bandits and murders.”<sup>66</sup>

Yet here too, political necessity as much as spiritual conviction inspired Nadzhmuddin’s recourse to Islamic law. Understanding the potential of banditry to spark a regional war, he ordered harsher punishments, including death, for crimes committed against Christians than for those committed against Muslims. Since such a decision to value Christians more than Muslims flew in the face of Islamic legal precedents, Nadzhmuddin justified it on the grounds of pragmatic contingency: “With those who commit violence against Russians and our friends the Cossacks, I will, I repeat, be especially implacable, since in such a difficult situation we must preserve the best relations with our neighbors; those who disturb our peaceful coexistence with our neighbors and threaten to plunge our

<sup>59</sup> RGVIA f. 1300, op. 1, d. 6, l. 52.

<sup>60</sup> DONOGO Polkovnik Magomed Dzhafarov p. 42.

<sup>61</sup> Poslanie Muftiia N. Gotsinskogo k mullam i prikhozhanam Severo-Kavkazskogo Muftiata, 4.11.1917, in: SogSKiD p. 76.

<sup>62</sup> ISKHAKOV “Kristallizatsiia” gorskogo osvoboditel’nogo dvizheniia pp. 17–18; IDEM Rossiiskie musul’mane p. 208. For more on *abrechestvo* see V. O. BOBROVNIKOV Musul’mane Severnogo Kavkaza: obychai, pravo, nasilie. Moskva 2002, pp. 16–40.

<sup>63</sup> ISKHAKOV Rossiiskie musul’mane p. 206.

<sup>64</sup> Tekst priglasheniia na II s’ezd gortsev Severnogo Kavkaza i Dagestana, 10.8.1917, in: SogSKiD p. 62.

<sup>65</sup> Soobshchenie nachal’nika ekspeditsionnogo otriada polkovnika Musalaeva o prebyvanii muftiia Gotsinskogo v Gudermese, 14.11.1917, in: SogSKiD pp. 85–86.

<sup>66</sup> This included, he emphasized, the amputation of the hands of thieves and execution of bandits and murderers. Those criminals who died in the course of committing their illegal acts were also not to escape punishment. They were to be buried in a special cemetery for bandits without any funeral prayers, as by their acts they had demonstrated themselves to be outside the community of the faithful (SogSKiD pp. 76–77).

region into anarchy are the enemies of Islam."<sup>67</sup> Nadzhmuddin was ambitious, but he was not the unapologetic or inflexible advocate of theocracy portrayed by historians.

Uzun Khadzhi's reputation as an unregenerate Islamist is even worse. His fanaticism is described as verging on the insane and his hatred for Russians indiscriminate. To support such characterizations – and to hint at the primitive mores of the mountaineers as a whole – historians have often recited these alleged words of the Chechen shaykh: "I am weaving a rope with which to hang students, engineers, and in general all who write from left to right." This statement is taken to neatly encapsulate Uzun Khadzhi's intense revulsion at all that smacks of European influence (the Arabic alphabet is written from right to left). The fact, however, is that Uzun Khadzhi never uttered such a statement. His Socialist opponents fabricated the quotation in leaflets in Avar, Arabic, Kumyk, and Russian in order to discredit him. As Uzun Khadzhi protested at the time, "How could I utter such nonsense! After all, we cannot get by without a secular intelligentsia. If we do not have such specialists as doctors, for example, then they should be invited from other regions. They are lying about me, and these rumors are spread by those who want to cause the people to mistrust me."<sup>68</sup> Nor apparently was this the first or sole attempt to discredit Uzun Khadzhi through rumors. The Arabic-language newspaper *Jarīdat Dāghistān* condemned earlier lies circulating about the shaykh's alleged agitation against the provisional government.<sup>69</sup>

As further evidence of Uzun Khadzhi's dogmatic thought, scholars point to his argument that a republican form of government is impermissible for Muslims because it is tantamount to renouncing the Prophet Muhammad and even God.<sup>70</sup> Since Uzun Khadzhi did attempt to form a theocratic state in September 1919, his rejection of the concept of a republic might seem principled.<sup>71</sup> A closer look, however, suggests that here, too, Uzun Khadzhi was not the dogmatist of legend. A contemporary associate averred confidently that the shaykh earlier had had no objection to the republican form of government.<sup>72</sup>

As the above examples suggest, the portrait of North Caucasian mountaineer society as dominated by religion obscures as much as it reveals. Islam did color the language of mountaineer politics, but it is impossible to say that it determined the content of those politics. Mountaineer religious authorities approved and initiated acts with no precedent in Islam. They approved not only of elections, but of even female participation in political life, as well as education. The most powerful *'ālim*, Nadzhmuddin, failed in his attempt to revive Shamil's Imamate because even the most of the highland mountaineers regarded such a move as unnecessarily provocative to their non-Sunni Muslim neighbors. Far from slavishly reproducing the classic strictures of Islamic law, Nadzhmuddin brazenly manipulated the principles of the *sharī'at*. And even the most zealous advocate of an Islamic order, Uzun Khadzhi, readily acknowledged the mountaineers' need for modern education and knowledge. The well-known caricatures of the mountaineers in general and of Nadzhmuddin and Uzun Khadzhi owe more to the records left by local Socialists and

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem* pp. 76–77, 86.

<sup>68</sup> SULAIEV *Musul'manskoe dukhovenstvo Dagestana* p. 30. See also ABDULLAEV *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia mys' v Dagestane v nachale XX v. Moskva* 1987, p. 59.

<sup>69</sup> Shaykh Hajji Uzun and His Jealous Critics, in: *Jarīdat Dāghistān* (17.08.1917).

<sup>70</sup> BENNIGSEN *Guerrilla Warfare* p. 51.

<sup>71</sup> Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Dagestana f. 8, op. 3, d. 248, l. 40–43: *Rasporiazhenie Glavnokomanduiushchego voiskami "Velikogo Veziria" Severo-Kavkazskago emarstva; Samurksii termed it a "sharia monarchy."* NAZHMUDDIN SAMURSKII *Grazhdanskaia voina v Dagestane*, in: *Novyi Vostok* 3 (1923) pp. 230–240, here p. 231.

<sup>72</sup> BUTBAY *Kafkasya Hatıraları* p. 20.

Soviet historians eager to class Islam as a particularly backward influence and to the tendency of later historians to rely on familiar stereotypes to produce a simple narrative to describe an unusually complex society in a confusing period.

### *The Foreign Relations of the UAM*

A corollary to the emphasis upon anti-Russian sentiment and Muslim identity has been the belief that the mountaineers aspired to unity with their Muslim neighbors and were particularly sympathetic to the Ottomans as fellow Muslims. The fact that the UAM made its formal declaration of independence in Istanbul and concluded a Treaty of Friendship would seem to lend support to this interpretation. Closer investigation, however, reveals clearly that the UAM consciously allied with the Ottomans for reasons of geopolitics, not identity. The UAM found the Ottomans to be useful allies because they could deliver military assistance, not because they were Muslims. As in its domestic policy, the UAM in its foreign relations pursued a policy of good neighborliness. It refused to compromise only on two issues: the need to expel the Bolsheviks, and the inclusion of Abkhazia in the Mountaineer Republic and not in the Georgian Republic.

The UAM from its beginnings maintained cordial ties with the Caucasians across the other side of the range, hosting at its congresses observers from its neighbors Georgia and Azerbaijan but seeing little need for a formal union with the south Caucasus. This assessment changed following the rise of the Bolsheviks. As earlier discussed, the Bolshevik threat first spurred the UAM to join Cossacks in the Southeastern League. When in January 1918 Bolshevik forces overran much of the Terek region and Dagestan, the UAM started to look outside their neighborhood for allies. To the south, the Transcaucasian Federation existed as a de facto independent state, with its own government and parliament, the Seim, in Tiflis.

Thus on 11 March 1918 the UAM Executive Committee decided to send a delegation led by their President Abdulmedzhid Tapa Chermoev and Foreign Minister Heidar Bammate (Gaidar Bammatov), a young Kumyk and graduate of the law faculty of St. Petersburg University, to Tiflis to propose North Caucasia's participation in the Transcaucasian Seim, which also had rejected the Bolsheviks as a legitimate government.<sup>73</sup> Upon reaching Tiflis, the UAM delegates learned that the heads of the Transcaucasian government had left for the Black Sea port of Trabzon to hold peace talks with the Ottomans, and so they, too, traveled to the Black Sea port to make their pitch for a unified Caucasus.<sup>74</sup>

Arriving in Trabzon at the beginning of April, the North Caucasians made their first contact with the Ottomans and met with the Ottoman Foreign Minister Nesimî Bey. They informed him that their most pressing need was for material aid to repel the Bolsheviks, and that covert shipments of arms would not suffice because they were engaged in combat along a three hundred kilometer front. They wished to form a union with the Transcaucasians as a unified Caucasus would simplify the supply of aid to the mountaineers and create a stronger state. They emphasized the need for the Ottomans to achieve good relations with the Georgians in particular, and urged that Istanbul therefore forgo its claim to the Black Sea port of

<sup>73</sup> KASHKAEV *Ot Fevralia k Oktiabriu* p. 243.

<sup>74</sup> BMMATE *The Caucasus Problem* p. 28.

Batumi.<sup>75</sup> Nesimî and the other Ottomans agreed that the union of the North and South Caucasus would create a more powerful buffer state and therefore serve Ottoman interests. From Istanbul Enver Pasha, the Ottoman Minister of War and triumvir, approvingly instructed the Ottoman delegation in Trabzon to try to convince the Transcaucasian Foreign Minister Akaki Chkenkeli to form a united Caucasus with the mountaineers.<sup>76</sup>

The Transcaucasians, however, were unable to give a definitive answer to the UAM's suggestion to form an independent union. They were deeply conflicted about their own status. They adamantly refused to recognize the Bolshevik government in Petrograd, yet steadfastly maintained that the Transcaucasus was still part of Russia. This ambiguity came to a head when the Ottomans confronted them with the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk wherein Bolshevik Russia agreed to cede control of the Transcaucasian provinces of Batumi, Kars, and Ardahan. The Transcaucasians decided to quit the talks and go to war. On the morning they departed, Bammator pleaded once more to them to reconsider and form a union, warning them that a divided Caucasus could not stand.<sup>77</sup>

The Ottoman army promptly seized Batumi on 14 April, bringing the war to an end in a day. Tiflis now declared the Transcaucasian Federation an independent state, and the UAM delegation left Trabzon for Batumi for the reopening of the Ottoman-Transcaucasian peace talks. While there, they met with Enver Pasha who invited them to the Ottoman capital for further discussions. Leaving behind Bammator and Zubair Temirkhanov in Batumi, the other delegates arrived in Istanbul towards the end of April where they took rooms in the famous Pera Palas Hotel. The Ottoman North Caucasian Political Committee (*Şimali Kafkas Cemiyet-i Siyasiyesi*)<sup>78</sup> greeted the UAM delegates and debriefed them.<sup>79</sup> Next, the delegates had an audience with Sultan Mehmed Reşad V who promised that the Ottoman state would work to achieve recognition of North Caucasian independence from its wartime allies.<sup>80</sup>

Istanbul at the same time was deeply suspicious of the Caucasian ambitions of Germany. Indeed, Enver believed the possibility that German forces in Ukraine might ad-

<sup>75</sup> A. N. KURAT *Türkiye ve Rusya* [Turkey and Russia]. Ankara 1970, pp. 483–484; ENİS ŞAHİN *Trabzon ve Batum Konferansları ve Anlaşmaları (1917–1918)* [The Trabzon and Batumi Conferences and Agreements (1917–1918)]. Ankara 2002, p. 388.

<sup>76</sup> ATASE K. 526, D. 2054–369, F. 3–2: Dispatch to the Third Army Command, 14.4.1334 [14.4.1918].

<sup>77</sup> HAIDAR BAMMATE *Le Problème du Caucase*, in: *Revue Politique Internationale* 13 (March 1920) pp. 193–224, here p. 213.

<sup>78</sup> The North Caucasus Political Community was composed of Ottoman citizens of North Caucasian heritage. BUTBAY *Kafkasya Hatıraları* p. 2; HIZAL *Kuzey Kafkasya Hürriyet ve İstiklal Davası* pp. 54–56.

<sup>79</sup> Chermoev impressed the committee members as a “fast living prince addicted to amusements and entertainment” who supported Caucasian independence on the condition that it not disturb him or his comfort. His main goal seemed to be “to experience the splendor and grandeur of the imperial age while serving as president of a republic.” The other North Caucasian delegates made better impressions. The twenty-eight year old Haidar Bammate was the hardest working of the delegates and came across as a bright and very well educated, a handsome gentleman who spoke French and German in addition to Russian. The Russian-educated Simon Basaria, a prominent Abkhaz, and Ali Han Kantemir, a thirty-year old law graduate from St. Petersburg University, both impressed the Ottomans as Caucasian patriots. (BUTBAY *Kafkasya Hatıraları* p. 6; *Âti* [newspaper] (26.6.1334) [26.6.1918], as cited in MESUT ERŞAN *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kuzey Kafkasya Siyaseti* [The Ottoman State's North Caucasus Policy during the First World War]. PhD diss. Atatürk University Erzurum 1995, p. 71, fn. 88.

<sup>80</sup> BAMMATE *The Caucasus Problem* p. 30.

vance southward into the Caucasus made it imperative that the North Caucasus declared its independence sooner rather than later.<sup>81</sup> An independent mountaineer state could block the ambitions of the Russians and Germans alike. For their part, the North Caucasians in Istanbul portrayed their condition as one of existential struggle. Describing themselves as “the indigenous people of the North Caucasus,” (*Kafkasya-yı Şimali ahali-i asliyesi*) they denounced Tsarism to the Ottomans as “a great threat to the continued existence of many nations and tribes.” Russia, they explained, “wished to drown the local Caucasian peoples in Russianness” by building fortified settlements of “Cossacks and [Slavic] peasants” among them. The mountaineers emphasized their need for assistance,<sup>82</sup> and the Ottomans duly promised military and other support.

Provided with assurances of assistance, Chermoev in Istanbul released a formal declaration of North Caucasian independence on 11 May 1918. Reflecting the global shift toward democratic or populist principles, the declaration staked the legitimacy of the “Government of the Union of Indigenous People of the North Caucasus” on the popular will expressed by the “national assembly” that had met in May and September 1917. The new state laid claim to the territory demarcated to the north by the borders of the Dagestan, Terek, Stavropol, Kuban, and Black Sea provinces, to the east and west by the Caspian and Black Seas respectively, and to the south according to a “border to be determined in conjunction with the Transcaucasian government.”<sup>83</sup> The following day Chermoev and Dibirov formally requested of Istanbul that a “sufficiently manned and equipped military force immediately be sent to the North Caucasus,” since the new state’s own forces were still in the process of formation.<sup>84</sup> Istanbul readily complied and ordered such a force to be formed before the end of the month.<sup>85</sup> The Ottoman Empire and Mountaineer Republic formalized their ties on 8 June with a “Treaty of Friendship.”<sup>86</sup>

On the same day that Chermoev in Istanbul had declared a sovereign state, Bammate in Batumi opened the peace talks by restating his pitch for a single Caucasian state. Two days earlier he and Temirkhanov had met with Chkhenkeli to again broach the idea of forming a united Caucasian state. Bammate explained to the Georgian that the passing reference to an independent North Caucasus in a telegram from Vehib Pasha was a mis-

<sup>81</sup> ERŞAN Birinci Dünya Harbinde Osmanlı Devleti’nin Kuzey Kafkasya Siyaseti p. 56.

<sup>82</sup> ATASE K. 1857, D. 722, F. 1–23, 1–27.

<sup>83</sup> ATASE K. 1857, D. 722, F. 1–27. An imperfect English translation can be found in BAMMATE *The Caucasus Problem* pp. 30–31.

<sup>84</sup> Şimalî Kafkas Hükümetinin Türkiye’ye Müracaatı, 12.5.1918, as cited in KURAT *Türkiye ve Rusya* pp. 671–672.

<sup>85</sup> HALİL BAL *Kuzey Kafkasya’nın İstiklalı ve Türkiye’nin Askeri Yardımı (1914–1918)*, in: *Kafkas Araştırmaları*. Vol. 3. İstanbul 1997, p. 47.

<sup>86</sup> For the text of the treaty see Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi [Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archives] *Saltanat-ı Senniye-i Osmaniye ile Kafkasya Cibaliyun İttihadı Hükümeti Beyninde Münakid Muhadenet Muahedenamesi [Mutual Friendship Treaty Concluded Between the Ottoman Government and the Government of the Union of Caucasian Mountaineers]*, Hariciye Nezareti Hukuk Muşavirliği İstişare Odası [Office of Legal Counsel of the Foreign Ministry] Dosya 107, Sıra 10; KURAT *Türkiye ve Rusya* pp. 672–674. In an article on the North Caucasian state in the newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, the new state was defined as comprising the Dagestan, Kuban, Black Sea, Stavropol, and Terek provinces of the former Russian Empire. The newspaper reported that to the south the state included the Abkhaz port of Sukhumi and that the border extended to the Kotur River. The coastal town of Ochamchira was left to the Transcaucasians because its population was predominantly Georgian. (Şimalî Kafkasya Hükümetinin Teşekkülü [The Formation of the North Caucasian Government], in: *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, 16.5.1918).

understanding.<sup>87</sup> Although the North Caucasians had felt compelled to follow the example of the Transcaucasian Federation and declare independence in order to attract the sympathetic interest of the Central Powers, Bammate nonetheless assured the Transcaucasians, “our firm will is to be with you, to be of use to you” as part of a single state. In the event of “problems from the north” the mountaineer government might have to act in concert with the Ottomans, but it remained uncommitted to such an alignment.<sup>88</sup>

Given the different trajectories the mountaineers were following in Istanbul and Batumi – asserting independence with Ottoman aid and encouragement in the former and appealing to Tiflis for a union in the latter – one may ask whether they were practicing a particularly duplicitous form of diplomacy or were extraordinarily confused? The answer is neither. Instead, they were trying to maximize their chances to realize their goal of ensuring the long-term survival and prosperity of their peoples. Ensuring the viability of their government had to be the UAM’s top priority. The mountaineers were under direct attack and had lost their major cities to the Bolsheviks. Because the only actor in the region capable of expelling the Bolsheviks was the Ottoman Empire, the mountaineers had little option but to declare independence and request Istanbul’s assistance. The Transcaucasians were diffident about a union and in any event, as Bammate explained to Chkhenkeli, the formation of a united Caucasian state presented an unavoidable diplomatic dilemma. In order to win the sympathy and recognition from the Central Powers necessary for such a project, the North Caucasians had to first declare their existence as a sovereign state independent from Russia. Indeed, two days after the declaration of independence in Istanbul, Bammate in Batumi reiterated in writing the proposal to merge the North Caucasian state with the Southern, being careful to recount that the Transcaucasians themselves had advised the mountaineers to declare independence first.<sup>89</sup>

Shared religious and ethnic ties smoothed Ottoman-UAM negotiations, but they did not motivate their relations. Internal correspondence between UAM leaders makes clear that both sides retained distance. Writing from Istanbul in July, Bammate warned Chermoev, “in the council of ministers there was no program or even the slightest reliable sympathy for us.” With the exception of Enver Pasha, the other members of the ruling Committee of Union and Progress were either indifferent or even hostile to the North Caucasians, he reported.<sup>90</sup> As noted earlier, Chermoev in Derbent was careful to explicitly downplay any fraternal aspect to Ottoman-mountaineer relations in public. Moreover, the North Caucasians sought to develop closer ties with Germany even as tensions between Istanbul and

<sup>87</sup> Stenogramma predvaritel’nogo zasedaniia predstavitelei delegatsii, pribyvshikh na Batumskuiu konferentsiiu po voprosu dopuska delegatsii Gorskoi respubliki na konferentsiiu, 9.5.1918, in: SogSKiD p. 111. In his telegram of 28 April acknowledging the Transcaucasian Federation’s own declaration of independence (a condition set by the Ottoman Empire for the resumption of negotiations), Vehib Pasha had written that the North Caucasus was also declaring its independence and informing the Ottoman Empire and other states of this fact. Although Vehib Pasha had also explained that the North Caucasian delegation was leaving Istanbul along with the Ottoman delegation for Batum and would take steps to merge with the Transcaucasus, the Transcaucasians had reasons to be confused. (Telegramma Vekhiba-Pashi o priznanii nezavisimosti Zakavkaz’ia, 28.4.1917, in: Dokumenty i materialy po vnesheinei politike Zakavkaz’ia i Gruzii. Tiflis 1919, p. 253).

<sup>88</sup> SogSKiD pp. 111–117.

<sup>89</sup> Georgian Archive, Houghton Library, Harvard University, box 19 reel 63: Bammatov to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 13.5.1918.

<sup>90</sup> Pis’mo diplomaticheskogo predstavitelia Gorskogo pravitel’stva G. Bammatova predsedateliu pravitel’stva A. Chermoevu o politike Germanii i Turtsii v otnoshenii Kavkaza i Rossii, 31.7.1918, in: SogSKiD pp. 143–145.

Berlin over the Caucasus mounted. As Bammate urged Chermoev, the Chief of the German Imperial Delegation in the Caucasus “von Kress is everything for us, and you must do everything to convince von Kress to support us.”<sup>91</sup> Towards that end, the young Dagestani emphasized to Chermoev the need for the mountaineers to retake Vladikavkaz from the Bolsheviks and to take a harder line toward Georgia in order to illustrate Georgia’s dependence upon the north. These two acts would impress upon Germany the UAM’s strength and the advantages to be gained from dealing with it.<sup>92</sup> To the Germans, Bammate in letter and in person proposed economic concessions in return for assistance. Moscow successfully deterred Berlin from recognizing the UAM government by threatening to withhold oil from Baku,<sup>93</sup> but Bammate’s repeated approaches toward the Germans finally paid off when the Germans promised and delivered arms from Tiflis in October.<sup>94</sup> Those weapons, however, would prove too little, too late.

Although the mountaineers were ready and willing to work with whomever could further the goal of an independent North Caucasus – be they Ottomans, Germans, Entente powers, Transcaucasians, or Cossacks – a sense of solidarity did bind them to one another. They were not willing to countenance the detachment of one group of mountaineers from the rest. When in August 1918 the Ottomans broached the idea of forming one state out of Dagestan and Azerbaijan and another separate state from the Chechens and the other North Caucasian peoples for the sake of forming a solid front against the Germans, Bammate rejected it out of hand, labeling such a project “a betrayal of our brothers” and threatened to leave Istanbul immediately if the Ottoman government attempted to implement this plan.<sup>95</sup> When the Georgians, with German assistance, began exerting control over Abkhazia, the North Caucasians refused to relinquish their claim to that region. Al-

<sup>91</sup> Pis’mo diplomaticheskogo predstavitelia Gorskogo pravitel’sтва G. Bammatova predsedateliu pravitel’sтва A. Chermoevu o politike Germanii i Turtsii v otnoshenii Kavkaza i Rossii, 31.8.1918, in: SogSKiD p. 152.

<sup>92</sup> SogSKiD pp. 142–144.

<sup>93</sup> Upon learning of the UAM’s declaration of independence, the Bolshevik Commissar for Foreign Affairs Chicherin disputed the legitimacy of the governments of both the Transcaucasus and the North Caucasus and threatened intervention. TAKHO-GODI Revoliutsiia i kontr-revoliutsiia pp. 61–62; Nota Zakavkazskoi delegatsii gen. fon-Lossovu, 19.5.1918, in: Dokumenty i materialy pp. 291–292. See also Protest pravitel’sтва RSFSR germanskomu pravitel’stvu po povodu radiotelegrammy, peredannoi cherez posla Grafa Mirbakha o sozdanii nezavisimogo gosudarstva na Severnom Kavkaze 16.5.1918, in: SogSKiD p. 125. To underscore his point that the Union of Allied Mountaineers lacked popular support, Chicherin sent to the Ottomans and the Germans documentation of pro-Bolshevik congresses in Chechnia and the Kuban where the Union was condemned (Nota Narodnogo Komissariata Inostrannykh Del Turetskomu poslanniku Khalib Kemal’ beiu, 30.5.1918; Telegramma Narodnogo Komissariata Inostrannykh Del polnomochnomu predstaviteliu RSFSR v Germanii, 31.5.1918, in: Dokumenty i materialy pp. 335–339). On 17 May the German observer at the Batumi talks Colonel von Lossow informed the UAM delegation that Berlin would not recognize their government despite having a prepared draft treaty on German recognition and military assistance. (Pis’mo predsedatel’ia germanskoi delegatsii na mirnykh peregovorakh v Batumi fon-Lossova na imia predsedatel’ia delegatsii Zakavkazskoi respubliky po voprosu priznaniia nezavisimosti respubliky gortsev Kavkaza, 17.5.1918, in: SogSKiD p. 126).

<sup>94</sup> Pis’mo diplomaticheskogo predstavitelia Gorskogo pravitel’sтва G. Bammatova predsedateliu pravitel’sтва A. Chermoevu o politike Germanii i Turtsii v otnoshenii Kavkaza i Rossii, 5.9.1918, in: SogSKiD p. 155; Pis’mo chlena pravitel’sтва Gorskoi respubliky P. Kotseva predsedateliu delegatsii respubliky v Konstantinopole o polozenii na Severnom Kavkaze, 24.10.1918, ibidem p. 167.

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem pp. 151–152. See also BIHL Die Kaukasus-Politik, Band 2, p. 305; and Pis’mo A. Kantemira G. Bammatovu (January 1919) p. 140–141 (cf. fn. 43).

though Abkhazia is technically located in the South Caucasus, the Abkhaz share ethnic and linguistic ties with the Circassian peoples of the North Caucasus and cultural ties to the mountaineers of the North Caucasus in general. The Abkhaz had been an integral part of the UAM from the very beginning.<sup>96</sup> Although the Ottomans were sympathetic to the UAM's claim – they recognized the “vital” importance of Sokhumi for the UAM and backed some failed attempts by volunteers to retake the region – towards the end of the war they were too preoccupied to help. Nonetheless, the UAM emphatically refused to acknowledge Georgian sovereignty in Abkhazia, thereby keeping its status in limbo,<sup>97</sup> despite the Georgians' violent expulsion of Abkhaz resisters.<sup>98</sup> As they had earlier demonstrated at Trabzon, Batumi, and elsewhere, the UAM leadership was more than willing to compromise the trappings of sovereignty for the sake of the security of their constituents, but they would not sacrifice their constituents for the sake of their state.

*Whose Homeland? Divided Identities and Fractured Loyalties*

Although the UAM delegates abroad possessed a solid idea of mountaineer unity and clear political priorities to go with it, the intrusion into their lands of the larger conflicts between Russia and her neighbors and within Russia disoriented the UAM's leadership, deprived it of cohesion, and ultimately tore the movement apart. First, the arrival from Russia's war-time opponent, the Ottomans, injected friction into the UAM leadership. Then, as the Russian Civil War began to take shape as a two-sided struggle between the Bolsheviks and the Volunteer Army of General Anton Denikin, many mountaineers felt forced to choose between one or the other in this larger Russian conflict. The defeat of the Central Powers deprived the UAM of any Great Power patron, as Britain assigned priority to backing General Denikin's anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army and adopted a stance of passive hostility to the mountaineer government.<sup>99</sup> UAM members with strong Socialist

<sup>96</sup> The UAM constitution designated one of seventeen seats on the central committee for the Abkhaz (SogSKiD p. 51). The Abkhazian Simon Basaria played a prominent role in the UAM Central Committee.

<sup>97</sup> Bammate reminded the Georgians of the Abkhaz National Council's decision to join the UAM and condemned the destruction and looting of several Abkhaz villages and the “savage murder” of the “true patriots of Abkhazia who did not wish to submit to the Georgian yoke.” (SogSKiD pp. 132–135, 153–155). The Ottomans at Batumihad originally agreed to Abkhazia's inclusion into Georgia. A number of Ottoman officers of Abkhaz heritage attempted to reverse Ottoman policy. The Ottomans understood Sokhumi to be a vital interest of the North Caucasus. Enver permitted them to raise a volunteer force of two hundred seventy five men to enter Abkhazia, but its defeat and more pressing issues prevented the Ottomans from pressing the issue. ATASE K. 526, D. 2059–369, F. 50–2: Intelligence Summary on the Caucasus, 3.6.1334 [03.06.1918]; FRITZ FISCHER Germany's Aims in the First World War. New York 1967, pp. 549–550; ÖMER TURAN Bolşevik İhtilalini Takip Eden Günlerde Kuzey Kafkasya'da Bağımsızlık Hareketleri ve Yusuf Ercan'ın Sohum Müfrezesi Hatıraları [Independence Movements in the North Caucasus in the Aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and Yusuf Ercan's Sukhumi Detachment Memoirs], in: Askeri Tarih Bülteni 21 (1996) pp. 151–158.

<sup>98</sup> ATASE K. 1857, D. 428–133, F. 1–38: Report to the Directorate of Eastern Affairs, 21.10.1918 [3.11.1918].

<sup>99</sup> Senior British officers described the UAM as a “gang of adventurers.” Major-General Holman to Chief of Imperial General Staff, War Office Ekaterinodar, July 10, 1919, in: British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Part II, Series A, vol. 1: Soviet Russia and Her Neighbours, Jan. 1917 – Dec. 1919. Ed. by D. Cameron Watt. Frederick, MD 1984, pp. 256–257.

leanings such as Said Gabiev sided with the Bolsheviks, while those who had been officers saw defeating Bolshevism as the greater task and opted to leave the UAM to join their former comrades in the Volunteer Army.

In June 1918 the advance force promised by the Ottomans, composed of 651 men and led by an Ottoman Circassian, Major İsmail Hakkı (Berkok) entered Dagestan. Their mission was to raise and train a native military force that could drive out the Bolsheviks and other foreign (i.e. Russian and British) elements and re-establish the UAM government. They found things in disarray. Inside Dagestan, Berkok wrote, the people were “living in darkness, poverty, and need” and displayed little political passion or cohesion.<sup>100</sup> Although Islam was ubiquitous in the culture and the shaykhs and men of religion wielded authority, Berkok found they were not uniformly anti-Russian, let alone pro-Ottoman. Indeed, when in mid-July Berkok led his forces toward the village of Tsatanik, he encountered Nadzhmuddin. Brushing off Berkok’s claim to represent the UAM, Nadzhmuddin ordered his own men to attack. The Avar alim’s decision to assault his Ottoman co-religionists is notable because it demonstrates how North Caucasian politics cannot be reduced to a story of religious or cultural identities. For many historians Nadzhmuddin stands as the embodiment of militant pan-Islam in the North Caucasus. Although it is impossible to know what precisely motivated Nadzhmuddin in his decision to attack the Ottomans, it is clear that it was not Pan-Islamic sentiment. Nor was it any inborn aversion to Turks. Nadzhmuddin, who spoke Turkish well, had spent time in Istanbul, and had met with Sultan Abdulhamid II, had in fact been known to Russian authorities as a dangerous Turcophile.<sup>101</sup> Yet now he was fighting his former Ottoman hosts and co-religionists.

In the event, Berkok’s force with its superior firepower threw back Nadzhmuddin’s men in a sharp firefight at Tsatanik. To save face, the chastened mufti submitted to the Ottoman-led force in the name of the Shaykh ul-Islam in Istanbul.<sup>102</sup> After that encounter, Nadzhmuddin withdrew to the highlands, choosing to emerge only after the Ottomans were forced to withdraw at the end of the war.

Berkok found the natives to indeed be excellent warriors, but poorly suited to formal military discipline. Thus it was not until the entrance into Dagestan of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division from Baku that the Ottomans were able to take Derbent and restore the UAM government to power on North Caucasian soil. From Derbent, the joint Ottoman-UAM force advanced on Petrovsk, where Bicherakhov and his unit of Cossacks, Russians, and Armenians had holed up. On 17 October Chermoev dispatched an ultimatum to Bicherakhov demanding that he quit Petrovsk and its environs by 20 October. Bicherakhov’s answer was defiant:<sup>103</sup>

“You have no right to drive me out of my country. I am by birth a Cossack and a Caucasian. And these lands are Russia’s. As for the men under my command, they are one part of the army of Great Russia. My cause therefore is right and I will not withdraw from Petrovsk. But

<sup>100</sup> ATASE K. 502, D. 2040–502, F. 1–2: Report on Conditions in Dagestan, 23.10.1333 [23.10.1917]; BERKOK Büyük Harpte p. 20.

<sup>101</sup> KHADZHİ MURAD DONOGO Nozhmuddin Gorsinski, in *Voprosy istorii* 6 (2005) pp. 34–57, here pp. 35–36.

<sup>102</sup> BERKOK Büyük Harpte p. 31.

<sup>103</sup> *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi 3ncü Ordu Harekâtı* [The Turkish War in the First World War. The Caucasian Front. Third Army Operations]. Cilt 2. Ankara 1993, p. 604; NASİR YÜCEER *Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Osmanlı Ordusu’nun Azerbaycan ve Dağıstan Harekâtı* [The Ottoman Army’s Azerbaijan and Dagestan Operations in the First World War]. Ankara 1996, p. 148. See also Chermoev’s letter to Tarkovskii, in: *SogSKiD* p. 168.

you do not know who you yourselves are. When you claim the North Caucasus, you do not remember the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the fact that the Turks were fighting against you. When the Turks have failed to do any good for their own lands, they cannot do any good for you. Have you not heard that English cannons are firing near the Dardanelles? Palestine and Syria have been completely occupied. Thus it is certain that within at most two weeks the Turks will withdraw completely from here. Then you will be alone and you will not have the power to do anything. So as your friend and as a compatriot who works for your wellbeing, I propose that you come and we talk. Let us discuss things that will be to your benefit and ours. After that it is your choice to do what you want. I request an answer to this letter of mine by 18 October 1918 [31 October 1918]. If I do not receive an answer, I will understand that what I wrote was not accepted and will move to retake Derbent. I know very well how many soldiers are in Derbent and what they are doing."<sup>104</sup>

It was an odd, almost surreal exchange of demands between two claimants to the North Caucasus. As his letter makes clear, Bicherakhov saw, or at least wanted to see, Russia's situation in 1918 as essentially the same as it was before 1917. He clung to the beliefs that the Caucasus was an essential part of a greater Russia and that he and his men were part of a greater, united and powerful Russian army. Yet the realities were that the Caucasus had effectively made its break with Russia, that his force was a patchwork of different units and varying loyalties, and that it was sapped by the same revolutionary hostility to military discipline that had already undermined and destroyed the Imperial Russian Army.<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, Bicherakhov saw more clearly than Chermoev the outcome of WWI, the impending Ottoman surrender, and the ultimate failure of the Ottoman expedition in the Caucasus.

Bicherakhov's plea was not without effect on Chermoev. He too believed that Bicherakhov really did not want to fight the mountaineers and was insisting only on the withdrawal of the Ottomans. But Chermoev felt the UAM had no choice. As he confessed to the mountaineer who straddled the two camps, Nukh Tarkovskii,

"Bicherakhov knows better than I that if we could organize internally, obtain technical means for the struggle against this Soviet power, then, of course, the government of the mountaineers would have had no reason to look for help from its friends and co-religionists the Turks, for whom the life of every soldier is dear in this world war. In this is the tragedy of our life – that without such help we cannot organize ourselves, for which above all we must cleanse our territory from the invading element."<sup>106</sup>

Seeking to avoid needless bloodshed and resolve the standoff with Bicherakhov peacefully, Chermoev promised that Russians who lay down their arms were free to stay in the North Caucasus or to leave as they wished without any harassment. He also obtained guarantees from Nuri and the Azerbaijani government that all Armenians, regardless of their past activities, would be allowed to travel unmolested through Azerbaijan to Erevan, the capital of the Republic of Armenia, by train under mountaineer escort. This gesture was consistent with the UAM's policy of intercommunal harmony, but it was remarkable given the context of the destruction of the Armenians and Assyrians of Anatolia and ongo-

<sup>104</sup> İZZET Büyük Harpte pp. 111–112.

<sup>105</sup> YÜCEER Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Osmanlı Ordusu'nun p. 148; BERKOK Büyük Harpte p. 77.

<sup>106</sup> Pis'mo predsedatelia soveta ministrov Gorskoi respubliki A. Chermoeva vremennomu diktatoru Dagestanskoi oblasti N. Tarkovskomu o politike Bicherakhova i turok, 25.10.1918, in: SogSKiD pp. 168–170.

ing strife between Azeri Turks and Armenians to the south.<sup>107</sup> Chermoev hoped that this act would prevent the spread of ethnic antagonisms into the north and even help prepare the ground for a future reconciliation in the south. Yet he steadfastly insisted on the liberation of mountaineer territory including Petrovsk. He warned Tarkovskii, a colonel from the Savage Division and UAM Central Committee member who broke from the UAM over the presence of the Ottomans, that if Bicherakhov failed to comply, he would expect Tarkovskii to end his stance of benevolent neutrality and act as a member of the UAM.<sup>108</sup>

After a night and day of desperate combat in the mud and bitter cold, Bicherakhov evacuated his men, and on 8 November the Ottoman-UAM force secured the city.<sup>109</sup> “The illusions of Peter the Great along with his name have been thrown back to Petrograd,” declared Yusuf İzzet Pasha.<sup>110</sup> But just as Ottomans and mountaineers entered the city they discovered that the war, in fact, had already ended. Indeed the armistice signed two weeks earlier required the Ottomans’ immediate and complete departure from the Caucasus. The Ottomans had helped restore the UAM government, but its control over much of Dagestan, let alone the territories beyond, remained fragile. On 12 November UAM representatives from Ingushetia, Chechnia, and Dagestan held a congress to decide their future course of action. They voted to reaffirm the declaration of 11 May and continue the struggle for an independent North Caucasus.<sup>111</sup>

The withdrawal of Ottoman support, however, had left the republic effectively isolated. Worse, the UAM in 1919 found itself trapped in the Russian Civil War between the Bolsheviks and the army of General Anton Denikin, an uncompromising advocate of a single, united “Great Russia.” Both the Bolsheviks and Denikin were hostile to the UAM, and British favor for Denikin destroyed whatever chance the mountaineers might have had of securing British aid. Bammate would lead a delegation to the Paris peace talks but would fail to attract Great Power interest in the small and remote region. The republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan did provide aid to their northern neighbor, but they themselves were embattled and possessed few resources to spare.<sup>112</sup>

Sensing that they had to choose one side or the other in the larger conflagration, several key UAM officers decided to defect to their former comrades-in-arms under Denikin.<sup>113</sup> Deprived of military personnel, revenue, and outside support, the UAM government had no choice but to acquiesce to Denikin’s ultimatum to disband its parliament in 1919. The leadership left for Tiflis, leaving only scattered armed groups to fight separately.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>107</sup> For more detail, see FIRUZ KAZEMZADEH *The struggle for Transcaucasia (1917–1921)*. New York 1951, pp. 68–75, 85, 129–132, 142–144; RICHARD G. HOVANNISIAN *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918*. Berkeley 1967, pp. 143–149, 227; RONALD G. SUNY *The Baku Commune 1917–1918*. Princeton, NJ 1972, pp. 214–233.

<sup>108</sup> TAKHO-GODI *Revoliutsiia i kontr-revoliutsiia* pp. 79–81; SogSKiD pp. 168–170.

<sup>109</sup> İZZET Büyük Harpte pp. 217–223.

<sup>110</sup> Arkhiv Instituta istorii, arkhologii i étnografii Dagestanskogo nauchnogo tsentra Rossiiskoi akademii nauk f. 2, op. 1. d. 62, l. 1: Telefonogramma Iusuf-Izzet Pashi, (8.11.1918)

<sup>111</sup> WASSAN-GIRAY CABAĞI *Kafkas-Rus Çatışması [The Caucasian-Russian Clash]*. Istanbul 1967, p. 90; V. D. DZIDZOEV *Ot soiuza ob’edinennogo gortsev severnogo Kavkaza do Gorskoi ASSR (1917–1924)*. Vladikavkaz 2003, pp. 176–177.

<sup>112</sup> M. RESULTADE *Dağıstan Cumhuriyeti*, in: *Türk Yılı [Turkish Yearbook]*. Ed. by Yusuf Akçura. Istanbul 1928, pp. 542–552, here p. 547; RGVIA f. 39247, op. 1, d. 1, l. 182: *Kratkaia ob’iasnitel’naia zapiska* (25.4.1921).

<sup>113</sup> WASSAN-GIRAY JABAĞI *[Cabağı] Revolution and Civil War in the North Caucasus*, in: *Central Asian Survey* 10 (1991) pp. 128–129.

<sup>114</sup> *Gorskaia kontrrevoliutsiia* p. 127 (cf. fn. 43).

Nadzhmuddin and Uzun Khadzhi chose to fight both Denikin and the Bolsheviks simultaneously. Their rival, Shaykh Ali Akushinskii, led another wing of the ulema to join the Bolsheviks against Denikin. Following the defeat of Denikin, the Bolsheviks invaded and effectively crushed organized resistance by March 1921. Uzun Khadzhi died a natural death in 1920; Nadzhmuddin continued fighting the Bolsheviks until finally they tracked down and executed him in 1925.<sup>115</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The UAM's failure was not unusual. Most of the Russian empire, after all, fell to Bolshevik rule. The example of Aslanbek Sheripov suggests one common reason why. Sheripov, as discussed earlier, had reminded his fellow mountaineers of the danger of European capital and the fate of the American Indians. By April of 1918 he had concluded that separation was pointless: "the only salvation of the mountain peoples of the Northern Caucasus [...] lies in close unity with the Russian revolutionary common people."<sup>116</sup> The real threat facing the mountain peoples was of a global and socio-economic nature, not a national territorial one. He quit the UAM, and joined the Bolsheviks.

While the importance of the UAM should not be exaggerated – the Mountain Republic was short-lived and exerted little control over the territory it claimed – it did represent the leading force in the North Caucasus' brief span of independence and proved capable of bringing together the intelligentsia, army officers, and the ulema. The example of the UAM's Mountain Republic remained compelling enough that the Bolsheviks felt obliged to establish their own Mountainous Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic as a counter.<sup>117</sup> Even if the UAM did not succeed in fulfilling the aspirations of its members, it did succeed in articulating them.

The story of the UAM can tell us a few things. One is that the conventional wisdom that Russian imperial Rule in the North Caucasus was a failure is not wholly accurate.<sup>118</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century a native intelligentsia that simultaneously identified strongly as mountaineers and looked to Russia was emerging. Because most of the UAM leadership had been educated and trained professionally in Russia one might be tempted to dismiss their attitude toward Russia as a mere reflection of their personal circumstances. Yet it is worth noting that often it is precisely this class of highly educated imperial subjects who spearhead nationalist resistance to colonial rule.<sup>119</sup> For this reason Tsarist officials had purposively neglected higher education for Muslim Caucasians.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, British imperial administrators in Egypt drew on their experience in India and

<sup>115</sup> GAMMER *The Lone Wolf* pp. 135–136.

<sup>116</sup> KING *Sergei Kirov* pp. 295–296.

<sup>117</sup> DZIDZOEV *Ot soiuza ob"edinennogo gortsev severnogo Kavkaza do Gorskoi ASSR*, pp. 99–116.

<sup>118</sup> ROBERT SEELY *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000. A Deadly Embrace*. London 2001, p. 20.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, MIROSLAV HROCH *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*. Trans. by Ben Fowkes. New York 1985.

<sup>120</sup> FIROUZEH MOSTASHARI *On the Religious Frontier. Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus*. New York 2006, p. 129.

restricted higher education to a narrow circle of Egyptians precisely to stymie the growth of a nationalist-minded class.<sup>121</sup>

More broadly in the same vein, many scholars maintain that modernization undermined empires in the early twentieth century through the creation of new social identities. The emergence of these identities upset the status-quo, disrupted processes of assimilation, and gave rise to uncompromising “utopian” politics wherein exclusivist communal identities produced ethnic violence throughout Eurasia.<sup>122</sup> Yet in the case of the UAM the assertion of a new communal identity supported a politics of compromise and inclusion rather than one of opposition and conflict. Throughout its existence, the UAM consistently pursued cooperation and close ties with the mountaineers’ neighbors. Integration with broader polities, not separation from them, was their preferred policy. At the Paris Peace Conference, Haidar Bammate expressed a vision wherein the Mountain Republic with its “diversity of languages and religions” would become “a small copy of the League of Nations for the peoples of the East and a kind of Intercontinental Switzerland which will be an element of peace and accord between Europe and Asia.”<sup>123</sup> The efforts of the UAM were true to that vision.

The tendency to portray the mountaineers of the North Caucasus as mere reagents to Russian power has obscured rather than illuminated North Caucasian-Russian relations.<sup>124</sup> For the UAM the affirmation of a mountaineer identity did not require the negation of a Russian one. Similarly, the study of ethnicity in empire should not reflexively be built on the assumption of polarized conflict. This is not to dismiss the importance of the so-called “national question.” It is, however, to suggest that the aspirations of the Russian empire’s non-Russians, including Muslims, cannot be understood solely through a prism that *a priori* assumes clashing national identities but must be examined from the perspectives and aspirations of the actors’ themselves.

### Summary

This article examines the political mobilization of the autochthonous mountain peoples of the North Caucasus in 1917–1918. These years provided a brief and confused yet real moment of freedom wherein the mountaineers were able to assert their own positive political ambitions. The most important mountaineer political force in this period was the Union of Allied Mountaineers (UAM), a broadly based pan-mountaineer movement led by a nascent native intelligentsia. This article contends that the conventional portrayal of the mountaineers in these years as intractable rebels and Islamists is misleading. It argues that a cogent sense of self-interest led them consistently to pursue cooperative policies, policies sharply at odds with the existing historiography’s emphases on violent conflict and resistance as the essential themes of not only North Caucasian politics but of the politics of ethno-national movements in this period in general. To support this contention, the article explores the record of the UAM and its members in three areas: relations with Russia and Russians, the impact of Islam upon mountaineer politics, and relations with outside powers.

<sup>121</sup> ROGER OWEN Lord Cromer. *Victorian Imperialist, Edwardian Proconsul*. New York 2004, pp. 314–316; DONALD M. REID *Turn-of-the-Century Egyptian School Days*, in: *Comparative Education Review* 27 (1983) pp. 374–393, here p. 376; MOUSTAFA KAMEL PACHA *Egyptiens et Anglais*. Paris 1906, p. 28.

<sup>122</sup> AVIEL ROSHWALD *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires*. Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923. New York 2001, p. 218; KAPPELER *The Russian Empire* p. 297; NIALL FERGUSON *War of the World. History’s Age of Hatred*. London 2006, p. XLI.

<sup>123</sup> DAVID MILLER *My Diary at the Conference of Paris*. Vol. 17. New York 1924, p. 491.

<sup>124</sup> For a rare study that locates a “middle ground” see THOMAS BARRETT *Lines of Uncertainty*. *Frontiers of the North Caucasus*, in: *Slavic Review* 54 (1995) pp. 578–601.