

The Nature of Anti-Soviet Armed Resistance, 1942–44

The North Caucasus, the Kalmyk
Autonomous Republic, and Crimea

ALEXANDER STATIEV

In 1943–44, the Soviet government deported several ethnic groups, justifying this act primarily by these nationalities' collaboration with the Germans. In 1989, the Supreme Council of the USSR condemned the deportations as "illegal and criminal,"¹ but the assumption that an exceptionally large proportion of these peoples collaborated with the invaders and that this was the major cause for their deportation continues to linger in Russian public opinion. The resistance and collaboration of the North Caucasian ethnic groups, Kalmyks, and Crimean Tatars has attracted little attention among historians. The most important publications of the Cold War era regarding these groups were those by Aleksandr Nekrich and Joachim Hoffmann.² Nekrich produced a brief overview based on solid research in published primary and secondary sources, both sanitized by Soviet censors; Hoffmann presented a case study of Kalmyk collaboration using, sometimes uncritically, German primary and secondary sources. Post-Cold War scholars prefer to concentrate on the deportations but usually ignore the nature of the conflict between stigmatized ethnic groups and the authorities. Russian historians at most touch on this dynamic. Some accept the official reports about collaboration and insurgencies in these regions at face value,³ others emphasize

¹ Document no. 63 in "Obiazat' NKVD SSSR ... vyselit' grekov": *O deportatsii grekov v 1930–1950 gody*, ed. N. F. Bugai and A. N. Kotsonis (Moscow: INSAN, 1999), 133.

² A. M. Nekrich, *Nakazannye narody* (New York: Khronika, 1978); and Joachim Hoffmann, *Deutsche und Kalmyken, 1942 bis 1945* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1974).

³ A. E. Alekseenkov, "Vnutrennie voiska v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine" (Doctor of Sciences diss., St. Petersburg Law Institute of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1995); V. P. Sidorenko, "Deiatel'nost' voisk NKVD na Severnom Kavkaze (1941–1944)" (Candidate of Sciences diss., St. Petersburg, 1993); and M. I. Semiriaga, *Kollaboratsionizm: Priroda, tipologiia i proiavleniia v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000).

Soviet heavy-handedness,⁴ but both parties offer little analysis of resistance or collaboration. Most Western authors assume that these anti-government manifestations stemmed from Soviet interwar policies but pay little attention to wartime circumstances that stirred up tensions between the state and local people and in some cases were their major cause. Historians writing on this conflict rely mainly on secondary sources based on anecdotal evidence,⁵ and some promote unsubstantiated assumptions that reveal an ideological bias.⁶ Those who use primary sources also focus on ethnic cleansing rather than resistance or collaboration: for example, Nikolai Bugai, the major Russian scholar of Soviet ethnic policy; and J. Otto Pohl, author of the only major Western, post-Cold War study of the Soviet deportations.⁷ Bugai has published many important document collections, but references to resistance in his scholarly work are mainly descriptive. Pohl relies solely on published documents and offers a synthesis of Russian and Western writings. As a whole, however, the historiography on this conflict remains scarce.

This article, based on archival sources, offers a comparative analysis of the anti-Soviet resistance and collaboration in the North Caucasus, the

⁴ I. V. Alferova, "Gosudarstvennaia politika v otnoshenii deportirovannykh narodov (30–50-e gody)" (Candidate of Sciences diss., Moscow State University, 1997); Gennadii Marchenko, "Deportatsiia," *Don*, no. 4 (1998): 212–23; Adam S. Khunagov, "Deportatsiia narodov s territorii Krasnodarskogo Kraia i Stavropol'ia" (Candidate of Sciences diss.: Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences, 1998); S. V. Ianush, "Bankrotstvo nemetsko-fashistskoi strategii na Kavkaze" (Candidate of Sciences diss., Stavropol', 1998); Movsur Ibragimov, "Vlast' i obshchestvo v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny" (Candidate of Sciences diss., Moscow State Pedagogical University, 1999); and D. V. Shabaev, *Pravda o vyselenii balkartsev* (Nal'chik: El'brus, 1994).

⁵ William Flemming, "The Deportation of the Chechen and Ingush Peoples: A Critical Examination," in *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, ed. Ben Fowkes (London: Macmillan Press, 1998); Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000* (London: Frank Cass, 2001); Curtis Richardson, "Stalinist Terror and the Kalmyks' National Revival: A Cultural and Historical Perspective," *Journal of Genocide Research* 4, 3 (2002): 441–51; Zaindi Shakhbiev, *Sud'ba checheno-ingushskogo naroda* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1996); and Aleksandr Iakovlev, *Po moshcham i elei* (Moscow: Evraziia, 1995). Norman Naimark used primary sources on the conflict in Crimea but relied on secondary ones on the Chechen and Ingush resistance. This explains the contrast in the quality of the analysis in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 94–102.

⁶ Abdurahman Avtorkhanov, "The Chechens and Ingush during the Soviet Period and Its Antecedents," in *The North Caucasus Barrier*, ed. Marie Bennigsen Broxup (London: Hurst and Co., 1992); John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and K. I. Chomaev, *Nakazannyi narod* (Cherkessk: PUL, 1993).

⁷ N. F. Bugai, ed., *Deportatsiia narodov Kryma* (Moscow: INSAN, 2002); Bugai and A. M. Gonov, *Kavkaz: Narody v eshelonakh* (Moscow: INSAN, 1998); and J. Otto Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR, 1937–1949* (London: Greenwood, 1999).

Kalmyk autonomous republic, and Crimea in 1942–44. Ehren Park and David Brandenberger have demonstrated that “even the most resourceful researchers [of Chechen resistance] have been forced to base their work on surprisingly meager and problematic sources.”⁸ This conclusion is also valid regarding the sources on other insurgencies in the Caucasus and Kalmykia: in the former case, because most documents remain classified; in the latter, because resistance was insignificant. The conflict between the authorities and the Crimean Tatars is better reflected in documents available in Russian archives. Historians are bound to rely mainly on reports of the Soviet police and regional leaders in all three cases, however, because the insurgents had at most embryonic political organizations that left virtually no records.⁹ The most reliable among these sources are those intended for internal use only, but even such documents should be treated with caution. It is hard to say which are more credible: the reports by party leaders or secret police officials. The secret police often distinguished politically motivated resistance from plain banditry, while party bureaucrats used “banditry” to refer to any armed action against the authorities, individuals, or state property. The secret police tended, however, to exaggerate the scale of mass disturbances and often misrepresented their nature, causes, and social basis. Depending on political circumstances, it could call identical incidents either “insurgencies” or “riots” and inflate the number of participants, so as to explain its failure to put a stop to resistance immediately. Ideological dogmas imposed by the Party on the secret police prevented it from analyzing the insurgencies’ nature. The *a priori* assumption was that the uprisings were instigated by prosperous peasants, clerics, or the Abwehr. Soviet sources could also attribute slaughter of civilians by the security forces in frontline regions to the Germans. Nevertheless, the disturbances these reports mention did occur. The secret police could not lie about its own losses or the number of civilians it had arrested or killed during counterinsurgency operations, because the latter were citizens registered by the administration; it could only present them as guerrillas, which it did. Despite all their flaws, Soviet primary sources reflect the events much better than Cold War–era historiography based on speculation.¹⁰

⁸ Ehren Park and David Brandenberger, “Imagined Community? Rethinking the Nationalist Origins of the Contemporary Chechen Crisis,” *Kritika* 5, 3 (2004): 543–60, here 544. These authors produced an excellent analysis of the sources on Chechen resistance.

⁹ The police files on Soviet pacification of the western borderlands in 1944–50, where insurgents established strong political organizations, contain many documents produced by these bodies and captured by the security forces. There are virtually no such documents in the declassified files on counterinsurgency in the North Caucasus, Kalmykia, and Crimea.

¹⁰ I am less skeptical about Soviet police records than Ehren Park and David Brandenberger. These authors correctly observe that “these reports are often little more than an anecdotal assemblage of rumors, crises, and incidents judged to deviate from official explanations. As such, they fail to supply the context necessary to determine how normative or representative

The major goal of this article is to contrast the causes and nature of anti-Soviet resistance and collaboration in the North Caucasus, Kalmykia, and Crimea and to argue against generalizations that have been common in previous study of these topics. First, I investigate the relationship between the authorities and local populations in the interwar period. Second, I analyze the nature of the resistance to Soviet power: its social foundation, its goals, and the extent of support it enjoyed among civilians. Finally, I discuss the government's motives for initiating ethnic deportations in 1943–44. The roots, types, and intensity of anti-Soviet demonstrations varied greatly among the three regions and within each of them. In some cases, anti-Soviet actions grew out of conflicts of the interwar period; in others, they were a response to wartime activities by local authorities that the government condemned as grave errors; and in yet others, they came about because some members of the stigmatized ethnic groups were impressed by the contrast between the Soviet interwar and German occupation policies. The government's claim that these ethnic groups were less loyal than others fluctuated on a case-by-case basis from valid to groundless, which suggests that the actual motives for the deportations were not those that were officially proclaimed.

The North Caucasus

The North Caucasus was the only region in the European part of the Soviet Union that experienced several large armed rebellions in the interwar period. During the Civil War (1918–21), the Bolsheviks enjoyed support among some North Caucasian ethnic groups not because the latter accepted communist ideals but because of their shared hostility toward the Whites and in particular the Cossacks, who had expelled the local population in the 19th century. The "Decree on the Socialization of Land" adopted by the Second Congress of the Terek Region in March 1918 ordered the redistribution of the land in favor of the mountaineers, who also hoped that the Bolsheviks would elevate their social status and give them a free hand at least in local decision-making. Torko Khadzhi Gardanov, an Ingush mullah, expressed the general sentiment at the Third Congress of the Terek Region: "We mountaineers see that the tsar and the iron fist were replaced by [another] Russia coming as a liberator who has cut the chains of slavery and given the mountaineers an opportunity to gain their rights."¹¹ Chechen, Ingush, and Balkar tribes allied with the Bolsheviks against Denikin in 1919–20. The Bolsheviks deported thousands of Terek Cossacks in 1920, passing their lands "to the

the events under discussion actually were" (Park and Brandenberger, "Imagined Community," 554). This observation would be true, however, of police reports in any state in social crisis.

¹¹ Makhach Magomedov, "O nekotorykh osobennostiakh Oktiaabr'skoi revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voiny na Severnom Kavkaze," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 6 (1997): 85, 86.

poorest landless population—first of all, mountaineer Chechens, who have always supported Soviet authority.”¹²

The honeymoon between the Bolsheviks and the North Caucasian ethnic groups was short, however. The endless requisitions ordered under War Communism caused a major uprising in Dagestan and Chechnya in the fall of 1920, which was suppressed by the Red Army and loyal mountaineers.¹³ The introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921–28) and the promotion of ethnic cultures by the Bolshevik government in the 1920s temporarily relaxed the tensions, creating unprecedented opportunities for upward social mobility of the local people. Between 1920 and 1924, the North Caucasian minorities received administrative autonomy. Much of the bureaucracy on which the Soviet regime rested in these regions was drawn from the local ethnic groups. Strategic policymaking still originated in the center, however, and the local authorities had to enforce the decisions made by Moscow, although they often moderated their extremes. Tensions between the government and a large part of the local population soon began to mount again over the incompatibility of local traditions and Soviet policies. Such conflict was most severe in Dagestan and, especially, Chechnya, where armed uprisings occurred in 1925, 1929–30, 1932, and again in January 1941.¹⁴ Smaller riots erupted between major rebellions. These revolts were provoked variously by the confiscation of illegal weapons from the population, by collectivization, by attempts to introduce pig-farming among the Muslims, by conscription after the introduction of universal military service, by the effort of the authorities to replace *adat* and *shariat* (customary and Islamic law) with the Soviet legal system, and even by the prohibition of vendetta among the local clans.¹⁵ Most of the North Caucasian population was deeply religious, and government-inspired atheist campaigns contributed to discontent throughout

¹² Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, 86; Fowkes, “Introduction,” in *Russia and Chechnya*, 6; and Shabaev, *Pravda o vyselenii balkartsev*, 20.

¹³ Magomedov, “O nekotorykh osobennostiakh,” 88, 89; and Marie Bennigsen Broxup, “The Last Ghazawat: The 1920–1921 Uprising,” in *The North Caucasus Barrier*, ed. Broxup, 116–31.

¹⁴ Leont’ev, head of the NKVD Struggle against Banditry Department [GUBB], to Kruglov, “Doklad o rezul’tatakh bor’by s banditizmom” (30 August 1944), Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation, hereafter GARF) f. 9478, op. 1, d. 63, l. 8, 9, 12. Apparently, the incident of January 1941 was merely a large riot.

¹⁵ Shamberg to the Central Committee (TsK VKP[b]) (31 October 1940), Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, hereafter RGASPI) f. 17, op. 122, d. 2, ll. 40, 41; and Marchenko, “Deportatsiia,” 216. Chechen society consisted of large kin groups, some with private and some with communal property. Clan membership presumed common interests and mutual assistance. In 1926–28 the Chechens were divided into 300 clans. Many of them were engaged in vendettas declared by a whole village or a cluster of villages on a rival clan. See *Bol’shaia sovetkaia entsiklopediia*,

the region. In Ingushetia, for example, the League of the Godless attacked mullahs, and in the Kabardin-Balkar autonomous republic 59 percent of the mosques were closed by 1936.¹⁶

As elsewhere, collectivization was the major source of tensions in the North Caucasian countryside. It progressed slowly, particularly in the remote mountain regions, which the authorities could not control well. Party officials observed that in these areas "private-property instincts hostile to collective farming, attempts to undermine labor discipline in the collective farms, wrong attitudes toward socialist property, and obvious resentment of Soviet policy are fairly common."¹⁷ The North Caucasus had a centuries-old culture of banditry and rebellion, which made it easier for young men to opt for armed resistance when the government's political or economic campaigns intensified. In 1932, 3,000 persons participated in an uprising provoked by collectivization in the Nozhai-Iurt District of the Chechen Autonomous Region. The police suppressed it, killing 333 insurgents and wounding 150.¹⁸ The army and police easily crushed rebellions, but the passive resistance to collectivization continued. In areas with a clan social system, like Chechnya or the Karachai Autonomous Region, peasants ordered to organize collective farms simply attached this label to their clan, abstaining from further changes. In other regions, peasants regarded the part of their property ceded during collectivization as lost in a natural disaster. They ignored the collective farms and worked on their individual plots, far larger than the law prescribed, breeding their own herds of livestock. Although 99.8 percent of Chechen peasants were formally registered in collective farms, in the Itum-Kale district in 1939, 91.0 percent of the cattle and 94.4 percent of the arable land remained farmers' private property, and 30.9 percent of the farmers had not worked a single day for the collective farm in the previous year. The situation was similar in other mountain regions.¹⁹ Lower-ranking

65 vols. (Moscow: BSE, 1949–58), vol. 51, 311, 312; and V. A. Tishkov, ed., *Narody Rossii* (Moscow: Bol'shaia Rossiiskaia entsiklopediia, 1994), 402.

¹⁶ Ibragimov, "Vlast' i obshchestvo," 385; and Marchenko, "Deportatsiia," 216.

¹⁷ Storozhev to Malenkov, "O polozenii v Kabardinskoi ASSR (no date)," RGASPI f. 17, op. 88, d. 614, l. 14.

¹⁸ Ibragimov, "Vlast' i obshchestvo," 122; and A. M. Gonov, "Problemy deportatsii i reabilitatsii narodov Severnogo Kavkaza, 20–90-e gody XX veka" (Candidate of Sciences diss., Kabardin-Balkar State University, Nal'chik, 1997), 144.

¹⁹ Akhmatov, instructor of the Organizer-Instruction Section of the TsK VKP(b), "Dokladnaia zapiska o proverke raboty po prizyvu v Krasnuiu Armiiu v ChI ASSR" (1940), RGASPI f. 17, op. 122, d. 2, ll. 52, 53; Kuznetsov, deputy chief of the Main Political Directorate of the Red Army to the TsK VKP(b), "O rezul'tatakh rassledovaniia faktov massovogo ukloneniia prizyvnikov ChI ASSR ot sluzhby v Krasnoi Armii" (7 October 1940), RGASPI f. 17, op. 122, d. 2, ll. 38, 39; and Nekrich, *Nakazannye narody*, 49.

officials believed collectivization was wrong and turned a blind eye to these violations. In May 1939, however, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) (VKP[b]) issued a directive, "Measures against the Squandering of Public Lands," enforcing the Collective Farm Charter. In the spring of 1940, the authorities drastically cut individual property in the North Caucasus, sometimes eliminating—in violation of the law—entire individual plots.²⁰ These actions sparked armed resistance in the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic that continued until the German invasion. The Chechen clan social system made it hard for the government to limit repressions to those marked as enemies. Customary law required a host to shelter any guest and defend him regardless of personal sentiments and risk. This and the tradition of vendetta were the prime contributors to Soviet difficulties in targeting repression. Arresting a few people could make dozens of villages explode. Chechens and Ingush were the least-educated nationalities in the North Caucasus: in 1939, only 42.8 percent and 39.2 percent, respectively, were literate, as compared to 62.0 percent of Karachais, 63.6 percent of Balkars, 63.9 percent of Kabardins, 68.5 percent of Adygei and Cherkesses, and 70.4 percent of Ossetians.²¹ Their low level of education impeded the spread of Soviet propaganda and values, facilitated the preservation of traditional societies, and limited upward social mobility, thus causing additional social strains. A small-scale, fragmented insurgency kept some regions of the Chechen-Ingush republic in permanent turmoil. In 1937–40, 1,535 alleged guerrillas and bandits were killed and arrested there by the police.²²

Some historians assume that Soviet policy, allegedly driven by Great Russian chauvinism, was exceptionally harsh toward ethnic minorities in the interwar period.²³ In fact, in the 1920s the ethnic minorities enjoyed certain privileges in comparison with Russians who lived in their regions. Even the fight against "bourgeois nationalism" that started in the late 1920s and the revision of the "nativization" (*korenizatsiia*) policy that the

²⁰ Akhmatov, "Dokladnaia zapiska," ll. 49, 50; and Nekrich, *Nakazannye narody*, 52.

²¹ Iu. A. Poliakov et al., eds., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 83.

²² Ibragimov, "Vlast' i obshchestvo," 296.

²³ John B. Dunlop, for instance, maintains that the People's Commissariat of Nationalities carried out a chauvinistic policy starting in 1920; he finds evidence of chauvinism in the replacement of the unmanageable Mountaineer autonomous republic with several smaller autonomous regions in 1921–24, the extension of their territories by attaching areas populated by Russians and other ethnic minorities, and the transfer of their orthography from Arabic to the Latin alphabet in 1928–29 (Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 40–47). These claims are hard to defend.

government began after 1932 affected mainly the educated ethnic elites. Peasants constituted the overwhelming majority of the North Caucasian population, and they were much more concerned about agrarian issues than about the move from Arabic to Latin and then to Cyrillic orthography. Collectivization was equally repugnant to Slavic and to North Caucasian peasants, but nowhere in the Slavic areas could peasants keep so much individual property or ignore the collective farms as did their counterparts in the North Caucasus. In most regions of the North Caucasus conflicts between the authorities and the local population were barely discernible against the general Soviet background in the interwar period. To be sure, tensions among the local ethnic groups—and between them and the Russians, inherited from imperial times—continued. In some areas, however, traditions clashed with government intervention more sharply than in the Slavic lands, and the uniform Soviet policy was perceived as more oppressive there than in the Slavic regions. Government directives that might cause only grumbling in Russia could spark rebellions in the North Caucasus, which the state suppressed as brutally as it would elsewhere.

By 1941, weak, fragmented armed resistance continued to smoulder only in Chechnya and Dagestan.²⁴ The tensions in the North Caucasus received a new impetus with the beginning of the German invasion. Because of the strained relations between the Soviet administration and large segments of the local population, fewer North Caucasians rallied around the Soviet government during World War II than did people in other regions within the pre-1939 borders. Conscription to the Red Army and the wartime labor draft provoked an uprising in the mountain districts of Chechnya in October–November 1941. Police, with the use of air force among other means, suppressed about 800 rebels, but a small-scale insurgency continued.²⁵ When the authorities attempted to conscript Chechens into the army in the spring of 1942, the police reported that “all the male population fled to the mountains in most mountaineer villages.” Out of 14,000 Chechens liable for conscription, only 4,395 were enlisted, and of those 2,365 deserted.²⁶ According to

²⁴ Leont'ev, “Doklad,” I. 9.

²⁵ Ibid., I. 16.

²⁶ Ibid., II. 36, 37. Several historians explain the high desertion rate by assuming that “the Soviet government did not permit the creation of such [Chechen and Ingush] native formations.... This caused much suffering to mountaineers, since many of them could not speak Russian, and because their commanding officers forced them to eat pork” (Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 60). See also Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict*, 81; and Gall and de Waal, *Chechnya*, 62. This argument is weak. The government did raise the native 114th Chechen and Ingush Cavalry Division on 25 November 1941. See Document no. 34 in M. L. Kichikov, B. S. Sandzhiev, and Iu. O. Oglaev, eds., *Kalmykiia v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945* (Elista: Kalmytskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1966), 69. Furthermore, many other Muslims could not speak Russian either and had no choice but to eat pork. Orthodox

Bugai, the government, despite all its efforts, could conscript only 17,500 Chechens and Ingush during the war, but many of them deserted. At one point, the number of registered deserters and draft-evaders among the recruits from this republic reached 13,000 men.²⁷ Most of the draft-dodgers were probably Chechens, because the Ingush lived mostly in the plains, where the authorities could round up unwilling recruits more easily. Desertions in the other North Caucasian regions were not as great, but they were still significant: out of 25,000 Kabardins drafted into the Red Army from the Kabardin-Balkar republic, 5,506 fled their units.²⁸ Of course, thousands of soldiers evaded military service in other regions, too, and most of them were ethnic Russians. In the North Caucasus, however, desertion was proportionally greater: 62,751 men deserted or escaped the draft from June 1941 to June 1944, as opposed to 128,527 men in Ukraine, 4,406 in Belorussia, and 149,849 in Central Asia, each with a population many times larger.²⁹ General conclusions about the loyalty of the North Caucasian peoples cannot be drawn from these data, not only because the draft-evasion statistics also include Slavs living in this region, but also because some of the local minorities contributed to the war effort as much as "average" Soviet nationalities. The government drafted about 16 percent of Kabardins and 20 percent of Karachais, but only 4 percent of Chechens and Ingush, many of whom deserted. All the neighbors of the Chechen-Ingush republic lost a much greater percentage of their populations fighting the Axis than did the Chechens and Ingush: in terms of men per capita killed and missing in action, the ethnic groups of Dagestan lost 2.8 times as many, Kabardins and Balkars 3.6 times, Ossetians 6.0 times, and Georgians 7.7 times.³⁰ The People's Commissariat of

Christians suffered no less from being fed meat and dairy products when they were supposed to be fasting, but their desertion rate was much lower. Dunlop also argues that Chechens "served with distinction" in the Red Army, pointing to the fact that they earned 44 decorations by October 1942 (Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 61). In fact, this was a modest achievement for a nationality of 400,000.

²⁷ Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, 136, 137. The source does not separate deserters from draft evaders.

²⁸ N. Mazin, secretary of the Kabardin Provincial Party Committee, "Spravka o politicheskom polozenii v Kabardinskoi ASSR" (2 November 1944), RGASPI f. 17, op. 88, d. 614, l. 5.

²⁹ Leont'ev, "Doklad," l. 177.

³⁰ The 1939 census shows 368,446 Chechens and 83,798 Ingush living in the Chechen-Ingush Republic (407,968 and 92,120 in the Soviet Union); 152,327 Kabardins in the Kabardin-Balkar Republic (164,185 in the Soviet Union); and 354,818 Ossetians, 75,763 Karachais, 857,499 Dagestanis, 2,249,636 Georgians, and 42,685 Balkars in the Soviet Union (Poliakov et al., eds., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda*, 57, 58, 66, 68). Kabardins and Balkars together lost 3,400 men in the war against Germany, Ossetians 10,700 men, Dagestanis 11,100 men, and Georgians 79,500 men, while Chechens and Ingush lost 2,300 men. See G. F. Krivosheev et al., *Rossia i SSSR v voynakh XX veka: Poteri vooruzhennykh sil*

Internal Affairs (NKVD) blamed the failure of conscription in the Chechen-Ingush republic not only on sabotage by the local people but also on unspecified "wrong actions of district conscription offices."³¹ Draft and casualty data, however, show that the contribution of the Chechens and Ingush to the war effort was less than average.

Those who escaped the draft gathered in the mountains and attacked Soviet administrators. The Soviet state reacted to revolts more harshly under martial law than it had before. A senior police officer from the NKVD's Struggle against Banditry Department found "excesses in security operations," showing that of 213 Chechens killed from January to June 1943, only 22 were registered as "bandits" by the police. The rest were probably their relatives, sympathizers, or other civilians who had the misfortune to live in the area where the guerrillas operated. From November 1941 to June 1943, the 141st NKVD Security Regiment deployed in Chechnya killed 973 and captured 1,167 "bandits" and arrested 1,413 "insurgents," apparently civilian rioters and hostages taken from families of the guerrillas. The regiment suffered 88 fatalities and 40 injuries. During one particular operation in three mountain districts of Chechnya in 1942, the regiment reported it had killed 200 guerrillas and arrested 187, while suffering 1 fatality and 1 injury.³² This disparity of casualties suggests that the security forces either grossly exaggerated the scale of the engagements and insurgency or slaughtered civilians.

Reports of the security troops operating in the Cherek Valley, Balkaria, reveal how they conducted the "pacification." The commanders of the 37th Army, which was thinly spread from Stavropol' krai to the Chechen-Ingush republic, were concerned that its rear was destabilized by resistance in some regions and banditry in others. After several Soviet soldiers were killed by deserters, the Headquarters of the 37th Army ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Shikin, the commander of the 11th NKVD Security Division, "to raze the village of Sredniaia Balkariia to the ground." Shikin sent a battalion commanded by Captain Fedor Nakin, encouraging him "to be merciless even to those who indirectly assist" the insurgency. Nakin reported on his actions: "From 27 November 1942 to 30 November 1942, five villages were destroyed.... Up to 1,500 persons were killed. Relying on information received

(Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2001), 238. According to I. M. Shamanov, 15,600 Karachais were drafted into the Red Army. See Shamanov et al., eds., *Karachaevtsy: Vyselenie i vozvrashchenie* (Cherkessk: PUL, 1993), 9.

³¹ Leont'ev, "Doklad," l. 15.

³² Khalukhaev, commander of the 141st Rifle Regiment of the NKVD Security Troops, "Doklad o rezul'tatakh deiatel'nosti 141 strelkovogo polka na territorii ChI ASSR" (26 March 1943), Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv (Russian State Military Archive, hereafter RGVA) f. 38650, op. 1, d. 629, ll. 278–80; and N. F. Bugai, *L. Beriia—I. Stalinu: Soglasno vashemu ukazaniu* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1995), 98.

from the hostages, [the battalion] killed 90 bandits and 400 males able to carry guns; the rest were women and children.... I take hostages, fight mercilessly, exterminate the population, and burn houses." During the action, 3 of Nakin's men were killed and 14 were wounded, which clearly shows that almost all the villagers they killed must have been civilians. Shikin wrote in response: "I approve of your actions, and the soldiers have performed outstandingly. If you cleanse Sredniaia Balkariia of the bastards who betrayed the Motherland instead of defending it and became bandits, you will complete a mission of great importance."³³ Senior Lieutenant Seskov, sent later to investigate the action, reported, "Nakin's unit killed many innocent civilians who had no contact with the bandits." He wrote that in the village of Sautu "in some houses, we found up to 60 corpses each, as the terrified local residents must have stampeded to a single house, and the hand grenades thrown through the windows killed everyone." In the village of Verkhniaia Balkariia, where 310 persons were killed, 20.3 percent of the victims were children from one to five years old and another 15.5 percent from six to ten years old.³⁴ Such a disproportionate "retaliation" for the actions of several deserters drove hundreds of Balkars to fight the authorities and collaborate with the Germans, who supplied them with weapons. Indiscriminate repression of this sort probably happened in other regions, too, and was a major cause of insurgencies.³⁵ Another cause was the contrast between the Soviet interwar and German occupation policies.

³³ Nakin met resistance in several villages. He exaggerated the number of those killed by his unit, apparently, in an attempt to emphasize his efficiency. In reports filed by the civilian authorities the total killed varies from 373 to 723 (K. G. Azamatov et al., *Cherekskaia tragediia* [Nal'chik: El'brus, 1994], 55, 150, 155–58, 179–81). The Soviet atrocities in Balkaria are reflected in this valuable collection of documents kept in the archives of the Kabardin-Balkar Republic. Robert Seely claims that the NKVD committed this massacre during its retreat from Nal'chik, which he calls "a town in Ossetia" (*Russo-Chechen Conflict*, 81). In fact, the Red Army left Nal'chik, the capital of the Kabardin-Balkar republic, in October 1942, a month before this "action."

³⁴ In the summer of 1943, the government of the Kabardin-Balkar republic ordered its officials to attribute these atrocities to the Germans and the anti-Soviet guerrillas (Azamatov et al., *Cherekskaia tragediia*, 55, 56, 163, 165–74, 180, 181, 188, 189). Ever afterward, Soviet historians obediently wrote that the massacre in the Cherek Valley was committed by the Germans. David Shabaev has published a book since the fall of communism in which he says no word about the Soviet atrocities in Balkaria, attributing them squarely to the Germans (Shabaev, *Pravda o vyselenii balkartsev*, 39, 40).

³⁵ Most files on the counterinsurgency operations in the North Caucasus in 1941–44 kept in the Russian archives remain classified, while the documents on similar actions in other regions have been opened to the public, apparently because the atrocities committed in the North Caucasus were extraordinary or because this issue is particularly sensitive in the current political situation. Many authors write about atrocities committed by NKVD security troops in Chechnya during the deportation of 1944, and several persons claim to have witnessed them. See Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 65; Norman Naimark, "Ethnic Cleansing between

What were the relations between the Caucasian rebels and the German invaders? The Abwehr attempted to destabilize the rear of the North Caucasian Front by launching "Operation Shamil": it called the local ethnic groups to revolt and gave insurgents some organizational support. In the Karachai autonomous region the Germans dropped 200 parachutists in 1943 alone and in the Kabardin-Balkar autonomous republic they dropped 92, mainly Abwehr agents of native background but also a few German officers who were supposed to coordinate armed resistance in the Caucasus.³⁶ Soviet police officers claimed that the uprising in the Chechen mountains in August 1942 was instigated by parachutists, 14 of whom were captured, but it is hard to establish how much parachutists actually contributed to the revolt.³⁷ The insurgents had more respect for local leaders with a long record of anti-Soviet resistance than for the German agents and pursued their own goals, different from those of the invaders. Nevertheless, the Germans found less resistance in the North Caucasus than in most Slavic regions within the 1939 borders, mainly because they moderated their occupation policy.

By 1942, some German officials and army commanders realized that they could secure the compliance of the Soviet population only if they postponed the imposition of the Nazi "new order." General Ewald von Kleist, commander of the First Panzer Army, ordered soldiers to "treat the population of the Caucasus as friends," open mosques, and pay for requisitions.³⁸ The national committees established by the Germans in the Caucasus had more authority in local economic matters than similar bodies in other territories. The Germans advanced their agrarian reform faster in the Caucasus Mountains than elsewhere. Reichsminister Alfred Rosenberg believed that since collective farms were unproductive in the mountains, they could be dissolved for propaganda purposes without much harm to

War and Peace," in *Landscaping the Human Garden*, ed. Amir Weiner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 221; Gall and de Waal, *Chechnya*, 65–69; Iakovlev, *Po moshcham i elei*, 128; Timur Muzaev, *Chechenskaia respublika: Organy vlasti i politicheskie sily* (Moscow: Panorama, 1995), 155; Flemming, "The Deportation of the Chechen and Ingush Peoples," 74; and Shakhbiev, *Sud'ba checheno-ingushskogo naroda*, 256–63. At present, no primary sources on these incidents are available (Vasilii Sidorenko, "Dlia vyseleniia chechentsev i ingushei napraviv' chasti NKVD," *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, no. 3 [2000], 70, 71).

³⁶ "Spravka o likvidatsii vrazheshkikh parashiutistov" (1943), RGVA f. 38650, op. 1, d. 128, l. 10; and Leont'ev, "Doklad," l. 40. Of 92 parachutists dropped in the Kabardin-Balkar republic, 68 were Kabardins; of 302 parachutists dropped in Stavropol' krai, 200 were Karachais, while the rest were Russians, Kabardins, Balkars, Adygei, and others (Mazin, "Spravka," l. 5; and Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, 122). Most agents were probably recruited among prisoners of war.

³⁷ Leont'ev, "Doklad," l. 38; and Khalukhaev, "Doklad," l. 280.

³⁸ Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1981), 241.

the economy.³⁹ In the Caucasus, the Germans pursued a *divide et impera* policy, providing privileges to some ethnic groups at the expense of others. The local Russians received no benefits from the German authorities. Nikolai Mazin, the secretary of the Kabardin Provincial Party Committee, observed that “German commanders treated Kabardins and Russians unequally. They distributed cattle and other property of the collective farms and the government agencies among Kabardins.... The Germans rarely hurt Kabardins, not even Communists and leading functionaries.”⁴⁰ The Caucasian ethnic groups, unlike the Russians, were excluded from the labor draft.

Some North Caucasian farmers found the temporarily moderate German policy less oppressive than the Soviet one, and most saw no reason to take sides in the war. Mazin wrote a report on the sentiments of Kabardins:

Some Kabardins welcomed the German Army.... The Soviet authority [in some districts] disintegrated even before the arrival of the enemy.... Many Kabardins mobilized to the Red Army deserted.... Most of them have joined the [guerrilla] bands or remain in hiding.... More than 50 percent of the partisans [enlisted in the republic] crossed the front line, defected to the Germans, and then returned to their homes. For example, the entire partisan unit of the Nal’chik district defected to the Germans. Many partisans deserted their units, keeping their weapons, and joined the bands.... The Germans were living pretty comfortably among the Kabardins. Throughout the occupation, no assassinations of Germans by local people or sabotage of German policy were recorded.... The Germans employed most Communists ... [of the 72 percent who ignored the order to evacuate] on various jobs, and some of them actively collaborated with the Germans.... Kabardins plundered the property of the collective farms and the government agencies and distributed all cattle belonging to the collective farms.⁴¹

This report could be extended to other North Caucasian ethnic groups in the occupied regions. The Soviet partisans had weak support there; their actions were few and unimpressive, although the mountains were the perfect terrain for guerrilla warfare. By 1 October 1942, when the Germans occupied Krasnodar krai and Stavropol’ krai, the Kabardin-Balkar republic, and most of the North-Ossetian republic, only 13 partisan units with 816 men were operating in the North Caucasus.⁴² All major ethnic groups from the occupied

³⁹ Ibid., 240, 246–48, 351.

⁴⁰ Mazin, “Spravka,” l. 4.

⁴¹ Ibid. ll. 1, 2.

⁴² Ianush, “Bankrotstvo nemetsko-fashistskoi strategii na Kavkaze,” 157. Many more partisans existed only on paper.

regions were represented among the partisans, but no information about their exact ethnic composition exists. Active collaborators who volunteered for service in anti-partisan and self-defense units organized by the Germans outnumbered the partisans. In the Kabardin-Balkar autonomous republic alone the Germans enlisted 600 men. In the Karachai autonomous region the self-defense kept the few Soviet partisans who operated there away from the villages but rarely engaged in aggressive operations.⁴³ Chechen rebels had no opportunity to reveal their attitude toward the Germans because the Red Army stopped the Wehrmacht before it reached Chechnya. The story, familiar to most Russians, about the white horse with its saddle (or harness) embroidered in gold (or silver) that the Chechens (or Karachais) allegedly sent to Hitler as a welcome gift was invented by communist propaganda to justify these people's subsequent deportation. Even now, Russian nationalists remind Chechens and Karachais of their alleged gift, arguing that it demonstrates their inherently treasonous national character. Chechens and Karachais have always denied the allegation, pointing a finger at the Kabardins, who were not deported. Alexander Werth wrote that wartime rumors attributed the gift to a Kabardin prince. An archival document confirms that it was indeed some Kabardins who sent a horse of unspecified color to Hitler.⁴⁴

With time, the hostility toward the invaders grew among the North Caucasians, because the Germans gradually returned to the usual standards of their occupation policy, looting the villages, introducing labor conscription, and exterminating the Jews. This horrified local people, who had not previously encountered antisemitism.⁴⁵ The collaboration of the North Caucasian ethnic groups with the Germans was still less intense than that of the Russian Cossacks. It was not collaboration but independent anti-Soviet resistance that developed with the approach of the Germans and after their evacuation that distinguished the North Caucasus from the Slavic lands.

As the tables make clear, resistance greatly intensified throughout the North Caucasus with the approach of the Germans. More people revealed their hostility toward the Soviet regime in the areas under German occupation than in those under Soviet control, and these were subsequently rounded up when the Communists returned. Even so, the number of guerrilla and bandit

⁴³ Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, 123, 164. I define collaboration as armed actions of the Soviet population against the Soviet regime organized and coordinated by the occupation authorities.

⁴⁴ Shamanov et al., eds., *Karachaevtsy*, 13; Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941–1945* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1964), 581; and Mazin, "Spravka," l. 3. The writer Nikolai Gorbachev retold the tale in a novel published in 1989; see Gorbachev, "Smertnye," *Moskva*, no. 7 (1989): 41, 42. Had he looked at a map, he would have found out that the town of Achkhoy-Martan, in which he claims Chechens gave the white horse to the Germans, was about 40 kilometers to the east of the point of maximum German penetration into the Chechen-Ingush republic.

⁴⁵ Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, 248, 249.

Table 1. **Guerrilla and Bandit Casualties, North Caucasus, 1941–44**

Casualties	1941	1942	1943	1944	Total
Killed	49	656	1,028	233	1,966
Arrested	457	1,608	4,674	3,530	10,269
Amnestied	—	1,605	4,342	300	6,247
Total	506	3,869	10,044	4,063	18,482

Source: Zaboiev, deputy section head of NKVD GUBB, “Spravka o kolichestve likvidirovannykh bandgrupp” (20 October 1944). GARF f. 9478, op. 1, d. 137, ll. 1, 2, 5.

These data do not reflect the actual strength of the resistance: while they probably include some civilian victims of “collateral damage,” many members of the anti-Soviet resistance were not apprehended.

Table 2. **Guerrilla and Bandit Casualties by Region, 1941–44**

Casualties	Dagestan AR	Kabardin-Balkar AR	Chechen-Ingush AR	Krasnodar krai	Stavropol' krai, incl. Karachai
Killed	503	147	656	266	330
Arrested	1,474	1,988	2,760	1,355	1,411
Amnestied	1,472	1,213	1,107	1,031	1,363
Total	3,449	3,348	4,523	2,652	3,104

Source: Leont'ev, “Spravka o kolichestve likvidirovannykh bandgrupp” (January 1945), GARF f. 9478, op. 1, d. 493, l. 1.

The totals in the two tables differ because Table 1 also includes some other regions of the North Caucasus where resistance was weak in comparison with the five mentioned in Table 2. How many civilians killed and arrested during punitive operations were included in these statistics is unclear. The data on Balkaria obviously exclude them, because the slaughter of civilians there was officially attributed to the Germans. In Krasnodar krai and Stavropol' krai many casualties were probably Russian Cossack collaborators.

casualties in Dagestan and the Chechen-Ingush republic, which the Germans never reached, was greater than in the three regions that fell under occupation.⁴⁶ Many of the 4,523 persons whom the police killed, arrested, and amnestied in the Chechen-Ingush republic were probably bystanders caught in the crossfire and harmless deserters. Those whom the Soviet regime perceived as eliminated opponents, however, outnumbered the Chechens and Ingush who died fighting in the Red Army by more than two times. The resistance in Chechnya and Dagestan had deep roots and enjoyed solid support among farmers. It was weaker in the Kabardin-Balkar republic and the Karachai

⁴⁶ Insurgency emerged only in some regions of these republics.

autonomous region. There, its manpower at first consisted mainly of deserters, of collaborators who saw no way back, and of farmers impressed by the contrast between the temporary German policy and Soviet heavy-handedness. Sometimes collaborator agencies served as organizing centers of anti-Soviet resistance—as happened, for example, with the Karachai National Committee, which inspired an uprising of 400 farmers in the Uchkulan district in the wake of the German evacuation in January 1943.⁴⁷ Between 300 and 1,500 guerrillas operated in each of these regions after the German evacuation, many more than the Soviet partisans who had fought in the North Caucasus during the occupation.⁴⁸

The guerrillas exploited the significant potential for rebellion created by the conflict between Soviet policies and local values and easily instigated revolts of far larger segments of the population. They vanished in the mountains with the approach of the security troops, leaving civilians to face the consequences. Most insurgents had only short-term objectives: to escape conscription and to get rid of the major components of the Soviet system in the countryside—the collective farms and the rural administrative agencies. They rarely clashed with security forces. Instead, they intimidated Soviet local officials and raided collective farms, distributing some of their property among farmers and plundering the rest. Many were engaged in plain banditry, robbing farmers from rival clans and other ethnic groups. As the *abrek* tradition demanded, the robberies were usually covered with some ideological veil. The authorities found it difficult to eradicate the guerrillas because they operated only in remote mountain regions and many farmers thought the turmoil caused by their activities a fair price to pay for the neutralization of Soviet social and agrarian policy. In Chechnya, most collective farms had already disintegrated by the end of 1941, and the government was too busy elsewhere to restore them.⁴⁹

The North Caucasian rebels had no common strategy. Many of their leaders were not ideological enemies of communism but opportunists who had attained lucrative positions in the Soviet administrative, party, and police apparatus and strove to preserve their power in the new conditions that emerged with the approach of the Germans. In the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic, 80 party functionaries and police officers deserted, including 16 of

⁴⁷ Leont'ev, "Doklad," I. 62; and Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, 125.

⁴⁸ Leont'ev, "Doklad," II. 38, 40, 61, 68; "Operativno-boevaya deiatel'nost' operativno-vnutrennikh voisk NKVD SSSR za period 1941–43" (no date), RGVA f. 38650, op. 1, d. 128, ll. 11–13 v. The security troops may have inflated the statistics on the insurgents' strength, seeking to emphasize their efficiency and to present the killed civilians as guerrillas.

⁴⁹ Ivanov, "Speech at the Meeting of the District Party Secretaries in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic" (13 April 1943), RGASPI f. 11, op. 88, d. 599, l. 3; Khalukhaev, "Doklad," I. 275; and Leont'ev, "Doklad," I. 38.

the 24 secretaries of the district party committees. Some of these opportunists became commanders of guerrilla bands, like U. Kochkarov, deputy head of the NKVD Directorate for Stavropol' krai; Batgaev, secretary of the district party committee in the Karachai autonomous region; Iakub Zhanguzarov, propagandist of the district party committee in the Kabardin-Balkar republic; and El'murzaev, head of a district NKVD section in the Chechen-Ingush republic. Sultan Albogachiev, people's commissar of internal affairs of the Chechen-Ingush republic and Idris Aliev, head of the Struggle against Banditry Department of the Chechen-Ingush NKVD, were later found guilty of cooperating with the guerrillas.⁵⁰ These public figures could not organize a political core for the insurgency, however. There were only two political rebel organizations besides the puppet national committees established by the Germans in the North Caucasus. The first was the United Party of Caucasian Brothers, founded in Chechnya by the former Communist and newspaper reporter Khasan Israilov; the second was the Chechen-Mountaineer National-Socialist Party, launched by Mairbek Sheripov, a former communist official in the lumber industry. Both emerged in late 1941–early 1942. Police claimed that the United Party of Caucasian Brothers had about 5,000 members, but this estimate seems inflated.⁵¹ These parties issued a joint declaration welcoming the Germans if they recognized the independence of the Caucasus and soon united, thus creating an embryonic political body that attempted to coordinate resistance in several Chechen mountain districts.⁵² It had no political program beyond the elimination of Soviet administration and a vague idea of independence, and it had no influence outside these districts. It disintegrated after Sheripov was killed in November 1942.⁵³

The fact that the guerrillas easily stirred turmoil in some North Caucasian regions shows that the tensions between the authorities and the population in those particular regions had reached the boiling point. Mass disturbances, however, rarely went beyond riots in which farmers ransacked the village councils and divided the property of collective farms. The specific social environment in the North Caucasus doomed this rebellious potential to be spent in chaotic uprisings that could not merge into resistance with positive strategic objectives. The resentment among ethnic groups, some

⁵⁰ Leont'ev, "Doklad," ll. 20, 39, 59; Semiriaga, *Kollaboratsionizm*, 465; V. P. Galitskii, "Obiazuius' pomoch' nemetskoï armii," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 3 (2000): 44; Igor' Pykhalov, "'Kavkazskie orly' Tret'ego Reikha," *Spetsnaz Rossii*, 61, 10 (2001): 1; and A. S. Khunagov, "Deportatsiia narodov s territorii Krasnodarskogo Kraia i Stavropol'ia" (Candidate of Sciences diss., Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences, 1998), 109.

⁵¹ GARF f. 9478, op. 1, d. 55, ll. 1–9; and Leont'ev, "Doklad," ll. 37, 67. These are the parties' names mentioned in the secret police reports. It is possible that their real names were different.

⁵² Avtorkhanov, "The Chechens and Ingush," 183.

⁵³ Leont'ev, "Doklad," l. 40; and Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, 135, 140.

further divided into hostile clans, fragmented any insurgency; and there was no local educated elite able to offer an attractive and viable political program to unite the separate rebellions.⁵⁴ These revolts were “uncoordinated and limited in nature, precipitated by specific excesses on the part of Soviet administrators rather than by calls for ‘holy war’ or national liberation.”⁵⁵ The guerrillas could operate only in the power vacuum that emerged when Soviet control over the remote regions weakened with the approach of the Germans. After the Wehrmacht left the North Caucasus in January 1943, the police destroyed most guerrilla units by the fall, although some, containing a large proportion of common criminals, continued to operate until the ethnic groups to which they belonged were deported from the Caucasus. Few survived until 1948.⁵⁶

The ratio between collaboration and independent resistance in the anti-Soviet demonstrations varied by region, as did their scale. Some North Caucasian regions, like Chechnya and parts of Dagestan, were bound to explode as soon as the Soviet authority was weakened by an external factor such as the German invasion. They experienced a spontaneous resistance that indeed stemmed directly from conflicts in the interwar years and enjoyed wide popular support. In other areas, the relations between the authorities and the local population were less strained. In the Karachai region, the anti-Soviet demonstrations had more collaborationist connotations, and the support for them was much weaker. The resistance in Balkaria, initially negligible, greatly intensified after the Soviet security forces “retaliated” against civilians for several minor attacks by deserters, but even then it was far less stiff than that in Chechnya. Ingushetia remained mostly quiet.⁵⁷

Human beings are opportunistic. The fact that more people belonging to the North Caucasian ethnic groups actively collaborated with the Germans than actively opposed them during the occupation cannot be interpreted as a sign of their overwhelming “disloyalty,” because on the eve and in the wake of the German occupation, the Soviet authorities had many

⁵⁴ In Chechnya, another division split the descendants of free people from the descendants of slaves (Nekrich, *Nakazannye narody*, 46).

⁵⁵ Park and Brandenberger, “Imagined Community,” 559.

⁵⁶ In an example of later guerrilla activity, three Red Army soldiers were ambushed and killed in Chechnya on 3 March 1947 (Lieutenant-General P. Burmak, commander of the MVD Security Troops, “Order no. 009” [1 April 1947], RGVA f. 38650, op. 1, d. 44, l. 15). See also Bugai and Gonov, *Kavkaz*, 152.

⁵⁷ Secret police documents do not confirm the claims made by Alexandre Bennigsen and Marie Bennigsen Broxup that the Ingush provided “the main fighting force” for the Chechen–Ingush resistance in 1941–43. See Bennigsen, “Muslim Guerrilla Warfare in the Caucasus (1918–1928),” *Central Asian Survey* 2, 1 (1983): 54; and Broxup, “The Last Ghazawat,” 114. Insurgency occurred primarily in mountain regions populated by Chechens.

more active supporters there than the Germans had found while they held these territories. Had the Germans reached Chechnya and Dagestan, they would probably have found more collaborators there than they did in other republics. As it happened, however, the solid majority of the people from the stigmatized ethnic groups who took up arms during the war fought on the Soviet side, some voluntarily and some not.

The Kalmyk Autonomous Republic

Kalmyks, nomadic cattle-breeders of Mongolic descent, populated the steppes to the west of the Volga River. Some of them started to settle down during the second half of the 19th century, but this process was slow, and by World War I most were still nomads. The majority of Kalmyks who participated in the Civil War fought against the Bolsheviks. Russian Cossacks who had moved to the Kalmyk steppes, wealthier Kalmyks suffering from Soviet expropriations, and those who resented the government effort to settle the nomadic population against its will continued sporadic armed resistance to the authorities until 1926.⁵⁸ Later, however, social stability returned to this region. The Soviet authorities gave a high priority to education, and the number of schools in the Kalmyk steppes grew from 31 to 302 between 1913 and 1939. During this period, the number of Kalmyk students swelled from 674 to 44,000. From 1926 to 1939, literacy among Kalmyks grew from 12.2 to 59.2 percent, which facilitated the promotion of Soviet culture and values in the Kalmyk communities.⁵⁹ The Kalmyk steppes were proclaimed an autonomous region in 1920, then reorganized into an autonomous republic in 1936. As elsewhere, collectivization met some passive opposition that, however, did not turn into an armed uprising. No particular tensions were visible in the region throughout the 1930s. Kalmyks were not as religious as people in the North Caucasus. Historians do not report that the destruction of Buddhist temples or the persecution of monks and priests in the 1930s caused an uproar. Kalmyks made up 48.6 percent of the republic's population by 1939.⁶⁰ As in most North Caucasian regions, the number and proportion of Russians residing in Kalmykia grew after the Revolution. They were the second-largest ethnic group.

In August 1942, the Red Army hastily retreated across the Kalmyk steppes toward the Volga without much resistance. On 2 August, the Kalmyk government issued an order: "Evacuate all cattle of collective farms,

⁵⁸ V. Ubushaev, "Otriady CHON Kalmytskoi oblasti v bor'be s vnutrennei kontrrevoliutsiei (1920–1924 gg.)," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 9 (1974): 82–85.

⁵⁹ Richardson, "Stalinist Terror," 443; and Poliakov et al., eds., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia*, 83.

⁶⁰ Poliakov et al., eds., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia*, 66.

state farms, and collective and individual farmers ... across the Volga River to the interior.⁶¹ Orders like this were routinely issued in every region threatened by occupation. After such requisitions, peasants survived by cultivating their individual plots. Kalmyks, however, were engaged mainly in cattle-breeding. The evacuation of cattle could be fatal, depriving people of their only means of subsistence. In several villages, Kalmyks rebelled, killing a few minor officials.⁶²

German and Romanian forces fully occupied 5 of the 13 Kalmyk districts and partially occupied 3 more.⁶³ These troops were too overstretched in Kalmykia to administer it, while the National Committee they organized was a powerless agency authorized to deal only with minor issues. In an attempt to attract the local population, the Germans allowed the Kalmyks to dissolve their collective farms, which they gladly did. Kalmyks complied with the regulations of the new administration in the few districts where it existed, but so did Russians living in the republic. The Axis attempt to win hearts and minds was soon undermined by the looting committed by German and, in particular, the much larger Romanian units.⁶⁴ The Germans organized the "Kalmyk Cavalry Corps" in the fall of 1942; according to primary Soviet documents, 1,500 Kalmyks, former Cossacks, and members of several ethnic minorities joined it. German sources state that the "Corps" numbered about 3,000 men by the time it left Kalmykia.⁶⁵ It was employed mainly in scouting missions and fighting against Soviet partisans. Many more Kalmyks fought on the Soviet side: by February 1942, 20,032 persons, both Kalmyks and Russians, had been drafted from the republic. Many of them died in combat or were discharged after being wounded, but by 1943 new drafts lifted the number of soldiers from Kalmykia in the ranks of the Red Army to 23,000.⁶⁶

Besides the collaborators, a few bands consisting mainly of deserters with a total strength of several hundred men roamed the Kalmyk steppes. These

⁶¹ Document no. 87 in *Kalmykiia v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, ed. Kichikov, Sandzhiev, and Oglaev, 137.

⁶² P. Lavrent'ev, secretary of the Kalmyk Provincial Party Committee, "O sostoianii Kalmytskoi ASSR" (4 December 1942), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 392, l. 24.

⁶³ Document no. 94 in *Kalmykiia v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, ed. Kichikov, Sandzhiev, and Oglaev, 149.

⁶⁴ Hoffmann, *Deutsche und Kalmyken*, 62, 65.

⁶⁵ P. Kasatkin, secretary of the Personnel Office of the Kalmyk Provincial Party Committee, "Ob itogakh partizanskogo dvizheniia v Kalmytskoi ASSR" (15 March 1943), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 393, ll. 24, 25; Leont'ev, "Doklad," ll. 55, 56; and Hoffmann, *Deutsche und Kalmyken*, 187. By 1945, the "Corps" rose to 5,000 men, reinforced by collaborators of various ethnic backgrounds who retreated with the Germans. See A. V. Okorokov, *Antisovetskie voinskie formirovaniia v gody vtoroi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: Voennyi universitet, 2000), 90.

⁶⁶ Nekrich, *Nakazannye narody*, 77.

guerrillas attacked the local Soviet administration and distributed the property of collective farms among the population. They fought for cattle against 25,000 Kalmyk loyalists who had complied with the government order and driven their herds across the Volga. P. Lavrent'ev, the secretary of the Kalmyk Provincial Party Committee, reported to Moscow:

Most Kalmyks are hostile to the arriving Germans.... Only a handful have committed treason.... The Central Committee of the Communist Party should know that the threat of banditry in the Kalmyk republic is grossly exaggerated.... Some commanders treat Kalmyks as a backward [people], as if they are all bandits. They suspect every Kalmyk on horseback whom they meet in the steppes of banditry.... [In fact,] despite the difficult working conditions, the [Kalmyk] population in the areas free of occupation wholeheartedly helps the Red Army.⁶⁷

The Kalmyk republic received few weapons and could not organize many partisan units. The steppes were poor terrain for guerrilla warfare. Only 220 partisans were operating in Kalmykia by 12 November 1942, but 124 of them, as well as a quarter of the partisan commanders, were Kalmyks.⁶⁸ Soviet officials reported no desertion or treason among the Kalmyk partisans.

The Kalmyk autonomous republic had little potential for anti-Soviet resistance on the eve of the German invasion. The Kalmyks resented the collective farms, but they tolerated them until the Axis administration sanctioned their dissolution. So did peasants in the Slavic regions. As a whole, Kalmyks collaborated with the Germans no more than Russians and much less than the Russian Cossacks. Unlike the Russian regions, however, some independent resistance emerged in Kalmykia. Its major cause, the evacuation of cattle, was specific and apolitical. It was a spontaneous outburst, leaderless and totally disorganized. Few Kalmyks participated in the resistance and the police weeded its remnants out by May 1943, four months after the German evacuation. The clashes of insurgents with the security forces were small: during the entire conflict, 64 guerrillas were killed, 381 arrested, and 341 amnestied.⁶⁹ The proportion of Kalmyks collaborating with the Germans was probably equal to the proportion of Chechens resisting the Soviet regime, but the number and the proportion of Kalmyks fighting on the Soviet side

⁶⁷ Lavrent'ev, "O sostoianii Kalmytskoi ASSR," ll. 24, 25.

⁶⁸ Ryzhikov, "Spisok komandirov partizanskikh otriadov" (31 December 1942), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 392, ll. 59-65; Lavrent'ev, "O sostoianii Kalmytskoi ASSR" (1 November 1942), RGASPI f. 17, op. 88, d. 126, l. 29; and Documents no. 90 and 128 in *Kalmykiia v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, ed. Kichikov, Sandzhiev, and Oglaev, 143, 208.

⁶⁹ Leont'ev, "Doklad," ll. 57, 58.

was much greater. The government's case against the Kalmyks was virtually without foundation.

Crimea

The mutual mistrust between the imperial Russian government and the Crimean Tatars was aggravated during the Crimean War, when the state resettled the Tatars from the coast inland after suspecting that they were collaborating with the enemy. Alexander II (1855–81) called the Crimean Tatars an “unwanted population” and ordered that their emigration be encouraged. In 1859–60, the number of Tatars in Crimea declined by two-thirds when government pressure prompted 100,000 of them to leave Crimea for the Ottoman empire.⁷⁰ This policy was reversed at the end of 1860, but the shock produced by mass exodus on the remaining Tatar communities strained ethnic relations in Crimea, as did the increasing influx of Christian colonists and Russification by force during the reign of Alexander III (1881–94).

Few Tatars took part in the Civil War. The major Tatar nationalist party, Milli Firka, was outlawed first by the Whites in 1919 and then by the Bolsheviks in 1921. It consisted mainly of intellectuals claiming without much basis to represent the entire Tatar population, viewing as their political goal at different times cultural and territorial autonomy or even sovereignty. The prohibition of the party by the Bolsheviks caused no turmoil; instead, its left wing joined the Bolshevik Party. Relations between the Crimean Tatars and the Soviet state evolved in the interwar period together with shifts in government social and ethnic policies. The life of Tatars considerably improved in the 1920s: their language received a status equal to Russian even though they accounted for only 25 percent of the Crimean population in 1923;⁷¹ the state facilitated the development of their ethnic culture; Tatar enrollment in schools rose from 17.0 percent in 1917 to 44.9 percent in 1928; the government established quotas for Tatar representation in the administration and gave Tatars priority in appointments to official positions, even if Russians had superior qualifications; and the agrarian reform increased Tatar landholding by 60 percent at the southern shore and by 95 percent in the steppes.⁷² In 1929,

⁷⁰ Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 89, 93.

⁷¹ Ibid., 112, 128, 138, 139. In 1939, Russians made up 49.6 percent of the Crimean population, Ukrainians 13.7 percent, and Tatars 19.4 percent (Poliakov et al., eds., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia*, 67).

⁷² In contrast, other ethnic groups living in Crimea, except the Bulgarians, increased their landholdings by only 16 percent. The Bulgarians increased theirs by 60 percent. See Brian Glyn Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: The Diaspora Experience and the Forging of a Nation* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 351, 352; and Viktor Denningkhaus [Victor Dönninghaus], “Polietnichnost' skvoz' prizmu klassovogo podkhoda,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 2 (1999): 116.

however, the educated Tatar elite was hit hard by the purge of prerevolutionary intellectuals throughout the Soviet Union. Like peasants elsewhere, rural Tatars resented collectivization, the anti-religious crusade, and the cultural revolution but offered mainly passive resistance to the “socialist offensive.”⁷³ The shift of ethnic policy away from nativization in the 1930s reduced Tatar influence in Crimean affairs.⁷⁴ As a whole, however, the conflicts of Tatars with the Bolshevik authorities in the interwar years were not much sharper than those of Slavic peasants. Mutual suspicion inherited from the chauvinist policies of the tsarist empire survived in the collective memory of Tatars and Slavs, but no overt tensions existed between the predominantly urban Slavic and rural Tatar communities. Why, then, did thousands of Tatars collaborate with the Germans during World War II? Their confrontation with Soviet authority stemmed largely but not exclusively from the grave mistakes committed by the organizers of partisan warfare in Crimea.

The Red Army High Command (*Stavka*) ordered the Crimean Provincial Party Committee to develop an organizational structure for guerrilla warfare long before the peninsula was occupied by the Axis.⁷⁵ The partisan movement in the Crimean Mountains was intended to be well organized, well supplied, and therefore efficient. It was everything but that, due to the narrow-mindedness and incompetence of the Crimean communist leaders and partisan commanders. The bureaucrats charged with organizing guerrilla warfare committed blunders that doomed the Crimean partisans. First, they sought to raise their units only from party and Komsomol activists, most of whom lived in the cities. The urban population consisted mainly of Slavs; and the recruiters generally ignored the rural Tatars, even though Tatars populated the Crimean Mountains where the partisans were to operate. Second, the organizers made the most serious error a guerrilla commander can make: they viewed partisan warfare in virtual isolation from the local population, conceiving it as small-scale actions conducted by activists around their bases. In fact, the report entitled “Struggle of the Crimean Partisans,” a major document on this subject, even denied that any actions were planned; instead the partisans “sought to establish good

⁷³ Fisher reports an uprising in only one village during collectivization (*Crimean Tatars*, 143).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 141, 144. As they have with the North Caucasian ethnic groups, some historians writing about Tatars baselessly attribute unrelated episodes and aspects of Soviet policy to this shift. Otto Pohl claims that “Soviet rule over the Crimea during the 1930s, however, became increasingly repressive toward the Tatar minority.” He gives among other arguments collectivization, the famine of 1932–33, and the purges, as if Tatars suffered from them more than the Slavs (Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR, 1937–1949*, 111).

⁷⁵ These preparations were initiated on 4 July 1941, four months before Crimea was overrun by the Germans. See A. V. Basov, *Krym v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), 192.

supply depots and to wait until the Red Army returned, then get out of the forests and present themselves as partisans.... They brought [their] wives, built comfortable dugouts, had abundant food supplies, and did nothing at all but play gramophones and enjoy tasty dinners.”⁷⁶ The fact that the party bosses forgot to bring any maps to the mountains corroborates this claim.⁷⁷ The final mistake of these bureaucrats was to establish food depots in broad daylight and near the roads, so that the supplies could be brought there directly by trucks. Many civilians knew where they were.

Colonel Mikhail Lobov broke through to the mountains with the remnants of his 48th Cavalry Division in November 1941 and was appointed commander-in-chief of the Partisan Movement in Crimea after his predecessor, Aleksei Mokrousov, was fired in disgrace in July 1942. Lobov assessed the failure to enlist Tatars in the partisan units as a fatal error. His report to the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement stated:

The Provincial Party Committee and the Crimean NKVD apparently did not seriously consider ensuring the cooperation of partisans with the local population.... These leaders absolutely ignored the fact that the native people of Crimea are Tatars and, therefore, it was necessary to enlist partisans who would enjoy prestige among Tatars in order to maintain close contact with and carry out constant [political] work among the Tatar people.... It was hard for us to establish contact with the population of the near-mountain and mountain regions, because the number of Tatars among the partisans was negligible.⁷⁸

The Slavic recruits from towns and plains had no idea how to survive in the mountains, particularly in winter. The commander of the North Caucasian Front, Semen Budennyi, wrote to Stalin in June 1942 that “the personnel of these [partisan] units were selected superficially, without thorough screening; and as a result, mass desertion began with the first days of combat.”⁷⁹ The Crimean leaders intended to raise over 5,000 partisans; but

⁷⁶ “Bor’ba krymskikh partizan” (no earlier than May 1942), RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 106, 106v. This unsigned report analyzes the development and failures of the Partisan Movement in Crimea from its start to May 1942. It was probably written by Colonel M. T. Lobov for the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement after Lobov became commander-in-chief of the Crimean partisans in July 1942. This document is the most revealing piece of evidence regarding the causes of the tensions between the partisans and the Tatar population. It attributes this conflict mainly to the flawed policy of the Crimean partisan organizers.

⁷⁷ Basov, *Krym*, 194.

⁷⁸ Colonel M. T. Lobov, commander of the Partisan Movement in Crimea, to Ponomarenko, “Doklad o deistviakh v Krymu” (14 December 1942), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 618, ll. 46, 47.

⁷⁹ Anatolii S. Chaikovskii, “Pomoshch’ sovetskogo tyła v organizatsii partizanskoi bor’by protiv fashistskikh zakhvatchikov na vremennookkupirovannoi territorii SSSR 1941–44” (Doctor of Sciences diss., Institute of Ukrainian History, Kiev, 1991), 127, 128.

3,000 of the prospective fighters, including most Tatars, “enlisted only on paper [*formal’no*],” according to Lobov, failing to report for duty when the German occupation of Crimea began. The desertion rate among Crimean partisans was huge: in November and December 1941, 891 fighters out of 2,000 fled their units. The partisan warfare was revitalized, however, by the influx of soldiers who escaped to the mountains after their units had been destroyed by the Germans.⁸⁰ Only after their commanders applied pressure on the partisan leaders did the latter take action. The partisans faced grim prospects because most supply depots had been lost, the result of “mass treason” among partisan deserters and the local population.⁸¹

The Nazis wanted to make Crimea into a German Riviera. That implied that the entire local population would have to be deported or killed sooner or later.⁸² For the time being, however, they gave Tatars some privileges, partly to sow discord between them and the Slavic majority and partly because they sought to impress a potential ally, Turkey. The Germans released Tatar prisoners of war, distributed gardens and vineyards belonging to the collective farms among Tatars, excused them from labor duty, reduced their taxes, opened mosques, and limited requisitions in their villages. They amnestied Tatar Communists and appointed Tatars to administrative positions in numbers much greater than their proportion in the Crimean population.⁸³ Their policy found a response among Tatars. Some of them, along with Slavic deserters, revealed depots to the Germans and were rewarded with their content. Other depots were robbed by partisan units that had lost their own.⁸⁴ As a result,

⁸⁰ Lobov, “Doklad,” ll. 41, 42; and Mokrousov to Budennyi, “Dokladnaia zapiska ob organizatsii partizanskogo dvizheniia v Krymu” (July 1942), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 618, l. 29. According to one source, the total strength of partisans equaled 3,098 men by 15 November (“O sostoiianii partizanskogo dvizheniia Kryma” [no date], RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12, l. 138). Another source states that by November 1941, 2,700 partisans were in the Crimean Mountains; of these, 60 percent were soldiers. See P. N. Pospelov et al., eds., *Istoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo Soiuza, 1941–1945*, 6 vols. (Moscow: Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, 1961–65), vol. 2, 121.

⁸¹ “Soveshchanie sekretarei Krymskogo obkoma” (12 July 1942), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 618, ll. 2, 10.

⁸² Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, 256, 257.

⁸³ “Obshchaia ustanovka na fronte i v tylu protivnika” (no date), RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12, l. 58; Beriia to Stalin, “Dokladnaia zapiska” (25 April 1944), GARF f. 9401, op. 2, d. 64, ll. 318–20; and Colonel Metelev, representative of the Ukrainian Partisan Headquarters, “Razvedsvodka o protivnike” (3 January 1944), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 758, l. 13.

⁸⁴ “Soveshchanie,” ll. 8, 10; Vladimir Bulatov, representative of the Central Partisan Headquarters in Crimea, “Stenogramma soveshchaniia nachal’nikov razvedotdelov mestnykh ShPD” (10–12 June 1943), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 726, l. 112. Il’ia Vergasov, chief of staff of the Yalta partisan unit, attributed loss of his food depots to the treason of a single person, Mitin, a Russian forest ranger (Vergasov, *Krymskie tetrady* [Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1969], 29, 90, 107).

Crimean partisans suffered far greater privations than did Soviet guerrillas elsewhere. On 30 August 1942, Lobov told Budennyi: "Most partisans are doomed to starve to death."⁸⁵ The Yalta partisan unit lost 30 of its 132 men in April–May 1942; 4 were killed in combat, 1 died from disease, and the rest starved to death. By 15 November 1941, after the influx of soldiers, 3,098 partisans were operating in Crimea. A year later, by 20 November 1942, 450 of these had starved to death; 848 had died in combat and of diseases; 400 had deserted; 556, wounded or exhausted, had been evacuated by aircraft; and 400 had been temporarily discharged. Only 150 fighters remained in the mountains.⁸⁶ The NKVD reported cannibalism among the partisans.⁸⁷

Many partisans attributed their suffering to the Tatar people. This point of view was officially endorsed by the Partisan Headquarters in Crimea. With its blessing, partisans raided Tatar villages that had appropriated food from their depots as well as others. These punitive raids were accompanied with indiscriminate violence and plunder. Il'ia Vergasov, the commander of the Fourth Partisan District, wrote a memoir in which he gave a graphic picture of his raid on the Tatar village of Koush, portraying it as a sacred battle against fascism and describing "the spiritual surge" that partisans experienced while burning "every house on our way as a fascist fortress."⁸⁸ The Crimean Provincial Party Committee interpreted the action differently:

A partisan unit from the former Fourth [Partisan] District, being drunk, carried out a pogrom in the village of Koush without distinguishing foes from friends. [Partisans] attributed the pillage of food depots by the fascists to the local population and shot everyone whom they met in the forest. Partisans' Central HQ did not react to these outrageous facts, and this alienated the population.... Partisans had been starving for months; and because of this, they were forced to confiscate cattle, potatoes, corn, and other [food]. This strained relations between partisans and the population to the utmost.⁸⁹

Lobov blamed not so much the Tatars as the party organizers for the privations suffered by the partisans: "The Crimean Provincial Party Committee

⁸⁵ Basov, *Krym*, 215.

⁸⁶ Vergasov, *Krymskie tetradi*, 124, 125, 127; and "O sostoiianii partizanskogo dvizheniia Kryma," RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12, l. 138. The latter source does not explain what happened to 294 of the partisans who had initially enlisted and had been brought in by air. A secondary, less credible Soviet source claims that 432 partisans remained in the mountains at that time (Basov, *Krym*, 230).

⁸⁷ Crimean NKVD to Ponomarenko (11 February 1943), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 748, l. 47.

⁸⁸ Vergasov, *Krymskie tetradi*, 290–94.

⁸⁹ V. Bulatov, first secretary of the Crimean Provincial Party Committee, "Postanovlenie Biuro Krymskogo obkoma" (18 November 1942), RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12.

made an inexcusable, serious error in appointing as commander-in-chief of the Partisan Movement in Crimea Mokrousov, a man who has lost his marbles, a drunkard unable to act as a leader in modern warfare.”⁹⁰ In November 1942, the Crimean Provincial Party Committee issued a directive, “Errors Made in the Assessment of the Attitude of Crimean Tatars toward the Partisans,” stating that Mokrousov “claimed wrongly that most Tatars were hostile to the partisans and formulated an erroneous and counterproductive policy for unit commanders. As a result, some partisan units undertook incorrect actions against local people.”⁹¹ The partisans did not know who had betrayed their depots and retaliated against Tatars on ethnic grounds. Vergasov admitted that “partisans spread no political propaganda but often provoked hostility by confiscating cattle, sometimes indiscriminately.... There is almost nothing left in the [Tatar] villages; everything has been robbed [by Axis soldiers and partisans], the population is starving.”⁹² The Tatars traditionally grew cash crops such as grapes, fruit, and tobacco, which they sold for food. The market was disrupted by the war, and Tatar villages barely survived on their small herds of livestock and vegetable gardens. Partisan raids, like the one by Gorodovikov’s unit that confiscated the entire potato crop from the Tatar village Enisaly, doomed farmers to famine.⁹³ Vladimir Bulatov, the first secretary of the Crimean Provincial Party Committee, believed that Tatar resistance was sparked by “a number of regrettable incidents that were politically harmful to us. Special operations were carried out [by the partisans] against the southern villages.... The Germans used these facts in their own interest. They said, ‘Look, the partisans are fighting you; they have destroyed your villages.’ In this way they managed to organize some part of the population [in self-defense units].”⁹⁴

Hitler allowed the formation of Tatar self-defense units on 2 January 1942. The Muslim Committee, established by the Germans in Simferopol’ on 3 January 1942 as a minor administrative body, raised eight Tatar police

⁹⁰ Lobov, “Doklad,” l. 51. Budennyi added a few strokes to Mokrousov’s portrait in his report: “When he was drunk, Mokrousov ordered a soldier to shoot Colonel Lobov, and only the intervention of Military Commissar Martynov prevented this absurd execution” (V. Malin to Ponomarenko, “Spravka iz materialov o Lobove M. T.” [no date], RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 618, l. 73).

⁹¹ Bulatov, “Postanovlenie Biuro Krymskogo obkoma,” RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12.

⁹² I. Vergasov, commander of the Fourth Partisan Region of Crimea, to Budennyi, “Raport o boevoi deiatel’nosti otriadov 4-go raiona” (19 July 1942), RGASPI f. 69, op. 1, d. 618, ll. 19–22.

⁹³ Bulatov, “Otchet o deiatel’nosti partizanskikh otriadov Kryma za period oktiabr’ 1942 po iun’ 1943” (no date), RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12, l. 82; and “Bor’ba krymskikh partizan,” RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12, l. 108 v.

⁹⁴ Bulatov, “Stenogramma soveshchaniia,” l. 112.

battalions with a large proportion of prisoners of war and a Slavic component. Tatar units acted in cooperation with the SS Einsatzgruppe D and were involved in atrocities against Jews, Gypsies, and prisoners of war; they fought the Red Army in Sevastopol' and Kerch. The German Headquarters in Crimea maintained the zeal of the collaborators by paying 50–70 Reichsmarks for every killed partisan; sometimes Tatar policemen killed Russian civilians and declared them as partisans to receive the reward.⁹⁵ Violence soon took the form of ethnic conflict. Collaboration with the invaders in Crimea spread wider than in any of the republics in the North Caucasus; in total, 20,000 persons enlisted in Tatar battalions and self-defense units.⁹⁶ Partisans reported that during Mokrousov's term, "all Tatars, from children to old men, openly fought against us.... [In turn,] the partisans exterminated all Tatars whom they met. When Tatars were picking crops, they kept their weapons at hand and captured and killed every partisan" in sight.⁹⁷ The Germans noticed, however, that the intensity of anti-Russian and anti-communist sentiments among Tatars varied by region and generation. While older people favored the Germans, many young Tatars refused to collaborate. In western Crimea Tatars ignored the German recruiters, who attributed this to "Bolshevik influence," among other reasons.⁹⁸ Some Tatar villages initially supplied the partisans, but after the Germans burned them down, most Tatars abstained from further support.⁹⁹

Seeing that the Crimean partisans were close to extinction, in July 1942, the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement fired the top Crimean commanders, including Mokrousov and his commissar Serafim Martynov.¹⁰⁰ Bulatov, appointed representative of the Central Partisan Headquarters in Crimea in December 1942, admitted:

unreliable and unverified information ... made us think that over half of the Crimean Tatars were traitors.... This impression turned out to be wrong.... About 150 purely Tatar villages exist in Crimea, but self-defense units were raised in only 20–25 villages. Therefore it would be ridiculous

⁹⁵ Beriia, "Dokladnaia zapiska" (25 April 1944), ll. 319, 320; Beriia to Stalin (1 May 1944), GARF f. 9401, op. 2, d. 64, ll. 386–88; Metelev, "Razvedsvodka o protivnike," 13, 14; G. A. Litvin, "Krymsko-tatarskie formirovaniia," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 3 (1991): 91; Bugai, *L. Beriia—I. Stalinu*, 146; and V. A. Zolotarev and G. N. Sevost'ianov, eds., *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina 1941–1945: Voenno-istoricheskie ocherki*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1998–99), vol. 4, 155.

⁹⁶ Bugai, *L. Beriia—I. Stalinu*, 146.

⁹⁷ "Bor'ba krymskikh partizan," RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 111 v.–12.

⁹⁸ Litvin, "Krymsko-tatarskie formirovaniia," 94, 95.

⁹⁹ Vergasov, "Raport o boevoi deiatel'nosti otriadov 4-go raiona," l. 19.

¹⁰⁰ Basov, *Krym*, 212.

to claim that [most] Tatars resented Soviet authority. On the contrary, we established that a number of Tatar villages actually supplied partisans and provided intelligence.¹⁰¹

Cornered by Lobov's reports and unable any longer to attribute the failure of the partisan movement in Crimea solely to Tatar subversion, the Crimean Provincial Party Committee revised its position and proclaimed that "most Tatars are as hostile toward the German and Romanian invaders as are all Crimean toilers." It promised that "no doubt, we can raise Tatars against the fascist invaders and their collaborators."¹⁰² Mokrousov himself admitted later that his "allegations that most Tatars living in the Crimean Mountains and near them committed treason were based on weak evidence and misinformed the Party about the Tatars, and I repudiate them."¹⁰³ Subsequent partisan commanders observed that thousands of Tatars fought against them but attributed this largely to actions of their predecessors. Punitive expeditions against Tatar villages were prohibited. In the second half of 1943, the Red Air Force established a permanent airlift, dramatically improving partisan supply. The number of partisans swelled. By 1944, 3,113 guerrillas were fighting in Crimea, of whom 630, or one-fifth, were Tatars, equaling their share of the Crimean population. Many Tatar partisans were collaborators who switched sides, sensing which way the wind was blowing. Vergasov describes the defection of a whole collaborator Tatar battalion to the partisans. He was pleased with its combat performance afterwards.¹⁰⁴

The first list of notorious Nazi collaborators in Crimea compiled by Lavrentii Beriia, the people's commissar of internal affairs, contained mostly Slavic names. Unlike the Tatars, who had no political organizations besides the Muslim committees, Russian collaborators established some minuscule fascist parties, like the Party of Truly Russian People and a branch of the National Labor Union.¹⁰⁵

The Crimean Tatars had no history of violent confrontation with the Soviet state, and no anti-Soviet resistance emerged in Crimea after the Red Army overran it in 1944. The conflict between this ethnic group and the representatives of the Soviet authorities started as a defensive reaction of the rural population to partisan violence provoked by the collaboration of a few

¹⁰¹ Bulatov, "Stenogramma soveshchaniia," I. 112.

¹⁰² Bulatov, "Postanovlenie Biuro Krymskogo obkoma," RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12.

¹⁰³ "Pro stat'iu A. S. Chaikovs'kogo 'Partyzans'kyi rukh u Krymu,'" *Ukrains'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, no. 11 (1991): 158.

¹⁰⁴ Bugai, *L. Beriia—I. Stalinu*, 146; and Vergasov, *Krymskie tetradi*, 521, 522. It is possible the battalion was only one company strong at that moment.

¹⁰⁵ Beriia to Stalin (1 May 1944), GARF f. 9401, op. 2, d. 64, ll. 386–88.

Tatars. Self-defense units offered no resistance to the Soviet administration during the month between the liberation of Crimea and the deportation, which shows that the actions against partisans were caused not so much by hatred of the Soviet regime as by the need to beat off those who doomed Tatar peasants to starvation. Many Tatars volunteered to join the Red Army in 1944; and according to Beriia, 40,000 of them enlisted by 25 April 1944.¹⁰⁶ If his figure is correct, this is a very high proportion of the Tatar population, which numbered 218,879 in 1939.¹⁰⁷ It is twice the total number of collaborators enlisted in Crimea during the German occupation, including Slavs. Bulatov, who in fact shared responsibility for the failure to enlist Tatars in the partisan units, nevertheless concluded that "the claim that the Crimean Tatars are enemies of Soviet authority is a slander against the Tatar people and an invention of politically ignorant persons who could not analyze the situation and who seek to acquit themselves of their mistakes."¹⁰⁸ This admission did not help the Tatars. They fell victim to intrigues of Crimean partisan organizers who, seeking to avoid punishment for their failure to organize guerrilla warfare in ideal conditions, blamed the Tatars for all the disasters suffered by the partisans.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

The anti-government manifestations of deported ethnic minorities do not fit narrow definitions of either collaboration or popular resistance. It is hard to find common features among the incidents of unrest examined here, beyond the fact that all were rural phenomena, all had purely negative objectives, and none was shaped by leaders with an articulated political agenda. Only in some parts of the North Caucasus were these rebellions the natural consequence of Soviet interwar policy; in other regions, such as Kalmykia and Crimea, they had no deep roots but were sparked by circumstantial factors. The causes of resistance in the last two areas were totally different, but in

¹⁰⁶ Beriia, "Dokladnaia zapiska" (25 April 1944), l. 320.

¹⁰⁷ Poliakov et al., eds., *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda*, 67.

¹⁰⁸ Bulatov, "Otchet o deiatel'nosti partizanskikh otriadov Kryma," RGASPI f. 625, op. 1, d. 12, l. 88 v.

¹⁰⁹ Other Soviet bureaucrats responsible for the failure to organize resistance also accused ethnic minorities of treason, without comparing minorities' behavior under German occupation with that of Russians inhabiting the same area. Mikhail Suslov, then secretary of the Central Committee in Stavropol' krai, similarly attributed the failure of the anti-Nazi resistance there to Karachai treason. Suslov forgot to supply the partisans with winter clothes and, like his Crimean counterparts, established food depots near the roads, where they were easily discovered by the Germans. The partisan warfare collapsed; and to avoid punishment, Suslov delivered up the Karachais as scapegoats for his own blunders (Chomaev, *Nakazannyi narod*, 16, 17).

both cases conflicts began not so much as clashes between anti-Soviet and pro-Soviet forces but as battles for food. It would be impossible to generalize about either “anti-Soviet” actions or the loyalty of the ethnic minorities considered here. Some of them were as loyal as most Soviets, and some much less. The causes, forms, and extent of the anti-Soviet resistance, the ratio of those who opposed Soviet authority versus loyalists, and the reasons for and methods of fighting varied greatly by region.

The government’s cases against the Chechens and the Crimean Tatars were the strongest. Turmoil in the Chechen-Ingush republic in the interwar period and the insurgency that began in 1941 made the Soviet leaders perceive this area as generally disloyal. Fragmented and chaotic, the insurgency nevertheless destabilized the rear of the 37th Army, which had been stretched along a front of 200 kilometers after the Germans pushed it to the Caucasian Crest, creating many gaps in its defenses. The number of Chechens who actively fought the authorities was insignificant, probably 1 or 2 percent of the population, judging from NKVD data. Chechen recruits, however, deserted *en masse*. Crimean Tatars did not evade the draft, but the proportion of Tatar collaborators was the greatest, about 10 percent of the population; and it was not so much German counterinsurgency as the conflict between partisans and Tatars that doomed anti-Nazi resistance in Crimea. The government established a weaker case against other minorities, some of whom collaborated no more than other Soviet ethnic groups. Independent anti-Soviet resistance of varying degrees of strength did, however, emerge in the lands these minorities populated, unlike other regions within the pre-1939 borders.

In 1943–44, the Soviet government also exiled a number of other peoples not treated here: Bulgarians, Armenians, and Greeks from Crimea; Meskhetian Turks; Kurds; and Khemshins. What were the motives behind the deportations? Most governments resorted to such brutal measures when prompted by security considerations or when they sought to punish treason and prevent it in the future. The earlier Soviet deportations of 1935–41 were caused by security concerns and targeted mainly diaspora ethnic groups from the borderlands and areas close to the front. The state viewed these deportations as pragmatic actions designed to eliminate the “fifth column” in vulnerable regions. Western democracies also exiled or interned diaspora ethnic groups during both world wars in even less threatening circumstances. Security concerns, however, were the least probable cause for the Soviet deportations of 1943–44. When these decisions were made, no resistance existed in Kalmykia and Crimea. In the North Caucasus, resistance was in steady decline after the spring of 1943, and by 1944 it had become a nuisance rather than a menace. At that time, the front line was 1,000 kilometers away from the Caucasus and the Kalmyk republic. Unlike the deportations from

the borderlands, these could not be interpreted as a pragmatic action in the face of danger; they required the diversion of considerable manpower and other resources from the war effort, which was undermined as a result. Furthermore, the government discharged and exiled soldiers belonging to the blacklisted ethnic groups, causing the Red Army to lose several divisions at a time when its manpower shortage was acute.

Some deportations of 1943–44 were a part of a general purification drive that started in the late 1930s, as Amir Weiner suggests.¹¹⁰ But how did the state separate rotten apples from good ones? Some of the exiled minorities, whose culture was the least compatible with Soviet values, actively resisted various Soviet policies throughout the interwar years. In response, the state may have decided to use the wartime situation to withdraw them from their habitual environment and disperse them across the country to be assimilated. Most of the nationalities exiled in 1943–44, however, offered no more resistance during the “socialist offensive” than did Slavic peasants. Could the deportations be interpreted as an elimination of “internal enemies whom the war and occupation helped uncover”?¹¹¹ Some of the forced migrations might be seen in this context, but others cannot. The reports of regional party bosses accusing certain ethnic groups of treason played a role, but they were hardly the major factor in Soviet decision-making. The government realized that at least in some regions, resistance or collaboration were consequences of mistakes committed by the local authorities. Top Soviet leaders could not be fooled by the reports of the regional party secretaries, who typically sought scapegoats to blame for their own failures. Soviet bureaucrats had more experience in reading between the lines of these reports than historians, who nevertheless see through their claims. Had the ratio of loyalty versus treason been the primary criterion the government applied in selecting the contingent for mass deportations, it would have left alone most of the ethnic groups it deported in 1943–44. Instead, it would have exiled Russian Cossacks; the residents of the Lokot’ district in Orel province, where Bronislav Kaminskii recruited 12,000 collaborators;¹¹² and many more West Ukrainians and Balts. The government had more evidence on subversion in Dagestan than on the treason of Kalmyks or Karachais, but it abstained from repression in

¹¹⁰ Amir Weiner, “Nature and Nurture in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism,” in *Stalinism: The Essential Readings*, ed. David L. Hoffmann (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 243–53.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹¹² S. I. Drobiazko, “Lokotskii avtonomnyi okrug i Russkaia Osvoboditel’naia Narodnaia Armiia,” in *Materialy po istorii russkogo osvoboditel’nogo dvizheniia, 1941–1945 gg.: Stat’i, dokumenty, vospominaniia*, ed. A. V. Okorokov, 2 vols. (Moscow: Graal’, 1997–98), vol. 2, 194.

that region. Nor did it deport Kabardins or Karels, although the provincial party secretary of the Kabardin-Balkar republic and party instructors from Moscow gave evidence against them.¹¹³ Even in internal correspondence, the government never accused the Crimean Greeks, Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, or Khemshins of treason; and the charges against Crimean Armenians and Bulgarians consisted merely of vague, ridiculous hints in a couple of police reports.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the government exiled these ethnic groups. It also deported those members of the stigmatized minorities who lived in other parts of the country that had never experienced resistance or occupation, hunting them down with no less zeal than the Nazis hunted Jews. These facts cast doubt on the hypothesis that alleged treason was the primary cause of deportation.

In addition to Stalin and Beriia, many of the planners of wholesale deportations—such as Vsevolod Merkulov, people's commissar of state security; Bogdan Kobulov, deputy people's commissar of state security; and Stepan Mamulov, head of the NKVD Secretariat—were of Christian Caucasian background and had inherited a profound mistrust of Muslim minorities, rooted in centuries of ethnic and religious feuds.¹¹⁵ The Caucasus suffered more wholesale deportations than any other Soviet region. Mass deportations there targeted only Muslims. Some authors attribute certain deportations to outright Georgian expansionism: after Karachais and Chechens were deported, parts of their former republics were incorporated into Georgia.¹¹⁶ Kalmyks, Crimean Greeks, and Bulgarians, however, were neither Muslim nor Caucasian.

It is therefore impossible to pinpoint a single or even a primary cause for the deportations of 1943–44. The experience of the Great Purge taught Soviet bureaucrats to collect or forge compromising evidence against individuals and groups identified according to various criteria suggested from above, and it taught them to be ready to produce this evidence when they received hints from their superiors. With the increasing shift of Soviet policy from

¹¹³ Mazin, "Spravka," I. 5; Chertov and Borzov, instructors of the Organizer-Instruction Section of the TsK VKP(b), "O rezul'tatakh proverki raboty TsK KP(b) KFSSR [Karelian-Finnish SSR]" (1 November 1944), RGASPI f. 17, op. 22, d. 262, ll. 79–86.

¹¹⁴ V. Sergienko, people's commissar of internal affairs of the Crimean Autonomous Republic, "Orientirovka o deiatel'nosti bolgarskikh natsionalistov v Krymu" (30 October 1944), GARF f. 9478, op. 1, d. 284, ll. 10, 11; Sergienko, "Orientirovka o deiatel'nosti armianskikh natsionalistov v Krymu" (30 October 1944), GARF f. 9478, op. 1, d. 284, ll. 1–6; and Beriia to Stalin (29 May 1944), GARF f. 9401, op. 2, d. 65, ll. 162, 163.

¹¹⁵ See, for instance, an order prepared by Beriia and signed by Stalin in Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Stalin: Politicheskii portret*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Moscow: Novosti, 1996), vol. 2, 372.

¹¹⁶ Chomaev, *Nakazannyi narod*, 28; and Shabaev, *Pravda o vyselenii balkartsev*, 62.

class to ethnic-based decision-making that started in the late 1930s, ethnicity became a criterion used to mark unwelcome clusters of society. During the war, the party bureaucracy, Slavic or not, fervently collected compromising evidence on the basis of ethnic criteria, but Moscow used the accusations selectively. The charge of treason was merely a pretext in fulfilling a grandiose social-engineering project aimed at assimilating blacklisted ethnic groups, and their conduct under occupation was often irrelevant to the top Soviet leaders who determined their fate. Selection for the black list was illogical and impulsive, exactly as it had been during the Great Purge. It was the outcome of several factors that differed in each case: a history of conflict with the state in the interwar years, geopolitical considerations, intrigues of regional party bureaucrats, Stalin's whims, the ethnic prejudices of top officials, and finally, resistance during the war. The last factor was often less important in the blacklisting process than the others.

Dept. of History
Social Sciences Building 656
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, Alberta
Canada T2N 1N4
astatiev@ucalgary.ca

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