*Article*

JCH

Journal of Contemporary History
2016, Vol. 51(2) 234–260
© The Author(s) 2015
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0022009414562821
jch.sagepub.com
SAGE

# Highland Rebels: The North Caucasus During the Stalinist Collectivization Campaign

**Jeronim Perović**
University of Zurich, Switzerland

**Abstract**
This article investigates one of the most tragic episodes of Soviet history: the collectivization campaign of 1929–30, when the Soviet state's brutal assault on the peasantry plunged the whole country into chaos and provoked large scale rebellions. Resistance was especially fierce in the Muslim dominated parts of the North Caucasus, a notoriously troubled region where Soviet structures were still very weak, and the social cohesion of mountain communities strong. Ultimately, the Red Army and the armed forces of the secret police crushed these rebellions ruthlessly. Yet in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachai and parts of Dagestan, they were at least sufficiently violent for the Soviet leadership to decide to suspend their collectivization attempt altogether until the mid-1930s. This is the first study to analyse collectivization in the non-Russian areas of the North Caucasus based on material from Russian archives as well as published document collections containing Soviet secret police reports.

**Keywords**
Chechnya, collectivization, North Caucasus, Soviet Union, Stalinism, violence

In mid-November of 1929, the Bolshevik leadership approved the program of 'total collectivization' (*sploshchnaia kollektivizatsia*). This marked the beginning of the state's frontal assault on the agrarian economic system and way of life across the entire country. The village in its traditional form was to be abolished. The village assemblies with their councils of elders were banned. Peasants were to become proletarians, to be drafted en masse for work in the kolkhoz, the collective farm. At the

**Corresponding author:**
Jeronim Perović, Department of History, University of Zurich, Karl Schmid-Strasse 4, CH-8006 Zürich, Switzerland.
Email: jeronim.perovic@hist.uzh.ch

same time, the countryside was to be cleansed of 'kulaks'. The state depicted these peasants as capitalist farmers and exploiters of poorer peasants, and thus enemies of the people. In the course of the so-called 'dekulakization campaign', hundreds of thousands of alleged 'kulaks' were arrested, deported, and many of them shot.[1]

As soon as the collectivization campaign began, the countryside descended into chaos. The Bolsheviks had no clear idea of how the measures were to be implemented, and did not bother to consider the potentially devastating effect of the campaign. The Bolsheviks considered the land and its population to be resources available for exploitation. They despised the rural way of life and culture, which in their eyes were the epitome of backwardness. The establishment of collective farms was intended to allow more efficient control of agricultural production. This campaign, which the Bolsheviks propagated as part of their great socialist reconstruction plan, not only targeted the peasants, but was also directed against religious institutions as well as their agents and symbols. The spiritual representatives of all religious denominations had already been subjected to persecution and repression. However, once the urban brigades closed down scores of churches and mosques on their march through the countryside, harassing the clergy, burning icons and melting down church bells, collectivization took on the character of an openly anti-religious campaign that had many people believing that the Apocalypse, the end of the world, had arrived.[2]

This broad assault provoked various forms of reactions, ranging from letters of protest from peasants to the party and state leaderships and voluntary mass slaughter of cattle and relinquishing of land and assets to the emigration of millions of mainly younger men to urban centres. Many peasants submitted to the massive pressure and finally resigned themselves to joining a kolkhoz. A substantial minority, namely including those peasants who had been classed as 'kulaks', saw no other option than to flee into the forests, mountains or steppes, where they occasionally joined up as armed bands.

Collectivization was met with rejection and armed resistance by people in all parts of the country.[3] Yet it was in the ethnically mixed, non-Russian and predominantly Muslim populated borderland areas that resistance more frequently evolved into large scale uprisings and military confrontations often involving regular Red Army troops. Apart from Central Asia, this type of conflict was especially characteristic of the non-Russian parts of the North Caucasus, where resistance took on an exceptionally fierce form. To be sure, the hilly topography did not determine the resistance of the various peoples living there. However, the mountains offered

1 For a general overview on collectivization in the Soviet Union: L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York, NY and Oxford 1996).

2 On rumours of Apocalypse: S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York, NY 1994), 45–7.

3 According to data provided by the Soviet secret police, the largest number of mass disturbances during the height of the collectivization campaign in 1930 was reported in the grain producing and black soil regions, namely Ukraine, the North Caucasus (the Kuban and Terek plains), the Central Black Earth and the Lower Volga. For an overview on the scale of rebellions in the USSR: Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 140.

options for retreat that enhanced the chances of successful opposition, even against an enemy that was superior in terms of military technology. The social cohesion of the mountain communities, which was based on strong tribal bonds, not only established important relations of identity, but also served as a network that protected individuals from the encroachments of the state. At the same time, these structures could be activated as organizational elements for armed resistance, should this appear necessary due to external threat.

Western literature has produced a number of studies on the situation in the Muslim areas of the Soviet Union during the collectivization period, but it has so far mainly focused on Azerbaijan and Central Asia, while largely disregarding developments in the North Caucasus.[4] This is somewhat surprising, as it was this part of the country that the Soviet Politburo had explicitly designated as the pilot region for its collectivization plan. At the November plenary in 1929, Viacheslav M. Molotov stated his personal conviction that by the summer of 1930, 'collectivization in the North Caucasus should be by and large complete'.[5] Molotov, who was responsible within the Central Committee for the collectivization project, could not or would not foresee that the endeavour would end in a fiasco. All that mattered to him was the very tight schedule: The Bolsheviks had only about four months before it was time for sowing, by which time the collective farms had to be functional and productive.[6]

Generally, whenever mention has been made of the North Caucasus, Western historiography has largely uncritically adopted the account of Chechen historian Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov.[7] However, his depiction of the events with regard to collectivization in Chechnya and the North Caucasus should be viewed with great caution.[8] It is true that Avtorkhanov was in Chechnya at the beginning of the collectivization campaign in 1929–30, leading the organizational department within the Regional Party Committee (*obkom*).[9] During this time, he had access

4 See, e.g., Jörg Baberowski's representative study on Azerbaijan: J. Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus* (Munich 2003), on collectivization: 669–752; Adrienne Lynn Edgar's study on Turkmenistan: A.L. Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, NJ 2004), on collectivization: 197–220; or Niccolò Pianciola's comprehensive work on Stalinism in Central Asia: N. Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera: Colonizzazione agricola, stermino dei nomadi e costruzione statale in Asia centrale (1905–1936)* (Rome 2009), on collectivization: 347–96.

5 Molotov quoted in: V. Danilov, R. Manning and L. Viola (eds), *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: kollektivitsatsiia i raskulachivanie: dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh: 1927–1939*, Vol. 1: May 1927–November 1929 (Moscow 1999), 759.

6 Ibid.

7 A. Avtorkhanov, 'The Chechens and the Ingush during the Soviet Period and its Antecedents', in M. Benningsen-Broxup (ed.), *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World* (London 1992), 146–94, on collectivization and the armed revolts, see 157–61.

8 For a critical review of Avtorkhanov's works, see: M.D. Fox, 'Memory, Archives, Politics: The Rise of Stalin in Avtorkhanov's Technology of Power', *Slavic Review*, 54, 4 (1995), 988–1003; E. Park and D. Brandenberger, 'Imagined Community? Rethinking the Nationalist Origins of the Contemporary Chechen Crisis', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 5, 3 (2004), 543–60, 545–51.

9 There, he worked closely with First Party Secretary Solomon A. Khasman, who was, however, already replaced at the beginning of 1930. Khasman's successor, Georgii M. Karib, who held this office from January 1930 until his reposting in August 1932: A. Avtorkhanov, *Memuary* (Frankfurt am Main 1983), 157–97.

to certain information about the situation in Chechnya, most likely basing his account largely on the monthly secret police reports, the so-called *svodki* (sing. *svodka*, 'digest'), which were at the time authored by G.G. Kraft. Kraft headed the Chechen section of the secret police, the OGPU,[10] from November 1929 to September 1930.[11] According to his own account, Avtorkhanov read these *svodki* on a regular basis.[12] This explains his detailed knowledge about the situation, since Avtorkhanov, like other Chechens who served in the region's central state and party apparatus at the time, was largely isolated from events that took place in the countryside.[13] Thus, Avtorkhanov was relying on accounts that he himself regarded as untrustworthy because they tended towards exaggeration and 'invented' fictional bandit groups, as he puts it in his memoirs.[14]

However, a comparison with declassified files from Russian archives and new published sources shows that Avtorkhanov frequently fails to represent this information accurately, that he gives wrong places or dates, or tends to exaggerate himself when writing on fighting in Chechnya. To this day, the problem remains that information is incomplete. Researchers are still denied access to Russia's federal security archive, where secret police reports are stored, and are faced with increased restrictions regarding access to Russia's other central archives. Also, the information available will remain partial if only because most of the North Caucasus rebels of that period were liquidated in the course of military operations, and there are thus hardly any written sources reflecting their point of view. Nevertheless, the publication of a fairly large number of secret police files, Red Army reports and other official documents allows us for the first time to reconstruct events in Chechnya and in other parts of the North Caucasus during the phase of collectivization and dekulakization in detail.

The fact that the Bolsheviks chose to start their collectivization campaign in the North Caucasus is quite astonishing, as the difficulties of collectivization in the non-Russian populated national regions (*oblasti*) of the North Caucasus could have been easily anticipated by the Bolsheviks. There had already been a major revolt in connection with the acceleration of the state grain campaign

10 The GPU (*Gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*, 'State Political Administration') was initially attached to the Interior Ministry of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (NKVD RSFSR), from November 1923 onwards to the Soviet Council of People's Commissars, at which point the organization adapted its name and became the OGPU (*Ob''edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie,* 'All-Union State Political Administration'). The secret police of the Soviet Union existed under this name from 1923 to 1934.

11 *Organy VCHK-GPU-OGPU na Severnom Kavkaze i v Zavkavkaze (1918–1934 gg.): prilozheniia k itogovomu otchetu po proektu 'Rabota s obshchestvennym mneniem Rossii dlia sozdaniia ob''ektivnoi i sbalansirovannoi otsenki deistvii Rossii na Severnom Kavkaze i Kavkaze v tselom',* Mezhdunarodnoe obshchestvo 'Memorial', internet-SMI 'Kavkazskii uzel', July 2004, 28. Available at: http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/system/attachments/0000/3107/Органы_ВЧК-ГПУ-ОГПУ_на_Северном_Кавказе_и_в_Закавказье__1918-1934_гг_.pdf (accessed 16 November 2011).

12 Avtorhkanov, *Memuary*, 167, 207.

13 Park and Brandenberger, 'Imagined Community?', 551.

14 Avtorkhanov, *Memuary*, 167.

(*khlebozagotovka*) in mid-June 1928 in the Baksan district (*okrug*) of the Kabardino-Balkaria region.

By the time the revolt began in the Baksan district, the situation in many villages of Kabardino-Balkaria had already been tense for some time. In the course of various grain shortages, the state had intensified its campaign of confiscating grain from peasants. The expeditions into the countryside, mainly led by uneducated party activists, were frequently accompanied by dispossession of farmers who were deemed wealthy, but also by antireligious actions such as closures of mosques and madrassas (Islamic schools).[15]

The revolt was triggered by an incident in the Kizburun II settlement, which was only a few kilometees away from the district capital, Baksan.[16] According to a detailed report submitted to the Bolshevik leadership by the OGPU intelligence department a few weeks after the Baksan revolt had been suppressed, the initial spark was ignited on 8 June 1928, when the farmers were confronted with demands for 4000 *pud* of grain (1 *pud* = 16.38 kg) to be provided during the month of June. After people had left the mosque following Friday prayers, a certain Urusov, a member of the village Soviet and a person which the OGPU report depicts as a *seredniak* (a 'middle peasant', that is, an average wealthy peasant, in Bolshevik economic category), together with another farmer, called an ad-hoc assembly at which he urgently warned the villagers of a famine should the wealthier farmers again be forced to hand over large parts of their grain stores to the state.[17]

Due to the unrest, the members of the Executive Committee (*ispolkom*) of the Baksan district arrived in the village the same evening with militia units in order to assess the situation. They adopted an uncompromising stance towards the angry crowd and insisted that the farmers had to hand over grain contributions at the volume specified by the state. The Baksan militia arrested Urusov and another person, apparently one of the *bedniaki* (the 'poor peasants' in Bolshevik category). On the following day, 9 June, about 200 of their relatives and other villagers assembled and marched to Baksan, where they managed to have the prisoners released. The same evening, the district authorities and their armed militia arrived again at Kizburun II, re-arrested the peasant who had just been released, as well as five other people, and transferred them to Baksan. Urusov, on the other hand, managed to avoid arrest, according to the secret police report. Subsequently, Urusov had the head of the Kizburun II village Soviet arrested together with his deputy and other members.[18]

15 Kh.G. Mambetov and Z.G. Mambetov, *Sotsial'nye protivorechiia v kabardino-balkarskoi derevne v 20-30-e gody* (Nal'chik 1999), 30.

16 A good summary of events is given in: A. Marshall, *The Caucasus under Soviet Rule* (London and New York, NY 2010), 202–5.

17 The report of the OGPU intelligence department (including appendix) can be found in: N.E. Bystrova et al. (eds), *'Sovershenno sekretno': Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922–1934gg.)*, Vol. 6: 1928 (Moscow 2002), 339–42, 365–66.

18 Ibid., 340, 365.

The actual revolt began on 10 June 1928. In the early morning hours, hundreds of villagers assembled in Kizburun II with the aim of freeing the prisoners from jail. Before making their way to Baksan, they plucked up their courage by dancing and were cheered on by the assembled women.[19] According to the secret police report, the approximately 1500-strong mob, armed with 'pitchforks, poles, and hoes', was led by Urusov.[20] Upon their arrival in Baksan, the crowd marched to the district government building to demand the prisoners' release. After negotiations with the authorities failed, the militia opened fire on the crowd with a machine gun. However, the crowd managed to subdue and disarm the police officers. They beat up the head of the district administration as well as the police officers, severely injuring a policeman as well as the local state official. Then the crowd stormed the prison, released the inmates, and entered the arms depot. There, they seized two more machine guns, 13 rifles, and 2500 rounds of ammunition.[21] Then the assembly dispersed, with many returning home. The remainder of the rioters, according to the account, heaped abuse on the representatives of the district government who had arrived from Nal'chik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria. These representatives included the chairman of the regional government, Betal E. Kalmykov, and Artur I. Mikhel'son, the head of the Kabardino-Balkaria section of the OGPU.[22] Possibly in order to avoid open confrontation and further bloodshed, the protesters did not offer any active resistance, returned some of the weapons they had seized and reluctantly surrendered to the authorities some of the people they had liberated from jail earlier. However, the people refused to betray the leaders of the revolt, who had withdrawn before the arrival of the government representatives.[23]

The following day, on 11 June, Kalmykov and the local secret police representative arrived in Kizburun II in order to persuade the crowd to surrender the leaders of the movement. Kalmykov also called upon the people not to allow residents of other villages to become involved in the affairs of Kizburun II. The residents then elected a new village Soviet and expressed their remorse to Kalmykov.[24] But the efforts of Kalmykov would prove largely ineffectual: The rebels of Kizburun II had already sent messengers to the surrounding villages to

19 Ibid., 365.

20 In the post-Soviet literature, however, Urusov is not listed as a leader, since he was supposedly arrested on 9 June together with other farmers: O.O. Aishaev, Krest'ianskie vosstaniia v Kabardino-Balkarii v period kollektivizatsii sel'skogo choziaistva (Nal'chik 2009), 2. Available at: http://vosstaniya.ucoz.ru/ (accessed 18 January 2013)

21 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 6, 340–1. According to other accounts, several hundred horsemen also took part in the attack, and the number of weapons seized was also higher: Aishaev, Krest'ianskie vosstaniia v Kabardino-Balkarii, 3; N.F. Bugai and A.M. Gonov, *V Kazakhstan i Kirgiziiu iz Priël'brus'ia (20-e - 50-e gody)* (Nal'chik 1997), 22. These authors base their accounts of the events mainly on reports of the local secret police, which they were able to study in the regional archives.

22 Mikhel'son headed the local OGPU unit in Kabardino-Balkaria from 30 November 1923 until 26 June 1928, when he was replaced by M.G. Raev: *Organy VCHK-GPU-OGPU na Severnom Kavkaze i v Zavkavkaze*, 25.

23 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 6, 341; Aishaev, Krest'ianskie vosstaniia v Kabardino-Balkarii, *2*.

24 Bugai, *V Kazakhstan i Kirgiziiu iz Priël'brus'ia*, 23; Aishaev, Krest'ianskie vosstaniia v Kabardino-Balkarii, 3.

ask their residents for support. On the evening of 11 June there seems to have been a large assembly in Kizburun II, attended by about 3000 people, about one-third of them from the neighbouring villages.[25] The revolt was now led by a 'rebel staff', which according to the secret police report was made up exclusively of 'kulaks' and adherents of the sharia, the Islamic law.[26]

At the assembly in Kizburun II, the rebels now issued demands that went far beyond calls for immediate cessation of the grain campaign. Specifically, they allegedly passed a resolution not only calling for an end to the grain campaign, but also including demands such as 'reestablishment of sharia', 'opening the closed madrassas', 'freedom of religion', 'discontinuation of the organization of [state] nurseries', and 'appropriate behaviour by the local state representatives'.[27] At the same time, the secret police also reported unrest in other parts of Kabardino-Balkaria, including disturbances in a village settled by ethnic Balkars and a Cossack *stanitsa* (settlement) in the neighbouring Terek district, both of which the secret police believed were closely linked to the events in Baksan.[28]

A fateful move for the future course of events was the decision by the Kizburun II rebels to march on Baksan once more on 12 June. It is unclear from the OGPU intelligence department's report why this decision was taken. According to one account found in post-Soviet literature, a messenger on horseback from Baksan brought news to the people in Kizburun II that the towns of Piatigorsk and Kislovodsk had already fallen into the hands of rebel forces. The messenger called on the villagers to take action immediately: They were to march to Baksan together with likeminded residents of neighbouring villages, seize weapons, and then capture the regional capital Nal'chik together with the rebels from other parts of the region.[29]

In any case, on 12 June, about 3000 people marched on Baksan, some of them reportedly carrying firearms.[30] Upon their arrival, the crowd surrounded the building housing 45 OGPU members and soldiers of the National Cavalry Division (a military unit consisting of local troops). The crowd demanded that these troops hand over their weapons. When even warning shots failed to disperse the mob, the security forces opened fire. By their own accounts, they killed eight people and wounded 20.[31] It was only now that the crowd dispersed. In the night of 12–13 June, fresh security police forces commanded by Mikhel'son arrived, reinforced the following day by Red Army units, which secured the entire town and

25 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 6, 341. Other sources report that this meeting did not take place until 12 June: Bugai, *V Kazakhstan i Kirgiziiu iz Priël'brus'ia*, 23; Aishaev, Krest'ianskie vosstaniia v Kabardino-Balkarii, 3.

26 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 6, 341.

27 Ibid., 366.

28 Ibid., 342, 366.

29 Mambetov, *Sotsial'nye protivorechiia v kabardino-balkarskoi derevne v 20-30-e gody*, 72–5.

30 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 6, 341. Other accounts state that the number was even larger and that about 5000 people, including 500 horsemen, marched on Baksan: Mambetov, *Sotsial'nye protivorechiia v kabardino-balkarskoi derevne v 20-30-e gody*, 76-7.

31 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 6, 339–41. Other sources refer to seven dead and 12 injured: Mambetov, Sotsial'nye protivorechiia v kabardino-balkarskoi derevne v 20-30-e gody, 76–7.

its surroundings.[32] This essentially marked the end of the revolt. According to the report by the special commission convened on 17 June by the party office of Kabardino-Balkaria to investigate the events in Baksan, a total of 20 rebels were killed during those bloody days in June.[33]

Once the revolt had been crushed, the security forces went on the counteroffensive: In the following days, they carried out large-scale campaigns of arrests and purges in the surrounding villages; according to the secret police report, up to 160 arrests were made.[34] Of these, 118 were sentenced in summary proceedings before the end of June 1928. Eleven individuals, including most of the members of the rebel staff, were shot.[35] The other convicts were sent to penal colonies, and some of them sentenced to long jail terms. Notably, the individual cases were not processed by the procurator's office, which would have been the normal course of the judicial process, but were decided and enforced by the highest decision-making body of the secret police, the OGPU-Collegium.[36]

When the grip of the state on the peasantry began to tighten in the course of forced grain procurements and the toughening of the struggle against religion in 1928 and 1929, acts of violence were reported in many parts of the USSR with similar characteristics.[37] Yet the Baksan revolt was at the time not only one of the most violent and largest peasant upheavals, it also anticipated those patterns of peasant resistance which would become typical for the later, far larger rebellions after the start of the collectivization campaign in the North Caucasus.

One of the decisive factors for the population's determination to join together in a mass uprising seems to have been the high degree of solidarity among the villagers. Social relations were by no means always harmonious in the North Caucasus villages. Generally, however, social cohesion was stronger in the North Caucasus *aul* (village) communities than in the Russian villages; accordingly, there was a greater possibility here of organizing resistance in a larger collective. The community joined up to protect its 'kulaks', since they, just like the village 'mullahs' (Islamic teachers), were often respected members of village life and its economy. Conversely, it was these individuals as natural authorities who were able to mobilize the population for an uprising in the first place.[38]

32 Bugai, *V Kazakhstan i Kirgiziiu iz Priël'brus'ia*, 25.
33 The commission's report is located in the FSB archive of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria (F. 10, Op. 1, D. 61, Ll. 2-10) and is cited in: Ibid., 28.
34 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 6, 339–41.
35 Bugai, *V Kazakhstan i Kirgiziiu iz Priël'brus'ia*, 28.
36 Aishaev, Krest'ianskie vosstaniia v Kabardino-Balkarii, 3.
37 Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 100–31; Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 37–45.
38 It is certainly true that peasants sought to protect one another also in Russian villages against the onslaught of the state (see: Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 67–99). Yet at least according to OGPU reports, internal strife among village communities seems to have been more a feature in the central, Russian and Slavic settled parts of the country. Here, collectivization frequently opened up conflicts among those who wanted to join the kolkhoz and those against. Also, in order to revive ancient enmities or even due to pure envy, neighbours denounced one another or took advantage of the situation for

A further characteristic is the fact that the revolt increased to significant proportions within a very short time. Only one day after the first march on Baksan, on 10 June, the villagers of Kizburun II were joined by residents of a number of other settlements. Mutual assistance was not only possible because the villages were immediately adjacent and the people apparently knew each other personally, but was likely also assisted by the fact that all villages involved in the uprising were situated in areas settled by Kabardians. However, the events also had effects in other parts. The mere news of the revolt in Baksan seems to have sufficed to fire up other settlements where people were also suffering from state encroachment. News passed on by word of mouth could rapidly grow into wild rumours, as illustrated by the erroneous reports that unrest had also broken out in other parts of the region and that the rebels were already enjoying successes. It is unclear who might have had an interest in launching such rumours intentionally. However, the fact that such a rumour could circulate and meet with approval allows us to draw inferences regarding the general mood: The villagers of Kizburun II were prepared to believe such a rumour because it affirmed them in following up on their own scheme.

The fact that the broader population in other districts of Kabardino-Balkaria and the North Caucasus did not actively participate in the Baksan uprising may be attributed mainly to practical reasons. The revolt was not planned in advance, but a spontaneous uprising. The rebels had hardly any weapons, nor could they resort to a large existing network for coordinating major actions. Also, time was too short to build up a hard-hitting organization. The movement, which began as a protest march on 10 June, met with a bloody end only two days later. The fact that the secret police nevertheless dedicated a large part of their report to analysing the events beyond the confines of the Baksan district hardly indicates that they were expecting a massive coordinated revolt across the entire region. Instead, it more probably points to the subliminal fear that in this historically restless region, with its as yet weakly developed Soviet state structures, developments might rapidly get out of hand, and that the party leaders would be well advised to pay close attention to the events there. This uncanny feeling was certainly exacerbated by traditional stereotypes about 'fanatic Muslims', whom the state viewed with fundamental suspicion (which was true not only for the North Caucasus region, but Muslim populated parts of the USSR in general, and the Central Asian region in particular).[39]

plundering and theft: N.E. Bystrova et al. (eds), *'Sovershenno sekretno': Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922–1934gg.)*, Vol. 8, part 1: 1930 (Moscow 2008), 29.

39 In the North Caucasus, the image of Islam as a 'threat' was nurtured by historical experience and the fact that the main leaders of anti-Bolshevik rebellions during the 1920s were all members of the Islamic clergy. The most famous was Imam Nazhmuddin Gotsinksii (1859–1925), who led a large-scale uprising in 1920–1 in Chechnya and Dagestan against the Bolsheviks, and was captured and shot only in autumn 1925: Benningsen-Broxup, 'The Last Ghazawat: The 1920–21 Uprising', in Benningsen-Broxup, *The North Caucasus Barrier*, 112–45. Similarly, in Central Asia, the Bolsheviks were faced from the very beginning of their rule with an armed resistance group, the so-called Basmachi movement, which they depicted as Islamic fanatics and which they were able to annihilate only by the mid-1930s. On the Soviet

Recourse to arms as a frequently used method of waging conflict in the North Caucasus is not only to be explained by the mountain peoples' warlike tradition, but also by the fact that the peasant population, most of whom could neither read nor write, had few other options for protest. Especially regarding the period following the start of the collectivization campaign, it is noticeable that the central archives have hardly any letters of protest from North Caucasian peoples, compared to a surge of protest letters from Russian farmers, who frequently turned directly to the state leaders to voice their grievances.[40]

Migration to urban centres, which for Russian peasants was another frequent form of passive resistance that allowed them to avoid the increasing state pressure, was largely not an option in the North Caucasus. For in the predominantly Russian-populated cities, the non-Russian and predominantly Muslim natives of the North Caucasus often faced rough treatment, and if unable to speak Russian, they could not manage in the urban centres. Even more than for the people of Kabardino-Balkaria, this was true for ethnic groups such as the Chechens and Ingush, who often faced open rejection from the Russian-dominated working class and party members in the cities of Groznyi or Vladikavkaz.[41] Also, the phenomenon of mass emigration to neighbouring countries as a way of escaping the pressure of collectivization (which was in part the case with Central Asian nomad peoples emigrating to neighbouring countries like China, Afghanistan or Iran, but also to other regions within the USSR), was far less prevalent among the North Caucasus mountain people at the start of the campaign.[42]

The result of all this was that unlike in the Russian villages, which saw their young people leave in droves after the start of collectivization,[43] many people in the North Caucasus remained in place, or withdrew to the mountains and forests, where they formed armed gangs and offered resistance. Active and armed resistance was also particularly widespread in the North Caucasus because the population was still relatively well armed. This was not the case with the residents of Kizburun II, who had first to capture their weapons. However, in other parts of the

anti-Islam campaign in Central Asia: S. Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917–1941* (Westport, CT 2001), especially 107–74.

40 During the period from the end of 1929 to spring of 1930, Stalin is reported to have received 50,000 letters of protest from farmers; Mikhail I. Kalinin, the formal head of state of the Soviet Union, even received 85,000: Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 92.

41 According to Soviet statistical data, only some 2 per cent of Chechens and 0.8 per cent of Ingush lived in urban centres (i.e. Groznyi and Vladikavkaz) by 1926: V.S. Belozërov, *Ėntnicheskaia karta Severnogo Kavkaza* (Moscow 2005), 59. Also, Chechen workers accounted for only a small fraction of the workforce in the oil industry around Groznyi. The Groznyi-based oil company *Grozneft'* in May 1928 employed only some 500 Chechens out of a total workforce of 16-18,000: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), F. 17, Op. 67, D. 463, L. 17; A.A. Igolkin, *Neftianaia politika SSSR v 1928–1940-m godakh* (Moscow 2005), 87.

42 Tens of thousands of families in Central Asia left with the start of collectivization, but many emigrated also in the early 1930s because of famine and large-scale devastation: Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, 397–418. Adrienne Lynn Edgar describes the situation during collectivization in the case of Turkmenistan as one of 'fight or flight': Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, 213.

43 Possibly some 12 million peasants left the village during the First Five Year Plan (1928–32): Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 82.

region, especially in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, many had handed in only some of their weapons during the disarmament campaigns of the mid-1920s; they had either hidden the rest or had procured weapons just after disarmament from other regions where that campaign had yet to commence.[44]

The frequent and rapid escalation into violence can also be attributed to a specific form of regime, which in the non-Russian periphery was dominated more strongly than elsewhere by the secret police whose members never hesitated to use force. Especially in the remote mountainous areas of the North Caucasus, it was the Russian-dominated secret police and its agents who, in want of other functioning Soviet institutions, in some cases actually served as the only representatives of state power in the countryside.[45] Ultimately, both arbitrary acts by the secret police and retribution by the locals had caused sufficient hatred to build up to trigger an extremely violent outbreak at the start of the collectivization campaign. Thus, by the time the party leadership demanded nationwide collectivization, all of the ingredients for the subsequent outbreak of violence had already been added to the mix.

The North Caucasus, with its fertile black soil in the Kuban and Terek plains and its favourable climate, was one of the nation's breadbaskets. As early as 4 July 1928, Andrei A. Andreev, head of the North Caucasian Regional Party Committee and member of the Politburo, presented to the Politburo a comprehensive report on 'socialist reconstruction' of the North Caucasus.[46] At this point in time, however, the goals were as yet only vaguely phrased. The specific form of the collective farm had not yet been agreed upon, either. It is noticeable, however, that the Baksan revolt, which was only three weeks past at that time, was not mentioned even in passing either in the Andreev report or in the subsequent discussions among the Politburo members, even though developments in other non-Russian settlement areas of the North Caucasus also indicated that the kolkhoz concept had little appeal for peasants.

Yet the party leadership was neither willing nor ready at this time to ponder potential problems. The Bolsheviks regarded the traditional peasant as an adversary which had to be eliminated sooner or later in order to build socialism. Against the chaos of the Civil War which followed the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, Lenin had occasionally advised a cautious approach. Yet by the end of the 1920s, the Soviet party leadership under Iosif V. Stalin ran out of patience. If the Soviet Union was to finally take the leap from an agricultural country to a modern

44 Thus, the Chechens in particular had procured their weapons in the South Caucasus from across the largely unmonitored borders with Georgia and Dagestan: Yu.L. D'iakov et al. (eds), *'Sovershenno sekretno': Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922–1934gg.)*, Vol. 7: 1929 (Moscow 2004), 498–9.

45 See the report written in April 1930 by the commander of the Red Army's North Caucasus military region, General Ivan P. Belov: 'Chechnia: vooruzhënnaia bor'ba v 20-30-e gody', *Voenno-istoricheskii arhkiv*, 2 (1997), 137–43, 138.

46 Andreev's report, including the subsequent discussion, is published in: L.P. Kosheleva, L.A. Rogova and O.V. Khlevniuk (eds), *Stenogrammy zasedanii Politbiuro TsK RKP (b) - VKP (b) 1923-1938 gg.: v trekh tomakh*, Vol. 3: 1928–1938 (Moscow 2007), 83–108.

industrialized economy, it was time the Bolshevik state took up the war with the peasantry.[47]

Throughout the 1920s, there had never been a complete letup of what the secret police reports labeled 'banditry' (*banditizm*) in the North Caucasus. With the increase of state pressure, it made a stronger reappearance at the beginning of 1928.[48] In these reports, the secret police frequently portrayed local events as being part of a larger threat, for instance by suggesting that there was a connection between the counterrevolutionary movements of White generals in Ossetia, unrest in the Cossack areas of the Terek and Sunzha plains, and the activities of anti-Soviet groups in Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan.[49] In Chechnya in particular, a rumour is said to have circulated in advance of collectivization to the effect that Turkey and its allies were planning to conquer the Caucasus and restore Islam. The secret police identified Islamic clerics, but also wandering preachers, as the source of such rumours.[50]

All of these events, according to a secret police report of October 1929, 'dictate the necessity of carrying out disarmament operations and liquidating counterrevolutionary bandit elements in Chechnya and Ingushetia'.[51] By 5 November 1929, thus before the actual start of mass collectivization, the security forces had confiscated a total of 12,475 weapons in a large-scale operation in Chechnya and Ingushetia (about four-fifths of them confiscated in Chechnya), liquidated several bands of outlaws, and arrested a number of rebel leaders as well as dozens of 'bandits', 'kulaks' and other 'counterrevolutionary elements'.[52] At the same time, the secret police was also beginning the 'liquidation of counterrevolutionary organizations' in the Dagestani districts of Andiiskii, Avarskii and Khazav-Yurtovskii, which in previous years had also served as refuges for rebels. Certainly, these were also pure campaigns of retribution, since members of the secret police had repeatedly been targeted by assassins in these areas.[53]

While the disarmament campaigns were predominantly directed at mountainous areas, it was mainly the peasants in the lowlands who felt the pressure in

47 Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 24.

48 According to a secret police report of October 1929, the situation in the North Caucasus had settled down after the disarmament campaign of 1925; however, from 1928 onwards, the bandit activity increased once more. In the period of January to August 1929 alone, the OGPU reported 35 assaults in Chechnya and 64 in Ingushetia: D'iakov, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 7, 498–9.

49 Ibid., 499–500.

50 Ibid., 253. Rumours about the imminent fall of the Soviet Union, the coming of war, or (after the start of collectivization) the end of time, were especially prevalent in the countryside during times of fear and insecurity. Soviet representatives often saw foreign agents, 'kulaks', priests and other 'counter-revolutionaries', but also marginal figures such as wandering pilgrims, beggars or women as bearers of rumours. It is not clear, however, whether these were indeed the actual transmitters of rumours, or if the security police simply labelled them so: Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 61.

51 D'iakov, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 7, 499–500.

52 In Chechnya, the disarmament campaign concentrated mainly on three mountainous districts – Itum-Kalinskii, Nozhai-Yurtovskii and Galanchozhskii – with which the military commanders were already familiar from earlier operations, namely against the famous leader of the 1920–1 rebellion, Imam Gotsinskii: Ibid., 500–1.

53 Ibid.

connection with the state's grain campaign. The actual uprising in relation to the state's collectivization assault thus began in the Chechen lowlands on 7 December 1929, when members of two clans (so called *teips*[54]) in the *aul* Goity cordoned off their living quarters with guards of their own and thus de facto seized power. A similar development took place the following day in the settlement of Shali, where residents disarmed the local militia in response to an attempt by the authorities to dispossess 'kulaks'. The secret police identified Shita Istamulov as the ringleader of the events in Shali. An OGPU report described him as a significant 'ideologue in the Chechen struggle against Soviet power' and a key 'spiritual leader'. Istamulov was accused not only of having headed the resistance in Shali, but also of having tried to incite the surrounding settlements 'in order to organize a major armed uprising'.[55]

On 8 December 1929, the local secret police demanded support from the Red Army, which was reiterated two days later by an official request by the authorized OGPU representative in the North Caucasus. The command of the armed forces in the North Caucasus military region subsequently put together a combat force in Groznyi consisting of two companies from the Vladikavkaz infantry school, one company of the 82nd Infantry Regiment, one squadron of the 28th Caucasian Infantry Division, and a battery of mountain guns. Finally, a total of 2000 men, equipped with around a dozen heavy artillery guns and supported by seven aircraft, formed up for a major attack on the two villages. The troops took Shali on 11 December and Goity on the morning of 12 December. The most important leaders of the rebellion, including Istamulov, were able to flee to the hills together with their armed followers. While units of the secret police and parts of the army subsequently continued to fight bandits south of Goity, other forces advanced to the mountainous south-eastern Nozhai-Yurtovskii district, where new unrest had been reported and where they conducted another major military operation from 20–27 December. Once again, however, they failed to apprehend the ringleaders. The price in blood was high on both sides: According to the army report, up to 60 Chechens were killed or wounded in the course of these operations. The army had suffered 21 dead and 22 wounded. In total, 450 people were arrested. The security forces confiscated hundreds of weapons.[56]

It was after these initial severe disturbances in Chechnya, if not before, that Andreev seems to have recognized that the prerequisites for 'socialist

54 A *teip* is a community whose members claim descent from a common ancestor, thus nominally making them blood relatives. The distinguishing feature of a *teip* is the cult of ancestors. Everyone who claims descent from the common (mythical) ancestor and shares in the (fictional) genealogy is a member of the *teip*: C.W. Dettmering, *Russlands Kampf gegen Sufis: Die Integration der Tschetschenen und Inguschen in das Russische Reich 1810–1880* (Mannheim 2011), 107–9; C.W. Dettmering, 'Reassessing Chechen and Ingush (Vainakh) Clan Structures in the 19th Century', *Central Asian Survey*, 24, 4 (2005), 469–89.

55 D'iakov, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 7, 585.

56 The (undated) army report is published in: 'Chechnia: vooruzhënnaia bor'ba v 20-30-e gody', *Voenno-istoricheskii arhkiv*, 2 (1997), 135–6. According to the secret police, 220 people were arrested in Shali alone, and 144 in Goity: D'iakov, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 7, 585.

reconstruction' were different from region to region. Not only was it necessary to distinguish between Russian and non-Russian settlement areas, but differentiation was also required between the individual national regions of the North Caucasus. On the occasion of the Third Plenary Session of the North Caucasus Regional Committee on 13 January 1930, Andreev stated that conditions in North Ossetia, for instance, were more comparable to those in the Russian-settled Kuban region of the North Caucasus than with those in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachai or Balkaria, where 'pre-capitalist' agricultural structures based on 'clan and patriarchal forms' as well as strong 'religious prejudices' prevailed.[57] Any collectivization that had to be enforced by Red Army troops and the deployment of 'brigades consisting of our Russian comrades' was worthless; this should be the task of national party cadres, which were, however, lacking in Chechnya and other national regions, as Andreev noted. Instead of pushing for total collectivization, Andreev urged the comrades in Chechnya to 'wait a little' and first 'create the elementary preconditions for collectivization'. He assured them that they would not be admonished for lagging slightly behind in collectivization.[58] The latter point must have sounded particularly cynical to the Chechen delegates present at the session. For after the uprisings in December the entire Chechen party leadership had been replaced.[59]

In calling for a more cautious approach to collectivization, Andreev was by no means arguing for lenience or clemency. Rather, he called for a determined fight against the 'kulaks':

> In the national regions [of the North Caucasus], there are just as many kulaks as in the Russian districts. This kulak first has to be found there, however. The most important thing is finding the kulak before we begin with collectivization; and I assure you, comrades, that our party organizations there do now yet know the kulak. . . . And in Chechnya, we only managed to seek out the kulaks with the help of the army [. . .].[60]

Andreev's appeal did not meet with local consent. As in other parts of the country, the party leadership in Chechnya was intent on resolving the issues of collectivization and dekulakization with a single strike in order to prevent Chechnya from falling behind other areas in the statistics. Soon after the official collectivization campaign had begun, the Chechen government reported impressive figures: In February 1930, according to these figures, the districts of Shalinskii and Gudermesskii had already reached collectivization levels of 97 and 83 per cent, respectively. Two weeks later, it was even reported that collectivization in these two districts had been completed altogether, with the Shalinskii district having even

57 RGASPI, F. 73, Op. 1, D. 99, L. 25-6.
58 RGASPI, F. 73, Op. 1, D. 99, L. 26; 28.
59 M.B. Ėl'zhurkaev, *Kollektivizatsiia sel'skogo khoziaistva v Checheno-Ingushetii: uroki istorii (1927–1937 gg.)* (Makhachkala 2000), 99, 122.
60 The sentence underlined has been struck out by hand, and it is not found in later versions of Andreev's speech: RGASPI, F. 73, Op. 1, D. 99, L. 27.

achieved 103 per cent fulfilment of the plan. According to official statements, the Chechen lowlands had already reached a collectivization level of 80 per cent by mid-March.[61]

These remarkable collectivization rates were possible, on the one hand, because short-term 'comprehensive collective farms' had been established in many *auls*. These sometimes included up to 1500 farms, as was the case, for instance, in the settlements of Goity and Urus-Martan. In many cases, entire areas were already regarded as collectivized if the farmers had formally agreed at meetings to join a kolkhoz that did not yet exist.[62] On the other hand, in Chechnya, too, the local authorities applied pressure in the collectivization campaign, further aggravating an already tense situation. There were more and more reports of bandit attacks on state facilities and of clashes with the secret police causing deaths and injuries.[63]

The situation was not much better in the areas bordering on Chechnya. On 3 February 1930, rebels in Ingushetia carried out a spectacular attack. On the road leading to the village of Surkhakhi, they ambushed the car of Iosif M. Chernoglaz, who had only been appointed as secretary of the party's Ingush Executive Regional Committee in September 1929. They murdered him together with the chairman of the local District Committee (*raikom*) as well as the driver of the car.[64] In the subsequent punitive operation, the secret police killed several 'bandits' and arrested around 200 people, apparently including the murderer of Chernoglaz.[65] While similar incidents with numerous deaths were reported from other national areas of the North Caucasus, especially Kabarda,[66] the main focus of the secret police's attention was on the situation in Chechnya and Dagestan.

According to reports by the security agencies, a major uprising was to be expected here at any moment. According to one report, 'Istamulov is travelling through the villages and meeting clerics as well as [other] authorities with the purpose of beginning his attack at the beginning of March'.[67] The secret police also

61 Already on 10 December 1929, i.e., while the fighting was still fully underway, the Chechen party leadership decided that Chechnya should be completely collectivized within just one and a half years. On 18 December 1929, the Chechen party committee approved the total collectivization of the Gudermesskii and Shalinskii districts, which was to be completed by spring of 1930: Ėl'zhurkaev, *Kollektivizatsiia sel'skogo khoziaistva v Checheno-Ingushetii*, 73–7.

62 Ibid., 77, 85–6.

63 A. Berelovich and V. Danilov (eds), *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VCHK-OGPU-NKVD: 1918–1939: dokumenty i materialy v 4 tomakh*, Vol. 3, book 1: 1930–1931 (Moscow 2003), 144–7.

64 According to Avtorkhanov, the murder of Chernoglaz took place in autumn of 1930 near the village of Galashki, which is in another part of Ingushetia: Avtorkhanov, 'The Chechens and the Ingush during the Soviet Period and its Antecedents', 165.

65 Berelovich, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VCHK-OGPU-NKVD*, Vol. 3, book 1, 146; V. Danilov, R. Manning and L. Viola (eds), *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: kollektivitsatsiia i raskulachivanie: dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh: 1927–1939*, Vol. 2, November 1929–December 1930 (Moscow 2000), 192.

66 Denilov, Tragediia sovetskoi derevni, Vol. 2, 225–9, 235–9.

67 Report by Comrade Rud' to Evdokimov on the aggravation of the political situation in Chechnya, written on 26 February 1930; the report was forwarded to Stalin and Vorozshilov: N.E. Bystrova et al. (eds), *'Sovershenno sekretno': Lubianka-Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922-1934gg.)*, Vol. 8, part 2: 1930 (Moscow 2008), 1249–50, 1249.

issued warnings about adherents of the 'Ali Mitaev sect',[68] which supposedly were preparing an uprising on the basis of their 'fanaticism and bonds of family and clan'.[69] Based on rumours that were supposedly circulating among the general population at the time, the secret police not only portrayed Istamulov as a rebel leader from Shali, but attributed to him the potential to become a 'national hero' and 'fighter for the liberation of Chechnya from Russian despotism'.[70]

In a missive to the party leaders in the national regions of the North Caucasus on 17 February 1930, Andreev complained that they were not observing directives and even further enforcing collectivization in the mountain areas. Once more, he complained that work brigades manned with Russian communists were being deployed in the *auls*. Andreev held to the view this was in the interests of the local communists, who could then deny any responsibility for potential mistakes. At the same time, he also clarified that the local party organizations were to refrain from dekulakization using 'naked administrative measures' without preparing and educating the population beforehand. Furthermore, he believed, all of these developments were taking place at a most unfavourable point in time, since all attention should be devoted to sowing, which was in jeopardy due to the current circumstances.[71] Any dispossessed peasant would simply join the rebels in the mountains, a fact that 'the national party organizations should not forget for even a moment'. Therefore, he argued, the focus should be on the 'struggle against the bandit holdouts'. Because bandits enjoyed the protection of their *auls*, Andreev urged that this 'network of accomplices' be destroyed.[72]

Andreev's criticism shows that the policy focus was no longer on collectivization, but on decisive measures to combat banditry and suppress ongoing or potential revolts. In fact, due to the massive internal unrests in many parts of the USSR in early 1930, the leadership of the Soviet armed forces was seriously concerned about the defence of the country.[73] When the unrest continued into February and March 1930, growing in size to the point where the sowing in spring was in jeopardy, the Soviet regime had no other choice but to intervene and take corrective political action. In order to remove themselves and the party leadership from criticism, it was convenient to pass the blame on to lower functionaries in the party hierarchy. Thus Stalin, in a *Pravda* article of 2 March 1930, accused local

68 This refers to the followers of Sheikh Ali Mitaev (ca. 1891–1925), who was one of the most important leaders of the Qadiriyya Sufi order and most influential in the Chechen plains and foothills (namely in the districts of Vedeno and Shali): M.D. Zaurbekov, *Sheikh Ali Mitaev: patriot, mirotvorets, politik, genii: etalon spravedlivosti i chesti* (Groznyi 2008).

69 Report by Comrade Rud' to Evdokimov, 26 February 1930: Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* 1249.

70 D'iakov, *'Sovershenno sekretno',* Vol. 7, 586.

71 RGASPI, F. 73, Op. 1, D. 97, Ll. 26-7, L. 26.

72 Ibid., L. 27.

73 A. Romano, 'Permanent War Scare: Mobilisation, Militarisation and Peasant War', in S. Pons and A. Romano (eds), *Russia in the Age of Wars 1914–1945* (Milan 2000), 103–19.

authorities, 'dizzy with success', of having committed mistakes in the enforcement of collectivization.[74]

Stalin's call for moderation did not signify that the Bolshevik leadership was reconsidering the principle of collectivization as such in any way. The party leadership now simply switched to a somewhat more differentiated strategy. In view of the particularly difficult situation in the non-Russian and economically 'backward' borderlands, the Politburo determined as early as late January 1930 that while the closure of churches and other places of worship was inevitable, a more cautious approach was advised.[75] On 20 February 1930, the party leadership decided to adopt a slower pace of collectivization in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Buriat-Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Yakutia.[76] Acknowledging the difficult situation in the North Caucasus, only five days later, on 25 February 1930, the Politburo adopted Stalin's proposal to include Chechnya, Ingushetia and Kabarda in the list of areas where the original aims of total collectivization were to be at least temporarily revised.[77]

With these decisions, the Politburo not only sanctioned Andreev's views to refrain from further collectivization in large parts of the North Caucasus, but also authorized the deployment of the armed forces to this troubled region. Thus, in the third section of its provisions of 25 February, the Politburo determined that 'in order to decisively and swiftly eradicate banditry', a 'sufficiently large number of armed troops' were to be deployed to Chechnya.[78] Two days later, the authorized representative of the OGPU in the North Caucasus requested that the army command for the North Caucasus move large units to Chechnya.[79] Andreev and the heads of the secret police and the armed forces agreed that the operation named 'Ugroza' ('Threat') would begin on 10 March.[80]

Unlike in the case of the December operation, the security forces this time were determined also to utilize 'in every conceivable way' the assistance of 'loyal authorities from the ranks of the sheikhs' and to exploit any internal disputes within the Chechen societies for the purposes of their military mission. To this end, the local branches of the secret police established contact with various people and middlemen, including a certain Magomedov, who is said to have offered 'his services for the liquidation of Istamulov and his closest lieutenants'. A number of followers of

74 I. Stalin, 'Golovokruzhenie ot uspekhov (K voprosam kolkhoznogo dvizheniia)', *Pravda*, No. 60 (2 March 1930), 1.

75 J. Baberowski, 'Stalinismus "von oben": Kulakendeportationen in der Sowjetunion 1929–1933', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 46, 4 (1998), 572–95, 586.

76 V. Danilov, R. Manning and L. Viola (eds), *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: kollektivizaciia i raskulachivanie: dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh: 1927–1939*, Vol. 2: November 1929–December 1930 (Moscow 2000), 251–6, 256. In the cotton-growing areas of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, however, total collectivization was still the declared goal: Baberowski, 'Stalinismus "von oben"', 586.

77 Danilov, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, Vol. 2, 260.

78 Ibid.

79 This is clear from the (undated) army report on the second military operation in Chechnya, which was conducted in March 1930: 'Chechnia: vooruzhënnaia bor'ba v 20-30-e gody', *Voenno-istoricheskii arhkiv*, 2 (1997), 144–5, 145.

80 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno'*, Vol. 8, part 2, 1249–50.

the Mitaev brotherhood, mostly likely under duress from the secret police, are also said to have offered their assistance in hunting down Chechen bandit leaders.[81]

The Chechen leadership was only informed by directive of the operation, but was not involved in the preparations. The Chechen government was only ordered to improve its propaganda efforts among the population.[82] While preparations for the military operation were underway, military units were deployed, and mountain garrisons were reinforced with additional troops, the Chechen government designed a detailed plan for carrying out mass events in the Chechen *auls* in areas affected by the unrest – events intended to educate the general public about the scourge of banditry in general and Istamulov, who was declared 'enemy of the people', in particular.[83]

In total, the army high command drew up a force of almost 4000 troops by mid-March, which were once more equipped with heavy weapons and supported by an air force squadron. In terms of its nature and its targets, this operation was no less than a military invasion for the purpose of occupying enemy territory. At least this was the way it was perceived by those involved. For instance, we read in a letter from a soldier who participated in the operation:

> The situation down here is very critical, we are at war. In Ingushetia and Chechnya, revolts have broken out, many gangs of bandits have been organized, and they are taking the field against us under the slogan 'Down with Soviet Power.' We are moving out to destroy these gangs. – [signed] 'K', Natskavshkola, SKK.[84]

The troops were concentrated in two theatres of operation: the Galanchozhskii district in the southern part of Chechnya and the intersection of the Itum-Kalinskii, Gudermesskii, Vedenskii and Nozhai-Yurtovskii districts.[85] When the security forces finally advanced on 16 March, the resistance was strongest in the Galanchozhskii district, where according to the army's report, around 500 armed fighters faced the troops. After heavy fighting, the army managed to break their resistance by 19 March, and 'the troops occupied the designated areas [*raiony*]'.[86] The situation was different in the second operational area, where the army encountered 'only resistance from individual clusters of gangs'. Up until this time, the losses on the side of the security forces were accordingly limited: The army report speaks of 5 dead and 20 injured. There are no figures for the number of dead Chechens.[87]

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), R-1235, Op. 109, D. 114, L. 524.
84 Published in: Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno'*, Vol. 8, part 2, 1222.
85 'Chechnia: vooruzhënnaia bor'ba v 20-30-e gody', *Voenno-istoricheskii arhkiv*, 2 (1997), 144.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 145.

An explanation for the differences in the reactions of the Chechens is offered by Efim G. Evdokimov in a report dated 23 March 1930.[88] Evdokimov had been the authorized representative of the OGPU in the North Caucasus before being appointed a member of the OGPU-Collegium and head of its 'secret-operational department' (*sekretno-operativnoe upravlenie* – SOU). He was thus largely responsible for organizing and carrying out dekulakization. By his own account, he personally travelled to the North Caucasus around 20 March because the comrades on the ground were 'not well oriented' and he wanted to study the situation for himself.[89]

According to Evdokimov, the reason why the army had met with such stiff resistance in the first operational area was because the appropriate educational efforts had been seriously neglected among the population there, whom he described in his report as 'extremely backward' and 'religious fanatics'.[90] In the second operational area, the situation was more favourable because the party had apparently conducted a successful propaganda campaign among the population. In secret negotiations, the authorities had managed to secure the loyalty of the key leaders of the Mitaev brotherhood, which largely controlled this part of Chechnya. It was not sympathy for the authorities or the security forces, but the knowledge that the fields had to be tilled that had tipped the scales towards individual bandit leaders and peasant rebels being persuaded to return from the mountains, after ultimatums to that effect had been issued.[91]

The situation was likely further pacified by the policy, imposed by the central party authorities, of refraining at all costs from further attempts at collectivization in the restless areas of the North Caucasus. While the military operation in Chechnya was underway, Andreev instructed the national leaderships once more at a party meeting on 18–20 March 1930 to desist completely from organizing collective farms in the mountain areas. If at all, such farms were only to be established in the lowlands, preferably in the form of 'Associations for cooperative cultivation of the land' (*tovarishchestvo po sovmestnoi obrabotke zemli* – TOZ). Unlike in the *artel'*, which the party leadership identified as the dominant form of the kolkhoz in the case of total collectivization, in a TOZ, the agricultural tools and implements (including horses) used by the farmers in the collective work on the kolkhoz lands remained the property of the farmers.[92]

88 The report 'On the political situation in the North Caucasus' was written by Evdokimov for the deputy leader of the OGPU in Moscow, Genrikh G. Yagoda. Yagoda forwarded the report to Stalin on the same day. Evdokimov's report is included in: Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno'*, Vol. 8, part 2, 1347–9.

89 S.G. Wheatcroft, 'Agency and Terror: Evdokimov and Mass Killing in Stalin's Great Terror', *Australian Journal of Political History*, 53, 1 (March 2007), 20–43, 31; Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno'*, Vol. 8, part 2, 1349.

90 Ibid., 1348.

91 Ibid.

92 RGASPI, F. 73, Op. 1, D. 83, Ll. 100; 102; RGASPI, F. 73, Op. 1, D. 102, L. 27. Unlike the TOZ, the *artel'* involved the communitarization of most of the land, cattle and agricultural implements. Peasants were allowed a small plot of land and a limited number of cattle for exclusive private use, although taxed by the state. Thus, the *artel'* constituted a variant that was less radical than the

Evdokimov was worried not only about the situation in Chechnya, but also about the neighbouring areas, where the events in Chechnya apparently were having destabilizing effects. The situation in the Dagestani areas bordering on Chechnya was particularly difficult. Here, the OGPU had already registered unrest after the first major Chechen uprising at the end of 1929.[93] However, major confrontations did not erupt in Dagestan until the beginning of April 1930.[94] In his missive, it was the Karachai region that Evdokimov identified as 'the worst affected place in terms of banditry', since practically the entire area settled by Karachaians was 'in the grip of revolt'. In order to reinforce the secret police forces and to oppose the advance of several hundred armed rebels towards the regional capital of Mikoian-Shakhar as well as other towns, even regular army units were withdrawn from Chechnya at short notice and redeployed to Karachai.[95] Evdokimov feared that if the situation there was not rapidly brought under control, there would be destabilizing effects on neighbouring Kabarda, where the security forces had only put down a major uprising a few days earlier, in the course of which 'more than a hundred' people had been killed, and hundreds had been arrested or had surrendered.[96]

It is impossible to determine with certainty how many people were killed during the events of spring 1930. According to a secret police report, the security forces killed around 200 'bandits' in Karachai within 10 days of intense combat operations. Hundreds were arrested or surrendered.[97] The commander of the Red Army's North Caucasus military region, General Ivan P. Belov, reported in April 1930 that the fighting in Karachai and Chechnya had caused 24 deaths and 34 injuries on the side of the security forces, most of them Red Army soldiers. Altogether, 417 'bandits' were reported killed in Karachai. The report gives the number of Chechens killed as 19, but states that the true number was likely to be much higher, since the Chechens would often carry away their fallen and only leave them behind 'when they flee in panic due to pressure from the army and air force'.[98]

However, the losses on the side of the secret police and army are also likely to have been higher. An army report on fighting in the southern part of Dagestan at the end of April and beginning of May stated that the rebels had suffered 46 deaths, while the army had only suffered five injured.[99] How far this is from truth may be

commune, which did not allow any private property at all, but it was nevertheless far more radical than the TOZ, which had been the dominant model up to this point.

93 The region around the Didoevskii sector of the Andiiskii district as well as other parts of Dagestan were caught up in the disturbances. As late as May 1930, the secret police was reporting heavy fighting in the south of Dagestan: D'iakov, *'Sovershenno sekretno'*, Vol. 7, 587–8.

94 Danilov, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, Vol. 2, 430–2.

95 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno'*, Vol. 8, part 2, 1349; 'Chechnia: vooruzhënnaia bor'ba v 20-30-e gody', *Voenno-istoricheskii arhkiv*, 2 (1997), 145.

96 Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno'*, Vol. 8, part 2, 1349.

97 Berelovich, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VCHK-OGPU-NKVD*, Vol. 3, book 1, 270.

98 Belov's report is published in: 'Chechnia: vooruzhënnaia bor'ba v 20-30-e gody', *Voenno-istoricheskii arhkiv*, 2 (1997), 137–43, 142. A short biography of Ivan P. Belov can be found in: Ibid., 172–3.

99 Danilov, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, Vol. 2, 430–2.

gauged by a letter from a soldier who was an immediate participant in the fighting in the southern part of Dagestan in May 1930:

> We traveled [to] Dagestan to liquidate bandits. The battle took four days, it was very difficult. There were 40 men in our company, 18 of whom were killed by the bandits; many fell into the gorge. – [signed] 'K', 2nd Infantry Regiment, South Caucasus.[100]

The fact that the army leadership admitted serious losses of their own side in the Chechen area of operations may be taken to indicate that the true number of victims should also be revised upwards. It is likely that both the Chechens and the security forces suffered their heaviest losses not during the first phase of the military operation in mid-March, but in the subsequent engagements between the retreating armed groups and the security forces, which in Chechnya lasted well into April.[101] Avtorkhanov's assertion that while fighting the security forces in spring of 1930 near Goity, the Chechens destroyed the entire 82nd Infantry Regiment, and even succeeded in annihilating 'an entire division' commanded by General Belov near Shali, a claim which has also been accepted uncritically in the Western literature, appears to be a complete exaggeration.[102]

The suppression of the revolts in Chechnya and Dagestan in April and May of 1930 marked a temporary end to the period of major revolts in the North Caucasus. With the security forces already having largely destroyed the bases of Istamulov's resistance in the course of their March campaign, the Chechen department of the secret police managed to track him down in the vicinity of Shali *aul* and killed him on 20 June 1930.[103] This did not mean that banditry had been completely annihilated. Shita's brother Khusein remained at large and continued to lead the resistance well into the mid-1930s.

Even ordinary people were quite aware that the mountain areas of Chechnya and Dagestan remained dangerous places. One example is Stepan Stepanovich Torbin, who resided in the Dagestani capital of Makhachkala from the early

100 Published in: Bystrova, *'Sovershenno sekretno'*, Vol. 8, part 2, 1222.

101 According to a secret police report, 35 rebels were killed and 58 arrested during the period from 20 to 26 March alone, while 223 surrendered voluntarily. It is claimed that among the dead were the leaders of important bandit groups (Mal'sagov und Temirgoev), while others (Khadzhi-Murat) were arrested. On the side of the security forces, eight dead and 18 injured are reported for the same period. A large part of an operative unit led by a certain Chigirin, who himself was killed in combat, were taken captive by the Chechens: Berelovich, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VCHK-OGPU-NKVD*, Vol. 3, book 1, 271.

102 It is equally unlikely that the Chechens almost entirely wiped out a 150-strong unit of the secret police during the revolt of December 1929, as Avtorkhanov claims: Avtorkhanov, 'The Chechens and the Ingush during the Soviet Period and its Antecedents', 159.

103 A. Berelovich and V. Danilov (eds), *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VCHK-OGPU-NKVD: 1918–1939: dokumenty i materialy v 4 tomakh*, Vol. 3, book 2: 1932–1934 (Moscow 2005), 708. This account, in turn, does not mesh with the version provided by Avtorkhanov, who claims that Istamulov was only killed in autumn of 1931 after the head of the local OGPU unit, Baklalov, had enticed him with false promises of an amnesty from Moscow to come to his office, where he shot him. Though severely injured, the story goes, Istamulov nevertheless managed to stab Baklalov to death before being killed by a guard: Avtorkhanov, 'The Chechens and the Ingush during the Soviet Period and its Antecedents', 160.

1930s onwards. In his unpublished memoirs, he described life in Dagestan around 1931 as 'easier and richer' than in other areas of Russia, since 'you didn't have to worry too much about the next day. If someone had no meat, he had fish'. Torbin knew that life was better in Dagestan from observing the starved people who went there from other parts of Russia and sometimes died in the streets from exhaustion. These people must also have brought Torbin 'reports of violent collectivization, the destruction of settlements and villages, and farmer families being robbed'. At the same time, however, he was aware that the mountainous areas of the Caucasus at the time were also 'not tranquil': 'Discontented with their lawless status, the terror, and the repression, the mountain people organized armed bands and channelled the bloody outrages committed against them at the innocent Russians, but also at anybody who happened to fall into their hands'. Because 'bands of nationalists' were forming in the mountains, the city dwellers organized 'self-protection detachments, the "partisan detachments of 1932". After 9 or 10 p.m., nobody risked leaving the house.'[104]

What Torbin was describing here was simply the aftermath of a conflict that had been conducted with utter ruthlessness. For instance, an army report dated from the time of fighting stated that 'bandits' involved in an encounter in Kabarda in February 1930 had brutally murdered members of the security forces and cut off their 'heads and hands'.[105] But the security forces were apparently not squeamish either. Even Belov in his report of April 1930 criticized the brutal practices of the secret police, such as burning and decapitating of dead bodies, and said that it was unnecessarily antagonizing the population.[106] Rapid reconciliation was thus hardly possible and acts of vengeance inevitable. Tensions were further fuelled by the massive repression and arrests by the secret police in the aftermath of the revolts. This approach was probably one of the reasons why another rebellion broke out in Chechnya in March 1932 that once more could only be put down with the help of regular Red Army troops. However, this revolt was largely limited to the Nozhai-Yurtovskii district bordering on Dagestan, which is why the security forces managed to overcome the rebels, commanded by a certain Imam Mutsu Shamiliev from Shuani *aul*, in a relatively short period.[107] This time, too, the blood toll was high: The army reported 24 dead bandits and nine wounded. Among its own ranks, the army reported one dead and two injured.[108]

Regarding the nature of the revolts at the time of collectivization in the North Caucasus, sources agree that they were in each case widespread, and that

104 'Memorial', F. 2, Op. 2, D. 91, Ll. 13-14; 27. Torbin wrote down his memoirs (309 pages in total) between 8 January and 5 June 1964. He was living in the Soviet Union at the time.

105 Danilov, *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni*, Vol. 2, 239. In connection with the murder of Chernoglaz, Avtorkhanov reports that bandits left him 'headless': Avtorkhanov, 'The Chechens and the Ingush during the Soviet Period and its Antecedents', 165.

106 'Chechnia: vooruzhënnaia bor'ba v 20-30-e gody', *Voenno-istoricheskii arhkiv*, 2 (1997), 140.

107 Other sources report that the revolt was organized by Shita's brother, Khusein Istamulov: Berelovich, *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VCHK-OGPU-NKVD*, Vol. 3, book 2, 77.

108 The report is dated 31 March 1932 and is published in: 'Chechnia: vooruzhënnaia bor'ba v 20-30-e gody', *Voenno-istoricheskii arhkiv*, 2 (1997), 161–6, 164.

occasionally the entire population of a certain district participated in the resistance. For instance, the abovementioned report by Belov states: 'In Chechnya, as in Karachai, we were dealing not with individual counterrevolutionary uprisings of bandits, but with actual revolts of entire districts (Galanchozhskii), with nearly the entire population participating in the armed insurgency'.[109] However, at no point after the beginning of collectivization had 'all of Chechnya exploded', as Avtokhanov claims; rather, the uprisings were always concentrated in specific areas.[110]

The great number of troops and masses of military equipment that the army leadership had concentrated in March 1930 were in no way commensurate to the actual threat from the individual armed gangs.[111] Certainly, there will have been contacts between the insurgent groups, but these were spontaneous and not well coordinated. At no point was there a unified leadership, and even within Chechnya, the best-known leader, Shita Istamulov, apparently did not have sufficient backing to be able to mobilize larger parts of Chechnya for the revolt beyond his own area of influence. The call to *gazavat*, the 'holy war', cited repeatedly in the secret police files as the rebel slogan, had no function as a unifying element. That Chechens in particular did not form a national unit can be seen in the fact that several groups of Chechens allowed themselves to be co-opted for the arrest of Istamulov. A distinguishing characteristic of the 1932 rebellion is that the population of the settlements bordering on the district of Nozhai-Yurtovskii apparently refused to join the resistance. In the report on the 1932 revolt, the army leadership explicitly praised the good morale of the 'national parts' of the Red Army, including the serving Chechen and Ingush soldiers, only two of whom had deserted ahead of the operation, but not a single one during the operation itself.[112]

The insurgents were not fighting for independence in the first place. Rather, the peasants were trying to resist the brutal interference with their traditions and customary rights. They were revolting against the harshness of state measures, and the capriciousness and despotism of local authorities. In this point, the North Caucasus mountaineers did not differ significantly from the peasants of Central Russia. However, the fact that in the mountain areas of Chechnya and other parts of the North Caucasus the local embodiment of the authorities was often the Russian-dominated secret police gave the conflict an ethnic component that was

109 Ibid., 137.
110 Avtorkhanov, 'The Chechens and the Ingush during the Soviet Period and its Antecedents', 157.
111 In fact, as far as the accounts on the number of rebels and bandits are concerned, even the secret police reports, which tend towards exaggeration, always only refer to hundreds, but never thousands of gunmen. But even this number is most likely to be too high. The tendency of the secret police to exaggerate must have irritated even the military leadership, which relied on secret police intelligence in preparing its operations. Thus, the commander of the 28th Mountain Infantry Division, Aleksandr D. Kozitskii, reported that the secret police in its *svodki* of 17 and 19 March had referred to 600 bandits, while he himself had only encountered 40; in another location, the secret police told him to expect 300 bandits – however, his detachment only came across 10 people. Kozitskii's report is dated 9 April 1930 and published in: 'Chechnia: vooruzhënnaia bor'ba v 20-30-e gody', *Voenno-istoricheskii arhkiv*, 2 (1997), 145–58, 155.
112 Ibid., 165.

absent in Central Russia. It is in this context that we should understand Andreev's remarks criticizing the lack of engagement by local state and party cadres. Often, workers' brigades were dispatched from the cities to carry out collectivization, while members of the Russian-dominated secret police were responsible for arresting 'kulaks'. The local cadres not only had no interest in making enemies in the countryside through unpopular actions; they were not even involved in key decisions.[113] They were sent out as mediators in advance of military operations or were charged with spreading state propaganda among the local population. In the case of conflict, minor state officials and members of local militias only had the choice of joining the rebels or fleeing, as adopting a neutral stance was difficult under the given circumstances. Several reports indicate that the local militias made up of natives had particularly little interest in helping the security forces. Often, they gave their weapons to the rebels, and in some cases even joined them.[114]

The army and secret police reports also make clear that little had changed in the way the North Caucasus peoples were viewed by the representatives of the central state power. The natives of the North Caucasus were regarded as unreliable allies who lived according to the rule of the fist, and only accepted authorities if the latter dealt with them severely enough. This, in any case, is what we are given to understand in a personal analysis of the fighting in Chechnya written by Aleksandr D. Kozitskii, commander of the 28th Mountain Infantry Division, in spring of 1930:

> A few words about the methods of combat in the Caucasus. The soft measures that we apply do not have the same effects on the mountain people [*gortsy*] as they do on culturally developed peoples. On the contrary, they reinforce their conviction that we are weak. This is in accordance with the nature of the mountain people. . . . Take, for example, the case of a Red Army soldier . . . who was maimed in Chechnya, where the inhabitants of the village that had tortured the Red Army soldier were not appropriately punished, but instead, a search was made for the perpetrators who were being hidden in the village. They say that our behaviour in such a case is due to our humanitarianism [*gummannost*], which due to their customs and traditions (non-observance of a blood feud dishonors the entire clan) they cannot understand.[115]

Archaic traditions such as the blood feud and the notion of collective liability certainly continued to be of great importance in the rural structures of Chechen society, which were based on clans and family ties. However, the conclusion that the notion of humanitarianism was completely alien to the mountain dweller (compared to whom the Russian military commanders must have felt themselves to be bearers of this humanitarianism) was based on similarly undifferentiated stereotypes as those that were typical of the Russian conquerors during the colonial wars

113 This is also criticized by Belov in his report of April 1930: Ibid., 139.
114 Ibid., 141; 164.
115 Ibid., 158. A short profile of Kozitskii is found in: Ibid., 174.

of the Czarist era. In this sense, Kozitskii's words might also have been written by a Russian commander of the Caucasus wars of the nineteenth century.[116]

It would certainly be misleading to understand resistance during collectivization as part of some mythical 400-year Chechen anti-colonial struggle against Russia, a narrative that became prominent during the independence movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s among leading Chechen political and intellectual figures.[117] Nor was Soviet policy to be understood as part of a 'policy of genocide' specifically aimed at the Chechens and Ingush, as some Chechen (as well as certain Western) historians would have it.[118] Yet if the resistance during this period is to be read as the continuation of a colonial campaign of subjugation, as Avtorkhanov contends,[119] one must at least take into account that the Bolsheviks treated not just the North Caucasus, but all of the supposedly antiquated farming sector as a kind of 'internal colony' that they sought to exploit.[120]

What is remarkable in this context is not so much the fact that the Soviet state ordered military operations to crush armed insurrections, but the fact that it finally desisted from carrying out the campaign to its conclusion in the non-Russian North Caucasus. Due to the violent unrest, collectivization was temporarily suspended across the USSR in spring of 1930. But while the campaign was resumed and continued unabated only a few months later in most parts of the country,

116 The most famous Czarist general during the Caucasian wars of the nineteenth century, Aleksei P. Ermolov (1777–1861), who was in command of the Russian forces in the Caucasus from 1816–27, is said to have justified his ruthless military campaigns in the following much quoted words: 'In the eyes of these Asians [the North Caucasus native people], softness is seen as a sign of weakness and it is precisely out of human kindness that am I so severe'. Ermolov quoted in: V.A. Potto, *Kavkazskaia voina: Ermolovskoe vremia*, Vol. 2 (Stavropol' 1994, first published in 1887), 19. Plenty of examples of such stereotypes are also provided in: M. Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY 2011).

117 The narrative of a 300- or 400-year long confrontation between Russia and Chechnya found its most prominent exponent in Chechnya's first democratically elected president, Dzhokhar M. Dudaev (1944–96). According to Dudaev, conflict started with the first Russian advance under Tsar Ivan IV in 1559. The period of forced collectivization was, according to Dudaev, only a 'resumption of war against the Bolsheviks': D. Dudaev, 'Kontseptsiia natsional'no-gosudarstvennoi politiki Chechenskoi Respubliki Ichkeriia' (without date and place, but published not before December 1994), 2. Available at http://zhaina.com/history/258-koncepcija-nacionalno-gosudarstvennojj-politiki.html (accessed 6 January 2014). The view of Russian-Chechens relations as one of permanent war is also reflected in some Western writings, see e.g.: J.B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge 1998); R. Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000: A Deadly Embrace* (Portland, OR 2001); S. Smith, *Allah's Mountains: Politics and War in the Russian Caucasus* (London 1998); B. Fowkes (ed.), *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis* (New York, NY 1998).

118 Dzh.Dzh. Gakaev, *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Chechni (xx vek): v dvukh chastiach* (Moscow 1997), 91. There is also a tendency in some of the Western literature to indiscriminately subsume the early Soviet period under the general rubric 'Soviet genocide', as if to suggest that this entire episode was only an overture to the tragedy of deportation in 1944. E.g. 'Soviet genocide' is the title of chapter 2 in: Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 40–84.

119 Avtorkhanov compares the resistance during the collectivization period to the wars of liberation under Mansur, Ghazi Muhammad, or Shamil: Avtorkhanov, 'The Chechens and the Ingush during the Soviet Period and its Antecedents', 159.

120 Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 20.

it was de facto stopped in the mountain areas of Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachai and parts of Dagestan.[121]

While no large-scale collectivization took place for the time being in Chechnya and some of the other North Caucasus national regions, the great problems of the mountain areas in particular were still unresolved. Not only did rural poverty and supply shortage persist. These regions also often lacked fundamental infrastructure such as healthcare, schools or roads. Ethnic tensions and disagreements over land assets continued to stoke conflicts; neither was the plague of banditry ever fully suppressed. The 'mountain problem', as one party instructor put it in a report of June 1931, was still far from being resolved.[122]

It was only in the mid-1930s that collectivization was resumed. In May 1934, the North Caucasus Party Committee gave the party leadership of this the Chechen–Ingush region the directive to engage on the path of total collectivization.[123] Some two years later, on 5 June 1936, Ali I. Gorchkhanov, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Chechen–Ingush region, was able to announce that 'collectivization of the mountain area [was] to 85 percent completed'.[124]

It was quite another story, however, how effectively these collective farms actually worked. The central Russian archives store many reports indicating that in reality, collective farms, at least in the mountainous parts of Checheno–Ingushetia, largely existed on paper, as they in fact functioned according to similar rules and norms as before collectivization. Decisions concerning the distribution of land and the organization of labour were oftentimes still taken by the rural communities with their councils of elders, and peasants did not turn up for work in the kolkhoz, but mainly took care of their own farms instead, sometimes using the kolkhoz inventory or even farming kolkhoz land privately.[125]

Thus the North Caucasus 'mountain problem' was, at least in Moscow's view, in no way solved when the Second World War broke out. When negative reporting from Chechnya and other parts of the North Caucasus on mass evasions of military service, anti-Soviet insurgency, and collaboration with the enemy reached the party leadership, Stalin ultimately took these reports as a pretext to do away with this perceived problem once and for all when he decided to deport the entire Chechen, Ingush, Balkar and Karachai nations to Central Asia in 1943–4.[126]

121 Ėl'zhurkaev, *Kollektivizatsiia sel'skogo khoziaistva v Checheno-Ingushetii*, 160–2.

122 RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 114, D. 245, Ll. 64–5.

123 Ėl'zhurkaev, *Kollektivizatsiia sel'skogo khoziaistva v Checheno-Ingushetii*, 160.

124 See the shorthand report of Gorchkhanov's speech during the session of the Presidium of the Soviet of Nationalities of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR on 5 June 1936: V.A. Kozlov et al. (eds), *Vainakhi i imperskaia vlast': problema Chechni i Ingushetii vo vnutrennei politike Rossii i SSSR (nachalo XIX-seredina XX v.)* (Moskva 2011), 627–9, 627.

125 See, e.g. the report compiled by V. Pomerantsev, a journalist of the newspaper *Bezbozhnik*, who travelled to Chechnya for three weeks and sent his impressions to the editor of the newspaper, Emel'ian M. Yaroslavskii. Yaroslavskii forwarded the (undated) report on 21 July 1939 to the Politburo (for the attention of Andrei A. Andreev). The report is contained in: RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 117, D. 26, Ll. 82-9, 86.

126 Accounts of these deportations were published in the West already during Soviet times (e.g. Aleksandr Nekrich), yet the first account based on evidence from Soviet archives was published in

There is no archival evidence to support the thesis that the rebellions of 1929–30 had a direct impact on Stalin's decision to deport the Chechens and other North Caucasian peoples. Yet almost continuous negative reporting on the situation in the North Caucasus throughout the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s could not but have influenced this fatal verdict.

## Biographical Note

**Jeronim Perović** is an SNSF-supported Professor of Eastern European History at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. He specializes in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, as well as the Balkans. His articles on Soviet–Yugoslav relations during the Cold War, Soviet and Russian energy history, regionalism in Russia during the 1990s, and North Caucasian history, have appeared in *Kritika*, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *Geopolitics*, *Demokratizatsiya*, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, and *Osteuropa*. He is the author of the monograph *Die Regionen Russlands als neue politische Kraft: Chancen und Gefahren des Regionalismus für Russland* (Russia's Regions as New Political Forces: Opportunities and Dangers of Regionalism for Russia) published with Peter Lang in 2001. He has also co-edited several books and written a series of book chapters published with Oxford University Press, Routledge and Palgrave Macmillian. He is currently preparing a monograph on North Caucasus history during the late Tsarist and early Soviet period (*Der Nordkaukasus unter russischer Herrschaft: Geschichte einer Vielvölkerregion zwischen Rebellion und Anpassung*, forthcoming in 2015 with Böhlau).

1990 by Russian historian Nikolai F. Bugai: N.F. Bugai, 'Pravda o deportatsii chechenskogo i ingushskogo narodov', *Voprosy istorii*, 7 (1990), 32–44. See also: N.F. Bugai, *Iosif Stalin – Lavrentiiu Berii: 'Ikh nado deportirovat': dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* (Moscow 1992); P. Polian, *Against their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Budapest 2004), 115–23.