Even though the events leading up to World War I may have appeared to be purely European affairs, they had deeper Eurasian roots: the change in the European balance of power caused by the rise of Germany as an imperial power after the 1871 unification and the decline of Russia following the Russo-Japanese War was the single most significant factor. According to one historian, the “long fuse that lit the Balkan powder keg originated in Manchuria.”¹

World War I involved four empires in East-Central Europe – the Ottoman, the Russian, the German, and the Habsburg Empires – and it led to the destruction of all four. With their collapse, numerous nations, willingly or unwillingly, became independent states. In the Caucasus, at least four new states emerged: Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Mountaineer Republic of the Northern Caucasus. By the spring of 1921, however, all of them had been conquered by the Red Army, and in 1922 they ended up in the newly created Soviet Union.

During the war Japan fought on the same side as Russia until the Bolsheviks seized power in the autumn of 1917. Consequently, Japan was no longer in a position to subvert Russia from within by supporting the independence movements of Russia’s national minorities. Instead, those within the Russian Empire who aspired to independence turned to Russia’s foes, Germany in particular. After the Bolshevik Revolution led to civil war in Russia, more than a dozen countries intervened militarily, including Japan, Britain, France, Germany, the United States, and others. In the end, however, the intervention failed to overthrow the Bolshevik government, and the Russian Empire reconstituted itself as the Soviet Union (sans Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states). This created new ground for Caucasian-Japanese collaboration against Moscow.

4.1 World War I

Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, Russia suffered a crushing defeat by Germany at the Battle of Tannenberg (described by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his epic novel *August 1914*). Russia’s initial success on the Galician front, too, was soon nullified by the German-Austrian joint forces. In the course of 1915, Russia was forced to retreat and abandon Galicia and Russian Poland (including Warsaw).

Turkey, initially maintaining neutrality, resisted Germany’s pressure to join the Central Powers while simultaneously toying with the idea of striking a deal with Russia. But in the end, the Ottomans closed the Straits and stood against Russia, which

on 31 October 1914 declared war on the Sublime Porte.² Compared with the European front, the Caucasian campaign proved much more propitious to Russia, which by the spring of 1916 had captured Erzurum and Trabzon and advanced deep into Eastern Anatolia.

Russia’s military gains, however, masked the tremendously complex political situation in the Caucasus. Both Russia and Turkey sought to use the Armenians for subversion against each other while at the same time treating them with suspicion. For example, both courted the Dashnaksutiun party of Armenian revolutionaries, simultaneously suspecting they were separatists and agents of the respective enemy. The party did, however, receive funds from Russia to organize armed rebellions by Armenians within Turkey,³ and some Armenians did put up armed resistance against the Ottomans, most famously in the city of Van in Eastern Anatolia in May 1915. These factors led the Ottoman Porte to deport ethnic Armenians on a large scale. In the process, up to one million Armenians died or were killed. This is commonly considered a genocide among Armenians.⁴ Along with Armenians, Christian Assyrians suffered similarly. The “Armenian question” became a valuable political weapon in the hands of Russia against its foe, the Ottomans. Yet Russia had no intention of granting autonomy, let alone independence, to the Armenians in the Russian Caucasus.

Just as Moscow was leery of the Christian Armenians, it did not fully trust the Caucasian Muslims. Unlike Muslims elsewhere in Russia (including Volga and Crimean Tatars), Muslims in the Caucasus and Central Asia were exempt from military service for the empire.⁶ Caucasian Muslims, however, could volunteer to fight, and indeed, in the summer of 1914 several cavalry regiments were formed from Dagestan, Chechen, Kabard, Ingush, Cherkess, Ossetian, and other volunteers. Admired and feared for their bravery, they were called the “Wild (Savage) Division,” about whom N. N. Breshko-Breshkovskii published a namesake novel in Riga in 1920. They

³ Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 116–17, and Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917–1921)* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 26–27. In Japan, ethnic Armenians who were Ottoman citizens were protected by Russian diplomatic legations from being treated as enemy aliens. See JACAR, reference codes: B1100646500 and B1100654800.
⁵ At the same time, a large number of Muslims, indeed a larger number of Muslims in absolute terms than Armenians and Assyrians, are said to have died or have been killed in Anatolia during World War I, many of them at the hands of Armenians and Russians.
⁶ Armenians, unlike Caucasian Muslims, served in the regular Russian army; they also served in voluntary units, which were disbanded in 1916.
were, however, used in the west against Europeans and not in the south against the Ottomans.

Meanwhile, the Central Powers, particularly the Porte, sought to use pan-Turkic, pan-Islamic, and, more grandly, pan-Turanian movements to their advantage (this last referred to the movement to unite all “Turanian” peoples – mainly Muslims but not necessarily restricted to them – in Turkey, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Siberia, and, in a wider sense, even Hungarians, Finns, Mongols, Koreans, and Japanese). During World War I, émigrés from the Russian Empire began organizing themselves against Russia. Already in August 1914, under Ottoman aegis, a Caucasian Committee was formed under the guise of the Turkish Medical Mission, uniting the representatives of Cherkessia, Dagestan, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Although this committee was dissolved in 1916 owing to internal conflict, a different political group emerged in Turkey in the same year, namely the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Turko-Tatar Muslim Peoples of Russia, formed from representatives of Volga Tatars, Crimean Tatars, Azeris, and “Bukharan Turks.” These and similar groups proposed to the Central Powers that they support armed uprisings of the Caucasian peoples and create buffer states, which would put the insatiable Russian desire for conquest to an end. In its October 1915 appeal to German foreign minister Gottlieb von Jagow, the Caucasian Committee requested Germany’s support for creating a Confederation of Caucasian states. In 1916, in Lausanne, Switzerland, non-Russian peoples of the Russian Empire (including those from the Caucasus) took part in the congress of the Union of Nationalities (formed in 1911 in Brussels) to acquaint the world with the plight of national minorities in Russia. Yet these activities amounted to very little in terms of actual political results within Russia itself. Nor did the attempts to recruit and employ Russian-Muslim prisoners of war as military forces go very far, apparently because Turkish officers did not treat them well.

---

9 Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Politisches Archiv (HHStA, PA) (Vienna, Austria), I 947 Krieg 21 k Türkei: Georgisch-grusinischer Aufstand im Kaukasus 1914–1918, fols. 88–90.
11 In 1916 a revolt did take place against labor conscription in Russian Central Asia. Britain and Russia ascribed it to the influence of German, Austrian, and Turkish agents. Although there were many prisoners of war of the Central Powers in Central Asia, there is little evidence that they or their agents played any role in the revolt of 1916. See Edward Dennis Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1954), 75–76 and 147–153.
Many Georgians also organized themselves against Russia during World War I under the aegis of the Central Powers. In August 1914, Archimandrite Nicolas, who previously oversaw the largest monastery in Georgia, founded with other Georgians a nationalist organization in Trabzon. In September in Berlin the Georgian National Committee (also known as the Committee for the Liberation of Georgia [see p. 70]) formed under the direction of Prince Giorgi Machabeli (1885–1935) and Mikheil (Mikhako) Tsereteli (1878–1965), formerly a close collaborator of Dekanozishvili.

The committee collaborated with Finnish and Ukrainian organizations against Russia. They all believed that the Caucasus would rise against Russia once the Central Powers invaded and that within two or three months, a combat-ready army of five hundred thousand men could be deployed there. In their September 1914 appeal to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Machabeli and Tsereteli, emphasizing the history of Georgia’s struggle against Russia, reminded the Germans of the Japanese precedent: during the Russo-Japanese War, a “certain power (eine Macht)” (that is, Japan) assisted the Caucasians with weapons and ammunition to stand up against the Russians. They suggested that assistance of the same kind by the Central Powers to the

Caucasus would make it impossible for Russia to continue this war, prompting it to conclude peace with the Central Powers. This would extend Germany’s influence to the Caucasus and all the way to Central Asia as well.¹⁵ In 1916–17 Germany did help the Georgians transport weapons and ammunition and political activists to the Caucasus using submarines,¹⁶ enterprises clearly influenced by the expedition of the Sirius. Hidden by local National Democrats (see p. 80) in secret stores in Georgia, the weapons and ammunition delivered from the German U-boats played an important role in arming the military units of National-Democrats and Socialist Federalists. Using these weapons, they subsequently conducted secret operations against Russian authorities and troops in 1917 and in the spring of 1918 resisted the Ottoman troops invading the Caucasus.¹⁷

The Georgian National Committee also organized a special Georgian Legion, a legion of fighters for Georgia’s independence, funded by the Germans and deployed by the Ottomans. Both Germany and the Porte promised independence for Georgia in exchange for their service. Comprising both Christian and Muslim volunteers and refugees (including the Northern Caucasian “mahajirs” or immigrants and refugees who settled in Turkey in the nineteenth century) and fighting under a Georgian flag, the Legion was not generally trusted by the Turks. Small in numbers (formed only on a battalion level) and poorly armed, they made little contribution in military terms.¹⁸ The legion’s commander, Leo Kereselidze (discussed in Chapter 2) and his brother Giorgi also sent agents inside the Russian Caucasus, where in 1915 a clandestine branch of the Georgian National Committee was created.¹⁹ In June 1916, Prince Machabeli himself, Selim Bey Bebutov, an Azeri, Murat Gazavat (Uzden Arzamakov), a Chechen, and two other Georgians were successfully dispatched by a German U-boat to Georgia. It is difficult to confirm whether their work had any significant impact. But soon the Russian autocracy collapsed. By the summer of 1917, Prince Machabeli returned to Berlin by way of Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was renamed in 1914), Japan, and the United States.²⁰ Whether he made any contact with Japanese authorities is unknown.

There is little indication of Japan’s contact with Caucasian independence fighters during the war. This is partly explained by Japan’s brief alliance with Russia: in 1916,

¹⁸ Bihl, Die Kaukasus-Politik der Mittelmächte, 63, 82, 238. Among the leaders of the Legion was the Georgian Muslim Osman Bey Kartsivadze (79 and 81).
¹⁹ Mamoulia, Les combats indépendandistes des Caucasiens, 15.
²⁰ Bihl, Die Kaukasus-Politik der Mittelmächte, 72.
Japan and Russia concluded an alliance and adhered to the London Declaration of 1914, according to which Britain, France, and Russia pledged not to conclude a separate peace treaty with the Central Powers during the war. Suffering an acute shortage of ammunition, Russia needed Japan’s help, and Japan in turn needed Russia’s tacit consent to its expansion in China. In fact, from early on in the war, Russia benefited greatly from the purchase of Japanese armaments and remained appreciative of Japan’s contribution to its war efforts. This helped the two countries to sign the 1916 alliance. But soon after the alliance was concluded, the Russian autocracy collapsed.

Russia’s spy mania, fostered by the bitter experience of the Russo-Japanese War, also gathered momentum during the war. Fears of total espionage now focused on Germany. German citizens in Russia, Russian citizens of German descent, and Jews (assumed to be sympathetic toward German and Austrian cultures) were singled out as suspects. Studying Japan’s experience, Germany and Austria deployed espionage extensively against Russia, employing businessmen, financiers, merchants, prostitutes, nurses, and the like, for indeed “total war necessitated total espionage.” Of course, Russia resorted to the same methods, although how effective they were is a matter of debate. In any event, pogroms and lootings against Germans and Jews took place in Russia, of whom hundreds and thousands were deported from the western borderlands to inland Russia. Even the Russian government and the Russian court, where people of Germanic heritage (including Empress Alexandra, originally Alix of Hesse, herself) were quite prevalent, became suspect in the eyes of many Russians.

In the Caucasus, Muslims, who were in general suspected of harboring sympathy for the Ottomans, fared better than did the Germans in Russia. Although some (ten thousand or so) were indeed deported to the Ottoman Empire, protests by Georgian deputies to the Duma ultimately prevented the mass deportation of Muslims in the southern borderlands. This did not, however, mean there were no massacres of Muslims. In 1915, for example, the Russian military slaughtered Muslim Laz and Atchars

---

23 In 1910 Karl Haushofer, who subsequently became “Hitler’s teacher,” was sent to Japan as a “military observer” to study the Japanese army. For Haushofer, see Bruno Hipler, Hitlers Lehrmeister: Karl Haushofer als Vater der NS-Ideologie (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1996).
26 There were some sensational cases, one of which was the Miasoedov Affair: in 1915 Colonel Sergei N. Miasoedov was hanged as a German spy. See William C. Fuller, Jr., The Foe Within: Fantasies of Treason and the End of Imperial Russia (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 2006).
27 Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire, 152–153.
in Georgia because their sympathies favored the Turks. In the Chorokhi (Çoruh) river valley, some forty-six thousand Muslims were purportedly killed, leaving only seven thousand.²⁸ Although these figures cannot be taken at face value, the massacres were openly and passionately condemned by the Baku deputy Muhammad Jafarov at the State Duma.²⁹ Yet suspicions of disloyalty never died. During the Russo-Japanese War, Greeks had been suspected of spying for Japan. During World War I, Russia suspected Greeks (Pontic Greeks) of spying for Turkey, even though they were never trusted by the Porte.³⁰

4.2 Revolution

In February 1917 (old style, March 1917 new style), Tsar Nicholas II abdicated and the Russian autocracy fell. Whatever plans Marxists and other revolutionaries may have had to overthrow the government, the turmoil leading up to the collapse was triggered by spontaneous demonstrations, staged in the capital on International Women’s Day, on 22 February (7 March new style), by a large group of women and hungry citizens demanding bread. The demonstrations led to strikes and other disturbances. Troops refused to obey orders to suppress the unrest and mutinied in their turn. Finally, on 2 March (15 March new style), Nicholas abdicated, but his brother refused to succeed and the autocracy collapsed. Thus, various plans of subversion, some prepared by people from the Caucasus with foreign help, were overtaken by popular actions.

All the same, the end to the autocracy brought much joy to the Caucasus as elsewhere in the empire. M. Philips Price, a British journalist, observed the following scene in Tiflis on Sunday, 5 March (18 March new style) 1917:

I passed down the Golovinsky street [the main thoroughfare today named Rustaveli Avenue] of Tiflis, and crossed the bridge over the Kura to the outskirts of the city. The streets were full of silent and serious people walking in the same direction. They were all going to a great mass meeting of the Caucasian people on the Nahalofsky square to welcome this great day in the history of Russia. In a large open space six raised platforms had been built, and round them was assembled a vast multitude composed of almost every element in the multiracial population of the Caucasus. There were wild mountain tribesmen, Lesgians, Avars, Chechens and Swanetians in their long black cloaks and sheepskin caps. The eddies of the wave of revolution had swept up into the recesses of the Caucasus, where they had lived sunk in patriarchal feudalism until yesterday. Many of them did not know whether they were subjects of the Tsar of Russia or the Sultan of Turkey. Yet

³⁰ For a “very well organized” espionage network along the Black Sea coast involving Greek businessmen, bankers, and clergy among others as well as Muslims,” see Reynolds, Shattering Empires, 163.
they had come across miles of mountain tracks out of curiosity to confirm the rumours they had heard, and in order to pay their humble tribute to the Russian Revolution.³¹

Of course, Georgians, Armenians, and Azeris also came:

There were the picturesque peasants of the fair provinces of Georgia, who had driven in on bullock-wagons. Doubtless many of them during the last ten years had been exiled to Siberia, where they had learnt from Western Socialists to appreciate the principles of Marxism, and had caught the breath of the International [i.e., an international organization of labor and socialist parties]. Then there were Armenian merchants from Tiflis, the staunch supporters of all progressive movements in Russia. There were educated Tartars of the East Caucasus, who had helped to inspire the revolutionary movement in Persia in 1909. There were the representatives of the urban proletariat of Tiflis and some from the Baku oil-fields, the grimy products of Western European industrialism which is slowly creeping into the East. Among them were the intellectual Russian student, the Georgian poet and the Armenian doctor, who had hitherto been forced to hide their talents . . . . The spirit of Demos had suddenly risen out of a multitude of suppressed individualities, and had manifested itself in the form of that great gathering of mediaeval mountaineers and twentieth-century working-men, all inspired by the same idea of brotherhood and freedom.³²

The Mensheviks (Social Democrats) were in control, urging, along with the Socialist Revolutionaries, the people to elect delegates to the soviets. Price commented that the meeting was “a genuine international movement, for it refused to consider any of the questions of nationality which had so long been troubling the Caucasus, and dividing the proletariat into hostile factions.”³³ Soldiers also joined and appealed to the crowd: “Comrades, let us not forget that over there in Germany we have brothers crushed under the same tyranny from which we have now been delivered. May God grant that the hour of their deliverance has also struck!” Prisoners, too, came out: “The political prisoners, who since 1906 had been pining in the dungeons of the Tiflis prisons, were being liberated and brought to the meeting. They were carried on the shoulders of comrades to the platforms, whence they addressed the multitude. The massed bands then struck up the Marseillaise.”³⁴

Despite the euphoria, the question of the future of the Caucasus remained uncertain. In Georgia there emerged a national democratic movement that led in 1917 to the formation of the party of National Democrats with Spiridon Kedia as its leader. It sought the restoration of Georgia’s national sovereignty and a democratic body politic in Georgia.³⁵ In July 1917, the Berlin-based Georgian National Committee wrote to the Central Powers, under the names of Giorgi Machabeli, Mikhako Tsereteli, Giorgi Keria-

³² Price, War & Revolution, 281–82.
³³ Price, War & Revolution, 283.
³⁴ Price, War & Revolution, 284.
³⁵ The party originated in the Georgian movement for national independence created in 1906 by Prince Ilia Chavchavadze. Although in 1907 he was assassinated by local Marxists who feared his po-
selidze, and Peter Surguladze, that the Georgians aspired for “indépendence complète.” Germany financed their political activity. In December 1917, after the Bolshevik takeover, the German government pledged support for the idea of creating an independent state in the Russian Caucasus. Those favoring the independence of Georgia, Armenia, and other areas (Azerbaijan, the Northern Caucasus, or larger entities like Transcaucasia) were decidedly a minority, however. Many thought that if Russia became truly democratic, there might be a way for them to live, as they had done since the nineteenth century, within the framework of “Russia.”

In Georgia, the overwhelmingly popular political party of the Mensheviks was concerned more with the future of “All-Russian” affairs than with Georgia per se. Nikolai (Karlo) Chkheidze (1864–1926), a Georgian Menshevik, worked as chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in 1917. Irakli Tsereteli, an influential Georgian Menshevik, even joined the second Provisional Government in Petrograd as Minister of Post and Telegraph and held the position of defending Russia against its war-time enemies while pursuing peace to end the war. Naturally, Machabeli and other supporters of independence accused the Mensheviks of being “averse” to the independence of the Caucasus.

Armenian political groups were reluctant to become independent of Russia for different reasons: they saw in Russia a counterweight against the Turks, whose political domination they dreaded. The Azeris had their own logic. The most popular political party, the Musavat originally supported the equality and independence of all Muslim nations in the Russian Empire. Yet in 1917 it, too, asserted that the Azeris could live within the framework of a democratic Russian republic. (Another important pan-Islamic and pro-Russian party, Ittihad [Union], took a similar position regarding the future of Caucasian Muslims.) Nonetheless, everything, including the future of the Caucasian body politic and such matters as the autonomy or independence of the Georgian Orthodox Church from the Russian ecclesiastical order, was to be decided at a future Constituent Assembly.

Meanwhile, in May 1917 in the Northern Caucasus, bordering on Russia, the people had created the Union of United Mountaineers. Hoping to build on the achievements of the February Revolution, the Union also envisioned the Northern Caucasus within a federated and democratic Russia. Despite the large number of ethnic Slavs and Cossacks with whom the Northern Caucasians had had contentious relations, the Union nevertheless foresaw a coexistence with them in a future body politic (the Southeastern Union of Cossack Hosts, Mountaineers of the Caucasus, and Free Peoples of the

---

The leaders of the Georgian National Democrats understood the cardinal significance of the solidarity of all peoples in the Caucasus. Some (Shalva Karumidze, Davit Vachnadze, Shalva Amiredzhibi, and Dmitri Chiabrishvili) attended the founding congress of the Union of the United Mountaineers in May 1917 for this reason.³⁹

But when the October 1917 coup took place in Petrograd before the Constituent Assembly was able to meet (not until January 1918, when it was promptly disbanded by Lenin), the political groups of the Caucasus found themselves in an awkward position: as the Georgian Menshevik leader Noe Zhordania remarked, “Now a misfortune has fallen on us. The connection with Russia has been broken and Transcaucasia has been left alone. We have to stand on our own feet and either help ourselves or perish through anarchy.”⁴⁰ Yet the separation also helped introduce the idea of independence into the political life of the Caucasus.

In fact, even before the October coup, all Caucasian national groups had begun forming military units in view of the unforeseeable military situation: Russian forces were progressively disintegrating amid the revolutionary confusion, while Turkish forces threatened to take over Transcaucasia. In February 1918, the Turkish army broke the December 1917 Armistice of Erzincan between the Ottoman Empire and the Transcaucasian Commissariat, created in Tiflis shortly after the October coup as a self-governing body, and advanced toward the Caucasus. In response, the Union of the United Mountaineers sought to unite the Northern Caucasus, Dagestan, and Transcaucasia into an independent state with the economic and military support of Turkey and the Central Powers.⁴¹

Meanwhile in March 1918, Bolshevik Russia concluded the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers, abandoning the Caucasus to its fate but affirming the independence of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus’, and Ukraine. The treaty also restored the territory the Ottomans had lost to Russia in the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish War (including the port city of Batumi, the fortress city of Kars, and the city of Ardahan).⁴² For its part, Turkey wished to create as its protectorate an independent state or states in the Caucasus as a buffer zone against Bolshevik Russia (although the Caucasians suspected Turkey’s imperial ambitions in the Caucasus in general). The Georgian National Democrats also sought to proclaim Transcaucasia’s independence, as

³⁹ Shalva Amirejibi (1886-1943), vol. 1 (Tbilisi, 1997), 271–274.
⁴⁰ Quoted in Kazemzadeh, The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 55.
⁴¹ Haidar Bammatt’s 28 February 1918 telegram to the Georgian National Council, M. Bammatt Family Archive, Paris, France.
ultimately did the Musavat. Yet the Sejm, or legislative body of the Transcaucasian Commissariat, which was headed by Nikolai Chkheidze, hesitated, nor did it heed the call by the Union of the United Mountaineers for a United Caucasus. In the end the Sejm delegation accepted the Brest-Litovsk terms in Trabzon in view of the overwhelming Turkish forces threatening the Caucasus. Yet the Sejm itself rejected the treaty and even declared war against the Ottomans. But overwhelmed by the advance of Turkish forces, on 22 April the Sejm finally accepted the Turkish conditions and declared independence, creating the Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia and resuming peace negotiations with Turkey.43 The government of the new independent state was led by Prime Minister Akaki Chkhenkeli (1874–1959), a Georgian Menshevik, and staffed by an equal mix of Georgian, Azeri, and Armenian ministers. Within a week, the Ottoman government recognized the new government of Transcaucasia.44

43 The Sejm’s debate and declaration are in Dokumenty i mater’ially po vneshnei politike Zakavakz’ia i Gruzii (Tiflis: Tipografija Pravitel’stva Gruzinskoj Respubliki, 1919), 220–23.
44 Dokumenty i mater’ially po vneshnei politike Zakavakz’ia i Gruzii, 253.
Nonetheless, the Ottomans continued their military advance, demanding further concessions from the new state and threatening to take over Tiflis, its capital. The Ottoman goal was to place Transcaucasia and Persian Azerbaijan under its control and secure the oil fields of Baku. Although this move did not disturb the Azeris, it greatly disquieted the Georgians and Armenians. The Ottoman territorial demands amounted to a virtual destruction of Armenian territory and a vast erosion of what Georgia claimed as its own. Moreover, the Ottoman move perturbed Germany, which also eyed the Baku oil fields and the manganese deposits in Georgia. The Ottomans thus wrought divisions within the brand-new Transcaucasian government. Georgia decided to turn to Germany for protection, and, with Germany ready to oblige, de-
clared independence from the newly minted state, effectively destroying it. On 26 May 1918 the Sejm dissolved itself, and Georgia declared the formation of the Georgian Democratic Republic. The government was headed by Menshevik Noe Ramishvili as prime minister, with Chkhenkeli serving as foreign minister. Berlin, Istanbul, Paris, Vienna, London, Rome, Washington, Moscow, Sofia, Tokyo, Bucharest, Tehran, Madrid, The Hague, Kyiv, Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Kristiania (Oslo) were notified. Two days later Armenia and Azerbaijan followed suit, declaring independence with Erivan and Ganja as their respective capitals. Within a week the three independent states signed peace treaties with Turkey, who largely dictated the terms.

The Northern Caucasus, bordering on Russia, faced threats not from the Ottomans but from Russia, both Red and White. After the Bolshevik seizure of power in the capital, the Union of the United Mountaineers cut its ties to the Bolshevik government, although the Union itself fragmented politically. Whereas the Union adhered to the

45 Dokumenty i mater’ialy po vneshnei politike Zakavakz’ia i Gruzii, 330–31, 335, 338. Two months later Noe Zhordania became prime minister, and Ramishvili minister of internal affairs.
idea of creating a unified Caucasian state as the only viable option, it also accepted the demand of some German military commanders that it constitute itself as an independent state to be recognized as the legitimate representative of the Northern Caucasus peoples. (In truth, the German commanders were interested in eventually annexing the Northern Caucasus to the German Empire.) Thus, on 11 May 1918, the Union (or at least those who claimed to represent it), appealing to Germany and Turkey for support, declared independence and created the Republic of the Mountainers of the Northern Caucasus and Dagestan (the “Mountaineer Republic”). The new Republic was headed by Tapa (Abdul Medzhid) Chermoev (1882–1937), a Chechen, with Haidar Bammat (Bammatov) (1890–1965), a Dagestani lawyer, serving as foreign minister. Chermoev and Bammat were the two who signed the 11 May declaration. While Russia denounced this move, it was recognized by Georgia.

There was a serious problem, however: the Mountaineer Republic claimed areas that it did not control, such as the Terek and the Kuban regions. In fact, it hardly controlled other regions it claimed, such as Chechnia and Dagestan. Moreover, the independence proclamation had been issued in Batumi, which was under Turkish control. The political situation in the Northern Caucasus had also grown complex, with insurgents and Cossack fighters rising in various places against whoever controlled them. But, in October and November 1918, both Turkey and Azerbaijan came to the aid of the new republic to expel the Bolsheviks and the Entente-oriented White Russian forces from the Northern Caucasus. Germany, far from united in its policy toward the Northern Caucasus, was deeply disturbed by the advance of Turkish forces into the area, yet it did not dare jeopardize the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Russia. Ultimately, as Bammat bitterly complained later, Germany failed to keep its earlier promise to support

---

48 See *Soiuz ob'edinennykh gortsev*, 121.
50 The Republic left the question of its southern borders open for future unification with the Southern Caucasus.
the Republic’s independence. Although the Allied countries, including Japan, supported the Republic with “Platonic sympathy,” they failed to recognize it officially.

4.3 Reconquest

In the end, all these republics and the entire Caucasus itself were reconquered by the Bolsheviks. One might fault in part the new republics with failures in internal reforms. The question of land reform, for instance, was certainly a vexed question. In the Caucasus the land question was not merely a class issue; it was deeply connected to the national question and the matter of Cossack privileges as well in the Northern Caucasus. In Georgia, although the Menshevik government did enact land reform by taking land from large landowners and redistributing (selling) it to the poorer peasants, it also saved the landowners from wholesale confiscation of their land. In western Georgia in particular, where agricultural land was scarce and most nobles tilled their lands themselves, little land was available for the peasants. The reform satisfied neither the poor nor the rich.

Many other factors undermined the new independent states. In the spring of 1918, for instance, a power struggle in Baku between the Bolsheviks and the Dashnaksutiun on the one hand and the Musavat on the other led to the mutual massacre of Muslims and Armenians (the former suffering larger losses estimated at twelve thousand). This incident (March Events) ushered in the Bolshevik-led Baku Commune, which in turn was quickly overthrown by the Centro-Caspian Dictatorship (an alliance of Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and Dashnaks) with the assistance of British forces. In September 1918, when the British forces left, Ottoman and Azeri forces occupied Baku and overthrew the Centro-Caspian Dictatorship, while Baku’s Armenians were massacred by the Azeri population (the September Events). Death estimates ranged from ten thousand to thirty thousand. Shortly afterward, the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan moved its capital from Ganja to Baku.

---

54 On “Platonic sympathy,” see *Soiu ob’edinennykh gortsev*, 174.
55 For a Menshevik view emphasizing “absolutely no problem” in implementing the land reform in Georgia, see G.I. Uratadze, *Obrazovanie i konsolidatsiia Gruzinskoi Demokraticheskoi Respubliki* (Munich: Institut zur Erforschung der UdSSR e. V., 1956), 93.
Territorial issues also contributed to discord among the new republics. As one observer aptly noted, the Caucasian peoples, after long years of submission and oppression, were enjoying independence and power for the first time. Some of their politicians were given to flaunting power, displaying pomp, and showing jealousy over haughty titles. Some became megalomaniacal. A newly acquired sense of power also spilled over into dreams of territorial grandeur, prompting these republics to fight over tiny territories: Lori, Borchalo, Nakhichevan, Karabakh, and so on. To be sure, these disputes were understandable, given that each territory, however small, had almost always had an ethnically mixed population. Baku, an Azeri city, was dominated by ethnic Russians and Armenians. The mayors of Tiflis, the capital of Transcaucasia and a Georgian city, were mostly ethnic Armenians, the last being Alexander Khatisyan, 1910–17, who later became prime minister and foreign minister of independent Armenia (1919–20).

It was perhaps unrealistic to imagine that these new republics, sandwiched between two contentious imperial powers, could have easily survived on their own. The Northern Caucasians understood this issue well. Bammat, then a socialist, for instance, was convinced that “only if all the peoples of the Caucasus worked together would they be able to defend a region of such strategic importance against attack, and to make the most of its abundant but unequally distributed resources.” He publicly proposed a Caucasian Federation made up of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and the Northern Caucasus. Turkey, too, supported this vision in its own strategic interests, although how sincere it was is open to debate. Yet this vision, like earlier ones envisioned by others, failed to materialize. Bammat feared that as time passed, the Christian Georgians and Armenians might be absorbed into Russia and emphasized the centrality of Muslims to the Caucasus. Bammat also believed that the Northern Caucasians belonged historically and culturally to Europe, which was “not the case with the Turks.” Therefore, he rejected any notion of uniting the Northern Caucasus with Turkey. Indeed, when the Mountaineer Republic welcomed Turkish troops to Dagestan in October 1918 to protect itself from the Bolsheviks, the Republic emphasized its ecumenical nature of treating all religions and nationalities equally. The Mountaineer Republic and Bammat repeatedly proposed to form a “single political

64 Bihl, Die Kaukasus-Politik der Mittelmächte, vol. 2, 311.
65 Soiuz ob”edinennykh gortsev, 162–63.
entity in the Caucasus,” which was “imperative in view of all the strategic, economic and political considerations.” But it bore little fruit. It was only in April–June 1919 that the four republics held a conference in Tiflis. The threat of Anton Denikin’s White Army drew the Georgians, Azeris, and Mountainers closer. Georgia and Azerbaijan agreed to render military assistance to each other, regional unity being their goal. Yet the conference failed to reach an agreement: the Azeris were absorbed in territorial issues with the Armenians, while Armenia, wishing for a Great Armenia and supporting Denikin’s forces, showed no interest in forming a single federative state. Meanwhile, the Northern Caucasus was being destroyed by Denikin’s Volunteer Army.

Ultimately, internal discord and international politics combined to cause the eventual demise of the newly independent republics of the Caucasus. Bammat’s complaint about Germany’s breach of promise owed largely to the fact that at the time Germany was seeking a supplementary agreement to the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Bolshevik Russia, to be concluded in August 1918. In exchange for receiving oil from Baku and the recognition of Georgia as an independent state, Germany promised not to support any third-party military operations beyond Georgia’s borders and the areas of Ardakhan, Kars, and Batumi. In August 1918 Germany and Russia also agreed to the eventual return of Baku to the Soviet government. These agreements in turn prompted the Turks and Azeris to occupy Baku the following month (see p. 87), seriously complicating German-Soviet-Turkish relations.

Subsequently, the end of World War I in November 1918, with the defeat of the Central Powers, presented both opportunity and danger for the Caucasian republics. The Ottoman defeat afforded Armenia an unprecedented opportunity for survival and unification with Ottoman Armenia in Eastern Anatolia. But to Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Central Powers’ defeat meant the loss of their respective patrons.

For now each country went its own way, despite the fact that Bammat and other federalists continued advocating for the unity of the Caucasus as a whole. In Georgia, the most stable of all the new states in the Caucasus, the Georgian language replaced Russian, while the Red banner gave way to the black-white-red tricolor national flag.

---

70 See Baumgart, Deutsche Ostpolitik 1918, 203–204.
71 Kazemzadeh, The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917–1921), 143.
72 Bammat’s indefatigable efforts to secure independence and international recognition is detailed in G. Mamoulia, Vatchagaev Mairbek, and Donogo Khadzhi Murad, eds, Gaidar Bammat – izvestnyi i neizvestnyi. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov (Baku: Azerbaijanskoе istoricheskое obschestvo, 2015).
Now with British instead of German forces stationed in the capital, the new republic held elections for the Constituent Assembly in February 1919. Mensheviks took 109 seats out of 130, with the National Democrats and the Socialist Federalists accounting for eight seats each. Noe Zhordania headed the newly formed government. By 1920 Tiflis, its capital, had been significantly “Georgianized,” although it never lost its multinational character. In the end, however, Georgia and all of the Caucasus would be conquered by the Bolsheviks.

The first to fall was the Mountaineer Republic, even though in late 1918 it had been “recognized” by British Major General William M. Thomson, who was acting as the Allies’ representative. Thomson was the commander of the British expeditionary forces that had arrived in Baku, in agreement with the Azerbaijan government, in November 1918, in the wake of the departure of the Ottoman forces. The British forces, however, also supported Denikin’s Volunteer Army, operating in the Don, Kuban, and Northern Caucasus, in the fight against the Bolsheviks. But Britain’s double game was not viable because Denikin’s goal was not merely the overthrow of the Bolshevik government but also the maintenance of “one and indivisible Russia.” This latter objective meant rejecting independent states such as the Mountaineer Republic. By mid-1919

73 Loris-Melicof, La Révolution Russe et les nouvelles républiques transcaucasiennes, 163–164. In the autumn of 1918, however, Germany entertained the possibility of a coup against the Menshevik government as it had the previous spring against the socialist government of Ukraine (the Skoropads’kyi coup). See Mamoulia, Les combats indépendandistes des Caucasiens, 17.
the Mountaineer Republic, riven by internal strife, was overrun by Denikin’s Volunteer Army. Those who claimed to represent the government moved to Tiflis, where they set up an émigré government (Medzlis). From Tiflis, Bammat and others appealed to European socialists and foreign countries for assistance. In June 1920, for example, Bammat, “an unctuous gentleman of a sophistication remarkable in a representative of Caucasian mountain tribes,” approached a British representative in Tiflis for help. But little or no help came from anywhere, including the British forces, which appealed to the peoples of the Northern Caucasus to accept Denikin’s forces in the fight against the Bolsheviks. Insurgency thus became the order of the day in that area, and the situation became so complex that it was difficult for anyone to assess.

The Soviet Red Army, however, succeeded in mobilizing the dissatisfied mountaineers to defeat the Volunteer Army, promising to honor the independence of the Mountaineer Republic. Ultimately, like the peasants in Russia, many mountaineers of the Caucasus may have regarded the Bolsheviks as the lesser evil, because the power of Denikin and his White forces meant the restoration of the old regime, whereas Bolshevism promised its destruction. Moscow thus effectively divided the anti-Bolshevik forces. The Volunteer Army’s defeat in spring 1920 by the Red Army did not, however, spell freedom. The Northern Caucasus virtually lost its independence with the Bolshevik conquest. Only on the verge of its defeat did the White Army recognize the Mountaineer Republic. It came too late.

Even after the Bolsheviks conquered Northern Caucasus and occupied Azerbaijan at the end of April 1920 (see p. 94), the mountaineers of the Caucasus did not cease fighting. In September 1920, Georgia helped the insurrection of Colonel Kaimz Alikhanov in Dagestan and the military operations of Muhammad Said Shamil (grandson of Imam Shamil) in Dagestan and Chechnia. Georgians, Azeris, and Northern Caucasians worked together to explore ways to ensure their political survival. All options required outside military assistance. Working with the Georgians, the French military mission in the Caucasus devised a grand plan of spreading insurrections to other parts of the Caucasus and cutting links between Russia and the Southern Caucasus along the Baku-Petrovsk (Makhachkala) line, where mountains soar sharply from the Caspian shorelines. Weapons and ammunition were to be supplied by France via

---

76 See a memoir by Sir Harry Luke, Cities and Men: An Autobiography, vol. 2 (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1953), 155. Luke added that “Bamakov” (Bammat) did not look to him as “the type to be a leader of such a venture [military operations against the Bolsheviks].”
78 Tiflis did send a detachment of troops, under General Leo Kereselidze, to the Northern Caucasus in August 1919 to fight the Denikin forces. See Leo Kereselidze, “Curriculum Vitae.” tananemamule (Tbilisi), 2007, No. 3(24), 16. The detachment was later recalled in the spring of 1920 when Tiflis, with the Azerbaijan government, sought to reach an agreement with Moscow.
Georgia. Yet Paris adhered to the idea of a Federative Russia in which the Caucasus was to enjoy autonomy, not independence. Units of the White Army, now headed by the newly appointed commander General Petr Vrangel’ (Wrangel), were to be dispatched from the Crimea to the Northern Caucasus to lead the anti-Bolshevik forces. Only through the general were weapons and ammunition to be handed to the rebels. The mountaineers and Azeris, however, were willing to fight alongside the Vrangel’ forces only in so far as the general officially supported the independence of the North Caucasus and Azerbaijan. But Vrangel’ had no such intention. His venture in the Northern Caucasus, however, failed in the summer and autumn of 1920. (By then Armenia was divided up by Soviet Russia and Turkey [see p. 96]). The insurgents, with no heavy weapons (which the French had earlier promised), were also doomed: when in December 1920 they struck their way out of the mountainous terrain to the Caspian shore areas in Dagestan, they faced formidable enemy forces. Although the fighting did not stop, by mid-1921 the insurgents had been largely defeated by the Reds. Only after the invasion of Georgia by the Red Army in February 1921 (see p. 98), did France finally begin supplying weapons to the Caucasus. It was, however, too late.

Although the other three republics fared better, their ultimate fate was the same: Bolshevik conquest. Yet they did enjoy a brief period of international recognition.

The Paris Peace Conference (which lasted from January 1919 to January 1920) proved favorable only to Armenia. The Democratic Republic of Armenia, with few resources but flooded with refugees from Turkish Armenia, was constantly on the brink of famine and collapse, although the American Relief Mission provided vital help. While the Western powers were unsympathetic to Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Northern Caucasus with their ties to the defeated Central Powers, they showed much sympathy for Armenia which was free of such ties and whose sufferings bought the sympathy of the Great Powers. Nevertheless, Armenia failed to achieve its goals. Even though its territorial claims (which included Turkish Armenia) did not differ from the proposals of the Entente powers, Armenia was “hypnotized by the grandeur and the magnificence of their future state.” It could not be satisfied with being a “small country” like Belgium, as some Europeans suggested. The delegates’ inordinate de-

mands and complaints did not help their cause, and in the end Armenia was not recognized, nor was any mandate issued regarding it.

Part of the reason for this indecision was that at the time, in mid-1919, the Council of Four (Britain, France, the United States, and Italy) and Japan, were hoping that the government of Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak might well conquer the Bolsheviks, and recognized this government as Russia’s. In return, Kolchak recognized the independence of Poland and Finland and promised autonomy to the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Transcaucasia. (The Mountaineer Republic sent its own delegates, including Bammat, to Paris, but in general they were not taken seriously there. By mid-1919, as discussed already, the Republic had been overrun by Denikin.) It was only in early 1920, when the Great Powers’ hopes for the victory of Kolchak (or Denikin) were dashed by the Bolsheviks, that they and Japan recognized de facto Georgia, Azerbaijan (12 January), and Armenia (19 January). Soon the newly independent Poland also recognized Georgia, with which it sought to establish a military alliance against Soviet Russia. At the beginning of 1920 the international situation of the three republics was therefore more firmly consolidated.

On 7 May 1920, the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the Russian Soviet Socialist Federal Republic concluded a formal treaty in Moscow whereby the latter, following the Western powers and Japan, acknowledged de jure the “independence and self-sufficiency of the Georgian state” and pledged “to renounce any kind of interference in the internal affairs of Georgia.” The two states pledged not to allow any foreign military forces onto their respective soils. But this treaty, which was secretly negotiated in Moscow, was not well received in Georgia, where it was published a month later on 7 June and denounced by the public as a “veiled subjection of Georgia to Russia.” Indeed, the provisions and consequences of this treaty, as David Marshall Lang has observed, contained “striking parallels with the treaty concluded in 1783 between

83 Its desire for independence and international recognition was not entirely ignored, however. US President Woodrow Wilson, with whom Bammat had a personal talk, was sympathetic with the cause of the Mountaineer Republic. See AMAE, correspondance politique et commerciale (CPC) 1914-1940, série E (Levant), Caucasian-Kurdistan, dossier no. 4, fol. 230–232.
86 This treaty was published in *Izvestia*, 10 May 1921, 2.
Catherine the Great of Russia and King Erekle II of Georgia, which proved to be the prelude to Georgia’s complete annexation.”

The Georgians’ suspicions proved correct, for the treaty contained a secret supplement. Immediately after taking power, the Bolsheviks had denounced the secret diplomacy of the Russian imperial government as well as of the Provisional Government (which existed briefly between the February and October 1917 Revolutions) and revealed many of the secret agreements they had concluded with foreign countries. Now the Soviet government was doing exactly what it had denounced as imperialist. The secret supplement contained a stipulation: “Georgia pledges itself to recognize the right of free existence and activity of the Communist party... and in particular its right to free meetings and publications (including organs of the press).”

As Firuz Kazemzadeh has noted, this clause in fact amounted to curtailing Georgia’s sovereignty and annulling the clause by which Russia pledged not to interfere in its internal affairs. Moscow knew well that the Georgian Mensheviks, close in political orientation to Western liberalism, could be tempted by such an ostensibly respectable clause, and that they also believed that Moscow’s official recognition of Georgia’s independence signified Moscow’s renunciation of aggression. But the Bolsheviks were far shrewder than the Georgian Mensheviks.

The Bolsheviks almost certainly had a plan to reconquer the Southern Caucasus. As soon as the Whites were driven out of the Northern Caucasus in the spring of 1920, the Bolsheviks began penetrating the Southern Caucasus. Moscow was in desperate need of the oil in Baku and was determined to capture it by all means. Turkey, now with its new Kemalist leaders (followers Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) and new geopolitical orientations (see p. 96), even helped Moscow by demanding that the Azeris allow Soviet forces to advance into their country in order to link up with the Turks and jointly defend Turkish borders from the British. The Turks even assured the Azeris that the Red Army would not occupy their country. Instead, the Red Army invaded Azerbaijan on 27 April 1920, overthrew the government, and on 30 April set up the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic in Baku. The Azeris thus “accused Mustafa Kemal’s men of having sold them out to Russians in order to save themselves.” Anti-Russian, anti-Bolshevik rebellions followed, with Georgians assisting. Plans were made to retake Baku. Yet the Menshevik government in Tbilisi ultimately canceled them for fear of

---

88 See Lang, A Modern History of Soviet Georgia, 226.
89 Kazemzadeh, The Struggle for Transcausasia, 299.
90 Kazemzadeh, The Struggle for Transcausasia, 299–300.
92 At the time Moscow and Ankara signed a mutual military action against the British. Kvashonkin, Khlevniuk, Kosheleva et al., eds., Bolshevistskoe rukovodstvo, 121.
93 Reynolds, Shattering Empires, 257.
an all-out confrontation with Bolshevik Russia. Rebels were mercilessly repressed, causing a stir even among the Kemalists in Turkey who were collaborating with the Bolsheviks. The Great Powers, which had de facto recognized Azerbaijan’s independence, hardly took action against Moscow’s annexation of the state, in which there was little Bolshevik influence outside Baku. Later, in January 1921, Azeris and Northern Caucasus mountaineers created in Tiflis a committee aimed at “liberating Azerbaijan and the Northern Caucasus from the Russian occupation, restoring Democratic republics, and creating a Caucasian confederation.” In February Tiflis recognized the committee as the provisional government of Azerbaijan and the Northern Caucasus. Three days later, however, Tiflis itself fell to the Red Army (discussed shortly).

The Georgian-Russian treaty of May 1920 took place within this context of Moscow’s reconquest of Azerbaijan. With hindsight, it appears evident that Moscow used the treaty to subvert Georgia from within by mobilizing the Communists in Georgia. By internal subversion and frontal attack, Moscow was to reconquer Georgia the following year.

Before Georgia fell, Armenia came under Moscow’s subjugation. Armenia was the strongest of the three Southern Caucasian independent republics from an international perspective because it had the sympathy of the Western powers. Although its megalomaniac position alienated it at the Paris Peace Conference, in early 1920 Armenia was internationally recognized de facto as an independent state. In August 1920 a peace treaty was signed between Turkey and the Allied powers (including Japan but excluding the United States). The Treaty of Sèvres amounted to the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, with its territory reduced by nearly three quarters, its military forces drastically curtailed, its finances to be controlled by the Allied powers, and Istanbul, Trabzon, Batumi, and several other cities to become free ports. The treaty also recognized Armenia as an independent state whose exact borders with Turkey were to be decided by the United States. (Even though the United States refused to be involved in the matter of Armenian affairs, it was assigned this task.) In the end, in November 1920 President Woodrow Wilson granted a large section of Turkey’s eastern Anatolia (including the Black Sea port of Trabzon) to Armenia.¹⁹

But the treaty was never ratified by Turkey because Turkish nationalists now founded an alternative government (in the form of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara) led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which then formed a united front with Soviet Russia against the Allied powers. Their cooperation started in 1919 and strengthened in 1920.¹⁰⁰ With Soviet gold, the Turkish nationalists created new armed forces equipped with Soviet arms. Unlike the Ottoman political leaders of 1918, they did not regard the Southern Caucasus as a buffer zone against Russia; rather, they cooperated with Soviet Russia to divide the entire region, with Moscow and Ankara secretly agreeing to partition Armenia between them. In September 1920 the Turkish Nationalist Army invaded Armenia and quickly defeated it, but as Turkish forces advanced deeply into Armenia, Moscow feared Turkey might breach the agreement.¹⁰¹ Not to be overtaken by the Turks, Moscow, too, intervened militarily in Armenia, removed

---


the Dashnaktsutiun-controlled Armenian government, and made it into a soviet.\textsuperscript{102} Several Bolsheviks from the Caucasus, such as Stalin and G.K. (Sergo) Ordzhonikidze, were in charge of this operation, which was completed by early December.\textsuperscript{103} Both the Allied powers and Georgia, while sympathetic to Armenia’s plight, extended little help. Armenia, like Azerbaijan, was thus written off. Stalin declared that the Dashnaks, “agents of the Entente,” had been overthrown by Armenians for having led Armenia to “anarchy and misery.” He displayed much satisfaction with the fact that, for all their rhetoric, the Western powers did not come to rescue Armenia, which, he contended, was saved only by the new Soviet Republic of Armenia.\textsuperscript{104}

Having conquered Armenia, Moscow now set its eyes firmly on Georgia. Russia’s official recognition did nothing to help Georgia. The Bolsheviks in Georgia, having gained their freedom in the wake of the May 1920 treaty, made every effort to arouse popular uprisings against the Menshevik government. Already Lavrenti Beria, future chief of the Soviet secret police, had created an intelligence network in Georgia. He and other Bolsheviks were soon arrested but released on condition they leave Georgia within three days. Beria, however, assumed the false name of Lakerbaia and worked in the Russian embassy in Tiflis. Arrested soon again, he was now imprisoned in Kutaisi. In June 1920, when Sergei M. Kirov was sent to Tiflis as Soviet ambassador, he brought with him “a large staff, which at once took charge of the Bolshevik movement inside Georgia.” Kirov successfully negotiated the release of Beria and others. At the time, as Kirov noted, Georgia was considered a “convenient back-door to Europe.” As soon as the backdoor was no longer needed, Georgia’s fate was sealed. Kirov frankly stated: “We don’t consider the Georgians as a Government, but as a tool.”\textsuperscript{105} In autumn 1920, a delegation of Western socialists, including Karl Kautsky, an outspoken critic of Bolshevism, visited Georgia. Shortly afterwar, Kautsky penned a laudatory book on the Georgian Social Democratic government.\textsuperscript{106} By then, however, having observed the Allied powers’ reaction to the Soviet conquest of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Moscow no longer needed Georgia’s backdoor to Europe. Instead it began military

\textsuperscript{102} Hovannisian, The Republic of Armenia, vol. 4, 374–75. Turkey accepted the Sovietization of a portion of Armenia as a guarantee of its own security in the Turkish part of Armenia. See Kvashonkin, Khlevniuk, Kosheleva et al., eds., Bol’shevistskoe rukovodstvo, 170.

\textsuperscript{103} Stalin was actively working in various parts of the Caucasus at the time: from 21 October to 20 November he traveled to Vladikavkaz, Baku, Temir-Khan-Shura (today’s Buinaksk in Dagestan), and back to Vladikavkaz. See I.V. Stalin, Sochineniia, vol. 4 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1953), 470–71.

\textsuperscript{104} Stalin, Sochineniia, vol. 4, 413–414.


preparations against the Georgian government in late 1920. At the Eighth All-Russian Congress of Soviets held in December 1920 (the last in which the Mensheviks were allowed to take part), Lenin declared: “You know that a final peace has been signed with a number of states bordering on the Western frontiers of Russia that were part of the former Russian Empire. The Soviet government has unequivocally recognized their independence and sovereignty, in accordance with the fundamental principles of our policy.”¹⁰⁷ But Lenin omitted mentioning Georgia altogether, a manifest sign of his scheme against it, which was immediately noticed by the Mensheviks present.¹⁰⁸

By January–February 1921, Moscow, aware that internal subversion in Georgia was hopeless, had made up its mind to conquer and sovietize it.¹⁰⁹ Officially Moscow displayed a friendly face even on the eve of the Red Army’s invasion of Georgia in February 1921. On 7 February 1921, a banquet was held in Tiflis to celebrate the Georgian state’s de jure recognition by Western powers, which had taken place ten days earlier, on 27 January,¹¹⁰ the day the Bolsheviks secretly decided to invade and conquer Georgia.¹¹¹ Diplomats from Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, Poland, and Russia attended. The following day, Kirov’s successor, Aron L. Sheinman, insisted that Russia “wanted to live in peace and friendship with the Georgian republic.”¹¹² Three days later, peasants of the Borchalo district, an area under dispute with Armenia, staged a revolt instigated by the Bolsheviks to justify military invasion. Indeed, within days the Eleventh Red Army had invaded Georgia to “assist the Georgian people.” Simultaneously Georgian Bolsheviks, headed by Filipp Makharadze (1868–1941), Mamia Orakhelashvili (1883–1937), and Shalva Eliava (1893–1937), formed a Revolutionary Committee, which then proclaimed a Soviet regime. A week of intense battle followed, with Georgian forces led by G.I. Kvinitadze and supported by the Mountaineer Republic and Azeri émigrés in Tiflis such as Bammat. Three days later, however, Tiflis itself was taken by the Red Army, accompanied by Ordzhonikidze. The Bolshevik Revolutionary Committee formally dissolved the Georgian government and declared the formation of the Georgian Soviet Republic. Most Georgian political and military leaders (including Zhordania, Ramishvili, and Kvinitadze) left to go abroad, as did other Caucasian fighters such as Bammat.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ See Kvashonkin, Khlevniuk, Kosheleva et al., eds., Bolshevistskoe rukovodstvo, 173, 175, 177.
¹¹⁰ For the recognition of Georgia and the Baltic states, see AMAE, correspondance politique et commerciale 1914-1940, série Z, dossier no. 649. Fol. 128–129.
¹¹¹ Kvakshonkin, Khlevniuk, Kosheleva et al., eds., Bolshevistskoe rukovodstvo, 177–178.
¹¹² Kazemzadeh, The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 313.
In conquering Georgia, Moscow regarded Turkey’s cooperation as necessary for success and coordinated its own military operations, implicitly or explicitly, with the Turks: while the Red Army assaulted Georgia, Turkey made territorial demands (for Artvin, Ardahan and Batumi) on Georgia.¹¹⁴ Forced to evacuate Artvin and Ardahan, the Georgians successfully defended against the Turks the port franc of Batumi, abandoned by Britain in July 1920.

The Bolshevik-Kemalist alliance did not, however, mean the parties trusted each other. Moscow constantly feared a betrayal by Kemalists: seeing Ankara’s hands in the numerous insurgencies in the Northern Caucasus and Azerbaijan. In invading Armenia and Georgia, it assumed the possibility of fighting the Turks as well.¹¹⁵ Well aware of the fragility of Bolshevik-Kemalist cooperation, foreign countries such as France maneuvered in turn to break up the alliance to their own advantage.¹¹⁶ Nor did Ankara for its part trust the Bolsheviks, who indeed schemed against the Kemalists in Turkey itself (see p. 100).

As for Armenia, during the brief Russo-Georgian War, Dashnaks in Armenia who had escaped Russian repression staged an uprising and deposed the Soviet Armenian government in Erevan. The anti-Soviet insurgents were “welcomed in euphoric celebration with the strains of ‘Mer Hairenik’ [Armenian national anthem] and the unfurling once more of the republic’s red, blue, and orange tricolor flag.”¹¹⁷ Following Tiflis, however, Erevan was retaken by the Red Army on 2 April. All of the Caucasus thus came under Soviet control.

By this time, Stalin had become firmly entrenched in revolutionary fervor. Earlier in 1917, he may have been inclined to help his Georgian friends who were not Bolsheviks. For example, the day after the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd in October, Spiridon Kedia, head of the Georgian National Democratic Party, received a stamp on his passport from Stalin to travel to Stockholm.¹¹⁸ But by 1920 and 1921 both Stalin and Ordzhonikidze were advocating a forceful conquest of the Caucasus dominated by non-Bolsheviks and, in the end, succeeded. In July 1921, after the takeover of Georgia, Stalin returned to Tiflis as a conqueror. Accompanied by secret police guards, he attended a meeting organized in the town’s working-class district. But he was greeted, according to an unsympathetic account, with cries of “traitor” and “murderer.” The

¹¹⁵ Kvashonkin, Khlevniuk, Kosheleva et al., eds., Bolshevistskoe rukovodstvo 177.
¹¹⁶ See for example, AMAE, CPC 1914-1940, série Z, dossier no. 631. fol. 234 (Mission militaire française au Caucase. Exposé de la situation politique pour la période du 1 au 15 novembre 1920, Tiflis, 16 November 1920).
¹¹⁸ See Bihl, Die Kaukasus-Politik der Mittelmächte, vol. 2, 282. It appears that Kedia went to Stockholm to collect money in order to fight against the Mensheviks who refused to fight for Georgia’s independence (p. 38). This may be why Stalin helped Kedia, although the National Democrats soon began working with the Mensheviks in Georgia, seeing no other way to influence the political life of Georgia.
crowd would not let him speak. Instead he stood at the meeting accused of treason by the old Social Democrat Isidor Ramishvili and others. Later that day, Ramishvili and some one hundred other Mensheviks were arrested. It was said that Stalin then convened another meeting of Tiflis workers, only to face the same fate. Humiliated, Stalin stormed into Bolshevik party headquarters in Tiflis and berated Filipp Makharadze, the Bolshevik leader in Tiflis. Having denounced the Mensheviks and Georgian nationalism, Stalin was said to have left for Moscow in a huff.¹¹⁹

### 4.4 The Caucasus and the World

By the time Moscow had conquered all of the Caucasus, the world – excepting Japan, the United States, and several other countries – had already begun accepting Soviet Russia. Most countries showed at most merely token sympathy towards the Caucasian states, which in essence were written off. The Kemalists of Turkey and the Bolsheviks circumvented the Sublime Porte and cooperated to reshape the recalcitrant Caucasus. Their cooperation led to the Treaty of Moscow signed in March 1921. This treaty confirmed the “existing solidarity between the two [governments] in the fight against imperialism,” annulled all treaties concerning Turkey, and demarcated common borders, giving to Turkey most of the former Kars Oblast’ (including the cities of Kars and Ardahan) and to Georgia Batumi and its surrounding area (as well as Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe).¹²⁰ It was a settlement favorable to Turkey: except for Batumi, it virtually restored the borders before the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish War. Moscow acted on behalf of the new Caucasian Soviet Republics (or, more accurately, usurped their authority) in concluding this treaty. To correct this inconvenient situation, in October 1921 a new treaty was signed between Kemalist Turkey and the three Caucasian Soviet Republics in Kars. The new Treaty of Kars affirmed the previous Treaty of Moscow.¹²¹

Although Moscow worked with the Kemalists to divide and conquer the Caucasus, it never trusted them, as noted earlier. For instance, in December 1920 both Lenin and Stalin insisted that the Bolsheviks not trust the Kemalists and instead concentrate all their efforts on the victory of the “Soviet party.”¹²² A few months later, in April and May 1921, that is, after the signing of the Treaty of Moscow, Lenin approved a plan to arm the White forces (the forces of Vrangel’, then a refugee in Istanbul) with Soviet weapons in order to conquer the Ottoman capital and then hand the city over to the Turkish Communists (and not to the Kemalists based in Ankara/Angora)! Leon Trotsky objected to this plan, a risky venture that he insisted would fail 95 percent and that, in

---

any case, would discredit the Bolsheviks even if it succeeded. Eventually the scheme was abandoned.\textsuperscript{123}

Just as the conquest of Ukraine in 1920 was not enough to satisfy Moscow, the conquest of the Caucasus was not enough for some Bolsheviks, who now eyed Persia on its other side. In May 1920, shortly after the fall of Baku, Communists and their sympathizers in northern Persia set up the Soviet Republic of Gilan with the help of Soviet Bolsheviks and Soviet military forces.\textsuperscript{124} Yet the Persian Republic soon turned, according to a retrospective Soviet assessment, into a “Soviet-imperialist enterprise.”\textsuperscript{125}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} M.A. Persits, \textit{Zastenchivaia interventsiia: O sovetskom vtorzhenii v Iran i Bukharu v 1920–1921 gg.} (Moscow: Muravei-Gaid, 1999), 187–89.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Persits, \textit{Zastenchivaia interventsiia}, 119 (assessment given in April 1921 by V.G. Tardov, Chief of Soviet Information Bureau in Persia: emphasis added).
\end{itemize}
in January 1921, Lenin still hoped to create a Soviet republic in Khorasan, Persia, as well “by the spring [of 1921].”\(^{126}\) He remained cautious about waging revolutionary war in Persia,\(^{127}\) however, ultimately choosing rapprochement with Britain (whose influence in Persia Moscow wished to dislodge). In February 1921 Moscow and Tehran concluded a friendship treaty, and the following month London and Moscow signed a trade agreement. But although the Gilan Republic soon collapsed, this did not end the ambition of some Bolsheviks towards Persia. Kirov and Ordzhonikidze, for instance, proposed to create an “illegal committee for the liberation of Persia” in Azerbaijan and organize revolutionary forces in Gilan. In November 1921 the two Bolsheviks were severely reprimanded by Lenin for subverting Moscow’s agreement with Tehran.\(^{128}\)

Of all the conquered Caucasian lands, Georgia was the most difficult and inconvenient case for Moscow to deal with. Moscow had formally recognized Georgia as an independent country but then destroyed it by force. Although Lenin repeatedly urged Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and others to be “extra careful” in scheming to occupy Georgia,\(^{129}\) in the end he went along with the more radical advocates within his party. But though Moscow succeeded in conquering Georgia, it did not conquer the hearts and minds of the Georgian people. Stalin, who triumphantly returned to Tiflis after the conquest, was instead humiliated and left the city indignantly. And whereas the Allied powers accepted the Soviet conquest of Georgia, France proved more protective of Georgia than did Britain. It was Aristide Briand, French Prime Minister and president of the Allied Supreme Council, who played a decisive role in the council’s de jure recognition of Georgia in 1921, overriding Britain’s reluctance. Indeed, France was the only country to provide military assistance to Georgia to fight the Red Army. But France also had no intention of going to war with Soviet Russia and so its military assistance was limited, leaving the Georgians unhappy.\(^{130}\) The weakness of Soviet power in Georgia, however, remained a matter of political interest to the Allied powers, one that could be exploited in case of necessity.

### 4.5 The Caucasus and Japan

Japan did not figure prominently in the delicate international politics concerning the Caucasus at the time. But generally following the Great Powers of Europe, Japan kept

---

\(^{126}\) *V.I. Lenin*, 412 (26 January 1921 instruction).

\(^{127}\) See the resolution of the Communist Party Politburo (27 November 1920) in *V.I. Lenin*, p. 403, where he also advocated avoiding war in Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey.

\(^{128}\) See *V.I. Lenin*, 467, 484.

\(^{129}\) See Lenin’s letters in November 1920 and February 1921 in *V.I. Lenin*, 403–404, 415.

watch on the Caucasian situation mainly from Istanbul, sometimes seeking intelligence from the British Army.¹³¹ Records show that Japan treated the new Caucasian republics well. Armenia opened a legation in Japan in 1919,¹³² and Consul Diana Agabek Abcar energetically worked in Japan to have Armenia accepted as an independent state, while Japan in turn “facilitated the relief activities and refugee services of Diana Abcar.”¹³³ In 1920 Japanese financiers formed a consortium with Armenians to build railways in Armenia,¹³⁴ although, given the Soviet conquest that followed, this resulted in nothing concrete. After Japan’s de-jure recognition of Georgia in 1921 (possibly even earlier, after its de facto recognition in February 1920), Georgians living in the Far East opened, with mandates from Tiflis, consulates in Vladivostok and Harbin in China. With the aid of Japan, Georgians in the Far East even apparently formed a Georgian national military unit within Ataman Semenov’s White Army, which Japan supported. The unit was commanded by Ilia Pateishvili and supported by Ilia Mikeladze.¹³⁵ The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs also regarded the Soviet conquest of the Caucasus as a prelude to Soviet exportation of Communism to Persia and India.¹³⁶

In military terms, although Japan’s moves did not have immediate impact on the Caucasus, they did have implications for subsequent development of cooperation with peoples from the Caucasus. As early as 1917 there were expectations that Japan would turn against Russia. Shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution, for example, the Japanese naval attaché in Petrograd noted persistent rumors in the capital that Russia’s unilateral peace treaty with the Central Powers would lead Japan to declare war against Russia.¹³⁷ Indeed, some Japanese political and military leaders advocated military intervention immediately after the Bolshevik seizure of power. But there were others in Japan who urged restraint and careful coordination with other powers, particularly the United States. It took Japan more than six months to decide to intervene militarily in Siberia in coordination with the United States and other Allied powers.¹³⁸

Soon, however, Japan began taking unilateral action in Siberia, deeply angering the United States, which feared giving away control of economic interests in the Russian Far East. Japan’s forces, with some seventy-three thousand soldiers on Russian

¹³¹ Reports from Constantinople, Gaimushō Gaikō Shiryō Kan (Hereafter GGMK), Tokyo, Japan, 1,6,3, “Rokoku Kakumei ikken,” vol. 2.
¹³³ Hovannisian, The Republic of Armenia: Vol. III: From London to Sévres February – August 1920 (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 430. However, Armenians could not freely dispose of their assets in Japan, because Armenia was yet a “non-treaty country” (a country with no commercial treaty with Japan). See JACAR, reference code: B0615142900.
¹³⁵ File of K.O. Gelovani, Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (Tbilisi).
¹³⁶ JACAR, reference code: B03051060400 (a survey of Russia in 1922), Section “Georgia.”
¹³⁷ JACAR, reference code: B03051400500 (29 November 1917 telegraph).
soil, were the largest of all the countries militarily involved except for Russia itself. The Japanese forces quickly occupied the cities of Blagoveshchensk and Chita, eventually reaching as far west as Irkutsk to the west of Lake Baikal. Japan’s undeclared goals were to detach the Russian Far East and Siberia from Soviet Russia and establish a puppet government or one friendly to Japan, thereby securing its political and economic interests there. In the end, however, Japan failed to achieve any of these goals. Its military hold was limited, and Bolshevik partisans rolled back the Japanese forces. Even after all other countries had withdrawn from military intervention against the Bolsheviks, Japan stayed on until 1922, when it finally withdrew from the Asian continent.\(^{139}\) Japan’s occupation of Northern Sakhalin (in support of an “independent Sakhalin”) lasted even longer from 1920 to 1925.\(^{140}\) This episode of Japan’s intervention, which did not affect the Caucasus directly, suggest that Japan was the most uncompromising power toward the Bolshevik regime, which in turn meant that anti-Bolshevik forces naturally turned to Japan for assistance. And so a new chapter in Caucasian-Japanese relations was opened.

In the longer term, Japan’s actions in the Far East likely affected the Caucasus directly. Chapter 3 discussed Japan’s alleged recruitment of Georgians for espionage after the Russo-Japanese War. The Society of Georgians in Harbin was said to have been created by Japan for this purpose. Such societies were created elsewhere as well. In Vladivostok, for example, the Society of Georgians was founded in 1919, according to one account, by the instruction of the Menshevik government in Georgia to fight against Soviet Russia and mobilize world support for an independent Georgia. Its chairman, Kirill Gelovani, was later arrested, in 1937, in Soviet Georgia. According to Gelovani’s confession under interrogation, the chairman of the Society of Georgians in Harbin, Ivlian Khaindrava (see p. 66), had called him to Harbin and told him that Japan’s occupation of the Far East was beneficial to the Georgians, most of whom were engaged in commercial activities protected by Japan. Gelovani said that Khaindrava practically proposed that he recruit members of the society for intelligence for Japan. Meanwhile, Georgians in the Far East sent the Socialist Federalist David Rostomashvili to Tiflis. Rostomashvili returned to Vladivostok at the end of 1919 with a mandate to found a consulate in Vladivostok. “Tumanov” (Tumanishvili) was appointed consul, and after his death in 1922, Rostomashvili took over. According to Gelovani, Rostomashvili agreed with Khaindrava about the necessity of Georgians working for Japan, and Gelovani and Rostomashvili together worked to recruit members for “espionage for Japan.” Allegedly to cover its intelligence operations, the Japanese occupation forces created the “Railway Bureau,” with which the Soci-


ety of Georgians communicated through Melkhisedek Menabde, a merchant. Gelovani stated to Soviet authorities that he had worked to inculcate Japanophilic sentiments in the Georgian colony in Vladivostok. He then sent promising men such as Vasili Kipiani to the Japanese.¹⁴¹

These Georgians in the Far East, according to Gelovani, maintained contact with both the Social Democratic government in exile and the Georgian National Democrats. Yet when a National Democratic organization was created in Harbin, the entire leadership of the Georgian colony joined it, including Khaindarava, Rostomashvili, Mike-ladze, Giorgi Pitskhelauri (see p. 66), and the “Ordzhonikidze brothers.”¹⁴²

In any event, there is no reason to take at face value the confessions made by Gelovani and others later in the 1930s under Soviet captivity. What was clear was that there was a mutual attraction between Japan and the Caucasians in the Far East. Both sides remembered the cooperation they had forged during the Russo-Japanese War. Both hoped that the Soviet regime would be short-lived and that the day of Caucasian autonomy and independence would come sooner or later. The strategists of both sides understood this very well and acted accordingly. Espionage or not, Soviet suspicions about the Caucasian-Japanese nexus existed even at the time, only to be colossally inflated in the 1930s.

¹⁴¹ File of K.O. Gelovani, Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (Tbilisi).
¹⁴² File of K.O. Gelovani, Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (Tbilisi). For Simon Ordzhonikidze, see p. 66 of the present book.