

Map 7

1829–1839: Administrative Makeup of the Early Russian Caucasus

Map 8

1840–1849: Escalation of the Caucasus War and (Re-)Establishment of the Viceroyalty

Maps 7 and 8 reflect changes in the administrative composition of the Caucasus against a backdrop of continuing war and the emergence of the imamate, the Islamic state that united a significant portion of Daghestan and Chechnya in their confrontation with the Russian Empire. In 1834 the imamate was taken over by Shamil of Gimry, the fourth imam, who continued enforcing sharia among mountain populations and managed to create an effective military and political machine that hindered Russian expansion for a quarter-century. However, the imamate was never more than an enclave of mountain resistance whose potential to export murid revolution (a social and political movement led by Sufis) was blocked on all sides by the defensive lines and buffer zones of firm imperial control. Despite some major military successes and efforts to organize coordinated action among Circassians beyond the Kuban River and raids on Derbent and Temir-Khan-Shura or into Kabarda, Shamil did not manage to expand the imamate through the entire mountain region. The military operations of the imamate in the east and of the Cherkess (a Turkish ethnic designation for all Adyghe, or Circassians, a term that was used widely among Russians in the eighteenth century) south of the Kuban in the west did, nevertheless, significantly influence how Russia deployed its defensive (or rather defensive-offensive) lines. The war also forced the imperial authorities to revise the system of government overall and contributed to the restoration of the viceroyalty in the Caucasus.

In 1832 the imperial authorities reorganized the Cossack military force. All Cossack regiments from Ust-Labinskaya in the west to the mouth of the Terek River in the east were united into a single Caucasus Line Cossack Host (Kavkazskoe Lineinoe Kazachye Voisko, KLKV). The KLKV and the Black Sea Host together constituted the Caucasus Defensive Line comprising three divisions or flanks. The right flank (from the Russian

perspective) confronted Circassia (in combination with a new line of fortifications along the Black Sea coastal border that Russia established in 1837–1839, a significant portion of which was destroyed by Circassians in February and March 1840). In the early 1840s the “New” Defensive Line along the Laba River (also called the Laba Defensive Line) was created—in essence, the old Kuban Defensive Line was moved forty to sixty versts (a verst is equivalent to 1.06 kilometers) deeper into Circassia. The left flank, along with the Lezgin Defensive Line, surrounded the imamate. The authority governing the center of the Caucasus line was responsible for Kabarda, which had finally been subdued in 1825, and the Vladikavkaz District (Vladikavkazsky Okrug), populated by generally loyal Ossetians and Ingush. In the center, military strategic control was strengthened by the construction of a new chain of stanitsas along the line where fortifications had stood, between Yekaterinogradskaya and Vladikavkaz (1837–1839), and later between Vladikavkaz and Groznaya (along the Sunzha Defensive Line, 1842–1847).

Expeditionary raids used against the highlanders relied increasingly on the Yermolov tactic that had been employed earlier, in 1817–1826, which involved confining the highlanders within a chain of fortifications and stanitsas. While previous chains of fortifications running through highland territories had not been continuous, forming only a broken line of military control, the establishment of stanitsas around the fortifications brought something new to the situation—a (militarized) Cossack population prepared to put down roots and support Russia’s colonization of the North Caucasus.

The Yermolov approach to capturing the “Caucasus Fortress” (an approach that combined three elements—the advancement of fortified lines, the clearing of forests, and the building of roads) was revived in 1831–1838 by General Aleksei Veliaminov, Yermolov’s chief of staff and later the commander

of the Caucasus Line, although Veliaminov believed that the best way to subdue the Caucasus was not through forts but with Cossack stanitsas. His strategy was to gradually move into highlander territories, following up military control with colonization. Russian military successes would be consolidated by Russian settlers. Cossacks—warriors, pioneers, and peasants all rolled into one—were ideally suited to the task. Cossack settlers represented the key difference between the Yermolov-Veliaminov approach and that of General Ivan Paskevich, the commander-in-chief of the Caucasus Corps in 1827–1830, who attempted to finish the war by means of intensive short-term expeditionary raids.

As military actions were being conducted in the North Caucasus, in the late 1830s the imperial authorities were getting ready to introduce the first comprehensive, systematic reform, which brought administrative order to more stable but no less complex areas of Transcaucasia. This and subsequent reforms had one goal—to incorporate the Caucasus into the empire. However, they embraced two conflicting strategies to achieve this goal—“centralism” and “regionalism”—strategies that at times led a bizarre coexistence and at times supplanted each other, as the overall course of imperial policy in the Caucasus shifted back and forth between centralism and administrative unification on one hand and regionalism and decentralization on the other.

The primary difference between the two strategies concerned how to govern the empire’s periphery, including the Caucasus. Centralism favored governing the region out of St. Petersburg through an imperial military authority put in place locally. Regionalism favored the creation of a special local administrative structure that would be directly subordinate to the emperor but would unify several territories and perform all the functions of government at the regional level. The administrative