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A RECOGNITION QUESTION OF A GENOCIDE: RUSSIAN ATROCITIES IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

ABSTRACT

Throughout history, violence has been an indispensable part of the Russian state tradition. Not only non-Russian subjects but also ethnic Russians have experienced their share of this tradition. In many cases, this tradition has turned into genocidal practices against non-Russian subjects. Due to the current political bottlenecks of the international community, this article focuses on the difficulties experienced in the recognition of these crimes against humanity and examines the genocidal practices of the Russian state in the North Caucasus, especially the Circassian Genocide in the nineteenth century. For more than two centuries, Russian state politics has been trying to erase the term “the Caucasus” as a geographical term in international public opinion and to make this region part of Southern Russia by cleansing or assimilating the indigenous North Caucasian nations. While the article focuses on the ‘velikorus’ (Great Russian) practices in the Tsarist and Soviet periods, it draws attention to the fact that there have been similar examples in the first thirty years of the so-called Russian federal state.

KEYWORDS:

North Caucasus, Circassia, Chechnya, Russia, Genocide, Deportation, United Nations

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Genocide is a phenomenon that scientists, lawyers, politicians, commentators, and activists use to refer to various socio-historical phenomena. The concept of genocide was part of human life centuries before Raphael Lemkin named it.¹ Neither Lemkin's naming of this phenomenon in 1944, nor the year 1948, when the UN Genocide Convention entered into force, are decisive factors in the criminalization of various genocide practices in history. Moreover, the legal dimension of this convention is limited to the actions of individuals and does not cover cases in which genocide is practiced as state terror. Therefore, rather than a legal term, it is more of a descriptive term, which makes the conscientious aspect of this phenomenon even more important. Lemkin's definition of genocide is briefly as follows:

- A Killing members of a group;
- B Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of a group;
- C Deliberately creating living conditions that are predicted to lead to the physical destruction of a group in whole or in part;
- D Taking measures to prevent births within a group;
- E Forcibly transferring the children of one group to another.

If the definition of genocide means any acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group (as Lemkin defined it), this does not mean that such acts were natural norms before Lemkin coined this definition.

As a matter of fact, the event that motivated Lemkin to focus on this issue was related to war crimes alleged to have been committed a quarter of a century previously. Moreover, Lemkin's definition of genocide has become insufficient in today's norms. Apart from the physical acts described by Lemkin, today it is possible to destroy national, ethnic, racial, religious, and class groups with spiritual, cultural, and several other indirect methods.

Today, many states accept the UN Genocide Convention in order to avoid genocide they committed before 1948 being recognized as such. However, making United Nations' approval a prerequisite for recognizing as genocide the forced and en masse expulsion of a nation from their native lands, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes committed during this exile, puts the issue in a stalemate from the very beginning.

¹ Raphaël Lemkin (1900–1959), a Polish lawyer who is best known for coining the term “genocide” and initiating the Genocide Convention; his interest was spurred after he learned about the Armenian genocide and found that no international laws existed to prosecute the Ottoman leaders. Lemkin coined the term “genocide” in 1943 or 1944. It comes from the Greek word “genos”, meaning family, clan, tribe, race, stock, kinn, and the Latin suffix “-cide”, meaning killing. See Douglas Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania, 2017), pp. 27–28.

Violence has always been one of the most important features and primary methods of the operations of the Russian state regarding non-Russian elements of the state. The rulers did not hesitate to commit ethnic and cultural genocide in the areas they conquered and governed during the reigns of The Tsardom of Russia (1547–1721), the Russian Empire (1721–1917), Soviet Russia (1917–91), and the Russian Federation (1991–). It can be observed that Russian state terror has targeted certain religious or national groups, regardless of age and gender, in lands occupied by Russian armies. Tens or hundreds of thousands of people were murdered in these massacres, such as the Siege of Kazan (1552), the Novgorod Massacre (1570), the Massacres in Kazan (1571–72), the Razin Revolt (1670–71), the Bashkir rebellions (1705, 1735, 1755), the Khiva Massacre (1881), the Polish Operation of NKVD (1937–38), and the Katyn Massacre (1940). Additionally, in events such as the World Wars, the Russian Civil War (1917–20), and the Stalinist Purges, when the state terror also included Russian ethnicities, great massacres were carried out on some specific ethnic groups by taking advantage of the chaotic environment.²

During the last two centuries, the North Caucasus has also become one of the primary war arenas for Russia. While mentioning all striking examples of genocidal performances committed by Russia in the North Caucasus, the article will mainly focus on the Circassian³ experience, as the national existence of the Circassians is currently under threat of extinction. Despite all the credible proof, the international community is hesitant to recognize the experiences of the Circassians as genocide due to its political and economic ties with the Russian Federation. If one agrees that the Circassians' experiences conform to Lemkin's definition of genocide, then the following facts should not be ignored.

The massacre and forced deportation of Circassians in the nineteenth century is some of the most barbaric violence that humanity has ever witnessed. Looking at the crimes against humanity that were committed in the same period by other colonial powers in different parts of the world, especially in Africa, the Far East, and America, and claiming that Russia's crimes against the Circassians in the nineteenth century could be considered within the norms of the period is simply an effort to cover up this crime. It must be noted that even Lemkin himself was inspired by events from the past when he coined the term "genocide".

² Micheal Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts, A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1492–2015*, 4th edn (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2017), pp. 22, 57–58, 91, 215, 387–434, 452, 526–28; Karol Karski, 'The Crime of Genocide Committed against the Poles by the USSR before and during World War II: An International Legal Study', *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 45 (2013), 703–60 (here: 706–12).

³ The term "Circassian" in this article collectively represents Adyge, Ubykh, and Abaza ethnonyms.

This is an undisputable genocide, as proven by legitimate documents and proof. The length of this study does not permit us to examine all scientific publications on this genocide in detail; however, to make the reality more visible, some documents and publications prepared by official Russian institutions and personalities will be shared with the reader as legitimate pieces of evidence. Tbilisi has hosted some these documents for the last two centuries as it used to be the administrative centre of the Caucasus Military District of the Tsar's government. Duplicates of these documents also exist in Moscow and St Petersburg. However, the Russian state does not allow researchers to access these documents. After the Russian-Georgian War in 2008, the Georgian president of the time made these documents accessible to researchers. The documents, which consist of thousands of pages preserved in funds number 2 and 416 in the Georgian State Archives, are irrefutable evidence of the crimes of the Tsarist era of Russian statehood. As a matter of fact, long before this archival discovery, there was also very striking proof of genocide in the very well-known twelve-volume documents extracted from the archive of the Main Directorate of the Viceroy of the Caucasus, compiled by The Caucasian Archaeographic Commission in the years 1866–1904.⁴

During the transition from tsardom to the empire, the existence of Russian army generals was purely dependent on these endless wars, and they expended great efforts to keep Russia in such a constant state of war. Extensive Russian invasions began with Peter I and continued during the whole Romanov dynasty. The wars in the Caucasus, which had ordinary, religious, national, or feudal motives, underwent a serious change in 1816 with the appointment of General Alexey Yermolov to the command post, and a period of great terror began. In a message to Tsar Alexander I, Yermolov said, "I desire that the terror of my name shall guard our frontiers more potently than chains or fortresses".⁵ Yermolov adopted terrorizing names for the fortresses that he built in the Caucasus, such as *Groznaya* (terrible) and *Vnezapnaya* (surprise).⁶ With the terror that he spread among the Mountaineers⁷, he forced innocent civilians to move from the plains to the mountains in search of shelter. He aimed to drive

⁴ Akty, *sobrannyye Kavkazskoy arkhograficheskoy komissiyey* (hereinafter: Akty), ed. by Dimitry Kobayakov, 12 vols (Tbilisi, 1866–1904), XII (1904), pp. 693–1025.

⁵ John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London: Longmans, 1908), p. 97; Lesley Blanch, *The Sabres of Paradise* 5th rev. edn (London: Bookblast ePublishing, 2015), p. 24.

⁶ Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest*, pp. 106–07.

⁷ The word "Mountaineers" is sometimes associated with the condescending attitude in some Russian sources towards the native population of the North Caucasus. However, in this article the capitalized term "Mountaineers" is a proper noun in the form of the special noun or name used for a specific person, place, company, or other thing. Proper nouns are always capitalized. So, the term "North Caucasian Mountaineers" becomes a proper noun defining a specific group of people which defines a national designation of the North Caucasians in association with their common state-building project. If this were not the case, North Caucasian politicians would not use this term for their political organizations and state entity. Also, thousands of scientific monographs, articles, and approved academic dissertations which use the term "North Caucasian Mountaineers" should not be neglected.

them from the arable lands in order to starve them to death. Yermolov's order to his officers was as follows: "Let the standing corn be destroyed each autumn as it ripens, and in five years they will be starved into submission."⁸ After the construction of the second Caucasian fortification line was completed, the punitive attacks of Yermolov – aiming to destroy all the Mountaineers, without distinction of men, women, and children – became an ordinary act.⁹

Contrary to what many monographic clichés claim, the Caucasian Highlanders were not an obstacle to Russia's imperial strategic plans to move to the warm seas and seize control of the Indian trade route. So, the war that they conducted in the North Caucasus was not in the vital interests of Russia. As early as 1561, kinship had already been established between the Circassian aristocracy and the Russian Tsardom with the marriage of Ivan the Terrible to Goshenay, the daughter of Kabardian Prince Temruk.¹⁰ Muslim Goshenay was baptized, converted to Christianity, and named Maria Temryukovna. This marriage paved the way for many Kabardian Circassians to enter the court of the Romanov dynasty, and this was projected by the Russian Imperial Court as the voluntary annexation of Kabardia to the Russian Empire.¹¹ Russia completed the construction of the Georgian Military Road in 1769 and conquered Georgia in 1801.¹² The boundaries of imperial Russia were extended to the Transcaucasus by going beyond the Daryal Pass and dividing the Caucasus down the middle with a demarcation line. So, the Caucasus was no longer an obstacle to Russia's absolute goal of new invasions in the south. Likewise, Shamkhalate of Tarki, Kazikumukh lands, and the lands on the Caspian Sea's coastline fall completely under Russian control in 1793 to 1823.¹³ The following map of the Caucasus, printed by Archibald Fullarton in England in 1872, based on the travel notes of the German ethnographer Karl Koch between 1836 and 1838, reveals this situation strikingly.¹⁴ The white zones marked with pink boundaries show the lands that were under the control of the free Mountaineers in the late 1830s; the territories marked with yellow boundaries define the Russian suzerainty. So, it is evident that Caucasian Mountaineers did not represent a threat against Russian imperial interests.

⁸ Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest*, pp. 121–22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130–32.

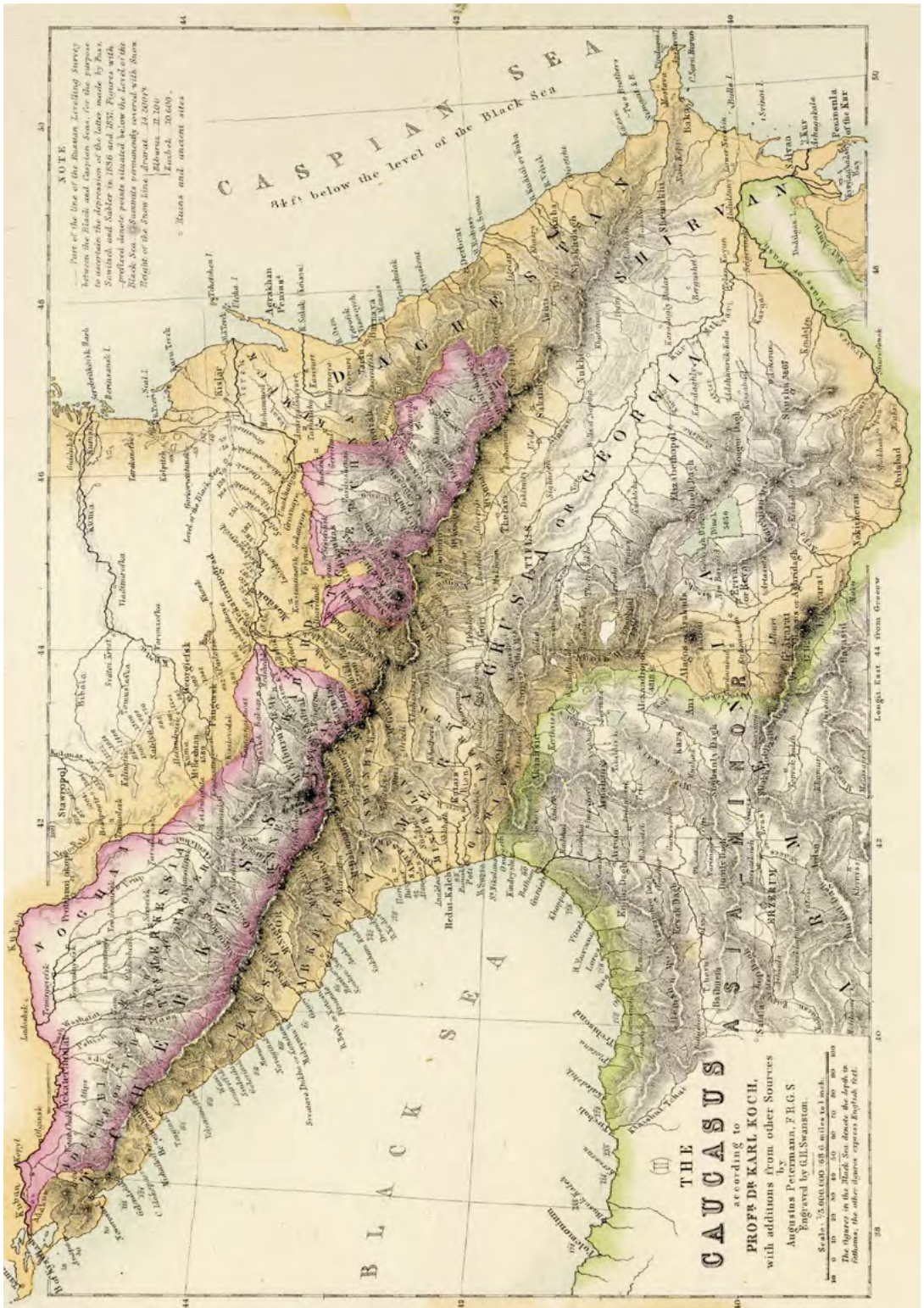
¹⁰ Sergej Nečaeŭ, *Ivan Groznyj. Ženy i naložnicy "Sinej Borody"* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo AST, 2010), p. 74.

¹¹ Aytek Namitok, 'The Voluntary Adherence Of Kabarda to Russia', *Caucasian Review*, 2 (1956), 17–33.

¹² Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar. Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

¹³ Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest*, pp. 73–91, 135–52.

¹⁴ Karl Koch, *Reise durch Russland nach dem kaukasischen Isthmus in den Jahren 1836, 1837 und 1838*, 2 vols (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta 1842).



The Caucasus with the Black & Caspian Seas, according to Prof. Dr. Karl Koch, with additions from other sources by Augustus Petermann, F.R.G.S. Engraved by G.H. Swanston. A. Fullarton & Co. London, Edinburgh & Dublin. (1872)

Salt was one of the most vital commodities of the era. Circassians, Ubykhs, and Abazas living by the Black Sea's coastline obtained this material from Russia's political and military rivals, especially from Ottoman merchants. The German scientist Julius von Klaproth, who was assigned by the Russian imperial administration to perform scientific research in the Caucasus, established salt trade centres in some places in the region to develop the Mountaineers' commerce with the Russians in peace and good neighbourly relations.¹⁵ Klaproth's initiative was also welcomed by the Russian Government, and the Barter Regulation, issued on 6 July 1810, was the first step toward the fulfilment of the plan.¹⁶ Genoese merchant Rafael Scassi was appointed as the head of the office established for this purpose in 1811. Scassi made great efforts to improve relations with the Mountaineers and to change their feelings and thoughts about Russia.¹⁷ However, Scassi's efforts were subverted each time by General Yermolov. In a message he sent to the Foreign Minister, Count Nesselrode, Yermolov stated that such a strategy would weaken the Ottoman influence over the Mountaineers and enlighten these semi-savage tribes. On the other hand, he added that such a strategy could not be applied among a people who were opposed to enlightenment and under the influence of a foreign enemy led by an ignorant Muslim government.¹⁸ In 1821, Yermolov left the command of the army to Mikhail Vlasov, whose sole job was to burn villages and massacre civilians. His acts of intimidation and atrocity against the civilian population were reflected in official correspondence in 1827, as follows: "The innocent Circassians have been deprived of their property and have become animated by vengeance. [...] The actions of our troops under the command of General Vlasov have incited hatred toward the Russians among the mountaineers in various ways. [...] But this admittedly rare devotion to us did not save the Natukhays from a terrible disaster that befell them last year, at the beginning of 1826, when a large squadron of Black Sea Cossacks, led by General Vlasov, unexpectedly burst into their homes, and specifically into the auls of Natukhay Prince Saghat-Girey, and destroyed everything and stole whatever remained. This prince and his relatives have always been an example of continuous loyalty to Russia, living for many years right along our border".¹⁹

With the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829, the Ottoman Empire abandoned the Black Sea coasts of the Caucasus (where she never had any

¹⁵ Julius von Klaproth, *Reise in den Kaukasus und nach Georgien Unternommen in den Jahren 1807 und 1808*, 2 vols (Halle: Waisenhauss, 1812–1814), 1 (1812), pp. 480–83.

¹⁶ Ali Kasumov, and Hasan Kasumov, *Çerkes Soykırımı* (Ankara: Kafkas Derneği, 1995), pp. 98–99.

¹⁷ Anatolij Fadeev, *Rossija i Kavkaz* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1960), pp. 63–65.

¹⁸ Adolf Berzhe, *Akty*, 2 (1875), VI, pp. 451, 485.

¹⁹ Georgian State Archive (hereinafter: GSA), fond 2, op. 1, doc. 2000, Letter from Kodinets to Ivan Pashkevich, 22 May (OS) 1827, ll. 8–12.

sovereignty) to Russia, and the other great rival in this colonial hustle, the British Empire, was also paralyzed. Thus, the Caucasus was besieged by Russians from all sides.²⁰ General Pozzo Di Borgo, who was the Tsar's ambassador to France and Britain at that time, summarized this situation by saying, "Public opinion has already sacrificed to us the fortresses and the Asiatic littoral of the Black Sea". In a way, he was saying that the Ottoman Empire and the West had transferred their non-existing rights in Circassia to Russia. Entering into an endless war in Circassia would weaken Russia. This was in the interest of both the Ottomans and the British.²¹ Although it is a matter of controversy even today who motivated the Russian generals who dragged the Romanov dynasty into this war, it was an undoubted fact that what motivated them was that they would cement their position with these wars and boost their wealth. The Caucasus was chosen as the most suitable arena for such a scenario of 'The Wolf and the Lamb' game, the most ferocious actors of which were gathered there. The popularity of the names of General Nikolai Velyaminov and General Grigori Zass had begun to increase in the 1830s. The cruelty of these two Russian officers had overshadowed Yermolov's fame as they were known as skull collectors.²² These two generals not only claimed that the Circassians were barbaric and semi-savage, but they also did not even consider them worthy of being called humans. Despite mentioning the burned villages, houses, and plantations in the military reports drawn up in the operation areas, the Russian officers were very careful not to mention what they were doing with the Circassians inhabiting these villages.²³

Between 1853 and 1856, even the Crimean war, which aimed to bring Russia to its knees, could not dissuade these generals from going to war in the Caucasus because the results of the Crimean War, which seemed like a victory for the Allies, were actually nothing but an image of shame for them. In the war, which cost the allies more than 100,000 souls and 200 million pounds, excluding the losses of the Ottoman state, the Russians did not use even a single warship. Whereas just two Russian cruisers could be a nightmare for the Circassians, the allies did not push the Russians to put their naval forces to use during this war. The ground forces of the Russian army, which numbered 68,000 soldiers, had lost approximately 20,000 of them in clashes on various fronts, which represented only 20% of the losses of the British, French, and Sardinians. Moreover,

²⁰ David Urquhart, 'Correspondence', *The Portfolio, A Collection of State Papers*, 5 vols (London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1836), VI, p. 524.

²¹ David Urquhart, *The Secret of Russia in the Caspian and Euxine, The Circassian War as affecting the Insurrection in Poland* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1863), p. 40.

²² Grigorij Filipson, *Vospominanija* (Moskva: V Universitetskoj tipografii, M. Katkov, 1885), pp. 126–27.

²³ GSA, fond 416, op. 2, doc. 24, From Velyaminov, 31 October (OS) 1836, pp. 112–26 (docs. 24, 17, 48, 117, 118).

Russia had voluntarily ended the war by promising to sign the Treaty of Paris, declaring that they would accept defeat in exchange for the Allies' evacuation of Crimea from Sevastopol. In the Treaty of Paris, which was signed after the war with such embarrassing results, there was not even a single article about the Caucasian Mountaineers. In fact, as understood from the official correspondence of the British government, the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829 was, in a sense, confirmed by the 30th article of the Treaty of Paris.²⁴

Thus, the Caucasian Mountaineers were left alone with an incompatible power. The atrocious military force that Russia brought down on these isolated peoples with the blockade of the 400-mile coastline on the east and west of the Black Sea had deprived them of all resources and vital commodities. Russia placed a permanent force of 200,000 men to conduct military operations on the two demarcation lines in the south and north of the Caucasus chain, which stretches at least 1400 miles in the northwest and southeast directions. When necessary, Russia increased the number by 50,000 to 100,000 men during these operations. Although the war in the Caucasus was depleting all resources of the Russian Empire, the Russian generals had no intention of giving up this war.²⁵

However, the plans of the Russian generals were all ruined by Shamil's ending of the war on 7 September 1859. When the Gazavat movement was wedged into a narrow area in the mountainous Chechen and Avar lands, Shamil understood that the civilians would suffer if he continued resisting.²⁶ Although Shamil's surrender temporarily saved the peoples in the east from the fate of the Circassians in the west, Chechens and Dagh-estani peoples too would wait for a few years to get their share of Russia's 'subdue or destroy' tradition. After Shamil surrendered, he sent a letter to his regent Muhammed Amin in Circassia. In this letter, which the Naib received on 27 November 1859, Shamil stated that he had no other choice but to surrender and that the Naib could choose the same if he wanted.²⁷ Muhammed Amin announced that he had also stopped fighting after meeting with General Philipson on 20 November 1859. Marshal Bariatinski continued his attacks against the Circassians, albeit with the death of another prominent Circassian leader, Seferbiy Zanuqo in January 1860. In March 1860, in his message to Tsar Alexander II, Bariatinski admitted,

²⁴ Foreign Affairs Committee, 'The Right of Englishmen to Trade with Circassia (1876)', in *The British Government the enemy of Turkey during seventy years. To His Excellency Ephem Pasha, Grand Vizier of Turkey* (London: Diplomatic Review Office, 1877), p. 10.

²⁵ Urquhart, *The Secret of Russia*, pp. 8–9; Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, p. 181.

²⁶ Gadži-Ali Čochskij, 'Skazanie očevidca o Šamile', *Sbornik svedenij o kavkazskich gorcach*, 10 vols (Tbilisi, 1868–1881), VII (1873), 1–76

²⁷ Kobyakov, *Akti*, XII, p. 827.

“My goal right now is to put the Abadzekhs to sleep, but also to continue the operation against the Shapsug with a ceaseless energy...”²⁸

Signs of the preparation for ethnic cleansing became clearly visible in the autumn of 1857. Dmitry Milyutin’s proposal to deport the Mountaineers aroused great interest in the Russian command. The Minister of War suggested that the conquest could be achieved by two methods. The first of these was to allow the Mountaineers to stay in the occupied lands; the second was to place the invaders in the Mountaineers’ lands by expelling them from their homeland. In the case of the Circassians, he said, the first option was not possible because the Circassians would always be an unreliable element. Therefore, by placing the Cossacks on these lands, maintaining Russian control over the region would be possible. Milyutin answered questions about the possible problems during the practice phase; “The mountaineers’ deep affection for their homeland [...], it is not to be doubted that they would prefer death to settlement on the steppes [...] and one can definitely say that not only whole tribes but also individual families would not choose to submit under these conditions and that this would lead not to submission but to their extermination.”²⁹ Milyutin also admitted this in his memoirs by emphasizing that Russia planned to complete their historical task in the Caucasus by an expulsion plan for the Kuban which was outlined in 1860. The plan was based on finally clearing the mountain strip of its original population and forcing the Mountaineers to choose one of the two options: either move to the indicated places on the plain and completely submit to Russian control, or completely leave their homeland and go to Turkey.³⁰

Russian General Melentij Olshevsky admitted in his memoirs that General Yevdokimov’s strategy in the Western Caucasus was “clean and hold”.³¹ Olshevsky also stated that, immediately after Yevdokimov’s arrival, many new Cossack Stanitsas were established on the left bank of the Laba River, and 34,000 Abaza and Besleney people were forcibly expelled to the Ottoman Empire. In another operation carried out just after Yevdokimov’s arrival, a group of approximately 15,000 people, consisting of Circassians from the Chemguy, Yegerkuay, and Makhosh tribes, was forcibly sent to the Ottoman Empire. Olshevsky’s memoirs were an explicit manifestation that partial deportations in smaller groups had begun long before

²⁸ Amirchan Magomeddadaev, *Muchammad-Amin i narodno-osvoboditel’noe dviženie narodov Severo-Zapadnogo Kavkaza v 40-60-eh gg. XIX v. (Sbornik dokumentov i materialov)* (Machačkala: In-t IAĖ DNC RAN, 1998), p. 38

²⁹ Dmitriij Miljutin, “Zapiska voennago ministra, gen.-adj’ut. Miljutina, po proektu o zaselenii predgorij Zapadnago Kavkaza Russkim” elementom”, ot 3-go aprélja 1862 goda, № 360, in *Akty*, XII (1904), pp. 981–87; Irma Kreiten, “A colonial experiment in cleansing: the Russian conquest of Western Caucasus, 1856–65”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 11 (2009), 213–41 (here: 217).

³⁰ Dmitriij Miljutin, *Vospominanija. 1860–1862* (Moskva: Rossijskij Archiv, 1999), p. 118

³¹ Melentij Ol’shevskij, “Zapiski M. Ja. Ol’shevskogo. Kavkaz s 1841 po 1866 g.”, *Russkaja Starina*, 83 (1895), 179–89.

the mass expulsions had started.³² A protocol was adopted in the autumn of 1861 for the return of Circassians who had gone to Ottoman lands for Hajj and other reasons. This protocol was another sign of ethnic cleansing. Those who were determined to obtain Ottoman citizenship, or whose passports had expired abroad, or who did not have a personal passport but were registered in a family passport would not be allowed to return to their homes. These people were to be sent immediately to the inner parts of Russia or Siberia.³³

After the Russians had occupied the south of Kuban with all their might in 1861, they moved further south and reached the territory of Abadzekh at the beginning of 1862. Circassian resistance was squeezed into a very narrow area between the Natukhay and Ubykh lands under the command of Karzech Shirikhuqo and Giranduqo Berzedj in the mountainous parts of the coastal section of the Black Sea. Circassian representatives who visited England to seek support in the last quarter of 1862 realized how they had been tragically duped by their so-called allies. The statements of David Urquhart, who greeted them on their arrival in England, demonstrated how hopeless the situation was for the Circassians:

Your arrival fills me with horror. You have come here either because you cannot stand of yourselves, or else, being able to stand, you have come here for help. If you cannot stand, all is over; if being able to stand, you seek aid from England, all is over. You will go back to carry despair by the refusal. If you obtain any help, it will only afford the means of betraying you by bringing you into communication with individuals who, having their own selfish interests to serve, must fall into the hands of Russia. If help is to be given to you, it can only be by Turkey; but then you have to make Turkey perceive her duties. That is your work. Turkey is like an old man supported by a stick which the rats are gnawing away. Circassia is the stick, the Russians are the rats, and they have with them all Europe.³⁴

In the meantime, the chief of staff of the Russian army, Alexander Kartsov – as if renouncing the ordinary statements of Russian historiography, which claims that new settlements were offered to the Circassians in the Kuban plains – said that:

³² Melentij Ol'sevskij, 'Zapiski M. Ja. Ol'sevskogo. Kavkaz s 1854 po 1866 gg. Čast' V. GL. III–VII', *Russkaja Starina*, 84 (1895), 105–17, 129–66 (here: 106, 131–32).

³³ GSA, fond 416, op. 3, doc. 140, From Valuev to Mikhail Nikolaevich, 20 February (OS) 1863, l. 1.

³⁴ David Urquhart, *The Expedition of The Chesapeake to Circassia* (London: Free Press Office, 1861), p. 9.

Everything is very clear now... No matter the conditions, the mountain people accept surrender; this surrender will only continue as long as they want it. The first bullet that can be fired in the Black Sea, even a fake letter signed by the Sultan or the appearance of someone calling himself Pasha, can start a war. Even if we filled the mountains with a chain of fortifications and connected them with roads, we would always have to keep an enormous number of troops in the mountains, and there would be no peace even for a single moment.³⁵

Similarly, Yevdokimov, in his message to Kartsov on 19 September 1863, while advocating the limitless expulsion of Circassians to Turkey, also pointed out that Russia could have placed the Circassians by force in any place in Russia, but that they would not give up their old way of life there and would easily believe in the provocations of the Ottomans. He therefore suggested that the Circassians should be exiled anyway, emphasizing that they would have to outlay great effort and money to keep the Circassians under control.³⁶ These statements were strong indications that the Russian military administration did not want the Circassians in the Caucasus.

Acting in line with General Yevdokimov's operation plan, General Geyman and General Grabbe moved from different directions, slaughtered everything on their way, and met in the Kbaada valley on 21 May 1864, at 11 am. Today the Russians celebrate this date as the accomplishment of the conquest of the Caucasus, whereas the Circassians commemorate it as a day of mourning this genocide.³⁷ The exile that had started with individual and smaller groups in 1858 became massive in 1862 due to General Yevdokimov's project. The Russians established a special commission on May 10 1862 to speed up the expulsion of the Circassians. Negotiations with privately owned Russian transport ships regarding the eviction of deportees were also conducted by the state. Three commissions were set up in Anapa, Konstantinovsky, and Taman to manage the whole process.³⁸ While the Russian consulate in Trebizond refused to issue travel visas to Ottoman citizens, they gave privileges to those who were going to take a role in the transportation of the exiles on their ships, who were granted visas quickly.³⁹

³⁵ GSA, fond 416, op. 3, doc. 140, From Kartsov to Novikov, 23 August (OS) 1863, l. 1.

³⁶ Ibid., From Yevdokimov to Kartsov, 19 September (OS) 1863, ll. 2–3.

³⁷ Semen Ėsadze, *Pokorenie Zapadnogo Kavkaza i okončanie Kavkazskoj vojny* (Tbilisi: Tipografija Štaba Kavkazskogo voennogo okruga, 1914), pp. 152–89.

³⁸ Tugan Kumukov, *Vyselenie Adygov v Turciju-Posledstvie Kavkazskoj Vojny* (Nalchik: Ėl'brus, 1994), p. 12.

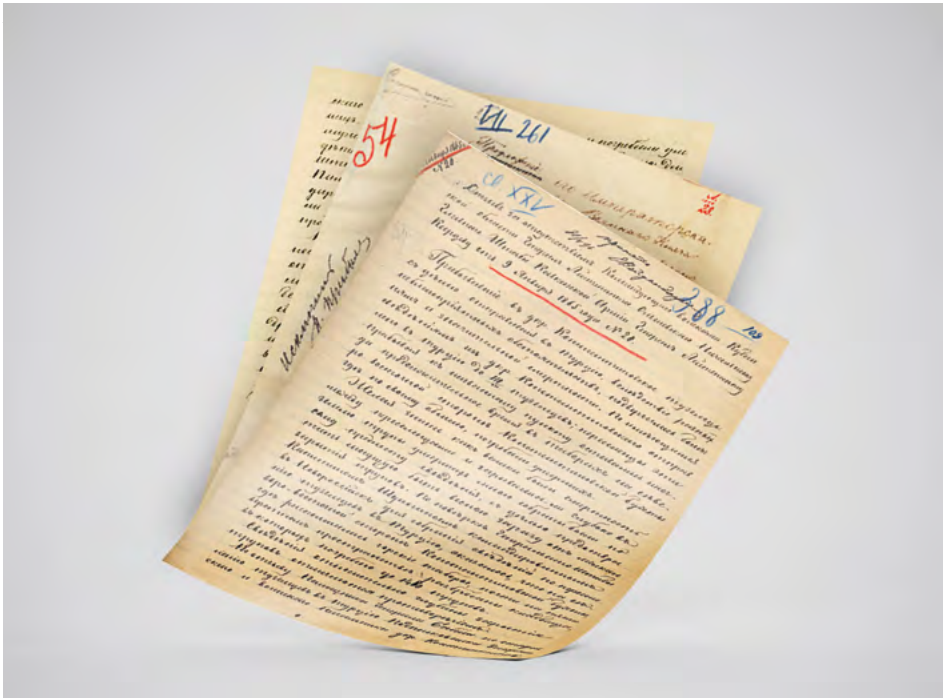
³⁹ Kemal Karpat, 'The status of the Muslim under European rule: the eviction and settlement of the Çerkes', *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 1:2 (1979), 7–27 (here: 17).

Even groups that were not in conflict with the Russians experienced their share of genocide. For example, the groups affiliated with Sultan Khan-Girey, who was well-known for being pro-Russian, could not escape Yevdokimov's pursuit. These groups did not even have a chance to harvest their crops and tried to flee to the mountains. However, towards the end of the summer of 1863, Yevdokimov's troops uprooted them from there and dragged them to the coastline. It is not known exactly how many villages were burned and how many people were killed by Yevdokimov's troops. While Yevdokimov carefully avoided giving exact numbers, using expressions such as "quite a high number" in his field notes, he did not hesitate to give clues that the extermination operation was on a massive scale.⁴⁰

According to various statistics, the number of Mountaineers who were forced to leave their homeland, especially in the 1862–70 period, is estimated to be two million. A century of uninterrupted warfare before the start of the systematic genocide and deportations makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact number of Mountaineers. These people, who were exposed to continuous Russian assault during the exile, started to suffer great losses even before they reached the shores of embarkation, most of which were natural coastal areas that did not have harbour features for ships. The refugees were transported by small boats to ships, which were waiting at some distance from the shore. Greedy merchants overloaded the small boats with passengers, and many Circassians perished before they could board the ships. No records were kept while passengers boarded the ships. Due to the Russian's haste, the ship owners crammed the passengers into the ships.

Therefore, estimates of the number of exiles could only be made on the basis of departure records from known places with port facilities. The deaths caused by disease and infirmity during the journey, not to mention the unfavourable living conditions in the refugee shelters at the destination, must also be taken into consideration. After a while, the Russians stopped the evacuation of the Circassians on these state-owned ships due to disease and transferred the job entirely to Turks, Russian private ship owners, and even a few independent British steamers, but no records were kept of these transports either. Casualties at the shores of the destination were also not recorded; neither were the people who died during the voyage and were thrown into the sea. The bodies were immediately buried to prevent odour and disease. The registration of the refugees who managed to reach the resettlement points in the Ottoman lands was also extremely unsystematic. Information was compiled by tracking the correspondence of

⁴⁰ GSA, fond 416, op. 3, General Yevdokimov's field notes, June–December 1863, doc. 1177, ll. 100–199.



Genocide evidence on the papers of the Russian Commanders (Georgian State Archive – Tbilisi)

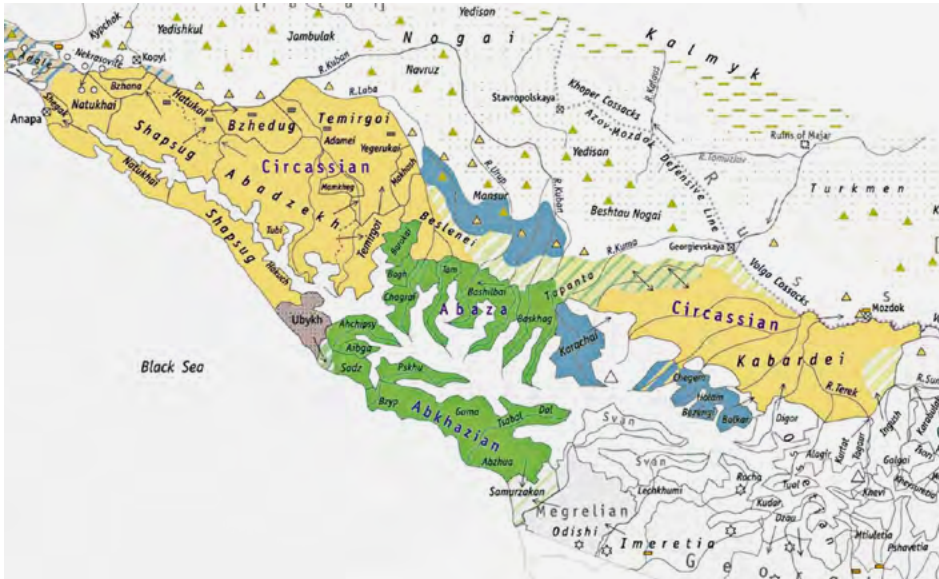
the Russian, British and French Consulates in Trebizond, the columns of newspapers such as *The Times* and *Invalide Russe*, and the available data in the Ottoman archives.⁴¹ In principle, these evacuations should have only been through the ports of Novorossiysk, Anapa, Taman, and Sochi. However, during the spring and summer of 1864, the entire coastline was crowded with refugees.⁴² The funds allocated by the Tsar's government for the rapid execution of the expulsion leaked into the pockets of Russian officers. When General Yevdokimov was no longer able to submit satisfactory reports about the expenditures, he found a solution by asking for help from the chief of staff, Kartsov. Saying that he could not follow the correct distribution of the funds, Yevdokimov begged for personnel support from the chief of staff. On that day, all allowances had already been stolen, so there was nothing left.⁴³ A significant increase was observed in correspondence between the high-level Russian command in that period. Almost all of the correspondence was about the cost of the expulsion process. Russian

⁴¹ The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, London (hereinafter: NA), Foreign Office (hereinafter: FO), 881/1259, no. 1, From Consul Stevens to Earl Russell, Trebizond, 17 February 1864, l. 1; *ibid.*, no. 2, From Consul Dickson to Earl Russell, Sokhumkale, 22 February 1864, ll. 1–2; *ibid.*, no. 3, From Consul Konsolos Bulwer to Earl Russell, Istanbul, 12 April 1864, ll. 2–3; *ibid.*, no. 4, From Consul Dickson to Earl Russell, Sokhumkale, 17 March 1864, l. 4; *ibid.*, no. 5, From Consul Dickson to Earl Russell, Sokhumkale, 13 April 1864, ll. 4–5; *ibid.*, no. 6, From Consul General Murray to Earl Russell, Odessa, 29 April 1864, l. 5; *ibid.*, no. 7, From Consul Bulwer to Earl Russell, Istanbul, 3 May 1864, ll. 5–7; *ibid.*, no. 8, From Consul Bulwer to Earl Russell, Istanbul, 11 May 1864, l. 7; *ibid.*, no. 9, From Earl Cowley to Earl Russell, Paris, 19 May 1864, l. 7; *ibid.*, no. 10, From Consul Lord Napier to Earl Russell, St Petersburg, 17 May 1864, ll. 7–8; *ibid.*, no. 11, From Earl Russell to Consul Bulwer, London, 25 May 1864, l. 8; *ibid.*, no. 12, From Consul Lord Napier to Earl Russell, St. Petersburg, 19 May 1864, ll. 9–11; *The Times*, 24 June 1864, p. 12.

⁴² GSA, fond 416, op. 3, doc. 149, From Kartsov to Black Sea Fleet Commander, 13 May (OS) 1864, l. 5; *ibid.*, Report from Glazenap, 17 April (OS) 1864, l. 1; *ibid.*, doc. 145, Report to Yevdokimov, 30 April (OS) 1864; *ibid.*, doc. 148, From Zabudsky to Cherkesov, 13 January (OS) 1864; *ibid.*, doc. 160, From Mikhail Nikolaevich to Novikov, 20 September (OS) 1867, l. 2.

⁴³ GSA, fond 416, op. 3, doc. 148, From Yevdokimov to Kartsov, 8 April (OS) 1864, l. 4.

officers tried to put the responsibility for the transportation process on the shoulders of the Ottomans to avoid the expenses. Russian officers aimed to complete the whole exile process before the Ottomans terminated it.⁴⁴ When autumn came, the scene of piles of corpses on the beach was tragic.



The lands populated by North-West Caucasian peoples before the forced deportation and genocide in the nineteenth century



The lands populated by the Genocide survivors

⁴⁴ GSA, fond 416, op. 3, doc. 149, From Commander of Nikolaevskaya Fortress, 17 April (OS) 1864, ll. 1–2.

A Russian officer named Smekalov commented on the death toll, saying, "I don't have any data because it's impossible to collect the bodies."⁴⁵

In his field reports, General Yevdokimov frequently used the term "cleaning" as a means of "genocide".⁴⁶ If public opinion does not perceive the term "cleaning" as "laundering", then Yevdokimov's term "cleaning" should be understood as "genocide". The complete expulsion process, which was planned to be completed by October, could not be finalized in time, despite Yevdokimov's efforts. The evacuation of the exiles continued into the winter in the face of adverse weather conditions. Yevdokimov had asked for only two additional weeks; however, when the Russians continued the exile even in late December, the Sublime Porte asked the Russians to stop the process.⁴⁷ In light of all these data, it can be assumed that the number of refugees able to reach the Ottoman lands is close to one million. While about 400 thousand refugees landed at coastal points in the Balkans, nearly the same number arrived at the Black Sea ports of Asia Minor. The number of refugees who followed the land route and entered Asia Minor via the eastern border in scattered groups until the 1870s at different time intervals was around 200 thousand.⁴⁸

The genocide that the Russians inflicted on the Caucasian Mountaineers, especially the Circassians, did not end with the conquest of the Caucasus in 1864. The practices of the Russian administrative body in the Sukhum military region caused an uprising in Lykhny in 1866. Tens of thousands of Abkhazians were expelled to the Ottoman lands in another exile wave that started in Lykhny in 1867.⁴⁹

Soon, the Ottoman and Russian empires were again in a battle arena. Circassians and other Caucasian Mountaineers once again became victims of genocidal practices in the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877–78. The Mountaineers who had been settled in the Balkans during the expulsion of the 1860s became one of the most important trump cards of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan theatre of war. On the other hand, many Caucasian Mountaineers who had managed to survive the tragic genocide and were able to stay in their native lands were fighting on the Russian side in this war. In a telegram sent by Gazi Osman Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman armies, to the Sublime Porte during the war, there were dramatic

⁴⁵ GSA, fond 416, op. 3, doc. 149, From Smekalov, 18 November (OS) 1864, l. 16.

⁴⁶ GSA, fond 416, op. 3, doc. 1177, General Yevdokimov's field reports, June–December 1863, l. 131.

⁴⁷ GSA, fond 416, op. 3, doc. 145, From Mikhail Nikolaevich to Milyutin, l. 8.

⁴⁸ Nedim İpek, *Rumeli'den Anadolu'ya Türk Göçleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1994), p. 4; Kumukov, *Vyseleniye Adygov*, pp. 15, 17; Karpat, 'The status of the Muslim', p. 11; Mark Pinson, 'Ottoman Colonization of the Circassians in Rumeli After the Crimean War', *Etudes Balkaniques*, 3 (1972), 71–85.

⁴⁹ The Turkish Republic Presidential State Archives, Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry (hereinafter: BOA), Application entitled 'İrade Meclis-i Mahsus 1408', Hijri 24 Zilkade 1283 (29 April 1867); Stanislav Lakoba, 'Thirty years of "guilt" (1877–1907)', *Abkhazworld.com*, 14 March 2013 <<http://abkhazworld.com/aw/history/617-thirty-years-of-guilt-1877-1907-by-stanislav-lakoba>> [accessed 7 July 2022].



Telegraph message stating that the Circassians fighting on the friendly side had encountered another Circassian group at the front. A conversation with the second group made them understood that the second group was on the enemy side.

descriptions of conversations between rival Circassians while they were fighting in opposite trenches. (See the image of the telegram below)

Caucasian Mountaineers were also the driving force of the Ottoman armies in the eastern theatre of the war. Caucasian immigrants saw this war as an opportunity to liberate their homeland, therefore they voluntarily enlisted in the Ottoman army. Musa Kundukhov, who was once a brigadier general in the Russian army, and Gazi Muhammed Pasha, the elder son of Imam Shamil, formed the backbone of the eastern wing of the Ottoman Army in this war.⁵⁰ The participation of a considerable number of volunteers from Abkhazia, Chechnya, and Dagestan in Sultan Abdul-Hamid's call for Jihad caused another tragedy at the end of the war.⁵¹ The Circassians in the Balkans had to pay the price for the Ottoman Empire's loss of this war with another expulsion. By adding an article to the Treaty of St Stefano (Edirne) after the war, the Russians ensured that all the Circassians in the Balkans were expelled in a month and sent to Palestine, the Aegean, and the Mediterranean coasts of Asia Minor, Cyprus, and Libya. The exiles were quickly pushed onto the Greek shores and crammed onto the ships, just like in 1864.⁵² While writers such as Ravenstein, Bianconi, and Kiepert stated that there were approximately 200 thousand Caucasian Mountaineers in the Balkans in 1876–78, consisting mostly of Circassian, Ubykh, and Abaza peoples, Kemal Karpat claimed that this number was

⁵⁰ Alihan Kantemir, 'Bir Kaç Söz', in *General Musa Kundukhov'un Anıları*, ed. by Murat Yağan (Istanbul: Kafkas Kültür Dernekleri Yayını, 1978), pp. 5–13 (here: 12).

⁵¹ BOA, İrade Dahiliyye no. 61009, I. 3; BOA, I, DH, 748/61133-03, Highest order written to Dagestan population to promote Islamic community for a holy war (Hijri 09 c. 1294), 21 June 1877, I. 3.

⁵² Edward Hertslet, *The Map of Europe by Treaty*, 4 vols (London: Butterworths, 1875–1891), IV (1891), pp. 2672, 2776, 2796.

at least 400 thousand.⁵³ Thousands of Circassians died of starvation and diseases in the holds of the ships during these voyages. One of the most striking examples of this was the tragic death of nearly 700 of the three thousand Circassians expelled through Kavala to Latakia by the steamship "Sphinx". The catastrophe started with forty exiles who fell overboard and drowned, but this was followed by a much worse disaster. Due to fire breaking out on the ship, the captain ordered the hatches to be closed on 5 March 1878. This led to seven hundred refugees burning alive below decks near Famagusta.⁵⁴ Thousands of Circassians who were brought to the Ottoman lands via Thrace by road were kept in intermediate stations for a very long time until they were sent to their new settlement places. Due to the terrible conditions of the relocation, many of the exiles were killed by hunger, disease, and cold. These people had no assets other than their clothes. They were given neither a tool with which to cultivate nor a seed to sow in the new lands designated for their habitation.⁵⁵ Tens of thousands of Abkhazians, Chechens, and Dagestanis in the eastern theatre of the war, who considered the war as an opportunity to liberate their homeland from Russian occupation, were killed or exiled to Ottoman lands and inner parts of Russia and Siberia. Most of the Abkhaz had to give up Christianity to avoid expulsion. Comparison of the remaining population with the pre-war census reveals that 31,964 Abkhaz were exiled.⁵⁶ More than 600 villages were destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of people became refugees in Chechnya and Dagestan. Over a thousand families were deported to Siberia, and over five hundred opinion leaders were executed.⁵⁷

The experiences of the nineteenth century were transferred to Russian historiography exactly by the words in the correspondence of the Russian generals. Nikolai Denilevsky, one of the pioneers of the Pan-Slavist movement, said that Russians should give up all their human feelings towards foreigners and develop a feeling of "hatred against humanity" (*odium generis humani*), and the absolute goal of this movement was to establish a Slavic Federation with its capital in Istanbul (Constantinople). His statements on the issue of the Caucasus were as follows:

⁵³ Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 46; id., 'The status of the Muslim', p. 11.

⁵⁴ NA, FO, 424/69–59/3, From Consul Watkins to the Earl of Derby & Report of Captain Ivanics on the loss of the Austrian Lloyd's steamer "Sphinx" under his command, Larnaca, 19 March 1878, ll. 27–29.

⁵⁵ NA, FO, 424/106, no. 153, From Lieutenant-Colonel Wilson to Sir. H. Layard, Istanbul, 12 April 1880, ll. 342–43.

⁵⁶ Bežan Chorava, *Muchadžirstvo abchazov 1867 goda* (Tbilisi: Artanudži, 2013), pp. 76–79.

⁵⁷ Abdullah Saydam, 'Kuzey Kafkasya'da Bağimsızlık Hareketleri', *Avrasya Etüdleri Dergisi*, 2 (1995), 88–125 (here: 105).

'It is true that Russian conquests of the Caucasian Mountaineers have not gone so well. In this case, what perished were independent tribes rather than independent states. [...] Since the partition of Poland, no other action by Russia has aroused such universal indignation and sympathy in Europe as the war against Caucasian Mountaineers, especially just after the subordination of the Caucasus. [...] What is closer to us in the Caucasus we will civilize all by ourselves. That the Caucasus Mountaineers – by their fanatical religion, by their way of life, by their customs, and by the very country in which they settled – are natural robbers and plunderers who have not and cannot leave their neighbours in peace; this we do not take into account. They are fearless, blameless knights, paladins of freedom, and that is that! In the Scottish Hills, a little over a hundred years ago lived some tens or even hundreds of thousands of such knights of Freedom, but they were Christian, a little more civilized, and more even-tempered; the English could not abide their Mountaineer ways, and at an opportune moment scattered them in all four directions. But Russia, unless it wants to be labelled as a persecutor and oppressor of freedom, should put up with many millions of such knights in the impassable overgrown crevices of the Caucasus, hundreds of versts from any peaceful settlement. While waiting to win over these enemies [Circassians], whom in the meantime can be expected to attack at every turn, We [the Russian army] should with no end in sight deploy an army of two hundred thousand to keep watch over all the paths and exits from these robbers' caves. Thus, by this Caucasus Question we can judge the good intentions of Europe towards Russia.'⁵⁸

Another well-known figure of Russian chauvinism, Colonel Pavel Pestel, a famous German Dekambrist, also puts the necessity of exile and genocide against the peoples of the Caucasus concretely down in his work *The Russian Truth*:

Divide all these Caucasian Peoples into two categories: Peaceful and Violent. Leave the former on their dwellings and give them Russian rule and organization; resettle the latter by force into the interior of Russia, smashing them into small quantities throughout all Russian Volosts and Stanitsas. To bring Russian settlements into the Caucasus and distribute the land to the Russian settlers, take all the lands

⁵⁸ Nikolai Danilevskii, *Russia and Europe: The Slavic Worlds Political And Cultural Relations With The Germanic-Roman West* (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers 2013), pp. 29–30.

from the violent inhabitants to erase all the signs of its former (that is, present) inhabitants, and turn this land into a calm and comfortable Russian land.⁵⁹ In his five-volume work on the Russian–Caucasian Wars, Vasili Potto described General Yermolov with the following words to justify the genocide committed by the Russian army in the Caucasus: “He regarded all the tribes, ‘peaceable’ or not, inhabiting the mountains of the Caucasus, as de facto Russian subjects, or destined to be so sooner or later, and in any case demanded from them unconditional submission. And, in his hands, the former system of bribery and subsidies gave place to one of severe punishments, of harsh, even cruel, measures, but always combined with justice and generosity.”⁶⁰ Russian General Erckert commented on Yermolov’s performance: “He was at least as cruel as the natives themselves.”⁶¹ Potto could find excuses to expose the activities of General Vlasov, who even attacked peaceful tribes, burned their villages, and killed innocent civilians. Potto claimed that giving stolen goods from the Circassian villages that Vlasov had destroyed to the Cossacks was the right move as it provided care for the orphans of the Cossacks and improved the conditions of the houses they lived in.⁶² Rostislav Fadeev joined this caravan of genocidal historians, saying that as long as the Circassians remained in their homeland, those lands could never be united with Russia, that the re-education of such a people was a centuries-long process, and that it would be ridiculous to hope to change the feelings of barbarian people.⁶³ Another genocide advocate “historian” was Adolf Berzhe, who always spoke highly of Yevdokimov in his works.⁶⁴

While Russian historians of that period wrote under the pressure of the hypocrisy of Russian state policies, westerners such as Teophile Lapinski, Taitbout de Marigny, James Stanislaus Bell, John Longworth, and Laurence Oliphant wrote works that give us a clear image of the events that happened in the Caucasus in those years. In addition to the literal works, the paintings of painters such as Gruzinsky, Gagarin, Horschelt, Roubaud, Preziosi, Simpson, and Ottenfeld, who had witnessed the violence in the Caucasus, also reveal the truth in a very blatant way.

⁵⁹ Pavel Pestel, ‘Russkaja Pravda ili Zapovednaja Gosudarstvennaja Gramota...’, in *Russkaja social’no-političeskaja mysl’. Pervaja polovina XIX veka*, ed. by Aleksandr Širinjanec, and Igor’ Demin (Moskva, 2011), pp. 184–301 (p. 224).

⁶⁰ Vasilij Potto, *Kavkazskaja vojna v otdel’nych očerkach, èpizodach, legendach i biografijach*, 5 vols (Sankt-Peterburg: Tip. E. Evdokimova, 1887–1889), II (1887), p. 15.

⁶¹ Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest*, p. 97.

⁶² Potto, *Kavkazskaja vojna*, II, pp. 329–30.

⁶³ Rostislav Fadeev, *Kavkazskaja vojna* (Moskva: Èksmo–Algoritm, 2005), pp. 152–53.

⁶⁴ Adol’f Berže, *Vyselenie Gorcev Kavkaza* (Nal’čik: Izdatel’stvo Marii i Viktora Kotljarovyč, 2010), pp. 22, 27.

Although there are still many old-fashioned writers among contemporary Russian historians, there are also several reputable historians who can tell the truth. For example, Tamara Polovinkina, author of the book *Čerkessija – Bol' Moya* (Circassia – My Pain), is one of those who made the Russian community confront this shameful page in their history. While describing the war crimes committed by the Russian military, Polovinkina satirically criticizes Russian historians who insist on not using the term “genocide” and try to mitigate the harshness of the crime: “We admit that in this case the wish ‘not to stir up history’ may appear as an argument against the facts of Circassian genocide, especially when it comes to the unseemly role of tsarist Russia in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, the facts of Circassian genocide.”⁶⁵ Using cynical language, Yakov Gordin, a prominent contemporary Russian historian, also explains the crimes committed by the Russian army in his works and comments on the cruelties: “Yermolov himself could be extremely cruel. But he was cruel in the name of enlightenment and prosperity. He shot and hung – sometimes by the feet – in the name of the progress of this region and its population.”⁶⁶ Even writers such as Vladimir Tolstoy, who was also an adviser to the Russian President Vladimir Putin, reveal some striking facts about the personalities of the Russian generals of the time, with remarkable expressions. For example, when talking about the characteristics of General Grigori Zass, Tolstoy says: “A Courlander⁶⁷ without a sign of education and vision, who had special abilities for armed robberies on a grand scale, and was entrusted with a raid by Velyaminov in cases of need to punish the treachery of any native tribe... The rest of the time this glorious General Velyaminov held Zass, as they say, on the chain...”⁶⁸

Even after the Russian conquest was complete, no single chance was given to peace in the Caucasus. The Russian nationalists, pursuing the *velikoros* ideals, occupied important positions in the bureaucracy and the army as the dominant group and came to an extraordinarily powerful position in politics. Alexander III and Nikolai II had engaged in a policy of Russification, not only for the dominance of the *velikoros* groups but also for their own safety. Besides the systematic Russification processes, the forces that were driven to the first front in the most difficult wars were specially selected from the non-Russian ethnicities. This was also the case in Russia's first military disaster of the twentieth century. The Caucasian Mountaineers were among the first to be called to the Russian-Japanese

⁶⁵ Tamara Polovinkina, *Čerkessija - bol' moja. Istoričeskij očerk (drevnejšee vremja – načalo XX veka)* (Majkop: Adygeja, 2001), p. 212.

⁶⁶ Jakov Gordin, *Kavkaz: zemlja i krov' Rossija v Kavkazskoj vojne XIX veka* (Sankt-Peterburg: Zvezda, 2000), p. 115.

⁶⁷ A person from Courland in Latvia.

⁶⁸ Vladimir Tolstoj, 'Charakteristiki russkich generalov na Kavkaze', *Rossijskij Archiv*, 8 (1996), 202–44.



Pyotr Nikolayevich Gruzinsky, *The Mountaineers' abandonment of an Aul as the Russian troops approached* (1872)



Rudolf Otto Ritter von Ottenfeld, *Fleeing from the Burning Aul* (1890)



Franz Roubaud (1856–1928), *A Tribe in Exile*



Amedeo Preziosi (1816–1882), *Circassian immigrants at the court of an Istanbul Mosque*

War. As soon as the Japanese attacked the Russian ships on 26 January 1904 (OS) and 31 January (OS), the Tsar issued an appeal for the Caucasian Mountaineers to join the war. The following statements were included in the call; “North Caucasians! The emperor, with his endless kindness and love for his loyal subjects, knowing your warrior nature, appreciating the courage of your ancestors in the Caucasian wars and the wars with Turkey, is showing you mercy and bestowing a great honour by inviting you to his service and forming the Caucasian Cavalry Brigade.”⁶⁹

The effects of defeat in the Japanese War were fatal. This defeat gave the revolutionary groups the opportunity they sought for an uprising. While all of Russia was agitated, the Caucasian Mountaineers, who had not yet healed the wounds of the genocide of the nineteenth century, were completely left out of the process. The Mountaineers were mostly rural people and the urban population consisted of Russian settlers. Mountaineers had never been integrated into Russia’s legal and political sphere. For the Mountaineers, who had always been ruled under martial law, nothing had changed in the fifty years following the conquest. The Bolshevik Revolution, with the slogan of freedom and brotherhood of the peoples, promised the Caucasian

⁶⁹ Chadži Murad Donogo, *Dagestancy na Rusko-japonskoj vojne 1904-1905 godov* (Machačkala: Èpocha, 2013), pp. i, 20.

Mountaineers hope for self-determination. The following announcement made by Lenin shortly after the revolution was not believed by some of the representatives of the peoples oppressed by the tsars for centuries:

Muslims of Russia, Tatars of the Volga and the Crimea, Kirgiz and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Turks and Tatars of Transcaucasia, Chechens and Caucasian Mountaineers! All you, whose mosques and shrines have been destroyed, whose faith and customs have been violated by the Tsars and oppressors of Russia! Henceforward your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are declared free and inviolable! Build your national life freely and without hindrance. It is your right. Know that your rights, like those of all the peoples of Russia, will be protected by the might of the Revolution, by the councils of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies!⁷⁰

Imam Shamil, in an article in the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, was praised as the leader who led the struggle of the Mountaineers of Dagestan and Chechnya against tsarism and colonialism. While Shamil was described as a leader who managed to unite the Mountaineers and subdue the feudal lords of Dagestan, it was stated in the same article that by joining Russia the Mountaineers had contributed to their economic, political, and cultural development.⁷¹ On the one hand, it was emphasized that Shamil was a freedom fighter leader; on the other hand, the *velikorus* ideology that Russians were the apostles of civilization was also emphasized.

It was soon realized that there had been no change in the Russian state tradition and that the Great Soviet Revolution was nothing but another *velikorus* movement. Azerbaijani writer Haydar Husseinov was awarded the Stalin Prize for Literature and Art in 1949 for his work entitled "The History of Social and Philosophical Thought in Nineteenth-Century Azerbaijan". Husseinov's remarks in this study on Muridism and Imam Shamil were reviewed again in May 1950, when it was pointed out that Husseinov's book contained the wrong political ideology and especially distorted the nature of Muridism and Shamil as it presented them as so-called progressive national liberation and democratic phenomena. The award was withdrawn. Moreover, accusing Husseinov of defending the teachings of bourgeois historians, the committee claimed that the book fundamentally distorted the true meaning of a movement that was anti-Marxist,

⁷⁰ Sovet Narodnyh Komissarov RSFSR, 'Obraščeniya Soveta Narodnyh Komissarov ko vsem trudjaščimsja musul'manam Rossii i Vostoka ot 24 nojabrja (7 dekabrja) 1917 g.', in *Meždunarodnaja politika novejšego vremeni v dogovorach, notach i deklaracijach, part 2: Ot imperialističeskoj vojny do snjatija blokady s Sovetskoj Rossii*, ed. by Jurij Ključnikov (Moskva: Litizdat NKID, 1926), p. 95.

⁷¹ *Bol'saja Sovetskaja Enciklopedija* (Moskva: Izd. Sovetskaja enciklopedija 1926–1990), LXI (1934).

reactionary, nationalist, and in the service of British capitalism and Turkey.⁷² Circassians (whom Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had presented as an example for all the peoples of the world in the fight for freedom) and Imam Shamil (whom they described as the “Great Democrat”) were now referred to as “British and Turkish agents, reactionary and primitive nationalists” by the Russian-dominated Soviet administration.⁷³

When the Republic of the Union of the Mountaineers of the North Caucasus was crushed under the boots of the Russian Bolsheviks, tens of thousands of North Caucasians became refugees all around the world. The local Bolsheviks who invited and facilitated the Russian Bolsheviks in the Caucasus were the first to be administratively liquidated and then physically destroyed.⁷⁴

One of the most striking genocide practices of the Stalin era was the mass exile of ethnic groups on charges of collaborating with Nazi Germany. All public records, monuments, and social memory of these peoples was destroyed during the expulsion process. The North Caucasians experienced one of the biggest shares of these practices. At the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944, together with the Crimean Tatars, the Kalmyks and the Volga Germans, the Karachay, the Balkar, the Chechen, and the Ingush were exiled to the Kazakh steppes and Siberia. These deportations, which were named an “operation of intimidation”, were in fact a merciless genocide because ethnic identity was the sole criterion. In this decision, no privilege was given to anyone belonging to these ethnicities. They were summoned not only from their native lands but also from other Soviet Republics. As the bloodiest battles on the European stage of World War II were going on at that time, most of the male population was fighting on different fronts. As soon as the war ended, these ethnicities were first gathered in the Kostroma region of Russia's European territory and then relocated to the death camps of Central Asia.⁷⁵ Although we do not have statistical data on the extent of the massacre in terms of loss of life since no records were kept of deaths, it is understood that thousands of people lost their lives in the *Khaibakh massacre* and similar murders at the beginning of the exile.⁷⁶ If Stalin had fully achieved his goal, the experiences of these people at that time would not be known today. All structures representing the social memory of the exiled peoples, including cemeteries, were destroyed. Their names were completely erased from maps,

⁷² ‘V komitete po Stalinskim premijam. «O knige G. Gusejnova», *Pravda*, 14 May 1950.

⁷³ Ahmet Nebi Magoma, ‘Komünistlerin İmam Şamil hakkında fikir değiştirmeleri ve onun sebepleri’, *Dergi Mecmuası*, 8 (1957), 26.

⁷⁴ Cem Kumuk, *Düvel-i Muazzama'nın Kıskaçında Kafkasya Dağlıları* (İstanbul: Selenge, 2022), pp. 391–508.

⁷⁵ Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 103.

⁷⁶ Moshe Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule* (London: Hurst and Company, 2006), p. 170.

streets, documents, and public memory. Even asking questions about their fate was forbidden. None of these peoples were mentioned in the USSR encyclopaedia published in October 1947. On the sixtieth page of this encyclopaedia, while the peoples that formed the union were listed according to their nationality, exiled nationalities were included in the population of 2,983,000 people in the category of “other” without mentioning their names.⁷⁷ Between 1939 and 1959, despite the harsh conditions of the labour camps, the population of the USSR increased from 170,467,000 to 208,827,000 – an increase of 22.3%. However, the Mountaineers who were deported from the Caucasus did not have the chance to grow their populations at the same rate.⁷⁸

Population	1939	1959	increase %
Chechen	407.690	418.756	2,70%
Ingush	92.074	105.980	15%
Karachay	75.737	81.403	7,40%
Balkar	42.666	42.408	-1%
Total	618.167	648.547	4,9%

Also frequently part of Russia’s genocidal tradition is cultural and demographic genocide, one of the most striking examples of which took place in the historical Circassian lands in 1967. In a significant part of the lands that were cleared of the autochthonous population in the Russian-Caucasian Wars, the public memory was destroyed forever. Krasnodar reservoir, which covered an area of 420 sq. km on the Kuban River to control the flow of the Kuban River and to produce rice in the region wiped 22 historical Circassian villages off the map. Among these villages were important places of memory such as *Lakshukai*, which had a rich history and was the centre of the great Circassian peasant uprising in 1855. There were 46 historical cemeteries and 5 mass graves on 35 thousand hectares of land. 16 thousand hectares of forest were completely cut down. Most of the Circassians, comprising approximately 13,000 souls who had to leave their homes, were resettled in Adygeysk and Tlyustenkhable.⁷⁹ It is also

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

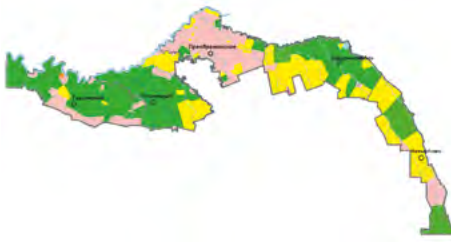
⁷⁸ Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj archiv èkonomiki (RGAÈ RF, formerly CGANCh SSSR), fond 1562, op. 336, nos. 966-1001, Nacional’nyj sostav naselenija po SSSR, respublikam, oblastjam, rajonom, fol. 15A, Development table of the national composition of the population in the USSR, republics, regions, districts;

⁷⁹ Vitalij Štybin, ‘Uterjannoe nasledie Adygei. Kakoj cenoj postroili Krasnodarskoe vodochranilišče’, *Juga.ru*, 13 July 2018, <<https://www.yuga.ru/articles/society/8470.html>> [accessed 7 July, 2022].

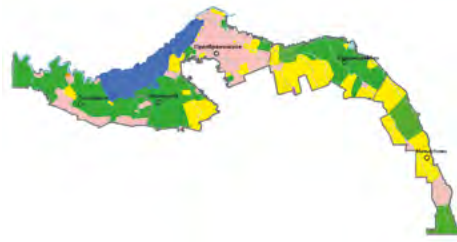


Arthur Tsutsiev, *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus*, London, 2014, p. 99

remarkable that while the non-native population of the North Caucasus inhabits approximately 85% of the 870 km Kuban river line, the entire 40-km-long reservoir was planned to wipe out only the settlements of the Circassian minority who had survived the genocide of the nineteenth century. Preparations for this operation had started long before 1967; the Maikop Region (rayon), whose total area was 3667 sq. km and only 2% of whose population was Circassian, was included in the Adyge Autonomous Region (oblast) in 1962. The Adyge Autonomous Region, which was established in 1926, had a much smaller area of 3027 sq. km, but 46% of its population was predominantly ethnic Circassians, who were dispersed when 14% of the area was flooded by the reservoir. The total area of the Oblast gradually doubled between 1936 and 1962. The proportion of the Circassian population was reduced to 25% and the decisive role of the Circassians in the decision-making mechanisms was eliminated. According to the artificially and carefully drawn map, it was necessary to exit and re-enter the region many times while traveling from one point to another because this reservoir was placed in the bottleneck of the autonomous region. Nevertheless, the great changes that this reservoir caused in the climate



Borders of the Adyge Autonomous District (1926), and lands populated primarily by Circassians (green areas)



Map showing the lands (blue area) flooded by the Krasnodar Reservoir

of the region would cause many other problems for the people and the environment in the coming years.

Genocide practices in the region in the post-Soviet period must be studied in depth. The collective punishments, violence, and many other human rights violations committed by Russian forces against civilians during the conflicts in 1994–1996 and 1999–2009 in Chechnya are documented in *Human Rights Watch Monitoring Reports*. Disappearances and mass executions became a natural part of daily life in Chechnya in that period.⁸⁰

Today, war crimes and genocide practices committed by states are only recognized as per the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. This Convention was accepted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in December 1948 and entered into force in January 1951. However, the weakest point of this convention is that genocide allegations can only be valid for individuals, not for states, and they can be vetoed by the United Nations Security Council. Since five major states, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, are permanent members of the Security Council, many genocidal crimes they committed in the past can easily be covered up for political and ideological reasons. Although the member states' demands to limit this vetoing right have been on the agenda of the UN General Assembly since 2013, no concrete decision has been taken yet.⁸¹ Therefore, the fact that the UN has not been able to take a concrete genocide resolution regarding Russia's actions in the North Caucasus – which started in the nineteenth century and continue until today – cannot be accepted as a criterion that Russia's actions are not genocide.

⁸⁰ Russia: *Three Months of War in Chechnya* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), pp. 1–20; Russia: *Russia's War in Chechnya: Victims Speak Out* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), pp. 2–6; *The "Dirty War" in Chechnya: Forced Disappearances, Torture, And Summary Executions* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2001), pp. 1–41.

⁸¹ United Nations, 'Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, Security Council', *United Nations*, [n.d.], <<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/security-council.shtml>> [accessed 10 June 2022].

Meanwhile, the international community remains silent on these crimes against humanity by accepting the subjective standards of the UN, whose basis for existence has become questionable due to its attitudes and actions in the face of current events. These violations, which are prohibited by international human rights treaties and humanitarian instruments to which Russia has been a party, are clearly defined in the second additional protocol of the 1949 Geneva Convention. Article 4 mandates humane treatment of civilians and explicitly prohibits violence against the life, health, and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder, torture, mutilation, or any form of corporal punishment. In addition, this protocol prohibits hostage-taking, collective punishments, insults to personal dignity, looting, and other related threats. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2444 (1968) obliges warring parties to distinguish between combatants and civilians and to protect civilians as much as possible. The UN Convention Against Torture and Other Forms of Cruel and Degrading Treatment also prohibits beating, torture, and other ill-treatment in custody.

All humanitarian and moral values, as well as the agreed international standards in this field prove that Russia's practices in the North Caucasus for the last two centuries are overt genocide. Demanding the United Nation's approval as a prerequisite for the recognition of the actual situation is purely an indication of the desperation of global public opinion. The *fait accompli* tradition of Russian state policies, which have not changed for centuries, continues recklessly even today, and world public opinion cannot go beyond weak objections.

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