Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Volume 8, No. 1 (2010) pp. 23 - 46

ISSN: 1653-4212

The Fedayeen of the Reich: Muslims, Islam and Collaborationism During World War II

Bruno De Cordier[*]

ABSTRACT

From 1941 to 1945, between 372,000 and 445,000 men of Muslim background and primarily from Soviet Eurasia and the Balkans, served in Hitler's armies as combatants or as labour auxiliaries. This little-known page of war history is often used to discredit Islam and Muslims. But what were the actual sizes and causes of the phenomenon? This paper examines the circumstances and the proportions of wartime collaborationist movements among Muslims, and compared these to collaboration among non-Muslim groups in the territories and countries concerned. It thereby focuses on the cases of the Central Asian Turkestan Legion of the Wehrmacht and of the Bosnian Handschar division of the Waffen-SS.

Keywords • Balkans • collaborationism • Eastern Front • Handschar division • nationalism • Pan-Turkism • Stalinism • Third Reich • Turkestan Legion • World War II • Yugoslavia

"The battleline between good and evil runs through the heart of every man."
Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Introduction

Few may know that in the final months of World War II, up to a quarter of Germany's armed forces consisted of so-called "foreign volunteers" and that some of these had a Muslim background. In Southeastern

[*] Bruno De Cordier is with the Conflict Research Group of Ghent University, Belgium.
[1] Antonio J. Munoz, et al., *The East came West. A Study of East European and Middle Eastern Collaboration with Nazi Germany in World War II* (New York: Axis Europa books, 2001), p. 61 and 233, and Lee J. Ready, *The Forgotten Axis: Germany's Partners and Foreign Volunteers in World War II* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co, 1987).

Europe, for instance, the Allies and the Communist partisans faced Bosnian Muslims and Uzbeks who fought under German command. During the Soviet siege of Berlin, remnants of an Arab paratrooper company and an anti-tank unit from the Northern Caucasus took part in the defence of the city, or what was left of it.[1] Long confined to military history, the presence of Muslim soldiers in the Reich's armies and the controversial role of pro-German Islamic leaders like the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Al-Husseini are regularly raked up in certain circles to demonize Islam and Muslims.

Proponents of this line argue that the "Nazi-Muslim common cause" of anti-Semitism and a common predilection for world conquest and a totalitarianism (a Pan-Germanic Reich for the Nazis, a global Caliphate for the Islamists) did not disappeared with the defeat of Nazi Germany but is still overtly as well as covertly part of violent and intellectual forms of militant Islam.[2] As such, the ongoing War on Terror is seen as an equivalent to the war against Nazism and the containment of Communism. The purpose of this paper is not to look into the real and imagined similarities between "Islam" and "Fascism" or to dispute whether any active collaboration among Muslims took place or not.[3] Rather, its aim is to examine how widespread such collaboration was as compared to collaboration among non-Muslim groups, and what its causes and the circumstances were. The question that will be raised is if and to what extent these can be compared to the present situation.

The Map of the Islamic World on the Eve of World War II

How did the political map of the Islamic world look like during the inter-war period?[4] After a long period of decline, the Ottoman empire, the last inter-continental Islamic power that exerted control over much of North Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East at one time, had been abolished

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[2] For an example, see Serge Trifković, "Islam's Nazi Connections", *Front Page Magazine*, December 5, 2002.

[3] For a critical discussion of the concept of "Islamo-Fascism", see Stefan Durand, "Fascisme, islam et grossiers amalgames. Un cadre idéologique pour la 'Troisième Guerre mondiale'? [Fascism, Islam and grotesque generalizations. An ideological framework for the 'Third World War'?]," *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2006, <www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2006/11/durand/14115> (also available in English under the title "The Lie that is 'Islamofascism'", <mondediplo.com/2006/11/05islamofascism>) (March 10, 2010).

[4] General overview maps can be found in Philippe Rekacewicz, *Le hold-up colonial* [The colonial robbery], Atlas du Monde diplomatique 2003 (Paris: Armand Collin, 2003), p. 23 and Jean Sellier and André Sellier, *Atlas des peuples d'Orient* [Atlas of the peoples of the East] (Paris: La Découverte, 1993), p. 41. For a concise discussion of the global position the the Islamic world, see David K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers. Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Fontana Press, 1989), pp. 10-14, and pp. 355-446 for the dynamics of the inter-war international order.

in 1922. One and a half decades later, the map of the Islamic world showed only a half a dozen of independent states which, with the exception of Turkey, were all ruled by monarchies. The rest were either colonies, protectorates or mandate territories of Britain, France and Italy, often ruled in conjunction with co-opted local and traditional elites. Several majority Muslim states that had formal independence (Iran, Iraq and Arabia) were subject to strong political jockeying by the European powers (and in the case of Iran also the Soviet Union) and oil companies or had foreign military bases on their territory (Iraq). The Muslims of Eurasia and the Balkans were largely incorporated in the Soviet Union and the then kingdom of Yugoslavia, both states dominated by non-Muslims. Albania, the only independent Muslim majority state in the Balkans, became a protectorate of Fascist Italy in 1939.

Europe's cities had no sizeable and established Muslim immigrant communities yet. The small Muslim communities in Europe consisted either of diplomats, business people, Middle Eastern nobility with European residences or political exiles from the Balkans and Eurasia.[5] Nazi Germany, for its part, had no colonial possessions nor any protectorates or mandate territories in the Islamic world but did had strong economic ties with Iran. It also tried to strengthen its diplomatic and ideological influence in Turkey and on nationalist circles, part of which sympathised with European Fascism, in Iran and Iraq. The strongest ties between the Third Reich and Iran were not under a religious regime similar to Iran's current regime, but existed under the secular rule of the pro-German Shah Reza Pahlavi I. In 1936 and 1937, Germany was Iran's largest trade partner. The Nazis also hoped to capitalize on the anti-British climate among Iran's population and on the ideological sympathies for Fascism and the Aryan race cult that existed among some of the Iranian military, intelligentsia and in the entourage of the Shah.[6]

European colonial policies, including the co-optation of and support for unpopular local rulers or religious minorities like Christians, and the foreign grip over foreign policy and key economic sectors like oil were resented by part of the population and opinion leaders in the Arab

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[5] For an examination of Islam and Muslims in inter-war Europe, see Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain, *Islam in Inter-War Europe* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2008).
[6] Jean-Pierre Digard, Bernard Hourcade and Yann Richard, *L'Iran au vingtième siècle* [Iran in the twentieth century], (Paris: Fayard, 1996), pp. 93-94 and Antoine Fleury, *La pénétration allemande au Moyen-Orient 1919-1939. Les cas de la Turquie, de l'Iran et de l'Afghanistan* [German penetration in the Middle East, 1919-1939. the cases of Turkey, Afghanistan and Iran], Collection de Relations internationales (Geneva: Institut Universitiare de Hautes Etudes Internationales, 1977), pp. 93-94 and 213-226, Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932-1941* (London: Routledge, 2006) and Wolfgang Schwanitz, *Germany and the Middle East, 1871-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 181-216.

countries and in Iran. In the USSR, Stalin's collectivisation campaigns and purges had heavily affected Muslim as well as non-Muslim societies of Eurasia. In several states, colonies and protectorates, anti-colonial, nationalist (Pan-Arab nationalism[7], Iranian nationalism) or reformist movements were active to one or another degree. During the early inter-war years years a number of reformist and autonomist movements in Eurasia (the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the Kokand Autonomy, the Alash Orda movement and the Tatar and Turkestani Jadids) had been quashed by the Bolsheviks.[8] These movements were predominantly nationalist and secular and not Pan-Islamist or Salafist. The latter currents did not have the real or perceived political weight and impact that they have today. The discontent and colliding interests caused by direct and proxy colonialism, active as well as suppressed anti-colonial or anti-Stalinist movements, the presence of political exiles from Eurasia in Europe and the run of military events during World War II would show crucial for the emergence of Muslim military collaboration with Nazi Gemany.

How Widespread was Collaboration Among Muslims?

A Look at the Numbers

According to various sources and estimates, between 1941 and 1945, from 372,000 to 445,000 (18 to 22 percent) of the some 2 million men who served in various labour brigades, transport and guarding units, or one of the ethnic and national divisions that were set up by the Reich for volunteers in the occupied territories were Muslims or at least of Muslim background and tradition.[9] Meanwhile, the armies of the Reich and its allies never annexed or occupied large portions of the wider Islamic world or areas inhabited my Muslim populations, with the exception of the Balkans, the Crimean peninsula, the North Caucasian piedmont, as well as a portion of North Africa during the campaigns of Tobruk and El-Alamein. The Reich actively supported the nationalist coup d'état of Rashid Al-Gailani against the pro-British monarchy in Baghdad in 1941.

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[7] Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914-1923* (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 105-115 and 207-217.

[8] A. Ahat Andican, *Turkestan Struggle Abroad. From Jadidism to Independence* (Haarlem: SOTA Publications, 2007), pp. 23-150; Olivier Roy, *La nouvelle Asie centrale, ou la fabrication des nations* [The new Central Asia, or the fabrication of nations] (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1997), pp. 75-82; Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism. From Irrendentism to Cooperation* (London: Hurst, 1995), pp. 15-21; and Fazal Ur-Rahman Khan Marwat, *The Basmachi Movement in Soviet Central Asia. A Study in Political Development* (Peshawar: Emjay Books International, 185), pp. 24-57.

[9] Oleg Romanko, *Musulmanskie legioni vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine* [Muslim legions during the Second World War] (Moscow: Transitkniga, 2004), p. 64.

It maintained good contacts with pro-German circles in Iran until the Shah was deposed and the country - too strategic because of the oil, its capacity of transport corridor for Anglo-American aid to the USSR and bordering as it did on British India - came under joint British-Soviet occupation.

Generally speaking, two forms of military collaboration were observed among war prisoners and civilians during the war in the occupied territories and frontline areas. The first involved so-called Hilfswillige (voluntary auxiliaries) who were engaged in labour and transport brigades, intelligence services and surveillance and police units. The second involved voluntary implication in combat and counter-insurgency operations in one of the national divisions of the Wehrmacht or the SS or in militias and vigilantes associated with them.[10] In many cases, the line between voluntary and semi-coerced collaboration and was not clear. This was especially the case among prisoners of war who received remarkably better treatment in exchange for cooperation.

The question arises as to how widespread military collaboration among Muslims was during World War II and in which areas and among which groups it happened the most. It is not easy to obtain accurate and consistent statistics on the number of men who fought or worked for the Reich in one capacity or another. Sometimes, the figures brought forward by the various authors and historians match, while in other cases, they show wide differences. The reasons for that include the chaotic circumstances at the Eastern Front, the fact that the recruitment of auxiliaries was often done at the initiative of individual German commanders rather than the central command. The frequent and sometimes shady reorganisations of the various units with Muslims, as well as the ideological bias and taboos that long cast a shadow over post-war research and discourse on the subject further blurred the lines.

If we base the study on the literature that contains statistical overviews, the picture looks as follows in Table 1.[11]

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[10] Alexander R. Alexiev, *Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime History*, Rand Corporation Document No. R-2772-NA (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1982), p. vi.

[11] Table compiled by the author. The sources consulted for this table and graphic include Oleg Romanko, *Musulmanskie legioni vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine*, *op. cit.*, Annex I-Table 2; Alexander R. Alexiev, *Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime History* , *op. cit.*, p. 33; A. Ahat Andican, *Turkestan Struggle Abroad. From Jadidism to Independence*, *op. cit.*, p. 477; Jonathan Trigg, *Hitler's Jihadis. Muslim Volunteers in the Waffen-SS* (Stroud: The History Press, 2008), pp. 69-158; and Antonio J. Munoz, *The East came West. A Study of East European and Middle Eastern Collaboration with Nazi Germany in World War II* (New York: Axis Europa books, 2001), Appendix B, p. 307. Note that throughout this paper, the term "Caucasian" is used to designate people belonging to ethnic groups from the Caucasus and not in its modern American sense (i.e. people of white race).

Table 1: Number of soldiers of Muslim background in the armed forces of the Third Reich or associated units (1941-45)

Origin	Numbers of men enlisted (approx.)[a]	
	In the Wehrmacht[1]	In the Waffen-SS[1]
Soviet Muslims		
"Turkestani" (Central-Asians including Tajiks and Uighurs)	178,000*	2,000
Azerbaijani Turks	24,000 to 34,000*	1,000
North Caucasians	27,400 to 29,400	600
Crimean Tatars	12,600 to 17,600*	2,400
Volga-Ural Tatars	38,000*	2,000
Subtotal for Soviet Muslims	*280,000 to 297,000*	*8,000*
Balkan Muslims		
Albanians (Kosovo, Metohija, Western Macedonia and Albania proper)	57,000 to 62,000**	3,000
Slavic Muslims (Bosnia and Sanjak)	35,000 to 40,000	20,000 to 23,000
Subtotal for Balkan Muslims	*92,000 to 102,000*	*23,000 to 26,000*
Others		
Arabs and North African Berbers	5,000 to 6,000°	—
"Hindustani" (Indian Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus)	3,000	2,300
Subtotal for Others	*8,000 to 9,000*	*2,300*

Important remarks

[a] These figures include combat units, auxiliary police as well as non-combatant labour brigades and reflect the maximal strength of the units involved. It must be noted though, that not all men in units created for Muslim peoples were effectively of Muslim background. The bulk of their senior officers and technical cadres were Germans, either from the Reich, Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) from Yugoslavia or, in some cases, Germans who had served with the Foreign Legion. The geographic and ethnic base of the units was also not homogenically Muslim. The İdel-Ural Legion that was created for Muslim Tatars and Bashkirs, for example, also included members of (nominally) Christian and pagan Volga-Ural peoples like Chuvash and Udmurts. Two-thirds of the rank-and-file of the Azad Hind (free India) legion were Muslims and the rest Sikhs and Hindus. Likewise, 5 to 7 percent of the (ethnic) Albanian soldiers or militia

members engaged were Christian.

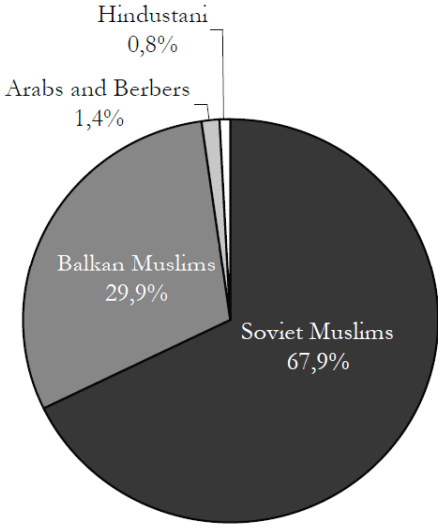
[1] In some cases the figures partly overlap because of the personnel transfer from Wehrmacht to SS units in the latter war years.

* Others sources put the number of Turkestani at some 70,000, Azerbaijani Turks at 40,000, Volga-Ural Tatars at 12,500 and Crimean Tatars at 10,000. Sergey Drobyazko and Andrey Karashchuk, *Vtoraya mirovaya voina 1939-1945. Vostochnye legioni i kazachi chasti v Vermakhte* [World War II, 1939-1945. The Eastern Legions and Cossack units in the Wehrmacht] (Krasnoyarsk: AST-OPT Kniga, 2000), p. 2.

** Inclucing tribal vigilantes and auxiliaries associated with, but not part of, formal Wehrmacht and SS units and detached units of the armed forces of the Albanian Protectorate.

° The figures include volunteer units like and the Legion Freies Arabien, the Sonderverbande No. 287 and 288, the Algerian Phalange africaine and Sonderstab "F" who all supported the Afrikakorps during its North African campaign , but do not include the native North African soldiers of the Vichy regime's colonial armies and police in French North Africa.

Figure 1: Percentual breakdown of the origin of Muslims in the armed forces of the Reich or associated units (1941-45)[12]



The above figures show clearly that, contrary to popular belief, the near-totality of Muslims who were involved in some form of military collaboration with the Reich were not Arabs nor from the "classical" Islamic world for that matter, but rather from its periphery: Eurasia and the Balkans. Numerically, Arabs and Muslims from the Subcontinent were marginal although the psychological and political importance of

[12] Figure created by the author based on Table 1.

these units and their ideological mentors go beyond their limited numbers.[13] As can be seen from the graphs, the vast majority of soldiers and the rank-and-file staff of Muslim units in, or connected to, the Wehrmacht and the SS belonged to the various Turkic peoples of the Soviet Union or were Albanian and Slavic Muslims from Yugoslavia.

How does this relates to the military collaboration among Christian and other non-Muslim groups in and from the respective areas? Of a total of some 2 million non-German collaborators, some 1.4 million were believed to be from the Soviet Union. Among these, Soviet Muslims who consituted 8.7 percent the Soviet Union's population of 170.6 million in 1939[14], formed between 17 and 21 percent.[15] A more detailed breakdown of the number of men in collaborationist units among the Soviet Union's main ethnic and confessional groups comes in the following graphic. [16]

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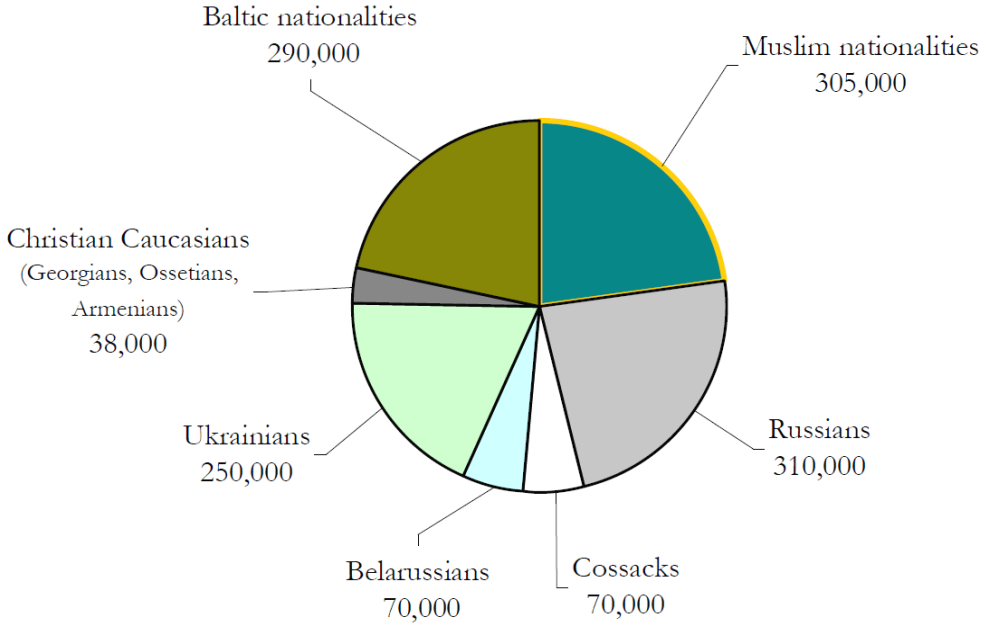
[13] The Arabs and Hindustani who joined German(-officered) units were largely recruited among POWs serving with the British and French colonial armies during the North African campaign between February 1941 and May 1943, but recruitment came to a halt after Rommel's defeat at El-Alamein and the capitulation of the Afrikakorps. Their leaders were ideologically Pan-Arabists and Indian nationalists. During the North African campaign, the Afrikakorps and other Axis troops captured some 17,000 Hindustani soldiers. Because of the colonial British concept of so-called martial races on which the military recruitment policies were based, 37.5 percent of the British Indian army in 1940 consisted of Muslims (against a share of a quarter of the overall population), 37.6 of Hindus, 12.8 of Sikhs and 10.9 percent of Gurkhas. Noor A. Hussain, "The Role of Muslim 'Martial Races' of Today's Pakistan in British-Indian Army in World War II," *Defence Journal*, 1999, <defencejournal.com/sept99/martial-races.htm> (March 10, 2010); and Jean-François Borsarello and Werner Palinckx, *Wehrmacht and SS: Caucasian, Muslim and Asian Troops* (Bayeux: Heimdal, 2007), pp. 81-83.

[14] Roland Pressat, "Pertes subies par la population de l'URSS 1918-1958 [Population losses in the USSR, 1918-1958]," *Population*, 34, 6 (1979): 1151. The rates given for 1926 are 11.7 percent of a total Soviet population of 147 million and for 1959 11.6 percent of 208.82 million. Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders S. Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire. A Guide* (London: Hurst and Co, 1985), p. 24.

[15] Among Hindustani and Arabs, the share of Mulims in the units concerned was about 65 and 100 percent respectively. Oleg Romanko, *Musulmanskie legioni vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine*, *op. cit.*, p. 228; Jonathan Trigg, *Hitler's Jihadis. Muslim Volunteers in the Waffen-SS*, *op. cit.*, p. 183 and 188; and Antonio J. Munoz, *The East came West. A Study of East European and Middle Eastern Collaboration with Nazi Germany in World War II*, *op. cit.*, Appendix B, p. 307.

[16] Figure created by the author on the bases of Table 1 and on data in Andrey Karashchuk and Sergey Drobyazko, *Vostochnie dobrovoltsi v Vermakhte, politsii i SS* , *op. cit.*, p. 6; and Sergey Chuyev, *Proklyatie soldaty. Predateli na storone III. Reiha* [Doomed soldiers. Turncoats on the side of the Third Reich] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2004), p. 52. The figure for the Baltics also include the regular armed forces of the vassal governments in the Reischkommisariat Ostland, the Nazi dominion that was established in a large part of the Baltics as well as parts of Belarus (called Weißruthenien) in mid-July 1941.

Figure 2: Overview of the Soviet Union's Muslim and non-Muslim groups involved in military collaboration with Nazi Germany (1941-45, number of men)



In the Balkans, between 115,000 and 128,000 Muslim soldiers served at some stage in various Waffen-SS or Wehrmacht units or associated local militias. With and alleged protion of 42 percent, direct military collaboration was at first glance numerically higher among Muslims Albanians and Slavic Muslims from Bosnia than among Yugoslavia's non-Muslim groups.[17] However, this picture changes considerably if one takes into account the active collaborationist role played by the non-Muslim armed forces and paramilitary units of Axis' vassal states in the Yugoslav space: the Independent State of Croatia and its notorious Ustaša militia which had some 76,000 men at its zenith, and the Military Administration of Serbia of General Nedić whose state guard and paramilitary force numbered nearly 37,000 men.[18] Nonetheless, in both Soviet Eurasia and the Balkans, the percentage of Muslims involved in some form and degree of military collaboration was higher than their overall share in the population of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

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[17] Oleg Romanko, *Musulmanskie legioni vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine*, *op. cit.*, p. 228. According to the 1921 census, which was the first one to be held in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and at once the last before World War II, Muslim Albanians formed 3.75 percent and Slavic and other Muslims 6.29 percent of the population, which brings the total portion of Muslims in the Yugoslav population at 10.04 percent and at about 11 percent in 1941. Youssef Courbage, "Les transitions démographiques des musulmans en Europe orientale [The demographic transitions among Muslims in Eastern Europe]," *Population*, 46, 3 (1991): 667.
[18] Noël Malcolm, *Bosnia: a Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 174-176; Jozo Tomasević, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 183 and 459.

There are three major circumstances, each with their specific push and pull factors, that explain the emergence of Muslim units in the German army. The first is the Reich's expansionist agenda in Central Europe and Eurasia. The second are the impact of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the subsequent occupation of large portions of European Soviet territory. And the third was the presence of long-standing local and subregional conflicts that were not caused by Nazi Germany nor related to World War II but which were exacerbated by the war and became proxy frontlines between the Axis and the Allies. We will now discuss these and illustrate them with concrete examples relevant to the geographical scope of this journal: the Central Asian Turkestan Legion of the Wehrmacht and the Bosnian Handschar Division of the SS.

The Limits of Racism: Managing Imperial Overstretch

In early 1941, months before the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, the Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete (Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, or Ostministerium) was set up to administer the occupied parts of the Baltics and the Soviet Union and coordinate the political-administrative reorganisation of the conquered territories once victory was a fact. Although the position and authority of the ministry and its wartime minister Alfred Rosenberg were contested and at times obstructed by competing centres of power in the Nazi and in the military hierarchy, it became instrumental in the realisation of Generalplan Ost (the general plan for the East), in fact a series of plans and scenarios that had already been prepared in 1939 and 1940.[19]

The occupation policies in the field constantly staggered between fanatical Germanic racism aimed at the enslavement or ethnic cleansing of most "inferior" non-Germanic populations - and indeed inspired much of the counterproductive rapacious behavior of the occupation forces in the USSR towards the civilian population and the prisoners of war - and a more pragmatic approach which found that military consolidation in and the sustainable administration of such a vast territory would be difficult without delegating parts of local government and security to sympathetic local regimes. According to the latter line, the Reich had to take advantage of local ethnic-national aspirations and of the resentment against Stalin's devastating pre-war annexation, collectivisation, purges and anti-religious policies to win the allegiance of the local population. In

[19] For more on the political dynamics behind the Ostministerium, see Constantin Graf Stamati, "Zur 'Kulturpolitik' des Ostministeriums [On the 'cultural policies' of the East Ministry]," *in Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 6, 1 (1958): 78–85; Jonathan Trigg, *Hitler's Jihadis. Muslim Volunteers in the Waffen-SS*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-28. For a detailed examination of the Generalplan Ost, see Helmut Heiber, "Der Generalplan Ost," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 6, 3 (1958): 281–325.

some areas like the Baltics, Galicia, Belarus and the Northern Caucasus, parts of the population initially showed substantial goodwill towards the German invasion. This had to be used to drive a wedge between the Soviet people and the Stalinist regime.[20]

Although the Generalplan Ost contained a Germanic supremacist and colonialist agenda, it also reflected the more pragmatic view that was propagated by certain officers in the Wehrmacht and part of Rosenberg's entourage and advisors.[21] The plan's essence was the partition of the European part of the Soviet Union into a number of non-Russian ethnic entities around a non-Communist Russian rump state. Certain parts of the Western USSR, like Galicia and a slice of Weißruthenien (Belarus), were to be directly annexed as a Gau (province) into the Greater Reich. The bulk, was to be transformed in so-called Reichskommissariate, dominions that were not directly annexed to the Reich but which were scheduled for rapid integration in its economy, administered by a Nazi civilan administration in cooperation with sympathetic local groups and units, cleansed of Jews and Communism and colonised by ethnic Germans in designated areas.

Two Reichskommissariate existed partly between 1941 and 1944. The Reichskommissariat Ostland covered most of the present Baltic states as well as Weißruthenien (the Western part of what is now Belarus). This entity, already home to communities of Baltic Germans and historically part of the domain of the Teutonic Order, was to be an area of instensive German colonisation and resettlement. The Reichskomissariat Ukraine covered much of the area of present-day Ukraine minus Galicia (which was absorbed into the Reich) and Transnistria (which was annexed by Rumania, then an Axis ally). Its planned area after the war was to stretch all the way to Saratov on the Volga, without the lower Dniepr basin, Taurida and Crimea which were scheduled for intensive German colonisation and eventually direct annexation as a Gau in the Reich.[22]

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[20]Alexander R. Alexiev, *Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8; Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht. Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944* [Under Wehrmacht rule. German military occupation and the local population in the USSR] (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008), pp. 117-122 and 301. The Galicia mentioned here is the region around Lvov (Lemberg in German) in Western Ukraine (Galitsina), not its Spanish-Portuguese namesake.

[21] A strong advocate of this line was Abwehr colonel and scholar Oskar von Niedermayer (sometimes nicknamed "Germany's Lawrence of Arabia"), who had conducted intelligence operations in Afghanistan and Iran during World War I and worked on a plan to fan nationalist sentiments against the British in India. Between 1921 and 1932 he was also a military attaché in Moscow. See also Wolfgang Schwanitz, *Germany and the Middle East, 1871-1945, op. cit.*

[22] Helmut Heiber, "Der Generalplan Ost [The General Plan for the East]," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 6, 3 (1958): 289-292; Gerald Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand: the Conflicts of German Policy in Russia, 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson,

Two other Reichskommissariate were planned but not realised. The Reichskommissariat Kaukasien (Caucasia) was to comprise the areas between the Don, the Black and Caspian seas including Astrakhan, and the entire Caucasus. It was not only one with a substantial Muslim population (i.e. Azerbaijani Turks and North Caucasians) but also one with important oil reserves around Baku and in the Northern Caspian. This dominion was designated as one where experiments were to be conducted with various forms of autonomy for "indigenous groups."[23] Finally, the Reichskommissariat Moskowien (Muscovy) was to be essentially a non-Communist Russian rump state in Northwestern Eurasia. This entity would also have an ethnic Muslim (Tatar and Bashkir) component in its population.[24] These would either be granted local autonomy, or be joined to a greater Turkestan.

The perspectives of imperial overstretch and the difficulties to govern large territories that would arise for the Reich without local support, theoretically opened a window of opportunity for one or another form of autonomy for the various Muslim and other non-Russian minorities on the Reich's planned frontiers. Beyond the Caspian and the European USSR, the planned or hoped-for collapse of the Stalinist regime thus opened a possibility for the creation of an independent Turkestan under a pro-German nationalist government. By mid-1942, the Reich's military overstretch was already severely felt with the high casualty rates in combat - by spring 1942, nine months after the invasion, these amounted to more than one million men or nearly one-third of the invading force - and the spreading of resources with the occupation of a large territory inhabited by 55 to 65 million people.[25] In occupied territory, the German

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1960). The reasoning behind the German settlement of the lower Dniepr, Taurida and Ukraine was that these territories were once the homeland of the Germanic Ostrogoths, although their strategic position near the Black Sea also played a role. For a view of the political map of Europa in case the Generalplan Ost had been realised, see the map *Die Utopie. Das 'Großgermanische Reich deutscher Nation'* [Utopia. The 'Greater Germanic Reich of the German Nation']," (Munich and Berlin: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 1999), <www.obersalzberg.de/utopie-grossgermanisches-reich.html> (March 10, 2010).

[23] Antonio J. Munoz, et al., *The East came West. A Study of East European and Middle Eastern Collaboration with Nazi Germany in World War II, op. cit.*, p. 48.

[24] According to one scenario, the city of Sankt-Petersburg (Leningrad) was to be directly annexed to the Greater Reich. Between November 1942 and August 1943, German forces and Russian auxiliaries of the Kaminskii Brigade set up the Lokotskoye Samoupravleniye (the Lokot Autonomy) near the city of Bryansk. This was an area with internal autonomy that was to serve as a test case for a Russian collaborationist government under the SS. More detailed discussions can be found in Sergey Chuyev, *Proklyatie soldaty. Predateli na storone III. Reiha* [Doomed soldiers. Turncoats on the side of the Third Reich], *op. cit.*; Sergey Drobyazko, *Pod znamenami vraga. Antisovietskie formirovaniya v sostave germanskyh vooruzhonnyh sil 1941-1945.*; Georg Fischer, *Soviet Opposition Against Stalin: a Case Study in World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952).

[25] Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht. Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944*, *op. cit.*, pp. 124; Jonathan Trigg, *Hitler's Jihadis.*

and other Axis troops increasingly had to deal with Communist partisan activity.

The Germans were also confronted with an enormous influx of Soviet prisoners or war. Their numbers may have been as high as 5.7 million. The estimates about those who died in captivity or during transport because of the appaling living conditions, epidaemia, mistreatment and executions go up to 3 million.[26] Much of this was the result of the initially rapid German advance deep into the USSR, the frenzy of conquest and of the status of "Slavic-Mongol subhumans" that Soviet people had in Nazi ideology. Initially, Soviet Muslim prisoners were not spared. Those who looked Meditteranean were often mistaken for Jews and treated as such, whereas those with Mongol features were considered to be "carriers of Bolshevism" along with the Jews. As such, the mortality rate among Turkestani (Central Asian) prisoners was particularly high. One figure that comes up in several sources is that only about 6 percent of the Turkestani prisoners survived captivity in the first half of 1941, compared to about half among Christian Caucasian prisoners.[27]

Paradoxically, these Soviet prisoners became the largest recruitment base for "indigenous" labour and combat units, including majority Muslim divisions like the Turkestan Legion. The high German losses on the Eastern Front, the daunting task of managing and consolidating control over large parts of occupied territory, the availibity of hundreds of thousands of war prisoners belonging to the USSR's ethnic and religious minorities as well as Hitler's strong desire to bring Turkey into the war on Germany's side (as it was during World War I) noped the Nazi hierarchy to adopt, be it reluctantly, a more realist approach as it was proposed by some army officers and Ostministerium advisors. As such, the Wehrmacht, police and Nazi administration became increasingly dependent "indigenous auxiliaries," not only for the construction of infrastructure but also for intelligence and counter-insurgency operations. By 1942, some 200,000 Hilfswillige and

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Muslim Volunteers in the Waffen-SS, *op. cit.*, p. 38. The civilian administration of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, for example, required the transfer of some 200,000 civil servants from the Reich. Alexander R. Alexiev, *Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime History*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[26] This is more than the number of German troops deployed on the Eastern Front. The figures may also include stragglers left behind by the Red Army, as well as turncoats. There are no uniform statistics and Soviet and German data differ widely. Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht. Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944*, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-203 and pp. 210-211; Michael Parrish, *The Lesser Terror: Soviet State Security*, 1939-1953 (Westport: Praeger, 1996), p. 131.

[27] Alexander R. Alexiev, *Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime History*, *op. cit.*, p. 31; A. Ahat Andican, *Turkestan Struggle Abroad. From Jadidism to Independence*, *op. cit.*, p. 434.

Osttruppen were serving in the Wehrmacht in the Baltics and the Soviet space. By 1943, they respectively numbered 200,000 and 370,000.[28]

Logically, the inhuman treatment and high mortality rate among Turkestani and other Soviet Muslim war prisoners in 1941 should have resulted in virulent anti-German hatred rather than any willingness to collaborate; and in part it did. Yet there was also resentment against the Stalinist regime and its military policies for bringing them into this predicament in the first place. Joining a German labour batallion or a combat unit became also a way to escape the treatment in the prisoner camps. Another fact that should not be under-estimated is that resentment against the excesses of Bolshevism and Stalinism and was more widespread than later hagiographies of the Great Patriotic War want to admit.[29] During the recruitment campaigns and training, the Nazis focused propaganda efforts among the local populations and war prisoners on Bolshevik and Stalinist repression of religion which was a particulary sensitive issue among Soviet Muslims,[30] on the higher standards of living in the Reich, and on the possibility to realize long-suppressed ethnic and national aspirations under German aegis after the war.[31]

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[28] Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht. Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944*, *op. cit.*, p. 177. Osttruppen, or troops from the East, was the common denomination for military units that were recruited among the indigenous population and prisoners of war in the Baltics and the Soviet Union. One of the first units that was interested in employing Soviet POWs was the Abwehr, the German military intelligence. The Sonderverband Bergmann, for example, grouped North Caucasian highlanders and was used for intelligence and sabotage during the German advance on the Caucasus. From 1942, the General Headquarters of the Ostlegionen and most training facilities were situated in the Generalgouvernement Polen (Nazi-annexed Poland). Oleg Romanko, *Musulmanskie legioni vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine*, *op. cit.*, p. 137 and 143.

[29] See, for example, Georg Fischer, *Soviet Opposition Against Stalin: a Case Study in World War II*, *op. cit.*

[30] Stalin understood this and relaxed his regime's behaviour towards Islam (as it did towards Orthodox Christianity and the USSR's other major religions) in order to gain more support for the war effort among the Soviet Muslims. In 1942 and 1943 it set up the Council for Affairs of Religious Cults and the regional Muslim Spiritual Boards, which existed until the demise of the USSR in 1991. Philip Walters, "A Survey of Soviet Religious Policy", in: Sabrina P. Ramet, *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union* (Cambrigde: Cambridge University Press, 1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 16-19 and Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse (eds), *Islam et politique en ex-URSS* [Islam and politics in the former USSR] (Paris: IFEAC-L'Harmattan, 2005), pp. 62 and 86.

[31] Alexander R. Alexiev, *Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime History*, *op. cit.*, p. 23. A detailed discussion of Nazi propaganda efforts can be found in Joachim Hoffmann, *Die Ostlegionen 1941-1943: Turkotataren, Kaukasier und Wolgafinnen im deutschen Heer* [The Eastern Legions 1941-1943: Turco-Tatars, Caucasians and Volga Finns in the German military], Einzelschriften zur militärischen Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges [Monographs on the military history of World War II] (Freiburg-Breisgau: Rombach, 1976). It is doubtful whether the Greater Reich, in case of actual victory, would have allowed anything more than a mosaic of ethnic protectorates and puppet states on its southern and eastern frontier, not an independent Turkestan, İdel-Ural state or a Pan-

It is here that political exiles from Central Asia and the Caucasus who had sought refuge in Germany and other European countries after the Bolshevik takeover of their respective countries and Pan-Turkic émigré circles in Turkey came in.[32] Several of these personalities had played a role in short-lived nationalist and reformist governments after the Bolshevik revolution and remained politically active in exile. These émigrés played an important part in the ideological training and political leadership of the volunteers and worked under the aegis of the Ostministerium and the Wehrmacht. In late 1941 and early 1942, several national committees were created in Berlin. In the opinion of their creators, these were to form provisional governments for their respective homelands while the military units manned by their countrymen would become the nucleus or the armies and police of these areas and countries once liberated from Stalinism.

The cooperation of the anti-Bolshevik émigrés and political cadres was not uniformly enthusiastic and at times reluctant. Yet considerations like a possibility to negociate better treatment for their countrymen in Nazi captivity and the perceived opportunity that the defeat of Stalin's USSR would offer for some form of autonomy, if not independence, for their homelands pushed many into collaboration anyhow. The Nazis, from their side, considered these organisms especially useful for propaganda and intelligence purposes rather than giving them any political weight. Of the Turkestan national committee's twelve sections, for example, five were given propagandistic tasks.[33]

The Turkestan Legion itself was by far the largest majority Muslim unit to ever serve in the Wehrmacht during World War II. It was formed in January 1942, when an auxiliary regiment of Soviet Muslims that was deployed on the Dniepr front was split into a unit for Turkestani, and another for Muslims from the Caucasus. [34] The Turkestan Legion was multi-ethnic and grouped soldiers from all of Central Asia's Turkic nationalities as well as Tajiks. Like with most Ostlegionen, however, the bulk of its officers corps were German. Although sources differ on this matter, one figure has it that only 87 of the 180,000 Turkestani volunteers were officers, of whom 23 were

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Arabic entity that eventually risked to become assertive and as much anti-German as they had been anti-Soviet or anti-British. Yet using (pan-)nationalist aspirations among political groups and exiles and popular frustrations certainly proved useful to mobilise support during the war.

[32] Long taboo or treated with heavy ideological bias in the Soviet Union, the existence and the circumstances of the formation of the Turkestan Legion became subject of attention and polemics again with the release of the film about Kazakh-Turkestani nationalist leader and publicist Mustafa Şokai in Kazakhstan in early 2008.

[33] Oleg Romanko, *Musulmanskie legioni vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

[34] Georg Fischer, *Soviet Opposition Against Stalin: a Case Study in World War II*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

assigned to the committee.[35] Two key figures that played a role in the legion's formation and its ideolological framework were Mustafa Şokai and Veli Qayyum. The latter was an agronomist and political scientist from Tashkent who had come to Germany to study during the interbellum and stayed in Berlin after the Bolshevik takeover of Turkestan. He became a regular contributor for several German periodicals on the Muslim world, yet was not know to be politically active in the Turkestani diaspora in Europe. His alleged ties with the German National Socialist Party and with Alfred Rosenberg during that period remain shady and a subject of controverse.[36]

Mustafa Şokai (or Chokaev), an ethnically Kazakh lawyer and journalist, was the president of the short-lived Kokand Autonomy before going into exile near Paris.[37] From there he worked as a journalist for several outlets and was active in the Turkestani movement abroad. In mid-1941, Şokai was brought from occupied Paris to Germany by the Abwehr. He was introduced to Veli Qayyum and got involved in the inventory and recruitment of Turkistani war prisoners in the POW camps. He also tried to obtain better conditions for the prisoners, but died of typhoid in December 1941. The leadership of the 28-member Turkestan national committee then shifted to Veli Qayyum, who was appointed its official chairman by the Ostministerium in early 1942. The legion's liaison officer in the committee was Baymirza Hayit, a Soviet army captain from Namangan who went into German captivity in 1941.

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[35] A. Ahat Andican, *Turkestan Struggle Abroad. From Jadidism to Independence*, *op. cit*., p. 479. The often-quoted figure of 178,000 to 180,000 Turkestani is disputed (cf. remarks under Table 1) in the sense that not all actually served in combat units. The latter number might rather have been 70,000 while the rest were assigned to labour brigades. The low rate of Central Asian officers in the Turkestan Legion is partly explained by German policy, but also a consequence of the under-representation of Muslims in the Soviet officers' corps. Alexander R. Alexiev and Enders S. Wimbush, *The Ethnic Factor in the Soviet Armed Forces. Historical Experiences, Current Practices, and Implications for the Future,* Rand Corporation Document No. R-2930/1 (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1983), pp. 3-5.

[36] A. Ahat Andican, *Turkestan Struggle Abroad. From Jadidism to Independence*, *op. cit*., pp. 460-466; Bahyt Sadykova, *Pamyati Mustafy Chokai. Istoriya Turkestankogo Legiona v dokumentakh* [In memory of Mustafa Şokai. A documented history of the Turkestan Legion] (Almaty: Qainar, 2002), p. 46.

[37] The Kokand Autonomy (or Turkestan Autonomy) existed from December 10, 1917 to February 13, 1918 and was a reformist Muslim government based in the namesake city. Although the Bolsheviks pretended that its task was to create a regional Caliphate under British influence, its self-proclaimed goals were land and social reforms, and Turkestani autonomy within a democratic Russian republic, invoking Lenin's decree on the right of national self-determination for the peoples of Russia. It was opposed by both the Tashkent Soviet, and by the traditional notability which feared the proposed reforms. During recapture by Bolshevik troops, Kokand was thoroughly destroyed. Its population, which stood at about 120,000 in 1897, was 69,300 in 1926. Bahyt Sadykova, *Pamyati Mustafy Chokai. Istoriya Turkestankogo Legiona v dokumentakh*, *op. cit*., pp. 12-13; Fazal Ur-Rahman Khan Marwat, *The Basmachi Movement in Soviet Central Asia. A Study in Political Development*, *op. cit*., pp. 32-39.

Most of the members of the national committees and political émigrés who got involved in the formation of the Turkestan Legion and other units for Soviet Muslims were not clerics nor ideologically adepts of Pan-Islamism or Salafism. They were essentially nationalists, often with roots in Jadidism and in the wider Pan-Turkist movement.[38] Islam was an element of a wider ethnic and cultural identity. The political goal was an independent, or at least autonomous, Republic of Turkestan rather than an Islamic Emirate or a global Caliphate. Although the Turkestan Legion had chaplain imams who were to carry the leaderships's political message and legitimize the anti-Bolshevik cause, the legion's flag did not included Islamic symbols but was inspired on the Turkic sky blue and red flag of the Kokand Autonomy, with a white bow-and-arrow in the middle.[39] Attempts were made to promote Çağatai Turkish in the Latin script as the language of communication. Along with German, it was the legion's official language.

To what extent were the legion's soldiers aware or motivated by a nationalist agenda? Most probably they were not to the same degree as the political leadership. There were more likely a variety of people and motivations, often in combination with one another. Apart from a fringe of criminal opportunists, most legionaries joined collaborationism to escape the terrible conditions of the prison camps. At the same time, many also had memories of the brutal Stalinist colletivisation and anti-religious campaigns and purges in the home regions. The forthcoming grudges made them recepetive for ideals of a liberated Turkestan with German support, even if these eventually proved deceptive.[40] The

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[38] The ties between certain Pan-Turkist nationalists and Fascism are treated in Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism. From Irrendentism to Cooperation*, *op. cit*., pp. 112-115; Charles W. Hostler, *Turkism and the Soviets: the Turks of the World and their Political Objectives* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957). In the Arab region, many personalities with real and alleged Fascist/Axis sympathies were Pan-Arabic nationalists, rather than Islamists in today's sense. Many would become associated with secular nationalist movements like the Baath Party in Iraq or the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale that were to deliver several of the secular Arab regimes that were later opposed by the Islamists. For examples, see Roger Falligot and Rémi Kauffer, *Le croissant et la croix gammée. Les secrets de l'alliance entre l'Islam et le nazisme d'Hitler à nos jours* [The crescent and the swastika. The secret of the alliances between Islam and Nazism from Hitler to the present day] (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990). For a discussion of the dynamics of Pan-Turkism, Pan-Islamism and ethnicity in Eurasia, see Olivier Roy, *La nouvelle Asie centrale, ou la fabrication des nations*, *op. cit*., pp. 75-82.

[39] This was organized in a similar way as the Catholic and Protestant chaplaincy in the Wehrmacht. Georg May, *Interkonfessionalismus in der deutschen Militärseelsorge von 1933 bis 1945* [Interconfessionalism in German military chaplaincy between 1933 and 1945] (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 1978), pp. 360-367. Also borrowed from Wehrmacht symbolism was the maxim "Biz Allah bilen!" ["God is with us!"] on the legion's arm patches.

[40] For personal accounts by soldiers and officers of the legion, see A. Ahat Andican, *Turkestan Struggle Abroad. From Jadidism to Independence*, *op. cit*., pp. 468-471; Stephen L. Crane, *Survivor from an Unknown War. The Life of Isakjan Narzikul* (Upland: Diane Publishing, 1999).

Turkestan Legion never fought in Turkestan itself, even if intelligence and sabotage commandos were deployed for covert operations in the Caspian port of Guryev (present-day Atyrau) and in Tashkent. There were eventually aborted plans to airlift men of the Turkistan Legion to areas inhabited by Turkic tribes in Northern Afghanistan to train a guerrilla force there and infiltrate the nearby USSR through its southern border.[41]

Various parts of the Turkestan Legion were deployed on the Kuban front north of the Caucasus, and in Stalingrad. Others were sent for guarding duties and counter-insurgency operations against the partisans in Belarus and Galicia. There are no indicators that the Turkestan Legion was ideologically driven by virulent, atavistic anti-Semitism - historically and culturally less ingrained in Turkestan than in large parts of Christian Europe - nor that it participated in mass murder against Jews like non-Muslim collaborators in Galicia, the Baltics and Belarus did.[42] In late 1943, eight batallions were sent to France and several more to Mussolini's Social Republic in North Italy to fight the partisans there. Yet the legion was never really equipped and armed up to its capacity. As it became clear that the Nazis considered the legionaries as auxiliaries rather than fully-fledged allies with a cause and an agenda, morale and discipline fell rapidly.[43] The legion was also affected by discontent among some of its Kazakh-Kyrgyz members towards the Uzbek domination of the political leadership and by the power struggle between the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS. In early 1945, several Turkestani batallions were transferred from the Wehrmacht to the *Osttürkischer Waffen-Verband der SS*, a Pan-Turkist SS detachment that operated in various areas of Southeastern Europe before its soldiers rebelled against their German officers and deserted.[44]

As the Reich collapsed, several battalions of the Turkestan Legion fought to the death, tried to join the partisans or turn sides again to the Soviets. Much of the legion ultimately surrendered to the Anglo-American forces, who were expected to be more lenient than the Soviets. The Yalta agreements, however, stipulated that all Soviet citizens found

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[41] This operation, code-named *Unternehmen Hansa*, is discussed in detail in A. Ahat Andican, *Turkestan Struggle Abroad. From Jadidism to Independence*, pp. 547-550.

[42] Detailed accounts of the latter can be found in Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 88-95, 141-162 and 274-285.

[43] Bahyt Sadykova, *Pamyati Mustafy Chokai. Istoriya Turkestankogo Legiona v dokumentakh*, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52. The use of the Turkestan legion and other Osttruppen on the Western front is documented in Peter Lieb, *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS-Weltanschauungskrieg? Kriegsführung und Partisanenbekämpfung in Frankreich, 1943/44* [A conventional war or a National-Socialist ideological war? Warfare and counter-insurgency in France, 1943/44] (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2007), pp. 118-130 and in Jean-François Borsarello and Werner Palinckx, *Wehrmacht and SS: Caucasian, Muslim and Asian Troops*, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

[44] Jonathan Trigg, *Hitler's Jihadis. Muslim Volunteers in the Waffen-SS*, op. cit., pp. 176-180.

or caught in Europe were to be sent back to the USSR. Once there, most returnees were interned in NKVD filtration camps before being either executed or condemned to labor camp or prison sentences. Some legionairies and members of the national committee managed to escape to Turkey and join the Turkestani emigré community there. Some, like Veli Qayyum and Baimirza Hait, benefited from the new Cold War paradigm and managed to stay and live in post-war Germany.

Unlike some 606,000 North Caucasian Muslims, a quarter of a million Tatars from the Crimea and several non-Muslim nationalities, no Turkestani nationality was collectively deported from its homeland to other parts of the Soviet Union at the end of the war on the grounds that a number of its men had fought on the German side.[45] This deportation policy and the choice of its targets were likely determined by the real or perceived number of pro-German collaborators as compared to the number of men from those communities who fought in the Soviet army; the sheer manageability of the numbers of people to deport; and by a securisation policy of the USSR's border areas close to Turkey and the Black Sea which included the removal of "historically restive and unreliable peoples" from those areas.[46]

Global War Meets Local Conflicts: Policing the Frontlines

If in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union, the Nazis used a combination of nationalist aspirations, anti-Stalinist sentiments and the sheer misery and desperation among Turkestani and other Soviet Muslim prisoners of war to mobilise Muslim units, the process was somewhat different in theatres like the Balkans and Bosnia in particular. One of the main Muslim collaborationist units there was the Handschar division of the Waffen-SS. Formed in February 1943 and recruited mainly among Slavic Muslims from Bosnia, it was the first fully-fledged non-Germanic SS division. As such, it served as a model for the creation of other Muslim-manned SS units in the latter war years.[47]

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[45] Michael Parrish, *The Lesser Terror: Soviet State Security, 1939-1953*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

[46] Juliette Denis, "De la condamnation à l'explusion: la construction de l'image de collaboration de masse durant la Grande Guerre patriotique" [From condemnation to expulsion: the construction of the image of mass collaboration During the Great Patriotic War], in: Aurélie Campana, Grégory Dufaud and Sophie Tournon, *Les déporations en héritage. Les peuples réprimés du Caucase et de Crimée hier et aujourd'hui* [The legacy of deportation. Repressed peoples from the Caucasus and Crimea yesterday and today] (Rennes: Presse Universitaires de Rennes, 2009), pp. 31-38.

[47] Amandine Rochas, *La Handschar. Histoire d'une division de Waffen-SS bosniaque* [The Handschar: the history of a Bosnian Waffen-SS division] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), p. 168. Other examples of non-Germanic SS-units include the Skanderbeg division which was recruited among Albanians from Albania, Kosovo-Metohija and Macedonia. In late spring 1944, the SS created a second Bosnian unit, the Kama division, though this unit had

One of Handschar's particularities was, that it had its recruitment base among a group whose identity was not so much determined by a language or a broader ethnic culture but by a religious affiliation. It consisted of populations of South Slavic origin and of Serbo-Croat language, but distinctive from the ethnically and linguistically related Serbs and Croats in that they professed Islam and not Orthodox or Catholic Christianity. Many Muslims in Bosnia and the neighboring region of Sanjak descend from Southern Slavs, in part members of dissident Christian churches who were heavily persecuted by Catholic nobility during the Middle Ages, who gradually converted to Islam after the establishment of Ottoman rule in Bosnia and Hercegovina in 1463.[48] After the withdrawal of Ottoman power, the Bosnian Muslims came under the Habsburg empire. Unlike the Turkestani or Tatar nationalists, Bosnia's Muslims had no clear and etnically-territorialy defined nationalist concept.

From April 1941 to May 1945, Bosnia and Hercegovina and the Muslim populations living there were part of the so-called Independent State of Croatia (ISC), one of the Axis vassal states carved out of Yugoslavia after the outbreak of World War II and the defeat of the royal Yugoslav army. The regime of ISC leader Ante Pavelić was of heavily Fascist nature and directly propped-up by German and Italian occupation forces who each controlled a sector of the ISC's territory. The capital Zagreb and the inland including Bosnia and Hercegovina came under German control, while the Dalmatian coast was under Italian control.[49] In 1941, only about half of the ISC's population of 6.3 million were Catholic Croats. Serbs and other Orthodox comprised about one-third and the some 717,000 Bosnian and other Muslims about 11 percent of the population. The ISC state was controlled by Pavelić's extremely brutal Ustaša militia and was supported by ultra-nationalist elements within the Croatian Catholic clergy. The Ustaša led a campaign of extremination, conversion and ethnic cleansing of Serbs and smaller minorities like Gypsies and Jews in which 500,000 to 600,000 people perished.[50]

The position of the Muslims in the ISC as well as the relations between the Muslim leaders and the population and the state were

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less than 3,800 men and was never fully operational. Jonathan Trigg, *Hitler's Jihadis. Muslim Volunteers in the Waffen-SS*, op. cit., pp. 139-156 and 157-174.

[48] For the process of Islamicization of Bosnia and the ethnogenesis of the Bosnian and Sanjak Muslims, see Noël Malcolm, *Bosnia, a Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 51-69; Mitja Velikonja, *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Station, Texas A&M University Press, 2003), pp. 55-90.

[49] For maps of pre-war and wartime Yugoslavia, see Jean Sellier and André Sellier, *Atlas des peuples d'Europe centrale*, *op. cit*., pp. 166-167.

[50] Mitja Velikonja, *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, *op. cit*., pp. 168-175.

ambivalent.[51] In order to boost the percentage of ethnic Croats in the ISC, the regime considered the Muslims as Croats of the Islamic faith rather than as a community in its own right. Bosnian notability and Islamic leaders were divided on how to behave towards the ISC-Ustaša regime. Like many Croats, part of the ISC's Muslim establishment initially welcomed the foundation of the ISC as a "liberation" from Serb hegemony in Yugoslavia, even though by the end of the war popular support for the ISC regime among Croats as well as Bosnian Muslims was marginal. Although the regime and its ideology were clearly influenced by Catholic Croat nationalism, there were no systematic persecutions or attempts to convert the ISC's Muslim population as there were towards Orthodox Serbs and Jews. The ISC's Muslims were also represented in the rubber-stamp parliament (6 percent of the seats), the gendarmerie and the regular armed forces, while 2 of the 20 state ministers in the ISC's government were Muslim.[52]

On the other hand, the growing influence of Catholic extremists and the genocidal behaviour of the Ustaša towards Serbs, Jews and other non-Catholic populations in Bosnia created clear unease and resentment among the Muslim population and several of its leaders, if only because Muslims might be the next in the persecution line.[53] A certain number of Muslims joined the Communist partisans, who set up special Muslim Brigades and promised religious freedom for Islam. Other Bosnian Muslim leaders, however, were aware of the treatment of Islam in the USSR and were not convinced. Reminiscent of the autonomy that Bosnia, Hercegovina and the Muslims had when they were part of the Habsburg empire between 1878 and 1918, they preferred autonomy under German protection.[54] This movement gained ground as Bosnia and Hercegovina were becoming Yugoslavia's main battleground, not only between the Axis and the Allies but especially of an intra-Yugoslav civil war in which the ISC and the Ustaša, Serb royalist Četniks, the Communist partisans and irregular militias fought each other in ever-switching and sometimes very local alliances, often with ad hoc support from one of the Axis or Allied powers. Much of the violence was fueled by grudges dating from the Ottoman period and even medieval times rather than by ideology.

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[51] For more on the position of Bosnia's Muslims in and their relations with the ISC and its regime, see Noël Malcolm, *Bosnia, a Short History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-192; Enver Redžić, *Bosnia and Hercegovina in the Second World War* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), *op. cit.*, pp. 85-87 and 164-196.

[52] Jonathan Trigg, *Hitler's Jihadis. Muslim Volunteers in the Waffen-SS*, *op. cit.*, p. 69; Enver Redžić, *Bosnia and Hercegovina in the Second World War*, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

[53] In late 1941, Muslim leaders in Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka issued several Fatwas (Islamic decrees) against Ustaša atrocities against Serb and Jews.

[54] Amandine Rochas, *La Handschar. Histoire d'une division de Waffen-SS bosniaque*, *op. cit.*, p. 28; Noël Malcolm, *Bosnia, a Short History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-155.

In reaction to the atrocities committed by the Ustaša, Bosnian Serbs and Četniks carried out massacres against Muslim civilians in Bosnia and in the Sanjak. Renegade Ustaša units also attacked Muslim villages. In both cases, the ISC's regular armed forces were not able or willing to interfere or do very much. Estimates on the number of Muslims killed during the war vary from 75,000 to 90,000, or between 11 and 13 percent of the population.[55] Bosnia's Muslims were not only increasingly organising self-defence units and armed vigilantes to protect their villages against attacks from all sides, part of the population and its leadership came to see the Germans as a more "neutral" external force in the conflict.[56]

It was in these circumstances that the Handschar division emerged. On the German side, the need to delegate the policing of Bosnia and Hercegovina to proper indigenous units rather than to rely on the increasingly unpopular and unstable ISC-Ustaša regime became acute in 1942. The formation of an own locally recuited SS division in Bosnia was to serve several vital interests. First, safeguard the production and transportation of bauxite from mines in Bosnia to the Reich's war industries. Second, protect the 600,000 to 700,000 Volksdeutsche or ethnic Germans living in the Banat and Vojvodina, both areas in the north of Yugoslavia. Third, stabilize increasingly anarchic Bosnia and Hercegovina. And fourth, its also had to create the possibility to release German military manpower from Bosnia in order to send them to the Soviet/Eastern Front where losses were particularly high.[57]

Because the Bosnian Handschar was the first Waffen-SS organisation with Muslims, several initiatives were take to "synthesize" National Socialism and Islam. Contrary to the Wehrmacht, the Waffen-SS had no Christian chaplaincy, yet its command did organised Islamic chaplaincy down to batallion level for the Handschar division. In order to boost the morale of the Handschar in Bosnia and, through it, enlist support among the some 300 million Muslims in the wider Islamic world, Berlin enlisted the help of Islamic leaders perceived as ideologically sympathetic - or at least having the same enemies - like the very controversial Grand Mufti

[55] The mortality proportion among Bosnian Serbs was 7.3 percent. Noël Malcolm, *Bosnia, a Short History, op. cit.*, p. 192.

[56] Viktor Meier, *Yugoslavia. A History of its Demise* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 204 and 504. Examples of such Muslim self-defence units were the Zeleni Kadar (green cadres) and the Hadži-Efendićeva Legija [the legion of Major Hadži-Efendić] in Tuzla. Jozo Tomasević, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration*, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

[57] Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1993) pp. 117-118; Jonathan Trigg, *Hitler's Jihadis. Muslim Volunteers in the Waffen-SS*, *op. cit.*, p. 70; Antonio J. Munoz e.a., *The East came West. A Study of East European and Middle Eastern Collaboration with Nazi Germany in World War II, op. cit.*, p. 249.

of Jerusalem Al-Husseini.[58] The Pan-Arab nationalist Al-Husseini firmly opposed Jewish immigration to Palestine during the inter-war period and was also a fervent supporter of the anti-British 1941 coup in Iraq. The Mufti visited the quarters of the Handschar division in Sarajevo and in France, and he and his mainly Iraqi entourage were instrumental in the propaganda efforts and in the selection of the division's imams.[59] This cooperation was not so much a matter of "ideological affinities" or "similarities" between Nazism and Islam, as it was part of an SS experiment to expand support and motivate its foreign volunteers by using their religious and cultural sensitivities as well as frustrated communal aspirations - especially when these volunteers were to be crucial in policing certain strategic areas like Bosnia.

The Handschar division had some 23,000 men at its zenith. Like the Turkestan Legion, its officer cadre was mainly German: only about 10 percent of its 360 officers were Bosnian Muslims, the rest were mostly ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia.[60] The division was sent to France for training but in the fall of 1943, the dissatisfaction among the soldiers for not being able to defend their villages while abroad caused the first substantial mutiny in the Waffen-SS.[61] Back in Bosnia and Hercegovina, the division was deployed in counter-insurgency operations against the partisans. In the fall of 1944, many Handschar soldiers deserted to the partisans or shed their uniforms and returned to their villages. The remnants of the division fought on with several ethnic German units along the lower Danube before surrendering to the Anglo-Americans near Vienna. Many were returned to the new Communist Yugoslav regime and met similar fates as the returnees of the Turkistan Legion did in the USSR. The dynamics that fed the civil war-within-the war in Yugoslavia, however, were all but dead.

Concluding Remarks

Certain opinion makers affiliated to the European and American far-right, extremist Zionists as well as Serb ultra-nationalists, present the existence of Muslim units in the Wehrmacht and the SS and the behaviour and alliances of Mufti Al-Husseini as the ultimate proof that Islam and Muslims have at least a weakness for "Fascism" and eagerly use this page of history to demonize Islam and Muslims. This paper examined the circumstances and the proportions of the wartime

[58] Amandine Rochas, *La Handschar. Histoire d'une division de Waffen-SS bosniaque, op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.
[59] Jozo Tomasević, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration*, *op. cit.*, p. 497.
[60] Enver Redžić, *Bosnia and Hercegovina in the Second World War*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
[61] Jozo Tomasević, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration*, *op. cit.*, p. 500.

collaborationist movements among Muslims and compared these to collaboration among non-Muslim groups in the territories and countries concerned. Collaborationism among Muslims did existed as it did among non-Muslims. Ideologically, their agendas were nationalist much more than religious, and the question also remains to what extent pro-German Islamic leaders like Mufti Al-Husseini spoke and acted for "the Islamic world" in general.

Can this be compared with the present situation? A first question that arises is who or what is supposed to play the role of the Third Reich. To depict contemporary Iran, Gaza under Hamas, or Saddam's Iraq after the Kuwait invasion of 1990, as a "new Third Reich" makes little more than a good tabloid blurb and today's international Salafist Jihadi networks are not a heavily industrialized one-party state with imperial ambitions and a racialist ideology. The various secular nationalisms or pan-nationalisms that motivated certain groups to engage into collaboration with Nazi Germany are much less factors and players today than they used to be. The question is also whether the anti-Semitic shock rethoric in some militant Islamist circles is more rooted in deep resentement and frustration about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rather than in Nazi anti-Semitism or the atavistic anti-Semitism that exists or existed in parts of Christian Europe. Given the nature of the inter-war geopolitical order, it is now obvious that the Muslim and other nationalist circles who engaged with one imperialism and totalitarianism to fight another, could eventually not be anything more than pawns in a war that was not theirs. In today's fledgling mutli-polar world order, parties fighting in others' wars exist more than ever. But the nature of modern proxy warfare is more ad hoc and fluid than the foreign regiments and legions of the Reich used to be.