Stalin in Mecca

*Robert D. Crews analyzes Homo tsariticus islamicus. And a story about Soviet Muslims as consensual imperial subjects*

Although the Russian and Islamic empires were heirs to a common Byzantine heritage, they experienced about a half-millennium of bellicose relations while the Russians expanded steadily into Central Asian lands.

Splendidly, “this book shows how Russia became a Muslim power and how the government made Islam a pillar of imperial society, transforming Muslims into active participants in the daily operation of the autocracy and the local construction and maintenance of the empire.”

Istanbul's German Embassy guided the concerted German-Ottoman jihad effort from 1914 to 1918: the Soviets followed suit and proclaimed their red jihad for "oppressed people against all colonialists"

Thereafter, Bolshevists cast an atheistical shadow over all that mattered to the Muslim faithful. Those infidels managed even to create an Eurasian brand of Islam and a *Homo sovieticus islamicus*.

Bolshevists aspired to world revolution and called Muslims to jihad against the rulers of rival empires, but Hitler turned Muslim prisoners of war around to jihad against their Soviet masters. After the Germans’ defeat, some of those anti-Soviet Muslims from Central Asia settled down in Munich.

With the Cold War in full swing, Western clandestine services recruited among them. Some were dispatched undercover as pilgrims to Mecca after Stalin’s death, so that they could discuss Khruschev and de-Stalinization with pilgrims from Soviet Central Asia—Tatars, Bashkirs, Kazakhs, Turkmenians, Tadjiks, Uzbeks—, and citizens of some other "–stan" lands.

The aim of Western intelligence was to explore Islamic potential for opposition to the Soviet colonization of their lands. But the leader of Soviet pilgrims, imam Mirza G. Salikhov, readily found passages in the Qur’an that could be interpreted in the Kremlin’s favor. The imam drew his salary from Moscow, though in the past he had spent two years in the GULag. He knew of Khruschev’s reforms, but not of his secret anti-Stalin speech.
Spying on Islam: 1956 talk with Imam Salikhov of Soviet pilgrims in Mecca as reported by former Soviet Muslims who were sent from Munich to Mecca. The German Islam policy used spies as pilgrims in Mecca too, and pan-Islamic slogans during World War I. In 1920 the Soviets picked this line up to incite a world revolution and instigate their red jihad against all the foreign overlords. On 13 August 1956 Radio Taschkent broadcasted in Usbekian that the Soviet pilgrims do the Hajj in Mecca. The group, led by Imam Mirza Gumaretdin Salikhov, spent also some days in Cairo to visit the al-Azhar University and sights.

Nevertheless, according to Western intelligence, Salikhov smoothly combined Islamic and communist ways of life; and most of the Muslims in his group (who rejected proffered gifts) also spoke favorably of their life in the U.S.S.R. Only one among them disclosed that, in order to encourage his prompt return, the Soviets had compelled him to leave his family at home.

In Mecca, these Soviet Muslims acted as consensual imperial subjects even when, in Moscow, the anti-Stalin disclosures were being made. The Soviet Muslims in Mecca spoke of “our government” and rejected “counterrevolutionary lies.”

As we know, there are now Muslims in the Russian Federation who would like to return to those “sunny Soviet days” before the onset of “today’s chaos.”

A question worth asking is why the Soviets were so much more skillful in their dealings with Muslims than either their postcommunist successors or their Western rivals have been.

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