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Islam in the Soviet Union after the Second World War*

YAACOV RO'I

By the time of the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War in 1941 there was little left of official religion in the entire Soviet Union. Houses of worship had been closed down and either destroyed or confiscated for other purposes, and the clergy had been subjected to persecution, as a result of which many had opted out of their profession, while those who persisted had mostly been arrested and sent to labour camps. Although for nearly a decade after the 1917 Revolution Islam had been rather favourably treated as compared with other religions, it too began to experience persecution from 1927 and by the end of the 1930s its position was in no way different from that of other faiths. The *vaqf* had been sequestered and the *sharia* courts had been shut down, as had religious schools, both traditional or jadidist, which once existed in very large numbers, and of over 20,000 mosques and an even greater number of clergy a mere handful remained.¹

In the postwar years the situation improved somewhat regarding religion as a whole and Islam in particular. The same basic policy on religion still applied to Islam as to other faiths, but a distinction has to be made between Islam and the other faiths both with regard to the practical implementation of this policy and with regard to its own evolution in the areas with traditionally Muslim populations. Despite the stereotypes in which the Soviet authorities thought and operated, they did differentiate to an extent between Islam and other faiths, if only in order the better to cope with the task of building socialism in the Muslim areas. As to internal developments within the Muslim community, they were inevitably affected by the specifics of the Islamic faith and of the nations concerned.

In 1943, as part of the campaign conducted by the Soviet leadership to encourage its citizenry's identification with the country's general goals and to mobilise it to greater support of the war effort, four Muslim Spiritual Directorates were established.² These directorates were to give legitimacy to a limited and carefully constrained religious activity, they themselves being subjected to constant and close surveillance and control. For the purpose of ensuring that religious activity throughout the country did not exceed the limits laid down by the central authorities in Moscow and did not violate the 1929 Law on Religious Associations, which remained the basis of religious policy, two councils were set up as part of the government establishment: the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1943, and in the following year the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults. The task of the lat-

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ter was to deal with all faiths other than the Russian Orthodox Church which the Soviet regime recognised as legitimate. This council had representatives in every union republic and *oblast'* throughout the country. It is on sources from the archives of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (the CARC) that this paper is based.

All official mosques and clergy were subordinated to the relevant Muslim Board (in Russian, literally 'Spiritual Directorate'), each of which had authority over a carefully defined geographical area, and each of which—presumably in order to highlight the differences between the various Islamic communities—used a different language: the Muslim Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (MBCAK) in Tashkent used Arabic; that of European Russia and Siberia (MBERS) in Ufa used Kazan' Tatar; that of the Northern Caucasus (MBNC) in Buinaksk, Dagestan, used Russian; and that of Transcaucasia in Baku used Azeri. In the second half of the 1940s it was proposed to set up a single umbrella organisation for all the Muslims of the USSR, but although this idea was supported by a number of influential persons it was rejected.³

One of the main tasks of the Muslim Boards was to register all mosques and clergy. Any religious worship or other activity that was not conducted in an officially registered mosque by an officially registered *mullah* or *imam-khatib* was by definition illegal and subject to administrative measures. It took some years – the period varied from place to place – for the Muslim Boards to establish their authority over all officially functioning mosques and to bring home to all concerned, both clergy and worshippers, the fact that being unregistered meant violating the law with all that this entailed. If for the first few years of the postwar period communities sought ways to evade registration, presumably in order to retain greater leeway for their religious practices, believing they could get away with it and continue operating openly, it gradually became clear that refusing to register or failing to obtain permission to register was tantamount to condemning the community to a hide-and-seek existence and probable persecution and retribution. (Again, there were differences from place to place depending largely on local circumstances.)

The CARC's main activity, or at least the activity that takes up most space in its correspondence and in the protocols of its meetings in the first 5 years of its existence, was registering or refusing to register prayer houses. Prayer-houses – in this case mosques – would be divided into two basic categories: those that were still functioning in their original capacity, that is, in buildings recognised by the local authorities as mosques and with religious officials who conducted services and ceremonies; and those former mosques which had been closed down in the 1920s and 1930s which were either empty or in use as educational or cultural institutions or even factories or storehouses, and which the local believers were seeking to have restored to their original function. While buildings in the first category could usually register with relative ease, considerable difficulty was encountered regarding the restoration of former mosques to their original use, and although a number were reopened as prayer houses in the mid-1940s applications concerning buildings which had been confiscated and were currently serving other purposes were inevitably accompanied by a hard struggle and were almost invariably rejected.⁴ Nonetheless, the CARC was of the opinion that in order for it to gain control of what it called 'the religious movement' that had evolved during the war years in the Muslim areas believers should have access to an officially registered mosque that while catering to their basic religious needs would operate under the auspices of the religious establishment.⁵ The Muslim 'religious movement' acquired a momentum of its own and apparently involved a larger measure of violation of the law than was the case with other religions⁶, which had also increased in strength during the war years. The Muslim move-

ment was said to involve the unauthorised opening of prayer-houses, the construction of new mosques, the revival of 'vestiges of the tribal order (*rodovogo stroya*) and of *adat* and sharia rites and customs,' and even in a number of localities the religious teaching of children both in private homes and in 'underground *mektebs*'.⁷

After some three years in which a measure of order was introduced into a situation that was by definition complex and rather amorphous, a few hundred mosques were officially registered. The CARC reports speak of 415 mosques in spring 1949⁸, and this seems to have been a maximum number for the postwar period. From then on their number diminished steadily. Indeed, pretexts for closing prayer-houses for all religions were easily found: by 1952 the number of registered mosques in the entire country was down to 351⁹ and by the end of Khrushchev's antireligious campaign at the beginning of 1965 to 305.¹⁰ Of the 351 mosques open in 1952, 129 were subordinate to MBERS, i.e. were spread throughout the RSFSR (outside the Northern Caucasus). This number included two mosques that still existed in Belorussia and one in Lithuania. One hundred and fifty were in Central Asia and Kazakhstan (and came under the jurisdiction of MBCAK); 50 were in the Northern Caucasus; and 20 were in Transcaucasia (the latter two groups subordinate to the relevant Spiritual Directorates). The number of officially registered clergy throughout the years under discussion was apparently slightly, but not significantly, higher than that of the mosques.¹¹

Some of the bigger and more famous mosques drew very large crowds on the major Muslim festivals, in some cases as many as 20–30,000; others, for a variety of reasons, were poorly attended even on these occasions. Yet, clearly, the small number of officially functioning mosques could not satisfy the needs of the USSR's Muslim population unless it was totally secularised, which it manifestly was not, particularly in the rural areas. (The total population of the Muslim nationalities was nearly 25 million in 1959 and over 35 million in 1970; in Central Asia, at least, some 70 per cent of this population was rural.) There were many large areas without any nearby registered mosque which a Muslim believer could reasonably attend. Consequently the number of unofficial, unregistered communities and ministers of religion was always meaningfully larger than that of the official ones. They often functioned at what Soviet jargon termed 'so-called holy places', mostly sacred tombs. In Andijan *oblast'* in Uzbekistan there were just seven registered mosques, whereas the CARC representative knew of the existence of no fewer than 183 illegal ones.¹² If in early 1964, for instance, there were 395 registered Muslim clergy, the existence of no fewer than 2346 unregistered ministers of religion was known to the representatives of the CARC and reported to the central office in Moscow.¹³ In all probability, the number was far larger. This conclusion rests on two hypotheses: first, that in many places the CARC representatives will have had considerable objective difficulty in finding out the truth regarding prayer-meetings that took place at irregular hours and in out-of-the-way places in order to evade discovery and risk retribution; and, second, that in many instances there was almost certainly a network of local officials, including those on whom the CARC representatives had necessarily to rely, and perhaps even these representatives themselves, who generally belonged to the indigenous titular nationality and whose basic loyalty was to the local population rather than to the authorities in Moscow, and who therefore failed to report illegal activity. There were said to be numerous cases of support for the clergy's illegal activity by local party and soviet organs, sometimes as a result of an unduly 'compromising and liberal' attitude to religion, sometimes because of the actual inclination of officials to attend prayers and observe religious rites and customs.¹⁴ This was

a serious problem for effective control by the authorities of the Muslim areas, particularly in the countryside, where the population was basically homogeneous and composed mostly of families and clans which had traditionally lived in these very same parts; it is also a basic problem for conducting definitive research, even when one has access to Soviet government archival material. In order to indicate that this is not a mere suspicion, it is relevant to note the distribution of the illegal communities whose existence was known to the authorities: while 496 were reported in the Tatar ASSR and 295 in Kirgizia in the mid-1960s, just two were said to be operating in the entire Dagestan ASSR and none at all in the Chechen–Ingush ASSR.¹⁵ This despite the fact that these two autonomous republics were generally thought to be the most religious of all the Muslim parts of the country.¹⁶ There seems to be no explanation except lacunae in official reporting.

The CARC itself was well aware of the fact that the policy of severely restricting the opening and registering of mosques exposed the Muslim population to the more pernicious influence of 'wandering mullahs' and other unofficial religious figures. From time to time therefore it sought to convince the authorities that they should be more liberal in this respect, usually with scant success.¹⁷ While the authorities were a little more lenient towards Islam than towards, for example, Judaism or Roman Catholicism,¹⁸ the basic position of the decision-making bodies as regards Islam too was generally negative. Specifically, they perceived Islam as being a religion that was not indigenous to the Soviet Union, but which had been imported to the areas currently under Soviet control from outside and still bore strains of Arab culture, custom and tradition.¹⁹ In addition, it had absorbed rites, mostly shamanistic, that had been associated with the way of life of the local population before converting to Islam, shamanism having been the dominant cult in most areas that later adopted Islam. These two features of Soviet Islam were emphasised recurrently in Soviet atheistic propaganda, both being considered as conducive to persuading believers to reconsider their adherence to a religion which either was not an inherent part of their original, national heritage or was not what it purported to be.²⁰ Islam was also a survival of the feudal past, of an exploiter society; Soviet writers pointed out that the slave-like status of women in Islam was proof of this thesis. Many superstitions, it was claimed, had penetrated Islam from both pre-Muslim Arab tradition and shamanism; like the superstitions that the Soviets claimed were generally inherent in religion, they had become irrelevant in a modern, scientific, technological age and even caused direct harm to the population, which tended, for example, to prefer faith-healers to qualified doctors.

Islam in the Soviet Union was predominantly Sunni, except in Azerbaijan, where it was over 60 per cent Shiite and where the Muslim Board was headed by a Shiite *sheikh ul-Islam*. In some places, however, a variety of sects operated which caused the authorities some concern, because of either suspected political pretensions or purported fanaticism, for instance, the Ismailis in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous *Oblast'*, or Bahais and Sufis, the latter particularly among the Chechen and Ingush. A 1947 report on Muslim activity in Turkmenistan addressed itself to the 'theatrical blood ceremony' with which Shiite sects celebrated the month of Muharram. Although to all appearances religion was more liable to control here than in other Central Asian republics, Turkmenistan bordered on Iran and Afghanistan and religious influence could penetrate from there. The republic's 365 'wandering mullahs' were called 'pedlars of pan-Turkism and pan-Islam'. Forty-five cases of self-immolation by women were also reported in that year in Turkmenistan.²¹

A report on the vestiges of religion in Kazakhstan in 1949 gives the impression of

extremely lively—and from the Soviet point of view pernicious—activity. Almost everyone, including party members, circumcised their sons. Friday and festival prayers were conducted everywhere and attracted large crowds, including young people and children, and even women, whom the clergy allowed to attend ‘in order to retain their influence among the population’. Where there was no mosque, prayers would be conducted in courtyards, fields and cemeteries. On major festivals people did not go to work either in towns or in the country. Violations of the law were frequent in all that concerned marriage: polygamy, the *kalym* (payment or receipt of a dowry), marriage of adolescents, the marriage of widows to the deceased’s brother, and so on. Moreover, these malpractices were becoming more rather than less frequent and the local authorities either justified or concealed them. In the event that lawbreakers were brought to trial, sentences would be minimal.²²

It can indeed be said that throughout the Muslim areas rites and customs connected, at least in the popular mind, with Islam determined relationships within society and provided the main fulcrum around which social life revolved. The basic social unit in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan continued to be the *mahalla* (the village or urban neighbourhood) at the head of which stood a council of *aksakal* (elders),²³ and in the Northern Caucasus it was the *jamaat* (the local variant of the mahalla), the clan or the *wird*. It was this inseparable link between Islam and the way of life of the Muslim population which made the task of controlling Islam so difficult for the authorities, insofar as it clearly exceeded the bounds of formal religious activity that could be pinpointed and restrained with relative ease. The everyday existence of the Muslim population, which by definition included practices that were carried out unobtrusively on a day-to-day basis, defied harassment.

Finally, Islam was believed to be potentially dangerous politically: were it allowed to flourish, it might provide the basis for bringing together and consolidating the USSR’s various Muslim populations or even creating a link between them and the Muslim world outside; in other words, the old bogey of pan-Islam, which had seemed such a threat to the new Bolshevik regime in its early years, continued to haunt the Kremlin. The corollary of this apprehension was the perception that began to prevail as of the 1960s, that Islam was a stimulus to the various Muslim nationalisms, each of the Soviet Muslim nations identifying it with its own particularistic national customs and traditions.²⁴

The CARC sought to follow and report not only the existence and activity of mosques and religious communities, but also the extent of religiosity. This became a standard component of its activity as of the mid-1960s,²⁵ but was present even in the 1940s. One important element was the observation of the popularity of life-cycle rituals which were widely held to be Islamic in their essence, although the experts in atheistic propaganda sought to prove that this was not so. The CARC instructed its representatives throughout the length and breadth of the USSR to gather information regarding the extent of the practice of circumcision and of religious marriages and funerals. This was no simple task, for often these ceremonies would not be conducted in the mosque or even by an official minister of religion, which meant that they need not be registered. Ceremonies performed in private homes, let alone those conducted at illegal religious meetings, were obviously not recorded and could not be included in any statistic. The CARC itself was well aware that its information on this score was incomplete; indeed, to the outsider, it seems to be so partial as to be almost valueless.

One of the dilemmas of the authorities regarding Islam was where to place the emphasis in their antireligious activity. The natural butt of the large host of atheistic propagandists was the religious establishment, whose influence they sought to curb by

taking advantage of its preferential position within Soviet society²⁶. If attention was devoted to the few hundred officially functioning clergy and prayer-houses, however, the much more widespread and far more unwelcome activity of the unregistered clergy would go unscathed. Paradoxically, a campaign against the registered, institutionalised religious frameworks served simply to encourage adherence to unofficial ones. On the other hand, an assault upon the latter gave the impression that as long as one limited one's religious activity to the confines of a community that was recognised by the authorities there was no danger of being considered an offender and exposing oneself to punishment. It was well-nigh impossible to maintain both fronts simultaneously since the brunt of the offensive was fundamentally different. It is not inconceivable that Islam in the Soviet Union benefited from the oscillation of party and government regarding where to place the emphasis of its anti-Islamic offensive.

Our picture cannot be complete without reference to the differentiation the Soviet authorities made between Islam at home, within the USSR, and Islam abroad, a distinction that also involved problems. From very early on it was decided to make use of the services of the Muslim Boards to counter the image of Soviet persecution of religion as a whole and of Islam in particular. Lenin had already discriminated between Islam and other religions (in favour of the former), not only in order to mobilise the Muslim population of the Russian Empire to the cause of Bolshevism, but also to carry its message to the colonial world, which he saw as a potential ally in the struggle against the great imperial powers of the West. Within but a short time of the establishment of the four Muslim Boards in 1944 their leading officials were visiting Islamic countries abroad, receiving foreign Islamic leaders and functionaries and sending written materials and broadcasting to the Muslim world outside.²⁷ A few carefully selected Muslims were allowed to perform the *haj* every year.²⁸ With the creation of the World Peace Movement and the use that was made of religious figures of the different denominations to propagate the Soviet message and denounce western aggression, the development of unconventional weaponry and the like, Muslim officials became a regular part of this campaign. Finally, the theoreticians who served the ideological apparatus of the CPSU developed an elaborate explanation of how Islam, which could play only a negative and subversive role within a socialist society, might have a constructive capacity in a body politic that stood at a lower level of political awareness and social development.²⁹ Attributing to Islam a positive role, albeit in circumstances other than those that pertained in the Soviet Union itself, entailed giving at least indirect encouragement to that religion's adherents in the domestic arena as well, a circumstance of which they naturally sought to take advantage.

Islam enjoyed a special position among religions in the Soviet Union. Apart from the Russian Orthodox Church, which had a long tradition of association with authority and which during the Second World War was brought back into the orbit of state activity, Islam was almost certainly the most favoured of all faiths. This did not, of course, mean that it was to be allowed to regain anything approaching its earlier position in the country's Muslim regions, but that, provided it adhered to the rules laid down by an openly atheistic regime, it would be permitted to survive in a truncated, basically secularised form. At the same time, irrespective of the intentions of the party and state, the Muslim population, especially in the countryside, seemed to recuperate from the weight of the blows it had endured in the decade and a half that preceded the war, and found often devious ways to retain some of the basics of the faith and to continue to identify itself as Muslim. This flexibility, this readiness to accept even a heavily watered-down Islam as its major frame of reference in a society, or

social experiment, to which it was generally alien and with whose goals it did not and perhaps could not on the whole associate, kept Islamic tradition and practice alive, so that as the constraints imposed by Moscow gradually lessened it could emerge once more as a major force in most of the USSR's traditionally Muslim areas.

Notes and references

- ¹ According to Alexandre Bennigsen, 'Muslim conservative opposition to the Soviet regime: The Sufi brotherhoods in the North Caucasus' in Jeremy Azrael (ed), *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices* (Praeger, New York, 1979), p. 335, there were some 25,000 mosques prior to 1917. The Soviet sources give the number 21,873 — RTsKhIDNI (Rossiiskiy tsentr khraneniya i izucheniya dokumentov noveishei istorii), f.17, o.125, d.506, l.129; but also 17,037 — GARF (Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii) f. 6991 o.4 d.196 l.1 (1 Jan 1961).
- ² Before the Revolution there had been a number of Muslim Spiritual Directorates or muftiates, established by the tsarist authorities as they established their control over Islamic populations. These had been undermined and then closed down by the Soviet government in the prewar period, except for the central directorate in Ufa.
- ³ See, for example, I. V. Polyansky to G. F. Aleksandrov, 1 July 1947. RTsKhIDNI, f.17, o.125, d.506, l.126; also a CARC official in Moscow to the CARC plenipotentiary in Uzbekistan I. Ibadov, 30 January 1946, Uzbekistan State Archive (UzSA), f.2456, o.1, d.90, l.5. All four Muslim Boards appear to have approved having one central body.
- ⁴ In Saratov, for example, where there were 1500 Tatar families — in addition to 600 further families in nearby Engel's, which also had no mosque—Muslim believers applied for one of the town's two mosques, which was being used as a kindergarten. Although the building was totally unfitted for that purpose, being very large and poorly heated in the winter, the municipal authorities turned down no fewer than nine applications presented to them in the two years 1944–46. A CARC session that discussed the situation finally decided to ask the Soviet government to intervene in order to overcome the obstinacy of the Saratov city soviet and executive committee. *Protokol no. 12*, 19–20 November 1946, GARF, f.6991, o.4, d.15, pp. 106–9.
- ⁵ *Protokol no. 13*, July 10–11, 1947, GARF, f.6991, o.4, d.19, pp. 441–43.
- ⁶ Goncharok to Malenkov, 8 September 1949, RTsKhIDNI, f.17, o.132, d.238, l.76.
- ⁷ CARC *protokol no. 11*, 18 June 1947, GARF, f. 6991, o.4, d.19, l.371.
- ⁸ Polyansky's report on the CARC's activities for 1948 and the first quarter of 1949, undated, RTsKhIDNI, f.17, o.132, d. 111, l.49.
- ⁹ L. Prikhod'ko, *Perechen' (Inventory)*, 5 May 1952, GARF, f. 6991, o.4, d. 23 l.60–63.
- ¹⁰ One year previously, on 12 January 1964, the number was 312: *Statisticheskyy otchet*, f. 6991, o.4, d.430, l.1.
- ¹¹ The numbers were 457 in spring 1948 and 395 in January 1965: f. 6991, o.4, d.429, l.1.
- ¹² Uzkov and Vrachev—two CARC officials—to Polyansky, 29 November 1946, RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, o.125, d.405, l.93.
- ¹³ GARF, f. 6991, o.4, d.436, l.1.
- ¹⁴ Goncharok to Malenkov, see note 6.
- ¹⁵ GARF, f. 6991, o.4, d.429, l.1 d.431, 11.21,97, d.436, 11.177–78.
- ¹⁶ See, for example, Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire* (C. Hurst, London, 1986), p. 183. Michael Rywkin found mention in the Grozny party paper of 'what the Russians call *krugovaya poruka* (a Sicilian-like law of silence) which makes it very difficult for Soviet security agents to penetrate Sufi brotherhoods': M. Rywkin, 'The Communist Party and the sufi *tariqat* in the Checheno–Ingush Republic', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 10, no. 1–2, 1991, p. 136. Perhaps it was in order to ensure their immunity in face of the ubiquitous prying of Soviet officials that the master, the *murshid*, *sheikh* or *ustath* of the *wird*, the basic unit of the *tariqa*, would seek to find his pupils (*murid*) from members of his own clan or locality. I have addressed myself briefly to this

question in my article 'The secularization of Islam and the Soviet Muslim areas' in Y. Ro'i (ed.), *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies* (Frank Cass, London, 1995), p. 13. This view of the religiosity of these two autonomous republics relates, of course, to the period after the return of the Chechen and Ingush from their places of exile in Central Asia, to which they had been deported in 1944, following the legislation of 1957 that recreated their autonomous republic and provided for their repatriation over a period of 4 years. See Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union* (Westview, Boulder, Co., 1991), pp. 241–45.

¹⁷ See, for example, Polyansky to Aleksandrov, 1 July 1947, RTsKhIDNI, f.17, o.125, d. 506, 11.126–27.

¹⁸ Thus, for instance, in summer 1947 the RCP (b) Central Committee issued instructions to the effect that whereas prayer-houses for these two religions were henceforth to be registered only in extraordinary circumstances, Muslim or Buddhist ones might be opened in places where it was considered expedient. Draft *Direktivny Sovetu po delam religioznykh kul'tov pri Sovete Ministrov Soyuzo SSSR po yego rabote na 1947 god* (*Directives to the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults regarding its work for the year 1947*), appendix no. 1 to *Postanovleniye ... o direktivakh po rabote Soveta po delam religioznykh kul'tov pri Sovete Ministrov Soyuzo SSR na 1947 god* (*USSR Council of Ministers Resolution no. ...*), July 1947, RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, o.125, d.506, p. 183.

¹⁹ See, for example, *Osnovy nauchnogo ateizma* (Gospolitizdat, Moscow, 1961), ch.10.

²⁰ There is, of course, a contradiction between the two themes, for Islam could not be claimed at one and the same time to be a foreign import from the Arabian Peninsula and therefore not intrinsic to local custom and also shamanistic, i.e. a very old local heritage, but this does not seem to have worried the atheistic propagandists unduly. It was not, after all, the only contradiction in Soviet atheistic propaganda. (See the articles by Mélikoff and Akiner elsewhere in this issue of *RSS* which give a different perspective on this same question – Ed.)

²¹ *CARC protokol no. 13*, 10 July 1947, GARF, f. 6991, o.4, d. 19, 11.426, 432, 436–37, 439.

²² Goncharok to Malenkov, 8 September 1949; RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, o.132, d.238, pp.76–78.

²³ The *aksakal* traditionally bore responsibility for the conduct of the members of his extended family.

²⁴ Interestingly, this apprehension does not seem to have been present in the late Stalin period, 1948–53, when the regime was vigorously condemning the 'bourgeois nationalism' of its various national groups and was already attacking Judaism, for instance, for its nationalist tendencies. See my article 'The Jewish religion after World War II', in Y. Ro'i (ed.), *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Frank Cass, London, 1994), pp. 263–89.

²⁵ In this period sociology became a recognised science in the Soviet Union and, as everywhere else, it involved study through surveys of population and attitude.

²⁶ Successive Soviet constitutions, while officially recognising the performance of religious ceremonies as a fundamental right of the Soviet citizen, forbade all religious teaching while condoning atheistic, antireligious propaganda. Article 124 of the 1936 Stalin Constitution read: 'In order to ensure its citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the USSR is separated from the state, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda is recognised for all citizens'. Quoted in David Lane, *Politics and Society in the USSR*, 2nd edition (Martin Robertson, London, 1978), p. 549. Article 52 of the 1977 Brezhnev Constitution stated: 'Citizens of the USSR are guaranteed freedom of conscience, that is, the right to profess or not to profess any religion, and to conduct religious worship or atheistic propaganda. Incitement of hostility or hatred on religious grounds is prohibited'. *ibid.*, p. 564.

²⁷ See, for example, Polyansky to Molotov, 21 November 1945, f.6991, o.3, d.10, p.154.

²⁸ See, for example, I. Ibadov to Polyansky, 17 March 1945, f. 6991, o.3, d.20, pp. 82–86.

²⁹ I addressed this issue briefly in my article 'The impact of the Islamic fundamentalist revival of the late 1970s on the Soviet view of Islam' in Y. Ro'i (ed.), *The USSR and the Muslim World* (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1984).