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RUSSIA'S HOMEGROWN INSURGENCY: JIHAD IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Stephen J. Blank
Editor

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CHAPTER 3

THE "AFGHANIZATION" OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS: CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS OF A CHANGING CONFLICT

Svante E. Cornell

The situation in the North Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya, frequently made headlines in the 1990s and early 2000s. In fact, it was a key issue in affecting Western views of Russia, a particular mobilizing factor for the democracy and human rights agenda as Russia was concerned. This changed, however, with President Vladimir Putin's successful curtailing of media freedoms in Russia, and the gradual decline of violence in Chechnya, with violence sinking to a low point in 2006. For the past 5 years, the North Caucasus has hardly had an effect on relations between the West and Russia; in fact, both the media and policy communities in the West have largely ignored the region. That has nevertheless begun to change in the recent past, for two main reasons: First, there has been a clear upsurge in violence in and related to the North Caucasus since 2007, with the completion of the process of transformation of a Chechen nationalist rebellion to a region-wide Islamist insurgency. It has become clear that far from pacifying the region, Moscow is failing to exert sovereignty there. Second, the International Olympic Committee's decision to hold the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi on the Russian Black Sea coast adjacent to the North Caucasus has made the North Caucasus a magnet for attention. This chapter seeks to assess the current situation in the North Caucasus, the reasons behind the evolution of the past decade, and its implications for Russia, the region, and the West.

THE NORTH CAUCASUS TODAY

The republics of the North Caucasus are presently characterized by a combination of factors that the present author has likened to "Afghanization." The term evokes the development of Afghanistan in the mid-1990s: a combination of war, human suffering, poverty, organized crime, and externally sponsored Islamic radicalism combined to generate an explosive situation, which the authorities are increasingly unable to respond to—and which, failing to understand the web of problems correctly and suffering from the constraints of their own system, they end up exacerbating.

Demographically and economically, the North Caucasus is in a deep malaise. Unemployment rates are sky-high, averaging 50 percent by some estimates, with 80 percent rates of youth unemployment being common in many areas of the region.[1] Between 60 and 90 percent of the budgets of the republics consist of direct subsidies from Moscow, suggesting the weakness of economic activity and of government ability to raise revenues. In fact, subsidies to the North Caucasus have begun to generate a backlash in Russia itself, with growing popular movements wanting to stop the government from "feeding the Caucasus."[2] A leaked Russian government report in 2006 cited that the shadow economy constituted an estimated 44 percent of Dagestan's economy, as opposed to 17 percent in Russia as a whole; 50 to 70 percent of Dagestanis with some form of employment were thought to work in the shadow economy.[3] These figures are unlikely to have improved since then. Ethnic Russians have largely left the region, removing some of the most-skilled

labor force. In Chechnya, where 200,000 Russians once lived, they now number in the hundreds. In Ingushetia, the number of Russians declined by a factor of over six. In other republics, the decline between the censuses of 1989 and 2002 are not as dramatic but nevertheless stark: The percentage of Russians fell from 42 percent to 33 percent in Karachaevo-Cherkessiya; from 30 to 23 percent in North Ossetia; and from 10 to 5 percent in Dagestan. The exodus of Russians has only continued since then, although census figures are not available.[4] Meanwhile, the educational system has largely collapsed while there is a rapid population increase due to historically high birth rates.

Since 2004, with the strengthening of the "vertical of power" in Russia, the republics are ruled increasingly by elites whose main feature is loyalty (of an often personal nature) to the leadership in Moscow rather than, as had been the case, with roots in the local politics of the region. This has been a source of additional friction between Moscow and the populations of the North Caucasus. Not only are these populations no longer able to elect their leaders even on paper, but their leaders are responsive mainly to the demands of the distant capital rather than their own needs. While the most well-known example is Chechnya, where Moscow supported the elevation of the Kadyrov clan to lead the republic, the most egregious case is Ingushetia. There, a highly respected but independent-minded leader, General Ruslan Aushev, managed to keep the republic stable and peaceful during the first Chechen war and its chaotic aftermath. Deemed too independent, he was replaced in 2002 by a Federal Security Service (FSB) officer of Ingush descent but with little connection to the region, Murad Zyazikov. Zyazikov's subsequent mismanagement, insensitivity

to local power-brokers, and repression alienated considerable parts of the population and led numerous young Ingush to join the armed resistance. Kabardino-Balkaria (KBR), Putin similarly appointed a Moscow-based businessman with roots in the republic, Arsen Kanokov, to the presidency in 2005, with the explicit purpose of appointing a person without links to the "clan politics" of the republic. However, Kanokov's lack of a popular base in KBR led the situation to deteriorate further.[5]

The North Caucasus is no longer the scene of large-scale warfare concentrated in Chechnya, as was the case in 1994-96 and 1999-2002. Instead, the resistance has morphed into a low-to-medium level insurgency that spans the entire region. Chechnya is among the calmer areas of the region, with the epicenter of the resistance having moved first to Ingushetia, then to Dagestan, with spikes of violence in KBR and the other republics as well. The conflict pits Moscow and its local allies, such as the Kadyrov clan, against loosely coordinated multiethnic groups of insurgents that largely remain led by ethnic Chechens. This insurgency no longer sees itself as a nationalist movement, but as part of the global jihadi movement. As such, it seeks the establishment of a region-wide Islamic state, dubbed the "Caucasus Emirate." Inspired by the global jihadi movement, the insurgency targets not only Russian forces but also civilian authorities across the region, as well as engaging in terrorist attacks on civilians, including in Russia proper. Thus, Chechnya has come to resemble Kashmir: a formerly nationalist and separatist insurgency morphed into a jihadi movement with whom central authorities can no longer, realistically, expect to reach a political compromise.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The present condition of the conflict in the North Caucasus is a fairly recent development, having undergone deep transformations in the past decade. An overview of the history of the conflict makes this clear. Indeed, it suggests that in 1989, ethnicity was increasingly politicized across the former Soviet Union. The ethno-nationalist uprisings and movements of 1989-94 clearly provide corroboration for that assessment. By contrast, religion was not politicized, and would not be for another decade. Among North Caucasus ethnic groups, only the Chechens had both the incentives and the capacity to sustain an insurgency against the Russian state, while a religious revival gradually got under way, centered on Dagestan. It was the first war in Chechnya in 1994-96 that attracted militant Islamist groups to the North Caucasus, whose ideology came to spread across the region, fanning out from Chechnya and Dagestan to span the North Caucasus.

The Salience of the Deportations.

The resistance of Chechens as well as other North Caucasian peoples to Russian rule in the 19th century is legendary. It is instructive to note that Russia had annexed Georgia by 1801, and acquired control over Armenia and Azerbaijan gradually in 1812-13 and 1827-28. By contrast, the areas north of the mountains were not subjugated until 1859-64. It took Russia 30 years after gaining control over the South Caucasus to pacify the North. Chechens, Dagestanis, and the Circassian peoples to the west fought an unequal battle until the 1860s to escape Russian rule.[6] Under

the legendary Dagestani chieftain, Shamil, the areas that today form southern Chechnya and inner Dagestan formed a shrinking independent Islamic state, an Imamate, from 1824 until the Russian capture of Shamil in 1859.[7] The Circassian rebels were not defeated until the mass expulsion of Circassians to the Ottoman Empire in 1864.

Even following the incorporation of the North Caucasus into the Russian empire, the northeastern regions were only partially pacified, but never appeared to become integrated with Russia in ways that other minority-dominated areas, such as in the Volga region, did. The physical expulsion of the majority of the Circassian population helped Russia manage the northwestern Caucasus; but Chechnya and Dagestan remained unruly. Whenever Russia was at war or otherwise weakened, these lands saw rebellions of varying length and strength. This occurred after World War I during the Russian civil war 1918-21, and, though in a much smaller scale, during the collectivization of the 1930s and World War II. In 1944, this obstinate refusal to submit had tragic consequences. Falsely claiming that Chechens, Ingush, Karachai, and Balkars had collaborated with the invading German forces, Joseph Stalin in February 1944 ordered the wholesale deportation of these peoples to Central Asia. Entire populations were loaded on cattle wagons and transported in the middle of winter to the steppes of Central Asia, where little preparation had been made for their arrival. An estimated quarter of the deportees died during transport or shortly after arrival due to cold, hunger, or epidemics.[8]

The largest number of the deported peoples of the North Caucasus was the Chechens. However, until deportation, Chechens primarily identified with their

Teip or clan, not as members of a Chechen nation. More than anything, deportation helped develop national consciousness among the Chechens. The demographic consequences of deportation and the 13-year exile of the Chechens until they were allowed to return in 1957 are very tangible. Between 1926-37, the Chechen population increased by 36 percent; in another 11-year period, between 1959 and 1970, the figure was 46 percent. But during the 20-year period from 1939-59, the rate of increase was only 2.5 percent, although the population would almost have doubled under normal circumstances.[9] Thus, it is difficult to overstate the importance of the deportations in the collective memory of the punished peoples. With regard to the Chechens, it had important political consequences that did not immediately materialize among the much smaller Ingush, Karachai, and Balkar populations. Most leaders of the Chechen movement for independence in the 1990s were either born or grew up in exile in Kazakhstan. The deportation convinced many Chechens that there was no way for them to live securely under Russian rule; it also explains the extent of support for separation from Russia among the people and perhaps the readiness among portions of the population to embrace radical ideologies of resistance.

After the August coup in Moscow against Mikhail Gorbachev that spelled the end of the Soviet Union, most constituent republics declared their independence. So did two autonomous republics within the Russian Federation: Chechnya and Tatarstan. Tatarstan, encircled by Russia proper, began negotiations on mutual relations with Moscow that eventually led to a deal in 1994 that granted Tatarstan broad autonomy. In Chechnya, however, the nationalist movement in power was less compromising. Gen-

eral Jokhar Dudayev, who had seized power from the former communist leadership in September 1991, was elected President of Chechnya and declared its independence soon after. Chechnya, in this context, stood out by being the only autonomous republic in Russia where a nationalist movement took power and ousted the communist party leadership. In this sense, it resembled the developments in Georgia and Armenia more than that of the Central Asian republics or Russia's other autonomous republics: The leadership consisted of true nationalists, not former Communist elites that cloaked a nationalist mantle.

While Russian President Boris Yeltsin made an abortive attempt to rein in Dudayev by sending special forces to Chechnya to restore Moscow's rule, Dudayev had managed to create a presidential guard that was enough of a deterrent to avoid Russian military action. At this point, Russia was itself in a chaotic situation. Yeltsin was preoccupied with building Russian statehood, and Chechnya was put on the back burner. However, by 1994, Yeltsin had consolidated his power after physically attacking his parliamentary opposition in October 1993—an action that indebted him to the military and security forces. Chechnya hence remained as a thorn in the eye of a rising Russia. Moreover, Chechnya's de facto independence and the heavily anti-Russian rhetoric emanating from Dudayev was foiling Russian plans of asserting control over the South Caucasus states of Azerbaijan and Georgia, in particular controlling the westward export of Caspian oil resources. Thus, for both internal and external reasons, the Russian government was now prompted to "solve" the Chechnya problem. Serious negotiations between Moscow and Grozny were never attempted, mainly because of the personal enmity between Du-

dayev and Yeltsin.[10] After seeking briefly to use subversion to overthrow Dudayev without success, the Russian government decided to launch a wholesale invasion of Chechnya in late 1994.[11]

Importantly, the Chechen movement for independence was an almost entirely secular affair.[12] Its chief leaders, such as Jokhar Dudayev and Aslan Maskhadov, were former Soviet officers with highly secular lifestyles. This is not to say that Islamist elements were not present: They did develop among the Chechen leadership, mainly through the efforts of Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev and Movladi Udugov, high officials in Dudayev's administration. However, they remained largely marginal, being able to assert themselves only tepidly during the internal crisis that Dudayev experienced in 1993, in which he briefly began using increasingly religious language in an attempt to shore up legitimacy when faced with growing criticism of his mismanagement of Chechnya's economy. Moreover, there is significant evidence suggesting that Yandarbiyev and Uduguov embraced Islamism in a mainly instrumental way.[13]

The First War.

Contrary to Moscow's expectations, the Russian threat rallied erstwhile skeptics around Dudayev once the war started. Aided by the dismal character of the Russian military campaign, the Chechen forces were able to resist the Russian invasion. Getting bogged down in Chechnya, the Russian military resorted to brutal tactics to subdue an opponent they had thoroughly underestimated, and used air bombing and artillery to level Grozny before entering it. Only after 2 months did the Russian army manage to estab-

lish control over the city—at the cost of thousands of Russian casualties, over 20,000 killed civilians, a total destruction of the city, and hundreds of thousands of refugees. The war continued, with the Chechen forces regrouping in the south of Chechnya. Meanwhile, Dudayev himself was killed by Russian forces in April 1996. Despite this setback, the Chechen forces in August 1996 managed to stage a counteroffensive, and retake the three major cities of Chechnya, including Grozny, in 3 days of fighting. This amounted to a total humiliation of the Russian forces, and the government was forced to end the war and pull out all its forces by a cease-fire signed 3 weeks later.

The war led to the total devastation of Grozny and many other Chechen towns and villages. According to the most credible estimates, the death toll in the first war was in the range of 50,000 people.[14] Compared with the war in Afghanistan, the Chechen war was far more lethal for the Russian army. During 1984, the worst year in Afghanistan, almost 2,500 Soviet soldiers were killed. In Chechnya, Russian losses surpassed this number within 4 months of the intervention. At its highest, the shelling of Grozny, counted by the number of explosions per day, surpassed the shelling of Sarajevo in the early 1990s by a factor of at least 50. Grozny was literally leveled to the ground in a destruction that recalled the battle of Stalingrad.

Moreover, the war was dominated by massive human rights violations, which are considered the worst in Europe since World War II. Russian forces engaged in several well-documented massacres of civilians, the most well-known of which occurred in the village of Samashki in April 1995. As noted above, the first war in Chechnya was waged almost exclusively in the name of national independence. But it is in the context

of the brutality of the Russian onslaught that the first jihadi elements appeared in Chechnya. Indeed, it is also the context in which the Chechen leadership and fighters welcomed or tolerated these foreign recruits; there is ample evidence that there was little love lost between the Chechen leadership and the jihadis—but the Chechens needed all the help that they could get, and were hardly in a position to turn away these new-found allies, all the more since they were exceptionally effective in combat.

Similarly, this is the context in which terrorist tactics enter the Chechen war. Practiced from the outset by the Russian detachments, some of the Chechens commanders gradually came to employ them. Here, the notorious Shamil Basayev deserves particular mention, whose hostage-taking raid on a hospital in the southern Russian town of Budyonnovsk in June 1995 was the first large-scale use of terrorism by the Chechens. It occurred at a time when the Chechen cause seemed all but lost, and arguably contributed to turning the tide in the war, or at least in forestalling defeat. Basayev himself was in one sense an unlikely terrorist: Only 3 years earlier, he had deployed as a volunteer to fight the Georgians in Abkhazia, being among the North Caucasian volunteers that received training and assistance for the purpose from the Russian military intelligence services.[15]

The number of foreign fighters in the first war was small, perhaps a few hundred at most. These were mainly the roving "Arab Afghans" who had fought in Kashmir, Tajikistan, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was the big focus of jihadi attention in the early 1990s. Tellingly, the person who actually declared a jihad on Russia was none other than Akhmad Kadyrov, then mufti of Chechnya, who would switch sides in 1999,

and became Russia's local satrap, a position his son, Ramzan, inherited upon his assassination in May 2004.

The Inter-War Period.

The August 1996 accords, complemented by a formal peace treaty in May 1997, granted Chechnya de facto independence, though the issue of Chechnya's status was deferred until December 31, 2001. In practice, Chechnya had the opportunity to build what in practice amounted to an independent state. Russian law did not apply in Chechnya, and no Russian police, army, customs, or postal service operated there.

However, for both internal and external reasons, this second attempt at independence in a decade ended in a dismal failure. Russia consistently prevented Chechnya from seeking outside financial help, and though it committed funds to the reconstruction of the war-ravaged republic, $100 million disappeared before they even reached Chechnya. In a celebrated statement, President Yeltsin publicly admitted "only the devil" knew where the money had gone.[16] Hence the basis on which the Chechen government could create a functioning state was shaky indeed.

Yet initial signals were positive. In a presidential election that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) termed largely free and fair, the population of Chechnya overwhelmingly voted for Aslan Maskhadov, Chief of Staff of the Chechen armed forces and the most moderate among the three presidential contenders. Thus, Chechnya acquired a legitimate government that was open to compromise and cooperation, although it never wavered from its commitment to an independent Chechnya. Sadly, this initial stability did not last. Chechnya was awash

with young, unemployed war veterans with arsenals of weapons, whose loyalty was to individual field commanders rather than to the central Chechen government. With the economic depression deepening, Maskhadov's authority over Chechnya gradually diminished, and the government became unable to uphold law and order. Various criminal groups emerged that engaged in smuggling and kidnapping, and the government showed its inability to effectively deal with this problem. Most alarmingly, warlords Shamil Basayev and the Jordanian-born Khattab began planning for the unification of Chechnya with the neighboring republic of Dagestan, still part of the Russian Federation. Maskhadov was either unwilling or unable to rein in these warlords, fearing an intra-Chechen war. As a result, Basayev and Khattab were able to recruit hundreds of Dagestanis and other North Caucasians, including Chechens, into what they termed an Islamic Brigade based in Southeastern Chechnya. This brigade would eventually launch the incursion into Dagestan in August 1999, which precipitated the second war.

It is instructive, at this point, to compare Chechnya to the major other armed conflict in Europe of the time: Bosnia-Herzegovina. In fact, Chechnya was similar to Bosnia in terms of the level and character of the jihadi presence; where it differed was in the absence of a Dayton-type internationalized conflict management mechanism.

Indeed, most jihadis that came to fight in Chechnya were veterans of the Bosnian campaign. This was true for the poster child of Chechen jihadis, the Saudi-born Amir al-Khattab. What is seldom recalled is the extent of the Islamist contagion in Bosnia at the time of the Dayton Accords. Indeed, the leadership of the

Bosnian Muslims in many ways leaned more toward Islamism than that of the Chechens: Alija Izetbegovic, the Bosnian Muslim leader, had a long history of Islamist inclinations dating back to his involvement in the Young Muslim organizations in Bosnia, *Mladi Muslimani*, during World War II .[17] Haris Silajdzic, his closest advisor, received Islamic education in Libya and served as an advisor to Bosnia's spiritual leader, the *Reis-ul-Ulema*. By contrast, the only Islamist to lead the Chechen resistance was Yandarbiyev, who only served as interim president between Dudayev's death in April 1996 and Maskhadov's election in January 1997. By contrast, Dudayev and Maskhadov were considerably more secular than the key Bosnian leaders.

The jihadi presence in Bosnia was a real problem at the close of the war. The Bosnian leadership was split between those wanting to rid Bosnia of the foreign radicals, and those grateful for their support and who wanted to allow them to stay. Most jihadis were nevertheless evicted shortly following the Dayton Accords, after several altercations with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces brought attention to their presence.[18] Indeed, this highlights the main difference between Bosnia and Chechnya: Chechnya had the Khasavyurt treaty that postponed the key issue in the conflict; was never fully implemented; was bilateral and lacked any international guarantor; and lacked international peacekeeping forces. Bosnia, on the other hand, had a real peace treaty, and NATO forces to keep that treaty. Thus, most jihadis were gradually evicted from Bosnia following the Dayton Accords. However, small numbers remained until as late as 2007, when the Bosnian government finally removed the last remnants.[19]

In Chechnya, there was no force capable of removing the jihadi elements. Indeed, the Maskhadov administration was considerably weaker than its Bosnian counterpart, and could not rely on an international force, whether military such as the NATO Implementation Forces (IFOR) or civilian such as the Office of the High Representative. Unlike Bosnia, which was awash in international assistance already a year following the Dayton Accords, Chechnya received next to no foreign assistance. Thus, the crippled Maskhadov government was in no position to successfully oust the jihadis. This was not for a lack of trying: In 1998, there was even fire exchanged between the Chechen government forces and jihadi groups. But unlike in Bosnia, the jihadi forces led by Khattab had found a powerful local ally in Shamil Basayev. Maskhadov was thus faced with a dire choice. He could either confront the jihadis that had ensconced themselves in southeastern Chechnya, at the cost of a Chechen civil war; or he could tolerate their presence, preserving peace and trying to strengthen state institutions. In the end, he chose the latter—which appeared the lesser of two evils. While he even sought a deal with Moscow in rooting out the radicals, a call that went unanswered, his decision contributed greatly to the failure of Chechen state-building and led directly to the second war.[20]

Thus, the Chechnya-based jihadis coalesced with Wahhabi groups that had emerged independently in Dagestan in the late 1990s. Training camps developed modeled on those in Afghanistan, where small numbers of people from the entire North Caucasus and beyond received training; many then fought in the second Chechen war, and subsequently spread the militant ideology and tactics back to their own home republics.

The Second War.

During the course of the second Chechen war, which began in October 1999, concern grew over the radicalization of the Chechen resistance movement and its links to extremist Islamic groups in the Middle East. Indeed, authors like Gordon Hahn have come to conclude that the "key, if not main factor driving the violence in the North Caucasus" is "the salience of local cultural and the Salafist jihadist theo-ideology and the influence of the global jihadi revolutionary movement."[21] While this chapter takes issue with that claim, the Chechen resistance has indeed acquired a much stronger Islamic character. The use of Islamic vocabulary such as jihad (holy war) or mujahedin (resistance fighters) increased markedly, as did active support for the Chechen cause by radical Islamic groups in the Middle East, at least until the U.S. invasion of Iraq led jihadis to flock to that conflict.

Moscow managed to drive this point across especially after September 11, 2001 (9/11). Immediately after the terrorist attacks on the United States, the Russian leadership began drawing comparisons between the attacks and the situation in Chechnya. Only hours after the collapse of the World Trade Centers, Russian State television broadcast a statement by President Vladimir Putin expressing solidarity with the American people, but also reminding the audience of Russia's earlier warnings of the common threat of "Islamic Fundamentalism." This marked the beginning of a strategy aiming to capitalize on the tragic attacks on America by highlighting the alleged parallels between the attacks on the United States and the situation in Chechnya. "The Russian people understand the American people better than anyone else, having

experienced terrorism first-hand," President Putin said the day after the attacks.[22]

This turned out to be the harbinger of a diplomatic campaign targeted at Western countries intended to shore up legitimacy, if not support, for the Russian army's violent crackdown in Chechnya.[23] This campaign was part and parcel of a five-step strategy to reduce the negative fallout of the war in Chechnya. The first component of that strategy was to isolate the conflict zone and prevent both Russian and international media from reporting on the conflict independently. The kidnapping of Andrei Babitsky, a reporter for Radio Liberty, early on served as a warning for journalists of the consequences of ignoring Moscow's rules on reporting the conflict. Since then, only a few journalists have actually been able to provide independent reporting from Chechnya. Most prominent has been the late Russian journalist, Anna Politkovskaya who was murdered in Moscow in 2007, and French writer, Anne Nivat.

The second prong in the strategy was to rename the conflict: Instead of a "war," it was an "anti-terrorist operation." Third, and stemming directly from this, Russia sought to discredit the Chechen struggle and undermine its leadership by accusing them individually and collectively of involvement with terrorism. Russia's campaign against Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov's chief negotiator, Akhmed Zakayev, is one example of this. This nevertheless backfired as first Denmark and then Great Britain refused to extradite Zakayev to Russia; Great Britain instead providing him with political asylum. Fourth, Russia sought to "Chechenize" the conflict and turn it into an intra-Chechen confrontation by setting up and arming a brutal but ethnically Chechen puppet regime in Gro-

zny under Kadyrov, the former Mufti (a professional jurist interpreting Muslin law) of the republic. This would reduce Russian casualties and enable hostilities to be depicted as a war between Chechen factions that Russia was helping to stabilize. Fifth, after branding the war as an anti-terrorist campaign, discrediting the rebel leadership, and trying to turn the war into a civil war among Chechens, Russia declared that the war was over.

The second war proved as heavy on the civilian population as the first. In many ways, Russian abuses were more systematic. For example, the Russian leadership set up what they termed "filtration camps"—essentially concentration camps that gathered male Chechens of fighting age, and in which torture and disappearances were rampant.[24] Whereas European countries and the United States kept a moderate but noticeable level of criticism against Russia's massive human rights violations in Chechnya during both the first war in 1994-96 and in 1999-2001, Russia succeeded in convincing western observers it was not fighting a people, but terrorists. In an atmosphere of increased cooperation between Russia and the West, with American need for Russian intelligence and cooperation in Afghanistan, a halt to criticism on Chechnya became the foremost price Russia managed to extract.

A Regional Insurgency.

Today, the nationalist Chechen leadership is almost exclusively an expatriate phenomenon. The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria has for all practical purposes ceased to exist; instead, the insurgency brands itself the "Caucasus Emirate" (CE), overtly boasts of its belonging to the global jihad, and oper-

ates across the North Caucasus. Studies of violent incidents in the North Caucasus agree that the violence peaked in April 2001, 18 months into the second Chechen war. From 2002 to 2006, violence was fairly steady before declining to a low point in 2006-07.[25] From 2007 onwards, however, violence has been on a steady increase, albeit fluctuating in both intensity and regional focus. Already in 2005, Dagestan and Ingushetia began seeing escalating violence, rivaling at times the levels in Chechnya.[26] Since 2007, the situation has continued to deteriorate, with the number of violent incidents rising sharply every year from 2007 to 2010.[27] In 2009 alone, for example, the number of violent incidents went from 795 to 1,100, with fatalities mounting from 586 to 900.[28] In the first 11 months of 2010, federal prosecutors acknowledged the death of 218 security personnel and the wounding of 536.[29] From 2008 onward, Dagestan and Ingushetia have alternated in the lead in the frequency of incidents.[30] In 2010 and 2011, the violence escalated significantly in the Western republic of KBR as well—marking the diffusion of large-scale and enduring violence beyond the republics bordering Chechnya. Thus, in 2010 political violence claimed 79 deaths and 39 wounded; the first 11 months of 2011 saw those figures rise to 98 and 39, respectively.[31] As if this was not enough, 2011 also saw violence spread to North Ossetia, a traditionally calm and majority Orthodox Christian republic.[32]

RUSSIAN POLICIES

What role did Russian policies play in transforming the conflict from a contained, nationalist rebellion to a sprawling jihadi insurgency? Counterintuitively as it may seem, Russian policies have contributed di-

rectly to this development. In another parallel to the Bosnian conflict, Russian rhetoric mirrored that of the Serbs: misunderstood defenders of Europe against the threat of Islamic radicalism, the "green wave." Indeed, this line of reasoning has been visible in Russian outreach efforts since the mid-1990s, with increasing fervor following 9/11.[33] But more than just arguing for their case, Russian officials actively worked to make the reality of the conflict conform to their vision of it. Thus, there was a remarkable pattern in Russia's priorities during the second war: the priority given to targeting the nationalist Chechen leadership rather than the jihadi elements within it. Therefore, on the battlefield, Russia targeted field commanders like Ruslan Gelayev, as well as Maskhadov himself, whom Russian forces killed in March 2005. On the diplomatic front, Russian diplomats and lawyers furiously prosecuted and sought the extradition of secular leaders like Zakayev and Maskhadov's foreign minister, Ilyas Akhmadov. By comparison, Islamist Chechen leaders have fared much better. Among exiles, Movladi Udugov remains alive, among the few remaining members of the first generation of Chechen leaders to survive. Yandarbiyev was killed in Qatar by Russian agents, but only in 2004. Similarly, the current leader of the CE, Dokka Umarov, has served since June 2006. The most notorious Chechen warlord, Shamil Basayev, was killed in 2006, but not necessarily by the Russians. French journalist, Anne Nivat, once wrote that the safest place in Chechnya was near Shamil Basayev: Russian bombs never appeared to fall there. Given Basayev's connection with Russian special forces (GRU) through the conflict in Abkhazia, numerous conspiracy theories emerged of Basayev's continued relationship with Russian state institutions; indeed, news re-

ports following his death suggested that he was killed accidently by explosives in the truck he was driving in mountain roads in Ingushetia.[34]

While allegations of Basayev's GRU connections during the Georgia-Abkhaz war are well-established,[35] those concerning subsequent periods are based mainly on innuendo. Clearer evidence is available in the case of Arbi Barayev, one of the most viciously militant as well as most criminalized of Chechnya's warlords. Barayev was one of the key forces seeking to undermine Maskhadov's leadership in the interwar era; it was his group that kidnapped and beheaded foreign telecommunications workers in 1998, effectively forcing out the small international presence in Chechnya. Similarly, it was Barayev's forces that engaged in firefights with Maskhadov's troops in 1998. Following the renewed warfare, Barayev lived freely in the town of Alkhan-Kala, under Russian control, until his death in 2001—despite the fact that he was responsible for gruesome, video-recorded murders of captive Russian servicemen. As several observers have noted, his opulent residence was only a few miles away from a Russian checkpoint near his native Alkhan-Kala, while his car had an FSB identification which allowed him to race through Russian checkpoints.[36] Tellingly, Barayev was killed by a GRU hit squad only after the FSB's then-head of counterterrorism, General Ugryumov, had died. The apparent conclusion was that Ugryumov provided a cover for Barayev, and the former's death made it possible for the GRU to take Barayev out.

Given the nature of this conflict, evidence can at best be inconclusive. But circumstantial evidence suggests two things: First, that during the second war there was no clear and unified chain of command on

either the Chechen or the Russian side. Chechen forces paid nominal allegiance to Maskhadov but, in practice, field commanders behaved independently, and with little coordination. On the Russian side, detachments of the army, GRU, FSB, and Ministry of Interior played different roles in the conflict, roles that were poorly coordinated; moreover, they each appeared to keep ties with some Chechen commanders, while combating others. Second, the policies of the Russian leadership itself contributed to change the nature of the conflict from a nationalist rebellion to one where the enemy was Islamic jihadis. While this is likely in the long run to be of greater danger to Russia, it did succeed in making the conflict fit into Moscow's desired narrative. After all, Maskhadov and the Chechen nationalist leadership was respected in Western circles, being granted meetings with Western officials and maintaining strong support among Western media, civil society, and human rights organizations. The jihadi elements, needless to say, did not and do not enjoy this status.

In a sense, however, Moscow is now faced both with a jihadi movement *and* a nationalist Chechnya. Indeed, the CE is everything it is blamed of being: a part of the global jihad, and a terrorist incubator on Europe's borders. While primarily led by Chechens, it is most active in the other republics of the North Caucasus. But Moscow also is faced with a nationalist Chechen leadership in Grozny. Indeed, the Kadyrov administration appointed by Moscow has developed in such a nationalistic direction that the secular Chechen nationalists in exile, who broke with the Islamist faction with the establishment of the Emirate in 2007, began mending fences with Kadyrov, their erstwhile foe, by 2009.[37] While a counterintuitive turn, the secu-

lar nationalists concluded that Kadyrov has in practice achieved what they failed to achieve through an armed rebellion: a Chechen republic that is for most practical purposes behaving as an independent entity. As early as 2005, Russian analysts began referring to Kadyrov's moves as "separatism-light."[38]

A PACIFIED CHECHNYA?

Presently, Chechnya is arguably among the least violence-ridden republics in the North Caucasus. The last several years have seen widespread violence in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and KBR; by comparison, Chechnya has been relatively stable. But the long-term outlook is clouded by the fragility on which this relative quiet rests.

The main reason for Chechnya's stability is the dominance that Ramzan Kadyrov and his militia forces exert over the republic. These fighters, estimated at over 5,000 in number, consist mainly of former resistance fighters. Moscow initially sought to balance the Kadyrov clan with other political figures. Following Akhmad Kadyrov's assassination, Ramzan—who had not yet achieved the eligible age for the presidency—was appointed deputy prime minister. Chechnya was instead led by career police officer Alu Alkhanov, who had sided with Moscow already in the first war. By March 2006, Ramzan Kadyrov was elevated to the post of Prime Minister, replacing Sergey Abramov. Less than a year later, Alkhanov was dismissed and Kadyrov appointed President. Thus, by 2007, any political balances to Kadyrov had been removed; fighting forces outside his control nevertheless remained: the "Zapad" and "Vostok" battalions, the latter commanded by Sulim Yamadayev, were nevertheless dis-

banded in November 2008 following escalating tensions and actual armed clashes with Kadyrov's forces. Yamadayev loyalists were evicted from Chechnya; Sulim Yamadayev was assassinated in Dubai in 2009, while his brother met the same fate in Moscow, presumably at Kadyrov's orders.[39] This removed the sole remaining check on Kadyrov's power in Chechnya, to the chagrin of many decisionmakers in Moscow—but with the apparent blessing of Putin and Kadyrov's immediate handler, the Chechen-born Vladislav Surkov, who serves as Putin's first deputy chief of staff and chief ideologue.

Kadyrov has walked a fine line between vows of absolute personal loyalty and subservience to Vladimir Putin, on the one hand, and institutional distancing from Russia. Thus, in 2007, he repeatedly urged Putin to stay on as president for life.[40] In 2009, Kadyrov said "if it was not for Putin, Chechnya would not exist."[41] In January 2010, he added that "I am completely Vladimir Putin's man. I would rather die 100 times than let him down."[42] Kadyrov also delivers votes for the ruling party. In 2007, for example, official figures showed that 99.5 percent of the Chechen electorate cast their votes, and that 99.3 percent voted for the United Russia party.

On the other hand, Kadyrov has increasingly appealed to Chechen nationalism and sought to Islamize Chechnya. In December 2006, he publicly sought the prosecution of Russian officers responsible for civilian deaths in Chechnya.[43] His attitude toward the Russian military, which he sought to have expelled from Chechnya, is best illustrated by his 2006 statement that "as for the generals, I'm not going to say that I care about their opinion."[44] Following his appointment as President, Kadyrov moved strongly to assert

Chechnya's economic and political autonomy. For example, he has sought the creation of a Chechen oil company that would keep the revenues of Chechnya's oil industry instead of sending them to Moscow; and campaigned to have Chechens convicted elsewhere in Russia serve prison time in Chechnya.[45] Already in 2006, Kadyrov began urging women to comply with Islamic dress codes, something that was later officially promulgated with a program to strengthen "female virtue."[46] He has also spoken favorably of Shariah in general, and of both honor killings and of polygamy in particular, and referred to women as men's property—all of which are in violation of Russian laws.[47]

Adding to this, Kadyrov has made a habit of diverting the enormous funds coming to Chechnya from the federal center. Indeed, Russian state auditors have repeatedly noted the disappearance of the equivalent of dozens of millions of dollars in state subsidies to Chechnya, which amount to 90 percent of the republic's budget.

Thus, all in all, Kadyrov has stabilized Chechnya on the surface. But the stability rests on a very weak foundation. On the one hand, it rests solely on the personal relationship between Kadyrov and Putin. As such, the question is whether the stability of the republic would outlive the departure from power of either man. Given the average life expectancy of Chechen politicians, the possibility of Kadyrov being assassinated is very real. If that were to happen, would the thousands of former rebels now forming the bulk of his militia pledge loyalty to a new leader, or would they return to the resistance, ushering in a third Chechen war? Even if Kadyrov remains in power, the defection of large sections of his militia to the resistance cannot be excluded. Similarly, Kadyrov's pragmatism is exhibited by his

decision to switch sides from the resistance to Russia. It is not inconceivable that he could switch sides again under some scenario—for example, if Putin were to leave power and his successor would discontinue the arrangement with Kadyrov. Before her death, Anna Politkovskaya observed that by his policies in Chechnya, Putin had essentially guaranteed a third Chechen war at some future point. She may have turned out to be prescient.[48]

CONCLUSION

The North Caucasus is sinking ever deeper into a process of Afghanization. While the external impetus of jihadi ideology has played a role in this development, this chapter has sought to show that the root cause of the region's decline is the Russian government's policies—in particular its prosecution of the wars in Chechnya; its over-reliance on repression in both Chechnya and the rest of the region; its centralization of power; its unwillingness to allow the North Caucasus to open up to the rest of the world; its failure to provide an economic future for the region's population; a political discourse that is making North Caucasians increasingly estranged from Russian society; and the corruption and criminalization of the Russian political system.

This situation destabilizes Russia, and forms its most acute political problem. But it does not only affect Russia: It greatly affects the security and prosperity of the South Caucasus, as well as potentially all of Europe. The impact on the South Caucasus is threefold. Most obviously, Azerbaijan and Georgia are directly affected by the violence and economic woes of the region. This is only likely to be exacerbated in the

future: While Azerbaijan experiences rapid growth thanks to its oil and gas industry, Georgia has made great strides in reforms, not least in terms of practically abolishing administrative corruption. Over time, the contrast between these economies and the languishing North Caucasus will have consequences, in terms, for example, of migration flows. Secondly, the southern neighbors of the North Caucasus are affected by the diffusion of the conflicts in the North. Thus, flows of refugees—and fighters—from the North Caucasus into Georgia and Azerbaijan have been a recurring phenomenon over the past 2 decades, with destabilizing effects on both countries. Third, the Russian government has shown a distinctive tendency to assign blame to its neighbors when it has proven unable to deal with the consequences of its own failures in the North Caucasus. In the beginning of the second Chechnyan war, both Azerbaijan and Georgia were accused, without a shred of evidence, of serving as conduits for thousands of foreign fighters to Chechnya; ever since, Russian accusations have focused on Georgia, with threats of intervention into the Pankisi Gorge on Georgian territory in 2002, and actual instances of Russian bombings of the Gorge.[49] Following the escalation of violence in 2008-11, Russian officials have made a custom of blaming Georgia—and occasionally Western powers—for actively colluding with the jihadi rebels in the North Caucasus. Thus, Russia's tendency to blame others for its failures poses a constant risk to its neighbors.

This predicament is most acute, given the upcoming Olympic Games in Sochi. Given current trends, Moscow is unlikely to be able to pacify the North Caucasus ahead of the Games, and will be increasingly likely to blame others for any terrorist attacks that

would threaten this prestigious event. The alternative option, a gigantic security operation to assert control over the region, would itself very likely have a spill-over effect on the South Caucasus.

Beyond the Caucasus itself, Russia's misrule in the North Caucasus poses a threat to Europe as a whole. In fact, with the European Union (EU) now extended to the shores of the Black Sea, it is a direct neighbor of the North Caucasus. Through the Eastern Partnership, Partnership for Peace, and other instruments, the EU and NATO are seeking to contribute to the building of stability, security, and prosperity in their eastern neighborhood. In spite of the unresolved conflicts of the South Caucasus and Moldova, and the mixed scorecard for democratic development across the region, the Eastern neighborhood has indeed seen largely positive trends over the past decade. But the North Caucasus is the sole remaining area where Europe has little to no ability to influence developments, but which could nevertheless have a considerably negative effect on Europe. The region is already a transshipment point for smuggled goods to Europe, and an incubator of jihadi elements from the region and beyond. Thus far, the Islamic Emirate has stayed focused on targets in the North Caucasus and Russia. But given its broader ideological orientation and its perception of Europe as a collaborator with Russia in the repression of Muslims, the prospect of groups affiliated with the Emirate targeting Europe itself should not be excluded. After all, jihadi elements with connections to Central Asia have already been implicated in planned terrorist attacks in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

Thus, Russia's failure to stabilize the North Caucasus has amounted to the creation of an Afghanistan-like environment in Europe: a failed state within a

state. Moscow is patently unable to remedy the situation, seeming only to design policies that are as a whole counterproductive. Unfortunately, the failure of Russia to address the region's problems is related directly to Russia's very system. The sad fact is that as long as Russia itself maintains a political system based on kleptocratic authoritarianism, the prospects of the North Caucasus will remain dim.

This poses a conundrum for Western powers. If the situation continues to deteriorate, Western powers may not be able to afford simply treating the North Caucasus as a domestic Russian issue. At the same time, their policy options in designing responses to the situation in the region are highly limited. While efforts could be undertake in conjunction with the South Caucasian states to contain the destabilization emanating from the North Caucasus, addressing the root causes of the problem will require a dialogue with Moscow, the prospects of which are dim.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHEN J. BLANK has served as the Strategic Studies Institute's expert on the Soviet bloc and the post-Soviet world since 1989. Prior to that he was Associate Professor of Soviet Studies at the Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL; and taught at the University of Texas, San Antonio; and at the University of California, Riverside. Dr. Blank is the editor of *Imperial Decline: Russia's Changing Position in Asia*, coeditor of *Soviet Military and the Future*, and author of *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin's Commissariat of Nationalities, 1917-1924*. He has also written many articles and conference papers on Russia, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Eastern European security issues. Dr. Blank's current research deals with proliferation and the revolution in military affairs, and energy and security in Eurasia. His two most recent books are *Russo-Chinese Energy Relations: Politics in Command*, London, UK: Global Markets Briefing, 2006; and *Natural Allies? Regional Security in Asia and Prospects for Indo-American Strategic Cooperation*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2005. Dr. Blank holds a B.A. in history from the University of Pennsylvania, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago.

SVANTE E. CORNELL is Research Director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, a Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center affiliated with the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Washington, DC, and the Stockholm-based Institute for Security and Development Policy. Dr. Cornell is an Associate Research Professor at SAIS.

GORDON M. HAHN is a Senior Associate (Non-Resident) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC; a Senior Researcher and Adjunct Professor in the Monterey Terrorism Research and Education Program at the Monterey Institute for International Studies in California; and an Analyst and Consultant for Russia—Other Points of View (*www.russiaotherpointsofview.com*). Dr. Hahn is author of the well-received books, *Russia's Islamic Threat* (Yale University Press, 2007), *Russia's Revolution From Above, 1985-2000* (Transaction Publishers, 2002), and numerous articles in academic journals and other English and Russian language media. He has taught at Boston, American, Stanford, San Jose State, and San Francisco State Universities and as a Fulbright Scholar at Saint Petersburg State University, Russia. Dr. Hahn writes and edits the bimonthly "Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Report" published under the auspices of CSIS.

SERGEY MARKEDONOV has been a visiting fellow in the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program since May 2010. He is an expert on the Caucasus, as well as Black Sea regional security, nationalism, interethnic conflicts, and de-facto states in the post-Soviet area. From 2001 to 2010, he worked as head of the Interethnic Relations Group and deputy director at the Institute for Political and Military Analysis in Moscow. He has held teaching positions at the Russian State University for the Humanities, the Moscow State University, and the Diplomatic Academy. Dr. Markedonov's publications include several books and reports, about 100 academic articles, and more than 500 press pieces. Recently published books and reports include *De facto States of the*

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