

Chechen Separatism and the Origins of the North Caucasus Insurgency

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Abstract

Since 2007, the North Caucasus region of Russia has been engulfed in an Islamist insurgency led physically and ideologically by the remnants of the Chechen separatist movement. Attacks occur on a daily basis throughout the region targeting government installations and security forces, destabilizing Russia's southwestern border and providing sustained volatility in an area prized for its hydrocarbon sources and transport routes.

A close examination of the post-Soviet Chechen independence movement and its deterioration following the 1999-2000 conflict with Russia revealed three critical reasons why Chechen independence was de-nationalized and rolled into an Islamist, region-wide conflagration: 1) The movement's loss of legitimacy following its switch to suicide attacks and terrorist operations when juxtaposed with the global fallout from the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US, 2) Russia's sustained success in eliminating the top rungs of rebel leadership, resulting in huge setbacks and spawning a new ideological direction for the movement, and 3) The installation of pro-Moscow strongman Ramzan Kadyrov as president of Chechnya, whose rule of fear and intimidation has stabilized the republic and forced the rebels to take their operations outside of Chechnya in an attempt to revive the insurgency.

Thus, the steady marginalization of Chechen nationalist ideology in favor of an Islamist one and the way that violence in Chechnya metastasized into neighboring republics can largely be viewed as inevitable after the rebels were crushed militarily, resorted to desperate tactics in an altered geopolitical landscape, and Moscow succeeded in co-opting many members of the Chechen elite in exchange for money and promises of broad autonomy.

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Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a watershed moment in the 20th century, yet despite the immense size and variety of its ethnic composition, the subsequent regime overhaul in post-Soviet successor states occurred unexpectedly peacefully.¹ In fact, other than a series of localized armed conflicts, large-scale political violence was exceedingly rare with one notable exception: the Caucasus region.²

Between the years of 1988 and 2008 there were six cases of war within the Caucasus: 1) the 1988-94 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, 2) the 1991-92 war over the status of the breakaway region of South Ossetia (which exploded into a second armed conflict under different circumstances in 2008 and is tallied here as the third case of war), 4) the Georgian civil war for control of the capital city of Tbilisi, 5) the 1991-92 war over the breakaway region of Abkhazia, Georgia and 6) by far the most significant and destructive of all post-Soviet conflicts, the two wars fought in Chechnya in the wake of its declaration of independence in 1991.³

This paper will focus on the conflict in Chechnya and its evolution towards a more widespread insurgency in the North Caucasus, a struggle that has stood out for its extraordinary levels of violence, complexity, and brutality. Although the seeds of conflict were planted when Chechnya declared its sovereignty in 1991, Russian forces did not engage in large-scale military confrontation with separatist fighters until attempting to seize the Chechen capital of Grozny in

¹ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 2.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

December of 1994.⁴ Despite suffering high casualties, Russian forces eventually destroyed most of Grozny and succeeded in capturing it, maintaining control of the city and repelling multiple Chechen counterattacks through the summer of 1996.⁵ However, an unexpected Chechen counter-offensive in August of 1996 battered the Russian military units occupying the city, leading to a negotiated settlement that ended the first Chechen conflict as well as the withdrawal of Russian forces from Grozny and Chechnya proper.⁶

Re-named the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, the agreement known as the Khasavyurt Accord formally left the status of Chechnya's relationship with Russia undecided until 31 December 2001, and thus subject to further negotiations.⁷ Now operating under the guise of *de facto* independence but saddled with an almost totally destroyed infrastructure, Chechnya deteriorated rapidly in the form of an epidemic of kidnappings and human trafficking, a rise in radical Islamist movements, and a lack of control by the central government in Grozny.⁸ A combination of events led most significantly by an August 1999 invasion of neighboring Dagestan by roughly 1,500 Chechen, Dagestani and foreign Islamists as well as a series of alleged terrorist bombings in Buynaksk, Moscow and Volgodonsk compelled Russian authorities to escalate the situation, first via aerial bombardment of Chechen territory followed ultimately by full-scale invasion.⁹

The end result was a second Chechen war that brought about the type of mass destruction not seen in Europe since World War II, leading the United Nations to declare Grozny the "most

⁴ Olga Olikier, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994-2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2001), 1.

⁵ Ibid, 1-2.

⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁷ Matthew Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars: Will Russia Go the Way of the Soviet Union?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 44-45.

⁸ Ibid, 46.

⁹ Ibid, 47.

destroyed city on Earth” in 2003.¹⁰ The punishing Russian military assault forced Chechen separatist formations to withdraw to the surrounding mountains in order to launch a guerilla war against the entrenched federal forces, and the rebels increasingly resorted to terrorist tactics as their conventional military capability waned.

Since then, the conflict in Chechnya has grabbed international attention in the wake of a series of spectacular terrorist attacks throughout Russia. The most recent attack was a 24 January 2011 suicide bombing claimed by Chechen rebel leader Dokka Umarov that killed 35 people and wounded 168 at Moscow’s Domodedovo airport, a facility that is a showcase for modern Russia.¹¹

Umarov is the leader of the “Caucasus Emirate,” an organization he created in October 2007 to serve as successor to the non-state Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, of which he served previously as president.¹² In his announcement declaring the creation of the Emirate, Umarov rejected the laws and borders of Russia, called on the Caucasus region to recognize the Emirate as the area’s new authority, adopted fundamentalist *sharia* law, and expanded the Emirate far beyond the original mandate of Chechnya into Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and predominantly Muslim areas located farther north.¹³

The creation of the Emirate can be traced to the “generational change” within the resistance that began to occur rapidly in the summer of 2006: by that time the movement had been weakened considerably and most of its top field commanders had been killed by Russian forces;

¹⁰ Rupert Wingfield Hayes, “Scars remain amid Chechen revival,” *BBC News*, 3 March 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/6414603.stm

¹¹ The New York Times, “Moscow Airport Explosion (2011),” *The New York Times website*, last updated 14 February 2011

¹² Scott Stewart and Ben West, “The Caucasus Emirate,” Stratfor: Global Security and Intelligence Report, 15 April 2010

¹³ *Ibid.*

additionally, the pool of potential rebels in Chechnya had shrank considerably as the population grew tired of “bloody and hopeless opposition to the federal forces.”¹⁴ Umarov hoped to unite the various military *jamaats* that had fomented in the republics surrounding Chechnya following the second war, which, in the context of the North Caucasus, are defined singularly as a “local community of Muslims...organized at an often basic level...to form the basis for military resistance to the administrative and security structures of the Russian Federation.”¹⁵

Thus, it can be deduced that Umarov’s 2007 declaration closed the curtain on the Chechen independence era and instead rolled it into a wider, more broad-based insurgency in an effort to increase the resistance’s ideological base and proliferate manpower, heralding a new era of conflict in this historically volatile region. Additionally, it can also be determined that much of the remaining instability in the north Caucasus is centered on areas outside of Chechnya such as Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria¹⁶ and Karachaevo-Cherkessia,¹⁷ despite popular Western perception of Chechnya as the hotbed of the North Caucasus insurrection.

This paper will attempt to lay out a sampling of the pre- and, more extensively, post-Soviet history of the Chechen independence movement, then identify and analyze the salient factors that resulted in the creation of the Caucasus Emirate and its accompanying broad-based insurgency that now plagues the Russian authorities in the North Caucasus. The analysis will be structured around three pillars, the first of which is the loss of global support and legitimacy that the separatist movement incurred once it began conducting terrorist operations against Russian

¹⁴ Mikhail Roshchin, “Caucasus Emirate: Virtual Myth or Reality?” *North Caucasus Analysis Volume: 10, Issue: 10*, 13 March 2009

¹⁵ Andrew McGregor, “Islam, Jamaats and Implications for the North Caucasus- Part 1,” *Terrorism Monitor Volume: 4, Issue: 11*, 2 June 2006

¹⁶ Emil Souleimanov, “Kabardino-Balkaria Risks Becoming New Insurgency Hotspot,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst Volume: 13 Issue: 4*, 2 March 2011.

¹⁷ Mairbek Vatchagaev, “Is Karachaevo-Cherkessia the Next North Caucasus Hotspot?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 43*, 3 March 2011.

civilians. Since many of the identified Chechen suicide bombers who struck Russian targets following the second war were victims of Russia's *zachistka* (cleansing) operations- methods which have resulted in the abduction and extrajudicial killings of thousands of Chechens-¹⁸ it is undeniable that the misconduct of federal forces contributed greatly to the adoption of such drastic measures. However, in a post-9/11 world such tactics have proven disastrous politically, and it will be argued that the turning points in the conflict were the 2002 *Nord-Ost* theater siege in Moscow as well as the school hostage crisis in Beslan, North Ossetia in 2004 that resulted in the deaths of 334 people, more than half of them children.¹⁹

The second pillar is the efficacy of Russian forces in eliminating top Chechen and foreign rebel commanders. The dilapidated Russian forces that entered Chechnya in 1994 were completely unprepared for the stiff resistance they encountered, as well as the ensuing guerrilla conflict launched from the mountain redoubt of the Chechen separatists. However, the second war and evolution of the conflict has seen a dramatic increase in the counter-insurgency capabilities of the Russian military, resulting in the targeted killings of nearly every single rebel commander of note. With the top level of separatist leadership all but destroyed, what remained was a fractured hierarchy of mostly second-rate commanders who lacked the funding, manpower and popular support to launch anything but sporadic terrorist attacks that have ultimately served to only further weaken and isolate their cause.

The third and final pillar is the established totalitarian regime of Moscow-backed Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov. The quintessential strongman, Kadyrov is the son of former pro-Moscow President of the Chechen Republic Akhmad Kadyrov, who was assassinated by

¹⁸ John Reuter, "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?" *The Jamestown Foundation*, 23 August 2004, 3.

¹⁹ The New York Times, "Video casts new light on fatalities at Beslan," *The New York Times website*, 31 July 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/31/world/europe/31iht-russia.4.6921472.html>

Chechen rebels in 2004. During his father's four-year presidency, Ramzan Kadyrov presided over the Kadyrovtsy, which is a Chechen paramilitary force composed of numerous former rebels who surrendered and switched sides to fight for the pro-Russian administration.²⁰ Considered the "best-trained, best-armed, and most battle-ready irregular forces at Russia's disposal in the North Caucasus,"²¹ the presence of the Kadyrovtsy has allowed Russia to withdraw many of its combat troops from Chechnya as Ramzan Kadyrov has consolidated his iron grip on the republic. Accused of massive human rights violations, the Kadyrov regime has allegedly been involved in extortion, abductions and illegal dealing in oil as well as torture and murder,²² while the Kadyrovtsy present a career opportunity of sorts for Chechen men, severely limiting the pool of potential recruits for rebels as well as interdicting the operational capacity of the fighters that do remain.

While no single pillar stands above the rest, the combination of the three created the conditions that led to Umarov's reorganization of the resistance movement into the destabilizing presence that it is today. Daily attacks on local security forces and government installations have turned the North Caucasus into a dangerous warzone littered with military checkpoints and instilled with a climate of fear, creating a seemingly intractable problem for both Moscow and the local governments in the region. And while the present security issues in the North Caucasus are at first glance attributable to the post-Soviet political vacuum, the roots of the conflict actually go back centuries, thus painting the picture of a deeply-rooted clash between Russian authorities and their Caucasian subjects ensnared in a tangled web of socio-political, ethnic, and religious strands that has heretofore proven unsolvable.

²⁰ Umalt Dudayev, "Chechen President's Men a Law Unto Themselves," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting: Congressional Research Service Issue 263*, 21 February 2005.

²¹ Pavel Felgenhauer, "The Kadyrovtsy: Moscow's New Pawns in the South Caucasus?" *The Jamestown Foundation: North Caucasus Analysis Volume 7 Issue: 24*, 2006.

²² Dudayev, "Chechen President's Men a Law Unto Themselves."

1. Russia and the Caucasus: A History of Violence

Chechnya is located on the southwestern border of the Russian Federation and is ethnically composed of Chechens, Russians, and Ingush peoples.²³ A Muslim nation, Chechen warriors had resisted Russian colonial expansion in the 19th century, engaging in decades of conflict that ultimately led to their being the last North Caucasian ethnicity incorporated into the Russian empire following the 1817-64 Caucasian War.²⁴

Russia's first substantial effort to subjugate the Chechens took place in the wake of the annexation of Georgia in 1801 and the outbreak of war with Turkey in 1807.²⁵ The strategic argument for Russia's southward expansion was the need to secure the route from Vladikavkaz to Tbilisi through the Darial Gorge, and was led by Russian general Aleksey Yermolov.²⁶ The tactics employed by Yermolov in Chechnya set the stage for future atrocities over the next two centuries: economic warfare via the burning of crops and villages, massacres against unarmed civilians, and the first of what would be several mass deportations of Chechens in the form of banishing captured prisoners into exile in Siberia.²⁷ The harsh and brutal policies of Yermolov paradoxically led to a gradual "consolidation of Chechen society," and drove many Chechens into the arms of Islamic resistance leaders such as Kazi Mullah and the most famous Caucasian warrior of all, the legendary Imam Shamil.²⁸

²³ "Conflict in Chechnya: Russia's Renegade Republic," *PBS website*, accessed 14 March 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/chechnya/map.html>

²⁴ Leon Aron, *Russia's Revolution: Essays 1989-2006* (Washington, DC: The AEI Press, 2007), 253.

²⁵ Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars*, 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Shamil, a native Dagestani, served as the political, military, and religious leader of the region's Muslims in their fight against Russian domination during the Caucasian War.²⁹ He also founded *Muradism*, otherwise known as the Caucasus Imamate, a movement that united Chechnya and Dagestan as a single state that resisted the Russian empire's attempts to expand south.³⁰

The establishment of the Caucasus Imamate is important thematically, as other than a brief reconstitution during the Russian Civil War as the "North Caucasus Emirate" in 1919,³¹ it would re-emerge in the late 1990's as the ideal of a pan-Islamic state for the Islamist wing of the Chechen resistance and turn out to be arguably the decisive factor in triggering the second Chechen war. It would also, of course, arise again in 2007, leading to the current situation in the North Caucasus.

The Russian relationship with Chechnya during the Tsarist era witnessed three significant deportations, establishing the historical precedent for Soviet Premier Josef Stalin's "genocidal" actions against the Chechens during World War II.³² Despite the fact that the furthest advance by German forces was Mozdok in North Ossetia- thus never reaching Chechnya- Stalin accused the Chechens of collaborating with the Nazis, and ordered the entire Chechen nation (then known as "Checheno-Ingushetia") of almost 400,000 people to be deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia over the course of just a few days in 1944.³³ The enforcement of this policy saw the Chechens loaded into cattle cars in the middle of winter and shipped to various locations thousands of kilometers away, where over the next thirteen years in exile up to 200,000 of them died due to hunger and

²⁹ "Chavchavadze Family: Imam Shamil (1797-1871)," *Smithsonian website*, accessed 14 March 2011, <http://achp.si.edu/chavchavadze/shamil.html>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Chechnya: Chaos of Human Geography in the North Caucasus, 484 BC – 1957 AD," *Suburban Emergency Management Project website*, accessed 14 March 2011, http://www.semp.us/publications/biot_reader.php?BiotID=479

³² Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars*, 13.

³³ Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Remembering the 1944 Deportation: Chechnya's Holocaust," *The Jamestown Foundation: North Caucasus Analysis Volume: 8 Issue: 8*, 2007.

disease.³⁴ This event, much like the reaction to Yermolov's brutality, was a "defining event for the reinforcement of a Chechen identity for both Russians and Chechens."³⁵

Upon the deportees' eventual repatriation under Nikita Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinization in 1957, the Autonomous Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia was reestablished with no significant acts of violence or retribution by the estranged Chechens.³⁶ However, due to their thirteen-year absence the demographics of their native land had changed significantly. Soviet census figures from 1959 reveal that half the population of Checheno-Ingushetia was comprised of ethnic Russians, mainly due to the influx of Slavic technical specialists who migrated to Grozny during the expansion of the Soviet oil industry that began in the 1950s.³⁷ Due to several factors, this trend would reverse course over the next three decades leading up to the demise of the Soviet Union: by 1989 the ethnic Russian population in Checheno-Ingushetia fell to 30%, partially because of the steady flow of deportees making their way back from Central Asia over the years, but mainly because of an explosion in the birth rate of Chechens.³⁸

Faced with a surging population that Slavic Russians inherently mistrusted, Soviet authorities employed a carefully constructed, lopsided power structure that ensured centralized control, subdued Chechen nationalist tendencies, and guaranteed "Slav ethnic dominance."³⁹ Finally, when the Soviet Union collapsed and splintered in 1991, it was the Chechen populace that had

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 10.

³⁶ Ibid, 11.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, 12.

“force of numbers as well as the fresh historical grievance that pushed them into open separatism.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars*, 15.

2. The First Chechen War (1994-96)

The contemporary era of bloodshed in Chechnya began as the Soviet Union broke apart and fifteen previously constituent republics of the USSR became independent countries. This atmosphere of political upheaval allowed for action that in the decades prior had been utterly inconceivable, particularly in the case of historically-repressed Chechnya.

To fully understand the origins of the first war, it is important to point out that political mobilization in Chechnya was fueled not just by nationalism but also anti-communism as well.⁴¹ As Marxist ideology bottomed out in Russia, Chechnya was one of the poorest regions in the country and ranked last or second-to-last in a series of economic indicators despite straddling a strategically important section of the Russian oil industry.⁴²

In the push towards self-rule, political liberalization began to take hold in the country: a free press was established that criticized authorities and religion went from banned to permitted, resulting in the construction of dozens of mosques.⁴³ Soon, in what was the biggest event in Chechnya in years, a Congress of 1,000 delegates met on 23-25 November 1990 with the aim of organizing and consolidating the different nationalist groups in the country and also to apply pressure on the local leadership to claim more autonomy from Moscow.⁴⁴

In attendance at the National Congress was Chechen-born Soviet Air Force General Dzhokhar Dudayev, who would be elected Chairman.⁴⁵ Inspired by the nationalist movement in Estonia- which he witnessed first-hand as the commander of a fleet of long-range bombers in Tartu-

⁴¹ Ibid, 15.

⁴² Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: NYU Press, 1999), 80.

⁴³ Ibid, 81.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 81-82.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 90.

Dudayev sought independence for Chechnya, and by the spring of 1991 was in the process of turning the Chechen National Congress into a radical political movement.⁴⁶

In July of 1991, the Congress met again and officially declared that the “Chechen Republic of Ichkeria” was not an integral part of either the Soviet Union or Russian Federation.⁴⁷ Later, on 15 September, the Checheno-Ingushetia Supreme Council dissolved itself, allowing for the separate re-establishment of the Republic of Ingushetia and thus paving the way for presidential and parliamentary elections in Chechnya.⁴⁸

Dudayev ran against two political opponents, and was elected president on 27 September.⁴⁹ However, since the separation of Chechnya and Ingushetia was not formalized legally in Moscow, the Kremlin refused to recognize the elections and declared the Chechen presidential elections to be invalid.⁵⁰

On 7 November, Russian president Boris Yeltsin declared martial law in Chechnya, issued an arrest warrant for Dudayev, and dispatched a battalion of roughly 600 Internal Affairs Ministry (MVD) troops to Grozny.⁵¹ The troops were met at the airport by a hostile crowd of citizens and militia fighters; they were then surrounded, disarmed and humiliatingly expelled from Chechnya on buses escorted by the Chechen National Guard.⁵²

⁴⁶ Ibid, 91.

⁴⁷ Stasys Knezys and Romanas Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 18.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 27.

⁵² Ibid.

This “threat of invasion” enraged Dudayev, who declared it an “act of state terrorism” while threatening to resort to “terrorist acts” against Russia.⁵³ Immediately underscoring this threat was the same-day November hijacking of a Russian airliner that was to fly from Mineral ’Nye Vody to Yekaterinburg by a group of Chechens led by Shamil Basayev, who did it to protest the introduction of martial law to Chechnya⁵⁴ and to draw international attention to the separatist movement. Basayev forced the plane to land in Ankara, Turkey and demanded a press conference to tell the world what was happening in Chechnya;⁵⁵ he then negotiated his safe return home as a national hero in what was the first significant act of terrorism in the conflict.⁵⁶

The declaration of martial law galvanized the Chechen population, serving to not only “immensely” increase Dudayev’s popularity but also allow him to strengthen his government and take additional measures to further solidify Chechnya’s independence.⁵⁷ In the wake of Russia’s botched attempt at military intervention, Dudayev focused his efforts on expelling Russian forces from Chechen territory and stockpiling weaponry in preparation for any future challenges to Chechnya’s sovereignty.⁵⁸

Soon, the loosely-assembled Chechen National Guard was indeed able to harass and intimidate Russian forces into leaving Chechnya, and on 28 May 1992, Russia’s new defense minister, General Pavel Grachev, formally agreed to bequeath half the weaponry that had belonged to the Soviet armed forces previously stationed in Chechnya to Dudayev’s government.⁵⁹ While on the surface this would appear nonsensical, it has been suggested that “it was actually an attempt at a

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Imogen Bell, editor, *Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia 2003*, (United Kingdom: Europa Publications, 2002), 549.

⁵⁵ Tom de Waal, *Shamil Basayev: Chechen warlord*, BBC News website, 30 September 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/460594.stm>

⁵⁶ Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 27-28.

⁵⁷ Knezyz and Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya*, 20.

⁵⁸ Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars*, 20-21.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 21.

dignified cover-up of the fact that almost all the weapons had been lost,' many of them apparently sold to Dudayev's representatives by retreating Russian soldiers and officers.'⁶⁰

Lacking a formal army, the massive influx of weaponry was widely dispersed throughout the general population, resulting in the rise of warlords, armed gangs and a surge of criminal activity that spilled out of Chechnya into other parts of Russia.⁶¹ Chechen organized-crime came to dominate the lawless post-Soviet landscape in Moscow and other Russian cities,⁶² while Chechnya also served as a critical transit point for the flow of narcotics into Russia, and, perhaps more importantly, Grozny's central government was able to export millions of tons of Russian oil for massive profits on the black market in exchange for kickbacks to corrupt politicians in Moscow.⁶³

In the meantime, the issue of Chechnya's secession became a useful political tool during the "president vs. parliament" struggle in the Kremlin, as well as something that could be utilized to "advance or attack issues of political and economic reform during the post-Soviet transition."⁶⁴

This delayed the onset of war to December of 1994, when Yeltsin- at the height of his presidential power but the low point of his popularity- authorized an invasion of Chechnya that was "partly impelled by the illusion that a 'short victorious war' would boost [his] ratings and political authority in Russia"⁶⁵ as well as to eradicate the "Islamic fundamentalists, criminal groups, and terrorist centers" allegedly employed by the Chechen regime.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Paul Klebnikov, *Godfather of the Kremlin: The Decline of Russia in the Age of Gangster Capitalism* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2000), 40.

⁶³ Ibid, 40-41.

⁶⁴ Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 56.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 77.

⁶⁶ Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars*, 35.

After an attempt at overthrowing Dudayev via pro-Moscow Chechen forces was repelled by Chechen loyalists on 26 November 1994,⁶⁷ 40,000⁶⁸ Russian Army troops poured into Chechnya on 11 December expecting “limited resistance,” but instead were immediately harassed by the local population,⁶⁹ slowing the Russian advance and delaying the assault on Grozny until 26 December.⁷⁰ Despite this resistance, a combination of poor intelligence and stunningly incompetent planning left the Russian military still expecting a walkover in Grozny, figuring that a show of force would intimidate the Chechens into submission.⁷¹ This assumption, however, would prove horrifically incorrect, as the Chechens were prepared to stand and fight against what they perceived to be a foreign invasion.

The Chechen units that defended Grozny could be divided into three groups: 1) Chechen regular army forces, 2) Volunteer forces (the most numerous group, many coming from across the North Caucasus), and 3) Self-defense formations made up mostly of volunteers from outlying towns and villages.⁷² Although the Russian media used derogatory terms such as “hitmen” to refer to the Chechen fighters, the reality was that a very coherent structure had been formed within the Chechen defense forces during their short preparation period.⁷³

Following a ten-day aerial and artillery bombardment, two Russian armored units- the 131st Maikop Brigade and the 81st Motor Rifle Regiment- attacked Grozny.⁷⁴ Facing no resistance during their initial penetration into the city, both armored units would soon be “engaged and fighting for their lives against skilled swarms of Chechen infantry, armed with automatic

⁶⁷ John Kohan and Yuri Zarakovich, “Fire in the Caucasus.” *Time Magazine*, 12 December 1994.

⁶⁸ LtCol Timothy Jackson, *David Slays Goliath: A Chechen Perspective on the War in Chechnya (1994-96)*, Marine Corps Wargaming Division Paper (2000), 4.

⁶⁹ Oliker, *Russia's Chechen Wars*, 10-11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 5.

⁷² Knezyz and Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya*, 66.

⁷³ *Ibid*.

⁷⁴ Jackson, *David Slays Goliath*, 11.

weapons and rocket-propelled grenades.”⁷⁵ Over the next 72 hours, the 131st Maikop Brigade would be totally destroyed, while the 81st Motor Rifle Regiment would lose half its fighting strength to casualties.

Realizing they had a serious struggle at hand, Russian forces re-grouped and resumed the assault on 5-6 January 1995.⁷⁶ A new military operations plan and a blockade to the southeast that cut off Chechen supply lines allowed Russian forces to push back the resistance fighters and eventually seize control of the ruined presidential palace on 19 January.⁷⁷ Chechen forces were then gradually pushed out of the city, and on 3 February Russian tanks were able to break through Chechen lines near the main highway and succeeded in nearly encircling the capital.⁷⁸

To avoid annihilation and create a staging area for guerrilla attacks, the Chechen separatists withdrew south⁷⁹ to the impregnable Caucasus Mountains. Over the next few months the Russian forces were able to consolidate their gains by seizing all but a few of the southernmost villages; by June of 1995 the Chechens “had their backs up against the mountains, and the war hung in the balance.”⁸⁰

It was at this point that the resistance was able to turn the tide of the war by embracing terrorist tactics. Two decisive turning points stand out: the June 1995 raid on the Russian town of Budyonnovsk, and the January 1996 raid on the Dagestani town of Kizlyar.

In Budyonnovsk, a group led by Basayev attempted a raid on what was supposed to be a military target; when that mission failed, they seized control of a hospital and took more than a thousand

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kneyzys and Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya*, 109.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 111.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 116.

⁷⁹ Jackson, *David Slays Goliath*, 15.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

hostages.⁸¹ Unsuccessful negotiations dragged on for days until Russian forces finally stormed the hospital; Basayev and his men repelled the assault, and a hundred civilians were killed.⁸² Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin then took to the telephone to negotiate with Basayev on live national television, and a deal was worked out: the Chechen fighters would be able to safely cross the border back into Chechnya and a republic-wide cease-fire would be implemented.⁸³ This event raised Basayev's stature further in Chechnya, while also strengthening the Chechen separatist position and forcing Russia to be serious about peace talks.⁸⁴

The second significant event was the raid on Kizlyar by another prominent Chechen warlord, Salman Raduyev. Originally targeting a nearby Russian helicopter base, Raduyev's men faced stiff resistance and were forced to retreat back into town; once there they seized- like in Budyonnovsk- the town hospital.⁸⁵ Taking at least 2,000 hostages, Raduyev threatened to execute the captives unless Moscow ceased its efforts to prevent Chechen independence.⁸⁶ The Russian government eventually agreed to allow the rebels' safe passage back to Chechnya with at least one hundred hostages, with the stipulation that they be released at the border; when they were not, Russian forces opened fire from the air, causing the militants to flee into the Dagestani village of Pervomayskoye.⁸⁷ Outnumbered 10:1, Raduyev's men endured a withering Russian

⁸¹ Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars*, 40.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸⁶ Michael Wines, "Former Chechen Rebel Leader, Once a Thorn in Russia's Side, Dies in Prison." *The New York Times*, 16 December 2002,

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B00EEDA163DF935A25751C1A9649C8B63>

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

assault and melted away into the mountains, yet again exposing the impotence of the Russian military and proving to be a “final straw” in the first war.⁸⁸

Embarrassed, demoralized, and now facing strong public opposition to the conflict, the Russian government realized that it was time to make a serious attempt at ending the war. The assassination of Dudayev in a rocket attack in April of 1996 “removed an unpredictable and unreliable negotiating partner,”⁸⁹ and allowed the Russians to partially save face by appearing to have both eliminated and never negotiated with the radical Chechen president. Dudayev was then succeeded by Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, who would meet with Boris Yeltsin and sign a temporary cease-fire in May of 1996.⁹⁰

The Chechens would shrewdly take advantage of the cease-fire to reconstitute and re-arm their forces, and on 6 August 1996 a rebel army under the command of Basayev attacked the Russian garrison in Grozny; over 500 Russian soldiers were killed and numerous armored vehicles were destroyed.⁹¹ The remaining 3,000 Russian soldiers in the city were trapped in their barracks, finally convincing Yeltsin to dispatch General Alexander Lebed to the town of Khasavyurt, Dagestan to commence peace negotiations.⁹²

By the end of August a deal was reached whereby Russia agreed to withdraw its troops and Chechnya was given its *de facto* independence with a final ruling to be put off until 2001,⁹³ thereby ending the First Chechen War. The violence, according to a conservative estimate, killed

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars*, 41.

⁹⁰ BBC News, “Timeline: Chechnya,” *BBC News website*, last updated 19 January 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/2357267.stm

⁹¹ Klebnikov, *Godfather of the Kremlin*, 255.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

36,000 civilians, 4,000 Chechen fighters, and 7,500 Russian soldiers,⁹⁴ all the while destroying much of Chechnya's infrastructure and thus creating an environment almost completely devoid of the necessary ingredients for the successful rehabilitation of the republic.

⁹⁴ Miriam Lansky, "Chechnya's Internal Fragmentation, 1996-1999," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* (Vol. 27.2 Summer/Fall 2003), 186.

3. The Interwar Period (1996-1999)

By 1 January 1997, not a single Russian soldier remained on Chechen soil.⁹⁵ Presidential elections were conducted that month, and the winner was Aslan Maskhadov, a former Soviet artillery officer-turned-rebel commander who was Dudayev's top deputy.⁹⁶ His primary opponent in the election was Basayev, whom he easily beat by a 59% to 23.5% margin.⁹⁷ Viewed through the extraordinarily complex prism of Chechnya in 1997, Maskhadov was a "conciliator, doing his best to restrain his wilder compatriots, often unsuccessfully,"⁹⁸ and also a "moderate, pragmatic politician" who attempted to unite his former political rivals by appointing Basayev to the post of deputy prime minister.⁹⁹

Maskhadov's stated goal was the creation of an independent, secular Chechen state which he believed could be best constructed via the establishment of a peaceful, positive neighborly relationship with Russia as well as the strengthening of mutually beneficial ties with Western governments.¹⁰⁰ To that end, Maskhadov was received in the Kremlin,¹⁰¹ which at this point was allowing Chechnya its own constitution and full control over finance and natural resources.¹⁰² However, the paltry aid Moscow supplied for rebuilding was hardly enough to repair the war-ravaged republic, and what aid did flow in was generally hoarded by corrupt government

⁹⁵ Aron, *Russia's Revolution*, 255.

⁹⁶ No author, "Obituary: Aslan Maskhadov," *The Economist*, 10 March 2005, <http://www.economist.com/node/3738936>

⁹⁷ Oleg Lukin, "The 1997 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Chechnya," *The Prague Watchdog*, 27 January 2007,

http://www.justicefornorthcaucasus.com/jfnc_message_boards/chechnya.php?entry_id=1167635280&title=prague-watchdog%3A-the-1997-presidential-and-parliamentary-elections-in-chechnya&comments=comments

⁹⁸ The Economist, "Obituary: Aslan Maskhadov."

⁹⁹ Lukin, *The 1997 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Chechnya*

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ The Economist, "Obituary: Aslan Maskhadov."

¹⁰² Aron, *Russia's Revolution*, 255.

officials and re-distributed to the numerous armed gangs and militias that would rapidly destabilize the entire country.¹⁰³

Lack of employment led many Chechen men to join such militias, and kidnapping for ransom became an epidemic throughout the region. The murder of aid workers and the kidnapping and beheadings of four UK-based telecommunications engineers in 1998 shocked the world and undermined the Chechen separatist cause.¹⁰⁴ Armed gangs roved the countryside, fighting amongst themselves as illegal activity exploded, and Chechnya became a gangster state. Thus, the nationalist ideal coveted and fought for by so many Chechens descended into a “Hobbesian jungle characterized by chaos, poverty, and violence.”¹⁰⁵

The interwar period also witnessed the rise of a conservative, radical strain of Islam known as *Wahabbism* within Chechnya, arguably the key political development of the era. The main reasons for the emergence of Wahabbism were twofold: 1) The astounding battlefield success of the increasingly-radicalized Basayev and his fighters, and 2) The reputation for discipline and courage earned by the foreign Islamist fighters that began to enter Chechnya in 1995 (many of whom had fought in Afghanistan, Abkhazia, Tajikistan, and Bosnia) as part of the numerous cases of conflict that involved Muslim communities perceived by jihadists to be under attack by the West or Christendom.¹⁰⁶ This gave politicized Islam a romantic aura and made it attractive to younger fighters in Chechnya.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Lanskoj, *Chechnya's Internal Fragmentation*, 186.

¹⁰⁴ BBC News, Chechnya kidnap victims dead, *BBC News website*, 8 December 1998, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/230215.stm>

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 185.

¹⁰⁶ Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 100.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

During this time, Shamil Basayev would evolve from a secular nationalist in the early 1990's to a jihadist who was quoted as saying in 1995 that his fighters were "warriors for Islam" fighting against a "godless" Russia.¹⁰⁸ This coincided with the arrival of Ibn al-Khattab, a Saudi Arabian guerilla fighter who commanded his own unit of Arab volunteers and also served as an intermediary for financing from the Middle East.

Khattab rose to fame after the Shatoy ambush on 16 April 1996, an event which according to the Russian government saw "a large gang of militants, including foreign mercenaries" destroy six infantry fighting vehicles, one tank, and eleven armored personnel carriers while killing 73 Russian soldiers and wounding 52.¹⁰⁹ He and Basayev became close partners in the Chechen resistance, and there is little doubt that Khattab's Islamist views had a strong influence on the national hero from the first Chechen war. Basayev himself once said, "In Khattab I found a comrade in arms...he helped me find my grounding in Islam."¹¹⁰

As more and more top rebel field commanders became radicalized, Maskhadov found himself in an increasingly difficult position. The Chechen president recognized that rebuilding his country and providing security and stability was impossible without Russian assistance, but his attempts at normalizing relations with Moscow were unacceptable to the embittered warlords.¹¹¹ In the meantime, a growing schism was developing between the Islamists and government forces, leading to armed clashes that resulted in further destabilization.¹¹² However, a determined Maskhadov was intent on establishing rule of law, clamping down on the Wahabbist movement,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 100-101.

¹⁰⁹ Льв Рохлин, "по факту гибели военнослужащих 245 мотострелкового полка", *ДОКЛАД ГОСДУМЕ*, 26 апреля 1996 года.

¹¹⁰ Wojciech Jagielski, *Towers of Stone: The Battle of Wills in Chechnya*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009), 209.

¹¹¹ Kevin Daniel Leahy, "From Racketeer to Emir: A Political Portrait of Doku Umarov, Russia's Most Wanted Man," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 4 [3], Summer 2010), 257.

¹¹² Ibid, 258.

and disarming local militias in order to improve his country's image not just to Moscow but also the rest of the international community.

In 1998, Basayev became disillusioned with Maskhadov's crackdown on the warlords as well as his continuous talks with Russia. Decrying how "almost no agreement signed between Grozny and Moscow has been fulfilled... the Russian side is not consistent in fulfilling its obligations in the framework of these agreements,"¹¹³ Basayev resigned on 7 July from the post of prime minister (he had been promoted from deputy prime minister on 15 January).¹¹⁴

On 16 July the situation boiled over when pro-government forces led by Sulim Yamadayev battled Wahabbist followers of the warlords Arbi Barayev and Abdul-Malik Mezhidov in the town of Gudermes, reportedly resulting in the deaths of fifty combatants and civilians.¹¹⁵ This incident led to the "sharp polarization of the Chechen people" and exposed the increasingly-dangerous divisions between Maskhadov's government and the radical Islamist fighters in Chechnya.¹¹⁶

Just one week later an explosion destroyed both a jeep and a car that were escorting Maskhadov, killing one bodyguard and wounding six additional people.¹¹⁷ While Maskhadov was able to "miraculously" escape injury after being ejected from his vehicle along with a door,¹¹⁸ Chechnya was rapidly spiraling out of control and lawlessness had become arguably the biggest scourge to the nation's inhabitants.

¹¹³ No author, "Dagestan Incursions- August-September 1999," GlobalSecurity.org website, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/chechnya2-2.htm>

¹¹⁴ Emil Souleimanov, "Chechnya, Wahabbism, and the Invasion of Dagestan," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 9, No. 4, Article 4), December 2005

¹¹⁵ Artem Kroupenev, "Radical Islam in Chechnya," *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 23 January 2009.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Sergei Mashkin and Musa Muradov, "Aslan Maskhadov Killed," *Kommersant: Russia's Daily Online*, 9 March 2005,

<http://www.kommersant.com/page.asp?id=552963>

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

In October, three top rebel commanders- Basayev, Salman Raduyev, and Khunkarpasha Israpilov- requested first of the Chechen parliament and later the Supreme *Sharia* Court that Maskhadov be impeached for “treason,” citing the president’s attempts to have formal relations with Moscow.¹¹⁹ Although this was denied by both bodies, the pressure on Maskhadov increased when two powerful, formerly neutral rebel commanders- Ruslan Gelayev and Ahmed Zakayev- soon decided to align themselves with the opposition against the president.¹²⁰

Maskhadov responded with a last-ditch attempt at stabilizing the political situation in February of 1999 by imposing fundamentalist *sharia* law throughout the country, stripping the pro-Maskhadov Chechen parliament of its legislative functions and abolishing the post of vice president.¹²¹ Although this was a clear attempt at appeasing the radical factions of Chechen resistance, it still wasn’t enough. The rebel commanders viewed Maskhadov as impotent and traitorous, and were on the precipice of allowing their radicalized nature to lead them down the path to war with Russia yet again.

¹¹⁹ No author, “Caucasus Report: 10 February 1999 (Vol. 2, Num. 6),” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty website*, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1341979.html>

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

4. The Second Chechen War

In April of 1999, the Wahabbist leader of the Dagestan-based “Islamic Army of the Caucasus,” Bagaudin Magomedov, appealed to the jihadists operating in and around Chechnya for help in “liberating Dagestan and the Caucasus from the Russian colonial yoke.”¹²² This played right into the interests of Basayev and Khattab, who in January had begun assembling a military unit composed of foreign jihadist volunteers known as the “Islamic Legion.”¹²³

Four months later- without consulting or warning Maskhadov- Basayev and Khattab led a group of around 1,500 militants (composed of Chechens, Dagestanis and Arabs) over the Chechen border into Dagestan on 6-7 August 1999.¹²⁴ In the words of Basayev, the rebels launched the invasion “to help our brothers who were longing for freedom, just as we once were.”¹²⁵ After occupying several villages, the rebels declared the birth of the “independent Islamic State of Dagestan,” with a stated goal of separating Dagestan from Russia and forming a single, united Islamic state with Chechnya,¹²⁶ an echo of Imam Shamil’s attempt at creating the “Caucasus Imamate” in the mid-nineteenth century.

Russian forces responded swiftly to the provocation, combining with Dagestani police and paramilitaries to expel the rebels from Dagestan by 12 September.¹²⁷ However, the situation was further exacerbated by a series of apartment bombings that began in the city of Buynaksk, Dagestan on 4 September, struck Moscow on 9 and 13 September, and then Volgodonsk on 16

¹²² Emil Souleimanov, “Chechnya, Wahabbism, and the Invasion of Dagestan,” *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* (Vol. 9, No. 4, Article 4), December 2005

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Jagielski, *Towers of Stone*, 208.

¹²⁶ Alexander Pashin, “Russian Army Operations and Weaponry During the Second Military Campaign in Chechnya,” *Moscow Defense Brief* (March 2002),

<http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/3-2002/ac/raowdsmcc/>

¹²⁷ Ibid.

September, killing over 300 people.¹²⁸ The Russian government immediately placed the blame on “Chechen terrorists,” although it should be noted that questions persist to this day about potential FSB involvement (the attacks remain unsolved and occurred just as the government was desirous of public support for large-scale military intervention).¹²⁹ Regardless, Islamist extremism and lawlessness had proliferated to such a point in Chechnya that it was virtually inevitable that Russia would invade again.

For his part, Maskhadov did everything he could to stave off war. Besides expressing his condolences to all Russian citizens and distancing himself from Basayev’s actions in Dagestan,¹³⁰ he also made repeated, “desperate” attempts to talk with Moscow, but they were all rebuffed.¹³¹ Maskhadov denied that Chechens were responsible for the apartment bombings in Russia, claiming the attacks were part of the struggle in the Kremlin over who would succeed Boris Yeltsin.¹³² When later asked why he failed to stop Basayev and Khattab’s invasion of Dagestan, Maskhadov said:

“[Russia says] I’m weak because I didn’t settle the score with Basayev when he attacked Dagestan. It wasn’t Basayev I was afraid of, it was war with Russia! Russia was absolutely counting on it. That we would jump at each other’s throats, kill one another. We would have scarcely started the war, and Russia would have sent its army to the Caucasus, allegedly to separate us and help us make peace, but in fact to murder us, to slaughter every last one of us. If Chechnya were an independent state like Georgia, if its security were guaranteed by

¹²⁸ Gregory Pfeifer, “Three Years Later, Moscow Apartment Bombings Remain Unsolved,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty website, 6 September 2002, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1100714.html>

¹²⁹ Andrew McGregor, “Beyond the Myth: A Review of The Wolves of Islam,” *North Caucasus Analysis Volume 6, Issue 12*, 22 March 2005

¹³⁰ Emil Pain, “The Second Chechen War: The Information Component,” *Military Review* (July-August 2000)

¹³¹ Patrick Cockburn, “Russian warplanes kill dozens of villagers,” *The Independent*, 11 October 1999, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russian-warplanes-kill-dozens-of-villagers-740254.html>

¹³² Ibid.

international law forbidding armed invasion, I would crush all my enemies in the blink of an eye. Just like [former Georgian president] Shevardnadze dealt with his bandits. He didn't have to be afraid of getting stabbed in the back [by Russia]. I'd have that strength as well, and my hand would not falter. But I could not start a civil war. My hands were tied. All in all, [the Chechen warlords] want freedom for Chechnya too...Russia would have attacked us either way."¹³³

Resigned to the fact that war was inevitable, the former Soviet artillery officer began preparations for a second showdown with Russian forces in Grozny, the defense of which would be all but impossible without the assistance of the myriad warlords who opposed him.

Recognizing the stakes, rebel commanders such as Basayev and Raduyev came to Maskhadov and offered support, saying, "What's done is done; you know you can count on us."¹³⁴ Ruslan Gelayev, who by this point commanded a substantial fighting force of 1,500 men, also joined in the defense of the city, deploying his fighters in preparation for the Russian assault.¹³⁵ The Chechen defenders were clearly hoping to entangle federal forces in the type of bitter urban combat that proved so devastatingly effective in the first war, and that has historically provided a significant advantage to outnumbered, technologically inferior combatants.

The Russians had learned their lesson, however, approaching the second war with an entirely different- and ruthless- strategy. Entering Chechnya from the north in October, any town or village that put up resistance was encircled by federal forces and then destroyed by airstrikes and artillery.¹³⁶ To the Russians, indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas- resulting in enormous amounts of non-combatant casualties- was acceptable when facing an opponent that allegedly

¹³³ Jagielski, *Towers of Stone*, 200-201.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 201.

¹³⁵ Cerwyn Moore, "The Tale of Ruslan Gelayev: Understanding the International Dimensions of the Chechen Wars," *Central Asia Caucasus Institute Analyst*, 28 May 2008.

¹³⁶ Olikier, *Russia's Chechen Wars*, 41-42.

employed similar “terrorist” tactics.¹³⁷ Once a town or village was sufficiently demolished, Russian ground forces would then move in for “mop-up” operations before the troop columns would continue their advance.

Upon reaching Grozny in mid-October, Russian forces surrounded the city and proceeded to pulverize it with airstrikes and ground bombardment lasting well into December.¹³⁸ Heavy fighting on the city’s outskirts then commenced on 23 December as the Russians slowly pushed into the capital, setting the stage for a final assault that started on 17 January.¹³⁹ Facing “isolation and annihilation,”¹⁴⁰ on 1 February the Chechen command ordered a general withdrawal headed southwest out of Grozny after paying the Russians a \$100,000 bribe (a not uncommon practice in the first war) to allow for safe passage out of the city.¹⁴¹ But in what would prove to be a crippling blow for the rebels, the bribe was a trap: the Russians had staked out and heavily mined the escape route.

The commanders of the retreating fighters were Basayev, Aslanbek Ismailov, Lecha Dudayev, and Khunkarpasha Israpilov.¹⁴² In an attempt at leadership, these four prominent members of the resistance vowed to walk at the front of the column to encourage their men; Ismailov, Dudayev, and Israpilov were then killed almost immediately by landmines, and Basayev would be seriously wounded, losing the lower half of his right leg.¹⁴³ Russian forces lying in wait then

¹³⁷ Pain, *The Second Chechen War*

¹³⁸ Ibid, 42.

¹³⁹ Timothy L. Thomas, “Grozny 2000: Urban Combat Lessons Learned,” *Military Review* (July-August 2000)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Lyoma Turpalov, “Chechen Corpses Paved Path Across Minefield,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 February 2000

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

opened up on the rebels with rockets and artillery, killing over 600 Chechen fighters and wounding scores more.¹⁴⁴

The last remaining rebel contingent of significance at this point was commanded by Gelayev, who had decided unilaterally (and against Maskhadov's wishes) to withdraw his forces from Grozny as the situation deteriorated.¹⁴⁵ Fighting to stay alive, Gelayev was contacted by fellow warlord Arbi Barayev and offered not just safe passage out of the conflict zone, but also a place to rest and reconstitute his unit in the town of Komsomolskaya, which also happened to be Gelayev's place of birth.¹⁴⁶ Upon arriving in Komsomolskaya, Gelayev and his men walked into a set-up: Barayev had betrayed Gelayev to the Russians, who in turn had encircled the town, enabling them to slaughter Gelayev's unit.¹⁴⁷ While Gelayev himself was able to escape the siege, his rebel unit was decimated and his ability to influence events in Chechnya was permanently compromised.

These crushing setbacks forced the rebels- including Maskhadov, Basayev, and Khattab- back into the mountains in order to stage guerrilla attacks. However, with the tough-talking Vladimir Putin now serving as acting president of Russia- and acquiring tremendous popularity for his relentless prosecution of the war- and the severely reduced rebel offensive military capability, it was clear that not only was it impossible to reach a negotiated settlement with Moscow, but there was also no chance that the Chechens would ever be able to dislodge the Russian military like

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Moore, "The Tale of Ruslan Gelayev," *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*

¹⁴⁶ Leahy, *From Racketeer to Emir*

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

they once improbably had in 1996. Thus, the large-scale military phase of the second Chechen war was over by the middle of 2000.¹⁴⁸

As Russian forces moved to consolidate their gains, the conflict would evolve as it became even more radicalized. Russian *zachistka* operations in Chechen villages resulted in widespread atrocities and human rights abuses.¹⁴⁹ Almost any Chechen man of fighting age was subjected to “verbal taunting, extortion, theft, beatings, and arbitrary arrest” by Russian forces, often never to be heard from again.¹⁵⁰ Mass executions also took place during and after the major combat phase, as Russian soldiers would execute villagers, rape women, then loot and burn their homes.¹⁵¹

These horrors- combined with the harsh reality of their limited fighting capacity- pushed the Chechen rebels ever closer to a position of desperation. Soon, a concerted campaign of suicide bombings and terrorist attacks would commence, signifying a strategic reshuffling that would come to have dire consequences for the viability, sustainability and legitimacy of the Chechen separatist movement.

¹⁴⁸ Reuter, *Chechnya's Suicide Bombers*, 5.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Bouckaert, “War Crimes in Chechnya and the Response of the West,” *Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Human Rights Watch)*, 29 February 2000

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

5. Postwar resistance and the current state of Chechen separatism

Forced into the mountains yet again, Chechen resistance fighters were able to conduct numerous hit-and-run operations out of their strongholds, but as each year passed their military effectiveness waned. According to official Russian statistics (see Figure 1), the number of federal forces killed in Chechnya dropped each year between 2000 (the peak of combat operations) and 2005 (as the situation in Chechnya began to relatively stabilize due to a variety of factors).¹⁵²

Shamil Basayev and Khattab organized many of the attacks on Russian and Moscow-backed indigenous forces, while Aslan Maskhadov also

retreated to the mountains in an attempt to broker a

political solution while also continuing to serve as

“president” of Chechnya. Beginning in April of

2000, Maskhadov made repeated calls for

unconditional peace talks with Russian authorities,

but each time they were summarily rejected.¹⁵³

Maskhadov also condemned terrorism¹⁵⁴ in an attempt to distance himself from the “terrorists and bandits” that Moscow so despised, but such proclamations would also fall on deaf ears.

In contrast to Maskhadov’s futile attempts at reconciliation, the military wing of the Chechen resistance took on a starkly Islamist face under the command of Basayev. This was most likely a

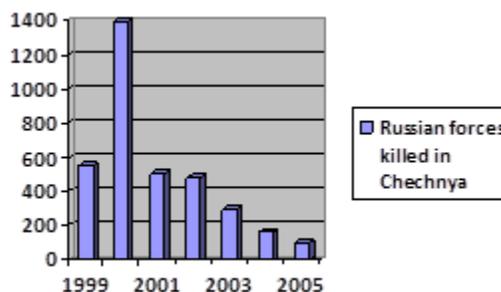


Figure 1 source: GZT.ru Новости

¹⁵² No author, Потери в Чечне в 5 раз, GZT.ru Новости, 26 Февраля 2006 года,

<http://www.gzt.ru/topnews/society/-poteri-v-chechne-sokratilisj-v-5--raz-/71591.html>

¹⁵³ Liz Fuller, “Analysis: Is It Too Late For Peace Talks With Chechnya?” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 11 February 2005,

<http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1057400.html>

¹⁵⁴ Andrei Babitsky, “Russia: RFE/RL Interviews Chechen Field Commander Umarov,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 28 July 2005,

<http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1060266.html>

deliberate attempt to secure and maintain external funding, much of it coming from the Chechen diaspora and radical Wahhabi sources across the Gulf States of the Middle East.¹⁵⁵ Basayev also spent time tapping into the native frustrations about the endemic corruption in the local administrations throughout the North Caucasus¹⁵⁶ by founding many of the ethnic-based *jamaat* groups in the republics surrounding Chechnya.¹⁵⁷ His goal was to shift the fighting out of Chechnya and into nearby regions in an attempt to force the Russian government to spread its security forces across the North Caucasus.¹⁵⁸

At some point before the 2002 *Nord-Ost* Theater siege in Moscow- a Chechen hostage-taking operation which resulted in the deaths of 130 people¹⁵⁹ and which drew international condemnation- Maskhadov made the fateful decision to announce that he was again coordinating resistance activities with Basayev, who would publicly claim responsibility for organizing the attack.¹⁶⁰ This action gave Russian authorities an *ex post facto* “cast-iron excuse to brand Maskhadov a terrorist, and demolished his credibility with the United States,” with one US official stating that Maskhadov had “forfeited any legitimacy he had...He’s either unwilling to stand up to terrorists or incapable of it.”¹⁶¹

Maskhadov would later denounce the actions of the hostage-takers in Moscow, saying, “I have never given orders to blow up buildings or to kill innocent people. I have even given orders to

¹⁵⁵ No author, “Symbolic Blow for Chechen Rebels as Notorious Warlord Killed in Southern Russia,” *IHS Global Insight website*, 11 July 2006,

http://www.ihs.com/products/global-insight/industry-economic-report.aspx?ID=106599178&pu=1&rd=globalinsight_com#

¹⁵⁶ IHS Global Insight, *Symbolic Blow for Chechen Rebels as Notorious Warlord Killed in Southern Russia*

¹⁵⁷ Mairbek Vatchagaev, “The Chechen Resistance Movement: 2006 in Review,” *North Caucasus Analysis Volume 8 Issue: 2*, 11 January 2007.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Oleg Lukin, “The Dubrovka Theatre Siege: 5 Years On,” *The Prague Watchdog*, 23 October 2007,

<http://www.watchdog.cz/?show=000000-000008-000001-000466&lang=1>

¹⁶⁰ Fuller, *Analysis: Is it Too Late for Peace Talks with Chechnya?*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

my mujahideen...not to carry out terrorist attacks that could hurt innocent people.”¹⁶² The *Nord-Ost* siege along with a string of attacks on Russian civilians culminating with the even more sinister hostage drama at Public School No. 1 in Beslan, North Ossetia in 2004 only served to further isolate and undermine the Chechen separatist cause. After Basayev claimed credit for that attack, Maskhadov called the perpetrators “madmen,” claiming forces under his control had nothing to do with the operation, and called for Basayev to face trial.¹⁶³

The following year, in March of 2005, Maskhadov would be killed in an operation by Russian forces in the settlement of Tolstoy-Yurt, just outside of Grozny.¹⁶⁴ His death was a significant blow to the rebel movement on multiple levels, not least of which being that during Maskhadov’s presidency there was actually a “noticeable” level of effective diplomatic activity in the international arena and even a Chechen parliament-in-exile based in Strasbourg, France.¹⁶⁵ The former would decline precipitously under the auspices of Maskhadov’s designated successor, while the latter would all but cease to exist.¹⁶⁶

Assuming the presidency was Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev, a commander who recognized the political isolation that Beslan had caused and who would go on to halt all terrorist operations by the separatist movement, claiming that, “in our state we do not consider it acceptable to conduct operations that entail the seizing of hostages, civilians.”¹⁶⁷ Sadulayev shared Basayev’s vision of expanding the insurgency, thus wasting no time in declaring a new “Caucasus Front” in May of

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ No author, “Obituary: Aslan Maskhadov,” BBC News Website, 8 March 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/459302.stm>

¹⁶⁴ No author, “Chechen leader Maskhadov killed,” BBC News website, 8 March 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4330039.stm>

¹⁶⁵ Vatchagaev, *The Chechen Resistance Movement: 2006 in Review*

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Liz Fuller, “Chechnya: Impact of Sadulayev’s Death Likely to Be Negligible,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 17 June 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1069245.html>

2005,¹⁶⁸ as Maskhadov's death caused the rebels to switch completely to a strategy of spreading the war outside of Chechnya and into Russia.¹⁶⁹ To further along his creation, Sadulayev would spend his first summer as president creating a network of field commanders responsible for leading the *jamaats* that had been fomented by Basayev throughout the various sectors of the North Caucasus.¹⁷⁰

Credited with dissuading Basayev from carrying out major terrorist attacks in the wake of Beslan, Sadulayev's time as president would be brief. Russian *Spetsnaz* (Special Forces), acting on a tip, would kill him in a raid on a house in his hometown of Argun on 17 June 2006.¹⁷¹

Sadulayev's designated successor was Dokka Umarov, a guerrilla commander who had served under Ruslan Gelayev and who had taken command of the "south-eastern front" of the Chechen resistance following Gelayev's death in early 2004.¹⁷² Umarov's election elicited confusion throughout the resistance movement, as he did not possess the legitimacy or military experience of Basayev or the "spiritual authority" of Sadulayev.¹⁷³ In an attempt to buttress Umarov's credibility, Basayev required that the ethnic *jamaats* throughout the North Caucasus swear oaths of loyalty to the new Chechen president in order to re-assert that Chechnya was the leader of the regional resistance movement.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ No author, "Caucasian Front established by decree of ChRI President Sadulayev," Kavkaz Center website, 20 May 2005,

<http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2005/05/20/3812.shtml>

¹⁶⁹ Andrei Smirnov, "No Terrorist Acts in Russia Since Beslan: Whom to Thank?" *North Caucasus Analysis* Volume: 8 Issue: 21, 24 May 2007

¹⁷⁰ Fuller, *Chechnya: Impact of Sadulayev's Death Likely to Be Negligible*

¹⁷¹ Carl Schreck, "Chechen Rebel Leader Sadulayev Shot Dead," *The St. Petersburg Times*, 20 June 2006,

http://www.sptimesrussia.com/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=17948

¹⁷² Ruslan Isayev, "Dokka Umarov: A Hawk Flies to the Ichkerian Throne," *The Prague Watchdog*, 20 June 2006,

<http://www.watchdog.cz/?show=000000-000004-000001-000188&lang=1>

¹⁷³ Vatchagaev, *The Chechen Resistance Movement: 2006 in Review*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Umarov would name Basayev his vice-president and designated successor, but two weeks after this appointment Basayev was killed in an explosion in Ingushetia on 11 July 2006.¹⁷⁵ Basayev's death was a crippling loss for the resistance, and Umarov would eulogize him as the "motor of jihad."¹⁷⁶ With Basayev dead, most informed observers expected Umarov "would continue to uphold the broad political line established by his predecessors by continuing to fight for an independent Chechnya."¹⁷⁷ Indeed, comments made by Umarov in 2005 seemed to paint the picture of a Chechen nationalist and public critic of the Beslan debacle with no great enthusiasm for radical Islam, impressions his initial public statement as president seemed to confirm.¹⁷⁸ However, largely due to the ideological influence of the Kabardino-Balkaria-based militant leader Anzor Astemirov as well as Chechen ideologist Supyan Abdullayev¹⁷⁹, Umarov's political outlook underwent a radical transformation over the next sixteen months, leading to his announcement in October of 2007 of the creation of the Caucasus Emirate:

"I reject all laws and systems established by infidels in the land of Caucasus. I reject and declare outlawed all names used by infidels to divide Muslims. I declare outlawed ethnic, territorial and colonial zones carrying names of 'North-Caucasian republics', 'Trans-Caucasian republics' and such like. I am officially declaring of [sic] creation of the Caucasus Emirate. All lands in Caucasus, where Mujahideen who gave bay'ah (oath) to me wage Jihad, I declare wilayahs of the Caucasus Emirate: wilayah Dagestan, wilayah Nokhchiycho, wilayah Ghalghaycho, wilayah Iriston, wilayah of the Nogay Steppe, the combined wilayah of Kabarda, Balkar and Karachay...I foresee objections of all educated and uneducated hypocrites, who will

¹⁷⁵ Leahy, *From Racketeer to Emir*

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Death of Umarov's Successor Is a Major Setback to Rebel Movement," *Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 68*, 7 April 2011.

claim that we are establishing an abstract, virtual state. I would like to say that, Inshaallah, the Caucasus Emirate is a formation that is more real than all artificial colonial zones existing today.”¹⁸⁰

Umarov’s decree reduced Chechnya to the status of a province in the Emirate,¹⁸¹ thus officially ceding the Chechen separatist movement to a larger, more ambitious goal: the establishment of an independent pan-Islamic state encompassing seven autonomous republics in the region.¹⁸² The declaration also created an umbrella organization for the insurgent groups operating in the North Caucasus, which Umarov and his deputies hoped would consolidate the once-large, well-organized Islamist units from the first and second Chechen wars that

REGIONS CLAIMED BY THE CAUCASUS EMIRATE



¹⁸⁰ Dokka Umarov, “The official version of Amir Dokka’s statement of declaration of the Caucasian Emirate,” *Kavkaz Center website*, 22 November 2007, <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2007/11/22/9107.shtml>

¹⁸¹ Leahy, *From Racketeer to Emir*

¹⁸² OSAC (US Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security), “North Caucasus Insurgency,” 10 August 2010, <http://info.publicintelligence.net/OSAC-Caucasus1.pdf>

were now “broken and weak” due to the success of local security forces.¹⁸³ It also “marked a shift from the motives” of his predecessors, which were always “more nationalistic than jihadist.”¹⁸⁴

By centralizing the efforts of previously disparate militant groups in the region, the Emirate utilizes raids against local security forces as well as terrorist attacks in the Russian heartland to form a destabilizing presence on Russia’s southwestern border in hopes of exhausting Russian power in the region, compelling federal forces to withdraw, and ultimately creating the conditions allowing for the installation of a trans-ethnic Islamic state. Besides the continued threat to Russian civilians, further implications of the Emirate include the steady disruption of a region valued for its hydrocarbon energy sources and transport routes (which threatens the already low level of private investment in the region), increased potential for excessively repressive counter-terrorism methods (which endangers President Dmitri Medvedev’s fragile regional reform agenda),¹⁸⁵ reduced capacity for Russia to project land power into Georgia and Azerbaijan (nations that both seek to reduce Moscow’s traditional dominance over them),¹⁸⁶ and the existential survival of the Russian Federation itself: should Moscow lose control of the North Caucasus, centrifugal forces could encourage other republics or territories such as predominantly Muslim Tatarstan or Bashkortostan, etc. to secede.¹⁸⁷

Such a startling makeover of the conflict in the North Caucasus begs the question: what factors led to the creation of the Caucasus Emirate and the de-nationalization of Chechen separatism?

¹⁸³ Scott Stewart and Ben West, *The Caucasus Emirate*

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Gordon M. Hahn, “The Caucasus Emirate Returns to the Far Enemy,” *Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Report, No. 4*, Monterey Institute of International Studies, 10 December 2009.

¹⁸⁶ No author, “North Caucasus Insurgency: Major Risks and Implications,” *Business Monitor Online*, 29 September 2009,

<http://www.allbusiness.com/international-relations/national-security-foreign/13064633-1.html>

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

The ensuing analysis will be structured around the aforementioned three pillars: 1) the deleterious combination of 11 September and increased adoption of terrorist tactics undermining the Chechen separatist movement, 2) The startling efficacy of Russian forces in killing key resistance figures and commanders, and 3) The installation of pro-Moscow strongman Ramzan Kadyrov as president of Chechnya, and his success in stabilizing the battered republic through ruthless counterterrorism tactics and repressive state surveillance.

6. The first pillar: 9/11, terrorist tactics and the undermining of Chechen separatism

Through two bitterly contested wars, it is perhaps surprising that the first recorded suicide attack by Chechen separatists did not take place until 6 June 2000, when- in what would become a trademark of the conflict- a female bomber drove an explosives-laden truck into the temporary headquarters of a Russian security detachment in the village of Alkhan Yurt.¹⁸⁸ Just weeks later on 2-3 July, five suicide attacks took place at Russian military bases across Chechnya, killing 54 people.¹⁸⁹ That the attacks were near-simultaneous and bore similar hallmarks suggested a high level of planning and coordination; yet despite their effectiveness, Chechen rebels would never again be able to coordinate so many large-scale suicide attacks in such a short period of time.¹⁹⁰

The Chechen switch to suicide tactics nearly coincided with the Second Intifada that erupted in Israel and the Palestinian territories in September of 2000.¹⁹¹ This is important because as Palestinian militants increasingly resorted to suicide bombings¹⁹² in their campaign against Israel, it brought worldwide attention and condemnation to both the psychology and perpetrators behind such acts. With Western governments repulsed by the Palestinian strategy, Shamil Basayev did the Chechen resistance no favors when in October of 2000 he announced that 150 militants from Chechnya were ready to travel to the Palestinian territories to join the jihad against Israel, while also declaring that the Chechen resistance would pay \$1,000 to the families

¹⁸⁸ Reuter, *Chechnya's Suicide Bombers*, 6.

¹⁸⁹ No author, "Russian attacks," *The Washington Post website*, 24 January 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/world/russian-bombing-timeline/index.html>

¹⁹⁰ Reuter, *Chechnya's Suicide Bombers*, 6-7.

¹⁹¹ No author, "Al-Aqsa Intifada Timeline," *BBC News website*, last updated 29 September 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3677206.stm

¹⁹² Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Suicide and Other Bombing Attacks in Israel Since the Declaration of Principles (Sept 1993), *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website*, <http://goo.gl/uxtpl>

of Palestinian suicide bombers.¹⁹³ While Russian military pressure would prevent both manpower and money from ever leaving Chechnya for the Middle East,¹⁹⁴ it can be argued that the timing of the Second Intifada coupled with the tactics and pronouncements of Basayev in southwestern Russia were the first domino to fall in the steady erosion of legitimacy for the Chechen separatist movement.

Another hugely important turning point in the conflict was the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. The devastating strikes organized and executed by Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization focused the world's attention even more dramatically on the startling capabilities of international terrorism, and Vladimir Putin wasted no time in aligning the forthcoming US war against Islamist terrorists with Russia's struggle against Muslim combatants in Chechnya.¹⁹⁵

After being the first world leader to phone George W. Bush, Putin delivered a statement on national television declaring, "What happened today underlies once again the importance of Russia's proposals to unite the efforts of the international community in the fight against terrorism, against this plague of the 21st century. Russia knows firsthand what terrorism is, so we understand more than anyone else the feelings of the American people."¹⁹⁶

Putin also offered immediate cooperation on US military operations in Afghanistan, facilitated the basing of American forces in Central Asia, and opened Russian airspace to humanitarian

¹⁹³ Andrew McGregor, "Distant Relations: Hamas and the Mujahideen of Chechnya," *North Caucasus Analysis* Volume: 7 Issue: 8, 23 February 2006

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Claire Bigg, "Five Years After 9/11: The Kremlin's War on Terror," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 2006,

<http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1071174.html>

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

flights.¹⁹⁷ Such overtures led to rapid reciprocal results for Russia: the US deployed about 150 Special Forces “advisors” to Georgia’s lawless Pankisi Gorge in May of 2002 in order to train the local military in more effective ways to combat Muslim extremists.¹⁹⁸ Previously, Putin had declared that “terrorists...are entrenched on the territory of Georgia,”¹⁹⁹ and it is also well-documented that Ruslan Gelayev had taken his remaining fighters to the Pankisi Gorge in mid-2001, using it as a staging area and recruitment ground for his unit that had been so decimated at Komsomolskaya.²⁰⁰ Still, despite Putin’s best efforts to draw international attention to Russia’s struggle in the Caucasus, it wasn’t until the hostage crisis at a theater in Moscow on 23 October 2002 that Chechen rebels placed themselves squarely on the television screens and in the consciousness of horrified spectators around the world.

That night, more than 40 heavily-armed Chechen rebels stormed an auditorium during the play *Nord-Ost*, seizing over 800 hostages.²⁰¹ The rebels were led by Movsar Barayev, the nephew of now-deceased warlord Arbi, and they demanded that Moscow halt its military action in Chechnya and withdraw all federal forces.²⁰² The Kremlin predictably refused such a demand, and following three days of fruitless negotiations the Russian authorities pumped a powerful narcotic gas into the theater and then stormed it with *Spetsnaz* soldiers; 125 people were killed in the rescue operation.²⁰³

Despite the ham-handed manner in which the Russian authorities ended the crisis, world outcry was- understandably- overwhelmingly against the Chechens. The United Nations unanimously

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Tim Dyhouse, “Green Berets Now in Georgia: US Special Forces are training Georgian soldiers to fight radical Muslims; The mission could benefit other US interests as well,” *VFW Magazine* (June/July 2002)

¹⁹⁹ Bigg, “Five Years After 9/11,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*

²⁰⁰ Moore, “The Tale of Ruslan Gelayev,” *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*

²⁰¹ Nikolai Gorshkov, “Moscow remembers theatre siege,” *BBC News website*, 23 October 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3206285.stm>

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Lukin, *The Dubrovka Theatre Siege: 5 Years On*

adopted Resolution 1440, which “condemned in the strongest terms the heinous act of taking hostages in Moscow on 23 October,” and “urged all states...to cooperate with the Russian Federation authorities in their efforts to find and bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of that terrorist attack.”²⁰⁴ President Bush declared that he felt “very strongly that the people to blame here are the terrorists,” and that “the people who caused this tragedy to take place are terrorists who took hostages and endangered the lives of others.”²⁰⁵ British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw declared that the Chechens responsible were “known to have links to al-Qaeda,” while Prime Minister Tony Blair said the crisis was a “brutal and horrifying” reminder of a “new form of terrorist extremism.”²⁰⁶ Even Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein viewed the operation as a mistake, saying, “It’s not wise for the Chechens to lose the sympathy...of the Russian people. This will provide Zionism and America with a chance to undermine Islam and Muslims.”²⁰⁷

The radicalized military wing of the Chechen resistance would not heed these words of advice, failing to grasp how damaging such operations were to their movement. A string of suicide attacks would follow *Nord-Ost*²⁰⁸:

- 27 December 2002: Chechen bombers ram vehicles into the local government headquarters in Grozny, killing 80 people.

²⁰⁴ UN Security Council, “Security Council Condemns ‘Heinous’ Moscow Hostage-Taking, Demands Immediate, Unconditional Release,” *United Nations website*, 24 October 2002, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/sc7545.doc.htm>

²⁰⁵ Steven Lee Myers, “Hostage Drama in Moscow: Russia Responds; Putin Vows Hunt for Terror Cells Around the World,” *The New York Times*, 29 October 2002

²⁰⁶ No author, “UK backs Russia over siege,” *BBC News website*, 28 October 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/2369369.stm

²⁰⁷ No author, “Saddam Says Moscow Hostage-Taking Undermines Islam,” *People’s Daily Online*, 26 October 2002, http://english.people.com.cn/200210/26/eng20021026_105686.shtml

²⁰⁸ “Russian attacks,” *The Washington Post website* <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/world/russian-bombing-timeline/index.html>

- 12 May 2003: Two bombers ram an explosives-laden truck into a government compound in northern Chechnya, killing 59 people.
- 5 July 2003: Two female Chechen suicide bombers kill 15 other people when they blow themselves up at a rock festival at Moscow's Tushino airfield.
- 1 August 2003: A suicide bomber blows up a military hospital in North Ossetia, killing fifty.
- 5 December 2003: Forty people are killed when a bomb explodes on a passenger train in Stavropol, southern Russia.
- 9 December 2003: A suicide bomber kills five people when a car explodes near the Kremlin in Moscow.
- 6 February 2004: A suicide bombing kills 39 people on a subway train in Moscow.²⁰⁹
- 24 August 2004: Two female Chechen bombers detonate themselves on a pair of Russian passenger planes that had taken off from Moscow; 89 people are killed.
- 31 August 2004: A female suicide bomber kills 10 people outside a Moscow subway station.

These operations led up to the most disastrous of all Chechen resistance operations, the 1 September 2004 Beslan siege. That day, a group of militants took over 1,000 children and adults hostage at a public school in North Ossetia, demanding an end to the war in Chechnya.²¹⁰ After a

²⁰⁹ No author, "Many dead in Moscow metro blast," BBC News website, 6 February 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3464545.stm>

²¹⁰ Valentinas Mite, "Russia Marks Bloody End of Beslan Crisis," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 3 September 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1071050.html>

two day ordeal, Russian *Spetsnaz* stormed the building, triggering a chaotic sequence of events that led to the deaths of over 330 people, over half of them children.²¹¹

Like the *Nord-Ost* operation, the extended nature of the siege left viewers around the world attuned to what was happening, and, also like *Nord-Ost*, the rest of the world was outraged. Once again the UN passed an emergency resolution condemning the act,²¹² while UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated, “There can be no excuse for this brutal and senseless slaughter of children, whatever one’s cause. It’s terrorism, pure and simple.”²¹³ President Bush said that the operation in Beslan had shown “once again, how the terrorists measure their success – in the death of the innocent, and in the pain of the grieving families.”²¹⁴ Many Arab leaders also expressed outrage at the attack, with Egypt’s top Muslim cleric asking, “What is the guilt of those children? Why should they be responsible for your conflict with the government? You are taking Islam as cover and it is a deceptive cover, those who carry out the kidnappings are criminals, not Muslims.”²¹⁵

The Beslan operation was a colossal strategic misstep, and Basayev and the rebel leadership seemed to recognize this. The fiasco in North Ossetia would be the last terrorist operation conducted by the rebels until August of 2007,²¹⁶ at which point Maskhadov, Sadulayev and

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² UN Security Council, “Security Council, In Presidential Statement, Condemns Hostage-Taking at Russian Federation School, Demands Their Immediate Release,” *United Nations website*, 1 September 2004, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/sc8179.doc.htm>

²¹³ Office of the Spokesperson of the Secretary General, “New York, 7 September 2004 – Secretary General’s press encounter upon arrival at UNHQ,” *United Nations website*, 7 September 2004, <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/offthecuff.asp?nid=627&storynr=100>

²¹⁴ George W. Bush, “President Speaks to the United Nations General Assembly,” *The White House website*, 21 September 2004, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/09/20040921-3.html>

²¹⁵ No author, “Arab leaders decry school killings,” *Al Jazeera English website*, 4 September 2004, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C720DD9E-F195-49C4-90E1-C31595D1A4F5.htm>

²¹⁶ “Russian attacks,” *The Washington Post website*

Basayev were dead, and a radicalized Umarov was on the verge of declaring the Caucasus Emirate.

The 11 September attacks also undermined the separatist movement by focusing the world's attention on international terrorism. Funding that Chechen rebels had received from Arab sources prior to 9/11 was diminished considerably by the American invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003²¹⁷ as well as the dragnet placed by American authorities on sources of transnational terrorist funding. Additionally, both American-led wars affected Chechnya's recruiting capabilities, as Afghanistan and Iraq became more "popular" destinations for jihadist fighters and affected Chechen manpower.²¹⁸

Therefore, it can be concluded that the switch in tactics by the rebels combined with the fallout from the 9/11 attacks combined to severely damage the separatist movement, the first of three major reasons why Chechen separatism is dead and the jihadist vision of the Caucasus Emirate has taken its place.

²¹⁷ Kevin Daniel Leahy, "Economy Affects Chechnya's Politics," *IslamOnline.net*, <http://goo.gl/iEQfe>

²¹⁸ Ibid.

7. The Second Pillar: Success of Russian security forces in liquidating rebel commanders

It wasn't until February of 2005 that Russia implemented a strategic effort targeting top and mid-level Chechen militants; that month, Vladimir Putin overcame reservations he had about the utility of such methods and finally sanctioned a "systematic, sustained campaign against Chechen commanders across the board."²¹⁹ Prior to this about-face, Russian forces had targeted the top levels of Chechen separatist leaders only irregularly, and "mostly in situations where Russia had no other option but to assassinate a specific leader."²²⁰

There were six very significant "liquidations" carried out by federal forces prior to Putin's 2005 authorization, as well as two happenstance killings. The first of these successes was the targeted killing of Chechen president Dzhokhar Dudayev outside the village of Gekhi-chu on 21 April 1996. Dudayev was killed while making a satellite phone call;²²¹ Russian forces allegedly planted a bomb inside of a car parked in a gully that the Chechen president was known to frequent, and once his location was picked up via interception of his phone call, the bomb was detonated.²²² Moments later, a Russian strike aircraft fired a missile at the same target for good measure, and Dudayev was eliminated.²²³

The irony of the assassination was that Dudayev's death expedited the end of the first Chechen war by removing an obstinate foe that was unwilling to negotiate with the Russian government. Indeed, it was Dudayev's successor Zelimkhan Yandarbiev who promptly flew to Moscow and

²¹⁹ STRATFOR, "Russia's Systematic Hunt for Chechen Commanders," *STRATFOR Global Intelligence*, 6 April 2005,

<http://goo.gl/bvBw6>

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Tom de Waal, "'Dual attack' killed president," *BBC News*, 21 April 1999,

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/325347.stm>

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

agreed to the cease-fire that allowed Chechen forces to reconstitute before re-taking Grozny that August.

The second coup for Russian forces was the capture of notorious warlord Salman Raduyev in March of 2000. Raduyev was the son-in-law of Dudayev,²²⁴ and was infamous for his raid on Kizlyar, Dagestan in 1996 that helped turn the tide of the first Chechen war, while also serving as a top rebel commander in the second conflict. Raduyev- referred to by Vladimir Putin as “one of the most odious bandit leaders” – was captured in the Chechen town of Novogrozinsky²²⁵ after a betrayal by members of his inner circle.²²⁶ He would be sentenced to life in prison for numerous murders and terrorism charges in December of 2001, and would die in a Russian penal colony from “internal bleeding” in December of 2002.²²⁷

Next was the death of Ibn al-Khattab, the legendary jihadist and *Emir* (commander) of all foreign fighters in Chechnya. Khattab was killed by a poison letter in March of 2002 after he was betrayed by his “personal adjutant for special tasks,” a man known as Ibragim.²²⁸ Ibragim was recruited by the FSB and became a double agent, and, serving in his role as courier for Khattab, brought mail from a secret postbox located in Azerbaijan.²²⁹ Included was a letter soaked in an unidentified poison, which killed Khattab within two hours of being opened;²³⁰ his death was considered the Chechen rebels’ “heaviest loss since their leader Dzhokhar Dudayev died in a

²²⁴ Lyoma Turpalov, “Russia claim capture of Chechen warlord,” *The Independent*, 13 March 2000, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-claim-capture-of-chechen-warlord-722231.html>

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ “Captured Rebel Leader Raduyev Hopes for 10 Years,” *Gazeta.ru*, 13 November 2001, <http://www.gazeta.ru/2001/11/13/CapturedRebe.shtml>

²²⁷ No author, “Chechen warlord dies in jail,” *BBC News*, 15 December 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2577065.stm>

²²⁸ The Jamestown Foundation, “Who Ordered Khattab’s Death?” *North Caucasus Analysis Volume: 3 Issue: 15*, 29 May 2002

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

missile attack in 1996.”²³¹ In retaliation, Shamil Basayev personally ordered the execution of Ibragim; his bound body would be found on the outskirts of Baku with five bullets in the head in May of 2002.²³²

Russia’s next major success was the targeted killing of Yandarbiev, the aforementioned acting president of Chechnya in the wake of Dudayev’s assassination. Yandarbiev had been living in exile in the Qatari capital of Doha since January of 2000,²³³ and was viewed as a “key financial link in the funding of Chechen rebels.”²³⁴ Cited by the UN in a June 2003 report as being part of a “sub-set of the critical membership of the al-Qaeda,” Yandarbiev was killed when his car exploded after he left a mosque to drive to his home in the affluent Dafna neighborhood on 13 February 2004.²³⁵

Qatari officials arrested two Russian agents shortly after the attack, and both were sentenced to life in prison following a brief trial in which the judge declared the men “had been acting on orders from the Russian leadership.”²³⁶ The incident caused a diplomatic row between the two nations, resulting in the transfer of the agents to Russia in order to serve their sentences; however, that would not happen, as Russian officials declared the decree of the Qatari court “irrelevant” and the men were set free.²³⁷

²³¹ “Obituary: Chechen rebel Khattab,” *BBC News website*, 26 April 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1952053.stm>

²³² Who Ordered Khattab’s Death? *North Caucasus Analysis Volume: 3 Issue: 15*

²³³ “Russia ‘behind Chechen murder,’” *BBC News*, 30 June 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3852697.stm

²³⁴ STRATFOR, “Chechnya: A Murder in Qatar,” *STRATFOR: Global Intelligence*, 13 February 2004, <http://goo.gl/cY6wW>

²³⁵ “Blast kills exiled Chechen leader,” *CNN.com*, 13 February 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/02/13/qatar.chechen/index.html>

²³⁶ ²³⁶ BBC News, *Russia “behind Chechen murder”*

²³⁷ Sarah Rainsford, “Convicted Russia agents ‘missing’” *BBC News*, 17 February 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4275147.stm>

Shortly after Yandarbiev's death, Russian forces would eradicate two more top rebel commanders, though neither were targeted killings. The first incident was a chance encounter near the Dagestan/Georgia border that resulted in the death of Ruslan Gelayev on 28 February 2004.²³⁸ Gelayev had been in the region with a unit of about thirty men in late 2003, possibly with the intent to travel to southwest Asia in order to seek funding.²³⁹ The unit would be tracked, cornered, and decimated by federal forces;²⁴⁰ Gelayev then attempted to make it to Georgia alone, but would die in a shootout with two Russian border guards near the village of Bezhta, Dagestan.²⁴¹

Just over a month later, Russian security forces were able to eliminate Abu al-Walid, who was Khattab's successor as leader of the foreign fighters in Chechnya. The Saudi-born al-Walid had traveled to Chechnya during the first war in 1995, following his participation in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Bosnia.²⁴² Al-Walid eventually became Khattab's top deputy and took over as Emir of the Wahabbi fighters following the latter's assassination, while also assuming Khattab's role as an important source of funding from the Middle East.²⁴³ The exact circumstances surrounding his death remain unclear, but it is known that Russian forces carried out a series of heavy attacks along the mountainous region of southern Chechnya and along the border with Ingushetia in April of 2004; dozens of militants were killed, and a rebel website would confirm that al-Walid had died during those operations in a "mountainous area."²⁴⁴ Along with Basayev,

²³⁸ No author, "To Kill Gelayev and Die," *The Russia Journal*, 2 March 2004,

<http://www.russijournal.com/node/17350>

²³⁹ Moore, *The Tale of Ruslan Gelayev*

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ To Kill Gelayev and Die, *The Russia Journal*

²⁴² Brian Williams, "Unraveling the Links Between the Middle East and Islamic Militants in Chechnya," *Central-Asia Caucasus Analyst*, 2 December 2003

²⁴³ STRATFOR, "Fall of Abu Walid to Weaken Chechen Insurgency?" *STRATFOR: Global Intelligence*, 19 April 2004,

<http://goo.gl/AgazD>

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

al-Walid was considered one of the two most important rebel commanders following Khattab's death; he allegedly co-masterminded (with Basayev) the *Nord-Ost* operation, as well as the February 2004 metro blast in Moscow.²⁴⁵

The month after Putin's February 2005 authorization of a stepped-up campaign against Chechen rebel leaders, Aslan Maskhadov was killed in a "special operation" in the Chechen village of Tolstoy-Yurt. Maskhadov had been tracked via his cell phone following the interception of a "long communication" he'd had; Russian security forces then surrounded the house, where Maskhadov and three bodyguards were holed up in the basement.²⁴⁶ After a standoff, the federal forces threw stun grenades into the basement and began firing their weapons; when the smoke cleared, Maskhadov lay dead, executed by his bodyguard (and nephew), who later said, "My uncle always told me to shoot him if he is wounded and his capture is imminent. He said that if he is taken prisoner, he would be mistreated like Saddam Hussein had been."²⁴⁷

In 2006, Russia would essentially cut the head off of the entire separatist movement with a devastating trio of successes. In June of 2006, Chechen president Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev was killed in a raid in Argun; in July, Shamil Basayev was killed in an explosion in Ingushetia; and November witnessed the killing of al-Walid's successor as *Emir* of the foreign fighters in Chechnya, Abu Hafs al-Urduni.²⁴⁸

As mentioned in chapter six, Sadulayev was killed during the attempted search of a safe house in the Chechen town of Argun. Acting off a tip, a group of FSB officers and local police

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Агентура, "Следствие: Масхадова застрелил охранник," *Agentura.ru*, 28 October 2005, <http://www.agentura.ru/timeline/2005/maskhadov/?id=1130484780>

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ RIA Novosti, "Last aide to late warlord Khattab killed in Dagestan - FSB," *en.rian.ru*, 26 November 2006, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20061126/56004290.html>

approached the home and were greeted with gunfire that killed two servicemen; one of the security officials then tossed a grenade into the house, killing Sadulayev.²⁴⁹

The circumstances surrounding Basayev's death remain murky because there is a Russian version and a Chechen version. Of no question is the fact that the Chechen terror leader and Russia's most-wanted man was killed when an explosives-packed truck detonated close to the car he was riding in outside the village of Ekazhevo; however, while the Russians claimed he was killed in a "special operation," the Chechens have ardently maintained it was an accidental explosion.²⁵⁰

Completing the run of Russian successes was the death of al-Urduni, who besides his top-tier military rank also served as the last direct link to Khattab.²⁵¹ As *Emir* of the foreign mujahideen, the Saudi-born al-Urduni had the typical role of liaison to Middle Eastern sponsors while also serving one of the top operational commanders in the entire resistance movement.²⁵² He was killed in a gun-battle after FSB agents stormed his safehouse in Khasavyurt, Dagestan.²⁵³

The sustained run of eliminating top rebel commanders from 2004-2006 resulted in a crippling blow to the insurgency that in many ways it has never recovered from. Very few of the top rebel commanders from the first war- those who have the most experience and garner the most respect- remain alive and/or influential. The single greatest setback to the resistance movement was the loss of Shamil Basayev; to both the rebels and the Russian forces who hunted him for years, Basayev was a talismanic figure in the resistance. His military expertise, cunning, and

²⁴⁹ Andrei Smirnov, "Sadulaev Death Result of Good Luck, Not Good Planning," *Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume:3 Issue: 121*, 22 June 2006

²⁵⁰ Peter Finn, "Blast Kills Leader of Separatists in Chechnya," *The Washington Post*, 11 July 2006

²⁵¹ RIA Novosti, *Last aide to late warlord Khattab killed in Dagestan- FSB*

²⁵² STRATFOR, *Russia's Systematic Hunt for Chechen Commanders*

²⁵³ Bill Roggio, "Chechen al Qaeda Emir Abu Hafs Killed," *The Long War Journal*, 26 November 2006, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2006/11/chechen_alqaeda_emir.php

utter ruthlessness had propelled him to mythical status in the eyes of those who supported Chechen separatism and also jihadists around the world.

A granular examination of the level of success that federal forces attained in 2006 is striking, and leaves one unsurprised that Chechen separatism was ceded to the formation of the Caucasus Emirate about a year later. After all, even by the time Basayev was killed it had become increasingly difficult for insurgents to operate in Chechnya, as much of the republic's territory was controlled by Chechen forces at least partially loyal to Moscow, but unequivocally subservient to Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Peter Finn, "Chechnya's Separatists Weakening," *The Washington Post*, 12 July 2006

8. The Third Pillar: The Rise of Ramzan Kadyrov

Akhmad Kadyrov, the former *Mufti* (Islamic scholar) of Chechnya's Muslims and onetime rebel from the first war against Russia, became president of the Moscow-backed Chechen government after winning a dubious election in October of 2000.²⁵⁵ Kadyrov, who commanded a militia of roughly 7,000 men by the time of the second war, had switched to the Russian side in 1999 due to "disenchantment" with Aslan Maskhadov and dislike for the radical Wahabbist doctrines being imported to Chechnya by Shamil Basayev and foreign fighters like Khattab.²⁵⁶

To the separatist movement Kadyrov was a traitor, while to most moderate Chechens he was seen as a "gangster" due to the routine kidnapping, extortion and looting his militia engaged in.²⁵⁷ However, his position was one of enormous importance to Vladimir Putin as the leader of the Kremlin attempted to implement a strategy of "Chechenization" in the war-ravaged republic.²⁵⁸

After taking over as president, Kadyrov's son (and also former rebel) Ramzan became head of security forces and was often accused of organizing deadly attacks against his father's political opponents.²⁵⁹ Despite such tactics, Akhmad Kadyrov was able to bring a "measure of stability" to the republic, as murders and kidnappings fell²⁶⁰ and the general security situation improved. But no matter what Kadyrov did he would remain a stooge in the eyes of the resistance movement, and on 9 May 2004 he was killed when a bomb exploded underneath him at Grozny

²⁵⁵ "Akhmad Kadyrov," *The Telegraph*, 10 May 2004, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1461379/Akhmad-Kadyrov.html>

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Julius Strauss and Daniel McLaughlin, "Rebels kill Chechen president in bomb attack on stadium," *The Telegraph*, 10 May 2004, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1461427/Rebels-kill-Chechen-president-in-bomb-attack-on-stadium.html>

²⁵⁹ The Telegraph, *Akhmad Kadyrov*

²⁶⁰ Strauss and McLaughlin, *Rebels kill Chechen president in bomb attack on stadium*

stadium during a holiday marking Russia's victory over Germany in World War II.²⁶¹ Within two weeks, the attack was claimed by Shamil Basayev, who mocked Kadyrov's death by calling it a "small, but important victory."²⁶²

Senior officials in Chechnya – fearing the power vacuum Kadyrov's death would create – pressed Putin to allow Ramzan Kadyrov to run for president, as it would take the overruling of the local constitution for Ramzan to be eligible (he was 28 at the time and the minimum age for the presidency in Chechnya is 30).²⁶³ Putin decided against this, but clearly wanted Ramzan in power; rather than overrule the constitution, Putin picked a career bureaucrat named Alu Alkhanov to hold the title of president until Ramzan turned 30, while Kadyrov was named deputy prime minister.²⁶⁴

Following a car accident that injured Chechen Prime Minister Sergei Abramov in November of 2005, Kadyrov served as acting prime minister before fully taking over on 4 March 2006 following Abramov's resignation.²⁶⁵ Kadyrov's elevation marked a transition from Putin's "policy of 'Chechenization' to a policy of 'Kadyrization'," as Chechen police and military formations assumed an expanded role in the republic.²⁶⁶ In fact, by 2006 almost all large-scale operations to eliminate militants were being carried out by Chechen forces,²⁶⁷ a significant turning point in the conflict.

²⁶¹ "Chechen rebel claims Grozny blast," *BBC News*, 17 May 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3720375.stm>

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Sultan Abubakarov, "Jabrailov's words that Alkhanov should resign in favor of Kadyrov were perceived ambiguously in Chechnya," *Caucasian Knot*, 8 November 2006, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/4995/>

²⁶⁵ The Jamestown Foundation, "Ramzan Confirmed as Prime Minister," *North Caucasus Analysis Volume: 7 Issue: 10*, 9 March 2006

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Although Kadyrov's reign as prime minister would be brief, he gradually began requiring that women wear headscarves in public (a violation of the Russian constitution), and banned alcohol and gambling in Chechnya.²⁶⁸ He also spent vast sums of money constructing mosques and ordered a revival of traditional Sufi Islam in "an effort to fall in line with Islamic standards of governance and use religion as an instrument of policy."²⁶⁹ To assert his control over the republic, Kadyrov utilized his now 10,000-strong private army called the "Kadyrovtsy." Although not as indiscriminate as the Russians, the methods of the Kadyrovtsy were just as brutal: kidnapping family members of suspected rebels, disappearances, beatings, official intimidation, and human rights abuses became commonplace.²⁷⁰ Kadyrov also created an extremely effective network of informers that trumped even that of the Russian FSB,²⁷¹ making it increasingly difficult for separatist militants to operate.

In February of 2007, Putin would dismiss president Alkhanov and install Kadyrov as acting president,²⁷² taking advantage of the presidential power to appoint regional governors ratified in Moscow's lower house of parliament in December of 2004.²⁷³ As president, Kadyrov would emerge victorious in vicious power struggles with Chechen political and military rivals; his opponents have been tracked down and killed in Vienna, Dubai, Moscow, and Chechnya.²⁷⁴ He

²⁶⁸ Alexander Metelitsa and Gregory Zalasky, "Policing Vice in Russia's North Caucasus," *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*, 18 August 2010

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Anna Nemtsova, "Ramzan's World," *Newsweek*, 25 September 2006

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Pravda, "Putin dismisses Chechen President Alkhanov and names PM Ramzan Kadyrov its acting president," *Pravda.ru*, 16 February 2007, <http://english.pravda.ru/news/russia/16-02-2007/87490-putin-0/>

²⁷³ Voice of America, "Putin Wins Power to Appoint Regional Governors," *voanews.com*, 3 December 2004, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-Putin-Wins-Power-to-Appoint-Regional-Governors.html>

²⁷⁴ Gregory Pfeifer, "The Price of Progress: Life in Kadyrov's Grozny Permeated By Fear," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 11 August 2009, <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/2009-148-23.cfm>

has also overseen the rebuilding of Grozny, which- at least aesthetically- looks remarkably reconstructed for such a relatively short timeframe.

Despite concerns in Moscow about the degree of autonomy that he has acquired, Kadyrov still remains the Kremlin's best bet for security and stability in Chechnya. His ruthless reign as a modern-day sultan has been fueled by a merciless quest to restore order and eradicate separatist fighters. To Kadyrov it seems – and often is – personal: when Basayev was killed, Kadyrov would “express bitter regret at not achieving his dream of killing his enemy.”²⁷⁵ Additionally, Kadyrov's effect on both the security situation in Chechnya and outside of it has been obvious. Chechnya is now the “calmest”²⁷⁶ of the four majority-Muslim republics in the North Caucasus, while it's no secret that places like Dagestan and Ingushetia face more violence because militants find it easier to operate. It's also no coincidence that as the Kadyrovtsy increased their role and pro-Moscow Chechen forces assumed more control over counterinsurgency operations in 2006 that Sadulayev, Basayev, and al-Urduni were killed in short order.

Thus, the last pillar of analysis makes it clear: by utilizing the tools of fear, intimidation and violence, Ramzan Kadyrov has created an environment that severely disrupts rebel recruitment and operations, has led directly or indirectly to the deaths of scores of militants, and ultimately was a major factor in the decision to abandon the notion of Chechen separatism and instead create the Caucasus Emirate.

²⁷⁵ Tom Parfitt, “Republic of Fear,” *The Sunday Times*, 20 August 2006, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/article605439.ece

²⁷⁶ Tom Parfitt, “Sword or Samovar,” *Foreignpolicy.com*, 15 February 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/15/sword_or_samovar

9. Conclusion

The historically antagonistic relationship between Russia and Chechnya finally metastasized in the form of two brutal wars after the fall of the Soviet Union. But while the first war was largely a secular struggle for Chechen nationalism, the second war was something entirely different, a war about radical Islam and jihad. This progressive marginalization of Chechen nationalist ideology in favor of an Islamist version can be seen as a natural outcome due to the lack of international recognition for Chechnya's right to secede as well as the abject failure of the interwar government to establish law and order in the republic.²⁷⁷

The genesis of the Caucasus Emirate, meanwhile, is a combination of many factors, and can be viewed as largely inevitable after the separatists were crushed militarily and Moscow succeeded in co-opting members of the Chechen elite (most notably the Kadyrovs) in return for generous financial infusions and promises of broad autonomy.²⁷⁸ But it's important to point out that the exhaustion of Chechnya's populace from a decade of war also helped create the political space for a strongman like Ramzan Kadyrov, which in turn has shrunk the area for militants to operate and forced them to abandon their secessionist ideal and instead take the war into Russia.

Going forward, the viability of the actual establishment of the Caucasus Emirate as a non-virtual entity is dubious. For starters, the North Caucasus region is essentially a giant welfare state dependent on Russian subsidies. Eighty percent of Dagestan's budget is underwritten by the Russian exchequer, while in Chechnya and Ingushetia the share approaches an approximate total

²⁷⁷ Alexander Knysh, "The Caucasus Emirate: Between Reality and Virtuality," *Keyman Program in Turkish Studies*, June 2009.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

of ninety percent.²⁷⁹ Such statistics imply that a Russian withdrawal from the region would create a catastrophic economic adjustment bordering on collapse. There are also long-standing disputes over land ownership in the region that has spawned resistance by the local populace whenever pro-Russian lawmakers attempt to redraw municipal boundaries.²⁸⁰ These disputes will not be resolved by a Russian exit from the region,²⁸¹ and would most likely intensify in the event of a power vacuum. Lastly, the implementation of fundamentalist *sharia* law in a region that traditionally practices a more moderate strain of Islam would almost certainly cause social unrest, most likely in the form of a violent anti-jihadist backlash. The potential for this is already being witnessed in Kabardino-Balkaria, where a shadowy vigilante group of “anti-Wahabbis” known as the “The Black Hawks” have launched a violent campaign of revenge against Islamist militants affiliated with the Caucasus Emirate.²⁸²

The leadership of the Emirate is also a highly-volatile situation. Dokka Umarov is for all intents and purposes the last of the true first-generation Chechen commanders, yet his existence- like all rebel commanders- lies on shaky ground. Witness the degree of recent Russian successes in killing top militant commanders, which has once again reached extraordinary levels in 2011:

- Umarov’s designated successor, Supyan Abdullayev, was killed in a Russian airstrike on 28 March.²⁸³
- On 18 April, the leader of the Dagestani wing of the Caucasus Emirate, Israpil Validzhanov, was killed along with three other militants after they opened fire on a

²⁷⁹ Kevin Daniel Leahy, “North Caucasian Rebels’ Economic Policy Defined by Conventionality and Wishful Thinking,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 2 February 2011

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Tom Parfitt, “Blood Relations,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, 18 February 2011,

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/18/blood_relations

²⁸³ Mairbek Vatchagaev, *Death of Umarov’s Successor Is a Major Setback to Rebel Movement*

group of Russian security officers attempting to stop their car on the Tashkapur-Hadzhalmahi highway in Dagestan.²⁸⁴

- On 21 April, the near five-year reign of Saudi-born militant Muhannad as successor to Abu Hafs al-Urduni as *Emir* of foreign fighters ended when he was killed by security forces in the Chechen village of Serzhen-Yurt;²⁸⁵ he was considered “truly the last of the Arab fighters to arrive in Chechnya at the beginning of the second Russo-Chechen war.”²⁸⁶
- Russian authorities killed Arsen Dzhappuev, commander of the Kabardino-Balkaria faction of the Emirate, on 29 April in the village of Progress on the border of the Stavropol region.²⁸⁷
- On 4 May, Russian *Spetsnaz* killed Abdulla Kurd in the Chechen village of Vedeno.²⁸⁸ Kurd was a Turkish rebel who took command of the foreign fighters in the North Caucasus following Muhannad’s death,²⁸⁹ but he was killed within two weeks of assuming the post.

Clearly, resistance commanders live on borrowed time, and Umarov is operating in an extraordinarily difficult environment. With his death a near-certainty and Abdullayev now dead, it’s unclear who would take Umarov’s place at this time, which could very well mean the insurgency heads in a new direction in the near-future. However, while the strategic goals of the

²⁸⁴ Thomas Grove, “Moscow says Islamist leader killed in Dagestan,” Reuters.com, 18 April 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/18/us-russia-insurgency-leader-idUSTRE73H1LJ20110418>

²⁸⁵ Mairbek Vatchagaev, “Emir Muhannad: The Last of Chechnya’s Arab Volunteers,” *The Jamestown Foundation Publication Volume: 2 Issue: 4*, 29 April 2011.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Mairbek Vatchagaev, “Moscow Kills Rebel Leaders in Kabardino-Balkaria, but was it a Mortal Blow?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 87*, 5 May 2011.

²⁸⁸ Maxim Tkachenko, “Russia Kills al Qaeda militant who fought with Chechen rebels,” CNN.com, 4 May 2011, http://articles.cnn.com/2011-05-04/world/russia.al.qaeda.killed_1_chechen-rebels-north-caucasus-russian-security-forces?s=PM:WORLD

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

Emirate may eventually be altered, the political and socio-economic conditions spawning the regional *jamaats* that fuel the insurgency almost undoubtedly won't be changing anytime soon.

Thus, rather than posing a true threat of political takeover as presently constituted, the Emirate instead creates an outlet for those disaffected by the endemic corruption and lack of social mobility in the region. Stuck between unhappiness with the local pro-Russian administrations and dependency on handouts from Moscow, many of those frustrated decide to take up arms. But to what end? Fighting for a movement that is discredited internationally and lacks any sort of implementable socio-economic apparatus is a road to nowhere, but unless and until Russia remedies the conditions pushing young men into the ranks of the Caucasus Emirate, violence and destabilization on Russia's southwestern flank will manifest itself indefinitely.

Policy Recommendations

- A) *Improve socioeconomic conditions in the North Caucasus*: Enhancing local administrations' capacities to develop and manage financial, human, and physical resources by increasing the awareness and willingness of said governments to operate transparently and in sustained partnership with their communities will improve local decision-making skills and "increase efficiency, equity, and effectiveness in the development and delivery of social and communal services."²⁹⁰
- B) *Increase donor attention to the region*: The Russian government has typically complicated and even restricted the ability of donors to operate in the North Caucasus.²⁹¹ To combat this, the international community must cease its ambivalent attitude towards the region and become more proactive in reaching out to the Russian government via the organization of donor's conferences, greater coordination amongst benefactors, improved transparency and accountability for international organizations engaging in the region, and increased donor allocations for human rights.²⁹²
- C) *Establish greater rule of law*: Russian officials claim that up to eighty percent of all terrorist attacks in the North Caucasus "are in fact protest actions" against widespread official corruption.²⁹³ The level of corruption is so high that in many instances it has "eroded the very basis of the state, which performs almost none of its functions and is

²⁹⁰ USAID/Russia, "Improved Local Governance and Economic Development: Transition to Smart Growth," North Caucasus Projects, 22 May 2009,

http://russia.usaid.gov/programs/cross_sectoral/north_caucasus/

²⁹¹ Sarah E. Mendelson, "49 Steps to Improve Human Rights and Security in the North Caucasus," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, September 2007.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russia sees vindication of its killing practices in the death of Osama bin Laden," *Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 87*, 5 May 2011.

seen as a source of disorder and violence rather than security.”²⁹⁴ Federal development programs designed to undermine the local insurgency in fact only contribute to it due to the misappropriation of massive amounts of money intended to create jobs and improve living conditions.²⁹⁵ This increases social tension, disrupts traditional communities, and ultimately serves to partially finance extremist groups in the region since militants often demand a “levy” from local businessmen and corrupt officials.²⁹⁶ To combat this, the accountability of government administrators is essential, as well as the cessation of the “brutal and illegal” methods employed by security forces that ultimately alienate the local populace, as well as prosecution rather than impunity for military and security officials who commit serious crimes that serve to only perpetuate the “cycle of anger and violence” in the North Caucasus.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ No author, “From Moscow to Mecca,” *The Economist*, 7 April 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/18527550>

²⁹⁵ Felgenhauer, *Russia sees vindication of its killing practices in the death of Osama bin Laden*

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ No author, “UN rights chief urges Russia to step up efforts to ensure rule of law, accountability,” United Nations News Centre, 17 February 2011, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=37556&Cr=&Cr1=>

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