

# **The Chechen Conflict: A Case for U.S. Intervention**

**A Monograph  
by  
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## Abstract

The Chechen Conflict: A Case for U.S. Intervention by MAJ Mark E. Johnson, U.S. Army , 67 pages.

With Russia's inability to improve conditions in Chechnya and the international community's failed attempts to negotiate a diplomatic resolution to the conflict, Islamic extremism in Chechnya is growing precipitously and risks spilling over into the neighboring republics of Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria and the neighboring country of Georgia. The question this paper addresses, therefore, is: does the unresolved Chechen conflict and the spread of Islamic extremism warrant U.S. intervention? As this paper's analysis of the conflict demonstrates, the answer to this question is a resounding –yes. In fact, this paper argues that if the United States does not use its influence to resolve the Chechen conflict and thus preempt the growth of Islamic extremism in the North Caucasus, Chechnya risks devolving into a major front in the GWOT.

The only thing that keeps Chechnya from morphing into a major front in the GWOT today is the secular Chechen separatist leadership that continuously struggles to control, with varying degrees of success, the rebellious Islamic extremist faction within its movement. The pro-Moscow Chechen security and Russian military forces' heavy-handed tactics and almost daily human rights abuses against the Chechen people do not help the already volatile situation. The only nation capable of reversing the downward spiral of Chechnya into a major front in the GWOT is the United States. The United States, as a close GWOT ally and economic partner to Russia, has the influence to negotiate an end to the Chechen conflict and deter the Islamic extremists' aspirations of a greater Islamic state in the North Caucasus.

This paper recommends the following six-point peace initiative as a framework from which the United States can intervene to resolve the Chechen conflict:

### Six Point Peace Initiative

1. *Define the Threat.* The United States needs to engage the Russian and Chechen leaders by first brokering an agreement on the definition of the threat in Chechnya. The Chechen nationalists are distinct from the Islamic extremists within the Chechen separatist movement. The Islamic extremists represent the real threat to both Russia and the United States
2. *Isolate the Threat.* Chechens nationalist leaders must sever all ties with the Islamic extremists and commit to sharing intelligence on their terrorist activities.
3. *Declare a Cease Fire.* Russia agrees to a cease-fire and the withdrawal of all of its forces from Chechnya except for small groups of Special Forces that will continue to track and eliminate Islamic extremists.
4. *Agreement of Autonomous Status.* Once Russia and the Chechen nationalists have agreed upon a cease-fire, the United States, Russia and the Chechen nationalists negotiates an agreement granting Chechnya regional autonomy within the Russian Federation. As part of the agreement, Chechnya recognizes the Russian Federation's territorial integrity, which includes the Autonomous Republic of Chechnya. Likewise, Russia acknowledges the right of the Chechens to political, but not national, self-rule.
5. *Repatriation and Elections.* Members of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) deploy to Chechnya to assist with the repatriation of Chechen refugees from the Caucasus region and Europe.
6. *Post Settlement Reconstruction.* The United States along with the United Nations identify and gain the support of donor nations within the international community to assist in the rebuilding of Chechnya and repatriation of the Chechen people. The international community needs to understand that the reconstruction of Chechnya as central to the GWOT.

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## Introduction

The bandits will be destroyed. Whoever takes up arms will be destroyed. And we're prepared to do business with all the rest. Let them elect a head of the republic. We are prepared to sign an agreement with Chechnya. How many power limitation agreements are there? Humans have developed an enormous number of ways to help different people in one state to live in harmony. Yes, some sort of compromise has to be sought, and we will seek it. But no one will force any sort of decision on us.

Vladimir Putin, Russian President, (March 2000)<sup>1</sup>

On the first day of September in the year 2004, like every other year, Russian school children went to school to celebrate the "Day of Knowledge."<sup>2</sup> They were dressed in their best clothes. Most parents and relatives accompanied them to take part in the big celebration. After the local dignitaries had given their customary speeches, the first graders gave the last graders flowers. In return, the last graders paired up with the first graders to take them to their class. Sadly, this tranquil and innocent scene never occurred at Middle School Number One in Beslan, Russia.

At 0930 hours, local time, soon after the children and their parents arrived to School Number One, approximately thirty men and women clad with black ski masks and explosive belts stormed the school killing five police officers. The attackers took 1,300 hostages, the majority of which were under eighteen years old. The standoff lasted three days. The attackers corralled the hostages into the school gymnasium, mined the gymnasium with improvised explosive devices, and set up booby-traps around the building. The attackers threatened they would blow up the school if the Russian security forces attempted a rescue. Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, who believed the attackers were Chechen separatists, requested a special meeting of the

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<sup>1</sup>Vladimir Putin, Nataliya Gevorkyan, Natalya Timakova, and Andrei Kolesnikov *First Person: An Astonishing Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President*, Tans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 166.

<sup>2</sup> The "Day of Knowledge" is a Russian Federation holiday. Russian schoolteachers, children and parents celebrate the holiday annually in early September to mark the first day of school.

United Nations Security Council. The United Nations Security Council convened and after a short meeting condemned the “terrorist attack” on Russia and demanded the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. On the third and last day of the standoff, the attackers finally agreed to allow medical workers to enter the school to remove the bodies of those hostages they had already killed. Though historians still debate the events that then unfolded, most observers believe that as the medical workers approached the school an attacker accidentally tripped over a booby-trap wire and set off an explosion. Consequently, armed civilians, mostly fathers of the hostages, opened fire. As the Russian security forces scrambled to find the source of the unauthorized shooting, the attackers panicked, believing the Russian security forces were storming the school, and detonated their explosives. Russian security forces and attackers exchanged gunfire for two hours. In the end, Russian forces either killed or captured all the attackers, while in the process killing many hostages. In total, 317 hostages, including 186 children, died on the “Day of Knowledge” in Beslan, Russia.<sup>3</sup> The Beslan School is just one of the latest battlefields in the Chechen conflict that has spread well into the North Caucasus.<sup>4</sup> The incident provides a small, but very disturbing glimpse into the deadly consequences of the conflict. Russian leaders have long stated the Chechen separatists are “terrorists” and claim the Chechen conflict is a part of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John B. Dunlop, “Beslan: Russia’s 9/11?” *The American Committee For Peace in Chechnya and the Jamestown Foundation*, [report on-line] available from <http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/reports/Beslan.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 October 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The most recent event in the Chechen conflict occurred October 13, 2005 when at least 100 Chechen separatists attacked security points in the town of Nalchik in Kabardino-Balkaria, which borders North Ossetia. (See Figure 1). After fierce fighting, Russian forces regained control of the town killing 61 and capturing 17 Chechen separatists. The Chechen separatists killed at least 24 Russian security personnel and civilians.

<sup>5</sup> Fred Weir, “A New Terror-War Front: The Caucasus” *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 February 2002, [article on-line] available from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0226/p01s04-woeu.html>; Internet; accessed 13 August 2005.

On March 8, 2005, Russian federal security forces brought the fight back to Chechnya when they killed the Chechen rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov.<sup>6</sup> Maskhadov led the Chechen separatist movement and secured temporary de facto independence from Russia after the First Chechen War. In January 1997, the Chechen people elected the war hero Maskhadov as their new president. However, Maskhadov proved a weak political leader and was unable to control the rise in Islamic extremism. In 1999, Shamil Basayev, the leader of Chechen Islamic extremists, invaded the neighboring Dagestan Republic that initiated the Second Chechen War.<sup>7</sup> After the start of the Second Chechen War, Maskhadov returned to lead the Chechen separatist movement in which a schism had developed between his secular Chechen separatists and Basayev's Islamic extremists. Since 2000, Basayev's Islamic extremists have claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist acts outside and inside of Chechnya to include the murder of pro-Moscow Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov in 2004.<sup>8</sup> The Kremlin ordered Maskhadov's death because they believed he was no longer able to control the separatist movement. Maskhadov's assassination was just another chapter in the bloody conflict between the Russian Federation and Chechen separatists.

Today in Chechnya, "the current situation is worse than war."<sup>9</sup> In Grozny, the Chechen people have put into effect a self-imposed curfew due to the alarming number of disappearances. The city lies in ruins and the inhabitants live in bombed out apartment buildings. There are few

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<sup>6</sup> Scholars, politicians, and observers use many different labels such as bandits, terrorists, rebels, insurgents, and freedom fighters to describe those involved in the Chechen separatist movement. The motivations and biases behind such labels at times are very clear. In other instances, authors use the terms interchangeably due to the difficulty in defining the evolving nature of the Chechen resistance. Unless attributed to a source, this paper uses the term "Chechen separatists" in an attempt to remain consistent and unbiased.

<sup>7</sup> Chechens often refer to Chechnya as the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, which has become the politically correct name in Chechnya to denote pro-independence.

<sup>8</sup> Shamil Basayev took responsibility for the Beslan School attack in September 2004 along with the bomb attacks in a metro station bound for Moscow and two airliners in August 2004 that killed 10 and 89 civilians, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> "Background: The Current Situation in Chechnya," *Human Rights Watch*, March 2005 [article on-line]; available from <http://hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/chechnya0305/2.1.htm>; Internet; accessed 15 July 2005.

signs of reconstruction. There is no running water and the power supply is undependable.

Despite the horrid living conditions, however, what the Chechen people fear most is Ramzan Kadyrov.

Kadyrov is the son of the former pro-Moscow Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov who the Chechen separatists killed in 2004. He is in charge of the pro-Moscow Chechen security forces as well as economic issues in Chechnya. He also serves as the deputy to the mostly symbolic Russia-appointed Chechen Prime Minister, Sergei Abramov. In November 2004, the pro-Moscow Chechen president, Alu Akhanov, gave Kadyrov the key responsibility of doling out compensation payments to Chechens who lost everything they owned in the war. According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Kadyrov abuses these responsibilities by using the money allocated to the Chechens to finance personal business ventures, support his security forces fighting the Chechen separatists, and to bribe senior Russian officials.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Human Rights Watch reports Kadyrov and his security forces are responsible for numerous disappearances in Chechnya and an overall atmosphere of fear in the republic:

In areas under the effective control of Ramzan Kadyrov, the fear stricken atmosphere is astounding. People who have survived the chaos of two wars and actively protested the abuses perpetrated in their villages are now too terrified to open the door even to their neighbors, let alone to complain. In some cases, people choose not to report the “disappearances” of their relatives to the authorities, hoping that their silence might protect their remaining family members.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Human Rights Watch’s concerns about Kadyrov, on December 29, 2004 President Putin bestowed upon Kadyrov the prestigious Hero of Russia award for his “courage and heroism in the line of duty.” As things stand today, the prospects of a near-term resolution in Chechnya are remote.

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<sup>10</sup> Liz Fuller, “Analysis: The Warlord and the Commissar,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 2001 [article on-line], available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/01>; Internet; accessed 15 July 2005.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Many observers of the conflict such as journalists, diplomats and human rights organizations believe the Chechen separatist movement has transformed from a movement of Chechen independence into a terrorist movement led by Shamil Basayev. The truth, however, is that though Basayev is a terrorist and has known ties to Osama Bin Laden from when he trained with him in Afghanistan in the 1990s<sup>12</sup>, Basayev does not represent the Chechen separatist movement. On the contrary, Basayev and his Islamic extremists are just as big a threat to the Chechen separatist movement as Kadyrov and his security forces. Though Abdul-Khalid Sadulaev<sup>13</sup> cannot afford to isolate Basayev and split the separatist movement, he is struggling to maintain the original objective of the Chechen separatist movement – a secular and independent Chechen republic, similar to that of Georgia, Chechnya’s southern neighbor. However, with each terrorist attack that Basayev and his Islamic extremists conduct against Russian civilian targets, Sadulaev’s task becomes more difficult. Not only does the international community look more upon the Chechen separatist movement as a terrorist organization rather than a nationalist movement, but more Chechens Muslims, especially among the youth, are joining the Islamic extremists’ ranks in the belief that they are the only ones willing and capable of freeing Chechnya from Russian rule.

## **The Problem**

With Russia’s inability to improve conditions in Chechnya and the international community’s failed attempts to negotiate a diplomatic resolution to the conflict, Islamic extremism in Chechnya is growing precipitously and risks spilling over into the neighboring republics of Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria and the neighboring country of

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Riebling and R.P. Eddy, “Jihad@Work, Behind the Moscow Theater Attack,” *National Review Online*, April 2002 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-riebling102402.asp>; Internet; accessed 15 July 2005

<sup>13</sup> Sadulaev is the new Chechen separatist leader who replaced the slain Maskhadov in March 2005.

Georgia. The question this paper addresses, therefore, is: does the unresolved Chechen conflict and the spread of Islamic extremism warrant U.S. intervention? As this paper's analysis of the conflict demonstrates, the answer to this question is a resounding –yes. In fact, this paper argues that if the United States does not use its influence to resolve the Chechen conflict and thus preempt the growth of Islamic extremism in the North Caucasus, Chechnya risks devolving into a major front in the GWOT.

Unfortunately, Chechnya is the forgotten war. Other than the brief media coverage on September 1, 2005 that commemorated the one-year anniversary of the Beslan School tragedy, the United States' President, the United States Congress, political pundits and the international media do not discuss the longest and fast approaching bloodiest conflict since World War II. The situation in Chechnya is on the verge of chaos. The only thing that keeps Chechnya from morphing into a major front in the GWOT is the secular Chechen separatist leadership that continuously struggles to control, with varying degrees of success, the rebellious Islamic extremist faction within its movement. The pro-Moscow Chechen security and Russian military forces' heavy-handed tactics and almost daily human rights abuses against the Chechen people do not help the already volatile situation. The only nation capable of reversing the downward spiral of Chechnya into a major front in the GWOT is the United States. The United States, as a close GWOT ally and economic partner to Russia, has the influence to negotiate an end to the Chechen conflict and deter the Islamic extremists' aspirations of a Greater Islamic State in the North Caucasus.

Especially since September 11, 2001, the United States represents freedom and hope against tyranny and fear. The Chechen people want to be independent from the Russian Federation where they can live free of bombs falling on their homes and late night security raids that claim their husbands and sons. The Chechen people want to live in homes that do not bear the scars of war and they want to work to provide a better future for their children who have only known poverty and war. The Chechen people have been fighting for their freedom for centuries

and they are convinced they will obtain this freedom either with or without the help of the United States. For the overwhelming majority of the Chechen separatists, their struggle is not about Islam. However, if the Islamic extremists are the only ones willing to stand and fight with them for their freedom, then an Islamic state is a small price to pay.

## **Methodology**

The Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic and Cultural (DIME-C) instruments of national power paradigm is a good framework to analyze the Chechen problem. Though there are other aspects that this paper could explore such as Financial, Intelligence and Law Enforcement (FIL) to further analyze the conflict; the cultural aspect of the conflict far outweighs these other areas. To borrow a term from the well-known political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington, Russia is a “cleft” country “that territorially bestride[s] the fault lines between [two] civilizations: the Muslim civilization and the Orthodox civilization.”<sup>14</sup> Moreover, according to Huntington, in virtually every definition of civilization, culture is a common theme.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, culture, or more appropriately the clash of cultures, is an integral component when discussing the Chechen conflict.

## **Structure**

Chapter Two, “Historical Background,” traces the genesis of the conflict from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to present day. Without a solid understanding of the historical background of the conflict, it is extremely difficult to understand the Chechen problem. The Chechen conflict is the culmination of a tumultuous relationship between Chechnya and Russia that extends over six centuries. Though the current conflict is not the first separatist movement the Chechens have fought against the Russians, it has been the most devastating. Chapter Three, “The Problem,”

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (Simon and Schuster, 1998), 137.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

utilizes the components of DIME-C to analyze the Chechen conflict. Chapter Four, “Conclusion” synthesizes the DIME-C analysis and provides recommendations on how the United States can intervene to resolve the conflict.

## **Definitions**

Since the criterion for this paper is the DIME-C paradigm, it is important to have a clear understanding of what the components of DIME-C mean. Therefore, the term *Diplomacy* refers to the international relationships, negotiations, and agreements by which Russia, Chechnya and the international community have attempted to end the decade long conflict. *Information* is how all the parties in the conflict, to include private interest groups, have used or misused the media and Internet to advanced their beliefs, justifications, and agendas in the conflict. Similar to Diplomacy and Information, *Military* addresses the military decisions and actions in the conflict that have aggravated the situation in Chechnya. The term *Economic* relates to the management and competition of the natural resources that either reside or transit through Chechnya between the Black and Caspian Seas. Finally, *Culture* entails the way of life, beliefs, and institutions of the Chechen people that have existed since the 13<sup>th</sup> century and continue to drive the Chechen people to resist Russian rule.

## **Geography**

Chechnya is located in the North Caucasus in southwestern Russia. The Caucasus consists of six autonomous Russian republics nestled between Russia and Turkey to the north and south, and the Black and Caspian Seas to the west and east (see Figure 1). The Russian republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia and North Ossetia border Chechnya to the east and west while Russia’s Stavrapol Province is to the north and the country of Georgia to the south. The most predominant geographic feature of Chechnya is the Caucasus mountain range that extends along the southern border (see Figures 2 and 3). There are four major rivers that run through Chechnya

which are the Terek, Argun, Martan and Sunzha rivers (See Figure 3). The capital city of Chechnya is Grozny.

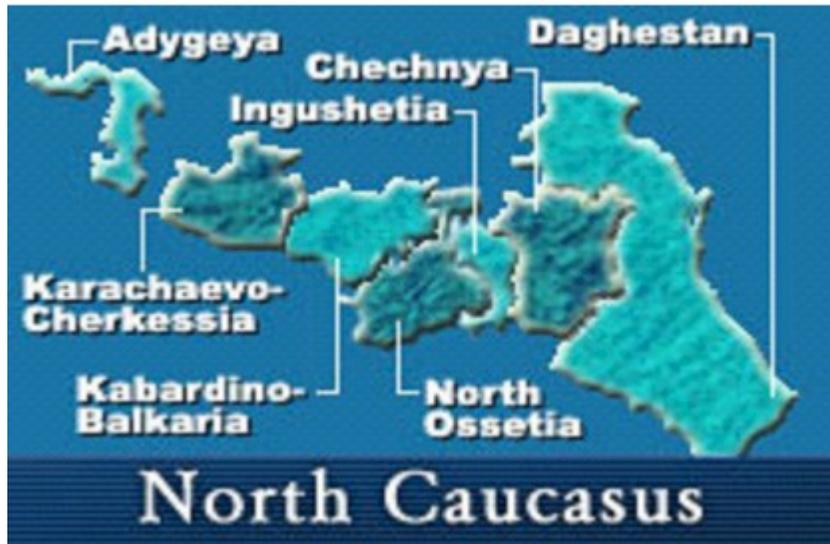
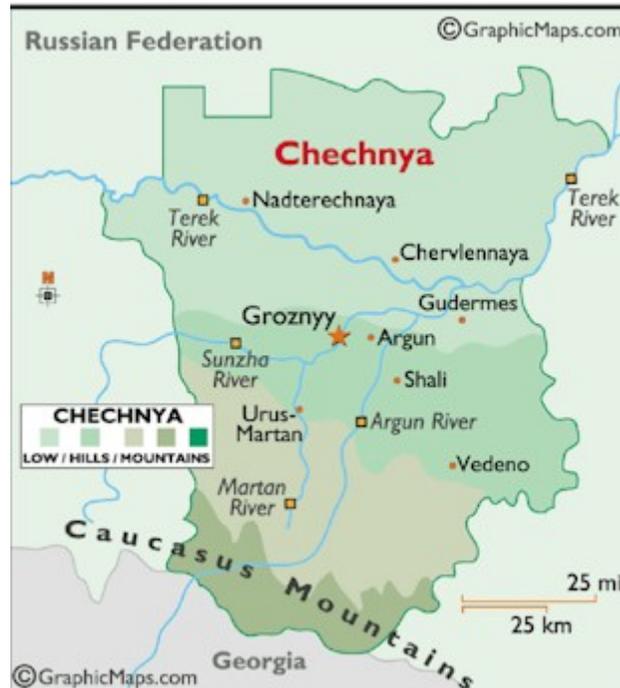


Figure 1 - North Caucasus Map



Figure 2 - Chechnya Map



**Figure 3 – Chechnya Map (geography)**

## Key Players

**Vladimir Putin** – Putin is the President of the Russian Federation. Though President Putin officially declared an end to the Second Chechen War in 2002, the conflict continues today. In an effort to withdraw as many Russian forces as possible from Chechnya, Putin has implemented a “Chechnization” policy in which the Russian military supports Pro-Moscow Chechen security forces in the struggle to defeat the Chechen separatists.

**Aslan Maskhadov** – Maskhadov led the Chechen separatist movement from 1996 to 2005. A nationalist who fought for a secular independent Chechnya, Maskhadov struggled with Islamic extremists such as Shamil Basayev and Amir Khattab within the Chechen separatist movement. Russian Special Forces assassinated Maskhadov on March 8, 2005.

**Shamil Basayev and Amir Khattab** - Both Basayev and Khattab were Chechen separatist commanders and Islamic extremists that sought support for a return to Shar’ia law and a non-secular way of life. Basayev and Khattab envisioned uniting all the Muslim people of the North

Caucasus into a greater Islamic State. Though Russian forces killed Khattab in April 2002, Basayev continues to fight for a greater Islamic state.

**Akhmad Kadyrov** –After the end of the Second Chechen War, Kadyrov served as the pro-Moscow Chechen President until Chechen separatists killed him in 2004.

**Ramzan Kadyrov** - Kadyrov is the son of the former pro-Moscow Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov. As the First Deputy Prime Minister of the pro-Moscow Chechen government he is in charge of the security forces as well as economic development in Chechnya.

**Sergei Abramov** - Abramov is Russia's Chechen Prime Minister who is responsible for running the pro-Moscow Chechen government. Ramzan Kadyrov is Abramov's deputy.

**Alu Alkhanov** - Alkhanov is the president of the pro-Moscow Chechen government. Moscow handpicked Alkhanov to run unopposed for president in August 2004.

**Abdul Khalid Sadulaev** - Sadulaev is the new Chechen separatist leader who replaced Maskhadov in March 2005. Similar to Maskhadov, Sadulaev struggles to control Basayev and his Islamic extremists while simultaneously fighting for a secular and independent Chechen republic.

**Dzhokhar Dudayev** –After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the Chechen people elected Dudayev as their president. Once elected, Dudayev enacted a law seceding from Russia that led to the start of the First Chechen War. On 21 April 1996, Russian forces killed Dudayev in a rocket attack.

**Boris Yeltsin** –In response to Dudayev's law of secession, Yeltsin ordered Russian troops to invade Chechnya in an attempt to restore Moscow's control over the separatist republic.

**Dmitry Kozak** - Dmitry Kozak is the head of the newly created Special Federal Commission on North Caucasus and a close ally to Vladimir Putin. He is responsible for the proper integration of Chechnya into the Russian Federation and the management of federal money earmarked for Chechnya's reconstruction.

**Akhmed Zakayev and Ilyas Akhmadov** - Akhmed Zakayev served as Maskhadov's Foreign Minister from 1997 to 1999. Ilyas Akhmadov replaced Zakayev upon his death and still holds the title of Chechen Foreign Minister of the Chechen separatist government.

**Doku Umarov** – Umarov is the senior Chechen field commander and Vice President of Chechen separatist government. Though he does not approve of Basayev's methods or his Islamic extremist views, he fears isolating Basayev will fracture the separatist movement.

## Historical Background

From my personal experience as Foreign Minister of Chechnya – in which capacity my main duty is to explain to outsiders the nature of the Chechen conflict – I would say that the biggest obstacle to be understood is the ignorance of the history of the conflict.

Ilyas Akhmadov, Foreign Minister of Chechnya (2005)<sup>16</sup>

### Pre-Soviet Period

In the 13th Century, the Mongols ruled the Caucasus region. They formed tight-knit mountain clans until the 16<sup>th</sup> century when they moved into the fertile lands in the plains and foothills. In 1556 because of the Caucasus' economic and military strategic position, Russia made claim to the region. In 1587, Russia attempted to strengthen its foothold on the Caucasus by forming an Orthodox Christian coalition with the Kingdom of Kakhetia (present day Georgia) and the Cossacks to counter the Dagestan and Chechen Muslim tribes in the region. Between 1593 and 1594, however, the Dagestanis and Chechens pushed the Russian led coalition out of the Caucasus. In 1604, in another attempt to gain control of the vital military and trade routes that ran through Dagestan and Chechnya to Persia, Russian Tsar Boris Godunov and his orthodox Christian allies invaded again. In this round of fighting, the local Chechen and Dagestan tribes formed an alliance with fellow Muslims - the Ottoman Turks - to defeat the Russians.

Despite Godunov's failures, Tsar Peter the Great did not give up on Russia's quest to conquer Dagestanis and Chechens; and in 1723, he finally did capture portions of Dagestan along the coast of the Caspian Sea. The Chechens, by contrast, repelled every Russian effort to enter Chechnya; at least until 1791 when Catherine the Great quelled the Chechen resistance movement

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<sup>16</sup> Ilyas Akhmadov, "Chechen resistance: myth and reality," *Conciliation Resources, Accord Series: Choosing to Engage: Armed Groups and Peace Processes*, 2005 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.c-r.org>; Internet; accessed 16 July 2005. Akhmadov is the foreign minister of the internationally unrecognized Chechen government.

long enough to claim parts of Chechnya.<sup>17</sup> Soon after Russia's conquest and the Russian-Turkish War, Tsar Paul I annexed Georgia and appointed Russian General Yermolov to serve as the head of the Russian military in the Caucasus. Between 1817 and 1821, fearful of uprisings, Yermolov built Fort Grozny<sup>18</sup> and subsequently pursued a campaign of rape and pillage against the Chechens until Tsar Paul I replaced Yermolov for his brutal actions.

By 1828, Russia controlled the entire Caucasus region except for parts of Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan. Determined not to live under Russian rule, in 1830, Ghazi Mohammad of Dagestan called on all Chechen and Dagestani tribes to follow strict Muslim traditions (Shar'ia law) and unite against Russian domination. The Russians responded to Ghazi Mohammad's call by destroying Chechen villages and demanding the end to Shar'ia law. Despite the loss of Ghazi Mohammad in battle, the Chechen resistance strengthened under the new leadership of Imam Hamza and then Imam Shamil. By 1859, however, the Russian Empire's military strength had overwhelmed Shamil's Chechen resistance allowing Russia to finally claim and annex Chechnya. Unfortunately, the struggle for independence cost the Chechens dearly. Between 1840 and 1859 alone, the Chechens lost almost half of their population. After Russia annexed Chechnya, the majority of what remained of the Chechen population returned to the mountains to regroup and wait for another opportunity to rid their land of Russian occupiers.

## **Soviet Period**

In the early 1900s, the Russians gave the majority of the fertile land in Chechnya to the Cossacks as reward for their support in defeating the Chechens. When the Russians discovered oil fields in Chechnya, Fort Grozny became a town. By 1912, the town's population had tripled

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<sup>17</sup> During this period Sheikh Mansur led the Chechen resistance fighters with his declaration of holy war against the Russians. Today Mansur, whose name means Shepard, is a national hero and serves as a symbol of Chechnya's struggle against Russia.

<sup>18</sup> The word "Grozny" means terrible and is indicative of how Yermolov viewed the Chechen people.

with Russian oil workers. Soon after, French, English and Dutch companies arrived and established oil refineries producing approximately 1,600 tons of oil per year.

In the civil war between the Bolsheviks and Whites, the Chechens chose to fight against the Whites. After all, the Whites had inflicted the greatest suffering on the Chechen people over the last centuries; the Communists represented a change and any change had to be better than the Whites. Under the leadership of Sheikh Uzun Haji, Dagestani and Chechen forces operating from their mountain villages conducted successful guerilla attacks against the Whites that led to their withdrawal from the region. With the Whites gone, Haji declared independence and created the North Caucasus Emirate uniting the Chechen and Dagestan mountain people. After Haji's death, Said-Bek assumed the role as leader. When the Red army tried to break up the newly created North Caucasus Emirate, it could not defeat Said-Bek's mountain forces. <sup>19</sup>

In 1921, after fierce fighting, Stalin, in an effort to stop the bloodshed of mostly the Red Army, offered amnesty to Said-Bek and his forces under the condition that the mountain people accept the Soviet government. Said-Bek agreed, but demanded an autonomous Soviet Mountain Republic, in which the mountain people could govern themselves under Shar'ia law, use Arabic as the official language, and conduct their internal affairs without Soviet interference. Stalin accepted Said-Bek's terms, but the agreement was short lived. Within a year, a revamped Soviet Army returned and quickly defeated Said-Bek's forces. As a result, Stalin, disdainful of the Chechen rebellious nature, expelled all the Chechens from the autonomous Soviet Mountain Republic and created a separate Chechen Autonomous Oblast.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Said-Bek was the grandson of Imam Shamil. He personified the Chechen mountain people's long tradition of resistance against the Russians.

<sup>20</sup> An Oblast in the former Soviet Union was an administrative entity that was two levels below the national government and one level below a republic. Stalin moved the Chechen people from the autonomous Mountain Republic to an autonomous oblast in order to isolate and better control Chechen resistance.

Within the Chechen Autonomous Oblast, the Soviets cracked down on Islamic practices, replaced the Arabic language with the Cyrillic alphabet, and required the study of Russian as a second language. Moreover, the Soviets took Chechen private lands and created collective farms on which Chechens had to exist. Predictably, the Chechens revolted demanding the return of their land, religious practices, and traditions. Rather than face another bloody conflict, Stalin chose to negotiate with the Chechens. In an effort to placate the Chechens, Stalin removed the collective farms, withdrew his forces, and gave amnesty and political positions to the leaders of the revolt. At the same time, Stalin changed the demographics of the region again to weaken the Chechens. In 1936, he created the autonomous Chechen-Ingush Republic by combining the Chechen Autonomous Oblast with the neighboring Ingush Autonomous Oblast. The new autonomous republic now encompassed Grozny and other predominantly Russian populated cities, which Stalin hoped would dilute the Chechen's influence.

As the Chechens represented a constant thorn in the side of the Whites from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, so did they for Stalin. In 1944, at the end of World War II, Stalin had had enough with the Chechens. Under false pretences, Stalin accused the Chechens and Ingush of collaboration with the Nazis, resulting in not only the abolishment of the autonomous Chechen-Ingush Republic, but also the deportation of the Chechen and Ingush people to Central Asia. With the physical removal of the Chechens from the Caucasus, Stalin believed that he had solved the Chechen problem. After Stalin's death, Khrushchev restored the autonomous Chechen-Ingush Republic and allowed the Chechens and Ingush to return, but the deportation left an indelible mark on the Chechen psyche.<sup>21</sup> For over a decade the Chechens lived as refugees during which time their hatred for the Russians and their desire for independence grew. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, few Chechens did not yearn for independence. Resentment ran deep within the

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<sup>21</sup> Many Ingush people blamed the Chechens for their deportation believing they were victims caught in the middle of the Chechen and Soviet power struggle.

Chechen people and they were eager to break their ties with Russia. The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1991 opened the door for another chance at Chechen independence. Ironically, it was a Soviet Air Force General of Chechen origin, Dzhokhar Dudayev, who led Chechnya through that door and into the First Chechen War.

### **First Chechen War (1994-1996)**

In October 1991, Dzhokhar Dudayev expelled the communist government from Grozny and called for presidential elections. Sensing change and a real opportunity for independence, the Chechen people rallied behind Dudayev and elected him president. Shortly after Dudayev's election, he enacted a law seceding from Russia. In response, Boris Yeltsen, the new CIS president, declared a state of emergency and deployed Interior Ministry troops into the autonomous Chechen-Ingush Republic; Yeltsin, however, reacted with too little, too late. By the time the Interior Ministry troops arrived in Grozny, Dudayev's forces had already blocked the Russian Interior Ministry building and were holding 600 Russian troops hostage. After tense negotiations, the Russian troops withdrew and departed the republic, abandoning large amounts of weapons. The standoff was a huge success for Dudayev and the Chechen people.

Unfortunately, Dudayev, worried about his own political power, failed to exploit his success by uniting the Chechen people. Instead, he divided the republic by abolishing the Chechen Parliament, the Constitutional Court and the Grozny Municipal Assembly, which created a schism between the mountain and lowland Chechen people. The mountain people supported Dudayev's supreme presidential rule while the lowland people wanted a republic governed by three branches of power: President, Parliament, and Constitutional Court.

Ultimately, in June 1994 the internal political dispute boiled over into armed conflict when former Chechen military commanders Raslan Labazanov and Bislan Gantemirov joined forces and attacked Dudayev's forces in Grozny. Although Dudayev's forces repelled the attack,

the open display of aggression between the Chechens gave Russia an opportunity to take advantage of the unrest. Russia chose to support Labazanov and Gantemirov and provided them arms and money. The Ingush, more bystanders than participants and worried about getting caught in the middle of a civil war, broke away from the autonomous Chechen-Ingush Republic to form their own republic.<sup>22</sup> Even though Dudayev was ultimately successful in defeating his adversaries and establishing a government in Grozny, he was unsuccessful in persuading other countries to recognize Chechnya's independence.

Frustrated with Dudayev's success, but encouraged by the international community's unwillingness to recognize Chechnya as an independent country, on December 11, 1994 Boris Yeltsin deployed 40,000 army and ministry of interior forces to reinstate Russian authority in Grozny. Poorly prepared and untrained, the Russian forces fought hard to defeat the Chechen separatists and "liberate" Grozny. In the end, the cost to liberate Grozny amounted to the death of thousands of Russian soldiers and separatist fighters as well as approximately 25,000 civilians. The remnants of the Chechen separatist movement fled into the Caucasus Mountains while the Russian forces took control of Grozny and the lowlands. In the Caucasus Mountains the Chechen separatists reorganized and prepared themselves for a protracted guerilla war against the Russians, similar to what their ancestors had done centuries before. Ironically, it is here in the Caucasus Mountains that Aslan Maskhadov emerged as one of Dudayev's most capable and courageous military commanders. Maskhadov's leadership and military successes made him one of the most influential Chechen separatist leaders and allowed him to replace Dudayev upon his death at the end of the First Chechen War.

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<sup>22</sup> Due to Stalin's deportation of the Ingush along with the Chechens in 1944, the Ingush were leery of their association with the Chechens in the autonomous Chechen-Ingush Republic. Therefore, when the Chechens declared independence from Russia and began to fight each other, the Ingush seized the opportunity to "free" themselves from the Chechens.

By March 1995, approximately one third of the Chechens were refugees. Though Boris Yeltsin declared a unilateral cease-fire in the spring of 1995 due to mounting Russian losses and domestic political pressure, Chechen separatists continued their attacks on Russian forces. In June 1995, Shamil Basayev with 100 Chechen separatists occupied a hospital in Budyonnovsk, Stavropol and took over 100 hostages.<sup>23</sup> After Russian forces failed twice to rescue the hostages, Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin negotiated an end to the standoff. As a direct result of this incident, the Russian government signed a treaty with the Chechen separatists agreeing to the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya in exchange for peace. Yeltsin wanted to continue to fight the Chechen separatists, but the Russian people wanted peace. The Russian people were uncomfortable, as was the world, watching on their television screens Russians killing Russians. It was one thing for Slavs in former Yugoslavia to be killing each other, but quite another for Russians to be killing each other. Moreover, with the Chechen separatists' ability to attack in and outside of Chechnya with devastating effects, the Russian people and Russian forces themselves began to question Russia's ability to defeat such a well-organized and determined guerilla force. Nevertheless, the treaty was short-lived. Three months after the signing of the treaty, the Russian government accused the Chechen separatists of breaking the treaty by critically wounding a Russian general in Grozny in a bomb attack.

Consequently, on April 21, 1996, Russian forces killed Dudayev in a rocket attack. In August 1996, the Chechen separatists responded by launching a major offensive to retake Grozny in which they successfully defeated the Russian forces. Upon the fall of Grozny, on August 31, 1996, General Alexander Lebed, Russian Advisor on Chechen Security Issues, and Aslan Maskhadov, then Chief of Staff of the Chechen Armed Forces, signed the "Khasavyurt Agreement", which put an end to the First Chechen War. Though the Khasavyurt Agreement

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<sup>23</sup> Stavropol is a Russian province north of Chechnya. Basayev's attack on the hospital was the first time Chechen separatists attacked Russians outside of Chechnya.

stopped the war, it did not address Chechnya's status within the Russian Federation, of which Lebed and Maskhadov agreed to postpone negotiations until December 2001. By December 1996, Russia had withdrawn its troops from Chechnya allowing the Chechens to hold presidential elections the following month. Maskhadov, the war hero, easily won these elections.

## **Second Chechen War (1999-2002)**

Despite Maskhadov's best efforts to maintain peace and form a democratic, secular government, the plight of internal struggle among the Chechen leaders brought Chechnya down the road of conflict again. This time, however, the struggle was not over political power, but over the spread of Islam. Over the last three years, the Chechens had seen their sons and husbands killed and their homes destroyed for what they believed would be a better life without the Russians. Instead, all they gained was a republic ravaged by war with a dilapidated infrastructure, ruined economy and rampant corruption. With no hope in sight, many Chechens turned to Islam to make sense of their loss and bleak future. Unfortunately, Shamil Basayev and Amir Khattab were waiting with open arms to receive the war weary Chechens. Both Basayev and Khattab were Chechen separatist commanders and Islamic extremists that sought support for a return to Shar'ia law and a non-secular way of life. Basayev and Khattab envisioned uniting all the Muslim people of the North Caucasus into a greater Islamic State. Under pressure from the newly created Chechen Council comprised of many of Basayev and Khattab's supporters, in 1997 Maskhadov reluctantly agreed to establish Shar'ia law in hopes of quelling the internal struggle and bringing in much needed foreign economic assistance from Islamic countries: Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Unfortunately, in August 1999, Shamil Basayev and Amir Khattab dashed any hopes of peace with or without Shar'ia law when they led an armed group of Islamic extremists into

Dagestan to create their Greater Islamic State.<sup>24</sup> Though the Russian and Dagestani forces repelled the attack, by mid-September the Islamic extremists had conducted more attacks in Dagestan, Moscow and in the southern Russian town of Volgodonsk. After two months of violence, in October 1999 Vladimir Putin, who had since replaced Yeltsin, ordered Russian forces back into Chechnya. In early 2002, after three more years of fighting that destroyed what was left of Chechnya from the First War, Putin declared an end to the Second Chechen War.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Russian forces reportedly poisoned to death Amir Khattab in April 2002. At age fifteen, Khattab left his family in Saudi Arabia to join the jihad in Afghanistan against the Russian Forces. In 1994, Khattab relocated to Chechnya to continue the jihad against the Russian Forces and later became a prominent Chechen separatist commander.

<sup>25</sup> Though President Putin officially declared an end to war in 2002, the conflict continues today. In an effort to withdraw as many Russian forces as possible from Chechnya, Putin has implemented a “Chechnization” policy in which the Russian military supports Pro-Moscow Chechen security forces in the continuous struggle to defeat the Chechen separatists. This is not to say, however, that the Russian military will not attack the separatists directly when needed. The Russian Special Forces operation that killed Chechen separatist leader Maskhadov is a good example of direct Russian military involvement in Chechnya.

## The Chechen Problem

### Diplomacy

The Kremlin's imposition of old-style central control will not make the people of Russia safer; it will merely curtail their freedoms. But terrorism in Russia does not result from too much freedom. If anything, it stems in part from the Kremlin's reluctance to address the legitimate aspirations of the Chechen people for autonomy or independence.

John McCain, United States Senator, (September 21, 2004)<sup>26</sup>

### Uncertain Future

Citing continued attacks on Russian civilians and military forces inside and outside of Chechnya, Vladimir Putin has refused to negotiate with the Chechen separatists. Rather, Russia's immediate strategy appears to be the physical elimination of all senior and mid-ranking Chechen separatist leaders.<sup>27</sup> Russia's assassination of the Chechen separatist leader, Maskhadov, in early 2005 was the first major success in the implementation of this strategy. Without Maskhadov's leadership, Russia believes the Chechen separatist movement will disintegrate, thus, making it easier for Russian forces to track and kill small, disjointed separatist groups and their leaders. Likewise, without a coherent or legitimate opposition leader such as Maskhadov, Putin no longer feels compelled to negotiate with the Chechen separatists. With Maskhadov out of the way, Putin can drive forward with his quest to finally integrate Chechnya into the Russian Federation.

Presently, Russia maintains control over Chechnya with a three-tier governmental system. In the first tier, Sergei Abramov serves as Russia's Chechen Prime Minister who is responsible for overseeing the pro-Moscow Chechen government. In the second tier, Dmitry

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<sup>26</sup> "Time to Resolve the War in Chechnya," *The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya*, October 2004 [article on-line]; available from [http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/news/200410\\_Quotes.htm](http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/news/200410_Quotes.htm); Internet; accessed 15 July 2005.

<sup>27</sup> On September 14, 2005 pro-Moscow Chechen security forces killed Shamil Muskiyev, an aide to Chechen separatist leader Abdul-Khalid Sadulaev, in Argun-east of the capital Grozny.

Kozak, the head of the newly created Special Federal Commission on North Caucasus and a close ally to Putin, ensures the proper integration of Chechnya into the Russian Federation. One of Kozak's main responsibilities is the management of federal money earmarked for Chechnya's reconstruction. The third and least powerful tier is the pro-Moscow Chechen government comprised of a presidency, currently held by Alu Alkhanov, and a parliament. Though the Chechen people elect their leaders into the pro-Moscow Chechen government, the Russian electoral commission is responsible for screening the candidates prior to every election to ensure their loyalty to Moscow. In direct opposition to the pro-Moscow Chechen government, is the unrecognized Chechen separatist government whose members live either in hiding in Chechnya and the surrounding North Caucasus region or abroad in Europe and the United States. Currently, Abdul Khalid Sadulaev, who replaced Maskhadov upon his assassination, is the president of the unrecognized Chechen government.

With the assassination of Maskhadov, Russia has created a power vacuum in Chechnya. The pro-Moscow Chechen President Alu Alkhanov, handpicked by Moscow to run unopposed for president in 2004, cannot lead Chechnya to peace because he does not represent the Chechen people nor does Russia allow him any true power.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Sadulaev, who carries the title of President of the Chechen separatist government, cannot lead the Chechen people because he lacks the influence and the power Maskhadov enjoyed. Consequently, Shamil Basayev, an Islamic extremist and terrorist, is the most powerful and influential Chechen separatist leaders left to fill

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<sup>28</sup> In Jim Nichol's article "Bringing Peace to Chechnya? Assessments and Implications" dated February 11, 2005 in the Congressional Research Service Report for Congress he writes many Chechens question Alu Alkhanov's legitimacy. After separatists assassinated the pro-Moscow Chechen president Akhmas Kadyrov on May 9, 2004, the Russian electoral commission refused to consider a return to direct presidential rule. Consequently, the commission called for new elections in August 2004 to install Alkhanov as the new pro-Moscow Chechen president. Similar to the questionable conditions that led to Akhmad Kadyrov election in October 2003, the Russian electoral commission, without explanation, ruled just prior to the August 2004 elections that Alkhanov's main challenger and the leading candidate, Malik Saidullayev, could not to run. Reportedly, on Election Day, as in previous elections, the commission manipulated the vote tallying so that it appeared Alkhanov won by a clear majority, even though in some electoral precincts there were more votes cast for Alkhanov than there were voters.

the power vacuum. Instead of negotiating with Maskhadov, a secular Muslim who repeatedly sought diplomatic negotiations and condemned terrorism, Russia has chosen a military rather than a diplomatic solution to the Chechen problem.<sup>29</sup> One wonders if the Kremlin understood the second and third order affects of its actions when it planned the assassination of Maskhadov. As it stands now, Russia will never negotiate with Basayev; and Basayev will never give up on his goal of creating a greater Islamic state in the North Caucasus. Consequently, the prognosis for a diplomatic solution in Chechnya is very bleak.

## Peace Initiatives

Though human rights organizations - Human Rights Watch, Memorial and Prague Watchdog - and Western governments have criticized Russia's human rights abuses such as assassinations, indiscriminant bombing raids, and random arrests and disappearances, the international community has done very little to pressure Russia to solve the Chechen conflict through diplomatic means.<sup>30</sup> The Bush Administration, in particular, is reluctant to pressure Putin to address the suspected human rights abuses or to criticize Russia's Chechen policy because it depends upon Russia's support and cooperation in the GWOT. Many observers in the form of journalists also believe the United States is reticent about condemning Russia's actions in public because the Abu Ghraib incident in Iraq and the controversial detainee facility at

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<sup>29</sup> In an interview, February 7, 2005, granted to Russia's *Kommersant* newspaper Maskhadov asserted that Shamil Basayev "is no longer apart of [Chechnya's] armed forces. He acknowledged the differences between Basayev and himself in fighting for independence and claimed Basayev's method of targeting innocent Russian civilians was unacceptable for the Chechen side. According to Maskhadov, as a direct result of the Beslan massacre and other acts of violence against Russian civilians, he planned to hand over Basayev and all other Chechens responsible for war against humanity to the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague.

<sup>30</sup> Memorial is a Russian human rights organization based in Moscow that operates an extensive Internet website available from [www.memo.ru/eng/memhrc/index.shtml](http://www.memo.ru/eng/memhrc/index.shtml). Prague Watchdog is a Czech human rights organization based in Prague that also runs a websites available from [www.watchdog.cz](http://www.watchdog.cz)

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba have undercut the Bush Administration's ability to take a moral high ground on human rights abuses.<sup>31</sup>

Since the United States is taking a decidedly non-interventionist approach to the Chechen conflict many other countries and organizations have attempted to fill the void left by the world's only superpower – but with little success. For example, the Council of Europe<sup>32</sup> suspended Russian membership in April 2000 because of human rights abuses. However, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and Russia's subsequent willingness to cooperate and share intelligence in the GWOT, the Council of Europe reinstated Russia's membership. Similarly, when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)<sup>33</sup> tasked Lord Judd to monitor the Chechen election and constitution referendum in February 2003 and he returned citing serious problems, PACE rejected Judd's proposal to condemn Russia for its manipulation of the electoral process.<sup>34</sup>

Despite numerous peace initiatives that Ilyas Akhmadov, Akhmed Zakayev,<sup>35</sup> and the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya have proposed to peacefully resolve the conflict,

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<sup>31</sup> "Chechnya's Disappeared," *Washington Post*, editorial, 4 April 2005; A20.

<sup>32</sup> The Council of Europe, established on May 5, 1949, currently has 41 Member States, from Albania and Andorra to the Ukraine and United Kingdom. The Council assists in strengthening democracy, human rights, the rule of law and Europe's cultural heritage in its Member States. Though at its inception the Council was primarily an international organization of western European members concerned with mostly western European issues, in the 1980s and 1990s the Council assumed a new role in the democratization of central and eastern Europe.

<sup>33</sup> The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is a statutory organ of the Council of Europe, which is composed of a Committee of Ministers and an Assembly representing the Council member states.

<sup>34</sup> According to Jim Nichol's article "Bringing Peace to Chechnya? Assessments and Implications" in Congressional Research Service Report for Congress the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) election observers noted voting irregularities during the constitution referendum similar to previous Russian run elections in Chechnya. For example, there was a noticeable absence of organized and open opposition to the constitutional draft and when the referendum did occur between 23,000 and 30,000 Russian troops "permanently stationed" in Chechnya voted. Moreover, the OSCE received complaints of pro-Moscow Chechen government officials threatening displaced and Chechen residents with food aid cutoffs if they did not vote for the referendum.

<sup>35</sup> Akhmed Zakayev served as Maskhadov's Foreign Minister from 1997 to 1999. Ilyas Akhmadov replaced Zakayev upon his death and still holds the title of Chechen Foreign Minister of the Chechen separatist government.

Putin has rejected all efforts to negotiate an end to the conflict.<sup>36</sup> The closest the Chechens and Russians have come to a possible peace negotiation occurred in February 2004 when nearly 150 European Parliament deputies endorsed Ilyas Akhmadov's peace proposal to send United Nations peacekeepers to Chechnya in exchange for Russia's withdrawal of troops and Chechen separatists' disarming. After tense negotiations between Chechen representatives and then pro-Moscow Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov, Kadyrov refused to accept the terms of the proposal stating the only way to end the conflict peacefully was for the Chechen separatists to surrender unconditionally. In April 2005, the European Union and Russia agreed to start a dialogue on Chechnya and allow Brussels to implement technical assistance projects in the republic. Though the European Union's efforts to initiate dialogue with Russia on Chechnya to relieve human suffering in the republic are laudable, they are more humanitarian in nature than diplomatic. Eventually, a diplomatic solution must address the root cause of the conflict - Chechnya's status within the Russian Federation.

## Significance

The international community's reluctance to pressure Russia to resolve the conflict diplomatically and Russia's preference to kill Chechen separatist leaders rather than negotiate with them are contributing to the growth and strength of Islamic radicalism within the ranks of the Chechen separatists. With every success Shamil Basayev achieves through terrorist acts, it becomes that much more difficult for Abdul Khalid Sadulaev to unite the Chechen separatist movement in its goal for a democratic, secular independent Chechnya. Abdul Khalid Sadulaev and his field commanders, such as Doku Umarov, do not approve of Basayev's methods or his

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<sup>36</sup> The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya is an organization that works to promote a peaceful resolution to the war in Chechnya. It is associated with Freedom House and The Jamestown Foundation that are also organizations dedicated to the resolution of regional conflicts. Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor; General Alexander M. Haig Jr, former Secretary of State and Supreme Allied Commander; Stephen J. Solarz, former Congressman, and Ambassador Max M. Kampelman chair the The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya headquartered in Washington, D.C.

Islamic extremist views, but they fear isolating Basayev and fracturing the separatist movement. Sadulaev and the majority of the separatist movement leaders that do not subscribe to Islamic extremism tolerate Basayev because he takes action and brings much needed money, recruits, arms and world media attention to the Chechen separatist movement. Ultimately, until Putin is willing to negotiate, Sadulaev has little choice but to accept Basayev's Islamic extremist faction lest he wants to risk an internal armed conflict within the separatist movement.<sup>37</sup>

According to the United States National Security Strategy, the goal of the United States is to ensure:

. . . political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity. To achieve these goals, the United States will champion aspirations for human dignity; strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends; work with others to defuse regional conflicts; prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies, and our friends, with weapons of mass destruction; ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade; expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy; develop agendas for cooperative action with other main centers of global power; and transform America's national security institutions to meet the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.<sup>38</sup>

If the United States is to hold true to its National Security Strategy in "champion[ing] aspirations for human dignity" and "work[ing] with others to defuse regional conflicts", then the United States needs to make Chechnya a priority in its foreign policy. As the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) recently noted, "the most egregious violations of international humanitarian law anywhere in the OSCE region are occurring in Chechnya today."<sup>39</sup> The United States failure to take an active role in ending the Chechen conflict undermines its ability to

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<sup>37</sup> Since more than 70 percent of the Chechen fighters are secular nationalists that seek independence from Russia, Basayev's Islamic extremist faction represents a small minority in the Chechen separatist movement. Nevertheless, Basayev's leadership, charisma, and military successes have made him one of the most powerful separatist leaders in Chechnya.

<sup>38</sup> President George W. Bush, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," *United States Government*, September 2002 [document on-line]; available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>; Internet; accessed 6 August 2005.

<sup>39</sup> "Crisis in the Caucasus," *The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya* [article on-line]; available from [http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/bg\\_crisis.htm](http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/bg_crisis.htm); Internet; accessed 7 August 2005.

achieve the goals set out in the National Security Strategy and more importantly to lead the GWOT.

The Chechen conflict is expanding rather than contracting. Basayev's forces are actively trying to integrate with other radical Islamic extremist elements in Ingushetia and Dagestan to widen the conflict into the rest of the North Caucasus. Even though Sadulaev understands Basayev and his Islamic extremists are more of a threat to Chechen independence than a solution, there is very little he can do without risking the fracture of the separatist movement. If the United States is unwilling to use its influence to broker a peace initiative then the Chechen conflict is likely to continue to spiral out of control and become a major front in the GWOT. It is obvious that Russia can no longer contain the Chechen separatist movement and that the European Union, despite its efforts, does not have the influence or resources to bring Russian and Chechen separatist leaders to the negotiating table. If left unattended, the Islamic extremists will continue to exploit the instability in Chechnya and the North Caucasus to recruit among the disenfranchised population. The Islamic extremists' recruitment pitch is not hard to imagine—  
“In the name of Allah, all Muslim brothers of the North Caucasus join arms to protect your family and homes from the Russian criminals that kill your children, violate your women, and bomb your homes. Liberate yourself from Russia and punish the West for their idleness and indifference to the suffering in Chechnya. Only Muslims can defend Muslims.”

## Information

Russia is keeping international and local journalists out of Chechnya through arbitrary and obstructive regulations. Journalists have a right to report on this conflict, and the obstacles placed in their path by the Russian authorities are unacceptable. By keeping journalists out, Russia is trying to hide the evidence of its brutal campaign in Chechnya from the eyes of the international community.

Jean-Paul Marthoz, European Press Director of Human Rights Watch,  
(February 2000)<sup>40</sup>

## The Information Campaign

### Russian

On the eve of the first Chechen conflict, December 10, 1994, international news organizations stood ready to cover Russia's first post-Soviet military campaign. Over the next two years newspaper journalists and television crews risked their lives to report on the war. Shocked and dismayed by the carnage and cruelty, Russian citizens grew tired and eventually outraged at the war's death toll. By August 1996, Boris Yeltsin finally succumbed to public pressure and agreed to sign a peace treaty with the Chechen separatists. Clearly not pleased with a negotiated peace agreement, Yeltsin, along with the rest of Russia's political and military leadership, blamed the media for Russian failures in Chechnya.

Therefore, by the time the Second Chechen War began, Vladimir Putin had designed and implemented a system to curtail journalists' access to the battlefield. Instead of news organizations entering and leaving Chechnya freely as they had done in the First Chechen War, Russian authorities required journalists to obtain special accreditation to travel to Chechnya. Furthermore, once in Chechnya, the Russian officials restricted the journalists to designated areas. As a result, the only reports the journalists could file were those that the Russian official

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<sup>40</sup> "Human Rights Watch Press Release: Arrest of Journalist, Blanket Media Restrictions on Chechnya Condemned—Rights Group urges all parties to respect rights of the press", *Human Rights Watch*, February 2000 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.hrw.org/press/2000/02/chech0201.htm>; Internet; accessed 16 July 2005.

spokesmen in Chechnya or the Director of the Russian Press Center in Moscow, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, carefully crafted and disseminated; and for those journalists who were not satisfied with Russia's official "spin" and ventured outside the designated areas, they faced numerous dangers such as kidnapping and death.<sup>41</sup> In January 2000, Putin took further measures to shape the Russian information campaign in Chechnya by taking direct control of all Russian national television and newspaper (private and public) media outlets. Moreover, at the regional level, Putin began a policy of regulating the amount of subsidies the federal government provided regional newspapers based upon the "quality" of their reporting.

Today, the Russian media rarely reports on the Chechen conflict detailing the daily suffering of the Chechen people or Russian military losses. Instead, Russian media outlets focus on Russian military and political successes placing particular emphasis on Russia's support to the pro-Moscow Chechen government and Chechen separatist terrorist attacks on innocent civilians. Since most Russian media outlets are now either government controlled or heavily subsidized by the federal government, political debate in Russia is almost non-existent.<sup>42</sup> Even the international media is not exempt from Russia's censorship today. For example, when on July 28, 2004 the U.S. television station ABC aired a lengthy interview on the evening news show "Nightline" with Shamil Basayev, Moscow reacted immediately threatening to bar all ABC news journalists from working in Russia. In the interview, Basayev, who claimed responsibility for multiple terrorist attacks in Russia to include the Moscow Theater bombing in 2002 and Beslan School tragedy in 2004, accused the Russians of being terrorists and promised more attacks in Russia. Though ABC defended its broadcast, claiming all positions in the Chechen conflict should have a voice,

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<sup>41</sup> At least two journalists have died in Chechnya. Reportedly, Russian aircraft shot one of the journalists, Ramzan Mezhidov, a freelancer for Moscow's Centre TV, while he was filming a Russian bombing raid on a refugee convoy.

<sup>42</sup> Humphrey Hawksley, "Tragedy throws spotlight on Kremlin," *BBC News*, 4 September, 2004 [article on-line]; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3627722.stm>; Internet; accessed 6 7 August 2005.

the interview enraged Russian officials especially military officials like Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov who issued a general order forbidding all military personnel to speak to ABC news journalists. While the ABC “Nightline” incident faded quietly over time with Russian authorities only refusing to grant some ABC journalists accreditation to work in Russia, Russia’s strong public stance against ABC served as a warning to other foreign and Russian journalists--if journalists want to work in Russia they need to support Russia and not the Chechen separatists.<sup>43</sup>

### International Community

In contrast to the Russian information campaign, the Western media, at least before September 11, 2001, tried to provide as much detailed and fair coverage as possible of the military struggle in Chechnya.<sup>44</sup> After September 11, 2001, however, the Western media became more concerned with the Chechen terrorist attacks and the increasing Islamic influences in Chechnya. In fact, many U.S. newspapers went so far as to redefine the Chechen conflict; instead of a struggle for Chechen independence, many journalists began to refer to the conflict as a Russian anti-terrorist campaign. Though there was already evidence of Al Qaida’s influence in Chechnya before September 11, 2001, the terrorist attacks on the United States permanently altered the discussion of Chechnya in the Western media.<sup>45</sup> Today Western media rather than reporting on Russian human rights abuses, largely reports on the gruesome details of Chechen terrorist attacks and the spread of Islamic extremism in the North Caucasus.

In an effort to counterbalance Russian and Western media reporting there are many other organizations such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, The Jamestown Foundation, the Institute for War and Peace, and The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya that report on

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<sup>43</sup> Nabi Abdullaev, “Russia targets media after failure in Chechnya,” *Center For Security Studies Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich*, 8 May 2005 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=12352>; Internet; accessed 16 July 2005.

<sup>44</sup> The term Western media refers to the media outlets within the liberal democratic societies of Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.

<sup>45</sup> Basayev and Khattab both had known ties to Al Qaida and trained in Afghanistan with Osama Bin Laden in the 1990s.

Chechnya. The mission of these organizations is to inform politicians, the media, and the public of developments in Chechnya, discuss the origins of the conflict and explore the possibilities for peace. Though the U.S. government and private donors provide the majority of the funding for these organizations, they nevertheless tend to be the least bias in their reporting.

Curiously, other than the Qatar-based satellite-television network al-Jazeera that strongly criticizes Russia's actions in Chechnya, the Muslim news media has been virtually silent. In fact, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, and Libya governmental news organizations have all refrained from reporting negatively on Russia's handling of Chechnya. The Muslim world's silence stands in stark contrast to many western human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Prague Watchdog that have been very outspoken critics of Russian human rights abuses against Chechen Muslims. According to Chechnya's only elected lawmaker in the Russian Duma, Aslambek Aslakhonov, the Muslim countries' reluctance to support Chechens is quite different from the political support many Muslim countries offered Bosnian Muslims and Kosovar Albanians in the 1990s and provide Palestinians today. Aslakhonov suggests that the reason Muslim countries are unwilling to criticize Russia is due mainly because Russia still wields a lot of power within the Middle East not only as the world's second largest oil producer, but also as a major arms supplier.<sup>46</sup> Despite the lack of support from Muslim government media outlets, many radical Islamic groups have taken up the Chechen separatist cause by creating websites calling for a Jihad in Chechnya against the Russians.<sup>47</sup>

### Chechnya

With limited support from Russian and international media, the Chechen separatists have used radio and the Internet to explain and report on their struggle. According to Russia's military

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<sup>46</sup> Valentinas Mite, "Chechnya: separatists get no official support from Muslim governments," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 11 February 2003 (article on-line]; available from [http://www.terrorisme.net/p/article\\_13.shtml](http://www.terrorisme.net/p/article_13.shtml); Internet; accessed 16 July 2005.

<sup>47</sup> The website [www.tellthechildrenthetruth.com/MuslimBrotherhood-todays-Jihad.htm](http://www.tellthechildrenthetruth.com/MuslimBrotherhood-todays-Jihad.htm) is a good example of an Islamic extremists group's use of the Internet to convey its messages.

news agency AVN, Chechen separatists are operating at least 23 radio networks, two of which they broadcast in the Arabic language. Moreover, the pro-Chechen Kavkaz-Tsentr web site ([www.kavkaz.org](http://www.kavkaz.org)) routinely reports on Chechen military successes as well as less important stories such as Shamil Basayev's marriage to his second wife.<sup>48</sup> Despite the Chechen separatists' efforts to compete in an information campaign with Russia, their acts of terrorism and frequent kidnapping of journalists have brought little sympathy from the media to their struggle. Though journalists may sympathize with the Chechens over Russia's human rights abuses and the squalor in which they live, they, especially Russian journalists, become less sympathetic when they see Chechen separatists kill women and children or kidnap fellow journalists for ransom. These factors, combined with Russia's near monopoly of the media, make it very difficult for journalists to file reports that portray the Chechen separatist movement in a favorable light.

## Significance

The study, "Freedom of the Press 2005: A Global Survey of Media Independence," recently reported that Russia's press falls in the category of "Not Free" -- a dubious distinction enjoyed since 2003.<sup>49</sup> Without the international media pressing Russia to get more access to Chechnya and more correspondents like Anna Politkovskaya<sup>50</sup> and news organizations like ABC willing to push the journalistic envelope, few countries will come to Chechnya's aid. In reality, the only reason the United States' is able to ignore the Chechen conflict is largely because Chechnya is not important to the international media. As long as the international media does not

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Feuilherade, "Russia's media war over Chechnya," *BBC News*, 19 February 1999 [article on-line]; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/528620.stm>; Internet; accessed 22 July 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Goldfarb, "Study Finds Decline in Global Press Freedom," *The Freedom House*, 27 April 2005 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/media/pressrel/042705.htm>; Internet; accessed 23 July 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Anna Politkovskaya is the author of the book "A Dirty War" and a renowned Russian reporter who in January 2000 won the prestigious Russian Union of Journalists' Golden Pen Award for her outspoken coverage of the Russian military campaign in Chechnya.

take an interest and ignores the conflict, the American people and the international community will remain ignorant of the Chechen problem. Unfortunately, it takes gruesome pictures and heart-wrenching reports from the ground bombarding television screens, similar to Bosnia, Somalia and even more recently with Hurricane Katrina, to outrage the American people and thus motivate the United States government. Until the international media makes more of a concerted effort to educate the public on Chechnya, the United States will continue to avoid pressuring Russia to find a diplomatic solution to Chechnya.

Unfortunately, Russia's information campaign is working. As long as Putin can control the journalists in Chechnya and shape the information coming out of Chechnya, he can keep the Chechen conflict out of the international public's eye – especially the American public. Putin has worked very hard to “sell” Chechnya as a struggle against terrorism to the international media<sup>51</sup> and the United Nations.<sup>52</sup> The more the international media reports on Chechen terrorist attacks rather than Russian human rights abuses the more effective Russia's information campaign will become. In the fall of 2002, the Hoover Institution estimated that Russian forces had killed approximately 12,000 Chechen fighters and 55,000 to 60,000 civilians. Moreover, the number of refugees living in horrid conditions in neighboring provinces is likely twice the official Russian estimate of 148,000. Since 2002, many more civilians have fled Chechnya, been killed, and died of disease or have moved to Russia or abroad in search of a better life.<sup>53</sup> Despite these statistics, in the absence of international media attention and an American public outcry to intervene in Chechnya, the United States will not risk disrupting the delicate relationship it has nurtured with Russia post September 11, 2001.

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<sup>51</sup> Weir.

<sup>52</sup> “Russia wants Chechen extremists on UN list,” *Interfax News*, 9 September 2005 [article on-line]; available from [http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/28/html?id\\_issue=11374043](http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/28/html?id_issue=11374043); Internet; accessed 11 September 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Fred Hiatt, “Tiptoe diplomacy,” *Washington Post*, 28 January 2002, A21.

## Military

Until we are freed from beneath the Russian jackboot, I can see no alternative, because there are no other possibilities left to us at the moment, particularly in view of what Russia and the so-called Russian Army has done here [Chechnya] in the last six years. In my opinion, no honest patriot or citizen of Chechnya can see any other way [than armed struggle against the Russians].

Doku Umarov, Senior Chechen Field Commander and Vice President of Chechen separatist government (July 2005)<sup>54</sup>

## Russian Military Forces

In the First Chechen War, Russia resorted to military force to prevent Chechen secession. In the Second Chechen War, Russia fought to regain its pride and annihilate the Chechen separatist movement. When the Russian forces withdrew from Chechnya in August 1996, the situation within Chechnya was desperate. While the Chechen separatist movement splintered into the nationalist and the Islamic extremist factions, Russia failed to deliver on its promises to rebuild Chechnya's infrastructure and economy. Consequently, the Chechens languished in corruption, poverty and mayhem for two years until Basayev decided to take matters into his own hands and attack into Dagestan.

Though Putin strongly condemned the incursion into Dagestan and the subsequent terrorist attacks, in reality, Basayev and his Islamic extremists played right into Putin's grand military strategy for Chechnya. When Putin replaced Yeltsin in 1999, he made a conscious decision not to negotiate with the Chechens for independence in December 2001 as agreed upon in the Khasavyurt agreement. Rather than negotiations, Putin wanted to destroy the Chechen separatists whom he believed were bandits and terrorists. He was eager for any excuse to reintroduce Russian forces into Chechnya. Putin clarified his position publicly in September

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Parsons, "Chechnya: Senior Commander Tells Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "No Alternate to Armed Struggle"", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 9 July 2005 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/7/9>; accessed 23 July 2005.

1999, just before the start of the Second Chechen War when he told the Russian state ITAR-TASS news service “Russian forces will follow terrorists everywhere. If we catch them in the toilet, then we will bury them in their own crap”.<sup>55</sup> Unlike with Yeltsin in the First Chechen War, the Russian people supported Putin’s strong stance on Chechnya largely due to Basayev’s new tactics of targeting Russian civilians.

Soon after Putin deployed military forces into Chechnya in October of 1999, he realized Russian conventional military forces were no better prepared to defeat the Chechen separatists than they were in the First Chechen War. Therefore, in 2001 Putin transferred military operational control in Chechnya to the Federal Security Service (FSB).<sup>56</sup> With the transfer of authority, Special Forces search and destroy units replaced poorly trained and equipped army troops. The FSB’s superior intelligence, technology, and cooperation with the local Pro-Moscow Chechen police force dramatically shifted the balance of power to the Russian forces. In the Second Chechen War, the Russian Special Forces simply out fought, out smarted and out maneuvered the Chechen separatists. By the time Putin declared an end to the Second Chechen War in early 2002, Russian Special Forces had either killed or captured most of the Chechen separatist field commanders, severed the separatists’ main supply and communications lines, and significantly disrupted the flow of money and arms into Chechnya.<sup>57</sup>

Today, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) is responsible for Chechnya.<sup>58</sup> The emphasis of Russian military operations has shifted from engaging armed separatists groups to tracking down and assassinating the remaining separatist field commanders and Chechen

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<sup>55</sup> Sergei Kovalev, “Putin’s War”, *New York Review of Books*, 10 February 2000, Vol. 47, No. 2..

<sup>56</sup> The Federal Security Service is the domestic successor of the Soviet KGB, which oversees Moscow's counterinsurgency operations.

<sup>57</sup> For an in-depth analysis of military operations during the First and Second Chechens Wars read Timothy Thomas’ “The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat”, Olga Olikier’s “Russia’s Chechen Wars 1994-2000: lessons from urban combat,” and M.A..Smith’s “The Second Chechen War: The All Russian Context.”

<sup>58</sup> The MVD took over responsibility of Chechnya from the FSB at the end of the Second Chechen War in 2002.

government leaders. The MVD calls this phase of the conflict the “psychological warfare phase”. With an aggressive counter-terrorism campaign, Putin hopes to convince the separatists and would-be recruits that continued armed struggle is futile. The MVD in Chechnya is comprised of three semi-independent entities: the local Chechen police force, teams of Regional Police detectives that have come from throughout the Russian Federation to support operations in Chechnya, and infantry-type Interior troops. Unfortunately, the MVD in Chechnya is largely ineffective. The Russian regional police detectives believe the Chechen police are disloyal and collaborating with the separatists. Therefore, the Russian detectives share little to no intelligence with them creating an atmosphere of animosity and distrust. Ultimately, the only thing that the Russian regional police detectives and Chechen police officers share in common is their willingness to take bribes, trade in illicit arms and kidnap for ransom. In an effort to improve Russian operations in Chechnya, by the end of 2005, the FSB will regain control of all federal forces operating in Chechnya.

### **Chechen Separatist Forces**

There are three forms of resistance in the Chechen separatist movement. The first form is the unrecognized Chechen government comprised of a parliament and presidency, which now leads and represents within and outside of Chechnya the separatist movement. In 1997, while Chechnya enjoyed a de facto independence status, the Chechen people elected parliamentary representatives and Aslan Maskhadov as president. With Russia’s installed pro-Moscow Chechen government in power, however, most parliamentary representatives now either live in exile in neighboring countries and abroad or fight from the Caucasus Mountains. After Maskhadov’s death, Abdul-Khalid Sadulaev took over as the president of the Chechen separatist government and leader of the separatist movement. Sadulaev has vowed to continue

Maskhadov's struggle for an independent and secular Chechnya inflicting as much damage as possible on the Russian armed forces.<sup>59</sup> Similar to Maskhadov, Sadulaev views all Russian military forces, whether in Chechnya or Russia, as valid targets. However, he condemns the targeting and kidnapping, whether by Chechen forces or Russian forces, of peaceful civilians. Sadulaev's goals and methods for prosecuting the separatist fight against the Russians are at odds with Maskhadov's former rival and Chechen separatist commander, Shamil Basayev. Though Basayev recognizes Sadulaev as president and leader of the Chechen separatist movement, he does not feel compelled to follow Sadulaev's rules of engagement.

The internal conflict between Sadulaev and Basayev risks fracturing the Chechen separatist movement. Thus far, however, Sadulaev has been able to keep the commanders united emphasizing their common military objectives (removal of Russian forces from Chechnya) and their hatred for pro-Moscow Chechens. For instance, Sadulaev, along with the rest of the Chechen leadership, despise the First Deputy Prime Minister of the pro-Moscow Chechen government, Ramzan Kadyrov who has terrorized Chechens throughout the republic with the assistance of the Russian MVD.

Chechen civil disobedience is the second form of resistance in the Chechen separatist movement. Chechen citizens and civil action groups regularly conduct anti-war marches and demonstrations in support of Chechen independence. However, since Russian authorities restrict the flow of information in Chechnya and quickly disband all public demonstrations through either force or the threat of force, expressions of civil disobedience are more symbolic than concrete efforts to bring about change.

The third and most important form of resistance is the separatist armed forces. The Chechen separatist forces are responsible for liberating Chechnya from Russian occupation. To

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<sup>59</sup> The term "Russian armed forces" also refers to the Russian backed pro-Moscow Chechen security forces.

accomplish this goal, the Chechen separatist force's mission is to inflict as many casualties on the Russian forces as possible inside and outside of Chechnya to leave Putin no other choice than to grant Chechnya independence. Within the Chechen separatist movement, there are three types of armed forces. The first type of force is the Chechen government military force trained, armed and led by Shamil Basayev. The second type of force is a small group of civilians that raise arms in response to Russian atrocities. After these armed civilians exact their revenge by either suicide attack or improvised explosive devices upon the Russian forces, they normally return to their daily lives. The third type of force resides outside of Chechnya among external groups in Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria. These external groups fight in support of the Chechen separatists because either they favor Chechnya's independence or they resent Russia's military presence in the North Caucasus. Generally, they target Russian forces garrisoned outside of Chechnya.

Among all of these Chechen separatist forces, especially the government forces and external groups, Islamic foreign fighters are present. Some of these Islamic fighters share Shamil Basayev's Islamic extremist ambitions of a Greater Islamic State in the North Caucasus. Other Islamic fighters fight to repay their debt to many Chechens who fought with the Mujahideen against the Soviet army in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Still other Islamic fighters take up arms simply because they have no home and want to die honorably fighting non-Muslims. Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to claim, as Russian officials have done in the past, that the Islamic foreign fighters are dominating and driving the Chechen separatist movement. Since September 2001, Russia has tried to characterize Chechnya as a base of operations for Al-Qaida and other Islamic terrorists groups. In doing so, Russia has conveniently equated all Chechen separatist fighters with terrorists; this, however, is not the truth. Though some Chechen

separatists, such as Shamil Basayev, are undoubtedly terrorists and have loose ties with Al Qaida, the link between the Chechen separatists and Al Qaida is weak.<sup>60</sup>

## Significance

For more than ten years Chechen separatists and Russian forces have engaged in one of the longest and bloodiest conflicts since World War II. Today nearly half of Chechnya's pre-war population is now either dead or displaced and more than 160,000 Chechen and Russian soldiers have died.<sup>61</sup> Incredibly, according to Memorial Human Rights Organization, the death rate in Chechnya is higher today than during Stalin's infamous purges in the 1930s.<sup>62</sup> The Chechen people live in fear and have no hope of a better future. Putin has made it very clear that Russia will continue to fight the Chechen "terrorists" until the Russian military has killed them all. In turn, the Chechen separatists have vowed to continue their fight in and outside of Russia. Even though the Chechen separatists realize they cannot defeat the Russian military, they will pursue their armed struggle either until Putin can no longer politically accept the military losses or until a more moderate leader succeeds Putin that is willing to negotiate. In President Bush's address to the United Nations High-Level Plenary Meeting September 14, 2005, he told the audience of more than 190 nation leaders that:

In this young century, the far corners of the world are linked more closely than ever before – no nation can remain isolated and indifferent to the struggles of others. When a country, or a region with despair, and resentment and vulnerable to violent and aggressive ideologies, the threat passes easily across oceans and borders, and could

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<sup>60</sup> At the start of the Second Chechen War, Sergei Ignatchenko, FSB deputy chief spokesman, stated: "These [Chechen separatists] are not nationalists or independence-seekers. They are disciplined international terrorists, united by a single aim: to seize power and bring a new world order based on Shar'ia law." More recently, other Russian security officials have claimed that Chechen separatists fought along side Taliban and Al Qaida forces against coalition forces in Operation Enduring Freedom. However, these claims are somewhat suspect since coalition forces never killed or captured Chechens in Afghanistan and none of the prisoners in Guantanamo Bay are of Chechen origin. Nevertheless, Russia is adamant that it is fighting a war on terror in Chechnya and not a separatist movement.

<sup>61</sup> Christopher Swift, "The Russo-Chechen War: Facts & Figures," *The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya*, [report on-line]; available from <http://www.peaceinchechnya.org>; accessed 3 September 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

threaten the security of any peaceful country...The lesson is clear. There can be no safety in looking away, or seeking the quiet life by ignoring hardship and oppression of others. Either hope will spread, or violence will spread—and we must take the side of hope.<sup>63</sup>

In these difficult and uncertain times, President Bush's message is very clear: to defeat terrorism and the spread of Islamic extremism, the international community must come together to bring hope to those who live in despair and see no future for themselves or their children. There are few other places in the world other than Chechnya where people have suffered for so long and the international community has ignored so much.

Chechnya is a powder keg ready to explode. If Sadulaev is unable to keep the Chechen separatist movement united and contain Basayev's Islamic extremist faction, Chechnya will undoubtedly engulf the rest of the North Caucasus. Unfortunately, as evidenced by the Beslan School attack in September 2004 and the most recent attacks in the town of Nalchik, in Kabardino-Balkaria republic, the violence is already spreading into neighboring republics. Muslim young men must now choose between living with poverty, corrupt governments and human rights abuses or Islamic extremism. As President Bush intimated in his speech to the United Nations, the choice for many who see no hope is an easy one. The United States, already fighting on two major GWOT fronts, cannot afford to allow Chechnya to explode into chaos. Russia's hard-line policy and support of such pro-Moscow Chechen leaders as Ramzan Kadyrov have set the volatile conditions. Now the only thing missing is the spark to ignite the powder keg; that spark lies in delicate balance between Sadulaev's ability to control Basayev and his Islamic extremists and Russia's ability to defeat the Chechen separatist movement without causing more despair among the Chechen people.

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<sup>63</sup> President George W. Bush's address to the United Nations High-Level Plenary Meeting 14 September 2005.

## Economics

Before the war we lived in the Shelkovskoy District [Chechnya] in our own house which is completely destroyed now. We have lost everything in this war – our relatives and friends, our property, belief in our state, and all tranquility and confidence in tomorrow.

Musaeva, age 37, wife and the mother of two children. (September 2005)<sup>64</sup>



Figure 4 – Caspian Region

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<sup>64</sup> “Memories of Better Times,” *Islamic Relief Worldwide*, September 2005 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.islamic-relief.com/submenu/Emappeals/chechmusaeva.htm>; Internet; accessed 23 July 2005.



Figure 5 – Caspian Region Oil Pipelines

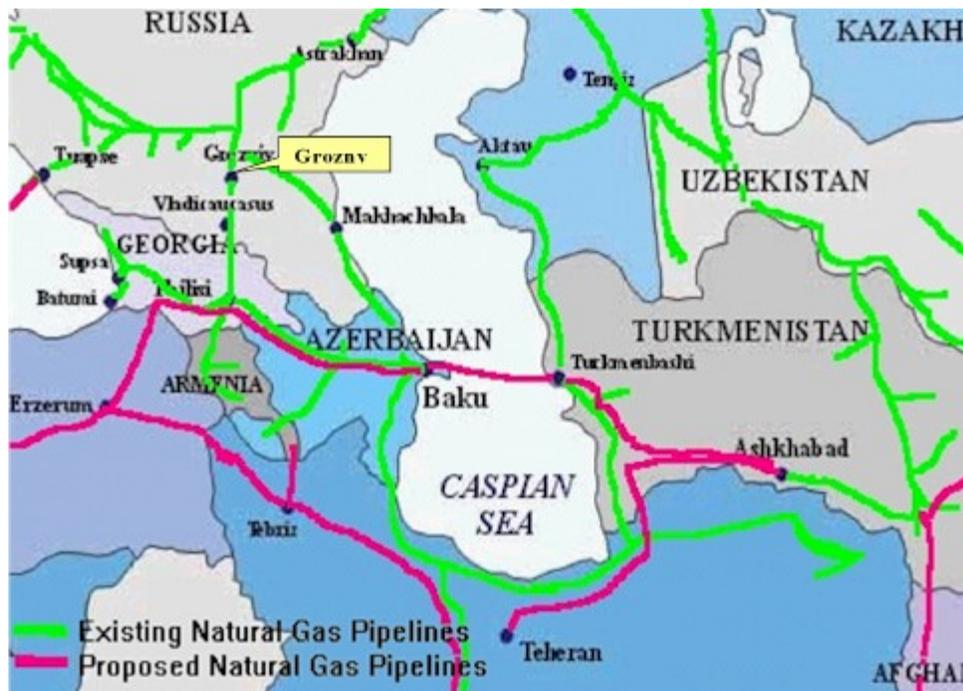


Figure 6 – Caspian Region Natural Gas Pipelines

## Challenges

One of Russia's principle justifications for not allowing Chechnya to secede in 1994 was that Chechnya's succession would have created a domino effect in the North Caucasus opening the door for other semi-autonomous republics (Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria) to demand independence. According to Russia, Chechnya was the lynch pin to the North Caucasus. If Russia lost Chechnya, it would have been a crippling economic blow since Russia's oil and natural gas pipelines run through the North Caucasus connecting the oil rich Caspian Sea and to the Black Sea commercial ports that feed the European markets (See figure 4).<sup>65</sup> Consequently, Russia was and still is willing to pay any cost in dollars and lives to maintain control of Chechnya and thus the North Caucasus.<sup>66</sup>

In 1992, Chechnya was one of most important oil refining centers in Russia producing 6.5 million tons a year. Moreover, pre-war Grozny was a hub for oil and gas pipelines running north from Baku to the commercial ports of Rastov and Novorossiisk along the Black Sea (See figures 5 and 6). However, since 1992, war has devastated Chechnya's infrastructure and has left Grozny in a state of disrepair. Most of the oil refining facilities, railways and road networks that once gave life to Grozny lie in ruin. Sadly, today, instead of serving as a hub for oil and gas pipelines, Chechnya has become a center for an array of illegal economic activity ranging from stealing oil from the Baku-Grozny-Novorossiisk pipeline, bank fraud, highway robberies to human smuggling.<sup>67</sup>

In Russia, much like in many parts of the world, there are two types of people: the "haves" and the "have-nots". The Chechens, despite their strategic economic position within

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<sup>65</sup>The Caspian sea basin is the site of the world's largest deposit of untapped oil reserves.

<sup>66</sup> Since as an independent country Chechnya would have likely continued economic relations and trade with Russia just like Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and the other former Soviet republics have done since their independence, Russia's economic concerns appear unwarranted.

<sup>67</sup> Alexandru Liono, "Economic Survival Strategies in North Caucasus," *DUPI Copenhagen*, [article on-line]; available from <http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/crs/eng/Vol5/lionu2.htm>; Internet; accessed 7 August 2005.

Russia, have historically been the “have-nots.” Other than untapped natural resources (oil reserves), a dilapidated oil and gas pipeline infrastructure, and some limited manufacturing and agricultural industries, Chechnya is predominantly a welfare state. In order for the Chechens to survive, Moscow must provide for almost every basic need such as unemployment benefits (income subsidies), food, water, electricity, heating oil, gasoline, hospitals, roads, and schools.

Currently Russia maintains approximately 100,000 troops in Chechnya, including 40,000 active duty soldiers and 60,000 support and logistics personnel. In July 1999, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank lent Russia \$4.5 billion, most of which Moscow diverted to fight the war in Chechnya rather than for its intended purpose to bolster the Russian economy. Though Russia has never released the total amount it has spent to prosecute the war in Chechnya, the sum likely exceeds \$10 billion.

Today, however, thanks to increased exports, international weapon sales, and soaring oil prices, Russia is in a better position to invest money into the reconstruction of Chechnya than ever before. Ultimately Russia would like to take advantage of Chechnya’s untapped oil reserves and refurbish the vital oil and gas lines that run through the republic. As recently as 2003 and 2004 Russia has made positive steps to rebuild Chechnya by compensating families who lost their homes during the wars and initiating massive rebuilding programs that include new schools, hospitals, roads and repairing the Moscow-Grozny passenger and commercial rail link.

Unfortunately, many of the people charged to coordinate this reconstruction effort are the very same ones undermining progress. Each year approximately \$45 million in salaries and compensation payments never reach their intended recipients. Russian military commanders and political appointees such as Ramzan Kadyrov are lining their pockets with money earmarked for the Chechen people. Instead of investing the money Moscow allocates every year into Chechnya’s reconstruction, Kadyrov and military top brass spend it on personal business ventures such as raising private security forces and setting up drilling operations to sell oil on the black market. Ironically, the black marketers drill 2000 tons of oil a day that is about double the

amount Russian professional oil companies can drill in one day. The corruption in Chechnya has reached such levels that many observers question how many leaders in Russia really want the lucrative Chechen conflict to end. Today the problem with Chechen economic recovery does not rest on whether Russia has enough resources, but whether Russia can gain control over the corruption that has plagued its local governments and military for years.

## Significance

Russia is very cognizant of the large oil reserves that lie beneath Chechnya and the strategic geographic importance of the entire North Caucasus region. As the United States, Europe and China continue to compete for new oil and gas markets to satisfy their thirst for petroleum, Russia would like to emerge as a major player in the crude oil and natural gas market. Russia already provides Turkey 70 percent of its natural gas and the leading Russian oil company, Lukoil, is looking for new ways to expand its oil producing capabilities in Egypt.

Saudi Arabia is also eager to conduct business with Russia to balance what it sees as American hegemony. After September 11, 2001, Saudi Arabia reassessed its relationship with the United States and began to look for other countries to initiate investment opportunities. Saudi Arabia feared it was too vulnerable to American economic retaliation such as frozen bank accounts and economic sanctions. Thus, Saudi Arabia turned to Russia for assistance who responded kindly with the creation of the Russian-Arab Business Council. Though the Russian-Arab Business Council ostensibly fosters closer business relationships between the two countries, the establishment of the council also signals a shift in political alliances.

Unfortunately, the warming relations between Saudi Arabia and Russia do not come as a surprise. The Arab world has long considered investing in Russia. In fact, Arab nations have made several attempts in the past to consolidate their money in Russia and establish an Arab Bank in Russia to protect their funds. In the end, however, only American pressure and Russian economic instability prevented the Arab nations from following through with their plans. Today,

the political and economic landscape is different. Russia is more economically sound and the United States' influence is more vulnerable to high oil prices and problems in Iraq. The Arab nations want a new-generation of weapons to defend against American military dominance and Russia needs more money to strengthen its economy, fight the war in Chechnya and eventually rebuild Chechnya.<sup>68</sup>

Hopefully, the new relations between Russia and Arab nations are of temporary convenience. If history is any barometer of what is to come, Russia is unlikely to ever allow the Arab nations to jeopardize its key role as a partner in the GWOT. After all, when push comes to shove, Russia has always been unwilling to ally itself completely with any Arab nation. Russia still believes Arab nations, under the guise of non-governmental organizations and private citizens, provide funds to the Chechen separatists and quietly support Islamic extremism in Russia.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear in the short term that since Russia needs money and the oil rich Arab nations want to invest in Russia, Russia is more than willing to cooperate with the Arab nations. The question is whether this economic cooperation will eventually solidify into a political alliance, as the Arab nations would like. It is in the United States best interest not to discover the answer to this question. Ultimately, in order to counter the Arab nation's attempts to build closer economic ties with Russia, the United States will need to take a more active role in resolving the Chechen conflict and providing reconstruction assistance to Russia. The sooner the Chechen conflict ends and the faster Russia can rebuild Chechnya, the less Russia will need to depend upon wealthy Arab nations.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Russia has agreed to build a new air defense system for the United Arab Emirate (UAE).

<sup>69</sup> Tom Goeller, "The Other Imperialist," *Kavkaz Center*, 20 September 2005 [article on-line]; available from <http://kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2005/05/16/3802.shtml>; Internet; accessed 7 August 2005.

<sup>70</sup> In addition to countering the Arab nation's influence in Russia, a peaceful resolution to the Chechen conflict could also open an extra source of energy to the United States in the North Caucasus.

## Cultural

I consider that the radicalization of Islam in the Northern Caucasus will gradually reach a critical level. And that in its turn can lead to the beginning of a new war, the consequences of which will be unpredictable both for the North Caucasus and for the country [Russian Federation] as a whole.

Shamil Beno, a former Chechen foreign minister who now works as a political analyst and activist in Moscow (August 2005)<sup>71</sup>

## People

The Chechens can trace their ancestry from pre-historic times to the Noxche people. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Russians first encountered the Noxche people in a village in the Caucasus Mountains named Chechen-aul. Over time, the Russians began to refer to all Noxche people in the North Caucasus mountain region as Chechens. The Chechens are an ethnically diverse people. Though the majority of Chechens are Sunni Muslim, there is a small percentage of Chechen Christians, Jews, and Buddhists. Islam has been the predominant religion in Chechnya since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, with the creation of the Soviet Union, most Chechens stopped practicing Islam. It was only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 that Chechens began to find their religion again.

Life in Chechnya revolves around the village and not Islam. Instead of Shar'ia law, most Chechens follow traditional and customary laws called Adats. Instead of Islamic religious leaders preaching the Quran, village council elders interpret the Adats and prescribe how the Chechens should live. The Chechen village has approximately 10 to 50 families and is the foundation of the clan structure upon which the Chechens have depended for centuries; villages with similar ancestry form clans. There are approximately 125 clans in Chechnya. The clan members elect

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<sup>71</sup> Paul Goble, "Russia: A Three-Way Struggle For Chechen Islam," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 22 August 2005 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/8/6540D02E-1FCA-45AF-9D89-7952C6C1F409.html>; Internet; accessed 7 August 2005.

their own leaders and believe these leaders are the only ones that possess true power over them. After the clan, the highest level in the Chechen social hierarchy is the tribe (Takum). Tribes are comprised of a conglomeration of clans with similar ancestry. There are nine tribes in Chechnya. According to oral history, the Chechen tribes all share a common ancestry with nine brothers who each founded a village and later formed clans.<sup>72</sup> Though rivalries and blood feuds are common among the Chechen clans, they are extremely uncommon among the tribes. In short, rather than a religion or government, the tribes are what unite and provide identity to the Chechen people. Due to the Chechen clan structure, Chechens are extremely independent and proud people.

## Religion

Traditionally, Chechens practice either the Shafi'i or the Sufi form of Islam.<sup>73</sup> Neither form is extremist in nature. In fact, Shafi'i Islam is one of the most open and least demanding forms of Islam practiced in the world today. Likewise, Sufi Islam is a very tolerant and peaceful form of Islam, which emphasizes the importance of spirituality and education. Among the Chechen Sufis, women and men are equal and share all the responsibilities of a civil society, to include waging war. This is why in the Chechen conflict it was common for women to fight side by side with Chechen men.

Today there are three Islamic groups competing for the hearts and minds of the Chechen people - the pro-Moscow muftiate, the traditional Sufi Muslims and the Islamic extremists; and the winner of the competition will ultimately shape the future of Chechnya. The least influential among the three Islamic groups is the pro-Moscow muftiate, which has never enjoyed much support because the Chechens view it as an instrument of the Russian government. One of the biggest contentions the Chechens have with the pro-Moscow muftiate is that the Russian

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<sup>72</sup> The nine stars on the Chechen flag represent the nine Takums of Chechnya.

<sup>73</sup> Shafi' Islam is also practiced in Yemen, Bahrain, Indonesia, Philippines, and parts of Central Asia. Sufi Islam is synonymous with the Sufi Brotherhood also called tariqats)

government appoints the muftiate leadership rather than allowing the Chechens to elect their own religious leaders. Consequently, whether the pro-Moscow muftiate leaders are genuine or not, the Chechen people distrust and resent Russian involvement in their religious affairs. Conversely, the Sufi Muslims are the most powerful group in Chechnya. The Sufi Muslim's have a large following not only because of their traditional ties to the Chechen clans, but also due to their fierce resistance to the pro-Moscow muftiate. Consequently, the Sufi Muslims represent a majority in Chechnya and in most cases the Sufi religious leaders speak on behalf of all Chechens on matters of Islamic faith.

However, since the start of the first Chechen war in 1994, the Islamic extremists have slowly emerged as a viable alternative to the Sufi Muslims with their form of Islam known as Wahhabism. Wahhabism is a radical form of Islam practiced predominantly in Saudi Arabia that depends largely upon the teachings of Islam from the tenth century. In fact, Wahhabis believe that any teachings of Islam that date after the tenth century are false. Wahhabism preaches the strict adherence to Islamic Shar'ia law and envisions one day all Muslims living in a Muslim state led only by holy Islamic men. It rejects any form of nationalism and international borders that divide Muslims and justifies violence to free Muslims from non-Islamic governments such as Russia.<sup>74</sup>

Though the vast majority of the Muslim world rejects Wahhabism, to many Chechens, Wahhabism is very appealing, especially among the Chechen youth who have known nothing but war and see no future with Russia. In fact, even some within the Sufi Muslim group, instead of feeling threatened by the radical preaching of Islamic extremists, have embraced many of the Wahhabis' ideals. The one common denominator upon which both the Sufi Muslims and the

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<sup>74</sup> "The History of the Muslim Brotherhood is the Key to Understanding Today's Islamic War Against the West", *tellchildrenthetruth.com* [article on-line]; available from <http://www.tellthechildrenthetruth.com/MuslimBrotherhood-todays-Jihad.htm>; Internet; accessed 13 August 2005.

Islamic extremists agree is their disdain for the incompetence and corruption of the pro-Moscow Chechen government personified by the muftiate. Though most Chechens do not practice Wahhabism, which in many ways also runs counter to Chechen clan traditions, the Islamic extremists represent hope because they are willing to act upon their beliefs and fight for the Chechen's independence from Russia.

## Significance

Although there is a clash of civilizations that exists between the Chechens and Russians, one also exists within the Chechen culture.<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, the Chechen cultural clash poses more of a threat to the GWOT than the Russo-Chechen clash of civilizations. For better or for worse, the United States has a long history of intervening and resolving clashes between civilizations like most recently in Bosnia and Kosovo. With the assistance of the international community, the United States took the lead and brought a peaceful resolution to both conflicts ignited over the question of independence. Though not without sacrifices and at great expense, the United States brokered agreements over the status of independence that were amenable to all parties involved in the conflicts.

Chechnya is not so simple. Besides the obvious animosity and distrust that exists between the Chechens and Russians, the Chechens no longer trust each other. The Chechen separatist movement initiated by Dudayev and continued until March 2005 by Maskhadov was

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<sup>75</sup> The clash of civilizations between the Chechens and Russians rests predominantly upon religious and societal differences. Since during the Soviet Union era, the central government did not allow citizens to practice religion, when the Berlin wall fell in 1989 so did the religious barriers. Consequently, in the early 1990s, much like in many other parts of the world like Bosnia and Kosovo, there was a resurgence of religion in Russia. Though the Chechen conflict is more about nationalism and independence than religion, both the Russians and Chechens use their religious differences (Chechens – Muslims and Russians – Orthodox Christians) to further their causes. The Chechens use Islam to garner support from the Muslim world, while the Russians use Islam to instill fear into the Russian Orthodox Christians. Perhaps more important than religion, there also exists a deep divide between the Chechen and Russian societies. The Chechen society is one of clans and villages loosely governed through traditional Adats. This type of tribal society, unfortunately, does not fit well into the Russian society that depends on a strong, centralized government and has a long history of Czars and totalitarian leaders.

always a secular movement united in its goal for independence. Today, a small, but very vocal and powerful faction of the Chechen separatist movement led by Shamil Basayev threatens that very goal. Instead of a secular independent Chechnya, Basayev seeks to replace Sufi Islam with Wahhabism and unite the Muslims of the North Caucasus under one Islamic state. For Basayev, the Chechen conflict is not about Chechen independence, but rather it is about spreading Islamic fundamentalism and winning independence for all Muslims in the region; Chechnya is just the first battlefield in what the Islamic extremists see as a very long struggle in the North Caucasus. If the United States is not careful and puts too much faith into Russia's ability to solve the Chechen conflict, Chechnya and parts of the North Caucasus risk becoming a safe haven and recruiting ground for Islamic extremists, much like Afghanistan under the Taliban.

Whether the Russians understand it or not the strategic center of gravity in the Chechen conflict is the Sufi Muslim population. The Sufi Muslims are the base of power from which Shamil Basayev needs to draw his strength (recruits) and freedom of maneuver (logistics, weapons, food and shelter) to be successful in Chechnya. If Russian military and pro-Moscow security forces continue to repress the majority Sufi Muslim population in Chechnya, the Chechens will inevitably turn to Wahhabism and fill Basayev's ranks as a means to their end – independence from Russia at any cost.

## Conclusion

Unlike other conflicts where expertise, political will and millions of dollars have been deployed to contain regional violence, this has not happened for Chechnya or the North Caucasus.

Fiona Hill and Sarah Mendelson, contributors to the Financial Times.  
(August 2005)<sup>76</sup>

If the Chechen conflict were easy to solve, the United States, Russia, European Union, or the United Nations would have found a political solution a long time ago; the truth is that it is a complex problem, one that the United States would like to avoid and have Russia solve alone. Before September 11, 2001, this may have been the best approach to the Chechen problem. After all, Russia is a sovereign nation that has the right to preserve the integrity of its borders without foreign interference. Moreover, from a strictly self-serving point of view, the Chechen conflict and instability in the North Caucasus at first glance appears to be good for the United States. The Caucasus and its oil and gas reserves are of vital interest to the United States as an alternative source of energy. In fact, the United States over the last decade has made great strides in strengthening its diplomatic, economic and military ties with Azerbaijan and Georgia in an effort to gain more influence in the Caucasus. The longer it takes Russia to bring peace and stability to Chechnya, the more opportunities the United States will have to make more inroads in the Caucasus - much to Russia's chagrin that considers the Caucasus within its sphere of influence. However, as long as Chechnya continues to be a distraction, there is little Russia can do to counter the United States.<sup>77</sup> Though the Chechen conflict and instability in the North Caucasus

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<sup>76</sup> Fiona Hill and Sarah Mendelson, "The world fiddles as the North Caucasus simmers," *Financial Times*, 29 August 2005, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Both Azerbaijan and Georgia have sought American investment and military assistance programs as a safeguard to the Caucasus regional instability and Russia's large political and military dominance in the region. For example, in 2001 and 2002 after Russia accused Georgia of turning a blind eye to the Chechen terrorists hiding and operating from the Pankisi Gorge, Russian planes conducted bombing raids against suspected terrorist positions in Georgia. In response, Georgian president Eduard

appear to favor the United States, the long-term consequences far outweigh any near-term U.S. political or economic gains in the region. Ultimately, if the Islamic extremists are able to spread their distorted brand of Islam and obtain a foothold in the North Caucasus from which to recruit and train future terrorists, a continuation of the Chechen conflict does not favor any nation that seeks to win the war on terror.

As this paper demonstrates, the diplomatic, informational, military, economic and cultural ramifications of the Chechen conflict loom large for the GWOT and risk making Chechnya a major front in the GWOT. The diplomatic impasse between Russia and the Chechen separatists has only led to more Russian and Chechen atrocities, Islamic extremism, poverty, and corruption. And while the Chechen, Russian and international diplomats wrangle over the fate of Chechnya, the war of words rages via the internet, newspaper, television, and radio.

Unfortunately, due to the Russian crack down on the free press and successful terrorist attacks, it appears the Islamic extremist faction within the Chechen separatist movement is winning the information campaign, thus attracting even more support for their cause. The only area in which Russia appears to have an advantage in the conflict is militarily. The Russian military has won this advantage, however, at a dear cost not only in Russian and Chechen lives, but also at the expense of Russia's reputation at home and abroad. Human rights organizations have leveled detailed allegations of human rights abuses against the Russian military over which the United States and the European Union have expressed concerns. Though still strong, the Russian military is vulnerable to international condemnation and internal corruption, which the Chechen separatists will continue to exploit to win their independence. Economically Chechnya is

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Shevardnadze requested American assistance to combat the terrorist elements in the Pankisi Gorge and prevent further Russian attacks. Consequently, the United States provided Georgia approximately \$64 million on training and equipping, 10 UH-1 helicopters and 200 Special Operations forces to assist Georgia. (Zeyno Baran, "The United States Will Help Georgia Fight Terrorism and Strengthen Internally," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 29 August 2005 [article on-line]; available from [http://www.csis.org/ruseura/georgia/gaupdate\\_0203.htm](http://www.csis.org/ruseura/georgia/gaupdate_0203.htm), accessed 8 October 2005.)

important because many of Russia's oil and gas lines run through the North Caucasus connecting the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea. Moreover, Chechnya has oil reserves of its own and important oil refineries just north of Grozny. Though Russia's economy has improved, Russia still needs help financing its military operations and reconstructing what remains of the war-torn republic. It is for this reason that Russia has accepted Saudi Arabia's offers to invest in Russia in exchange for modernized weapons that can counter-balance American hegemony in the Arab world. Perhaps the most alarming aspect of the Chechen conflict, however, is the cultural divide that the Chechen conflict has exposed in the region. If left unattended, the Chechen conflict risks not only spreading into neighboring Russian republics and countries, but also becoming a safe haven and recruiting ground for Islamic extremists. Wahhabism is growing in Chechnya and if life does not improve for the Chechens, there is no reason to believe that Wahhabism will not continue to grow and win over more traditionally Sufi Muslims.

Without a political solution, the Chechen conflict will not go away resulting in Chechnya and perhaps the entire North Caucasus becoming a major front in the GWOT. The answer to the Chechen problem is not the status quo. Instead of waiting for the Islamic extremists to gain a foothold in Chechnya and eventually the North Caucasus only to have to confront them in the future, it is in the United States national interest to assist in the resolution of the Chechen conflict now.

## Recommendation

Based upon this paper's analysis of the Chechen conflict, the following is a recommendation for a six-point peace initiative. Far from pretending to hold the "answer" to the Chechen conflict, this recommended six-point peace initiative offers some of the same measures

that world diplomats and scholars proposed toward the end of the Second Chechen War.<sup>78</sup> Why then, one might ask, if the peace initiatives proposed in 2001 and 2002 by such prominent leaders as ex-Russian Prime Minister Primakov, Chechen Foreign Minister Ilyas Akhmadov and former Secretary of State and Supreme Allied Commander Alexander M. Haig Jr. did not take hold, should this peace initiative be any different? The answer to this valid question rests upon two simple reasons: Iraq and Afghanistan. Iraq and Afghanistan have taught the United States that it is difficult and very expensive monetarily and in human lives to root out terrorists once they have taken refuge in a weak Islamic nation. Furthermore, once the United States commits forces, it takes a very long time to bring them home.<sup>79</sup> With forces engaged on two major fronts on the GWOT in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States cannot afford to allow a third front to develop.

Since September 11, 2001, Russia has cooperated with the United States at an unprecedented level. As a key GWOT ally, Russia is eager to take a lead role on the world stage and reduce its financial burdens. Consequently, Putin has largely staked his presidency on improving Russia's standing in the world and defeating terrorism at home. The United States needs to seize upon this unique opportunity in history and assist Putin to accomplish his goals.

Russia cannot defeat the terrorist threat in Chechnya alone. Russian human rights abuses and

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<sup>78</sup> The following are just a few of the peace initiatives proposed over the last decade to solve the Chechen conflict: Letter from Ilyas Akhmadov, Chechen Foreign Minister, addressed to the NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson, North Atlantic Council and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, dated June 4, 2001; "Toward a U.S. Policy on Chechnya", proposed by Sarah E. Mendelson and Scott Lindsay, members of the Center for Strategic and International Studies center in Washington, D.C, dated November 2001; "The Way to Chechen Peace" proposed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Alexander M. Haig Jr. and Max Kampelman, founders of the American Committee For Peace In Chechnya, published in Washington Post June 21, 2002; "Ex-Premier Primakov Calls For Reviewing Counter-Terror Tactics in Chechnya" proposed by Yevgeny Primakov, Former Russian Prime Minister (1998-1999), published in Rossiyskaya Gazeta September 10, 2002; The Liechtenstein Plan For Peace in the Chechen Republic, proposed by Professor Ruslan Khasbulatov, Akhmed Zakayev (Vice Premier of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria) and the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya, ratified by the World Chechen Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark, October 29, 2002; "The Russian-Chechen Tragedy: The Way to Peace and Democracy: Conditional Independence under an International Administration, proposed by Ilyas Akhmadov, Chechen Foreign Minister, published by the American Committee For Peace In Chechnya, February 2003.

<sup>79</sup> South Korea is the most obvious case in which The United States has committed military forces and has had to leave them there for more than 50 years to discourage North Korea from invading again. The United States just recently withdrew its military forces from an eight-year mission in Bosnia and still has troops in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.

indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians in the name of counter-terrorism has done more to incite extremism and terrorism than it has done to end the conflict. Likewise, the Chechen separatists understand they cannot win their independence against the numerically superior Russian military forces. Hence, the best they can hope for is a stalemate that saps the Russian military and public will to fight. At this point, if it meant an end to war, destruction and human rights abuses, the Chechen separatist leadership would abandon its demand for independence and readily accept an autonomous status within the Russian Federation, similar to what Kosovo enjoys within Serbia and Montenegro. The time has come for the United States to serve as “third party” in the Chechen conflict. It is in the United States’ national interest to apply all its instruments of national power in Chechnya and once more take the lead in the GWOT to achieve its strategic objectives.<sup>80</sup>

#### Six Point Peace Initiative

1. *Define the Threat:* The United States needs to engage the Russian and Chechen leaders by first brokering an agreement on the definition of the threat in Chechnya. Clearly, Russia’s past attempts to categorize all Chechens as terrorists has not facilitated any meaningful dialogue. Though the definition served its purpose by providing Putin an internationally recognized excuse not to negotiate with Maskhadov, the definition is not only inaccurate, but has been an obstruction to progress. The Chechen nationalists are distinct from the Islamic extremists within the Chechen separatist movement. The Islamic extremists, who are responsible for the Beslan school tragedy, suicide bombings in Moscow, and the most recent attacks in Kabardino-Balkaria, represent the real threat to both Russia and the United States. As a well-respected and

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<sup>80</sup> On October 6, 2005, President Bush, in his speech to the National Endowment for Democracy, outlined the United States’ five strategic objectives for winning the war on terror. The strategic objectives are as follows: prevent terrorist attacks before they occur; deny weapons of mass destruction to outlaw regimes and to their terrorist allies; deny radical groups the support and sanctuary of outlaw regimes; deny militants control of any nation, deny militants future recruits. These objectives differ slightly from the objectives President Bush published in the March 2003, National Security Strategy for Combating Terrorism.

courageous Chechen separatist commander, Basayev has wrapped himself around the nationalist separatist movement to pursue his own Islamic extremist objectives. Russia and the United States must clearly distinguish between the two factions within Chechen separatist movement. The terms “nationalists” and “terrorists” can no longer mean the same thing. The United States and Russia must invite the “nationalists” to the negotiating table, while Russia continues to hunt the “terrorists.”

2. *Isolate the Threat.* Sadulaev and the other Chechens nationalist leaders must sever all ties with the Islamic extremists and commit to sharing intelligence on their terrorist activities. Though by isolating Basayev and the Islamic extremists, Sadulaev runs the risk of fragmenting and creating an internal armed struggle within the Chechen separatist movement, Sadulaev needs to prove to Russia and the United States that he is serious about peace. This will be very difficult for Sadulaev who depends heavily upon Basayev as his military commander. In essence, by isolating Basayev, Sadulaev will be dismantling the Chechen separatist movement. The only way Sadulaev can possibly take this extreme measure is with the United States serving as the third party and guarantor of fair negotiations. Once Sadulaev publicly denounces Basayev and his Islamic extremists and declares they are no longer a part of the Chechen separatist movement, Basayev will likely respond with increased attacks on Russian forces and the targeting of Chechen nationalist leadership. However, with better intelligence sharing from the Chechen nationalists, the Russian forces will be able to identify and target the Islamic extremists more effectively.

3. *Declare a Cease Fire.* Though the European Union has made many valiant efforts to end the conflict, a mutually respected cease-fire has been elusive. Since the first two points of this proposed peace initiative calls for the Chechen nationalists to take the initial steps toward peace, this third point requires Russia to demonstrate its commitment to the peace process. In this phase of the peace process Russia will need to agree to a cease-fire and the withdrawal of all of its forces from Chechnya except for small groups of Special Forces that will continue to track and

eliminate Islamic extremists. In the spirit of cooperation and a genuine global GWOT coalition - though Russia may initially decline the offer - the United States needs to offer to send U.S. Special Operations Forces to assist the Russians to hunt the Islamic extremist.<sup>81</sup> In addition to U.S. military support, the OSCE and possibly the United Nations will need to deploy significant number of international cease-fire monitors to ensure no party violates the agreement.

4. *Agreement of Autonomous Status.* Once Russia and the Chechen nationalists have agreed upon a cease-fire, the United States, Russia and the Chechen nationalists will negotiate an agreement granting Chechnya regional autonomy within the Russian Federation. As part of the agreement, Chechnya will have to recognize the Russian Federation's territorial integrity, which includes the Autonomous Republic of Chechnya. Likewise, Russia will have to acknowledge the right of the Chechens to political, but not national, self-rule. After the Russian and Chechen nationalist leaders sign the agreement, the Chechen nationalists will establish an interim government replacing the pro-Moscow government leadership with members of the Chechen government with Sadulaev serving as the interim president. Soon after the creation of the Chechen interim government, the Chechen Parliament will draft a new constitution, with the assistance of the OSCE that will provide for extensive self-government within the Russian Federation, similar to Tatarstan's constitution.<sup>82</sup> With the completion of the draft constitution,

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<sup>81</sup> Though Russia is a key ally in the GWOT, Russia is sensitive to what they view as foreign interference in their internal affairs. Russia will likely agree to the United States brokering a peace settlement to the Chechen conflict because peace in Chechnya will only benefit Russia diplomatically and economically in the future. American forces operating on Russian territory, however, may equate to many Russians as too much American involvement in the Chechen conflict.

<sup>82</sup> The Republic of Tatarstan is a constituent republic of the Russian Federation. It is located approximately 800 kilometers east of Moscow and lies between the Volga River and the Kama River. The following is an excerpt from the Tatarstan constitution passed in 2000 that defines Tatarstan's status within the Russian Federation:

The Republic of Tatarstan is a democratic constitutional State associated with the Russian Federation by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan On Delimitation of Jurisdictional Subjects and Mutual Delegation of Powers between the State Bodies of the Russian Federation and the State Bodies of the Republic of Tatarstan, and a subject of the Russian Federation. The sovereignty of the Republic of Tatarstan shall consist in full possession of

the Chechen people will then be able to vote in a constitutional referendum. Assuming the Chechen people vote in favor of the new constitution, the interim government could then announce new parliamentary and presidential elections.

5. *Repatriation and Elections.* Members of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) deploy to Chechnya to assist with the repatriation of Chechen refugees from the Caucasus region and Europe. The OSCE, which will already have cease-fire monitors on the ground, will need to deploy additional personnel to organize and monitor the constitutional referendum and future parliamentary and presidential elections.

6. *Post Settlement Reconstruction.* The United States along with the United Nations identify and gain the support of donor nations within the international community to assist in the rebuilding of Chechnya and repatriation of the Chechen people. The international community needs to understand that the reconstruction of Chechnya is central to the GWOT.

This six-point peace initiative is by no means a panacea to the Chechen conflict nor does it account for the many international agreements and United Nations resolutions that would be required prior to a Chechen peace initiative. Rather, this proposed six-point peace initiative serves as a guide to positive measures that the United States and the international community can take to bring peace and stability to a region that poses a threat to the GWOT. The diplomatic, economic and military commitments needed to end the Chechen conflict are not unlike those the United States and the international community undertook in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. In fact, the only apparent difference between the conflicts is Russia. Serbia and the Taliban did not have the political standing Russia enjoys in the international community to ward off international interference. Thus, the key to peace and stability in Chechnya is Russia. The United States is the

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the State authority (legislative, executive and judicial) beyond the competence of the Russian Federation and powers of the Russian Federation in the sphere of shared competence of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan and shall be an inalienable qualitative status of the Republic of Tatarstan.

only nation with the ability to work with Russia to end the Chechen conflict and defeat the terrorist threat. Together, the United States and Russia need to deal a blow to Islamic extremism and terrorism in the North Caucasus. Together, they need to send a clear message to other Islamic extremists in Iraq, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Algeria and Sudan that the GWOT coalition is strong, united and ready to fight terrorism in any part of the world at any time. Success in Chechnya would be a major triumph in the GWOT, but it will not happen until the United States takes an active role in working with Russia to solve the conflict.

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