

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM, CHECHEN NATIONALISM,  
AND THE BLACK WIDOWS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, more than a dozen sovereign countries have surfaced in Eastern Europe and Central Asia stretching from Estonia to Tajikistan. The national independence movement that emerged during *perestroika* initiated events that would change the faces of Europe and Asia and shape them into what they are today. The process of change, however, has not concluded. Chechnya, nestled between Ingushetia and Dagestan in the Southern Federal District of Russia, still seeks to realize its independence. Though it is just one of Russia's twenty-one ethnically defined republics, it has been the setting for two Russian invasions since 1994 in which approximately 70,000 people have been killed and many thousands more displaced.<sup>1</sup> The numerous deaths and immeasurable devastation have yielded only more bloodshed and bitterness between Chechnya and the Russian government with no resolution in sight. Thus far, Chechnya is still officially a part of the Russian Federation, with no formal recognition of independence by any state in the international community.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Wood, *Chechnya The Case for Independence*, New York: Verso Books, 2007, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> The only entity to recognize Chechnya was the unrecognized Afghan Taliban government in the year 2000; see "Taliban Formally Recognizes Chechnya," *Chechnya Weekly*, Vol. 6, January 8, 2000.

While the first Russo/Chechen War in 1994 was categorized as a revolutionary struggle for independence, the second conflict since 1999 is not as easily definable. Since the arrival and growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Chechnya during the mid-1990s, the Chechen resistance has been portrayed as a part of global *jihād* by the Russian Federation and the international media. Russian President Vladimir Putin certainly emphasized this when he initiated the second invasion on grounds of retaliation against Chechen Islamic radicalism and terrorism. Putin easily rallied support for his anti-terrorist platform after Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev invaded Dagestan in August 1999 and various Russian apartment buildings were supposedly bombed by Chechen terrorists the following September.<sup>3</sup> The subsequent Russian invasion of Chechnya took place immediately afterwards and was harshly criticized by the West and international society for the reckless use of force by Russian troops. However, following 9-11 and the onset of the global war on terrorism, the international community changed its tone to support Russia's 'anti-terrorist operations' in Chechnya. Tragedies such as the Moscow Theater and Beslan School Crises further influenced the world's perception that Chechnya was a haven for Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.

The perception that Chechnya is a part of global *jihād* is both correct and incorrect. It is accurate because Islamic fundamentalism's influence in Chechnya is embodied through the rise of Chechen-Wahhabist followers in the 1990s and the emergence of the Chechen Black Widows and other suicide bombers in the second

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<sup>3</sup> The accusation that the apartment buildings bombed in Moscow, Volgograd, and Dagestan in 1999 is heavily debated. Chechen insurgents were blamed, but controversy circulates over involvement of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and whether or not Chechens actually participated. For more detail see "Authorities Suppress Information About 1999 Bombings," *Chechnya Weekly*, Vol. 4, November 19, 2003.

Russo/Chechen War. The tactics used by both male and female Chechen suicide bombers were imported by Islamic radicals seeking to spread the global *jihad* movement to Chechnya. At the same time, the perception is incorrect because the motivations for participating in suicide operations is not completely derived from Islamic fundamentalist ideology; rather, it stems from desires of independence and feelings of hopelessness in fighting an asymmetrical war against one of the largest militaries in the world. While the world's attention is focused on Chechen terrorism and suicide bombings, the Chechen separatist government has sought to distance itself from suicide operations and other radical Islamic tactics in order to gain legitimacy in the international community's eyes.

This essay will study two facets of the Chechen issue. First, it will provide an examination of the Black Widows and Chechen suicide terrorism to show why both of these have become a common occurrence in the second Russo/Chechen War. It will show that both tactics provide a simple and effective means for Chechens to fight an asymmetrical war where Russian forces have the advantage. These approaches to war will also show the influence of Islamic fundamentalism on Chechen radicals since the 1990s through the introduction of suicide terrorism as a tactic of warfare. There were no documented suicide bombings during the first Russo/Chechen war. However, there were approximately twenty-seven documented Chechen suicide attacks in the Russian Federation between 2000 and 2006.<sup>4</sup>

The second point this essay will investigate is whether Islamic fundamentalism or nationalism is a stronger force in Chechnya. This essay argues that while Islamic fundamentalism has altered the political make-up and tactics used by various groups of

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<sup>4</sup> Yoram Schweitzer, "Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?" A report issued by The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, August 2006, p. 63.

the Chechen resistance in the Second Russo/Chechen War, it has not changed the root cause for the continued struggle of the Chechen insurgency, which is national self-determination.

This essay is divided into eight chapters. Chapters one through five will introduce and chronologically present the contemporary historical background of the Russo/Chechen wars. These chapters will shed light on the roots of the conflict to show how it has been a struggle for Chechen national sovereignty by examining the collapse of the Soviet Union, the subsequent Chechen Revolution, and both Russo/Chechen Wars. The sixth chapter will discuss the Black Widows, examine the different theories for female participation in Chechen suicide operations, and briefly discuss the use of female martyrs in Islamic society. It will also examine Chechen suicide bombing to show why it has become a popular method of engagement by Chechen extremists. Since both these phenomena illustrate Islamic fundamentalism's influence in the ongoing conflict, the seventh chapter will examine Islamic extremism in Chechnya and its implications in the Second Russo/Chechen War. This examination will trace how Islamic fundamentalism grew during the inter-war period, but did not alter the core motivation of the Chechen resistance for national self-determination.

The sixth chapter will attempt to adequately examine the Black Widows. However, because they attack sporadically and are a recent phenomenon since the year 2000, there is a substantial lack of data on this topic. Thus, the challenge of examining the Black Widows is in the limited amount of information available for analysis. Unfortunately, there are not enough detailed reports or testimonies with adequate descriptions of cases and incidents. There is also not enough documentation on how

women are recruited and treated in terrorist groups or on the reasons for women's participation in suicide attacks. Nonetheless, there is some evidence that the Black Widows are more a tactic of Chechen nationalism than a symbol of Islamic fundamentalism. The evidence that the Black Widows are a function of a national campaign rather than an emblem of Islamic fundamentalism is that the Chechen resistance has stopped using the Black Widows in order to convince the world that their cause is one of national independence and not Islamic terrorism.

It should also be noted that the author of this essay did not personally translate Russian sources used for reference. All documents examined were already in translated form via secondary sources.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There are no simple explanations for the cause of the Russo/Chechen Wars or for the devastation Chechnya has endured. Chechnya's right to secession, suicide terror accompanying the rise of Islamic extremism, Russian human rights violations, and Western views of the ongoing conflict are just a few aspects that complicate a clear understanding of the Chechen crisis. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the roots of the modern conflict to provide a discernible comprehension of the situation that exists today.

Russo-Chechen tensions date back to the eighteenth century. Much understanding can be derived by tracing historical events from Peter the Great's 1722 campaign into the North Caucasus when Russians and Chechens first contended with each other, to the 1817 Caucasus War in which Chechen lands were given to their rivals, the Cossacks, to Soviet repression and Stalin's 1944 deportations that nearly wiped the Chechen nation off the map. Throughout history there has been a titanic struggle between Chechens who want independence and Russian imperialism. This study focuses on the central factors of that conflict in modern times after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The August 1991 events in Moscow, in which conservative hardliners attempted to seize power from Mikhail Gorbachev, was followed by the disintegration of the USSR. The collapse was one of the most pivotal events of the twentieth century which not only marked an end to the Cold War, but also redrew the map of Eastern Europe. It also provided a unique opportunity for the Soviet republics to replace their existing communist bureaucracies with democratic systems of power through peaceful constitutional means. As constituent republics declared independence from the collapsing empire, Chechnya followed suit by asserting its own sovereignty. However, whereas the fifteen former Soviet republics were granted the right of secession, Chechnya's proclamation was adamantly rejected by the Russian Federation.

The rationale for Russia's dismissals of Chechen independence revolves around two key points. Due to the weak economic condition Russia was in following the collapse, oil was a significant factor. A major oil pipeline in Chechnya carried oil from Baku on the Caspian Sea into Ukraine. Chechnya's capital city, Grozny, also had a major oil refinery along this pipeline. Russian officials were concerned that Russia's oil needs would not be met if they relinquished control of Chechnya. In addition, Russia would lose jurisdictional authority over a major pipeline in negotiating oil prices with foreign customers, especially with the members of the European Union.

Besides oil, the Russians also objected to Chechen independence because they were concerned that allowing Chechnya its independence might lead other national regions within the Russian Federation to follow suit. By bestowing sovereignty upon the Chechen Republic, Russian authorities feared that an unavoidable domino effect would undermine Russia's territorial integrity. Over twenty-percent of the new Russian state

consisted of non-Russian nationalities. If Chechnya were allowed to depart, it would be hard for the Russians to maintain that they had a right to control Tartars, Koreans, Mongols, and many other groups, as well as territories like the Kurile Islands and Konigsberg.

Russia's concern over oil was legitimate, but since the Russians controlled the supply, if not the pipeline, this argument seems feeble. On the other hand, Russia's fear of the nationalist domino effect was reasonable. After all, Russia and the rest of Eastern Europe witnessed national devolution when the Soviet Union collapsed around them. However, there was no reason for Russia to think that other national groups would follow the Chechen lead. The Russians surrounded virtually all the other groups and many of them were so fragmented that they did not constitute a viable nationalist challenge, with the exception perhaps of the Tartars, though in their case the Russians still encircled them.

So the Russian case against Chechen independence is weak. The conflicts that have taken place between these two peoples clearly have more to do with Russian imperialism than with oil and a Chechen catalyst for remaining a national component of Russia. In no sense is the Chechen-Russian struggle a symbol of Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism. Of course, the Russians eventually portrayed it as such, and the Black Widows added substance to Russian charges, but as mentioned the Black Widows were more a tool of asymmetrical warfare than a weapon of Islamic terrorism.

Before the Russian-Chechen conflict is unraveled, it is necessary to describe the collapse of the Soviet Union and the historiography that deals with this phenomenon because it helps to put the Chechen national struggle into context. The USSR's demise

was relatively calm. Though it was one of the most startling events of the twentieth century there was no violent revolution as there was in 1917. The only events that marked the disintegration were a televised farewell address by Mikhail Gorbachev and a small group of communist demonstrators protesting the downfall in front of Lenin's tomb. Without a farewell ceremony or a drop of blood, the Soviet Union quietly ended, and one by one the constituent republics declared their independence.

As Stephen Kotkin writes, "from its inception, the Soviet Union had claimed to be an experiment in socialism, a superior alternative to capitalism, for the entire world. If socialism was not superior to capitalism, its existence could not be justified."<sup>5</sup> As history illustrated, it was apparent that the Soviet experiment had failed. But why did such a dominating political force, which encompassed the world's largest territorial mass, suddenly cease to exist? This question has been answered with a variety of explanations.

One notion is that external forces brought on by the United States resulted in the USSR's eventual collapse. Specifically, this notion refers to the arms race and the large expenditures in the U.S. defense budget during the Reagan administration which, some argue, contributed to the USSR's demise. Patrick Glynn, who served under Reagan as Special Assistant to the Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, contended that surges in defense spending and the restriction of U.S. aid to the Soviet Union and its client states directly challenged the Soviet Union. While this led to higher tensions between the two hegemon, it also enabled the United States, which was much more inventive than the USSR, to achieve a superior global-power position because the USSR did not have the flexibility in its political and economic institutions to compete. Glynn explains that Gorbachev's reforms, *perestroika* and *glasnost*, were made largely in

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 19.

response to heightened U.S. power and the realization that the USSR was failing in comparison.<sup>6</sup>

Critics of this argument stress that there is no direct evidence that the arms buildup influenced Soviet behavior. Matthew Evangelista, for example, asserts that Soviet reforms did not come until Gorbachev assumed power in 1985, which was three years after the United States deployed Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces in Germany. Evangelista suggests that it was Gorbachev's new thinking of Soviet domestic and defense needs that led to the USSR's collapse, not American arms escalation.<sup>7</sup>

Another contention of the USSR's demise claims that the Soviet Union was an ideological-driven totalitarian system incapable of reform. Conservative proponents such as David Satter and Michael Dobbs argue that for the duration of Soviet existence, nothing of consequence ever reformed or was able to change. For them, the Soviet Union was an accident waiting to happen. Gorbachev's *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and other attempts at reform were mere illusions and the collapse of the Soviet Union was cogent proof of its unreformability.<sup>8</sup>

There is also the argument that profound social change contributed significantly to the collapse of the USSR. Urbanization combined with educational growth gave rise to a differentiated society that was harder to control from above as previously was the case in Soviet history. Following the Stalinist era, Nikita Khrushchev introduced reforms that loosened the Soviet grip on the social sphere, but this was halted when Brezhnev

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick Glynn, *Closing Pandora's Box: Arms Races, Arms Control, and the History of the Cold War*, New York: Basic Books, 1992, pp. 309-332

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Evangelista, "Sources of Moderation in Soviet Security Policy," in Phillip Tetlock, Robert Jervis, et al, eds, *Behavior, Society, and Nuclear War*, vol II, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, "Was the Soviet System Reformable?" *Slavic Review*, Vol. 63, (Autumn, 2004), pp. 459-488.

assumed power. As a result, a dissident movement formed during the Brezhnev era which included scientists, writers, and other intellectual types. The censorship of the movement continued in the early 1980s, and though there was no major political or social upheaval, the Soviet central institutions' abilities to dominate society had begun to decline. As technological advancements exposed the Soviet people to Western standards of living, it was quickly revealed that the regime's propaganda had been a lie and the system's legitimacy came into question.<sup>9</sup>

The most convincing explanation for the implosion of the USSR is the eruption of repressed nationalities in the Soviet Union. As Robert Strayer argues, the primary causes of the various anti-Soviet nationalist movements were linked to Soviet repressive policies and practices against non-Russian ethnicities.<sup>10</sup> There were many deep-rooted ties to ethnicity and nationalism which existed among the many nationalities that the Soviet Union inherited from the Russian Empire. While many different peoples fell under Soviet control, they were never blended into a Soviet nationality, even with Stalin's collectivization and deportation efforts. As ethnic and national resentments became recognized by Soviet officials in the 1970s, restrictions and central controls over republics were loosened to promote a unifying Soviet identity. This allowed each republic to elect members of their own nationalities into office to manage internal affairs. But the reform backfired and constituent republics began pushing for sovereignty over their territories in the 1980s, citing Article 72 of the 1977 Soviet Constitution. Moscow

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<sup>9</sup> Caroline Ibos, "The Delegitimization of the Soviet System. From *Chestidissyataniki* to *Perestroichiki*," in *The Fall of the Soviet Empire*, ed Anne De Tinguy, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, pp 138-145.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Strayer, *Why did the Soviet Union Collapse? Understanding Historical Change*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998, pp. 71-74.

officials denied the claims for sovereignty, stating that the whole set of constitutional affiliated norms denied the sovereign status of the republics.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Soviet based centrality began falling apart as nationalism motivated the republics to demand their sovereignty.

Two schools of thought argue against the nationalist explanation. The first is represented by Stephen Cohen. He argues that the Soviet Union possessed a fundamental capacity for reform. He supports his argument by examining Soviet domestic political and economic reforms, refuting the notion that there was an anti-Soviet revolution, and discredits contentions that the USSR was condemned by its inherent defects. Instead, he asserts that the Soviet Union was not unreformable, but had failed in its attempts at reform. From his examination of the evidence, he finds that there are no valid conceptual or practical reasons which substantiate claims that the USSR was unreformable; in his own words Cohen argues, “by 1991 most of the system was in a process of far-reaching democratic and market reformation. The Soviet Union under Gorbachev was, of course, not yet fully reformed, but it was in full ‘transition’.”<sup>12</sup>

Cohen has in favor of his argument the case of Red China. Here was a country that made the transition from a Soviet-style economic system to a market economy. It has not yet changed to include political democracy, but there is evidence that new voices are being heard and that political reform is in the horizon. However, the China case actually proves that nationalist argument. China is approximately 98 percent Han and a nationally homogeneous state. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was a multi-national

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<sup>11</sup> A. Shtromas, “The Legal Position of Soviet Nationalities and Their Territorial Units According to the 1977 Constitution of the USSR,” *Russian Review*, Vol 37, (Jul. 1978), p. 269.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 487

state where national minorities constituted over 50 percent of the population. Russian nationalism and imperialism repressed the minority nationalities and when they had an opportunity, they bolted the Soviet framework and set up independent national states.

The second argument against the nationalist case is represented by Martin Malia. He asserts that nationalist disaffection was more of an effect than a cause of the Soviet system's decomposition. He points out that for seven decades the Soviet Union easily repressed non-Russian nationalities and simply pushed aside oppositionists. Instead, Malia argues that the Soviet ideology was an illusion that made it appear as legitimate as capitalism. As Malia explains,

The chief legitimizing postulate of the regime had been that socialism is more productive as an economic system than capitalism. As the Cold War wore on, however, it became increasingly clear that the Soviet economy, except for its military arm, was declining relative to the West. Yet Gorbachev – to the end committed to the ‘socialist choice made in October’ – believed he could revive the system and hence preserve its superpower status. He therefore undertook to reanimate the system with a whiff of *glasnost* by permitting the comrade first to speak out critically and, as he hoped, constructively. Instead, the Soviet intelligentsia transformed itself into a veritable Third Estate of dissidents. [After] a few months of speaking the truth...the logocratic spell that held the decrepit structure together was broken. Forthwith the country ceased to live according to the Lie.<sup>13</sup>

Malia makes an important point in his assertion that failing Soviet economic conditions were indicators of the shortcomings of the Soviet system. In the 1970s, it was clear that the Soviet Union could not economically compete with the capitalist West. Despite the impressive military achievements during the Cold War, attention could not be removed from the country's crippling economic stagnation.

But Malia's argument is flawed, too. He says repressed nationalism would have remained repressed if the Soviet economy had done well, as promised by the ideology of Communism. If that were the case, why repress the nationalities at all? Why did

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, p 407

Finland, Poland, and the three Baltic States choose not to participate in the Communist dream in 1917 instead of racing to set of independent states? Why did the Soviets grant republic status to fifteen major nationalities if it were not to appease aspirations of nationalism? There is no doubt that Soviet ideology was a farce and that the economy was weak. But nationalism was a real force that predated and postdated the Communist experiment. It was not a consequence of poor balance sheets. It was alive and thriving, and Chechen nationalism was very much a part of the totality of the different national groups in the USSR who hoped to achieve their own sovereign state.

All scholars agree that the Soviet Union had massive economic problems, and it was in response to those problems that the Soviet Union unraveled and nationalism moved to the forefront as the dominant political force. The economic problems of the USSR were linked to a variety of factors that were an integral part of the socialist system of economy. Such problems, as low productivity of labor and capital due to the absence of producer competition and its incentives, the slow progress of science and technology because of centralized decision making, and the Soviet Union's defense and military expenditures drained the economy of its dynamism and buoyancy.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the emphasis on heavy industry and the incredible efforts to expand the Soviet economy were outweighed by the costs of doing so. Natural resources had depleted, lower birth rates resulted in fewer workers, there was little arable land to cultivate, and there was enormous inefficiency and wastage. Quotas were more important than innovation, so while the USSR out-produced the United States in steel, coal, and various types of machine tools, the development of technology lagged behind, and this gap proved hurtful

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<sup>14</sup> Victor Kuznetsov, "The Economic Factors of the USSR's Disintegration," in *The Fall of the Soviet Empire*, ed Anne De Tinguy, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 264

to the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> Attempts to rectify these problems, such as decentralization or market pricing, appeared to Soviet officials as a path towards a hated capitalist economy. As a result, few reforms were made, which kept the country's economy in isolation from international competition and continued to drain it.

Gorbachev's reforms were an attempt to revitalize the stagnant economy and, at the same time, increase the Party's popularity and preserve its socialist ideology. The reforms not only addressed economic issues, but incorporated social and foreign policy reforms as well. *Glasnost*, which provided new freedoms for expression, and *perestroika*, which sought to limit state control over the economy, reduced the Communist Party's role in Soviet society. These reforms paralleled a Soviet society that was ready for change. Strayer argues that while "economic stagnation motivated Gorbachev's reforms, the social changes of the post-Stalinist era provided *perestroika* and *glasnost* with millions of active supporters and drove those initiatives further and faster than their leader ever intended."<sup>16</sup>

Five years into the Gorbachev regime the Soviet Union had changed substantially with new freedoms of expression, the emergence of genuine elections and private enterprises, and a reduction in the Communist Party's role in Soviet affairs. Ironically, the outcomes of the reforms were opposite to what Gorbachev had hoped for. Instead of reviving socialism and the Communist Party, the new reforms discredited communist ideology and stroked nationalism. *Perestroika* pushed the economy more towards failure than success, while the preservation of the Soviet Union in the face of economic collapse gave way to nationalist pressures. Subsequently, the country's super power status

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<sup>15</sup> Marshall Goldman, *USSR in Crisis*, New York W W. Norton, 1983, p 33.

<sup>16</sup> Strayer, 61.

plummeted; by early 1990 high crime rates, economic shortages, inflation, and rising unemployment angered Soviet citizens who viewed themselves as victims of *perestroika* and its creator.

As the crisis deepened, Gorbachev admitted there was a need for a restructured federation, but he remained hesitant to respond to the republics' demands of a new Union Treaty. His demeanor changed, however, after the "War of Laws" emerged when a series of local elections gave electoral legitimacy to nationalists in the republics and new legislation was created that contradicted the Soviet Union's laws. This was followed by Russia's declaration of sovereignty in June 1990 as well as Boris Yeltsin's famous declaration to the republics to take all the sovereignty they could swallow.<sup>17</sup>

Once Russia seceded from the Soviet Union, other republics followed suit by declaring their own sovereignty. As a result, the necessity to address issues of autonomy became vital. A period of legal uncertainty ensued as constituent republics slowly became *de facto* independent. Negotiations commenced over the next year and the majority of the constituent republics supported Gorbachev's proposal of a strong central government with strong republics. However, there were those in opposition who called for a different plan in which the central government would play a minimal part in the affairs of member states. These included the Baltic and Caucasian republics, as well as Ukraine, Moldavia, and Russia itself.

Concessions were soon made, including the repeal of Article Six of the Soviet Constitution that declared the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) as the "leading and guiding force of Soviet society, the nucleus of its political system and of all

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<sup>17</sup> Gail W. Lapidus, "Contested Sovereignty: The Tragedy of Chechnya," *International Security*, Vol 23, (Summer, 1998), pp 5-49, p 12.

state and public organizations.”<sup>18</sup> The repeal allowed the legal creation of other political parties. It was a devastating blow to the CPSU and resulted in the subsequent resignation of many members from the Party. This was followed by the “500 Day Program” economic reform plan that called for privatization of industries and granted more economic power to the republics. In response to the concessions, conservative elites confronted Gorbachev with demands for a dictatorship or presidential rule to preserve the Union and resolve the political and economic crisis. In fear of being ousted, Gorbachev implemented policies to appease the conservative right to reestablish order, including the appointment of conservative officials to higher governmental positions, granting new power to the KGB to battle economic sabotage, and endorsing the a draft of the Union Treaty, which limited the republics’ powers.

In January 1991, tension heightened as Soviet security forces took violent action against separatists in Lithuania and Latvia. The event prompted democratic protests with an aggressive conservative counter response. Yeltsin gained popular support for his open protest of the attack and utilized the publicity to secure his victory in the June Russian presidential elections. At the same time, Gorbachev’s political standing was considerably weakened as anti-Communist protests erupted and conservative distrust was apparent. Following the March referendum on the preservation of the Union, Gorbachev agreed to make new economic reforms, which would abandon Marxism and adopt a new social democratic platform. He also consented to sign a new Union Treaty that would restrict central governmental controls and increase the republics’ powers.

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<sup>18</sup> Christopher Osakwe, “Theories and Realities of Modern Soviet Constitutional Law: An Analysis of the 1977 USSR Constitution,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol 127, (May, 1979), p 77.

In response to Gorbachev's appeasement of the democrats, the State Emergency Committee comprised of members of the conservatives, the military, and KGB, staged a coup on August 18<sup>th</sup>. Gorbachev was detained under house-arrest when the public announcement of the coup was made the morning of August 19<sup>th</sup>. Vice president Yanaev assumed presidential powers and declared a six-month state of emergency. All political parties, demonstrations, and strikes were outlawed, media censorship was implemented, and the central Soviet government declared control over all other governmental bodies.<sup>19</sup>

The attempted takeover, however, was unsuccessful due to poor planning and the lack of legitimacy in its leadership. Members involved in the coup were continuously challenged by ongoing critical international media coverage and Western countries declared the entire event illegal, thus denying it international acceptance. Yeltsin held up his own authority as the incoming Russian President against the conspirators and demanded that Gorbachev be reinstated. His declaration received mass support and shortly afterwards leaders from the republics of Ukraine and Kazakstan publicly announced their objections to the coup as well. Recognizing the growing support against them, the coup leaders became reluctant to use force against their opposition. To add to their hesitation, a growing number of military and security force members, who originally helped with the takeover, began to switch their loyalties to the opposing democratic side. By August 21<sup>st</sup>, Gorbachev was released and the coup leaders were arrested, though several committed suicide.

With the attempted coup thwarted, the balance of political power dramatically altered in the Soviet Union. As George Neimanis asserts, the Soviet elite's authority had

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<sup>19</sup> John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, Princeton. Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 199-210

become illegitimate because “the Soviet system turned out to be incapable of selecting people for key positions who were good at what they did.... [Instead] it recruited people who were ambitious, obedient, and ideologically correct; talent was secondary [and] nobody had to work very hard, but alienation from work and personal responsibility created cancerous inefficiencies that ultimately killed the system.”<sup>20</sup> The conservatives’ reputations were thoroughly discredited because of the failed coup and the Communist Party was legally banned by Gorbachev and Yeltsin. The democrats were triumphant in their efforts against the hostile takeover and gained popularity among the populace. Yeltsin benefited the most out of the group, and he was soon portrayed as charismatic leader who was aligning with Western nations.

In contrast, Gorbachev’s political reputation suffered greatly. As the Union’s political climate changed, Gorbachev’s objectives to revive socialism and the Communist Party were extinguished and his political balancing act between conservatives and democrats had backfired. Yeltsin took advantage of the situation and used a political platform that put Russia first by nationalizing Russian energy sources, cutting off financial contributions to the central government, and taking over the USSR Finance Ministry and Academy of Sciences. In effect, Yeltsin appropriated the Soviet Union’s powers to Russia, making it a dominant force within the crumbling empire.

Though nationalists of non-Russian republics were pleased to see the central government losing its control over the region, they were wary of the growing power of Russia. As negotiations continued for a new Union Treaty, tensions emerged as Russia took the dominant role among the republics. During discussions, Yeltsin insisted that all Soviet nuclear weapons be returned to Russia, that borders be readjusted, and that all

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<sup>20</sup> George J. Neimanis, *The Collapse of the Soviet Empire*, Westport. Praeger Publishers, 1997, p 5.

republics pay world market prices for imported Russian oil. In addition, no consensus could be reached on what kind of union would emerge from the negotiations. While some opted for the republics to stand alone, others promoted a united coalition.

The USSR's disintegration was imminent when Yeltsin and the presidents of Ukraine and Belarus took matters into their own hands. Without Gorbachev's knowledge, in December 1991 the three presidents met and agreed on the disintegration of the USSR and formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Since no public referendum was held and no proposal was drafted for the Soviet parliament to review, Gorbachev viewed the act as another coup and warned of future ethnic or civil wars, but was ignored by Yeltsin and the other conspirators. Subsequently, eleven republics, all except Georgia and the Baltic states, signed and ratified the CIS agreement. On December 25, Gorbachev resigned from his position and handed control of the Soviet military forces and nuclear arsenal to Yeltsin. With Gorbachev stepping down from power, the Soviet Union ceased to exist and fifteen independent republics emerged in its place.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dunlop, 273-274.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CHECHEN REVOLUTION

During the Soviet collapse, Chechnya played a predominant role in the rising nationalist movement. However, ethnic tensions and anti-Russian uprisings were already present in the Chechen-Ingush region since the 1950s. The return of the Chechen and Ingush populations to their homelands in the 1950s following Stalin's deportations produced strong ethnic nationalism, along with tight clan and religious structures which made the Chechen people resistant to cultural and political assimilation with Russia. Apart from Abkhaz, the Chechens and Ingush were the first Northern Caucasian peoples to make national claims under Soviet rule. Large demonstrations in 1973 by Ingush and Chechen protesters resulted in Moscow appointing more Chechens to official posts in the region, which was uncommon since Soviet official policy required many top administrators be ethnic Russians. Further protests, which emerged in the 1980s, dealt mainly with environmental concerns, religious freedom, and protection of the Chechen language and nationality.

As the Soviet Union was coming to an end, Gorbachev and Yeltsin struggled for political control. One of the prevalent factors in the struggle was Chechnya movement for national sovereignty. With the constituent republics demanding independence

Russia's autonomous republics wanted their voices heard as well, and Chechnya was the loudest voice. In Gorbachev's eyes its siren call was an opportunity to discredit Yeltsin. A rebellion within the new Russian Federation would only humiliate Yeltsin, and Gorbachev welcomed the development. In addition, Yeltsin had not yet created any armed forces, so it was up to Gorbachev to send Soviet troops into Chechnya, which he refused to do. In an attempt to show his power, Gorbachev attempted to rally Chechen support by inviting Doku Zavgayev to participate in discussions for the new Union Treaty that was being formulated. The invitation, however, proved to be a mistake as Zavagayev's absence allowed the Chechen Revolution to commence shortly after the coup started in Moscow.

The Chechen Revolution of 1991 can be attributed to various economic, social, and demographic factors. The region was extremely poor and contained much social upheaval. One of the most apparent factors was a division in the Chechen economy occurring in the 1980s, with Russian oil-extracting industry on one side, and Chechen nationalist small-town production on the other. This division resulted in uneven economic growth with a shortage of labor for transport and industry, and an inability of agriculture production to absorb a large work force. Chronic unemployment and rural overpopulation forced many Chechens to seek seasonal work outside of their homeland in countries such as Siberia; at the same time a large influx of Russian oil-specialists were imported into Chechnya to extract oil. This depleted the country's oil resources from 87 million to 58 million barrels during the years of 1985 to 1990.<sup>22</sup> Poor social and health services, low education levels, extremely high birth rates, and heavy pollution from

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<sup>22</sup> John B. Dunlop, *Russian Confronts Chechnya Roots of a Separatist Conflict*, Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 85-88.

Russian oil industry were also problems Chechnya faced during this time. Despite Grozny being the center of an oil pipeline network which branched out to Siberia, Kazakhstan, Baku, and Novorossiisk, low socio-economic conditions persisted making the Chechen population ripe for political turmoil.

In 1989, a positive occurrence seemed to take place when Moscow approved Communist Party functionary Doku Zavgayev to be the first Chechen in charge of the Chechen-Ingush region. Initially with Zavgayev in power, political liberalization began to spread through Chechnya; press and religious restrictions were loosened and dozens of mosques were built. These changes, however, were not drastic enough for Chechen radicals. The desire for independence and heightened Chechen nationalism became a rising force in the political arena. In the summer of 1990 the Chechen National Congress was organized with the intention of pulling together different nationalist groups to assert Chechen autonomy. By late 1990, the movement for Chechnya to become an independent republic became a priority in the Congress' agenda. In November of that year, the call for Chechen independence provided a popular platform for General Jokhar Dudayev, a former Soviet air force commander and appointee of Zavagayev, to receive appointment as Chairman of the Executive Committee. Shortly afterwards, the Chechen National Congress convened and a resolution was drafted which declared Chechnya a sovereign republic stating "the Chechen-Ingush Republic is a sovereign state, created as a result of self-determination of the Chechen and Ingush peoples."<sup>23</sup>

By the spring of 1991, Dudayev made his intentions clear by transforming the Chechen National Congress into a radical political movement. In June he convened a

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<sup>23</sup> Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya Calamity in the Caucasus*, New York New York University Press, 1998, p. 82

new session of Congress and renamed it the National Congress of the Chechen People (NCCP). At the same time, he declared the formation of *Nokchi-Chu*, an autonomous Chechen republic independent from Soviet or Russian influence. The timing for Dudayev's proclamation proved opportune with the crisis that ensued in the Soviet Union. The attempted coup in Russia on August 19 resulted in a quasi-victory for Yeltsin and an opportunity for Dudayev. While Zavgayev was in Moscow participating in discussions about the new Union Treaty with Gorbachev, Dudayev and his Congress leaders immediately organized a protest against the coup in front of the Communist Party headquarters in Grozny. Dudayev and the protest gained massive support from the Chechen population; though Zavgayev denounced the Soviet coup upon his return from Moscow on August 21, his legitimacy as Chechnya's leader had already been compromised by Dudayev.

Three days after the onset of the failed Soviet coup, Chechnya was in a state of revolution. On August 22 the armed guard of the NCCP, Gantemirov's National Guard, took control of the Grozny television and radio stations, along with the Council of Ministers building. The Supreme Soviet was still the official authority of Chechnya. However, even though Russian police, KGB, and military troops were in the vicinity of Grozny, the Chechen uprising received no opposition. Yeltsin, who by this time was established as the Russian Federation's authority, viewed Zavgayev as a potential threat because of his earlier support of Gorbachev and the Union Treaty. As a result, Moscow assured Dudayev that "force would not be used and that he could act boldly and decisively."<sup>24</sup> Dudayev was happy to comply. On September 6, Chechen protesters took over the Supreme Soviet building in Grozny and physically dragged Zavgayev from his

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 94.

office; shortly afterwards, Zavgayev fled to his home village in North Chechnya. Nine days later the Supreme Soviet in Chechnya was officially dissolved and a provisional Supreme Soviet was put in place until elections could be held in November; Dudayev, however, solidified his authority in Chechnya by dissolving the new provisional body and declaring the Executive Committee of the Congress would take on governmental powers and responsibilities during the transitional period. To ensure his committee's authority could not be undermined, Dudayev ordered Gantemirov's National Guard to occupy the Grozny KGB building, which gave him access to a huge weapons cache.

The seizure of the KGB building raised the eyebrows of Russian leadership. The immediate response was to send representatives to persuade Dudayev to give up the building and newly acquired weapons. Viktor Ivanenko, a reformist and new head of the KGB, and Alexander Rutskoi, the Russian Vice-President, flew to Grozny for the negotiations; their trip however, was made in vain. Dudayev refused to release the KGB building from his possession. In addition, Rutskoi's comments and treatment of the escalating situation only fueled Chechen frustration with Moscow.<sup>25</sup> Following the visit, Rutskoi's reported back to the Supreme Soviet in Moscow on October 8, which resulted in a chamber vote that issued an ultimatum calling for the disarmament of Chechens by midnight on October 10. Dudayev's response to the Russian decree was the mobilization of all Chechen males between the ages of fifteen and fifty-five.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rutskoi was often very blunt in his political assertions, he did not believe Chechnya was forming into a proper democracy, but rather a "banditry" From his experiences as a former Russian fighter pilot in Afghanistan, Rutskoi's beliefs on how to solve the Chechen problem was through use of force as opposed to negotiation. According to an interview with Ivanenko in *Rossiya* in 1995 (No 5), Rutskoi's suggestion was to handle the takeover of the KGB building as it would be handled by Russians in Afghanistan, specifically, through violent means

<sup>26</sup> Though thousands of men signed up to join Dudayev's militia, not all Chechens approved of Dudayev's actions; opposition groups such as the Round Table were opposed to Dudayev's control of the media and

On October 19, Yeltsin publicly addressed the escalating Chechen situation by labeling Dudayev's actions unconstitutional and proclaiming elections for a new Supreme Soviet must take place in early November. In addition, Yeltsin called for a referendum on the new Chechen state structure according to the Russian Federation and proclaimed that if Dudayev and the Chechen Congress did not abide, then he would do what was necessary to restore constitutional order. But Yeltsin's orders fell on deaf ears; the Chechen parliamentary and presidential elections went ahead as scheduled on October 27, with the NCCP controlling the entire electoral process. Though they were confusing and chaotic to the Chechen population, many people eagerly participated in what they saw as the first free, all-Chechen election. Though numbers are distorted, the official turnout figure was 458,144 people or about 72 percent of the electorate.<sup>27</sup> Dudayev won the presidency with 90.1 percent and immediately declared Chechnya an independent state on November 1, 1991.

The day after the Chechen elections, Ruslan Khasbulatov was inducted as Speaker of the Russian Parliament in Moscow. In response to Dudayev's declaration of Chechen independence, Khasbulatov pushed forth a resolution that declared the Chechen elections invalid. In addition, Ruskoi began making plans to forcibly overthrow Dudayev. The plan, however, was poorly initiated in the beginning. The decree to impose a state of emergency was to be signed on November 7, the public holiday celebrating the October Revolution. No Russian leadership was present for work, including Yeltsin who foreshadowed a pattern of absence and unreachable by phone. Due to the circumstances,

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use of armed force Groups such as these held public opposition rallies that insisted on the disbandment of Dudayev's forces; however, many of these groups later dissolved with the Russian invasion

<sup>27</sup> Gall and de Waal, 99

Rutskoi took charge and initiated the decree and on November 8, Russia announced Chechnya to be in a state of emergency. In response, the new Chechen parliament held a session in which emergency powers were granted to Dudayev. On November 9, 600 hundred Russian Interior Ministry troops arrived at the Khankala airbase outside Grozny with reinforcements to come shortly afterwards. Due to the poorly executed plan, however, additional reinforcements and weapons were sent to wrong areas, leaving the small Russian Interior Ministry force weak and vulnerable. Chechen fighters easily surrounded the Khankala airbase, while hundreds of thousands of Chechen protestors gathered in Grozny to oppose Russian intervention.

Due to the inadequate plan to forcibly remove Dudayev, Russian troops were immediately pulled out of Chechnya before suffering any casualties. The Supreme Soviet then met in Moscow and revoked the state of emergency, despite Rutskoi and Khasbulatov's objections. Though it was a quick occurrence and no blood was shed, Dudayev emerged as a hero from the events of November 9, his legitimacy as the Chechen president was solidified and the majority of the Chechen populace viewed him as a liberator of their country.

Russian troops withdrew by the summer of 1992, which strengthened Dudayev's assertions that Chechnya was a sovereign republic. Chechnya emerged out of the Russian political sphere and virtually no armed attempts were made against Dudayev by the Russian government for the following three years, except for Russian troops moving to the Chechen border during Ingush-Ossete conflicts. The only actions taken by the Russian government from November 1991 to July 1994 were ineffective trade blockades and financial cut-offs. Though the blockades achieved little, the cut-off of subsidies to

Chechnya resulted in black market activities, such as money-laundering, fraud, and smuggling, to become the prevalent way to earn a living in Chechen society. In fact, much of the success of Dudayev's regime can be attributed to corrupt Russian officials and black market activities providing profitable, illegal business opportunities.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, little money was being put towards public spending for such things as hospitals and schools. Even with the profits made from continued oil production and exports, the new Chechen government primarily spent money on arms for national defense rather than Chechnya's infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> As a result, Chechnya's official economy ceased to produce efficient revenue while arms trading and other black market endeavors thrived.

To many Chechen citizens, signs pointed to disaster with Dudayev in power and they were opposed to his continued role as leader. The attempts he made to build a Chechen state in 1992 were feeble and unsuccessful; new freedoms, such as open political expression and capitalism, were not adequately implemented with Dudayev wanting to keep power attached to the state. In addition, Dudayev's attempts to visit foreign countries to gain international recognition were made in vain. Since Chechnya did not meet the criteria for state sovereignty, no country officially recognized Chechnya's independent status.<sup>30</sup> Due to these and other inadequate social and economic conditions in Chechnya, discontent for Dudayev spread among the Chechen population. Dissatisfaction spread among Chechnya's citizens primarily because Dudayev did little

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>29</sup> Lieven, 74.

<sup>30</sup> Gerhard Von Glahn, *Law Among Nations*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., Needham Heights. Simon & Schuster Company, 1996, p. 51.

to consolidate Chechen statehood, and was very slow to implement economic reform. The Chechen Congress did not have confidence in him because they believed his military background did not equip him with knowledge to develop a clear concept of political leadership or to understand the complexities of a democratic government. Dudayev also surrounded himself with a small clique of followers and governed arbitrarily and secretively. As a result, he fell under the influence of corrupt mafia types and political adventurers. In addition, Dudayev's response to any form of criticism was to stir up fears of Russian intervention, which frustrated effort to initiate a rational negotiation process with Russia.<sup>31</sup>

Despite their displeasure, many Chechens were reluctant to speak out against Dudayev. His eccentric personality, his growing dictatorial power, and his toleration of illegal activities performed by members of his national guard kept many in fear of Dudayev's repercussions for public criticism.

It was clear that instead of focusing on preserving Chechnya's infrastructure and pursuing practical means of achieving independence, Dudayev's efforts were on increasing Chechnya's military power. Former Soviet bases holding caches of weapons, along with tanks, airplanes, and other vehicles, became a main concern for Dudayev. The Russian military was also aware of the weapons that remained in Chechnya, but it was also aware that any attempt to retrieve them would end in bloodshed. As a result, a directive was signed in 1992 by Pavel Grachev, the Soviet Defense Minister, which divided the weapons fifty-fifty between the Russian military and Dudayev. The reality, however, was that the majority of the weapons and vehicles had already been acquired by

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<sup>31</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya Life in a War-Torn Society*, Berkeley University of California Press, 2004, p. 65

Dudayev. Official estimates include forty-two tanks, twenty-nine thousand machine guns, two-hundred twenty-six airplanes, and thirty-six armored troop carriers became the property of Dudayev.<sup>32</sup>

Dudayev's unpopularity eventually led to a rising opposition movement within Chechnya. As state services collapsed and black market activities thrived, public discontent spread among approximately two-thirds of the population by April of 1993. Public opposition became more widespread and Dudayev eventually experienced a falling out with the Chechen parliament. Dudayev's response was the use of force against his opposition through the declaration of presidential rule and imposing a curfew. Even as the parliament began the impeachment process, Dudayev immediately shot back by dissolving the parliament and the Chechen Constitutional Court. As a result, two factions formed in Chechnya: one pro-Dudayev and the other in opposition. The opposition, with the support of parliament members, gathered arms and demanded a referendum to be held on June 5, 1993, to establish a public consensus on the future of Chechnya.

The day before the referendum was to be held Dudayev ordered an attack on his rivals. Led by Shamil Basayev, Dudayev's men fired into the Town Assembly building killing at least seventeen people; this act of violence solidified Dudayev's control of Grozny and ended any hope of peaceful dialogue between opposing Chechen parties. Dudayev's opposition, which was comprised of ex-Communists, intellectuals, and various gangsters, were disorganized and unable to form a united front. The only sign of an organized effort was the Provisional Council led by Umar Avturkhanov. Though its beginnings were unimpressive to Dudayev and his regime, the Provisional Council would

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<sup>32</sup> Gall, 113.

eventually become part of Russia's front line offensive in Chechnya. Other opposition movements included former Chechen Prime Minister Yaragi Mamodayev and his Government of National Trust, and Ruslan Labazanov, a former bodyguard of Dudayev who was obsessed with killing the Chechen dictator and formed a guerilla front against Dudayev.

In addition to the Provisional Council, the other emerging opposition to Dudayev was Ruslan Khasbulatov, a former Russian parliament member and Speaker of the Supreme Soviet who had strong family roots in Chechnya. His well-established ties to the clan-based Chechen society gave Khasbulatov public support and made him a formidable enemy against Dudayev. However, Khasbulatov's past political power in Russia also made him a threat to Yeltsin. Yeltsin feared the possibility of Khasbulatov's rise to power in Russia, so he offered no help in challenging Dudayev.

Despite his opposition, Dudayev was able to achieve an initial victory, but his power was not solidified by any means. His popularity reached its all time low in early 1994, and though he maintained an authoritative position, his dictatorship appeared on the verge of collapse. To rectify the dilemma, Dudayev's main tool for retaining authority was the use of military force against opposing factions and his ability to keep the Chechen population in fear of Russian aggression. He exploited the public's anticipation of Russian intervention in Chechnya and continued his passionate orations of Chechen independence. Even with speeches of freedom and independence, the powerful grip he once had on Chechnya was loosening.

As a dictator who foresaw the end of his regime, Dudayev put himself in a position to negotiate with Russia, but peaceful negotiations were never realized. A

supposed meeting had been planned between Dudayev and Yeltsin in the spring of 1994. Yeltsin was initially unsure about the meeting and by the time he finally agreed, it was too late. In May, an assassination attempt on Dudayev's life by unknown hit men influenced Dudayev to refuse any further communication with Yeltsin. The reluctance for Dudayev to correspond with Yeltsin was of no consequence to Moscow. Russian officials believed Dudayev would fall from power and Chechnya would eventually sort itself out. However, Russian political competition, along with geopolitical reasons including the exploitation of new oil fields, influenced Russian politicians to push for a faster solution which was realized just a few months later.

## CHAPTER 4

### 1994: RUSSIAN INTERVENTION

The Russian military invasion of Chechnya on December 11, 1994, initiated a fierce and bloody war that would last for twenty-one months. Chechnya's self-declared independence and the seizure of power by Dudayev were extraordinary events in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. Chechnya had never experienced any form of independence for hundreds of years and even with rivaling Chechen factions, the threat of Russian imperialism outweighed any apprehension of a Dudayev-led government.

Russian intervention began with the financial and arms support to Chechen opposition groups, specifically the Provisional Council, in the fall of 1994 to facilitate the overthrow of Dudayev's regime. Russian arms, tanks, and helicopters were supplied to the Provisional Council, but each contribution failed to realize Moscow's desire of ousting Dudayev; bloody battles ensued frequently between Dudayev's National Guard and Avtukhanov's Provisional Council, but no progress was made against destabilizing Dudayev and his regime. As the autumn months passed, Yeltsin publicly declared that Russia would not intervene in Chechnya. However, despite his declaration, Russian troops and tanks were secretly sent to Grozny in mid-November to aid the unsuccessful Provisional Council. The attack that followed on November 26 proved to be a chaotic

embarrassment for the Russia and its strategic plans of assisting Chechen opposition groups. Dudayev's forces easily overran the un-trained Provisional fighters and took twenty-one Russian soldiers prisoner. Following the botched military operation, Yeltsin issued an ultimatum that required Chechens to disarm within forty-eight hours. The Russian Security Council then met on November 29 to vote on sending military forces into Chechnya; it took only three days for the Security Council to vote in favor of deploying troops to end Dudayev's three year rule.

The decision to invade was based on many reasons. The fear that Chechen secession would lead to a domino effect of the whole Caucas region played a major role. If Russia were to grant Chechnya independence, it might be a signal to other Caucas states that they could take the same actions as Chechnya did and assert their sovereignty. If this were to happen, Russia would eventually lose key territory. Another reason was related to security interests for the Russian Federation, since Dudayev's government was obviously a criminal regime. In addition, there was the very important question of oil. Russian oil production had been declining for years, even before *perestroika*, and the issue of concern was oil passing through the republic via a major pipeline which ran through Grozny.<sup>33</sup>

According to Edward Walker, these and other various reasons contributed to the decision to invade Chechnya, but the determination to do so was primarily based "not on oil or a radical change in the situation on the ground, but in a shift in the balance of Kremlin politics combined with poor intelligence from Chechnya."<sup>34</sup> The Soviet collapse

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<sup>33</sup> Edward W Walker, "The Crisis in Chechnya," Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Berkeley: University of California, Spring 1995, pp 2-3, <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~Ebsp/caucasus/articles.html>

had sent Russia's political arena into a whirlwind, and Yeltsin saw an opportunity in the Chechen crisis to further his political aspirations. A small victorious war against the perceived aggressive, rebellious Chechens was very appealing to Yeltsin because a decisive victory would boost his approval ratings for the 1996 elections. Contradicting his earlier public comments of objecting Russian intervention, Yeltsin signed a decree for the invasion on November 30, yet he would not publicly speak about military operations in Chechnya until December 28.

On December 11, less than two weeks after Yeltsin signed the decree, 40,000 Russian troops, along with a barrage of tanks, artillery, and aircrafts, crossed the Chechen border. As Chechens rallied behind Dudayev in fear of the invasion, Russian soldiers were bewildered at what to do in the face of unarmed Chechen civilians who formed large protest groups and attacked their assailants. The confusion and low morale felt by many Russian soldiers, combined with difficult terrain, uncooperative weather, and poor planning, made the initial invasion slow and unimpressive. Many Russian soldiers and officers were against the intervention from its beginnings. They felt unprepared, uninformed, and feared a repeat of the bloody failure the former Soviet Union experienced in Afghanistan. Some of Russia's top generals of that time, including General Eduard Vorobyev, General Alexander Lebed, General Georgy Kondratiev, and defense ministers Boris Gromov and Valery Mirnov, openly displayed their discontent with the invasion and were relieved or quit their positions. All in all, around 557 officers of all ranks were disciplined or left the army, either by force or choice, for protesting the intervention.<sup>35</sup> In addition, a number of Moscow's politicians felt the same and pushed

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid , 165

for a halt to the intervention so negotiations could occur. Dudayev was open to peace talks as well, but following a confusing array of rescheduling and changes in Russian negotiators, Dudayev refused any further efforts to compromise with Russia. The invasion continued forward as planned and Moscow issued a deadline for Chechens to disarm. At the same time, Russian planes began conducting devastating air-strikes and artillery attacks on Chechen villages and towns outside of Grozny; with only a few thousand fighters, many of whom were not properly trained in warfare, Chechen military forces began a defense that seemed unachievable against the larger and technically stronger Russian army.

Tanks and other armored vehicles that had been previously acquired by Dudayev were used in initial battles of the invasion, but were not used as the war progressed; many were either destroyed or taken over by the Russian army. In addition, many of the Chechen fighters did not have modern weapons; some anti-tank grenades, rockets, mortars, and firearms were utilized, but it was rare to have enough of these to equip very many fighters. Other Chechens had no weapons at all, but their mobility, guerrilla warfare tactics training, and tenacious efforts to defend their country, proved to their advantage in many battles.

The determination for independence was apparent not only in armed Chechen fighters, but also in ordinary Chechen citizens who retained fierce loyalty to their country. Many Chechen citizens retaliated against the Russian Army, though they had not joined the rank of Chechnya's military force. As one Chechen citizen proclaimed, "you could say the whole population here is involved in the defense. Every street has provided several groups of four or five volunteers so someone is on watch the whole

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<sup>35</sup> Lieven, 106.

time. There are no formal commanders here. We just work together....As you see, we are not an army. We are just ordinary people defending our home.”<sup>36</sup> Another volunteer declared similarly, “there are 20 of us here in my group from Vedeno, all relatives or friends. Every group chooses its own commander, or elder. On the whole we work things out with the other groups in our area, and we don’t have much contact with the high command. This isn’t an army. It is the whole Chechen people with is fighting.”<sup>37</sup>

Though vastly outnumbered and outgunned, when the battle for Grozny began in early January, Chechen fighters honed their abilities and managed to delay the takeover of Grozny by Russian troops for nearly three and a half months. This was not only due to the Chechens having a territorial advantage, but also because Russian soldiers had not received proper training in urban warfare, despite the Soviet military’s past experiences in such urban battles as Stalingrad, Sebastopol, and Berlin. Russian troops made slow progress; when the Chechen Presidential Palace was taken over on January 19, Moscow viewed it as a sign of a coming victory. A week later, the Russian National Security Council declared Grozny under Russian control. The Security Council publicly issued that the Russian military phase in Chechnya was over and the policing phase was to begin on January 26. Both declarations were premature; it wasn’t until March 7 that Russian troops were able to drive the majority of Chechen fighters back and gain complete control of Grozny.

Grozny was under Russian control, but was also in ruins from air-strikes and artillery shelling. Both sides suffered casualties which included many civilians. By May 1995, Shatoy and Vedeno were the only two major cities left in Chechnya that were

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid , 119.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid , 119

under separatist control, but their grip dwindled with little supplies, fatigue, and almost no ammunition to fight with. The following month, both areas fell into Russian hands. The capture of both the two areas would have signaled the inevitable defeat of Chechnya had it not been for Shamil Basayev and Chechen fighters under his command advancing into Russian territory. Basayev believed offensive raids and taking hostages were Chechnya's only option since Russia was quickly taking over Chechen territory. After bribing their way into Russian territory, Basayev and his forces attacked the town of Budyonnovsk on June 14<sup>th</sup>. Basayev rounded up several hundred hostages and held them in a hospital, threatening to execute them if Russia did not withdraw from Chechnya. Russia's response was to send in special-forces units on June 17. After two unsuccessful attempts were made to take the hospital, Russia's Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, opened negotiations with Basayev. On June 18 an agreement was made for the release of the hostages and Basayev's safe return to Chechnya. As Basayev received a hero's welcome home to Chechnya, peace talks began between Dudayev's representatives and Russian authorities. One month later on July 31, a cease-fire accord was signed between the two warring countries.

Basayev's offensive was an important event in the Russo-Chechen war. Though it was labeled an act of terrorism, it was widely praised by many Chechen separatists and marked a turning point in the conflict. It initiated a cease-fire agreement that provided a chance for Chechen fighters to regroup, rearm, and retrain for future battles. Separatists were able to filter back into Chechnya and retake many areas they had lost to the Russian army with essentially no fighting. However, the cease-fire and the peace talks that precluded it only lasted until late August. Disputes over future Chechen political

arrangements and defense measures created tensions that culminated in the Russian bombardment of Chechen mountain villages. Moscow was determined to keep its puppet government, headed by Salambek Khajiev, in full control of Chechnya and wanted to quickly assert its domination over Chechen rebels. In a matter of days, battles commenced between Russian troops and Chechen separatists that ended with bloody results. Heavy artillery shelling and air-strikes leveled Chechen villages while assassinations and kidnappings were performed by Chechen fighters, mainly out of paranoia of Russian spies within their ranks.

In an attempt to solidify power Moscow sent Zavgayev, who had resided in Russia since Dudayev ousted him in 1991, to return as head of the Russian government in Grozny. Zavgayev arrived with a political platform that called for free elections in December of that year and asserted that he would take office only if he were appointed by the Chechen people. His aspirations were realized on December 17, when he was successfully elected by a majority vote. The bulk of votes, however, came from Russian soldiers and local government officials because virtually no Chechen citizens voted in the election. The election was viewed as legitimate by Moscow, but was condemned by the Chechen people. In the spring of 1996, Zavgayev was determined to show he was in control of Chechnya and worked with Russian generals to bully villages to sign peace accords; violent methods were used at times to persuade Chechens to sign the agreements and Chechen separatists reacted accordingly with violent attacks of their own. In many instances, the only means for Russians to defeat Chechen soldiers was to call in artillery and air-strikes to wipe out entire areas containing Chechen fighters. Bombardments were

the best way for the Russian army to attack Chechen fighters and proved very effective throughout their campaign.

The heavy combat of 1996 was ignored by Moscow due to the upcoming elections in June. Yeltsin was running for office and the Russian media censored reports on the shaky Chechnya situation in order for him to save face. In fact, Yeltsin attempted to completely remove the topic from his political agenda. It wasn't until April 21 when Yeltsin took interest in events in Chechnya. On that day, while riding through the village of Gekhi-Chu in a private automobile, Dudayev was struck and killed by a Russian rocket aimed at his portable satellite phone. Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, the Chechen Vice-President, took over the rebel Chechen presidency with Aslan Maskhadov controlling military operations. Yeltsin saw this as an opportunity to make peace with Chechnya that would aid his chances of retaining the Russian presidency and provide some needed relief for the new Russian economy. On May 27, Yandarbiyev flew to Moscow to meet with Yeltsin and the two signed a cease-fire agreement. The next day, while Yandarbiyev and his staff were conducting further negotiations with the Russian Prime Minister in Moscow, Yeltsin flew to Chechnya and announced that Russia had won the war; it was a bold act of propaganda that assured Yeltsin's electoral victory. Upon returning to Moscow, Yeltsin fired the members of his staff that originally dragged Russia into the war and appointed Alexander Lebed as head of the National Security Council.

On June 10, another peace accord was signed which called for the withdrawal of Russian troops by the end of August. Signs of goodwill were presented with the withdrawal of one Russian regiment; however, one week after Yeltsin was re-elected in July, Russian planes bombed Makhkety, a Chechen village in the mountains used

primarily by Chechen separatist leaders as a meeting area. The majority of the separatist leaders escaped with their lives as Russian paratroopers jumped into the village. Over 1,500 Chechen fighters led by Shamil Basayev attacked Russian-occupied Grozny on August 6; despite overwhelming odds, the Chechen fighters contained the Russian infantry and tanks taking the city in just one day. After the fighting, Lebed flew to Chechnya to begin peace talks on August 12. A cease-fire was agreed to, but was not put into practice until two weeks later when Lebed successfully convinced Chechen and Russian military leaders to end the fighting. By August 31 Russian troops were out of Grozny and the Khasavyurt agreement was signed. The agreement was titled "Joint Relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic" and stipulated that Chechnya's status for sovereignty would be determined by December 31, 2001.

Despite the title of the agreement, the accord signaled the defeat of Russian forces in the war. Lebed, who blamed the Russian defeat on military under-funding and a lack of ideology, received much criticism in Moscow for the treaty. Many were angry about the loss of life in the war and felt embarrassed by Russia succumbing to such a country of little power as Chechnya. The opposition to the agreement never abated and Lebed was relieved of his position the following October. Despite Lebed's termination, the agreement held firm and after two more accords were signed by Chechen and Russian officials, the last of the Russian army pulled out at the end of 1996.

The ending death tolls for the war vary. Estimates range from 35,000 to 40,000 total lives lost.<sup>38</sup> The range was attributed to the fact that there were confirmed 6,500 were military deaths and 28,500 civilian deaths.<sup>39</sup> However, many civilians and soldiers

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<sup>38</sup> Tishkov, 74.

were still unaccounted for and there were tens of thousands of refugees outside of Chechnya. The war caused an estimated \$5.5 billion in economic damage and was largely the cause of Russia's national economic crisis in 1998.<sup>40</sup> Russian troops were also accused of war crimes. The first public allegations arose in January 1995 when the International Court of Justice denounced Russia for the indiscriminate use of force by Russian troops against Chechen civilians in the first conflict. The court stated that “the Russian Army violated the right to life of unarmed civilians on a massive scale.”<sup>41</sup> Re-occurring cases of civilian ill-treatment and tragedies such as the Samashki village massacre in 1995 brought robust criticism against the Russian Army. The censure was magnified as reports were released that an estimated 1,266 Chechen civilians ‘disappeared’ during the first conflict.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the carnage and destruction that Chechnya suffered, the population was hopeful about its new partial-independence. On January 27, 1997, 400,000 Chechens turned out to vote in presidential and parliamentary elections. The Chechen republic had obtained *de facto* but not *de-jure* recognition in the international community.<sup>43</sup> The two leading candidates for president were the military leaders Maskhadov and Basayev. Maskhadov won the majority vote, making him the new Chechen president, while Basayev was named prime minister. The elections were deemed a success by Chechens,

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<sup>39</sup> Lapidus, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Emil Pain, “The Second Chechen War,” trans by Robert R. Love, *Military Review*, July-August 2000, p 59.

<sup>41</sup> Svante E. Cornell, “International Reactions to Massive Human Rights Violations: The Case of Chechnya,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol 51, (January 1999), p. 88.

<sup>42</sup> Lieven, 130-132.

<sup>43</sup> Von Glahn, 79.

but both men were elected among ominous conditions in post-war Chechnya, including widespread destruction and poverty, economic collapse, and the lawlessness of armed militia groups. These conditions proved fertile ground for the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, which, in turn, provided Russia with an anti-terrorist rationale to initiate another invasion.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE SECOND RUSSO/CHECHEN WAR

The Khasavyurt Accords gave Chechnya *de facto* independence, but the one page document ultimately postponed the final decision on Chechnya's status until the end of 2001. Though the agreement delayed an official declaration of independence, it recognized Chechnya as a subject of international law, which was later reaffirmed by the "Treaty on Peace and Principles of Interrelations Between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria" that was signed by Yeltsin and Maskhadov in May 1997.<sup>44</sup> These documents not only granted Chechnya *de facto* independence, but also stipulated that both sides would commit to building relations according to international protocol for sovereign states.

But from 1996 to 1999 Chechnya was nowhere near ready to face the challenges of a sovereign state. Though Maskhadov had come to power via free elections, he was incapable of dealing with the various Chechen field commanders and warlords that had gained power via black market activities. Likewise, the separatist government's social, political, and economic structures were insufficient to adequately handle its new-found sovereignty, so progress was slow. It was unable to impede the widespread chaos and

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<sup>44</sup> Wood, 82.

faced the rising problem of Wahhabism and its terrorist entities. As noted in the previous chapter, economic support promised in the Khasavyurt Accords was never fully delivered by Russia, and international aid was scarce due to the dangerous conditions that were prevalent in the republic.

The embarrassing loss of the first war and the ominous state Chechnya was in made Russian officials eager for retribution. Most notably, Vladimir Putin made his intentions clear during his ascent to power. In August 1999 Putin replaced the then current prime minister, Sergei Stepashin. Yeltsin appointed Putin with the intention that the new prime minister would follow on as his successor as president. Putin's popularity with Yeltsin, the Russian parliament, and the public was not only due to his strict and orderly image, but also to his hardliner stance on Chechen terrorism. Whereas other politicians had been accused of treating Chechen terrorism delicately, Putin was praised for his more assertive style of politics. Unlike Yeltsin, who tried to distance himself from Chechnya, Putin was openly defiant about the Chechen resistance and independence. He recognized the dire situation in Chechnya and was able to use it to his advantage. He successfully appealed to Russians' national pride and thereby increased public support to oppose Chechen independence. He also gained international support against Chechen independence by labeling Chechnya as a breeding ground for terrorists.<sup>45</sup> When Basayev's forces invaded Dagestan in August and were then accused of the September bombings in Moscow, Putin was able to capitalize on the events and gain popular support for a new invasion.<sup>46</sup> This war was popular and national pride in the Russian armed

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Service, *Russia Experiment with a People*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 163.

<sup>46</sup> In September 1999, apartment buildings were bombed in Moscow, Volgograd, and Dagestan, killing at least sixty-four people. Controversy circulated over whether or not Chechens were responsible for the

forces increased dramatically. Putin rode the war to an easy victory as Russia's new president in the 2000 Russian elections.<sup>47</sup>

The second Russian intervention proceeded differently than the first. The main distinctions were Russian dominance of the media and the use of massive air strikes and bombings in the initial campaign. The air strikes inflicted incredible damage before ground forces were sent in, thus reducing the probability of close combat. In addition, the entire logistical operation was more effectively planned than the first invasion. As early as August 26 Russia acknowledged it had begun air strikes, claiming they were in retaliation to the Chechen/Islamic rebel attack in Dagestan.<sup>48</sup> However, by mid-September, devastating Russian missile attacks were launched against Grozny and the surrounding area, destroying the city's infrastructure.

It quickly became clear that Russia intended to save face from its humiliating defeat three years earlier. The air campaign's crippling results were evident early on with approximately 1,700 sorties carried out by warplanes as of September 25. Russia claimed that a total of 150 military bases were destroyed, along with 30 bridges, 80 vehicles, six radio transmitters and 250 kilometers of mountain roads.<sup>49</sup> The ground invasion followed on October 1, with Russian forces taking control of major Chechen cities and strongholds. By December, Russian ground forces surrounded the majority of

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explosions, however, despite any contesting viewpoints, full blame was placed upon Chechen insurgents. Following this incident, public support for the invasion escalated. Council on Foreign Relations, *Chechnya Based Terrorists*, July 11, 2006, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9181/>

<sup>47</sup> Michael Orr, "Second Time Lucky? Evaluating Russian Performance in the Second Chechen War," (March, 2000), <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2000/JIRArticle.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> CNN News, "Russia Acknowledges Bombing Raids in Chechnya," August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1999, <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9908/26/russia.chechnya>

<sup>49</sup> Global Security Organization, "Phase I – The Air Campaign – September 1999," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/chechnya2-4.htm>

Grozny and unleashed a bombardment that virtually wiped it out. Despite rebel counter-attacks, Russian troops took control of the city by February 2000. Russian forces then turned to the southern mountainous region of Chechnya in pursuit of fleeing rebel groups. By the end of the month Russia declared victory and began the process of pacification.

While Russian President Putin successfully incorporated the Chechen conflict into the West's global war on terrorism, some observers argue that the second Russian invasion was unjust and counterproductive. They contend that Chechnya is a case where the label of terrorism has been misused as reason to justify Russian military occupation and to de-legitimize the resistance movement.<sup>50</sup>

While there is no doubt Putin's public reputation was forged by his handling of the Chechen crisis, the spark that prompted Putin's anti-terrorist campaign and the subsequent invasion of Chechnya was riddled with controversy. Specifically, the involvement of the Russian FSB in the September 1999 apartment building bombings in Moscow, Volgograd, and Dagestan has received much scrutiny. Yuri Felshtinsky and Alexander Litvinenko present a detailed examination of the circumstances around the bombings. Felshtinsky argues that the entire incident was planned and executed by the FSB to start the war and solidify Putin's ascent to the Russian presidency. Felshtinsky asserts, "there was absolutely no way terrorist attacks could produce the decision the Chechens wanted on granting Chechnya formal independence. [Rather] the bombings were needed by the Russian secret services, in order to start a war with Chechnya [and] future events confirmed that this was indeed the case: the war began, the secret services

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<sup>50</sup> Ilyas Akhmadov, *The Russian-Chechen Tragedy The Way to Peace and Democracy*, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, February 2003.

came to power in Russia, and Chechen independence came to an end. And all as a result of the terrorist attacks carried out in September.”<sup>51</sup>

Other critics of the war argue that Russian policies in Chechnya have not been effective. For example, Alexander Dugin claims that it is impossible to control Chechnya through the use of force. He asserts that military and technological means of exercising authority have failed for Moscow, so it is necessary for Putin to reevaluate Russia’s current strategy and find new methods of negotiation with Chechnya’s political elite. Dugin recommends giving Chechnya autonomy and avoiding a unified political regime in the republic, which would prove difficult to maintain in Chechnya’s clan-structured society. By doing this, Russia would not only initiate the peace process, but would also set the tone for positive relationships with its other minorities.<sup>52</sup>

Russia has also been criticized for human rights violations. While the Russian government’s justification for continued occupation in Chechnya is based on claims that the Chechen terror movement will thrive with outside funding and assistance from Islamic terrorist organizations, this assertion ignores human rights abuses occurring in Chechnya that continue to fuel terrorist activities as well as nationalist separatist motivations.

Russian human rights violations are one of the most controversial factors in the Russo-Chechen Wars. Murder, bombardment of civilian targets, kidnappings, rape, and beatings are among the barrage of infringements that the Russian Army has been accused of. Like the first Russo-Chechen War, the second conflict brought harsh denouncements

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<sup>51</sup> Alexander Litvinenko and Yuri Felshtinksky, *Blowing Up Russia*, New York: Encounter Books, 2007, p. 110.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander Dugin, “The Chechen Path to Russian Statehood,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol 2, (July-September, 2004), pp. 89-92

against Russia. Due to the lack of independent access to Chechnya, accurate civilian death tolls were difficult to arrive at; however, in April 2003, the pro-Moscow Chechen government compiled a report that was accidentally released to the public. In the report, which catalogued Chechen civilian deaths, approximately 1,314 civilians were murdered in 2002, a rate of 109 per month. Of the 1,314 deaths, none was related to direct combat operations or accidents, which left analysts open to speculate how many deaths actually occurred at the hands of Russian soldiers. Estimated total civilian deaths were around 150,000 since 1999, but this figure included artillery shelling of towns and villages.<sup>53</sup>

Alleged abuses by Russian forces, including forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and the indiscriminate use force, became an everyday occurrence for Chechen civilians. The most common form of abuse occurred during *zachistaka* operations.<sup>54</sup> Chechen villagers and townspeople were often the victims of abuses that occurred during routine *zachistaka* operations which resulted in arbitrary detention and subsequent torture, rape, ill-treatment, and disappearances. Most of the operations were aimed at finding Chechen rebels, supporters, and hidden ammunition caches. In some cases, Russian forces conducted the operations in response to ambushes or enemy fire on Russian convoys, while others were based on intelligence reports on insurgents' whereabouts; occasionally, some occurred without any apparent cause. The Russian Army has been accused of murdering many civilians, both during and outside *zachistaka* operations, in indiscriminate shootings. Russian soldiers wearing masks conducted

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<sup>53</sup> Bridget Conley "For the Women of Chechnya, Hope Dies Last," *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 3, (September 2003), pp 331-342, p 340.

<sup>54</sup> *Zachistaka* refers to "cleansing" or "mop-up" operations when Russian troops try to verify the identities of all inhabitants of a village; they are often performed after a bombardment Anne Nivat, *Chienne de Guerre*, New York. Public Affairs, 2001, p. 130

numerous night raids, detaining men who were later reported as missing. Several villages and towns, including Argun, Novye Atagi, Starye Atagi, and Tsotsin-Yurt, were alleged sites of repeated *zachistaka* operations.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the substantial growth of evidence of Russian human rights violations, investigations have been minimal. In addition, there is no record of any violators being convicted of any crimes. Amnesty International reported, “investigations into allegations of extrajudicial execution, torture, ill-treatment, and looting or destruction of private property are infrequent, inadequate, and rarely lead to prosecutions. Despite compelling evidence from the victim or witnesses as to the identity of the individual perpetrator or the unit responsible, these investigations are often closed, due to the authorities’ apparent ‘inability’ to locate the perpetrator. Russian authorities regularly use amnesty provisions to exculpate members of Russian forces accused of less serious cases of assault against civilians.”<sup>56</sup>

To show goodwill, Russian officials introduced Order #80 on March 27, 2002, in response to claims of abuses during *zachistka* operations. The order issued new regulations for soldiers to adhere to during village searches: Russian soldiers had to introduce themselves and give their reasons for a search; they were forbidden to wear masks; they could not cover the license plates of vehicles they were using during searches; a representative of the village must accompany them during the search; witnesses had to sign statements that no abuses occurred, and village authorities had to be

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<sup>55</sup> *Memorandum to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on the Human Rights Situation in Chechnya*, Human Rights Watch, March 18, 2002, [http://www.hrw.org/un/unchr-chechnya.htm#P69\\_5983](http://www.hrw.org/un/unchr-chechnya.htm#P69_5983).

<sup>56</sup> Amnesty International, Russian Federation, Failure to Protect or Punish Human Rights Violations and Impunity in Chechnya, *Memorandum to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*, January 21, 2002, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur460042002>.

notified of people's names, locations, and reasons for detainment or execution by Russian soldiers. On April 19, 2002, Russia's human rights representative for Chechnya made a public statement that Order #80 was being strictly adhered to with no violations.

Subsequently, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights disapproved a motion to punish Russia for violations in Chechnya even though human rights activists still maintained that the atrocities continued.<sup>57</sup>

Thus far, no reliable declarations of casualties in the second war have been provided. According to the Russian Defense Ministry reports in 2003, "the official casualty toll of all the power-wielding agencies with troops deployed in the separatist province in the period from September 1999 to December 2002 currently stands at 4,572 servicemen killed and 15,549 wounded – a total of 20,121 servicemen."<sup>58</sup> The number of Chechen separatists killed is unknown, but estimates range from 4,000 to 5,000 from 1999 to 2004, along with numerous more civilian deaths. In addition, the war produced thousands of Chechen refugees who fled their homes before and during Russian air raids. Neighboring regions such as Ingushetia were reported to have appealed for United Nations aid to deal with tens of thousands of refugees in 1999.<sup>59</sup>

Since May 2000, Russia has exercised direct rule over Chechnya. Although insurgent fighting and terrorism continue to this day, Russia has made strides in what it calls its "counterterrorist" campaign. It has chalked up the elimination of prominent Chechen separatist leaders, including former president Aslan Maskhadov, the insurgent

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<sup>57</sup> Conley, 336-337

<sup>58</sup> Boris Sapozhnikov, "Second Chechen Campaign Takes its Toll," Johnson's Russia List, February 18<sup>th</sup> 2003, <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/7067-8.cfm>.

<sup>59</sup> RTE News Report, "Russia Launches More Air Strikes Against Chechnya," September 27<sup>th</sup> 1999, <http://www.rte.ie/news/1999/0927/russia.html>

warlord Shamil Basayev, and Islamic fundamentalist Amir Khattab.<sup>60</sup> Russia also eliminated Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev, the successor to the Chechen separatist presidency after Maskhadov's death. Initially, Russian intelligence described Sadulaev as an Arab and a representative of al Qaeda, even though it was revealed that the new separatist president was a native Chechen and an Islamic scholar. Some observers have argued that the new president would have been merely a pawn for the terrorist ambitions of fundamentalists. However, Sadulaev had disassociated the Chechen resistance from al Qaeda and other terrorist networks. He tried a new long-term strategy, involving some negotiations with Russia and a low keyed military campaign that aimed at obtaining independence. While Maskhadov was never able to assert authority over different extremist factions in the resistance, Sadulaev was more successful. The organized raid on Nalchik in October 2005 was the first unified military action that Chechen insurgents have participated in since 2004.

The significance of Sadulaev was that he was the first religious scholar to lead the resistance in the Russo-Chechen conflicts. Whereas Dudayev and Maskhadov were

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<sup>60</sup>“On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005 former Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov was killed during a raid by FSB special forces. While the circumstances surrounding his death remain murky, FSB head Nikolay Patrushev reported that Maskhadov was accidentally killed when a grenade was thrown into the bunker in which he was hiding. Russian media reports stated, however, that the Chechen leader was accidentally shot by one of his bodyguards during the chaos of the raid. Following his death, Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev was appointed as the underground president only to be killed by FSB forces a little more than a year after accepting the position on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Another blow dealt to the Chechen insurgency in 2006 was the death of Shamil Basayev on July 10<sup>th</sup>. Basayev was killed in Ingushetia when the vehicle he was traveling in exploded. The source of the explosion remains contested. While many say that Basayev's brutal tactics, especially the Beslan school massacre, alienated him from more mainstream Chechen separatists, his position as a key figure in the insurgency is indisputable.” See Global Security Organization, “Second Chechnya War, 1999 - ????” (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/chechnya2.htm>, Confirmation of Khattab's assassination was on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2002, when Chechen rebels affirmed that he had been killed by touching a poisoned letter; Russian secret services claimed the kill. See BBC News, “Chechens Confirm Warlord's Death”, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1957411.stm>

In addition, Russian forces confirmed that Abdul-Halim Sadulaev was killed during a gun battle between Russian troops and Chechen rebels in June 2006. See BBC News, “Rebel Leader Killed in Chechnya,” June 17, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5089942.stm>

soldier-turned-politician leaders, Sadulaev assumed a more traditional genre of Islamic authority. As noted in the previous chapter, it is possible that this was an intentional motive for Maskhadov in selecting Sadulaev as a successor since a native religious figure would not only provide a unifying presence in the Chechen separatist government, but also would also refute allegations that Chechen insurgents were led by Arab Islamists with links to al Qaeda. Sadulaev did allow some terrorist attacks to take place. However, they were only tolerated against military and economic objectives, and not civilian targets. Sadulaev believed civilian attacks contradicted Chechen values.<sup>61</sup>

Upon Sadulaev's death, Doku Umarov, the Chechen vice-president and a former Chechen field commander, took over the Chechen separatist presidency and serves in that role to this day. A Sufi-Muslim and Chechen native, Umarov has vowed to continue the work Sadulaev begun by strengthening the Chechen separatist militia and distancing the resistance from Wahhabist radicalism and connections to global terrorist networks. Umarov, who has been involved in the Chechen resistance since 1990, asserted that under his control, only Russian military and police forces would be targeted by Chechen separatists and civilian casualties would be avoided.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the continued existence of the Chechen separatist movement, Russia has succeeded in installing a pro-Moscow Chechen regime. Initially, Akhmad Kadyrov was appointed as head of government in 2000 and then elected as president in 2003. In March 2003, a new Chechen constitution was passed via a referendum and went into

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<sup>61</sup> Andrew McGregor, "Upheaval in Nalchik. New Directions in the Chechen Insurgency," *Terrorism Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, (November 3, 2005) <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369822>.

<sup>62</sup> BBC News, "Regions and Territories: Chechnya," January 21, 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country\\_profiles/2565049.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/2565049.stm).

force the following April. Although the constitution permitted Chechnya more autonomy, it was met with resistance by the Chechen public for its incorporation of Chechnya into the Russian Federation.

In May 2004, Kadyrov was assassinated by Chechen separatists and, as a result, Alu Alkhanov was elected the following August with Sergei Abramov serving as prime minister. Today, Akhmad Kadyrov's son, Ramzan Kadyrov, who is also the leader of the pro-Moscow militia the Kadyrovites, serves as the prime minister. With Putin's support, he is quickly becoming the most powerful man in Chechnya and is expected to obtain the Chechen presidency once he reaches the constitutionally required age of thirty. Due to Kadyrov's rise to power with support from Putin and other pro-Moscow officials, the overall security situation in Chechnya is increasingly difficult to accurately portray due to the near monopoly that the Russian government has on the media.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE BLACK WIDOWS

On September 1, 2004, school children began filling the halls of School Number One in the Russian town of Beslan, North Ossetia. Students and family members alike were all present for the first day of school which occurred during *lineyka*, a celebration of the beginning of the school year observed throughout Russia.<sup>63</sup> As tradition mandated, the older students lined up to welcome the younger first-year students to class as parents and relatives proudly observed from the sides. Pictures were taken and friendly greetings were exchanged between students, parents, and the school faculty during the festive event. As the morning progressed with the arrival of students and observers, the number of people present that day at School Number One was considerably higher than usual. Being a time-honored tradition, the large number of family members and spectators participating in the celebration was nothing out of the ordinary. Unfortunately, the tragic events that unfolded shortly after the school day began would transform the large crowd of celebrating participants into a group of hostages, hundreds of whom would be killed.

At 9:30 that morning a group of thirty-two masked assailants armed with machine guns and wearing self-explosive belts entered School Number One and opened fire on the

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<sup>63</sup>Anna Politkovskaya, *Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy*, trans. by Arch Tait, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2004, p. 247.

ceremonious crowd. In a matter of hours, twelve people were killed and nearly 1,200 hostages were taken and held in the school gymnasium. With the hostage-takers threatening to detonate their explosives inside the building, Russian security forces began negotiation efforts to ensure the safety of children and family members inside the overrun school. As the crisis continued, the hostage-takers claimed they were members of a militant organization called *Riyadh al-Salihin*, led by Chechen Islamist warlord Shamil Basayev.<sup>64</sup> The attackers were reported to be comprised of Chechen and Ingush members and made demands for an end to the second Russo/Chechen War, the withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya, and the recognition of Chechen independence. There was also the later claim, however, that Basayev and the group planned the attack not for nationalist causes, but rather to create an Islamic Emirate across the North Caucasus.<sup>65</sup> Despite the motivation for the takeover, the outcome was tragic. The crisis would continue for three days, with a final violent stand-off between the Chechen hostage-takers and Russian security forces on September 3. Approximately 330 people were killed during the crisis, including 186 children, and hundreds more wounded.<sup>66</sup>

Beyond the tragic loss of life, there were many controversial issues that surrounded the Beslan School Crisis. They ranged from how the hostage-takers successfully coordinated the logistical aspects of the attack to how the Russian

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<sup>64</sup> BBC News, "Timeline: Russian School Siege," September 3, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3621856.stm#schoolplan>

<sup>65</sup> Damien McElroy, "Ruthless Rebels Who Dream of an Islamic Empire," Telegraph.CO.UK, April 9, 2004, [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml;jsessionid=YV4DXD5HCCL2DQFIQMFCFFOAVCBQYIV0?epollResult=true&view=DETAILS&grid=P8&xml=/news/2004/09/05/wosse505.xml&\\_requestid=316612](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml;jsessionid=YV4DXD5HCCL2DQFIQMFCFFOAVCBQYIV0?epollResult=true&view=DETAILS&grid=P8&xml=/news/2004/09/05/wosse505.xml&_requestid=316612)

<sup>66</sup> BBC News, "Putin Meets Angry Beslan Mothers," September 2, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4207112.stm>

government managed the situation and its bloody conclusion. Among the disputes, there existed an important factor that demanded attention – among the thirty-two hostage-takers, two were positively identified as Chechen women.<sup>67</sup> The women's involvement in this tragedy signified a growing and disturbing trend in the use of women as terrorists by Islamic radicals in Chechnya.

The use of women in terrorist activities is typically uncommon throughout international society and viewed as beyond the pale in Western nations. In Chechnya, however, it became a regularly used tactic against the Russian opposition. Of the twenty-seven documented Chechen suicide attacks, twenty-two have involved women as primary actors, thus comprising 81% of total suicide attacks.<sup>68</sup> Chechen female suicide bombers, known as Black Widows, have also participated in organized assaults such as the aforementioned Beslan school crisis and the highly publicized 2002 Palace of Culture Theater crisis in Moscow, in which there were nineteen female hostage-takers involved. This phenomenon demands analysis because it reveals that Islamic fundamentalism has had an impact on the nature of the current Russo/Chechen engagement by providing a new ideology for some Chechen radicals to embrace, but, more importantly, by bringing a new tactic for Chechen radicals to use in the asymmetrical war against their Russian enemies.

First of all, the permissibility of women participating in suicide operations in an Islamic society such as Chechnya's must be addressed. In the realm of Islamic martyrdom operations throughout the Muslim world, the use of women as suicide

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<sup>67</sup> The two female terrorists were identified as Roza Nagaeva from the Chechen village Kirov-Yurt and Mairam Taburova from Mair-Tub. Information found at The Jamestown Foundation, "Document Suggests That the Feds Were in Charge During Beslan," *Chechnya Weekly*, Vol. 6, March 20, 2005, p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Schweitzer, 63; see appendix A

bombers or martyrs is a prevalent issue of debate that continues today. According to David Cook, the debate of female martyrs in regards to the Islamic faith, divine reward, and interpretations of the Qur'an has yet to be resolved.<sup>69</sup> The unsettled issue has not deterred women from being used in the majority of Chechen suicide attacks, as well as by other Islamic extremist groups in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Sri Lanka, and Palestine. This means it is necessary to take a cursory look at Muslim women's roles and how female martyrdom is viewed in Islamic society.

The main topic at issue is that Islamic societies are traditionally known for having a patriarchal heritage. Feminist authors, such as Gordon Means, label the practice of sexual inequality as contradictory to Islamic ideals and argue that the Qur'an serves as a charter of rights for Muslim women.<sup>70</sup> They contend that many areas of public policy ignore Islam's definition of women's rights and reject the notion that Muslim laws must be interpreted and executed exclusively by men. Advocates of Muslim women's rights, such as Mahnaz Afkhami of WLP (Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace), further argue that Muslim women are useful sources of political mobilization and "fair and reasonable representation of Muslim women in international debate will also help correct a debilitating tendency...to stereotype, label, and reject women's movements."<sup>71</sup>

In contrast, religious fundamentalists, who support purging Islamic society of all non-Muslim practices, view men as politically and religiously dominant over women.

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<sup>69</sup> David Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, Berkeley. University of California Press, 2005, p 146

<sup>70</sup> Gordon Means, "Women's Rights and Public Policy in Islam: Report of a Conference," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, (March 1987) pp 340-354, p 354

<sup>71</sup> Mahnaz Afkhami, *Faith and Freedom Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, London: I B Tauris, 1995, p 6

Many advocate the segregation and isolation of women and a strict definition of women's roles and responsibilities. This includes the veiling of women and their subjugation to men in a patriarchal household. In addition, it is often argued by Arabian Islamic movements that in contemporary Muslim society women's political participation should be limited to non-leadership positions and, under normal circumstances, should not be permitted to actively engage in war. As the Qur'an states,

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more [strength] than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).<sup>72</sup>

A contemporary interpretation of this verse depicts it as a precept for men's authority over women in Muslim society and denies women the right to participate in warfare.<sup>73</sup>

Given the controversial debate, the use of female martyrs is an interesting phenomenon. Though fundamentalist terrorist organizations maintain a patriarchal heritage in their religious and societal views, the use of females in warfare via suicide attacks is on the rise. According to Debra Zedalis, this might be because "according to the level of religiosity, terrorist organizations have different policies concerning women suicide bombers."<sup>74</sup> To members of terrorist organizations, suicide operations in general are acts of martyrdom that can be used by anyone, but only as a last resort. They further

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<sup>72</sup> Quote from the Qur'an, 4:34 see Ihab Saloul "Martyrdom, Gender, and Cultural Identity: The Cases of Four Palestinian Female Martyrs," Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, p. 13, <http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/iam/saloul/bestanden/Martyrdom,%20gender%20and%20cultural%20identity.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid , 13

<sup>74</sup> Debra D. Zedalis, "Female Suicide Bombers," Strategic Studies Institute of the U S Army War College, June 2004, p 11

argue that women can serve as combatants, but only after the majority of male combatants have been depleted.<sup>75</sup> To justify their beliefs, contenders assert that women cannot be denied the right to participate in *jihad* based on the grounds of traditional Islamic *hadith* literature.<sup>76</sup> In this context, Islamic radicals deem it permissible for women to act as martyrs in suicide operations.

According to Michael Scheuer, typical Western reactions to suicide bombers is to depict them as tragic figures, who are victims of poverty, mental illness, poor education, and despair because suicide in the West is thought to be caused by these types of elements.<sup>77</sup> It is assumed by many Westerners that the same holds true for Muslim society. However, this assumption is untrue. As Robert Pape points out, “we know that suicide terrorists can be college educated or uneducated, married or single, men or women, socially isolated or integrated, from age 13 to age 47.”<sup>78</sup> In addition, when examining the Qur’an the desire for an extremist to participate in martyrdom operations becomes clear despite his or her level of education, mental stability, or lifestyle. By acting as a martyr, he or she is assured a place in heaven with additional rewards for his or her family.<sup>79</sup> However, the issue becomes gray as other readings of the Qur’an teach

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid , 11

<sup>76</sup> Cook, 146. *hadith* refers to the traditional literature ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions

<sup>77</sup> Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris Why the West is Losing the War on Terror*, Washington D C.: Potomac Books Inc , 2004, p. 135.

<sup>78</sup> Pape, 344

<sup>79</sup> This is illustrated in the Qur’an 3:169-70. “And do not think those who have been killed in the way of Allah as dead; they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for. Rejoicing in what their Lord has given them of His bounty, and they rejoice for those who stayed behind and did not join them, knowing that they have nothing to fear and they shall not grieve ” see David Cook, “Radical Islam and Martyrdom Operations: What Should the United States Do?” James A Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, 2004, p. 1-2.

suicides and murders are forbidden acts in Islam.<sup>80</sup> As a result, the responsibility of interpreting the Qur'an's teachings is generally left up to the reader.

To clarify the permissibility of martyrdom, the Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations was created.<sup>81</sup> This document specifically asserts that suicide and martyrdom operations are justifiable:

Martyrdom or self-sacrifice operations are those performed by one or more people, against enemies far outstripping them in numbers and equipment, with prior knowledge that the operations will almost inevitably lead to death.

The form this usually takes nowadays is to wire up one's body, or a vehicle or suitcase with explosives, and then to enter amongst a conglomeration of the enemy, or in their vital facilities, and to detonate in an appropriate place there in order to cause the maximum losses in the enemy ranks, taking advantage of the element of surprise and penetration. Naturally, the enactor of the operation will usually be the first to die.

The name 'suicide-operations' used by some is inaccurate, and in fact this name was chosen by the Jews to discourage people from such endeavors. How great is the difference between one who commits suicide - because of his unhappiness, lack of patience and weakness or absence of *iman* [faith] and has been threatened with Hell-Fire - and between the self-sacrificer who embarks on the operation out of strength of faith and conviction, and to bring victory to Islam, by sacrificing his life for the upliftment of Allah's word.<sup>82</sup>

The document, which is applicable to any perceived enemy of Islam, proclaims suicide committed as part of a *jihad* against infidels is acceptable and the martyr is guaranteed entry into heaven. Contemporary Muslim authorities approve of the

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<sup>80</sup> The Qur'an 2:195 states "And spend in the way of Allah and cast not yourselves to perdition with your own hands..." Qur'an 4:29 states "...do not kill your people . "

<sup>81</sup> The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations is believed to be written by Yusuf al-Ayyiri, the leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia until his death in June 2003.

<sup>82</sup> The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations is available online at <http://journal.maine.com/pdf/martyrdom.pdf>; also look in *Understanding Jihad* written by David Cook, pp 143-144.

document's guidelines and justify martyrdom operations due to a relative lack of manpower and advanced technology possessed by their enemies.<sup>83</sup>

The appearance of Muslim female suicide attacks in such regions as Chechnya and the Middle East have been debated among prominent Islamic religious figures. In the choice between adhering to religious texts and fulfilling practical needs, extremists in support of suicide attacks have found an expedient justification that permits the use of women for their cause. As a result, many fundamentalist leaders opted to use female suicide attacks as opposed to abiding by cultural norms. This was illustrated by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, who in 2002 categorically renounced the use of women as suicide bombers.<sup>84</sup> Two years later, he defended the use of female suicide attacks in 2004 proclaiming “the fact that a woman took part for the first time in a Hamas operation marks a significant evolution for the Iz a Din al-Kassam brigades. The male fighters face many obstacles on their way to operations, and this is a new development in our fight against the enemy. The holy war is an imperative for all Muslim men and women.”<sup>85</sup>

Upon examination, it is obvious that the willingness of fundamentalist terrorist organizations to use women in spite of the paradoxical religious predicament it causes stems from an understanding of the tactical advantages:

- Female suicide terrorism minimizes cost and logistical needs while maximizing destruction.

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<sup>83</sup> Cook, 142.

<sup>84</sup> Arnon Regular, “Mother of Two Becomes First Female Suicide Bomber for Hamas,” *Haaretz*, January 16, 2004, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=383183&contrassID=1&subContrassID=5&subContrassID=0&listSrc=Y>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

- The use of women in suicide operations permits an element of surprise which results in a more effective attack; due to feminine stereotypes that cause a hesitancy to suspect or search them during combat operations, women have more access to targets than men do.
- The use of women increases the pool of recruits terrorist organizations can pick from, thus increasing the potential number of missions.
- Due to the associated stigma of using women in suicide tactics, successful bombings receive more publicity, which results in more attention and recruitment for the terrorist organization.
- The shock value of women combatants killing themselves to murder others also induces a negative psychological effect on an enemy, especially in Western nations.<sup>86</sup>

The first known female suicide attack was performed by a member of the Syrian Socialist National Party in 1985. Since then a rising number of extremist groups have used women as attackers. These include the Kurdistan Workers Party, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Al Aqsa Martyrs, Hamas, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. While the Syrian Socialist National Party claims the first ever female suicide attack, Chechen female martyrs are on record as killing the most people in a single attack; specifically, the Moscow theater attack in 2002 and the Beslan school crisis in 2004 resulted in approximately a total of 500 people being killed.<sup>87</sup>

While the appearance of Chechen female suicide bombers paralleled developments in the Middle East, the motivation for the Black Widows to participate in

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<sup>86</sup> Zedalis, 7

<sup>87</sup> Zedalis, 2.

such activities was not clearly linked to Islamic fundamentalist ideology.<sup>88</sup> A study conducted by Yoram Scheitzer revealed that out of twenty-six interviews conducted with Chechen female suicide bombers, twenty-two were secular Muslims prior to conducting an attack, while four were reported as traditionally religious.<sup>89</sup> A large portion of motivation is derived from the tragedies, frustration, and hopelessness that Chechens have experienced during the two Russo/Chechen wars. With the country being ripped apart and many of their family members dying in the process, desperate motivation is especially applicable to Chechen women who have suffered incredible losses or abuses during the Russo/Chechen wars.

The devastation and atrocities of the first Russo/Chechen War from 1994 to 1996, the lawlessness of the three year inter-war period, and the second Chechen War have had a dramatic impact on Chechen women. The tragic conditions created by war yielded feelings of despair and revenge. When combined with the fundamental ideals, influence, and training of radical Wahhabism, which gained a small, but solid base of support in Chechnya during the inter-war period, these feelings made Chechen women susceptible or willing participants in suicide operations. Schweitzer's study illustrated this by revealing nineteen of the twenty-six interviewed female suicide bombers were connected with Wahhabism after experiencing trauma.<sup>90</sup> According to Schweitzer, "traumatization was very likely one of the deepest leading motivational factors that drew the Chechen bombers into embracing terrorism ideologies and, ultimately, terrorist acts. In the

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<sup>88</sup> John Reuter, "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?" *The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya*, (September 16, 2004), pp. 24-26

<sup>89</sup> See appendix B.

<sup>90</sup> See appendix B

majority of cases...those who ultimately became bombers sought a connection to Wahhabist groups soon after the trauma and in direct reaction to it; in a minority of cases...they were already affiliated with the Wahhabist groups by marriage or family ties but began to become more deeply invested in seeking the terror-promoting aspects of these groups.”<sup>91</sup>

This point is further illustrated through interviews conducted with the Black Widow Zarema Muzhikhoeva, who attempted but failed to detonate herself outside a Moscow coffee shop in July 2003. Interviews showed that she was not a religious fanatic or fundamentalist. Rather, she was a woman who like many had experienced poverty, desperation, and hopelessness typical in a society that has experienced nothing but war for an entire decade. Zarema’s desire to avenge her husband’s death and the influence she received from Islamic extremists shows that “for many of Chechnya’s Black Widows, their motives lie somewhere between choice and coercion.”<sup>92</sup>

With the appearance of the Black Widows in the second Russo/Chechen conflict, various theories were devised to explain the causes for female involvement in such activities. A widely accepted theory, from which the name Black Widows is derived, is that war and instability have created the circumstances that produced the Black Widows. Many Chechen women were grief-stricken from the loss of husbands, fathers, brothers, and/or sons in the conflicts or during Russian *zachistaka* operations. In addition, Russian atrocities that women have witness or experienced, such as systematic torture and forced evictions, have also had profound effects on Chechen women. Such environmental

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<sup>91</sup> Schweitzer, 66-67

<sup>92</sup> Viv Groskup, “Chechnya’s Deadly Black Widows,” *Newstatesman*, September 6, 2004, p.2, <http://www.newstatesman.com/200409060023>.

conditions evoked feelings of hopelessness and despair that transformed some ordinary Chechen women into potential suicide bombers. This became apparent from interviews with various Chechen women; as one Chechen widow stated “it is a great sin to commit suicide, but I know why these women do it....Sometimes, I feel like I’d rather die than continue living through this nightmare.”<sup>93</sup>

Proponents of this theory, such as Anna Politkovskaya, assert that because of the grief and abuse suffered at the hands of the Russian Army, traumatized Chechen women are “virtually pre-assembled suicide attack units that independently volunteer for the role of suicide bombers.”<sup>94</sup> John Reuter makes the same point cogently:

Chechen suicide terrorism has indigenous roots...those who plan and implement suicide terrorism are analytically distinguishable from those women who actually carry out the attacks...Russia's brutal tactics in prosecuting the war have done much to radicalize the Chechen populace and thus increase the potential pool of suicide bombers. Utter despair and a pervasive sense of injustice lay at the core of suicide terrorism in Chechnya, where an entire generation of women without hope for the future has been created....This is a dangerous breeding ground for the type extremism that spawns suicide bombers.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, it is easy to see why many experts and observers conclude that Chechnya's Black Widows are driven to suicide terrorism by a dangerous combination of hopelessness, despair, and grief. The horrendous conditions of the Chechen wars and human rights abuses perpetrated by Russian forces caused feelings of rage, desperation, and hopelessness. These feelings resulted in creating vulnerability in Chechen women to the sway of Islamic fundamentalism and ultimately being recruited into terrorist networks.

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<sup>93</sup> Michael Manville, “Black Widows terrorize Russia,” *Toronto Star*, (July 13, 2003) <http://www.cdi.org/russia/264-10.cfm>.

<sup>94</sup> John Reuter, “Chechnya’s Suicide Bombers. Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?” *The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya*, (September 16, 2004), p. 18

<sup>95</sup> John Rueter, “The Calculus of Chechnya’s Suicide Bombers,” *Chechnya Weekly*, Vol 6, (January 12, 2005), p. 6.

By providing women with spiritual or emotional support, religious extremists were able to play upon feelings of hopelessness and exploit the grief that Chechen women experienced in a cruel, war-torn environment. According to Scott Atran, the transformation from a grieving widow to a Black Widow would be an easy process for extremists to accomplish because “support and recruitment for suicide terrorism occur...when converging political, economic, and social trends produce diminishing opportunities relative to expectations, thus generating frustrations that radical organizations can exploit....Frustrated with their future, the appeal of routine national life declines, and suicide terrorism gives some perceived purpose to act altruistically, in the potential terrorist’s mind, for the welfare of a future generation.”<sup>96</sup>

Though the grief theory is convincing, it is not the whole answer. After all, thousands of Chechen women have witnessed the deaths of loved ones, experienced some form of personal violence or persecution, and have become poverty stricken. Yet, most of them have not become suicide bombers. It is clear that grief and despair is a contributor to Chechen female suicide terror, but not the only cause.

Another theory, highly endorsed by Moscow officials, asserts that women were systematically abducted, raped, blackmailed, brainwashed or drugged, and forced to execute terrorist attacks. According to Russia, the perpetrators of these abductions are either Chechen militants or Islamic radicals. This theory is common among Russian authorities who used it as a means to profile Chechen female suicide bombers. Russian authorities assert that Chechen Black Widows and insurgents received money, training, manpower, and ideological inspiration from international Islamic organizations.<sup>97</sup> Many

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<sup>96</sup>Scott Atran, “Mishandling Suicide Terrorism,” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Summer 2004) pp 78-79

of their claims are based on the well-publicized case of Zarema Muzhikhoeva, a Black Widow who was captured by Russian police in July 2003 as she attempted to carry out a suicide attack at a Moscow downtown café. During interrogations following her apprehension, Muzhikhoeva claimed that she was kidnapped, drugged, and then manipulated by religious extremists to participate in the attack. Her testimony, however, was later proven inconsistent and contradictory. Though she later admitted to fabricating parts of her story, Russian officials used her case as a basis of analysis when examining the Black Widows dilemma. They claimed that the very existence of female suicide bombers was evidence of Chechen links to international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. While the Muzhikhoeva case was a breakthrough and provided useful information, the theory of abduction/manipulation is unconvincing because there is little other evidence to support it.<sup>98</sup> It overstates the role of radical Islam in Chechen suicide bombings. While terrorist recruiters most certainly use religious fundamentalism as a component of recruitment, there is no reliable evidence that it is the primary motivator for Chechen Black Widows and other suicide bombers. Extremist Wahhabism does not constitute the majority of Chechnya's practiced religions; rather, traditional Sufism, which stresses non-violence, has a much stronger base of support in Chechen society. However, it is not difficult to see how the war-torn conditions in Chechnya could have played an underlying factor in the spread of Wahabbism to militant factions, thus

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<sup>97</sup> C.J. Chivers and Steven Lee Meyers, "Chechen Rebels Mainly Driven by Nationalism", *New York Times*, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

<sup>98</sup> Reuter, "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?" p. 23

providing the means for more suicide attacks.<sup>99</sup> In addition, there is only one case where Black Widows referred to religion and that was the attack on a Moscow theater in 2002.

A final theory states that Chechen women become suicide bombers out of a simple desire for revenge; their motivation was not ideological or political, but rather personal and family driven. The crimes and murders perpetrated by Russian troops against Chechen men and families led to women's desperation to avenge the deaths of their loved ones. Out of rage and hopelessness, women sought out Chechen or Islamic radicals from whom they received training and assistance in their quest for revenge. This was a popular theory that received much publicity in 2003 and 2004 from media sources that constantly used the label Black Widows when describing the Chechen women.<sup>100</sup> This theory was exemplified in the case of Luiza Gazueva, a Black Widow who killed herself and Chechen District Commander Geidar Gadzhiev in November 2001. Gazueva's motivation for participating in the assassination was in retaliation to the murder of her husband during a Russian interrogation.<sup>101</sup> Although revenge is obviously a factor too, it does not explain the actions of all the Black Widows.

The various Black Widow theories are all plausible, but the most convincing theory would be a combination of them all. All three theories are correct in asserting that the Black Widows are products of the war-torn conditions of Chechnya. The grief, hopelessness, or desires for revenge that arose from the Russo/Chechen conflicts provide a basis of motivation for Chechen women to become involved in suicide terror. But their

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<sup>99</sup> Reuter, "The Calculus of Chechnya's Suicide Bombers," pp 4-6

<sup>100</sup> Jessica West, "Feminist IR and the Case of the Black Widows: Reproducing Gendered Divisions," *Innovations A Journal of Politics*, Vol. 5, 2004-2005, p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> Reuter, 4-6

aspirations could not be realized without the imported tactics that Islamic fundamentalism brought with it to Chechnya. As Schweitzer argues, “the *jihadist* ideology...provides ill-fated psychological help to the trauma victim in the short run as a result of the terror-sponsoring organization’s distorted use of Islam to further its political goals.”<sup>102</sup> Men such as Shamil Basayev and Ibn al-Khattab, who had proven links to al-Qaeda and trained in countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, assisted in bringing suicide terror to Chechnya.<sup>103</sup> Without the training and instruction from these men and *jihadists* ideology, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the Black Widows would not have participated in suicide operations. Whether these tactics were forced upon grieving Chechen women, or sought out as a tool for vengeful widows to realize their aspirations for revenge is open to speculation because there is not enough data to analyze. However, all of the theories only make sense against the background of a war for Chechen nationalism. There would be no Black Widows if Chechnya were free and the Russian occupiers were gone.

With the radicalization of Islam in the 1990s, the Black Widows and Chechen suicide bombing became common occurrences in the second Russo/Chechen War. As previously mentioned, there were no documented Chechen suicide attacks during the first Russo/Chechen War, as opposed to the twenty-seven incidences since the year 2000. The majority of these attacks have taken place within Chechnya, though some have ventured outside its borders, including Russian territory. While the majority of Chechnya-based

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<sup>102</sup> Schweitzer, 68

<sup>103</sup> U.S. Department of State, *U S Designates Chechen Rebel Leader as Terrorist*, Press Release, January 2004, <http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/Archive/2004/Jan/07-157373.html> , and *Omar Ibn al-Khattab* [http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/profiles/omar\\_ibn\\_al-khattab.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/profiles/omar_ibn_al-khattab.htm).

suicide attacks did not receive much international attention due to Russian media restrictions, attacks in Russia, particularly Moscow, were highly publicized.

The focus on Moscow-based attacks pointed out an important occurrence of Chechen suicide terrorism. Chechen insurgents were not limited to domestic targets and their capabilities to execute external attacks were rapidly developing. A case in point is the Moscow theater crisis of 2002 which brought intense media exposure to Chechen terrorism and the Black Widows. While this attack provided Putin with ample public support for counter-terrorist operations against Chechnya, which included support from U.S. President George W. Bush, the real significance of the event was that forty-nine Chechen insurgents successfully infiltrated Russian borders without being detected. Clearly, this incident showed the world that the logistical complexity of recruiting, training, and transporting thirty men and nineteen Black Widows to Moscow was mastered by Chechen rebels.<sup>104</sup>

The reason why Black Widows and other Chechen suicide bombers are used is because, in a tactical sense, suicide bombing is an effective method of fighting for Chechen insurgents, especially in counter-balancing the asymmetries of force in the ongoing conflict. Putin's invasion in October 1999 was 100,000 strong as compared to Yeltsin's deployment of 24,000 troops in the first war.<sup>105</sup> Even after troop reductions, there are approximately 60,000 Russian soldiers against 5,000 active Chechen resistance fighters. With Russian forces posing such a formidable risk, suicide bombing is a discrete and destructive tactic which requires minimal planning as opposed to an organized attack. Typically, it is easy for any suicide bomber to get close to a desired

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<sup>104</sup> John Rueter, "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers. Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?" p 14.

<sup>105</sup> Tony Wood, "The Case for Chechnya," *New Left Review* 30, (November/December 2004), p. 28.

target undetected and there is no need for a planned escape route. This has been especially prevalent in Chechnya where most successful attacks or assassinations were accomplished via suicide bombings.<sup>106</sup> In addition, it is extremely difficult to counter suicide attacks because thus far there is no common profile of Chechen suicide bombers. Although there are very few people who become suicide terrorists they often come from different backgrounds and lead different lifestyles. Motives, family-life, and past experiences are diverse among the identified perpetrators, so it is virtually impossible to identify them before an attack.<sup>107</sup>

Analysis of Black Widows and other Chechen suicide attacks show there have been three different categories of targets. The first category of attacks are directed towards civilians. This is the most dangerous type because it inflicts the largest number of casualties and has no apparent political or military motive. For example, in July 2003 two Black Widows blew themselves up at rock festival in Moscow. Fifteen people were killed and another fifty were wounded in the blast. There were no demands or statements made as to why they carried out this mission.

The second type of target aims at specific individuals and government compounds. Typically these types are directed towards pro-Moscow government officials and state buildings in and around the North Caucasus area. Examples of these include the assassination of then Chechen President Akhmed Kadyrov in 2003 and the attack on a Russian FSB headquarters in Magas, Ingushetia later that year.

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<sup>106</sup> The only two conventional attacks during the second Chechen/Russo war have been raids on Nazran in 2004 and Nalchik in 2005; all other documented attacks have been either small terrorist ambushes or suicide bombings

<sup>107</sup>Pape, p. 344.

The third and largest category of targets is Russian military and police installations and personnel. This is not only the most popular objective, but was also the first target engaged by a Black Widow in June of 2000.<sup>108</sup>

The aforementioned targets are not chosen at random. Instead, they are selected by Chechen extremists as a means to further specific purposes. According to Robert Pape, suicide attacks are political in nature and designed “to coerce a target government to change policy, to mobilize additional recruits and financial support, or both.”<sup>109</sup> It is evident that in Chechnya’s case, all these elements are present. The heart of the Russo/Chechen conflict has revolved around Chechens’ desire to liberate their country from Russian intervention and control. This has been a powerful movement since the Chechen Revolution in 1991 and continues to be the primary motivation of the Chechen resistance. There is also the need, however, to attract attention, support, and funding for the continued existence of the Chechen insurgency. This has been a problem for Chechnya since it has not been recognized as an independent republic or its army as an official military organization. Recognition will not come from the international community until Russia does so first. As a result, Chechnya has predominantly remained isolated from international aid. However, assistance in the form of training and monetary funding has been moderately successful with help from radical Islamic organizations that come from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkey.<sup>110</sup> It can be assumed, however, that their motivations for assisting Chechnya are primarily

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<sup>108</sup> 22-year-old Khava Barayeva became the first publicized Chechen female suicide bomber when she drove a truck filled with explosives into an OMON compound in the village of Alkgan Yurt. This was followed by six additional suicide bombings directed at military targets throughout Chechnya in July 2000.

<sup>109</sup> Pape, 344

<sup>110</sup> Murphy, 140-153

based on the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in the North Caucasus region, rather than on the sole desire for Chechen independence.

While it is obviously clear that the first Russo/Chechen conflict began as an ethnic/nationalist struggle that initially did not involve female suicide terrorism, the second war has a predominantly religious tone and female suicide bombing is a common occurrence. Chechen Wahhabist terrorist groups who employ women for martyr operations apparently contradict the principles of their religion, as well as of traditional social norms. Perhaps this development indicates that the conflict has become confused as both an ethnic-nationalist and a fundamental-religious battle. However, fundamentalism in Chechnya remains weak and the use of Black Widows seems to be mainly a desperate effort of Chechen nationalists to struggle against superior Russian forces.

Until a peaceful resolution is accomplished, research indicates that terrorist organizations in Chechnya and throughout the world will continue to employ female suicide bombers; therefore, targeted nations should create a comprehensive counterterrorism plan which recognizes the increasing potential of women attackers.<sup>111</sup> This assertion illustrates an important weakness in some Western nations' counterterrorism strategies. As Jessica Stern points out, when using the United States as an example, "the official profile of a typical terrorist -- developed by the Department of Homeland Security to scrutinize visa applicants and resident aliens -- applies only to men."<sup>112</sup> It is hopeful then, that with examples such the Chechen Black Widows,

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<sup>111</sup> Zedalis, 12.

<sup>112</sup> Jessica Stern "When Bombers are Women," *Washington Post*, December 18, 2003, p A35, available on Lexis-Nexis online database, <http://web.lexis->

international society will re-define its classifications of terrorists and include women in the category.

## CHAPTER 7

### ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM VERSUS CHECHEN NATIONALISM

In contemporary international society Islamic fundamentalism has become a vital topic of discourse. The growth of violent Islamic extremism and the mass casualties suffered at the hands of terrorists are of the utmost concern to international security officials. With global media coverage focusing on terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and its involvement in the escalating crises in Iraq and Afghanistan, the examination of Islamic fundamentalism typically draws the attention of Western governmental officials to the Middle East. While the Middle East is perhaps the most studied region for an understanding of Islamic terrorism, since the mid-1990s Islamic extremist ideology has also filtered into Chechnya's war-torn society and produced devastating effects. The high publicity the Black Widows and other Chechen suicide operations have received in the international media, as well as the declaration by Russian officials that the current conflict in Chechnya is a part of the global war on terrorism, has resulted in Chechnya being labeled as one of the forefronts for global *jihad*.<sup>113</sup>

The assertion that Chechnya posed a dangerous threat to Russia and the international community was a vital element in Putin's justification for invading

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<sup>113</sup> Robert T Mclean, "Chechen Jihad," *Colaboraciones n°725, Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos GEES*, December 30, 2005, p 3.

Chechnya in 1999. As he explained in July 2000, “Russian soldiers today are at the forefront of the struggle with Islamic extremism. We are the witnesses of the creation of an extremist international in the so-called arc of instability beginning in the Philippines and ending in Kosovo.” He continued by adding, “Europe should get on its knees and show a large amount of gratitude for the fact that we struggle against it, so far, unfortunately, on our own.”<sup>114</sup> Following the September 11 attacks, Western governments became more open to Putin’s contention, which helped validate the argument that Russia’s intervention was justified. In addition, tragedies such as the Moscow Theater and Beslan School crises, as well as the media’s attention on men like Shamil Basayev and Ibn al-Khattab for their involvement in leading and training Chechen suicide operatives, further categorized the second Chechen conflict as a war against terrorism.

While the terrorist tactics used in the aforementioned tragedies illustrate the correspondence between groups of Chechen radicals and foreign Islamic terrorist organizations, there remains debate as to what role Islamic fundamentalism plays in the second Russo/Chechen War. The convenient labeling of the Chechen resistance as part of the global *jihad* movement demands scrutiny as to what it is trying to accomplish – national sovereignty or the creation of an Islamic Emirate in the North Caucasus region?

Though Islamic fundamentalist ideology and terrorism have a presence in Chechnya, a close examination reveals that Chechen aspirations for independence are more powerful than Islamic fundamentalist ideology. As Tony Wood explains, “radicalizing influences from overseas have played an important part in Chechnya’s fate, affecting the battle tactics and political complexion of the Chechen resistance movement.

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<sup>114</sup> Mark A. Smith, *Russia and Islam*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, August 2001, p. 1.

But they have not altered its core substance, which was and is directed towards achieving national self-determination.”<sup>115</sup> This chapter will support this argument by examining the emergence of Islamic extremism in Chechnya and show that while links exist between radical Chechen militants and Islamic terrorist organizations, the Chechen separatist government is secular in nature, rather than a proponent of Islamic *jihad*.

The reality is that the Chechen resistance movement began and remains completely secular. Achieving worldwide Muslim domination or establishing an Islamic Emirate has never been the Chechen separatist aim. When Chechen separatists were faced with the overwhelming force of the Russian military, the virtual annihilation of Grozny, and no aid from the international community, some found themselves in a situation that forced them to accept help from religiously fundamental groups that promoted a terrorist ideology. While the majority of the world views Wahhabism as an ideology that fortifies global *jihad*, in Chechnya it is viewed as a tool on behalf of a nationalist cause against a repressive regime.<sup>116</sup>

The Islamicization movement in Chechnya does not appear to have resulted from a traditional commitment to Islamic beliefs and practices. According to Edward Walker, “evidence suggests that Islam was less well entrenched in Chechnya prior to the war in 1993-96 than it was in many other parts of the former Soviet Union.”<sup>117</sup> Walker further explains that this has important implications because if the Islamic revival in Chechnya had truly been a re-emergence of traditional beliefs and practices that were repressed during the Soviet period, then traditional conservatism and political moderation would

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<sup>115</sup> Wood, 124.

<sup>116</sup> Schweitzer, 74.

<sup>117</sup> Walker, 2

more than likely have prevailed; if, however, the embrace of Islam was more political in nature emerging from the traumas and insecurities in Chechnya's war-torn society, then there is a stronger likelihood that Chechnya's Islamic revival would be more fundamentalist and anti-Russian.<sup>118</sup> When examining Islam in Chechnya since 1991, it appears that the latter of the two occurred. The Islamicization movement became more important themes in Chechnya only after the first conflict was imminent. This implies that the war led to the politicization of Islam, instead of vice-versa.

This argument is supported by other observers such as Steven Cornell. Cornell argues, "the suffering of the first war caused an increase in religiosity both among civilians and fighters. Moreover, since the use of Western conceptual arguments of human rights, democracy, and self-determination brought no support from the West, Islamic rhetoric remains the only option available to Chechen rebels to attract the desperately needed foreign assistance."<sup>119</sup> Thus, Islam provided a unifying ideology for the Chechen population after the devastation of the war and created a bridge for needed assistance from Middle Eastern Islamic countries.

As discussed in the previous chapter, suicide tactics were imported by Islamic fundamentalists and utilized to counter-balance the asymmetries of force in the ongoing conflict. But the use of terrorist tactics proved to be a strategic disaster for the international legitimacy of the separatist government. When the Chechen conflict appeared in the international media, attention was primarily centered on terrorism, tragedy, and radical Islam. As a result, the aspirations for Chechens to gain

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>119</sup> Steven E. Cornell, "The War Against Terrorism and the Conflict in Chechnya. A Case for Distinction," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 27, (Summer/Fall 2003), p. 174, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/forum/27-2pdfs/Cornell.pdf>.

independence were negatively affected. This is primarily due to the association of the resistance movement with Wahhabi radicalism, the internal strife between Chechen moderates and Islamist radicals, and the changing global political climate in the war on terrorism.

The incorporation of Chechnya into the global war on terrorism occurred with the influx of Middle Eastern Islamic fundamentalists and *mujahideen* who trained and fought alongside Chechen militant radicals towards the end of the first Russo/Chechen conflict. The first conflict, which lasted from 1994 to 1996, concluded with Chechnya's quasi-victory and *de facto* recognition of independence by Russia. But the consequences of war left Chechnya in poor shape in the war's aftermath. Chechen government officials began the overwhelming task of recovery, but the country's infrastructure was destroyed, the economy had collapsed, civil institutions were disintegrated, and thousands of refugees had yet to return. International aid was scarce, and despite the cooperative efforts of Alexander Lebed and the signed cease-fire agreement, strained relationships continued between Chechnya and Russia. Even when Russian Prime Ministers Yevgeny Primakov and Sergei Stepashin promoted strategies towards working with then Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov to rectify the situation, promised aid was never given to Chechnya.

By 1997 Chechnya turned into a nest of insurgent activity, clan violence intensified, and terrorism and kidnappings became major problems. Many Russian and Western technical specialists working within the country's borders were targeted, as well as pro-Moscow Chechen government officials. Kidnapping and ransom collection became a huge source of income for radical Chechen groups who were willing to commit

such deeds. By 1999, there were 1,843 abduction cases being monitored by the Russian Ministry of Interior and the total income from abduction activities reached an estimated \$200 million, which exceeded the sale of oil or the allocations from Russia's federal budget.<sup>120</sup>

With different groups of guerrillas running rampant throughout rural neighborhoods and villages, Chechen kidnappings and terrorism became increasingly violent and progressed closer towards Russian borders. The first incident noticed by the international community was on December 16, 1996, when six workers of the International Committee of the Red Cross were murdered by masked Chechen rebels in an attempt to disrupt the Chechen elections in January.<sup>121</sup> Chechen field commanders such as Abri Barayev, Salman Raduyev, Abu Movsayev, and the Akhmadov brothers, who were rumored to have ties to Moscow officials which allowed them to operate inside Russia, were key players in Chechen kidnapping rings.<sup>122</sup> It was easy for many of these field commanders to operate since the break-up of Soviet Union left plenty of weapons in the area. Poorly funded Russian bases and under paid soldiers were also helpful in their willingness to take bribes and smuggle weapons or other necessities in through Dagestan.

It was under these circumstances that more radical Islamic elements in Chechnya gained power. Until the 1990s, Chechens predominantly practiced Sunni Islam and adhered to the Sufi *turuq* (path or method of instruction). Sufi Islamic practices were intertwined with the *'adat* system of social norms which were largely based on local clan

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<sup>120</sup> Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p 114

<sup>121</sup> Khassan Baiev, *Grief of My Heart: Memoirs of a Chechen Surgeon*, New York: Walker & Company, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>122</sup> Tishkov, 120.

customs which varied throughout the North Caucasus. During the Soviet era, Islam was repressed in Chechnya by vast amounts of anti-religious propaganda and bureaucratic restrictions. As a result, the post-Stalinist generation was moderately secular in matters of formal worship and divine belief in Chechnya. However, even with harsh restrictions, many families maintained their adherence to some ritual aspects of Islam through local customs. The religious climate then took a dramatic turn in the late 1980s with reforms under Gorbachev's regime which loosened restrictions on religious practices. Clerical activities resumed, public worship increased, and religious texts were published and distributed among the population.

Even though Islamic religious practices made a comeback in the 1980s, Chechnya's declaration of independence in 1991 was purely secular, making no references to Islam or Allah. This disturbed Chechens who favored the Islamicization of the state, but General Jokhar Dudayev was not open to any suggestions for a religious based government:

There is a time for everything. There are many Muslim countries in the world, but few of them live in strict observance of Shari'a law... The roots have been badly damaged by the Communists, and we cannot restore them in an hour or even a year... If we declare the rule of the Shari'a law today, tomorrow you will demand that the heads and hands of offender be cut off... you are not ready for that... let us put our souls in order according to the Qur'an, and our lives according to the constitution.<sup>123</sup>

Dudayev's reluctance to declare Islamic law in Chechnya came about for two reasons. First, Dudayev wanted to establish a working relationship with Russia despite the foreshadowed 1994 conflict. Since the Soviet Union promoted atheism for so long, Dudayev wanted a secular political platform to stand on for negotiation purposes, which he promoted until his death in 1996. Secondly, Dudayev recognized that there was still a

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<sup>123</sup> Quote from Dudayev's speech during the last prewar convention of the Chechen elders in 1993; see Tishkov, 169.

large population of people residing in Chechnya who were not Muslims. In his eyes, an Islamic government could have potentially resulted in unstable relations among ethnic Russian and Chechens, which would affect diplomatic relations with Russia.

Despite the secular Chechen government maintained by Dudayev, Chechen Islamic fundamentalism began to spread in the form of Wahhabism, otherwise known as “pure Islam”. Wahhabism is based on the fundamentalist Sunni Islamic campaign founded by Abd al-Wahhab in eighteenth century Arabia and is the core of the present-day radical Islam movement.<sup>124</sup> Wahhabism advocates a literal interpretation of the Qur’an, charges practitioners of Sufism and Shi’ism with apostasy, and rejects secular authority and institutions. It also practices a strict form of Shari’a law, which is a legal code of Islam based on the teachings of the Qur’an.<sup>125</sup> Though traces of this austere religion already existed in the North Caucasus region, it did not receive significant attention until the Russo/Chechen War erupted in 1994. As Arabain *mujahideen* arrived

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<sup>124</sup> David Cook. *Understanding Jihad*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, p 74.

<sup>125</sup> Distinctions between ‘traditional’ Islam and ‘fundamentalist’ Islam were exemplified during the Soviet-Afghan War. Traditionalist Islam refers to Muslims who support forms of Islam traditionally practiced in most parts of the Islamic world, more specifically, traditionalists support Islamic beliefs that accommodate practices, beliefs, laws, and social institutions not specifically prescribed by the Qur’an or the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. In contrast, fundamentalists, advocate a literal interpretation of the Qur’an, oppose conformity or accommodation to traditions or social conditions, and support the return of the Caliphate. Distinctions also exist between moderate, radical, and militant forms of Islam. moderate Islam generally means tolerant Islam or one that is willing to accommodate both other religions as well as other forms of Islam itself, radical Islam means the opposite - it is an Islam that is intolerant of non-Islamic beliefs and practices, and accuses tolerant forms of apostasy. Militant Islam is any form of Islam that advocates the use of violence in an effort to impose specific Islamic beliefs on others. “ . in principle, then, one could be a militant traditionalist— as indeed was the case for some of the *mujahideen* parties fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan that were willing to take up arms in defense of traditional way of practicing Islam and tribal law. likewise, one could be a radical but non-militant fundamentalist.. which advocates the establishment of a caliphate throughout the Muslim world but by non-violent means ” See Edward K. Walker. *Roots of Rage: Militant Islam in Central Asia*, presentation from “Central Asia and Russia: Responses to the ‘War on Terrorism,’” a panel discussion held at the University of California, Berkeley on October 29, 2001, p 2, Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies; Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies; the Caucasus and Central Asia Program, Institute of International Studies at University of California, Berkeley <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~iseees/>

in Chechnya to participate in the conflict, they brought the teachings and tenets of Wahhabism and were also able to stimulate already existing radical proponents.<sup>126</sup>

One of the most prominent figures to arrive in Chechnya during the Wahhabist movement was Samir bin Salekh al-Suweilem, more commonly referred to as Amir Khattab, or al-Khattab. Khattab, a Saudi veteran of the war in Afghanistan, arrived in February 1995 with desires of participating in what he viewed as Chechnya's *jihad*.<sup>127</sup> Khattab's arrival in Chechnya made a dramatic impact on the first Russo/Chechen conflict as he already had experience fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. In a short time, Khattab became well known throughout Chechnya for his effective insurgent training methods. He also provided much needed funding for Islamic fundamentalists in Chechnya.<sup>128</sup> His financial support came from his wealthy background and from propaganda which included video clips of terrorist operations that were used as training aides for new recruits. By broadcasting these videos on the Internet, Khattab was able to attract donations and financing from terrorist organizations outside Chechnya with video sales and by showing potential Islamic financiers what they are buying for their money.<sup>129</sup>

In addition to Khattab's financial support, Russian intelligence also reported that Chechen rebels received international funding from the Middle East to aid the insurgency and to promote the spread of Islamic fundamentalist beliefs throughout the republic.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Wood, 130.

<sup>127</sup> Paul Murphy, *The Wolves of Islam*, Washington D C . Brassey's Inc , 2004, p. 32.

<sup>128</sup> Gall, 308.

<sup>129</sup> Murphy, 34.

<sup>130</sup> Tishkov, 175.

Reports of this type sparked controversial debate on the connections between Chechen insurgents and Middle Eastern terrorist organizations in the media.

To briefly summarize, Russia insists that strong ties to al-Qaeda have firmly imbedded Chechnya in the global web of terrorist networks. As evidence, Russia emphasizes that several Arabian *mujahideen*, such as Khattab, have links to al-Qaeda which proved to be a fundamental asset in setting up a number of terrorist training camps in and around Dagestan. Russian authorities proclaim that in these clandestine training camps Chechen suicide bombers received instruction from terrorist agents, Arab psychologists, and demolition experts for use in combat operations.<sup>131</sup> According to Russian intelligence reports, training camps and materials were funded by Osama bin Laden, who donated at least \$25 million and dispatched numerous fighters to Chechnya, including Khattab. Russia's assertion was validated when the United States confirmed Khattab had ties to al-Qaeda when it added three Chechen rebel units to its list of terrorist organizations in 2003.<sup>132</sup> In addition, Russia's FSB has supposedly detected contact between Chechen radicals and groups such as Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Liberation Party, and pro-Islamic organizations in Britain and Germany.<sup>133</sup>

While militant Islam in the northern Caucasus has definitely been strengthened by the second war, scholars such as Brian Williams of London University feel there may be error in subscribing to Russian intelligence and propaganda that promotes Russia's anti-terrorist campaign. This sentiment comes from the belief that Russia is trying to depict the Chechen resistance as an out-of-control, crazed terrorist organization funded by al-

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<sup>131</sup> Zedalis, 10

<sup>132</sup> Tishkov, 233.

<sup>133</sup> Murphy, 149-152.

Qaeda. The propagandist objective is to blunt the public's negative response to Russia's counter-terrorist campaign that has been criticized for the barbarity of Russian military and security forces against Chechen civilians. As Williams asserted in the year 2001, "the U.S. State Department and CIA found no links between Osama bin Laden and the Chechens during their extensive investigation following the bombings of American embassies in east Africa. Russia's shrill accusations of an unholy alliance between the fundamentalist Taliban government in distant Afghanistan and the Chechens are just as far-fetched."<sup>134</sup>

Though Williams makes convincing points in his argument, the contention that *no* links exist between various Chechen rebels and foreign terrorist organizations is not supportable. According to a 2005 estimate by Mark Kramer of Harvard University, "as many as 400 to 500 *jihadists* have been fighting alongside a Chechen force that often numbered less than 2,000 guerillas."<sup>135</sup> Though the real extent of international backing for the Chechen resistance is impossible to determine, the influence *jihadists* and *mujajideen* have had on Chechen radicals is apparent in the dramatic increase in terrorist attacks since 1999. Documented Chechen suicide attacks began in the year 2000 and peaked in the years 2002 to 2004.<sup>136</sup> The amount of logistical requirements (reconnaissance, training, purchasing of equipment, etc.) and planning to execute many of these attacks indicates that support from external terrorist organizations had to begin and be maintained prior to the initial phase of the second conflict. The increased

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<sup>134</sup> Brian Williams, "The Russo-Chechen War: A Threat to Stability in the Middle East and Eurasia?" *Middle East Policy Journal*, Vol. 8, (March 2001), pp. 145-146.  
[http://www.mepc.org/journal\\_vol8/0103\\_williams.asp](http://www.mepc.org/journal_vol8/0103_williams.asp)

<sup>135</sup> Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror and a Strategy for Getting it Right*, New York. Henry Holt and Company, 2005, p. 96.

<sup>136</sup> See appendix A

capabilities of Chechen radicals to wire and use VBIEDs (vehicle born improvised explosive devices), carry out sniper attacks, and target oil pipelines also illustrate the effectiveness of training provided by Islamic terrorist networks.<sup>137</sup>

Though links to terrorist organizations exist, they do not encompass the entire Chechen insurgency or the separatist government. There is no denying that some groups of Chechen radicals use imported terrorist tactics and have links to the global *jihad* movement, which is exemplified in part by the Black Widows and suicide terrorism. Yet, in reporting on these phenomena, the international media has put too much emphasis on the presence of foreign fighters that operate within the republic's borders. With tragedies such as the Beslan School crisis and the high number of attacks perpetrated by Black Widows the media's focus on Islamic foreign influence is natural; but contentions that there are numerous *mujahideen* in Chechnya distort their actual numbers and portray Chechnya as a breeding ground for terrorism. According to Tony Wood, "military analysts have at various times estimated the total number of foreign fighters to be anywhere between 200 and 400; in March 2002 pro-Moscow forces in Chechnya declared that there were 250-300 foreigners operating there. Given this...they would account for 1-2 percent of the total rebel strength and, therefore, cannot decisively influence the course of the war."<sup>138</sup> To add to this, the cultural and linguistic barriers between foreign fighters and the Chechen resistance prevent the fusion of radical Islamic beliefs with the majority of the Chechen resistance. In addition, the Black Widows were not entirely tools of Islamic fundamentalism.

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<sup>137</sup> Benjamin, 96.

<sup>138</sup> Wood, 138

Another important point is despite the lack of international aid, there is an absence of open aggression towards the West, which is common occurrence in radical Islam. The Chechen resistance has made no professions of hostility towards Western civilization or criticized the West's involvement in the Middle East. For these reasons, it can be inferred that foreign radical Islamic elements were unable to instill a firm ideological presence in Chechnya. The Chechen resistance seems to be a secular, separatist movement and not a member of a terrorist coalition or pawn of global *jihad*.

The Chechen separatist government's goal is independence, but there are radical elements in Chechnya that received training and monetary support from external sources. This is a significant indicator of Islamic fundamentalists' attempts to disseminate international *jihad* to regions outside the Middle East. Contemporary studies reveal that Islamic terrorist groups operate in at least sixty countries throughout the world.<sup>139</sup> This high number reflects a significant growth of activity since the 1970s when modern fundamentalists began their fight to restore the Caliphate in Afghanistan. During this time, Middle Eastern *mujahideen* and *jihadists* began their struggle to stimulate revolutionary change in their society and restore the greatness of the Islamic empire.<sup>140</sup>

Islamic aspirations of triumph were mirrored by frustrations with Western nations. Tensions ran deep because many Muslim fundamentalists believed the power that Islamic kingdoms once enjoyed had deteriorated for two significant reasons.<sup>141</sup> The

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<sup>139</sup> Marc Grossman. "Diplomacy and the War Against Terrorism," Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, U S State Department, Washington D C , March 18, 2003  
<http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/18900.htm>

<sup>140</sup> *Mujahideen* refers to a group of people devoted to Wahhabism, who fight *jihad* wherever it is needed, the term *jihadis* refers to militant activists who feel estranged from secular social and political order and threatened by westernization

first was the intense military and political pressure put on the Islamic world by Christianity. This was heightened especially after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which was the last multinational Islamic empire. The second reason was the cooperation of Islamic rulers with non-Muslim states such as the Christians, Jews, and Hindus. Primary aggression was focused against nearby pro-Western Muslim regimes like Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and Hosni Mubarak's Egypt. The strategic goal for *ihadists* was to overthrow secular Muslim rulers, replace them with Islamic regimes, and then engage Western nations such as Israel or the United States.

In the 1990s, Islamic fundamentalists sought to realize their goals by calling for a new global *ihad* against the United States and its Western allies, otherwise referred to as the "the Zionist-Crusader alliance and their collaborators."<sup>142</sup> This *ihad* movement took place amidst many important events within the international community such as the withdrawal of Russian troops from Afghanistan, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Gulf War which entailed the permanent stationing of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia. These events were significant in the eyes of Islamic fundamentalists because they illustrated that it was possible for a great power such as the Soviet Union to suffer defeat and fall. At the same time, they reminded fundamentalists of the ever-lasing threat of Western imperial domination. These events focused Islamic extremist aggression outwards from pro-Western Muslim rulers to more important enemies such as the United States, Britain, and Israel. This outward aggression, which took form in tragedies such as the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the pivotal catastrophe of 9-11,

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<sup>141</sup>George Friedman *America's Secret War Inside the Hidden Worldwide Struggle between America and its Enemies*, New York: Broadway Books, 2004 p 28

<sup>142</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p 21

revealed to Western nations that “the catastrophic threat at this moment in history...is the threat posed by Islamist terrorism [and] a radical ideological movement in the Islamic world [that] has spawned terrorist groups and violence across the globe.”<sup>143</sup>

Despite the popular stance of Western governmental officials and the 9/11 Commission Report which asserts Islamic terrorist participating in a global *jihad* are the largest threat to the West, some scholars argue otherwise. As Samuel P. Huntington explains:

The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam; a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West; a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that fuel conflict between Islam and the West.<sup>144</sup>

Huntington’s contention is that the basis of conflict does not reside in extremism, but rather in the deeper incongruities of fundamentally different civilizations. Therefore, a foreboding and enduring conflict between Islamic and Western civilizations has existed for the past fourteen hundred years and will continue to thrive in future generations. Though at times the conflict simmered with peaceful coexistence, the majority of years were ripe with dissension and war because Islamic and Christian religions, and the civilizations they encompass, are expansionist in nature. To the contemporary generation, the conflict became more apparent when tolerance for each other declined and a general anti-Western sentiment spread through the Islamic world during the 1980s and 90s. Anti-Western sentiment spread as a result of growing fear and resentment of

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<sup>143</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, 2004, pp. 362-363.

<sup>144</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, pp. 217-218

westernization that threatened the integrity of Islamic culture. Many Muslims felt the problem with the West was not Western adherence to an erroneous religion, but rather the lack of adherence to any religion at all. They believed that secularism was an evil that outweighed the faults of Western Christianity. In addition, there was also a fear of the seductive nature of Western society which was viewed as corrupt, materialistic, and immoral.

There is also the belief that Islamic extremism is a formidable entity that is constantly gaining momentum. Proponents of this viewpoint argue that much of the anti-Western sentiment that fuels Islamic extremism does not stem from hatred of the norms and values that exist at the core of Western society, but rather from Islamic extremists who despise Western foreign policies that damage and exploit Muslim nations. As Bernard Lewis points out, “a new American policy has emerged in the Middle East...Its main aim is to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemony that could dominate the area and thus establish monopolistic control of Middle Eastern oil...The recent history of Iraq illustrates the different ways that such a policy can go wrong.”<sup>145</sup>

Ill-conceived or poorly executed U.S. and Western foreign policies can be viewed as forms of state aggression by Islamic radicals. Therefore, the actions taken by Islamic fundamentalists are not viewed by them as acts of terrorism, but acts of retaliation against Western expansive policies. According to Michael Scheuer, Islamic extremist aggression is aimed at achieving the following goals: “the end of U.S. aid to Israel and the ultimate elimination of that state; the removal of U.S. and Western forces from the Arabian Peninsula; the removal of Western forces from Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Muslims lands; the end of U.S. support for the oppression of Muslims by Russia, China, and India;

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<sup>145</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, New York. Random House Trade, 2003, pp.100-101.

the end of U.S. protection for repressive, apostate Muslim regimes in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, et cetera; and the conservation of the Muslim world's energy resources and their sale at higher prices.”<sup>146</sup>

When reviewing Scheuer's list of Islamic extremist aspirations, it becomes apparent why Arabic *mujahideen* journeyed to such places as Chechnya to fight against an imperial foe. The Russo-Chechen conflict provided an opportunity to involve the Chechnya in the global *jihad*, and in the process, Chechen militant factions were given material and financial support while movements for the Islamicization of the Chechen state gained momentum. Though the majority of Chechen Muslims practiced traditional Sufi Islam, the immediate benefits of Wahhabist insurgent training and financial support resulted in a growing popularity among the younger generation of Chechen fighters. With the ominous threat of the Russian Army, Wahhabism served as a powerful means to mobilize Chechen rebels by not only providing a holy justification to fight, but the means to do so. Unlike Sufi Islam, which was particularly amenable to the Chechnya's *'adat* traditional culture with its village-based individualism, egalitarianism, traditional practices, and respect for elders, Wahhabism reverted to older societal Muslim traditions: compulsory prayers were mandatory, shaving was banned, traditional Arab clothing was worn, and women took subordinate roles in the community.

The Wahhabist movement gained a stronger following from 1996 and 1997 with Chechnya's quasi-victory in the first war. Much credit was given to Islamic radicals such as Basayev and Khattab for their successful efforts in the conflict. As its popularity spread among various militant groups, so did the support for Islamicization of the

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<sup>146</sup>Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris Why the West is Losing the War on Terror*, Washington D C · Potomac Books Inc., 2004, p xviii.

Chechen state. Chechen Islamicization was almost a natural step to take in the separatist process because communism was dead and western liberal democracy was discredited by the refusal of the West to help Chechnya during the war; as a result, all that was left was Islam, which was very compatible with Chechnya's culture.<sup>147</sup> Moderate Sufists, who had been long dominant in Chechnya, began to notice the increasing numbers of Wahhabist followers. Differences between the two religious entities provoked political and clan rivalries which would eventually prevent the Maskhadov government from establishing civic foundations for political legitimacy, law and order, economic sustainability, and public services.<sup>148</sup>

Subsequently, a rivalry arose between adherents of traditional Islam and Wahhabism in 1997. The majority of Sufi Muslims called for the banishment of radical Wahhabis from the country. Officially, the Maskhadov government took a negative stance towards Wahhabism and its radical elements. Policies meant to drive Wahhabis out of the country were implemented. However, existing public support of Wahhabist practices sparked public controversy about the new anti-Wahhabist policies. Intense intergenerational conflict between older Sufi Muslims and younger Wahhabist Muslims sprouted among the Chechen populace and as discontent for both sides grew stronger, the rivalry provided justification for increased terror and violence between the two factions.

When President Maskhadov denounced Wahhabism for its radical measures, high tensions emerged between him and government officials who were in support of state Islamicization. As tensions heightened, controversy grew around Maskhadov's

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<sup>147</sup> Edward W Walker, "Religion and Spirituality in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Islam in Chechnya," *Contemporary Caucas Newsletter*, No 6, Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Berkeley: University of California, Fall 1998, p 5

<sup>148</sup> Tishkov, 223.

governing of Chechnya. In early 1999, he faced numerous accusations from Chechen Islamic officials. Allegations emerged that he violated Chechnya's constitution, strayed from Dudayev's original path, had a lack of interest of creating an Islamic state, failed to observe Shari'a laws, and made concessions to Russia. As incriminations were thrown about, a commission was set up to investigate Maskhadov's administration. In this setting, Maskhadov proclaimed Chechnya a Shari'a state renaming it the Islamic Republic of Ichkeria in February of that year.

Maskhadov's declaration of Shari'a law could have been forced upon him from the upsurge of demands from fundamentalist supporters or it could have been an attempt to undermine his opponents in the power struggle for Chechnya's presidency. It is likely that Maskhadov concluded that embracing Islam as a state ideology would help re-establish order and allow him to maneuver around his political rivals. Whatever his reasoning was, Maskhadov's role as an authoritative head in Chechnya became insignificant shortly after the proclamation because Chechen Wahhabists demanded the abolition of the presidential office and the establishment of a religious head of state. His legitimacy as the Chechen president began to falter and rampant terrorist activities became more widespread.<sup>149</sup>

The sentiment for increased violence became even stronger when Basayev, a war hero in the first conflict and Maskhadov's prime minister, turned against the Maskhadov government in support of the radical Wahhabist movement. Basayev already had established connections with the Pakistani Inter-Service-intelligence in 1994 and trained in Afghanistan that same year.<sup>150</sup> He proved his worth during the first conflict in 1996

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<sup>149</sup> Tishkov, 178.

when he led an invasion on the Russian town Budyonnovsk, where he took hostages and demanded an end to the conflict; his actions were later viewed as having led to the initial negotiations for the cease-fire agreement which ended the first war.

In August 1999, Basayev led another armed group of Chechen fighters into Russian territory, this time into Dagestan. This invasion, however, was not to demand an end to Russian intervention, but was an attempt to aid Dagestani Wahhabists in the takeover of the republic. The hopeful outcome was to incorporate Dagestan as a part of Chechnya and form a united Islamic secessionist movement. Though they suffered hundreds of casualties, Russian troops thwarted the attack pushing Basayev and his forces back to Chechnya.

Basayev's failed invasion of Dagestan in August provided Putin with ample support to initiate plans for a retaliatory invasion, though it was asserted by former Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin that plans for Russian intervention actually commenced earlier that year.<sup>151</sup> Shortly after Russian air-strikes were initiated, public support for a Russian offensive heightened with the September 1999 bombings in Moscow, Volgograd, and Dagestan. Russian officials blamed these tragedies on Chechen insurgents, but controversy surrounds the bombings with assertions that they were executed by Russian FSB agents.<sup>152</sup> Despite the shady circumstances, the public outrage allowed Putin to

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<sup>150</sup> Murphy, 16.

<sup>151</sup> Former Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin admitted that the Russian government had begun preparations for an August invasion of Chechnya as early as March 1999. It is possible that Basayev's invasion of Dagestan delayed the Russian invasion and gave Chechens forces advance notice. Stepashin's admittance damaged the moral grounds for Russia's 'anti-terrorist' invasion of Chechnya. See Brian Williams, "The Russo-Chechen War: A Threat to Stability in the Middle East and Eurasia?" *Middle East Policy Journal*, Vol. 8, (March 2001), pp 128-148 [http://www.mepc.org/journal\\_vol8/0103\\_williams.asp](http://www.mepc.org/journal_vol8/0103_williams.asp)

<sup>152</sup> See "Authorities Suppress Information About 1999 Bombings," *Chechnya Weekly*, Vol. 4, November 19, 2003.

capitalize on the populace's anti-terrorist sentiment which justified the invasion. Since then, Russian authorities have portrayed the second conflict not as an attempt to destroy Chechen ambitions of independence, but as part of a larger war against an Islamic insurgency ripe with terrorism.

But the Chechen insurgency was and is rooted in secularism, not Islamic ideology. The separation of Islam and the independence movement is apparent when examining presidential lineage of the separatist government. For example, Dudayev's campaign for sovereignty was originally secular. As previously mentioned, Dudayev wanted to form a Soviet-style military structure of governing and stressed the importance of attaining independence before Islamicization of the state. As a result, Dudayev approached Chechen sovereignty in a non-religious manner. The Chechen constitution adopted in 1991 was relatively liberal and established a secular democratic state which provided freedoms of religion and expression. During that time, Islam had little to do with the declaration of independence and the stand-off between Moscow and Chechnya. According to Anatol Lieven, Islam "had essentially become an aspect of Chechen national tradition and national pride, rather than the central motivating force in its own right. [Islam] was felt overwhelmingly a symbol and expression of national feeling rather than a detailed programme in its own right."<sup>153</sup>

Further evidence of secularism in the Chechen resistance is apparent in the examination of other Chechen resistance leaders as well. Maskhadov, Dudayev's successor, was a former Soviet officer and moderate politician and was not known as a devout Muslim or Islamic radical. When entering presidential office at the conclusion of

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<sup>153</sup> Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya Tombstone of Russian Power*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, p 363.

the first conflict, he faced the challenge of the growing Islamist movement. But Maskhadov's victory in the Chechen elections of January 1997 over more radical Islamic opponents, like acting President Zelimkhan Yandarbiev and Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, showed that the majority of Chechens preferred secularism and internal order over Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>154</sup> This suggests that there was not a great turn to Islam, especially to radical Islam, among the majority of the Chechen population.

Despite his moderate stance, Maskhadov appointed a number of Islamists to key governmental positions in an attempt to appease religious elites and calm the heated rivalry between Sufism and Wahhabism. However, due to the chaotic conditions of the inter-war period, Maskhadov declared Shari'a law throughout the republic in 1999. One could argue that this is evidence of Islam's predominant role in the separatist government. But, as noted earlier, Maskhadov's declaration was done for many reasons. Not only was there intense pressure from Islamists, but Chechnya was also physically devastated from the war and in need of a unifying ideology. Maskhadov also faced powerful opposition from different Chechen militia commanders who operated autonomously during the war and were not answerable to the Chechen president. Among the militia groups were Wahhabist proponents, who had access to funding from international sources and were able to employ young, unemployed militants who were eager to fight. With leaders like Shamil Basayev, they had the ability to command political support and provide fighters with a sense of security and belonging unifying them against Russians, the Maskhadov government, or the Chechen traditional religious elite. As a result, terrorism, kidnappings, and lawlessness were rampant during the inter-war period. It can be hypothesized, then, that the public pressure put on Maskhadov to

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<sup>154</sup> Walker, 4.

take steps towards Islamicization of the state emerged from the insecurities and traumas of a war-torn, chaotic society.

The feud between Sufism and Wahabbism and the undermining of the Maskhadov government by Chechen Islamists contributed to the collapse of state authority during the interwar period. With the absence of a legitimate government Russia had an open door to invade in 1999. In recognizing this, it is possible that Maskhadov intentionally named a religious scholar, Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev, as his successor. Having a native religious figure would provide a unifying presence in the Chechen separatist government as well as differentiate the resistance movement from Islamic fundamentalism. Sadulaev, an Islamist, was a strong proponent of incorporating Islam into state affairs. Yet, he placed sovereignty and independence before Islamicization as exemplified in 2006 when he intervened in a dispute between secular nationalists and Islamists by supporting the formers assertions of independence and retaining Chechnya's secular constitution.<sup>155</sup>

Though Sadulaev's tenure as president was short, support for a secular separatist government continued with his successor, Doku Umarov, who is currently serving as president. A Sufi-Muslim and Chechen native, Umarov has continued in the footsteps of Sadulaev by strengthening the Chechen separatist army, expanding the conflict through the North Caucasus, eliminating collaborators, and distancing the resistance from Wahhibist radicalism. Upon his entry to office, Umarov has been a steadfast supporter of Chechen independence and adhering to the standards of international law. His nationalist agenda encompasses creating the Chechen state first and only afterwards giving attentions to Chechen Islamicization. Umarov's presidential goals include putting a stop

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<sup>155</sup> Andrei Smirnov, "Sadulaev's New Decrees Reveal Division within the Separatist Movement," *Chechnya Weekly*, Vol. 7, February 9, 2006.

to Russia imperialism before any thoughts of building a pan-Caucasian Islamic state. As Umarov stated, "my vision of the end of the Russian-Chechen war consists of Russia leaving us in peace and recognizing our vested right to self-determination."<sup>156</sup>

In summary, the desire for independence serves as the motivation for the Chechen resistance to persevere in combating the Russian Army. The public role of Islam increased as a means to create a national bond among Chechen separatists; likewise, Islamic fundamentalism has influenced the conflict via the use of terrorism by Chechen radicals, but it is minimal as compared to the majority of Chechen separatists who support a secular fight for national sovereignty. The Black Widows are mainly a consequence of nationalism, not fundamentalism. The asymmetrical Russo/Chechen Wars, in which Russia had and has a dominating advantage, brought on the embrace of Islam, and specifically the rise of Islamic extremism in Chechnya. As Tony Wood argues, "the harsh circumstances of war are fertile ground for millenarian brands of religion....The battlefields of Chechnya were no exception to the rule....It was the war itself that was responsible for the success of a chiliastic brand of Islam which was ultimately to prove hugely destructive."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Statement of June 23, 2006, taken from Andrew McGregor, "New Fronts, New Focus. Dokku Umarov's War on Russia," *Chechnya Weekly*, Vol. 7, June 29, 2006

<sup>157</sup> Wood. 130.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

The Black Widows and Chechen suicide terrorism became a common occurrence in the second Russo/Chechen War. Due to their simplicity and effectiveness, Chechen radicals have used them to fight in an asymmetrical war where Russian forces have the advantage. The dramatic increase in using them also exemplifies the influence Islamic fundamentalism has had in the second Russo/Chechen War. However, while radical Islam's presence in Chechnya is apparent from analyzing these phenomena, it is not the root cause for the Chechen resistance's continued struggle against Russia. It is evident that national self-determination is the ultimate goal for the Chechen separatist government, as exemplified by its continued loyalty to maintaining a secular political platform.

The ongoing conflict in Chechnya has been labeled as an Islamic war, which is part of the Wahhabi Islamist *jihad* that we see in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Kashmir<sup>158</sup>. This is partially because Islam was rarely mentioned in the first war, besides its use as a shared commonality against the Russians, but has now taken a predominant

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<sup>158</sup> Patrick Armstrong, "How to Turn a Local War into Part of the International Jihad," *The Second Russo-Chechen War*, Johnson's Russia List, Research and Analytical Supplement, (April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002), <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/6191-3.cfm>.

role in the current conflict via the use of martyr and suicide operations. While it is true that the large influx of Arabs and Islamic fundamentalists to Chechnya changed the face of the conflict, the assertion that Chechnya is an integral part of global *jihad* is not accurate. Wahhabism does not have enough of a formidable presence in Chechnya to adequately transform the secessionist movement into a proponent of *jihad*. While some Chechens have embraced radical Islam and the tactics that accompany it, the majority of the population prefers the traditional Sufi Islam and the secular stance of the separatist government.

Russia has portrayed the second Russo/Chechen War as an integral part of the global war on terrorism because of fear that a united front, including global Islamic *jihadists* and Islam sympathizers, has the potential to spread to other North Caucasus republics and incite them to join in the conflict.<sup>159</sup> Though religious identity has taken center stage in the conflict, Russia ignores that independence is still the primary objective of the Chechen resistance. This is evident in the separatist government's desires to distance itself from radical Islamic elements, such as Wahhabism, and its attempts to execute more organized military attacks.

Initially in the second war Chechen forces were dispersed under the influence of different field commanders who seldom coordinated their efforts, and at times, were even at odds with each other. Arguably, strife among the different groups could be one of the major reasons why counter offensives did not occur. However, in June 2004, the first organized attack since Basayev's invasion in Dagestan in 1999 took place when Chechen

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<sup>159</sup> Whereas in 1994-1996 a few north Caucasians fought alongside the Chechens, numerous young men from the neighboring republics of Dagestan, Karachai-Cherkessia, and Kabardino-Balkaria joined the second war. (Williams, Brian, "The Russo-Chechen War: A Threat to Stability in the Middle East and Eurasia?" *Middle East Policy Journal*, No. 8, (March 2001), [http://www.mejc.org/journal\\_vol8/0103\\_williams.asp](http://www.mejc.org/journal_vol8/0103_williams.asp).)

and Ingushetia militants attacked security and police posts, as well as a military armory in Nazran, Ingushetia.<sup>160</sup> Further organization was apparent with the October 2005 offensive by Chechen-backed North Caucasus militants who attacked military compounds in the capital city Nalchik of the southern Russian republic Kabardino-Balkaria Republic.<sup>161</sup>

There have been many officials and scholars who have commented on the current Russo/Chechen War and how Moscow has handled it. The most notable critics, however, are the Russian people. In a 2007 Russian poll, nearly 70 percent of respondents said the Russian government should negotiate with Chechen separatists, as opposed to only 16 percent that believe the military campaign in Chechnya should continue. The same poll asked how they thought the situation in Chechnya was covered in the Russian media; 49 percent labeled the coverage superficial and proclaimed it does not give a clear sense of what is happening, while 28 percent said it is subjective and distorts the problems that exist there. Only 11 percent said media coverage of Chechnya was satisfactory.<sup>162</sup> With public sentiment like this, it is hoped that Russian officials will pay attention and take positive steps towards resolving the Chechen crisis. Then the phenomenon of the Black Widows in Chechnya will disappear.

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<sup>160</sup> C. J. Chivers and Steven Lee Myers, "75 Die as Chechen Rebels Stage Raid Across Border," *The New York Times*, June 23, 2004.  
<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F70B11F73B5D0C708EDDAF0894DC404482>

<sup>161</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Russia: Nalchik Raid Leaves Painful Legacy," (October 12, 2006).  
<http://www.rferl.org/features/article/2006/10/2478a0b5-1e24-4879-bfab-2d99b2671126.html>.

<sup>162</sup> "Poll Finds a Plurality of Russians Distrust Ramzan," *Chechnya Weekly*, vol. 8, March 15, 2007.

**APPENDIX A**

**SUMMARY OF SUICIDE TERROR ATTACKS ATTRIBUTED TO CHECHENS  
(JUNE 2000-JUNE 2005)**

	Date	Place	Total terrorists	Female terrorists	Male terrorists	Fatalities	Injured victims	Hostages	Terrorists' outcome
1	June 7, 2000	Chechnya, Alkhan-Yurt military base (Khava Barayeva, Luiza Magomadova)	2	2	0	2	5	0	Dead
2	June, 2000	Chechnya, military checkpoint	1	0	1	?	?	0	Dead
3	July 2, 2000	Chechnya, military base (Movladi)	1	0	1	33	81	0	Dead
4	Dec. 2000	Chechnya, MVD building (Mareta Duduyeva)	1	1	0	?	?	0	Wounded, later dead
5	Nov. 29, 2001	Chechnya, Urus-Martan, Military office (Elza Gazueva)	1	1	0	1	3	0	Dead
6	Feb. 5, 2002	Chechnya, Grozny, Zavodskoy ROVD (Zarema Inarkaeva)	1	1	0	23	17	0	Wounded
7	Oct. 23-26, 2002	Moscow, Dubrovka Theater	40	19	21	129	644	<800	Dead
8	Dec. 27, 2002	Chechnya, Grozny, governmental complex (Ismrievs family)	3	1	2	83	<200	0	Dead
9	May 12, 2003	Chechnya, Znamenskaya, governmental complex	3	1	2	59	111	0	Dead
10	May 14, 2003	Chechnya, Iliskhan-Yurt, religion festival ( <i>Shahidat</i> Shahbulatova, Zulay Abdurzakova)	2	2	0	18	145	0	Dead
11	June 5, 2003	North Osetia, Mozdok military base (Lida Khildehoroeva)	1	1	0	17	16	0	Dead
12	June 20, 2003	Chechnya, Grozny, governmental complex (Zakir Abdulazimov)	2	1	1	6	38	0	Dead
13	July 5, 2003	Moscow, rock festival (Zulikhan Elihadjieva, Mariam Sharapova)	2	2	0	14	60	0	Dead
14	July 11, 2003	Moscow, Tverskaya Street (Zarema Mujikhoeva)	1	1	0	1	0	0	Survived
15	July 27, 2003	Chechnya, Grozny, military building (Mariam Tashukhadjieva)	1	1	0	?	?	0	Dead
16	Aug. 1, 2003	North Osetia, military hospital	1	0	1	35	300	0	Dead
17	Dec. 5, 2003	Southern Russian near Yessentuki, train (Khadijat Mangerieva)	4	3	1	41	<150	0	Dead
18	Sept. 15, 2003	Ingushetia, FSB office	2	1	1	2	31	0	Dead
19	Dec. 9, 2003	Moscow, National Hotel near Duma	1	1	0	6	14	0	Dead

	Date	Place	Total terrorists	Female terrorists	Male terrorists	Fatalities	Injured victims	Hostages	Terrorists' outcome
20	Feb. 6, 2004	Moscow subway station Avtozavodskaya	1	0	1	41	<130	0	Dead
21	April 6, 2004	Ingushetia, president's car	1	0	1	2	25	0	Dead
22	Aug. 25, 2004	Airplane TU-134 Moscow-Volgograd (Sazita Jebirhanova)	1	1	0	43	0	0	Dead
23	Aug. 25, 2004	Airplane TU-154 Moscow-Sochi (Aminat Nogaeva)	1	1	0	42	0	0	Dead
24	Aug. 31, 2004	Moscow, subway station Rijskaya	1	1	0	10	33	0	Dead
25	Sept. 1-3, 2004	North Osetia, Beslan school (Roza Nogaeva, Mariam Tuburova)	32	2	30	330	470	1120	Dead
26	May, 2005	Chechnya, Grozny	1	1	0	0	0	0	Dead
27	May, 2005	Chechnya, Assinovskaya	2	2	0	0	0	0	Dead
	Total		110	47	63	938	2473	1920	
	Percent		100%	43%	57%				

\* Table from Yoram Schweitzer, "Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?" The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, August 2006, pp. 64-65.

**APPENDIX B**

**DEMOGRAPHIC DATA, CHECHEN FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISTS 2000-2005**

Marital Status	Education Completed	Economic Status	Previous Religiosity	Relation to Wahhabism	Trauma*
13 – single	17 – high school	2 – poor	22 – secular Muslims	19 – connected after traumas	12 – more than one family member killed
3 – married	1 – college	14 – middle	4 – traditionally religious	7 – connected through family	4 – father or mother was killed
4 – divorced	5 – university	9 – good			6 – brother killed
5 – widowed	3 – in college	1 – high			1 – husband killed
1 – remarried					3 – family members arrested or disappeared after arrest
					2 – general societal traumas

\* Total greater than sample size as some individuals suffered multiple types of traumas.

\* Table from Yoram Schweitzer, “Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?” The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, August 2006, pp. 64-65.

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