VOLATILE BORDERLAND
RUSSIA AND THE NORTH CAUCASUS

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THE JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION
The Future of the North Caucasus

Introduction by Paul Goble

As I reflect back on my career in writing about the nationalities of Russia and the former Soviet Union I can recall the days that when you tried to assemble all the people in the Washington, D.C. policymaking community who knew about all the nationalities of what was then the Soviet Union. At that time in the early 1980s you could gather them all together in to a small corner office in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) at the State Department and still have extra space. Times have changed though and now we are increasingly being forced to consider the future of the North Caucasus.

When asked to write an introduction to this important book on the volatile borderland between Russia and the North Caucasus, which explores in detail the region we call the North Caucasus, I wonder what the Caucasus may look like in 2050 which allows me to recall an event which some experts may remember. In 1981, an American novelist prepared a book called The End of the Russian Empire. And a number of the U.S. book clubs saw the title, The End of the Russian Empire and assumed it was a history of the events of 1917 and wanted to buy it. But when the novel actually appeared, it was obvious that it was a work of fiction and it was not about events of 60 years earlier but rather of events ten years later; namely, the coming apart of the Soviet Union and the coming apart of the Russian state thereafter. Now, all of us who have lived in Washington for any length of time know that there are a large number of books that are listed on the nonfiction side that contain a great deal of fictional information. Indeed there have been a number of memoirs that I was quite prepared to see on the fiction bestseller list.

But I would like to make another argument in this introduction and that is that there have been a large number of works of fiction that have been instructive about the facts of the case, especially with respect to developments during periods of rapid change. That reflection is prompted by the amazing success in the last year of a novel by Elena Chudinova in the Russian Federation called The Mosque of Notre Dame de Paris. This has been a book that has gone now through eight different editions, has been a bestseller among many groups of people. It poses the Shariat Islamic takeover of the European Union by 2048 and the remodeling of the cathedral of Notre

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1 From a speech given at The Jamestown Foundation on September 14, 2006.
Dame in Paris into a mosque. And then a terrorist underground led by the daughter of an oligarch, a dissident Catholic cardinal, a Serb who hates Europeans, and someone from Israeli intelligence that decide that the way to overthrow Shariat control of Europe is to blow up the Mosque of Notre Dame de Paris.

Chudinova is a Russian Orthodox children’s author whose views have unfortunately now surfaced. Her views about the way in which that country should be organized are truly frightening. But her novel has provided an occasion in the Russian media for the discussion of what is likely to happen in what we call the Russian Federation today over the next half century. Because what people are increasingly appreciating in Russia, but which many of us do not, is that we are still in the midst of a period of enormous change; that there is a turning point of history – there are several turning points of history that are not simple right angles, but rather a long trend line that we need to understand.

This is not unusual of course in the history of the world. It has frequently been the case that when individuals have been confronted by periods of massive change they have turned not so much to scholarship but rather to novels, to dystopian novels or anti-utopian novels to try to come to grips with these changes. It was certainly true in the Soviet Union in the 1920’s, it was true in the late 1940’s and into the 1950’s in Britain and the United States as we attempted to come to terms with things.

Now, I think there are three big reasons why this is the case. First, fiction novels provide a possibility for exploring periods of radical unsettled change for which there is no clearly defined set of categories in the standard academic or political literature. And it also provides the possibility of exploring both sides of these debates because all too often much of the discussion of people opposed to the Russian Federation sounds to me like a meeting of the Vatican in the twelfth century discussing heresies rather than an examination of problems which we make judgments about what the opponents think on the basis of what the Russians say. As I like to point out, you can cover Israel from Damascus, but it would be wrong. And in these periods which Thomas Kuhn talks about as a scientific revolution, fiction often allows us to get at those things.

The second thing is that fiction can provide a plausible explanation, allow you to explore things that have happened. When I look at the various dystopian novels about the end of Soviet Union that appeared in the 1970’s and 1980’s, I am struck by how much they got right as opposed to some of the scholarly literature at the time. They were able to take risks because the normal standards of evidence were relaxed and the possibility of exploring multiplicities was increased.

And the third reason that I think distopias are so useful is that they allow us to extend our discussion and understanding of time, space and identities. When we talk about the Caucasus –
the North Caucasus – we rapidly fall in to the trap of talking before the Soviets came, while the Soviets were there, and after the Soviets left, as if those were the most relevant periods for the people on the ground. In fact, that either argues for a return to the pre-Soviet past or it implies that it is all about escaping from what the Soviets did. That periodization does not capture, as I’ll argue in a minute, what’s going on in the Russian Federation, in the Russian areas, or what’s happening in the North Caucasus.

Second, fiction allows us to escape from our rigid geographic definition. Americans, as you probably know, are among the most geographically illiterate people on Earth. I like to say that we are prisoners of the Mercator projection. You know the map of the world I have in mind which the United States sits in the middle as God intended, protected by two large blue bodies of water and a large number of vowel and consonant challenged countries on the edge ready to fall off. If you doubt that isn’t hardwired, try briefing a senior official with a map that has anything else in the middle of it. When the Karabakh War started in the late ’80s, I briefed some people on the seventh floor at State and I had a map put in ginned up by the geographer’s office that put Nagorno-Karabakh in the middle. When you do that the United States is in four pieces. A certain now retired professor at Stanford University did not hear a single word I said but I watched his face go like a clock.

I think it is a real problem calling this the North Caucasus. I think of the question of what that includes. We have not talked about the extent to which demography is changing the boundaries of that to the north, nor the extent to which the Caucasus to the south is also part of a Caucasian world. And trying to exclude those things or allowing them to be excluded by definition gets in the way of a proper understanding of this region.

And finally, one of the things that fiction does for us is that it encourages us to understand other people the way we understand ourselves. We are as any number of people have observed like those Russian wooden nesting dolls, the matryoshka doll, we are a set of identities and personalities and the issue is which identity is exposed at any particular time and who makes the choice as to which identity is exposed? All too many of the discussions about the Caucasus act as if there are a series of discrete choices for people who will shift from talking about being either loyal Russians, being separatists, being Muslims, being terrorists, being whatever, as if these were things that people change completely overnight.

In fact, many characteristics are things people have in common and therefore it is terribly important. And if we’re going to understand what’s going to happen in this region by 2050, I think we need to do that. Now, many of you who I’ve known for years have heard me say before that one of the reasons that many of us who engage in Sovietology have taken refuge in futurology is that this is what we were trained in: a discipline that dose not require too many facts but a great deal of ideas.
And there are three major ideas I would like to focus on. First of all I would like to look at the changes in the three major outside actors around this region; not so much the chess moves, some of which have been described, but rather the broader trends of development in the Russian Federation, the world of Islam, and what we can call the global world. I think that we need to look at these because in many cases what these places do and how they act will determine which layer of the matryoshka doll in Grozny or Makhachkala is exposed.

Second, I would like to look at what I think are the incredibly rapid set of changes in what we’re calling the North Caucasus in regards to demographics, religion, politics, and ideas.

And finally, because this is Washington I’d like to talk about the challenges all of this presents for the United States, challenges which so far at least I don’t think we have met very well. The Russian Federation – what we chose to call the Russian Federation is just as much an artificial formation as was any region within the North Caucasus. It was drawn with specific intention. In fact, it is more artificial than anything in the North Caucasus because it was drawn by negation; to wit, Stalin drew everything else first and what was left was the Russian Federation. That tends to be forgotten because we tend to act as if Russia is a reality and all the others are simply made-up things. Moreover, it is true as we’ll see in a minute, Russian national identity is far more fragile, far less certain and with much shallower historical roots than the identities of the peoples of the Caucasus and elsewhere around the edges of what used to be the Russian and Soviet empires. But I want to make two arguments in particular on this point because of time.

The first is the argument that at least since the end of the nineteenth century we have been at a period in which the Russian state has been in a rather rapid and accelerating decline and disintegration. We have watched the empire be at least temporarily saved by the Soviet Union. The Soviet system saved the empire by changing the ideological formulation. It was about empire saving; it was not about empire transformation, and that tends to be forgotten. What happened in 1991 was tragically delayed by 74 years. Had Anton Denikin taken Moscow, which given how incompetent he was, this was unlikely, but had he taken Moscow you would’ve seen the disintegration of the Russian empire proceed 75 years earlier and you would’ve seen Russia emerge as a kind of East European state of one kind or another.

What we are currently witnessing is the downturn of Russian history. Until the early part of the twentieth century, Russia developed by having Russians assimilate other peoples. Now the pattern of assimilation has gone the other way in that these peoples are attempting to foster their own national identities. When that happens in a nation that is built on assimilatory pressures, you know that the end is near.
We are watching also the Russian state today fall into much the same trap that Alexander III and Nicholas II did. Nicholas I understood very well that you don’t play the Russian nationalist card because it will destroy everything. Nicholas I classically said, there are no bad Germans and good Russians, there are only good subjects and bad ones. By the time of Alexander III and Nicholas II, we saw an attempt to play the Russian card and the country came apart. We saw again the attempt to play the Russian card with Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin in 1989, 1990 and 1991 as the country came apart. This has not stopped. It may have started as a small thing, but as I write this introduction there have been killings in Saratov and in several towns in Omsk Oblast – and this is just in the last 48 hours. Just because it is not being reported in the West does not mean it is not happening. That is a general historiographic issue. We are watching some – you don’t have to be a follower of Lev Gumelev, and I certainly am not, to buy into the notion that we are watching the end of some kind of huge cycle in Russian history.

But there is a more immediate, policy-relevant, if you will, issue of Russian imperial decay, which we need to focus on a little bit. After the Soviet Union came apart in 1991, the West, and the United States in particular, was terrified about the fact that more disintegration was likely. There was a fear that if more disintegration happened, it would lead to loose nukes, and therefore the United States became the last guarantor of Soviet borders announcing on February 6th, 1992, that there would be no secession from secession in the Russian Federation; not only trivializing what had happened the year before but having the effect of putting the United States on the side of the police and not the people. It slowed things down, but it did not stop them.

But what is worse, it means that the United States and most American analysts are refusing to acknowledge what is actually happening on the ground in a place we call the Russian Federation. What is actually taking place is not so much the end of an empire, although that is happening, but rather the death of a state and the subsequent attempts to revive this state.

The Russian Federation in the 1990s was very much a failed state. Mr. Putin has succeeded in recovering some of it, but far from all. And we were unwilling to look at that I think for three reasons. First, if you said it was a failed state, someone would say who controls the nukes? And the answer was that’s not always clear. Second, if you said it was a failed state, you would have to confront the reality that we do not know of a single case of a failed state that has recovered without inflicting violence on its own people or on its neighbors. Indeed, it is arguable that was Mr. Putin did by blowing up the apartment buildings in 1999 and starting the Chechen War was an effort to recover state power, as ugly as that is.

But the third reason we did not want to talk about Russia as a failed state is that if we talked about Russia as a failed state we would have to confront this reality: while states fail all the time – and please understand a failed state is not one that has no powerful institutions on its territory,
but rather no single controlling legal authority. Americans did not get chased out of Somalia because there wasn’t anyone with power on the ground in Somalia.

When was the last time a major power’s state disintegrated? The answer is Germany in November of 1918 and we all know how that story ended 15 years later. And the idea that the default setting of the end of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Russian Federation might not lead to a liberal democratic free market ally of the United States, but to something else, was not something people wanted to be faced with.

Now, as I say, Mr. Putin is attempting to wrestle with this and he is addressing it by focusing on a whole variety of things, although I am not sure he entirely understands the issue. Let me very briefly say what I think the challenges are. And the way to do that is to recall to you Voltaire’s observation about the Holy Roman Empire. You remember he said it wasn’t holy, it wasn’t roman, and it wasn’t an empire, but other than that it was a very good name. Well, I believe that the Russian Federation is the Holy Roman Empire of today; to wit, it is not the Soviet Union, it is not Russia, and it is not a federation. Other than that, calling it the Russian Federation works fine.

But it is not the Soviet Union which seemed to benefit because the Russian Federation is technically somewhat more homogenous than was the Soviet Union at the end, although not nearly as much as the Russians claim. They falsified the 2002 census only slightly less than Stalin did with the 1939 census. And we now have a situation where the birth rates of non-Russians are staggeringly higher than the Russian populace. Not only is Moscow already the largest Muslim city in Europe, but last year in the Russian capital the average fertility rate of ethnic Russian women was 1.1, while the average fertility rate of Kazan-Tatar women living in Moscow was six, and the average rate of Chechens and Ingush living in Moscow was ten. Given those numbers, it won’t take many generations to change who’s going to be in control.

It also helps that the United States has changed the rules and the non-Russians have fewer places to go. But the disadvantages of it not being the Soviet Union are far greater. First, the sense of loss that Russians feel is very great. We fought two world wars to convince one nation in Central Europe that its borders were to be respected. We have a government in Moscow now that thinks that its borders are to be respected, unless they can be expanded. That is a very dangerous thing when people have that problem, so this is one area.

The second is it is not Russia. No Russian that I have ever met thinks the borders of the Russian Federation are the proper borders. A poll last spring found that 74 percent of high school graduates in the city of Moscow think the proper borders of the Russian Federation are those of the Russian Empire in 1914. Which means Poland, Finland, the Baltic countries, and part of
Turkey, and there are several people in the Russian Duma who want negotiations restarted about Alaska.

Countries that are not comfortable with their borders are a problem, as we know. I keep thinking of Tom Lehrer’s song about Germany: he said we taught them a lesson in 1918 and haven’t had any problems since. Well, we shall see.

And the tragedy of it not being Russia is magnified by the fact that Russian identity is focused on the state. The tragedy of Russia, and this is something that is really a whole lecture in itself, is that the Russian state became an empire before the Russian people became a nation and as a result the Russian state has never been a nation-state, but the Russian nation has always been a state-nation. Which means that when state power is weak, nationalism is not a counterbalance; it becomes weak. When state power starts gaining, you see nationalism taking off as well. And it is not a federation, not only is there no agreement on who does what, there are not the instruments to link it together.

Many of you will have read the gushy articles in the American press about Mr. Putin opening the first trans-Russia highway last year from Vladivostok to Moscow, all 6,600 miles. I would have been as impressed as the New York Times was had I not known three things. First, that project was started in 1903. Second, of the 6,600 miles only 3,800 are paved and only 5 percent are more than two lanes wide. The highway connecting the two largest cities of Russia, St. Petersburg and Moscow, is paved, but it is two lanes wide. And this week the editor of the car magazine of the Russian Federation urged that the Russian Federation come up with a new international car sign: the end of the road. Because he had just gone on a federal highway which ran out into a track and provided absolutely no indication of how to get from here to there. And that was in between Irkutsk and Krasnoyarsk. So we have a problem in this respect.

If the Russian Federation is at a turning point, and I believe that it is and I believe that the borders will change in a variety of ways, and I think they will change largely due to the actions of the Russians and Russian desires, as we’ll see. And this leads me to my one good piece of advice to the people who monitor affairs in this region: do not buy any maps. Buy stock in companies that print maps and you will make a lot of money.

But it is equally important that Islam, too, is at a turning point. Indeed, if you understand the Muslim view of what happened in the Soviet Union in 1991, you can see a direct line from there to September 11th and you can understand why Muslims who were ethnic Muslims who didn’t know very much about their identity and what their faith was about turned to Islam in the ways that they did.
The collapse of the Muslim project after the French Revolution and the colonization of the Muslim world, which was more or less complete except for Egypt and Afghanistan by 1922, left the Muslim world with the question: if we are right, how come we are losing? And there were three answers. God’s time is not our time so we wait it out. The second answer was, we are wrong; we have got to be radical secularists. And the third is, back to basics: Allah, Sharia – the people who become the fundamentalists.

As long as there was a Soviet Union supporting the radical secularists, and please remember it was the Soviets who were doing that, the third category were in jail. Once the Soviet Union could not do that, those people emerged. And with the Muslims reading, or some Muslims reading anyway, of 1991 you saw a very different set of messages for people who were Muslims. These were in many ways – and this is another argument, different, but just to point it out for you – I believe that Central Asia and parts of the Caucasus will be over time the prime recruiting area for a radical fundamentalist Islam. Why? Because people there know they are Muslims, but don’t know exactly what it means and therefore they are prepared to listen to people who tell them exactly what it means.

I remember a conversation I had with Dzhokhar Dudaev, the first president of Chechen Ichkeria. Mr. Dudaev said to me, “Mr. Goble, I’m a good Muslim I pray three times a day.” Well I was very polite and deferential to this senior officer and didn’t point out that a good Muslim prays five times a day. After all, he had been in the Communist Party since the age of 18 and was a major general in the Soviet Air force.

Therefore with the rise of Islam and the collapse of the Soviet Union, what was the message that the Allah-Sharia Muslims took with them at the collapse of the Soviet Union? From their point of view the USSR came apart overnight as a result of a single small set of shocks. For Americans the Soviet Union came apart because we had stood tall against communism for 40 years. But the people who thought it came apart overnight assumed that the Soviet Union, the most radical expression of Western secularism would come apart in the same way with a few good kicks. September 11th flows directly from that logic of 1991. It is wrong, but it has to be understood.

And the third turning point is the West. We are witnessing a number of changes to what the West or the international system means. Let me just list three. First demographically, 40 years ago there were twice as many people living in Europe and Anglo-America as there were living in the world of Islam. Today that number is approximately equal. In 2030, there will be three times as many people living in the Muslim World as living in Europe and Anglo-America. That is a huge shift.

Second the relationship of state power and violence has changed as we all know. Third the meaning of borders has changed. There is another example of a word that we invoke routinely,
border, as if it were a fixed thing. Borders are a socially constructed reality and they keep changing in meaning. I live in Estonia very near the Latvian frontier. The Latvians do not have borders; they have frontiers. I torture my students by forcing them to write essays about the difference between a frontier and a border, but never mind.

Now, what is all this going to mean for the North Caucasus? Let me just discuss a couple of quick points. First the demographic realities are not just that there are getting to be more people who are in the North Caucasus – what we call the North Caucasus, but those people are leaving and they are moving elsewhere. At present, the number of North Caucasians living in Moscow is 700,000. The number of Caucasians living in Kondopoga is several thousand. The number of North Caucasians living in Omsk Oblast is in the tens of thousands. It is not just the demography there; it is the demography that’s leading the spread.

In fact, there is now an argument in Russian national circles that we should give these people independence and then declare it a state border and keep them on the other side of it. One of the things people haven’t thought about is that people who may secure the independence of the North Caucasus are Russian nationalists who want to exclude them. If you doubt this, please go to the DPNI.ru website which is the movement against illegal immigration. These are the people who are fascists but wear good clothes. However, these people are some really ugly folks.

Within the North Caucasus, it is important to understand that the meaning of Islam is highly variable within all these republics we’ve been discussing. And the meaning of Islam for the actions of people politically is highly variable. We should not be surprised. Instead we treat Muslims as if they were automatons who would do certain things because they are Muslims no matter what. It doesn’t work that way. We are, as I said, we have to look at people as matryoshka dolls with multiple layers and that’s critical.

A third point about the North Caucasus is especially interesting. It is why people like me keep looking at it despite my Baltic obsessions of recent years because it is precisely at the point where these three huge trend lines are coming together: the changes in the world, the changes in Russia, and the changes in Islam. In essence, it is a fault zone, it is a fracture zone in which the outside actors are doing certain things and which inside actors are responding, and the other way around.

Now, looking out the next 50 years I see a huge range of possibilities. I would like to make one general comment and I am simply going to give you the three broad trends I see. We are very good in the West in studying one kind of nationalism and we are atrociously bad at studying another. We are good at studying pessimistic nationalism.
The Estonian version is, if we don’t get those damn Russians out of here, there won’t be any Estonians in a generation. The American version is Lexington and Concord: we have to stand here or else. We are very good at analyzing Chechnya that way. What we are not good in analyzing Chechnya or the North Caucasus or elsewhere is optimistic nationalism – the nationalism of people who think they are going to win because they are on the winning side of history. Those people behave differently. Some of you may have seen one of my favorite movies, “The Lion in Winter,” with Katharine Hepburn playing Eleanor of Aquitaine. And at one point Henry II, played by Peter O’Toole, tells the young king of France, “Don’t push me, boy. If you do any more, England will declare war on France.” And the young teenage French king responds, “And France will surrender because we can’t lose, old man.” That kind of nationalism, that kind of view is something we rarely factor in to our understanding in the Caucasus or Central Asia and it is there.

There are so many people who because they were exposed to the world of Islam when they did and because they can see the Russian state dying are optimistic despite any particular defeats. I am not saying it is the only thing out there; I am only saying it is an issue we do not tend to examine.

I see three broad patterns ahead. One is this whole area could remain chaotic, unstable and a backwater with intermittent violence, a lot of corruption and increasing desires on the part of neighboring countries to build walls and keep the people behind them.

The second is the one solution the Russian government claims not to want and it is currently doing what it can to make happen, and that is a unified North Caucasus based on Islam that will resist being part of the Russian Federation and will demand independence as such. They will demand that unity precisely in response to Russian nationalism. Sergei Markedonov’s writings were already mentioned by John Dunlop in his essay in this book. Markedonov has written a series of articles in the Russian press over the past couple of years in which he has said the real danger to Russian control of the borderlands is Russian nationalism, not the nationalism of the non-Russians.

Any number of people know that a number of the countries that emerged in 1991 did so less because their populations wanted to go than because they didn’t want to see what might happen if they were ruled by a Russian or at least Slavic-dominated state. So that unity could happen if Russia continues on its way, and given that empires on the way down tend to behave badly I do not think we can exclude that possibility.

And the third is something that I would ask you to consider in more detail than we have so far. And that is that as the peoples of the North Caucasus move out of the region and develop there will be competition with Russians. The ethnic Russian area is being pushed north, and the Terek
River is no longer a border. The Caucasians are on both sides and they are moving north. And I find it very interesting that now we see maps being produced in some parts of southern Russia which do not refer to Saratov but Saritao, as the Mongols did 800 years ago.

If that happens, then we are talking about a fragmentation of the Russian Federation that will not be so much Muslim or Turkic, but will be part of a general fragmentation of Eurasia. I personally think that those who believe that the North Caucasus will lead the parade of new sovereignties are wrong. I think the people who will lead it will be the Sibiriaki, the people of Siberia and the Far East, because I think we have made a huge mistake in the West in assuming that Russian identity is strong and that everybody else's identity is weak. Russian identity is more artificial and weaker by any measure you care to name than the identities of the Avars or the Chechens or the Circassians. I say that not to dump on the Russians, but simply to correct what it is unfortunately the tendency to act as if Russia is a real place and these places are not, Russians are a real nation and these people are not. That is purely nonsense.

Now, to conclude the United States has three challenges. There are three possible responses we can use to what's going on. The first is we can encourage these people. I wish we would, but we won't and there are good reasons for this because our encouragement could be the kiss of death.

Second, we could do what we have done up until now and oppose them. Let me tell you that our track record of opposing the national right of people's self-determination has led to the kind of racist regime we currently see in the Russian Federation. Do not forget that on October 5th, 1993, after Boris Yeltsin had used that highly democratic method of dispersing his parliament; namely, using tanks, the mayor of Moscow, Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, issued a decree expelling people of Caucasian background from the city. Instead of denouncing that, we not only didn't denounce it but we told our European allies to keep their mouths shut as well. Now there are similar regulations in every Russian city over 100,000 and in many smaller ones as well. In short, we set a train in motion by supporting something that is really frightening and morally reprehensible.

Finally we can watch; we can pay attention to what is going on. I commend The Jamestown Foundation for publishing this book because I think watching and developing expertise is critical so that we will be able at the margins to, one, know what's going on and, two, maybe be able to do something useful.

But let me end, since I began by talking about fiction and its role, by citing a name that should be present in the minds of everyone who does research on the Caucasus. I was thinking and mentioned to Paul Henze, who agreed this is the largest gathering we've seen in this area in a long time on this subject. I was thinking of President Kennedy's observation in 1962 or 1963 when he assembled the American Nobel Prize winners, and said there was more intelligence assembled in that room tonight except perhaps when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.
The person I am thinking of in terms of this subject is the late Alexander Bennigsen, the father of one of our participants, the direct teacher of a number of us and, in a larger sense, the teacher of all of us in this field. And I wanted to end by mentioning something that Alex used to say in his seminar at the University of Chicago, which we students didn’t understand at the time. Professor Bennigsen used to say that when he finally retired he looked forward to the day that he could write a book where he invented all the facts, all the footnotes, and all the bibliography. And most of us at the time assumed that he had already done that. But now I recognize that it was precisely another form of understanding; to wit, that if we’re going to go beyond the day-to-day, incremental approach to a period of revolutionary change we’re going to have to turn to a more imaginative direction, one that fiction may do more than what we call non-fiction most of the time.
Putin, Kozak and Russian Policy toward the North Caucasus

John Dunlop

Introduction

In an article entitled “From What is the Homeland Being Constructed?” that appeared in the magazine Profile, the authors posed a key question. “Will Russia,” they asked, “be preserved within its borders fifteen years from now?” The region of the Russian Federation singled out as being the most vulnerable was, not surprisingly, the North Caucasus, and, specifically, that region’s “Muslim” autonomous republics.

Among the threats facing the North Caucasus, the Profile authors observed, were: “The fantastic, even by Russian standards, scale of corruption; the clan organization of politics and economic life; unemployment... and the collapsing social sphere.” The poverty and the marginalizing of broad segments of the populace were said to represent, “a nutritional bouillon for the spreading of radical Islamic identity and filling up of the ranks of the terrorist underground,” in the Russian South.

In the period antedating the horrific terrorist attack on a school in Beslan, North Ossetia in September of 2004 in which 330 hostages—186 of them children—lost their lives, the Russian leadership’s approach to the North Caucasus region could have been summarized as being an unwieldy combination of coercion (including, at times, the use of massive police and military force), “Chechenization” (the empowerment of pro-Moscow Chechens headed up by representatives of the Kadyrov family) and heavy doses of “PR” (or “spin”). While this approach yielded occasional successes, it was not working particularly well or effectively in the period leading up to the Beslan tragedy; largely because it failed to address the harsh economic and

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social realities besetting the region. It also failed to address the plague of all-pervasive corruption, especially police corruption.

The existence of this web of difficulties identified by the Profile authors undoubtedly helped convince President Putin in the early autumn of 2004 that a change in Russia’s approach to the region was needed. A major change in Russia’s approach to the North Caucasus was signaled in September 2004 when Dmitrii Kozak was named polpred (plenipotentiary presidential representative) of the Southern Federal District. The appointment of this vigorous lawyer and seasoned bureaucrat, who had played a major role in organizing Putin’s 2000 and 2004 presidential election campaigns and had occupied top posts in the Russian presidential administration, suggested that President Putin had become serious about tackling the manifold problems afflicting the region.

Despite periodic setbacks and defeats at the hands of local republican leaders and their allies, Kozak has, over the past two years, persevered and has succeeded in ousting—with Putin’s backing—key leaders of the corrupt and deeply entrenched ruling clans of certain republics in the region. To the extent that it has proved possible, he has also sought to foster the rule of law in the Russian South. In July of this year, it was reported, for example, that Kozak was insisting upon an improvement of the work of the procuracy in the Southern Federal District: “Only last year [2005],” he noted acidly, “the courts returned about 4,000 cases to the procuracy [to be reworked and improved]. This is not something the procuracy should be proud of.”

One admirer and vigorous supporter of Kozak’s approach has been Yuliya Latynina, a leading Russian journalist who has transformed herself into a specialist on the North Caucasus, which is a region she frequently visits. Her detailed reports—large segments of which often concern the North Caucasus—appear during her highly popular Saturday broadcast carried by Ekho Moskvy Radio (transcripts of the broadcasts are posted the following day on the radio’s website) as well as infrequent columns that she publishes on the pages of Novaya gazeta or posts on the websites of Ej.ru and Gazeta.ru. Latynina, who is often sharply critical of the policies of the Putin regime, recently had this to say about polpred Kozak: “We have seen definite achievements in the state of our politics. One man—Dmitrii Kozak—the man who is now in the North Caucasus appointing responsible presidents there and is showing that the response to the anarchy [bespredel] which was created by previous Russian authorities and presidents is not for people to join the rebels but is rather to follow the law.”

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2 For Kozak’s biography, see Aleksei Mukhin, Praviteli Rossii: Staraya ploschad’ i Belyi dom (Moscow: Algoritm, 2005), pp. 55-58.
“I am prepared to support any president appointed by Russia who does something useful in the Caucasus,” Latynina observed during another Ekho Moskvy broadcast. “I will never cast a stone at Mukha Aliev, the new president of Dagestan, nor at Taimuraz Mamsurov, the president of [North] Ossetia, nor at Arsen Kanokov, the president of Kabardino-Balkariya; those presidents who under the most complex circumstances have come to help their people. Yes, they don’t succeed in everything, and from the point of view of a true democrat I could point my finger at them…but I understand perfectly that these people are working under inhuman conditions.”

In another broadcast, Latynina provided several examples of the type of lethal Russian bespredel that threatens the work of Kozak and of the reformist presidents that Putin has been appointing in the region: “There exists conditions that give birth to the rebels…These conditions are called stupidity and anarchy. There is, for example, the situation in Ingushetia when after 22 June [2004] they introduced troops there and complete chaos [bardak] ensued. A [Russian] soldier came up to an open-air shop and asked for vodka. They gave him vodka and then asked, ‘Where is your money?’ He opened fire on the shop. In another incident, some drunken [Russian] paratroopers were eating a lamb in the mountains… Some shepherds came up to them and asked them, ‘Where is our lamb?’ The paratroopers then shot them and burned their bodies.”

“So,” Latynina concluded, “I will never cast a stone at such people [the newly appointed reformist presidents]. To the contrary, I feel that they are making an enormous effort, and that they and poľpred Kozak are trying to ensure that the [North] Caucasus will remain in Russia.” “Without Dmitrii Kozak,” Latynina warned, with a touch of hyperbole, in early June of this year, “we would lose the Caucasus by the fall [of 2006]. I am completely serious.”

Of course, it is Vladimir Putin and not Dmitrii Kozak who has the most influential say in determining what Russia’s policies toward the North Caucasus should be. Kozak’s recommendations constitute only part of a mix of advice that Putin hears from his numerous counselors; on occasion Putin appears to prefer the advice of other more hard-line or more cynical aides. The Russian president’s predilection for coercion and “PR” rather than for strenuous and costly economic, social and legal reform is often evident.

6 ibid.
7 ibid.
8 ibid.
The “Patrushev Amnesty”

The recently announced “Patrushev amnesty” represents one example of such an alternative approach to the problems of the North Caucasus. FSB director Nikolai Patrushev, who is also the head of the Russian National Anti-Terrorist Committee, is, like Kozak, in a position to significantly influence events. On 15 July, following the killing of rebel leader Shamil’ Basaev, and during the run-up to the G-8 summit in St. Petersburg chaired by Putin, Patrushev announced what impressed some commentators at the time as a genuine amnesty for Chechen separatist fighters. “We offer you,” he informed the rebels, “until 1 August 2006 to enter into negotiations with representatives of the legal authority of the Chechen Republic and the federal center.”9 (On 31 July, Patrushev extended the period of the amnesty until 30 September.)

Those who closely scrutinized Patrushev’s statement, however, came to the conclusion that it was not in fact an amnesty but rather an exercise in “PR.” “Publicly,” journalist Tat’yana Stanovaya commented, “this sounds like an invitation to an armistice. But the word ‘armistice’ does not contain any political content.”10 It was noted by journalists that only those rebels who had committed neither crimes nor terrorist acts were eligible for Patrushev’s amnesty. As Yuliya Latynina noted sardonically: “An amnesty is when a crime is forgiven... If they forgive those who are not guilty, that is called something else.”11 It was noted by reporters that of the 110 Chechen fighters who had contacted law enforcement organs, “essentially all of them had left the ranks of the Illegal Armed Formations a long time ago.”12 As for those who remained members of the armed separatists, according to one pro-Russian Chechen MVD official: “The rebels will come out of the woods only when the authorities forgive them not for an abstract participation in this illegal uprising but for serious crimes such as killings and terrorist acts.”13 Another commentator pointed out that no legal foundation whatever underpinned the FSB director’s declared amnesty. “The words of Patrushev,” he concluded, “constitute a guarantee only in words.”14 The Patrushev amnesty, thus, largely constituted an exercise in “PR,” an approach apparently favored by Putin, but not, it would seem, by Kozak.

Putin’s Recently Announced “Withdrawal of Troops”

In similar fashion, on 8 August, the Russian government newspaper Rossiiskaya gazeta published excerpts from Putin’s decree of 2 August that seemed to mandate a phased withdrawal of Russian forces in Chechnya over the next two years. Once again, those analysts who looked closely at the decree concluded that there was in reality little substance to it. Journalist Oleg Vladykin, for

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10 Tat’yana Stanovaya, “Amnistiya ili smert’,” politcom.ru, 1 August 2006.
13 Nikolai Sergeev, “Boeviki vydelili nomera v Soveite Federatsii,” Kommersant, 1 August 2006.
example, entitled his report, “A withdrawal of troops that won’t happen,” while a leading specialist on the North Caucasus, Sergei Markedonov, captioned his essay, “His Majesty PR.”

At present, there are approximately 70,000 siloviki based in Chechnya: 23,000 on permanent assignment from the Ministry of Defense; 24,000 from the Internal Troops of the MVD; 17,000 pro-Moscow regular police; 3,000 FSB border guards, plus FSB and Ministry of Justice units. It is not at all clear that at the end of 2008 there will be less of them there. In the North Caucasus as a whole, Russia possesses approximately 250,000 siloviki throughout the Southern Federal District. Dmitrii Kozak has stipulated that the district has 1,180 siloviki per 100,000 people, making it among the most militarized regions in the world. Despite this huge armed presence, Kozak has underlined the lack of effectiveness of these forces.

It seems fair to conclude that for Vladimir Putin, if not for Dmitrii Kozak, coercion and PR remain the cornerstones of Russia’s approach to the North Caucasus. The divergent approaches of Kozak on the one hand, and of the siloviki and Russian Procuracy on the other hand, were highlighted at important meetings held on 25 August in Rostov-on-Don. Kozak, FSB director Patrushev, MVD chair Nurgaliev and the new Russian procuracy general Yurii Chaika met with the thirteen heads of districts in the Southern Federal District. In his remarks, Kozak emphasized that, “over the past two years the number of terrorist acts has decreased in Southern Russia by 300 percent.” He added that, according to polls, for local residents, corruption among the representatives of the Russian government was the second most significant problem after unemployment. The issue of security, he said, should be solved not by, “spewing out slogans,” but by creating, “a system of administration that is understood by everyone.”

The Russian procurator general, by contrast, emphasized at these meetings that the number of terrorist acts over the first seven months of 2006 was at the same level as for the same period in 2005. He said that crime was up in the federal district by ten percent, with Rostov Oblast leading the way, followed by Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia and Chechnya. Kozak’s relative optimism contrasted rather starkly with the procurator general’s gloomy pessimism.

For the remainder of this paper we shall examine how Putin and Kozak have been seeking to cope with the manifold problems besetting the “Muslim” republics of the North Caucasus.

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Chechnya

The situation in this unsettled region remains charged and difficult. On the one hand, "Chechenization" has, to a considerable extent, represented a success for the Russian leadership. The pro-Moscow leadership under President Alu Alkhanov and the de facto dominant figure in the republic, Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov, has quite successfully been taking the fight to the rebels. Today, Chechnya is no longer the most at-risk republic in the North Caucasus.

In accomplishing this, Moscow has, however, acquired a difficult-to-control proxy leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, son of the "martyred" former president of Chechnya Akhmad Kadyrov, who, especially in the time since he was made prime minister in early 2006, has sought to take the republic and its finances under his personal control. While the appointment of Ramzan as prime minister appears to have represented Putin's personal choice, and not Kozak's (who is clearly repelled by corrupt leaders), in order to help the consolidation of Russia's hold over the republic, it remains unclear how much longer the Russian president and his siloviki allies will be able to tolerate the excesses of the ambitious Chechen premier. Early next month Ramzan will turn thirty, which will make him eligible for appointment by Putin to the post of Chechen president. It will be difficult for Putin to keep Ramzan reasonably content while at the same time denying him the Chechen presidency. Ramzan's supporters in Chechnya, however, are currently ratcheting up the pressure to force Putin to name Kadyrov president right now. The speaker of the lower chamber of the Chechen parliament, Dukvakha Abdurakhmanov, recently asserted, "The people don't ask whether or not he [Ramzan] wants to head up the republic but desire that he should be president [now]." On 5 October—Ramzan's birthday—Abdurakhmanov announced that a World Congress of the Chechen People will open in Grozny. This Congress's chief task will be to push for Ramzan's appointment as Chechen president.

Putin, who has historically been a highly skilled mediator of ambitious subordinates, is evidently attempting to use President Alu Alkhanov and several pro-Moscow police leaders as a political counterweight to Ramzan. If, however, Ramzan were to be sacked from his post or, as some have speculated, to be given a prestigious administrative post elsewhere in Russia, it seems likely that a number of his recent successes against the rebels could unravel. Indeed many members of his police force are former rebels who could once again decide to turn against Russia. President Alkhanov, in contrast to Ramzan, appears to be a loyal servant of the Russian state and its interests. His biography makes this clear: "Alkhanov is a graduate of the Academy of the MVD of the USSR. He occupied various positions in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR. After the rise to power in the republic of Dzhokhar Dudaev he was one of the leaders of the opposition... In 1996 he personally confronted the rebels who seized Grozny. In 1997-2000 he was the head of a department of the police in the city of Shakhty, Rostov Oblast."  

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21 Sergei Markedonov, "Kadyrov protiv Alkhanova: prezidentskie spory," politcom.ru, 15 August 2006. On the intensifying power struggle between Alkhanov and Kadyrov, see also: Anna Politkovskaya, "Slozhenie oruzhiya,
When Kadyrov, in an overt attempt at intimidation, ordered Alkhanov’s office surrounded by armed followers at the time that the Chechen president was meeting with the head of the Russian Auditing Chamber, former Russian premier Sergei Stepashin, Alkhanov became so incensed that he traveled to Rostov and informed Kozak that he wanted to resign. “Kozak,” Yuliya Latynina has recalled, “persuaded the president of Chechnya not to resign. Then Putin reconciled Alkhanov and Kadyrov [at a meeting in Moscow]. They both returned to Chechnya, and Kadyrov began to restore Grozny so as to show that he is better than Alkhanov. Since the federals had forgotten to put money into a special program for the restoring of Grozny...Kadyrov had to pay with his own money.”

Ramzan Kadyrov, in contrast to Alkhanov, is a Chechen nationalist who has sought to identify himself, despite egregious behavioral lapses, with the traditional religion of Chechnya, Sufi Islam. His feelings toward ethnic Russians are not warm. On one occasion, when he was in the reception room of Kozak’s office, Ramzan reportedly confided, “I killed my first Russian when I was sixteen years old.” A Western journalist who recently spent time with Ramzan has written: “In private, Kadyrov is said to despise the Russians, admitting to one interviewer: ‘We should keep away from them.’... He troubled Moscow earlier this year by banning gambling, calling for women to wear headscarves and promising that polygamy would be tolerated in the republic, which is a clear breach of Russian laws.” Ramzan’s disrespectful attitude toward Russians even while he heaps praise on Russian president Putin and urges that he serve at least two more terms, earns him points with elements of the Chechen populace. Like Ramzan’s late father, specialist Sergei Markedonov has noted, “Kadyrov positioned himself not as a pro-Russian politician but as a person who is personally devoted to President Vladimir Putin.”

In the opinion of Yuliya Latynina, in seeking to rein in Ramzan, or especially by removing him from office, Moscow, could be making a critical error. In her view, Kadyrov constitutes, along with Dmitrii Kozak, “a very important achievement in our policy in the Caucasus.” Despite his self-evident flaws, Ramzan has accomplished much on behalf of the Russian state. “We see,” she recently observed, “that Ramzan Kadyrov is indeed the chief person in Chechnya. He is someone who has managed to get Chechnya under control. In other words, he is someone who has accomplished what neither Dudaev nor Maskhadov succeeded in doing. Moscow is currently

attempting to create a counterweight to Kadyrov in the person of Alkhanov, and with the detachments of Yamadaev and Kakiev. But this effort is repeatedly unsuccessful because Kadyrov turns out to be too strong. In addition, Kadyrov is now restoring Grozny...with his own money... Kadyrov is one of the few activists of the Putin epoch who has understood the chief secret of the Putin regime—if you say pleasant things to the regime but do whatever you want, then the regime is too weak to prevent you from doing what you want.”

In contrast to Latynina’s appreciation for what Ramzan has accomplished on Russia’s behalf, analyst Sergei Markedonov has emphasized the deleterious effects of Ramzan’s political dominance: “Today one can speak of the concentration of all real power in the republic in the hands of the Chechen prime minister... This means that the institutionalization of power in the republic ...has not been carried out.” There has, in addition, he notes, occurred a “squeezing out Russians from positions of control [the prime minister, for example, is no longer an ethnic Russian]...a minimalizing of Russian power structures; a ‘Chechenization’ of power and of the administration of the police; and an extension of this concept into the military.” Russia’s hold on Chechnya has thus been weakened, not strengthened, by Ramzan’s period of rule.

A key issue for the future is whether or not Russia will prove capable of carrying out the physical restoration of Chechnya. As Russian journalists have noted, Ramzan has been conducting a rather extensive restoration of the republic out of his own pocket. One way he has been doing this has been to withhold funds from the paychecks of pro-Moscow Chechen officials and police and then contribute those monies to the restoration effort. Ramzan and other pro-Moscow Chechen officials have complained bitterly that Moscow has contributed nothing to the restoration campaign. Dmitrii Kozak for one appears to understand the danger for Russia represented by such a perception among Chechens. In late July, he was accompanied on an inspection trip to Grozny by German Gref, the Russian minister for economic development and trade, Aleksei Kudrin, the minister of finance, and Andrei Fursenko, the minister of education, as well as other high-ranking Russian officials. According to the newspaper Kommersant, the inspection group confirmed that Kadyrov’s home base of Gudermes had been completely restored but saw that Grozny manifestly had not. “Even the rubble had not been removed.”

According to a path-breaking report by journalist Anna Politkovskaya, Ramzan demanded to the visiting Russian ministers that Chechnya be reimbursed for the extensive restoration work that has already been carried out. Ramzan was, however, unable to provide the required documentation for this work. According to Politkovskaya, Kudrin told Ramzan directly that he

did not intend to go to prison because of him. Given this impasse between Ramzan and several top Russian ministers, it seems unlikely that the Russian state—despite assurances to the contrary made by German Gref and others—will agree in the foreseeable future to give massive funds to a Chechnya that is de facto headed by Ramzan.

In similar fashion, the Russian Ministry of Defense has likewise made what has turned out to be empty promises. In December of last year the defense ministry was given the job of removing the rubble from Grozny.\textsuperscript{31} An inspection visit by defense minister Sergei Ivanov in July of this year served, however, to only point out that almost nothing had been accomplished toward this goal. The financing of the restoration of Grozny, Ivanov hastily announced during his visit, “will begin next week.”\textsuperscript{32} It did not. What actual restoration is accomplished in Grozny will therefore likely be conducted by the Chechens themselves. If this turns out to be the case, then what perceived need will Chechens feel for a Russian state that is demonstrably incapable of keeping its promises?

**Ingushetia**

The situation in Ingushetia could, today, be the most critical within the entire North Caucasus region. The Putin-appointed president of Ingushetia, Murat Zyazikov, a former FSB general, represents an appointment made with Putin’s blessing, but not Kozak’s. (Zyazikov’s name is conspicuously missing from Yuliya Latynina’s list of “rational” presidents in the North Caucasus.) By failing to address the massive social and economic ills afflicting his republic, Zyazikov has allowed the situation there to markedly deteriorate.

In late June of this year, it was reported that over the past two months, “illegal armed units conducted more than twenty terrorist operations” in the republic. Among those assassinated by the terrorists were the deputy minister of internal affairs of Ingushetia, Dzhabrail Kostoev, the commander of the republican OMON of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Musa Nal’giev, and the deputy head of the Sunzhenskii District in the republic, a woman named Gubina who had been in charge of a program to return ethnic Russians to Ingushetia. In fact, she had succeeded in returning a thousand of them. In August an attempt on the life of the procurator of Nazran’ district also took place.\textsuperscript{33} These terrorist acts were committed despite the presence of a regiment of Internal Troops and a motor rifle regiment from the Defense Ministry in the tiny republic.\textsuperscript{34}

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\textsuperscript{33} “Ingushskomu prokuroru postavili stakan s granatoi,” \textit{Kommersant}, 11 August 2006.

The assassination of Lieutenant Colonel Nal’giev, as well as the killing of his young children, was the newspaper Kommersant observed, clearly intended to send a brutal message: “The terrorists sent the local OMON a clear message. He who cooperates with the federal center will be pitilessly destroyed together with his family, including his children.” The murder of Gubina carried the additional message that “there is no place for ethnic Russians in Ingushetia.”

The deteriorating relations with ethnic Ingush and Ossetians within both the republics of Ingushetia and North Ossetia has, from the point of view of the Russian leadership, been even worse than such terrorist acts. It was reported in early August that Dmitrii Kozak had tried but failed to reconcile the presidents of the two republics. The regime’s attempt to return ethnic Ingush to the contested Prigorodnii District in North Ossetia, an effort apparently supported both by Putin and Kozak, has, not surprisingly, proven to be a destabilizing policy.

In late August, General Nikolai Patrushev, the head of the National Anti-Terrorist Committee, reported that, as a result of Russia’s successful counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya there had occurred a “transfer of terrorist activity into regions bordering on the republic.” He stipulated that of the 78 terrorist acts that took place in Russia during the first seven months of 2006, 18 of them occurred in Igushetia and 11 took place in North Ossetia. In addition, Patrushev said, the number of crimes committed with the use of illegal firearms had increased during that period in North Ossetia by 101% and in Ingushetia, by 20%.

The stated desire of Ramzan Kadyrov and his followers to reintegrate Ingushetia with Chechnya has also had a destabilizing effect upon Ingushetia. “De facto,” one journalist, Vadim Rechkalov, has commented, “this idea [of Ramzan’s] is little different from Basaev’s idea of a ‘Caliphate from the Black Sea to the Caspian.’” (Ramzan’s project, it should be noted, also foresees Chechnya’s eventual integration with all or parts of Dagestan.

North Ossetia

Given the deteriorating conditions in North Ossetia, a republic where the majority of the population is not Muslim but which is nonetheless heavily impacted by developments in adjacent

35 Kommersant, 11 August 2006.
Muslim areas, especially in Ingushetia, it has become evident that decisive action needs to be taken. On 29 August, it was announced that the republic’s president, Taimuraz Mamsurov, had fired the republic’s entire government. The likely new head of government, Nikolai Khlyntsov, is an official with close career ties to Mamsurov. The attitude of Dmitrii Kozak toward Khlyntsov’s candidacy remains unclear.

**Dagestan**

As in Ingushetia, the large republic of Dagestan, which has a population of approximately 2.5 million, has also been destabilizing rapidly. “Dagestan,” Sergei Markedonov has remarked, “has become the leader in terrorist activities. Just last year [2005] it surpassed Chechnya in terms of the number of terrorist acts.” According to police spokesmen, there could presently be as many as 2,500 rebels active in the republic, while there are perhaps several hundred active in Chechnya. In early August, in the town of Buinaksk, the local procurator, Bitar Bitarov, was killed by a bomb. A second assassination attempt on the same day came close to killing the republic’s minister of internal affairs, Adil’gerei Magomedtagirov. There are Muslim villages in Dagestan, such as the highland village of Gimry, where Sharia law, not Russian law rules.

Two key problems contributing to the destabilization of Dagestan and serving to empower the rebels are massive unemployment as well as police brutality and corruption. According to the former Russian minister of nationalities, Ramazan Abdulatipov, who is currently Russian ambassador to Tajikistan, “In my native Dagestan, for every employed person there are 160 who are unemployed.” “In Dagestan,” journalist Ol’ga Allenova has stated flatly, “there are no jobs... If in Dagestan they promised work to those who would put down their weapons then a half of the informal formations would not remain.”

As for the corrupt and ineffective Dagestani police, they routinely resort to the use of torture, employing “needles under fingernails, the breaking of fingers, and beatings on the kidneys with rubber truncheons.” Far worse torture than this is routinely used. “Not a single man in the [North] Caucasus can forgive [such treatment],” Allenova has commented. Polls conducted by

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42 “Osetinskii prem’er ne dostig sovetsviya dolzhnosti,” Kommersant, 30 August 2006.
49 Ibid.
the government agency FAPSI have shown, as Dmitrii Kozak recently underscored, that 88% of the residents in the republic do not have faith in the Dagestani police.\textsuperscript{50}

As soon as he was appointed to the post of \textit{polpred} for the Southern Federal District, Kozak began to pay close attention to the worsening conditions in Dagestan. A special report on Dagestan was issued by a working group attached to his office that, citing public opinion surveys that it had commissioned, warned that poverty and broad-scale corruption were serving to rapidly destabilize the republic.\textsuperscript{51} On Kozak’s recommendation, Putin appointed Mukhu Aliev, an ethnic Avar, as the new head of the republic. (Aliev figures prominently on Latynina’s list of “rational” presidents in the North Caucasus.) A key point in Aliev’s program has been that the highly corrupt and violent \textit{siloviki} who served under his predecessor, Magomedali Magomedov, had to be removed; something that is, of course, easier said than done. Aliev is said to believe that “the problem of extremism in the republic will not be resolved by special operations alone …Jobs have to be created, unemployment has to be reduced, and the number of those who go abroad to attend religious schools in Arab countries has to be cut back.”\textsuperscript{52} Aliev has, like other reformist presidents in the region, sought to make use of the “Patrushev amnesty” in order to offer the rebels attractive incentives to disarm.

It has been noted by commentators that Aliev appears not to be corrupt, that he does not give or take bribes, and that he is not part of the republic’s ruinous clan system. In Latynina’s approving words, “The president of Dagestan is in general a very rational man.” “I am an adherent not of [protest] meetings but of the law,” Aliev told her in words that, perhaps intentionally, echoed the views of \textit{polpred} Kozak.\textsuperscript{53}

\textbf{Kabardino-Balkariya}

In October of 2005, a major assault by Islamic militants took place in the city of Nal’chik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkariya. Thirty-five representatives of the power ministries perished, as did ninety-two rebels and twelve civilians. The unexpected appearance of some 150 rebels represented a major surprise for the authorities, but it could have been worse—Shamil’ Basaev reportedly watched the fighting from a nearby hilltop and chose not to commit 150-300 of his own fighters to the fray.\textsuperscript{54}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[	extsuperscript{50}] Madina Shavlokhova, “Dagestanskii lider razoblachetat vzyatichnikov v pogonakh,” GZT.ru, 28 August 2006.
\item[	extsuperscript{51}] “Kak budut vzryvat’ Dagestan.” mk.ru, 8 July 2005.
\item[	extsuperscript{52}] Yuliya Rybina, “Dagestanskim boevikam predlozhili dialog po razoruzheniyu,” \textit{Kommersant}, 21 July 2006.
\item[	extsuperscript{54}] Andrei Soldatov, Irina Borogan, “Basaev brosil boevikov v bede,” politcom.ru, 7 July 2006.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The geopolitically key republic of Kabardino-Balkaria finds itself today enmeshed in the same harsh poverty as the rest of the North Caucasus. “The level of wages in the republic is two times lower than the average, while the percentage of those who are unemployed is 25%. In addition, not one of the large industrial enterprises in the republic is currently operating.”

In addition to such economic woes, Kabardino-Balkaria has been the victim of a plague of police corruption and brutality. The chair of the State Duma’s committee on security, Vladimir Vasil’ev, has called the police in Nal’chik “the most corrupt system of the MVD [in Russia].”

Concerning the issue of police brutality in the republic, Yuliya Latynina has said, “I have said many times that the situation in Kabardino-Balkaria and in Ingushetia is typical in the sense that the main source of extremism in these republics is not so much the terrorists as much as it is the law-enforcement organs who behave, of course, as they generally behave in Russia itself...When it [police brutality] happens in Blagoveshchensk [in the Russian Far East], no one reacts. However when such a thing occurs in the Caucasus... the man who has been beaten can very easily convince himself that he has to take up an automatic weapon and kill [ethnic] Russians in return....”

In Kabardino-Balkaria, Latynina recalls, the former head of the republican police, Colonel Shagenov, “unleashed a literal terror against the Kabardino-Balkaria Jamaat. Believers were dragged out of mosques, were beaten up by the hundreds, had [Orthodox] crosses shaved on their skulls, had their beards were set on fire, and kicked a pregnant woman [Elena Gaseeva] in the stomach with their shoes...saying, ‘You won’t give birth to another ‘Wahabbi.’” To keep Gaseeva from identifying her police attackers, they seized her husband, warning, ‘If you identify us, we’ll kill your husband.’”

Latynina’s reference to the widespread corruption of the police throughout Russia, and not just in the North Caucasus, has been confirmed by recent polls conducted throughout Russia. According to one survey taken in January of this year, 70% of respondents stated that they did not trust Russian law-enforcement organs. Fifty-three percent maintained that they were poorly defended by the police, while 27% said that they were not defended at all.

Dmitrii Kozak, supported by President Putin, has clearly seen the danger represented in Kabardino-Balkaria by the mix of harsh poverty, sky-high unemployment and police brutality and corruption. A reformer, Arsen Kanokov, who is on Latynina’s list of “rational” republican heads, has been named republican president. Also just recently, a member of Kozak’s own staff,

58 Tat’yana Mashkova, “Obernis’ neznakomyi v pogonakh,” Novaya gazeta, 27 July 2006. The poll was taken by the organization “Obshchestvenniy verdict.”
Andrei Yarin, was appointed prime minister of the republic. But is there sufficient time for the reformers to avert disaster? On 12 August, after a lull of some months, rebels once again made their presence felt by opening fire on police in the town of Khasan’ya, a suburb of Nal’chik. The rebels were reportedly from the same group that had attacked Nal’chik in October 2005.

Karachaevo-Cherkessiya

The Republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessiya is one in which Kozak has not yet succeeded in removing the republic’s compromised president, Mustafa Batdyev, who has been in power since 2003. This is true despite the fact that Batdyev’s (former) son-in-law orchestrated a gangland-style slaying in 2004 in which seven people were gunned down. The grisly murders sparked significant popular unrest.

Adygea

In the case of Adygea, an autonomous republic located within the confines of Karasnodar krai, Kozak (and Putin as well) appear to have suffered a noteworthy political setback. In an apparently ill-advised effort to “strengthen the vertical” they sought to remove the republic’s Adyg president, Khazret Sovmen from office, and to do away with Adygea’s autonomy and sovereignty, merging the region with the largely Russian and Cossack Krasnodar krai. This ill-considered move threatened to destabilize the entire western North Caucasus: “Adyg and Cherkess committees from across the North Caucasus warned that if Moscow continued to push the abolition of Adygea’s status as a separate republic, these committees would in turn propose to unify the historic territories of Adygea, Kabarda, Cherkessia, and Shapsugia to create a far larger Adyg (Cherkess) republic.” This episode, as well as the efforts made by the regime to resettle Ingush in North Ossetiya and ethnic Russians in Ingushetia, seems to demonstrate that Kozak, at least to a degree, shares Putin’s relative blindness with regard to the acute dangers involved in shaking up the delicate and highly combustible ethno-religious balance in the region.

Conclusion

With the appointment of Dmitrii Kozak as polpred in the Southern Federal District, Vladimir Putin has for the first time chosen a “rational” man to spearhead Russia’s efforts to keep the

Russian South attached to Russia. This is despite the fact the overall record has been somewhat mixed. Kozak has, with Putin’s approval, appointed “rational” regional leaders in certain key republics: Aliev in Dagestan; Kanokov in Kabardino-Balkariya; Mamsurov in North Ossetia. In other instances, the Russian president has not acquiesced to the removal of an incompetent or corrupt incumbent. The most notable of these is Murat Zyazikov in Ingushetia. In at least one instance, both Kozak and Putin, as we have seen, were rebuffed in an attempt to remove an entrenched incumbent: Khazret Sovmen in Adygea. Finally, both Kozak and Putin currently find themselves confronted with the intractable problem of what to do about the ambitious Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya—Kadyrov has to date served as a champion of Russia’s interests in the region but he could represent a dire threat to those same interests in the future.

As to what will happen in the North Caucasus region in the near future, it remains unclear whether Kozak and Putin will prove capable of overcoming the endemic Russian bespredel and bardak highlighted by Latynina and other commentators. To do this, they need to set about bolstering the economy and infrastructure in the region’s desperately poor “Muslim” republics with their stratospheric numbers of unemployed and heavily armed young men. If they should fail, then it will remain uncertain whether the North Caucasus, or at least sections of it, will remain part of Russia in 2015.

On 17 August, it was reported that Putin intended to soon meet with “the biggest businessmen in the country”, Oleg Deripaska, Aleksei Miller and other oligarchs, at his summer residence in Sochi in order to encourage them to invest in the North Caucasus. “The initiator and intermediary for this meeting,” it was remarked, “was to be the polpred Dmitrii Kozak.” While the leading Russian oligarchs will predictably listen carefully to the Russian president’s exhortations, it remains unclear whether, even if the requested funds are offered, the Russian state will prove capable of carrying out the restoration of Chechnya and the bolstering of the economies and infrastructure of the North Caucasus republics.

While Putin and his press spokespeople are wont to indict Al-Qaeda and “international terrorism” for the monumental difficulties they currently face in the North Caucasus, it seems clear that this is little more than a red herring. A quarter of a million siloviki stationed in the North Caucasus District should be sufficient to hold eight hundred (the figure provided by General Arkadii Edelev, deputy minister of internal affairs) rebels at bay. Even if the actual number of rebels is four times as high, a quarter of a million armed men should be enough to do the job.

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It seems clear that there is another key question. As Anton Danilov-Danilyan, the head of the Economic Working Group of the Russian Presidential Administration, recently put it: “If there are jobs and investments in the economy of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, then there will be fewer of those willing to risk their lives for the sake of [islamic] slogans.”64 The operative word here is “if.” Will Kozak and Putin be able to get the job done, or will they fail?

**Postscript**

In the approximately nine months that have passed since this essay was completed, the regime has pressed ahead with implementing President Putin’s strategy toward the North Caucasus region. This strategy, it should be noted, appears to owe considerably more to the convictions (and to the deep political cynicism) of the Russian president than it does to the views of his polpred in the Southern Federal District, Dmitrii Kozak. The Putin approach to the region, as was remarked earlier, combines heavy doses of coercion and of PR (or “spin”) with the installing of local leaders who can be counted on to do Moscow’s bidding. In pursuing such a strategy, the regime has self-evidently not been addressing the key socio-political problems of the region: sky-high unemployment, widespread poverty, inter-ethnic strife, and massive corruption of republican police and local bureaucracies.

In early February of 2007, a leading specialist on the region, Sergei Markedonov, published an essay entitled “Irony instead of a strategy” in which he awarded the regime low marks for its benighted and counter-productive approach to the North Caucasus.65 During a recent Putin recent press conference devoted to the region, Markedonov commented, “The problems of the North Caucasus were simply not examined. Not the problem of Dagestan (where since 2005 terrorist activity has been intensively growing), not the unresolved Ossetian-Ingush conflict (which did not once attract the interest of experts and politicians during 2006), and not the situations in Kabardino-Balkariya (the results of the [October 2005] tragedy in Nal’chik) and Karachaevo-Cherkessiya (the growth of the activity of Islamic radicals). None of these issues were focused upon by journalists or by the President of the Russian Federation.... The president also did not say anything new [about Chechnya], limiting himself to the traditional ‘high assessment’ of...Ramzan Kadyrov.”

As for the attitude toward the region of Dmitrii Kozak, Markedonov went on, the polpred has recently been asserting that the North Caucasus has become a stable and secure region. “The problems of security and instability,” Kozak was quoted as maintaining, “now lie in the past.... With full certainty one can state that it is 40% safer to work here than it is in Russia as a whole.” Markedonov wondered where Kozak could have come up with such a bizarre statistic. The

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“wahhabis” who are increasingly active in the North Caucasus, he pointed out, would beg to differ with Kozak’s opinion. In Markedonov’s view, an unjustified mood of triumph underlies the Putin-Kozak approach to the North Caucasus.

In an informative and stimulating April 2007 essay entitled “Beyond the Borders of Chechnya: The Emergence of Jamaats in the Northern Caucasus and their Radicalization,” Emil Souleimanov of Charles University in Prague (a visiting fellow at Harvard during 2007) summed up recent developments in the North Caucasus thusly: “One thing is certain: over the last few years, [Islamic] jamaats have been springing up like dandelions all over the Northern Caucasus. More and more frequently these jamaats have a military agenda, while some (not all) established jamaats are becoming militarized. These jamaats are then gradually losing their ethnic character, are internationalizing, gaining contacts with the Chechen resistance and trying to draw the attention and appreciation of their colleagues with highly visible actions.... They are united, however, by the idea of the justness of their common cause: jihad, an effort to rid themselves of the corrupt local elite as well as Russian domination and to create an Islamic state based on the sharia.”65

Souleimanov underscored one significant development that is currently taking place in the northwestern part of the North Caucasus: “Processes are underway that are similar to those experienced in Chechnya in the period between the wars [i.e., during 1996-1999]. Religious societies of (not only) ideologically devoted people are gradually becoming radicalized and militarized beneath the indiscriminate repression of the state apparatus.... Moreover, both in Karachaevo-Cherkesiya and in Kabardino-Balkariya, people are aware that (mono)ethnic separatism is, if not impossible, at least very complicated, taking into account the enormous numbers of local Russians. If the apologists of the jamaats are to succeed, it is vitally important to forget ‘ethnic’ wrongs and to stick together with ‘Muslim brothers’.... The latest attacks against Islam and Muslims by the republic’s law enforcement agencies, in which Russians play leading roles, are strongly resented by much of the local population, whether of Turkic or Adygean origin.”

We now move on to a necessarily brief examination of the political situation in certain key republics of the North Caucasus region. Our main focus here will be on the charged situation in Chechnya and on the uncertain fate of the Chechen diaspora living in the Russian Federation. As is well known, Ramzan Kadyrov was appointed Chechen head of state by President Putin earlier this year. While repeatedly emphasizing his fealty to Putin and his personal concern for

the well-being of ethnic Russians, Kadyrov has, at the same time, been sponsoring a campaign to take full control of all police, procuracy and economic levers in the republic. Through his close allies in the Chechen leadership, he has, for example, recently sought, to oust the republic's procurator, an ethnic Russian, Valerii Kuznetsov. Kuznetsov had earned the ire of Kadyrov and his colleagues by investigating cases of corruption among Chechen elites. Kadyrov has also been seeking to take control of the one remaining police entity in the republic that he does not yet control—the Operational Investigate Bureau (ORB-2)—currently subordinated to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Southern Federal District.

Having only just been appointed as Chechen president, Kadyrov is already, through his republican allies, pressing to have his presidential term extended from four years to 5-8 years. If Putin follows through on his assurances to hand over power to a chosen successor in 2008—and especially if that successor is a silovik, such as Sergei Ivanov—then Kadyrov’s continued loyalty to the Russian state will be very much in question. At the least, he will predictably seek to freeze the Russian state out of all Chechen internal affairs.

Kadyrov’s mounting difficulties with the Russian state are taking place, it should be emphasized, against a background of rising ethnic Russian xenophobia directed toward ethnic minorities and especially toward Chechens. This sentiment has been documented in polls taken, for example, by the Levada Center in Moscow. One indication of such xenophobia was the recent effort by certain extreme Russian nationalists forcibly to obtain the renaming of Akhmad Kadyrov Street in Moscow (named, of course, after Ramzan’s father) to “the Street of the Pskov Division of Russian Paratroopers.”⁶⁷ Significant numbers of Moscow police had to be called out to keep the street sign from being torn down by angry Russian activists. A number of residents of the Russian capital, including those living on or close to the street, were reported by the press to be incensed that a street in the Russian capital had been named after a Chechen “bandit.”

A far more serious sign of deteriorating Russo-Chechen relations was the severe ethnic riots that erupted in the city of Stavropol’ in late May and early June of this year. Stavropol’ Krai, it should be noted, borders on all of the “Muslim” republics of the North Caucasus (with the exception of Adygea). Several hundred ethnic Russians and Muslims from the North Caucasus clashed in a mass riot that saw the wielding by the rioters of knives and a threatened use of firearms. Three deaths marked these tumultuous events. On 24 May, a Chechen student was beaten to death, apparently by Russian police who had taken him into custody. On 3 June, two ethnic Russian students were found stabbed to death. Rumors, as are their wont, spread like wildfire, and local public opinion in Stavropol’ concluded that the stabbings of the Russians had been payback for the killing of the Chechen (though no such connection has been demonstrated). The local police,

many of them veterans of the two wars in Chechnya, openly sided with the Russian “side” in the melee.

According to some reports, approximately a thousand Russians paraded by the mayor’s office in Stavropol shouting “Glory to Russia!” (a well-known slogan of the neo-Nazi Russian National Union) and “A suitcase—a train station—Chechnya!” (a call to deport Chechens back to their home republic). Some demonstrators were reported to have marched by the local FSB headquarters “shouting slogans and extending their arms in a Nazi salute.” During the bloody mass slugfest, Muslim participants were said to have shouted: “Allah akbar!” and “Russian swine—get out of the Caucasus!” Fifty-one individuals were taken into custody by the police, many of them reportedly Muslims, while nine criminal cases were subsequently opened by the procuracy in connection with the riots. A number of those involved in the slugfest—thirty in all from both “sides”—had to be hospitalized, some with quite serious injuries. Reporters noted that many of the Russian and Muslim participants in the skirmish were unemployed.

Russian journalists and academic specialists chose to emphasize the regime’s inadequate reaction to the incident. Polpred Dmitrii Kozak was quoted as dismissing the incident as having been a “banal scuffle.” In similar fashion, the head of the Russian MVD, Rashid Nurgaliev, stressed that the incident was “not connected with ethnic motives.” Specialist Sergei Markedonov pointed out that such a dismissive attitude by the authorities toward latent conflicts had in the past led to severe military-political consequences both in Russia and in post-Soviet space. “During the 1950s-1980s,” he recalled, “inter-ethnic clashes between Russians and Chechens, Russians and Ingush, and Chechens and Ingush were exclusively seen as common social conflicts.” But, as one can see now, he added, such conflicts paved the way for the savage Russo-Chechen wars of 1994-1996 and 1999-present. In similar fashion, the Armenian pogroms that took place in Sumgait (1988) and Baku (1990) presaged an all-out Armenian-Azerbaijani war.

Journalist Yuliya Latynina made a similar point in her comments on the incident. “In answer to the question, ‘What is happening?’ the regime declares that nothing is happening… A crowd races down the streets [of a city] while the regime with white lips says that everything is in order. Under Yeltsin Russia lived worse than under Putin… But there were no pogroms…” The course that Russia is pursuing today dooms it to inter-ethnic fragmentation [razlom], and the most dangerous part of that fragmentation is the relations between Chechens and Russians. For the

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Russians this is a conflict between beasts and human beings, for the Chechens, between wolves and sheep. This conflict is developing under conditions of the complete absence of the [Russian] state... The regime denies the problem with a well-tested approach—by denying its existence. That’s as effective as curing a stroke by asserting that a patient is healthy.”75

In a detailed analysis of the Stavropol’ riots that appeared in the mass circulation daily Komsomol’skaya Pravda, journalist Vladimir Voloshin warned: “In point of fact we are already witnessing the beginning stages of a disease in comparison to which the civil war [that pitted Reds against Whites] was a just a common cold. The viruses of Kondopoga, Sal’sk and now Stavropol’ are capable of paralyzing the entire country which will then break apart...[Russia] needs to be healed immediately. Two heavy doses of medicine are needed—harsh punishment for the provoking of national conflicts and at least some kind of ethnic policy on the part of the state. At least something like the Soviet model, when in the USSR the authorities painstakingly constructed a ‘melting pot of nations’... And now there is simply no choice—we have to construct that melting pot once again. Before it is too late...”76

Moving on very briefly to the key republic of Dagestan, one should note that it is not clear today that the Putin-Kozak effort to replace the republic’s State Council as a ruling body with an appointed president (an ethnic Avar, Mukhu Aliev) will prove successful. Growing ethnic strains are already becoming visible.

In Ingushetia, the incompetent leadership of former FSB general Murat Zyazikov is failing to prevent an accelerating economic and social decline of the republic. In addition, Zyazikov is now being called upon to fend off efforts by Ramzan Kadyrov and his supporters to merge the two republics, with Chechnya, of course, being slated to play the dominant role.

Lastly, in the small but politically key republic of Adygea, the Russian imperialist approach being taken by Putin and Kozak threatens quite simply to blow up in their faces. A political client of the Russian president and of Kozak, Aslancheryy Tkhakushinov, a former rector of Maikop Technological University, was appointed republican president by Putin in January 2007. Like Murat Zyazikov in Ingushetia, Tkhakushinov seems likely to prove incapable of coping with the forces that and his sponsors have unleashed. His attempts to merge Adygea with Russian and Cossack Krasnodar Krai have already served to anger and stir up the Muslim populace of his republic. In December of 2006, Putin was forced by Adyg public opinion to rule out such a plan. But Kozak and Tkhakushinov are continuing to promote Adygea’s rapid economic integration into Krasnodar Krai, even in cases where this is not to the economic advantage of Adygea. If pursued to the end—i.e., to the de facto merger of Adygea with its much larger neighbor—such a

development could eventually produce a political explosion in the northwestern part of the North Caucasus where pan-Cherkess (pan-Adyg) sentiment is already strong and growing. This point was recently made to me by a Russian journalist who makes frequent visits to the North Caucasus region.

To sum up, the future of the North Caucasus remains murky and uncertain. The Putin-Kozak approach to the region has in many ways proved to be ineffective. Under Putin’s successor—especially if he should prove incapable of forging a modus vivendi with the thrusting and unpredictable Ramzan Kadyrov—the situation in the region could deteriorate further, perhaps rapidly so. The worrisome growth of ethnic Russian xenophobia and in particular of the widespread detestation of dark-skinned “peoples of the Caucasus” could serve to threaten and significantly to weaken Russia’s continued hold on the region.
Separatism in the Northern Caucasus

Moshe Gammer

Introduction

Western media and observers frequently call those Chechens fighting the Russian army "separatists". From the media’s perspective this term is used for two reasons: it is accurate and at the same time does not convey sympathy with either side. Although the original definition of the word "separatism," is, "the advocacy or practice of separation of a [certain] group of people from a larger body on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or gender," it is nowadays limited mainly to ethnic/national groups striving for independence. As such the term, "separatists," is practically synonymous to, "secessionists," but is far simpler to use, write and pronounce. Also, in many cases, "separatism," is interconnected with, "irredentism," which is defined as, "nationalist agitation in other countries, based on historical, ethnic, and geographical reasons, for the incorporation of territories under foreign rule." It seems the phenomenon of separatism in its modern connotation is strongly connected to nationalism and nation-building. After all, nationalism is an ideology that advocates the right of each national group to have its own independent state. Since World War I, nationalism has

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2 It is defined as “the ambition of a minority to form its own sovereign state” (*Dictionary of Geography*), “the idea of creating a separate and sovereign political entity” (*The Oxford Companion to Canadian History*), and “can involve secession from a state and the establishment of independent countries” (*Dictionary of the Social Sciences*).

3 "Secession" is defined as the "formal withdrawal from an association by a group discontented with the actions or decisions of that association. The term is generally used to refer to withdrawal from a political entity; such withdrawal usually occurs when a territory or state believes itself justified in establishing its independence from the political entity of which it was a part. By doing so it assumes sovereignty.” (*Dictionary of the Social Sciences*).


5 There is, of course, a difference between nationalism and separatism. See, for example, Ekaterina Sokirianskaia, "Ideology and Conflict: Chechen Political Nationalism Prior to and During Ten Years of War," in: Moshe Gammer (ed.), *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder* (tentative title, to be published by Routledge).
become the norm for international relations and the basis for the existence of the nation-state. In the case of the Northern Caucasus, nation-building and nationalism were the products of and the end consequence of Soviet policies and practices with regards to ethnic minorities in the USSR.

Soviet Nation-Building and National Conflicts

Ethnically and linguistically, the Caucasus is one of the most diverse regions in the world. Several dozen ethnic groups inhabit this mountain range. The sizes of these ethnicities vary from the inhabitants of a single village to several hundred thousand. The people in the Caucasus were aware of their ethnic and linguistic divisions long before they had contact with Russia and the modern world, but these differences had no political overtones at that time. In spite of this ethnic, linguistic and even religious diversity all the “mountaineers” shared the same way of life, traditions, customs and even way of dressing. In other words, while fully aware of their own peculiarities, all these groups also shared a common culture and identity.

Ethnic demarcation was introduced into the Northern Caucasus by Imperial Russian ethnographers and administrators. By 1917 these new boundaries were internalized, at least by the more educated strata in the Northern Caucasus. Thus, the short-lived “Independent Democratic Republic of the Mountaineers of the Northern Caucasus” (1918 – 1919) was planned as a federal republic of seven states based on the nationalities established in the previous century. It was, however, the Soviet regime, and more precisely Stalin as Commissar for Nationalities Affairs, which created and shaped the current divisions of the existing peoples in the Northern Caucasus.

6 For nationalism as ideology, see Elie Kedourie, Nationalism (London, 1985, 3d. rev. ed.).
7 The majority of the native people of the Northern Caucasus are Sunni Muslims, but there are also Christians and Jews (known as Mountain, Caucasus or Tat Jews). At the time of the Russian conquest some groups were still pagan.
Soviet nationalities policy vis-à-vis the Muslims of the ex-Russian Empire (reassembled by the Bolsheviks) was motivated by a strong fear of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. It aimed, therefore, at, “dividing and ruling,” these societies along three parameters:

1) To divide them by creating new peoples out of existing ethnic groups and by creating new literary languages to replace long established regional languages.

2) To keep the outside Muslim world out of the region through the methods described above as well as forcing a switch from Persian (Arabic) to Latin (and later on to Cyrillic) orthography.

To make them forget their unique histories through the application of these new languages and alphabets.

In the Northern Caucasus the application of this nationalities policy started with the division of the region into two multi-ethnic Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). These two ASSRs were Dagestan and the Mountain Republic. Dagestan remained a single multi-ethnic republic. When this happened, more than 30 native ethnic-linguistic groups were redefined into 11 officially recognised titular "peoples". Three more ethnic groups were then lumped into Dagestan with these 11, with each ethnic group enjoying its own polity within the USSR. Dagestan is, thus, a unique state that is “owned” jointly by 14 peoples.

The Mountain Republic ASSR was divided into several separate autonomous regions within the RSFSR.11 After some initial fluctuation the number of autonomous regions stabilized in the late 1950s at five: the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, the North Ossetian ASSR, the Kabardino-Balkar ASSR, the Karachai-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast (AO) and the Adyghie AO.12 This is how three closely related Muslim ethnic groups were split into separate peoples and divided throughout two or three republics -- the Circassians were divided into the Kabartay, Cherkess and Adyghie peoples; the Vaynaks into Chechens and Ingush; and the Karachai and Balkars were separated from each other by political boundaries.13 Yet, at the same time, three of the autonomous oblasts were bi-national in their make-up. The exception, Adygea, was mono-ethnic but the Adyghes formed a tiny minority group surrounded by a Russian sea.14

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11 See A. Kh. Daudov, Gorskaia ASSR (1921 – 1924 gg). Ocherki sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi istorii (St. Petersburg, 1997)
12 In addition the Abkhaz ASSR and the South Ossetian AO were created and made part of the Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) of Georgia.
13 In all three cases, it seems the Soviets merely reconfirmed divisions made by the Tsarist authorities. And cf. Francine Hirsch, Empire of Nations. Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union (Ithaca, 2005).
14 The other mono-ethnic unit – the North Ossetian ASSR could hardly be regarded an exception. A large portion of Ossetians are Christian (at least nominally) and were, therefore, measured by a different yardstick, especially since
All these new "peoples," in due time, developed their own identity (however partially-formed and imperfect these identities might have been) and nationalism (and under Soviet conditions even xenophobia and chauvinism) and proceeded along divergent paths. Thus, a large potential was created for "nationalist" strife and conflict between these newly-created peoples. The universal policy of creating national autonomous territories further enhanced this potential. 15

First, these peoples did not have equal access (and in some cases did not have any access at all) to the state apparatuses and tools of rule accompanying the status of titular people. In a situation where a territory had more then one titular people it was rather natural for the largest one to monopolize power and resources. The smaller titular peoples, therefore, felt they were being discriminated and/or persecuted. Yet the attainment of status as a titular group was crucial for the advancement of political goals. Groups that were not defined as having titular status did not enjoy such opportunities and consequently were not able to develop nationalist and separatist demands. These groups that were not officially recognized as a titular group include the Avars and Dargins in Dagestan, the Abaza in the Karachai-Cherkess ASSR and the Shapsugs in the Krasnodar krai.

Second, the political-administrative borders diverged markedly from ethnic borders (if these even existed). These political-administrative borders were purposely set up in this fashion. Consequently, large portions of ethnic groups and peoples found themselves living outside their nominal territories as non-titular minorities with no national rights. 16 These disenfranchised groups included the Lezghins, Tsakhurs and Rutuls in Azerbaijan who were officially registered on their internal passports as Azerbaijans, the Avars in Georgia as well as the Nogais in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR and Stavropol krai.

All the disputes associated with this political and administrative quagmire were kept under wraps during the Soviet period. Indeed, these frictions did not develop into serious conflicts during Gorbachev's glasnost' or even after the dissolution of the USSR. The only exception was the problem of the Lezghins and other Dagestani groups, who now found themselves divided by an international border between the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan. The serious conflicts that developed in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR were the result of two actions that took place during the Soviet period.

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16 The only exception is the Aki (Dagestani) Chechens who were recognised as a titular people of that ASSR.
One was Stalin’s deportation, and even more so Khrushchev’s subsequent “rehabilitation”. During World War II several peoples were completely expelled from their homelands and forced to relocate to Central Asia and Siberia. Among them were four North Caucasian peoples – the Chechens, Ingush, Balkars and Karachai. Their autonomies were abolished and their territories were obliterated. Oftentimes, they were renamed and partly annexed by neighboring administrative areas thus ensuring that any sign or memory of their existence in their homelands left with them. In 1956, in what became known as the “Secret Speech”, Khrushchev denounced, among other things, the deportations. Afterwards, these peoples were “rehabilitated”, and were allowed to return to their lands and their autonomies were reinstated. 17 But the restoration was not complete, as a Karachai leader told a British reporter in 1991:

It's not like in the United States where the Japanese-Americans who were put in camps during World War II were apologized to and given financial compensation. Or look at the Germans, the way they have apologized to the Jews and banned anything anti-Jewish.

Instead, our repressed peoples came back in the late 1950s either to have their oil exploited in the case of the Chechens, their best lands taken away in the case of the Ingush, their autonomous status removed in the case of the Karachai and, again, a loss of territory in the case of the Balkars.18

While there were reasons behind the lack of full restoration of these peoples, the fact that it was not done was the major cause for almost all of the acute conflicts in the Northern Caucasus, including the desire of these peoples for separatism.

The other Soviet deed which contributed to an acute conflict was more specific to Dagestan. Rapid economic development of the lowlands accompanied by sometimes poorly planned and massive resettlement and urbanization rapidly changed the ethnic balance in the lowlands. This

18 Sebastian Smith, Allah’s Mountains: Politics and War in the Russian Caucasus (London and New York, 1998), p. 91. The references exclude the Prigorodny raion, which had been part of Ingushetia but were subsequently annexed to North Ossetia from the reinstated Chechen-Ingush ASSR, the unification of Karachai, which had been a separate AO before the “deportation” with Cherkesia, and the failure to reinstate the pre-“deportation” Balkar districts in the re-established Kabardino-Balkar ASSR.
process, combined with the results of the partial “rehabilitation” of the Dagestani Chechens, created the most complex conflict in the Northern Caucasus, as shall be described below.

Post-Soviet National Conflicts and Separatism

The current post-Soviet conflicts in the Northern Caucasus can be divided into two categories:

(1) conflicts between mountain peoples, and (2) conflicts between mountain peoples and external actors. The latter conflicts tend to deteriorate into violent clashes more easily. With one exception, the conflicts between mountain peoples have not deteriorated into armed warfare. The mere fact that such conflicts had emerged at all proves that the Soviet (Stalinist) policy of “divide and rule” has worked beyond all expectations. Most if not all these conflicts in both categories involve either separatism, irredentism or a combination of both. However, with one notable exception no separatist movement has had full independence as its end goal.

Conflicts between Mountain Peoples

All of the conflicts between mountain peoples have their roots in the actions of the Soviet government during and after the Second World War. As was described above, this was the period of “deportation” and “rehabilitation” and the rapid economic development in the 1950s. As mentioned above, the main problems and frictions resulted from an incomplete return to the status quo ante bellum. Gorbachev’s liberalization brought all these problems and conflicts to the forefront when people used their newly established political freedom to create nationalist movements and parties. All of these conflicts – with one exception – reached their peak towards the mid-1990s, but were all self-contained and did not become violent.

No national movement in the Northern Caucasus objected – at least not openly – to the political structure and national divisions in the early Soviet period. Even peoples who were divided into two and three separate political entities, such as the Karachai-Balkars and the Circassians (who were divided into Kabartay, Cherkes and Adyghe groups, which had not previously existed), conducted their political activity within republican borders. The Circassian Adyghe kh‘ases (Adyghe Councils), although cooperating with each other, addressed specific problems in its own republic, while the International Circassian Association defined its goal as “to serve the idea of the cultural and historical revival of the Circassian people” – B. Akbashev, “Prophet in his Homeland,” Circassian World, No. 1 (Spring 1998), p. 7. See Chen Bram, “The Congresses of the International Circassian Association: Dilemmas of an Ethno-National Movement,” in: Moshe Gammer (ed.), The Caspian Region, Vol. II: The Caucasus (London, 2004), pp. 63 – 103, from where this quotation is taken. Since the Balkars and Karachai still saw themselves as one people, they were rather reticent to cooperate. Only in 2000 – 2001 did the Balkar Malkar Auzy and the Karachai Alan organizations decide “to coordinate their activities, especially in the cultural sphere – the development of spiritual heritage, the preservation of national originality and the re-establishment of objective history” – Quoted in Julietta Meskhidze, “The Events of November 1996 in Kabardino-Balkaria and their Prehistory,” in: Moshe Gammer (ed.), Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder (tentative title, to be published by Routledge).
The Karachais’ main complaint, apart from the lack of personal compensation for their hardships, was the fact that the Karachai AO was not restored, but rather merged with the Cherkess AO. However, any separatist tendency was mitigated by the fact that the Karachai were the larger, and therefore the dominant people in the newly formed AO.

Unlike the Karachais, the Balkars were not given separate autonomy by the Soviets. Balkaria was a separate okrug in the Mountain ASSR. Once Kabarda was designated as an AO in 1922, however, Balkaria, contrary to the will of its populace, as well as some recommendations in Moscow, was forced to combine with Karbada to form the Kabardino-Balkar AO, which was later elevated in status to an ASSR. After the deportation, Balkar lands were partly annexed to Georgia and partly resettled by people from “kolkhozes short of land” in other parts of the republic. When the Balkars were “rehabilitated,” the borders were not fully re-established. Another Balkar grievance was the failure of the Kabardino-Balkar authorities to allocate proper financial and other resources to the Balkars. Rather, they later claimed, the authorities treated them “as a 10% minority”.

As Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost reforms began to affect life in the peripheral regions of the USSR in the late 1980’s, “Töre – the Balkar Forum” was established in 1990 as a popular movement. Its stated aim was the “full political, legal and economic rehabilitation of the Balkar people.” More precisely, this meant figuring out how to ensure the “survival and [the recovery from the] dire economic situation” of the Balkar people and re-establishing “the administrative-territorial integrity of Balkaria.” On November 17, 1991 the First Congress of the Balkar People convened and declared the, “national sovereignty of the Balkar people.” Thus from the very beginning the Balkar national movement had in it an element of separatism, and to a lesser extent irredentism. However, this separatism was only a symptom of the Balkar nationalist demands to redress the consequences of the deportation and to complete the supposed “rehabilitation”.

In March 1994, on the 50th anniversary of the deportation of the Balkars, President Boris Yeltsin publicly apologized for the “injustice” and signed a decree “on the Means for the Rehabilitation of the Balkar People and Statehood and to Support its Revival and Development”. Yet, next to nothing was done to implement this decree in the following years. It was only then that Balkar separatism truly surfaced and peaked on November 17, 1996, when the Congress of the Balkar

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20 Ibid.
21 This was but one in a series of such declarations following Yeltsin’s call to the various peoples of the USSR to, “take as much sovereignty as you want.”
People proclaimed the establishment of an independent Republic of Balkaria as part of the Russian Federation, suspended the Constitution and legislation of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic in Balkarian territory, and requested that the President of the Russian Federation and the Federal Council in Moscow install direct presidential rule in Balkaria.

As stated above, the most complicated conflict where separatism was present developed in Dagestan. The economic development and urbanization of the lowlands accompanied by the massive resettlement from the mountains had changed the old ethno-demographic balance there within a generation and transformed the Kumiys, the Nogais and the Azeris into minorities in their historical homelands. Of the three, the Kumiys felt particularly overwhelmed by this process. In comparison, only a small portion of the formerly nomadic Nogais lived in Dagestan – most of them lived in other parts of the Northern Caucasus – and were not historically attached to their territory in Dagestan. The Azeris in Dagestan represented but a tiny fraction of the titular nation across Russia’s southern border. The Kumiys, on the other hand, felt that they were losing their ancestral lands and becoming a minority in their homeland in the process.

Once Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and perestroika reached the periphery of the USSR in the late 1980s, several Dagestani peoples were quick to establish their separate national movements. Among these were the Kumiys. Their national movement – Tenglik – demanded a cessation of further migration into the lowlands. It also demanded that Dagestan be restructured into a federal republic with full territorial autonomy for each nationality in its historical homeland, regardless of the demographic realities at the time. These demands have been fervently opposed by both the republican government and the Avar national front. This conflict reached a boiling point when it became intertwined the one involving the Aki Chechens.

The primarily Chechen district of Aki (Akinskii raion) was annexed to the Dagestan ASSR in the 1920s. Its Chechen population was deported on February 23, 1944 along with their Chechen brethren across the border. Laks from central Dagestan were forcibly settled in most of the empty villages and the district was renamed the ‘New Lak’ (Novolakskii) raion. To prevent the Lak settlers from returning to their homeland, their original villages – and more importantly, the elaborate system of terraces which enabled agriculture to flourish in the mountains – were destroyed. When the Chechens were “rehabilitated” in the late 1950s, the Aki Chechens were not allowed to return to their original villages and were forced to settle in the towns of Khasav Yurt and Kizil Yurt.

Nevertheless, the Aki Chechens never gave up the dream to return to their ancestral villages and the graves of their forefathers.23 Under Gorbachev’s glasnost they publicly voiced their claims

23 According to a British observer, the Chechens, “consider ancestors as important as the living, [and] still rise out of their car seats in respect as they drive past cemeteries.” — Smith, Allah’s Mountains, pp. 1 – 2.
again. This time the Dagestani authorities acknowledged their right to return to their ancestral villages. But in order to do so, a solution had to be found for the Laks who had settled in this region. It was decided, therefore, to resettle the Laks in the vicinity of Makhachkala, Dagestan's capital city. But, such a massive resettlement threatened to diminish even further the percentage of the Kumyks in their homeland. Tenglik, therefore, warned that it would forcibly resist any such move. The Avar national movement threatened to use force against such steps by Tenglik. The conflict reached its peak in the early 1990’s, when thousands of armed Avars and Kumyks confronted each other on several occasions. 24

It was against this background that the extreme wing of Tenglik demanded separation from Dagestan and the creation of a separate Kumykh autonomous republic within the Russian Federation. Their claim was that the Kumyks had never been part of Dagestan until they had been annexed to the republic by the Soviets in the 1920’s. Furthermore, the Kumyks had always had and autonomous and independent state since the times of the Khazars – whom they claimed as forefathers – up to the time of the Russian conquest of the Northern Caucasus in the 19th century. 25

The Ingush - Ossetian conflict was an exception in several ways: it deteriorated into open warfare; it reached its peak in 1992; and one of its outcomes was a successful case of separatism.

Even before the Soviet era, relations between Ossetians and Ingush were strained. 26 Indeed, the current conflict between them goes back to the deportation. When the Ingush were deported in February 1944, the Prigorodny raion (across the Terek River from Vladikavkaz) was re-settled by Ossetians and subsequently annexed to the North Ossetian ASSR. When the Ingush were allowed to return to their homeland, and the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was restored, the Prigorodny raion remained part of the North Ossetian ASSR and the Ingush were not allowed to return to it. Those who tried to return to their villages faced considerable animosity. Nevertheless, during the Soviet period a considerable number of Ingush managed to unofficially purchase and occupy their former houses but they were never recognized as official residents. 27


26 And see descriptions in John Frederick Baddeley, The Rugged Flanks of the Caucasus (Oxford and London, 1940).

Demands to return the Prigorodnyi raion to Ingush control were raised occasionally during the Brezhnev years.28 It was natural, therefore, that during Gorbachev's last years, a campaign with that goal in mind unfolded. Encouraged by what looked as Yeltsin's positive stance and faced with growing Chechen threats to secede from (what was still officially) the RSFSR, an Ingush Congress declared on September 15, 1991 a separate Autonomous Republic of Ingusgetia within what would soon be the Russian Federation. Thus, a marginal separatist aim was achieved in what looked as a means to secure Moscow's support in an irredentist one.

However, if the Ingush were seeking to procure the Kremlin's support through this declaration, they were soon to be disappointed. In late October 1992 the Ingush-Ossetian dispute flared up into an armed conflict in which tens of thousands of Ingush were forced out of their homes in the Prigorodnyi raion into refugee camps in Ingushetia.29 The Ingush accused Russian peacekeeping troops of siding with the Ossetians.

Conflicts between Mountain Peoples and Outsiders

These conflicts focused on disputes arising from the borders that were demarcated by the Soviet Union in the North Caucasus region in the 1920s. The multi-layer structure of the Soviet Union, in which ASSR's and AO's were created within (and as a part of) constituent republics of the USSR, the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs), created what nationalists in the post-Soviet space called "mini-empires." In other words, these were regions in the SSRs that, under the pressure of Russification, developed strong nationalist tendencies and attempted, many times forcefully, to assimilate the minorities of these regions into their own culture and language. Such minorities included both groups given their own autonomies within union republics and groups who were separated from their brethren across SSR borders. In most, if not all cases, this nationalist pressure often had the opposite effect of what was intended. The minorities clung to their own culture(s) as far as possible. When the USSR dissolved, all these minorities found themselves in new states bound on forging cohesion with regards to national identity and homogeneity. In many cases this was a prescription for conflict.

The Lezghin problem involves groups with no autonomous status in Azerbaijan. That might be one reason to why it has not become a violent conflict. The borders drawn in the 1920's divided some of the titular nationalities of Dagestan, making it so that some nationalities' homelands

28 See for example, Gammer, The Lone Wolf and the Bear, p. 189.
straddled the borders. Included among such affected nationalities were the Avars in Georgia and in Azerbaijan as well as Lezgins, Tats and Tsakhurs in Azerbaijan. While the Avars living across the border constituted only a small portion of their nation, the Lezghins in Azerbaijan accounted for more than a third of the Lezghins and the Tsakhurs and Tats were to be found in larger numbers in Azerbaijan than in Dagestan.

As long as the Soviet Union existed, this divide caused few problems since the borders between Azerbaijan and Dagestan were meaningless. Once the USSR was dissolved, however, all these groups faced national as well as personal daily problems. Overnight, they became cut off from their national, cultural and educational centers. Personally, thousands of people suddenly needed a visa to visit their families, ancestral lands, places of work, markets, etc., which, in many cases, they had previously done on a daily basis.

Of the peoples affected, only the Lezgins had the political clout necessary to solve this problem. The Lezgin national movement, Sadval, demanded a solution to the problems emanating from these new realities. If no satisfactory solution could be found within the existing borders, its moderate wing demanded border changes be made to include all the territories inhabited by Lezgins within Dagestan (and thus within the RF). The more radical wing of Sadval added a separatist dimension to the irredentist demands of its moderate wing: it demanded the establishment of an autonomous republic of Lezginistan, separate from Dagestan, which would include all Lezghin-inhabited territories in both Dagestan and Azerbaijan, within the RF.30

The conflict in South Ossetia carried also irredentist as well as a separatist elements, but unlike the case of the Lezghins, the Ossetians were a titular nation in that territory.

The AO of South Ossetia was established in April 1922 as part of the Georgian SSR. In the late Gorbachev years, in response to growing Georgian nationalism, the Ossetian national movement Ademon Nykhas (Popular Front) was formed. It initially demanded greater autonomy for the AO. Afterwards, it sought unification with the North Ossetian ASSR. On September 20, 1990 the South Ossetian AO declared its independence from Georgia as the South Ossetian Democratic Soviet Republic and requested Moscow’s recognition of it as an SSR within the Soviet Union. The self-proclaimed republic boycotted the October 1990 elections in Georgia and held its own elections on December 10, 1990. On the following day the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR annulled the elections and abolished the autonomous status of South Ossetia. Georgian police and National Guard units were also sent to South Ossetia, which provoked a war which has continued intermittently to this day.31

31 For the conflict, see Jim Potier, Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (The Hague, 2002).
The conflict in Abkhazia, on the other hand, was purely separatist in nature. The Abkhaz, who inhabit the southwestern area of the Caucasus range are closely related to northwestern Caucasian ethnic groups such as the Circassians, Abaza, Shapsugs. Whether they are native inhabitants of the land or migrants who were preceded by “Georgian tribes” is a matter of dispute between historians on both sides of the divide.32 In the 19th century, the principality of Abkhazia was peacefully annexed by Russia, but following its abolition in 1864, some 60% of Muslim Abkhaz emigrated to the Ottoman Empire. Between then and 1917 many Armenians, Russians and Georgians subsequently settled in the area.

In 1921 Stalin created a special status for Abkhazia. He turned it into a Soviet Socialist Republic (that is a union republic) associated to the Georgian SSR. However, in 1931 Abkhazia was demoted to an ASSR within the Georgian SSR.33 Between 1931 and Stalin’s death in 1953, many Georgians were encouraged to immigrate to Abkhazia. Many Russians settled there as well. Finally, in the 1950s and 1960s the Armenian Church supported a massive migration of Armenians. As a result, the Abkhaz became a small minority in the republic named after them.34

In the perestroika years, as Georgia moved towards independence, tensions between the Abkhaz and the Georgians grew and Abkhaz nationalists demanded separation from Georgia and the restoration of Abkhazia’s pre-1931 status as a union republic. On February 21, 1992, Georgia reinstated its 1921 constitution. Abkahazia declared its independence from Georgia two days afterwards. In response, Tbilisi sent in troops, thus starting a two year war. Aided covertly by Russia and overtly by other North Caucasian peoples, the Abkhaz separatist gained control of the country.35

All the above cases have quite a few common features. In none of them did the separatist party aim at establishing an independent state. To the contrary, they wanted to detach themselves from another entity and either join, or remain part of, Russia. In this sense they were all pro-

33 The reason behind Abkhazia’s special status of Abkhazia was Stalin’s personal friendship with Abkhazia’s first Soviet leader. When Beria became the party “boss” of Georgia he managed to get in the way of that relationship. From that time until Stalin’s death and Beria’s execution Abkhazia was controlled personally by Beria even after he moved to Moscow.
35 For the conflict see, for example, Potier, Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
Russian. Furthermore, they all depended on Moscow’s goodwill. They all were, therefore, contained, though not solved, through this dependence on Russia.

The conflict in Chechnya is in a category of its own. First, while it was a conflict between mountain peoples and outsiders, its immediate roots were the same as in conflicts between mountain peoples. In other words, the main grievances of the Chechens were in the result of “deportation” and “rehabilitation”, not in the national and territorial delimitation of the 1920s.36 Second, unlike other cases of separatism aimed at external (that is non-Mountain) political units, Chechen separatism was aimed against Russia. Furthermore, Chechen separatists demanded full independence. Finally, Chechnya is the only conflict in the Northern Caucasus to go through two full-scale wars with Russia, the second of which is still not over.

To understand these grievances one has to remember that while not always allowed to resettle in their native lands, on the whole, the Chechens as a whole had a larger territory after their “rehabilitation” in 1958 than in the original, pre-1944 republic. Therefore, on the surface, the Chechens had no territorial grievances. However, there were still two reasons behind their alienation from the Soviet state.

First, although they were publicly “rehabilitated” and their “deportation” declared a crime, the authorities continued to express doubts concerning Chechen loyalty and considered them as having been “pardoned rather than politically rehabilitated.”37 “The deportations were considered non-events. No memorial monuments were erected and there was certainly no mention of what had happened.”38 “People kept quiet as if the tragedy were some sort of collective stigma for which they had to pay,” and “middle-aged Chechens, particularly those who had attained prominent administrative posts, curiously referred to their exile period as work on the ‘virgin lands’”.39

The second grievance, which follows from the first, was that Russian dominance in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was much stronger and more manifest than in any other nominally non-Russian portion of the Soviet Union. In these other regions, a member of the titular nationality was always a figurehead first secretary even though real power rested in the hands of the second secretary, who was almost always a Russian national. For 32 years, the first secretary of the party obkom was a Russian.40 Only towards the end of Gorbachev’s rule, in 1989, and after strong

36 Indeed, the Chechens in Chechnya have been extremely cautious not to address the problem of the Chechens in Dagestan as no to arouse suspicions of irredentism, while the Aki Chechens have always referred to their problem as an internal Dagestani matter for the very same reason.

37 Jabrail Gakayev, Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Chechni (XX vek) (Moscow, 1997), p. 107.

38 Smith, Allah’s Mountains, p. 67.


40 For details, see ibid., pp. 35 – 40.
Chechen pressure, was a Chechen nominated as first secretary. The result was that there was no Chechen political elite (other than a few individuals) capable of running the country. The detrimental consequences of this fact were revealed in the post-Soviet period.

In Chechnya, unlike in the other republics of the Northern Caucasus, but very similar to what transpired in neighboring Georgia and Azerbaijan, the ex-Communist political elite was replaced by nationalists. In both Azerbaijan and Georgia, the inexperience of the new leadership resulted in considerable damage to their countries and they were soon replaced by the partokratiia. In Chechnya, this did not happen because there was no Chechen partokratiia. Furthermore, the new Chechen leadership lacked not only experience, but also a common language with the Russian (ex-nomenklatura) leadership. This political experience and a common language with Moscow were two important components in the success of the partokratiia in the neighboring autonomous republics to contain their local conflicts. The lack of both experience and a common language were major factors which contributed to the escalation of the Chechen nationalist leadership to supporting full separatism and its inability to find a compromise with Moscow that would prevent war.41

The First war in Chechnya (1994 – 1996) ended with a pyrrhic victory for the Chechens. The political, economic, social and cultural infrastructure of the country lay in ruins while, and even more important, the moral structure of its people was destroyed. The chaos during the inter-war period and the second war (1999 – present) only added to the general environment of lawlessness. More important, this ambiance and Russian actions against the (moderate) nationalists only served to enhance the strength of the Islamists, or the “Wahhabis” as they have been called in the post-Soviet space.42

From National to Islamic Separatism?

The “return of Islam” began in the Northern Caucasus under Gorbachev’s glasnost and was part of the general religious revival in the USSR.43 This was also the first public appearance of foreign extremist Islamic currents, dubbed all over the former Soviet Union as “Wahhabis.” In the ideological and legitimacy void that followed the banning of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and then the dissolution of the USSR itself, one could observe a growing Islamization of politics as both the authorities and some opposition groups turned to Islam for political mobilization and legitimization. This was especially true in Chechnya and Dagestan. Still, Islam played second violin to nationalism.44

42 For further details, see ibid., pp. 208 – 218.
44 See Gammer, “Walking the Tightrope between Nationalism(s) and Islam(s).”
The first war in Chechnya accelerated the Islamization of Chechen politics and policies. The arrival of foreign – mainly Arab – “Jihadists” played its role in Islamizing Chechen resistance, or at least the language of the resistance, and directing it in the “Wahhabi” direction. But it was the second Chechen war that propelled Islamism into dominating the resistance. More importantly, Chechen leaders who embraced “Islamism”, such as Shamil Basayev, were now successful in exporting “Russian decolonization” to other parts of the Northern Caucasus. Thus, Islamic organizations bearing various names have popped up, first in Dagestan and then in other autonomous republics, including Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkesia and even North Ossetia.

Most of these organizations have called for the establishment of an Islamic state in their republic. Many of these have called for an Islamic state comprising the entire Northern Caucasus. In either case, the establishment of an Islamic state means separation from Russia, unless, as some organizations have noted, Russia embraces Islam. Furthermore, some of these organizations have maintained that they are connected to the Chechen Islamic resistance and have claimed responsibility for attacks on Russian and local government targets as well as military targets and personnel. They have also not shied away from civilian casualties and acts of terrorism.

The reasons for the proliferation of Islamic opposition groups are rather clear. First is the successful containment of nationalism all over the Northern Caucasus. In Chechnya Moscow crushed it; in the other republics the partokratiias emasculated it by co-optation and other means. The nationalist alternative has, thus, become obsolete. Second is the new Russian policy of re-centralization since the accession of Putin, which has strongly curtailed local autonomy and “elbow room”. Third is the targeting of Islam as “the enemy” by republican and central authorities.

The interest of both Moscow and the local authorities in the Northern Caucasus in portraying any opposition as part of a single, unified movement connected to international Islamic terrorism is evident. So is the interest of the Chechens and many of these groups themselves to

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do so. Does this however, reflect reality? Have all these groups overcome their local, ethnic, national and social interests and grievances? Are they really strongly committed to an Islamic ideology, and if so to which one exactly? Have they the same vision of the future? Can one really speak of an Islamic separatism in the Northern Caucasus? Only the future will provide the answers to these questions and many more.

48 The reason for such behavior could perhaps be found in the fact that in a world where ‘fundamentalist Islam’ is a (if not the) major enemy, to be a ‘fundamentalist Muslim’ is, surprising as it may seem, second best. Admittedly the ticket to join the club is to appear to fight the ‘baddies,’ (i.e. ‘fundamentalist Islam’). This is the position to strive for. However, if one is rejected from, or unable to join the club there are still advantages to be reaped from being a ‘fundamentalist,’ if one does not overplay one’s hand. Such a label carries with it notoriety, nuisance value and a certain amount of bargaining power, since the most obscure group once called by its opponents ‘Wahhabi,’ or ‘fundamentalist’ is immediately promoted to the status of the West’s enemy No. 1. Perhaps this should not be as surprising as it looks. After all, in a world where ‘market economy’ is the ideal, this is merely the translation into politics of the laws of supply and demand.” – Gammer, "Between Mecca and Moscow," p. 848.

49 Thirteen additional ethnic groups have been officially registered as Avars: Akhvaks, Andis, Archis, Bakgulals, Botlyks, Chamals, Didois, Godubers, Kapuchins, Karatais, Khunzalis, Khvarshis and Tindis.

50 Two additional ethnic groups have been officially designated as Dargins: Kaitaks and Kubachis.

51 Only less than half of the Lezgins live in Dagestan. The majority of them live in the adjacent areas of northern Azerbaijan.

52 Only about 42% of the Nogais live in Dagestan. An equal number live in the Stavropol krai, and almost all of the rest – (3,572 according to the 2002 census) in the Chechen Republic.

53 Tats, particularly in Dagestan, are Caucasian (Mountain) Jews (gorskie evrei). Almost all respondents of the 2002 census preferred to designate themselves as “Mountain Jews” or simply as “Jews.” Another major concentration of over 1,000 Mountain Jews (Tats) lives in Kabardino-Balkaria according to the census. A great number of Tats live in areas adjacent to Dagestan in northern Azerbaijan, where this name is applied not only to Mountain Jews but also to Muslim (mainly twelver Shi’ites) and Christian (belonging to the Armenian church) speakers of Tat dialects. See Mark Tolts, “Demography of North Caucasian Jewry: A Note on Population Dynamics and Shifting Identity,” in
## Appendix: The Titular Nationalities in the Northern Caucasus
According to the 2002 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republic/Nationality</th>
<th>No. (in Thousands)</th>
<th>% of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dagestan</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avars(^{56})</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dargins(^{57})</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumyks</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lezgins(^{58})</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laks</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabasaranians</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nogais(^{59})</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutuls</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aguls</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tats(^{60})</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsakhurs(^{61})</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azeris</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chechens</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,576</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Chechnya**         |                    |                 |
| Chechens\(^{62}\)    | 1,031              | 93.5            |
| **Total**            | 1,103              | 100             |

| **Ingushetia**       |                    |                 |
| Ingush\(^{63}\)      | 361                | 77.3            |
| **Total**            | 467                | 100             |

| **North Ossetia-Alania** |                   |                 |
| Osset\(^{64}\)        | 446                | 62.8            |
| **Total**             | 710                | 100             |

| **Kabardino-Balkaria** |                   |                 |
| Kabartay\(^{65}\)     | 500                | 55.5            |
| Balkars\(^{66}\)      | 106                | 11.8            |
| **Total**             | 901                | 100             |

| **Karachai-Cherkessia** |             |                 |
| Karachai              | 169              | 38.5            |
| Cherkes\(^{67}\)      | 51                | 11.6            |

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\(^{54}\) Only about 34% of the Tsakhurs live in Dagestan. About 63% of them live in Adjacent areas in northern Azerbaijan.

\(^{55}\) The number of Chechens in Chechnya is clearly inflated while their numbers in neighboring Ingushetia (some 95,000) and Dagestan (about 88,000) are strongly depleted. For the falsifications of the census results in Chechnya, see "Naselenie Chechni: prava li perepis?" *Demoscope Weekly*, September 7, 2005, http://www.polit.ru/research/2005/09/07/demoscope211.html.

\(^{56}\) There are other Ingush concentrations, including some 21,000 in the Prigorodny raion of North Ossetia as well as another 3,000 that live in Chechnya.

\(^{57}\) Many more Ossetians live across Russia-Georgia border in South Ossetia.

\(^{58}\) All three ‘Circassian’ groups – Adyghe, Kabartya and Cherkes – were grouped together in their three titular republics.

\(^{59}\) The Balkars and Karachai were grouped together in both their titular republics.
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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>439</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADYGEA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adyghe</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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60 This should also include 32,346 Abaza, a non-titular nationality closely related to, though distinct from the Cherkes. Together they represent some 83,000 people, and account for about 19% of the population.