

MERIA

CHECHNYA, WAHHABISM AND THE INVASION OF DAGESTAN

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"We are like a herd of horses. When we sense danger, we unite immediately in order to confront it. As soon as the danger disappears, however, we start turning on one another."

–Chechen proverb

Between 1996 and 1999, Chechnya enjoyed a de facto independence. This experiment, however, failed due to many factors, including the triumph of loyalty to the clan (which undermined any chance to establish a strong central authority), a lack of state institutions capable of effectively safeguarding the needs of the state and society, a high post-war crime rate, mass armament, and corruption involving clan-based nepotism. Since then, such conditions have also been responsible for the country's unfortunate situation.¹

After 1996, Chechnya was in ruins and in a state of total chaos, with the exception of a few northern districts fortunate enough to make it through the war unscathed. The war had destroyed the country's entire infrastructure. Factories and processing plants had been thoroughly bombed. Mines were planted under roughly 5,000 hectares, 15 percent of the republic's cultivatable soil, causing injuries and deaths among civilians.² The lowest estimate puts the number of civilian deaths at 35,000, the highest up to 100,000 individuals.³

According to some statistics, 60 to 70 percent of the republic's housing stock had either been destroyed or severely damaged.

Refugees numbering in the tens of thousands were struggling to survive in refugee camps, primarily in Ingushetia. The war made temporary or permanent refugees out of up to 50 percent of the Chechen population.⁴ The post-war Chechnya unemployment rate was as high as 80 percent; among young people this figure reached nearly 100 percent.⁵ Many others were injured during the war and will suffer long-term physical and psychological damage.

The generation of Chechens who experienced the horrors of war, losing friends and relatives as well as their homes and property, were then forced to search for their place in life and society under dire conditions. At the same time, the war raised thousands of youths in such a way that an automatic rifle became their most trusted friend and life's only wisdom. These people learned to rely primarily on their own strength as well as on the tried and true traditions of the clan network and therefore never on the (national) concept of the state, which was rather ephemeral in Chechen society.⁶

At the same time, the invasion of federal forces, which were accompanied by countless acts of violence, evoked intense humiliation

for thousands of struggling Chechens who longed for revenge. As a result of all this, many young Chechens saw no other option but to turn to illegal arms trafficking, car theft, and extortion both in Chechnya and elsewhere, including in Russian cities. According to a number of sources, only 10 percent of the population had wholly legal employment in interwar Chechnya.⁷ The country also witnessed a substantial rise in kidnappings. Hundreds of people were abducted each year. Even the local population, especially the members of weaker clans feared being abducted. In many cases, kidnappers tortured their victims. High-profile kidnappers were particularly attracted to foreigners from Western countries, such as engineers and journalists who could be expected to bring high ransoms. The most notorious incident involved the brutal execution of abducted Chechen Telecom employees in October 1998 by the nation's most infamous ruffian and kidnapper, Arbi Barayev.⁸ The victims included Britons Rudolf Petschi, Darren Hickey, and Peter Kennedy as well as New Zealander Stanley Shaw.

The fact that virtually everyone owned a firearm and was conscious of the nation's victory over the Russian army--previously regarded as invincible--instilled a great deal of confidence in the Chechens. Together with the anarchy that continued to reign, this evoked a sense of impunity and "anything goes" sentiment in many young Chechens. There was an explosive growth of nationalism that often included a sense of superiority.⁹

Such high spirits led to the spread of messianic visions. Some Chechens regarded their people as God's chosen ones, whose mission was to liberate their "Caucasian brethren" from "Russia's colonial yoke." Others deemed Chechnya and the Chechens as the core of the Islamic world's, or even all of humanity's, progress.¹⁰ Furthermore, the nationalists argued that considering its geographic isolation, Chechnya could only achieve true independence if the republic were to gain access to the Caspian and Black seas. It was believed this could only be achieved by the unification and institutionalization of the North Caucasian peoples within a united (Islamic) state. This would in fact be a grand version of Shamil's Imamate. This ambitious expectation served as the ideological foundation for the empowerment of nationalistic and religious interventionism, which engaged the imaginations of several influential personalities, including Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, Shamil Basayev, and Movladi Udugov.

As there was a lack of studies on Chechen history and culture while Chechnya was part of the USSR, once it had gained independence, the desire to compensate for this and gave rise to wild ideas. There were serious discussions on such matters as the racial superiority of the Vaynakhs as the direct descendants of Noah and supposed "founders" of the Aryan and even Caucasian (i.e., white European) race, the originally Islamic character of Chechen ethnopsychology, and the excellence of the Chechens' ethno-social structure. After 1996, the studies pumped out in a swift, assembly-

line fashion and were affected by uncritical post-war euphoria and arrogant nationalism.

Russia's military withdrawal was followed by an extensive dispensing of titles and positions among war veterans, with "Brigadier General" being especially popular among field commanders. Between 1996–97, the number of people holding this title skyrocketed. The field commanders who felt they were not getting their fair share of political power or economic benefits came to hate the government as well as their more successful compatriots. They withdrew to their *auls* (highland villages), where they built "family" bases, refusing to recognize the sovereignty of the central government and thus involving their whole clan in conflict with the regime.¹¹ A special tension occurred in relations between the highland natives (and subsequently entire *teyps*) and the residents of towns and the plains. Owing to the highlanders' enormous contribution to the war effort--but thanks also to smoothly functioning clan bonds--members of the highland clans (*teyps*) managed to occupy several important positions in the republic at the expense of their fellow countrymen from the towns and lowland areas.

Even Aslan Maskhadov's¹² policies geared towards social compromise failed to defuse perpetual rivalries between *teyps*. Therefore, as early as 1998, the despairing president started to place members of his own Aleroy clan in the government. Of course this was met with resistance from the members of other *teyps* and undermined Maskhadov's legitimacy as president; he had in the mean time won with 64.8 percent of the vote in the presidential elections of January 1997, described by local OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe)

Mission's chief Tim Guldiman as "legitimate and democratic."¹³ Maskhadov's main rival, Basayev, received 23.5 percent of the vote and Yandarbiyev received only 10.2 percent.¹⁴

Facing regional and clan leaders, President Maskhadov's attempts to stabilize, or rather rebuild, centralized political power were condemned to failure right from the start. This was despite his remarkable merits in other fields; his well-balanced policies, for instance, staved off the very real threat of a catastrophic civil war.

As mentioned earlier, many individual field commanders established themselves in respectable positions in their native villages and towns and were unwilling to acknowledge Grozny's authority.¹⁵ They generally argued that they only recognized "Allah's supremacy."¹⁶ In a sequence of controversial events, they did not even hesitate to use traditional means of "force" in order to convince rivals of their sole sovereignty and right to limited economic resources, especially oil wells, which represented a source of steady income. In several regions battles for wealth and positions of power flared between men who had once fought side by side. Now they were divided into armed formations according to clan or territorial principles which fought endless blood feuds and extorted money from members of weaker clans.

Consequently, the degree of Grozny's actual authority was determined to a far greater extent by personal sympathy toward Aslan Maskhadov, or clan kinship with him, rather than by devotion to the notion of a united Chechen state. This is shown by the president's appeal:

Chechens, Citizens of Ichkeria, Brothers and Sisters! We spent many long years walking along the path of war with certainty and dignity: However, now we have suddenly changed entirely. Yesterday's comrades-in-arms look at one another with mistrust because the seed of discord has been sown amongst them and its name is ambition for power! There is no other explanation but the pursuit of power for the behaviour of the liberation movement leaders and military commanders of yesterday, formerly united by one vision and one goal, who today cannot handle a taste of fame and have become hostages to tawdry injustices, speculations, slander and gossip ...Leaders of the Jihad! Be worthy of the love and respect of the Chechen people, throw the burden of conceit off of yourselves and in the name of this great nation, whose flesh you are, rally your ranks against our common enemy! The fight against our people is not over; it has only assumed new low and treacherous forms and its objective is to drain the blood of the Chechen people at all costs, to alienate you from your people, and to discredit the warriors of the jihad. Stop basking in the rays of past glory! There is but a step from being esteemed to being hated, so take a step towards each other, towards unity and harmony. Today we have a chance, a great chance to become the joint authors of the victory of the

Chechen nation- a nation of toil, of war, and of triumph in its centuries-long struggle for independence and sovereignty!¹⁷

In all likelihood, an overwhelming majority of the republic's cocksure field commanders and religious radicals would have interpreted Maskhadov's potential firm (i.e. armed) efforts to unite the Chechen regions and *teyps* as a flagrant attack on their own liberty. In the end, this might have been the quickest route to a civil war among the citizens of the already devastated country.

POLITICIZATION OF ISLAM

Despite their intensive efforts, the Soviets did not manage to completely eradicate Islam in the northern Caucasus. Although the Chechens' originally Islamic self-awareness adopted distinctly atheist elements over several decades of active Sovietization, adherence to external signs of Muslim dogma--as an integral part of an anxiously guarded ethnic identity--persisted even during years of severe repression. This was the case for the Chechens, as well as the Ingushes, Karachay, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and other Caucasian groups--including the Christian Armenians--whose fear of extinction as a result of deportation and massacres led to a revitalization of ethnic traditionalism. This revitalization also incorporated religious self-awareness. As Alexei Savateyev wrote, even after the intensive repressions in effect from the 1960s to the 1980s:

[Islam] obviously existed in everyday life. Its prevalent form in the

[Caucasian] society at that time was so-called 'National Islam,' a syncretic religious system with a strong Sufi influence, whose organisational groundwork lay in the illegal brotherhoods (*virids*). Conservative by nature, National Islam resigns itself to the archaic beliefs of its followers, whose community was traditionally organized on the basis of the customary norms (*adat*), and actually supports these in certain ways. Paradoxically, traditional social structures thus ultimately enabled Islam to survive under the conditions of the Soviet political system economic reforms and to descend from the mountains to the town.¹⁸

The Achkhoy-Martan district is a prime example of Islam's survival. In 1968, the district had over 30 registered Murid groups and sects organizing secret meetings, during which, in addition to reciting their prayers, members discussed political events from a patently anti-Soviet position.¹⁹ With state control diminishing in the late 1980s, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic saw the emergence of up to 280 Murid groups. These groups reconstructed or built hundreds of mosques and *ziyarats*, highly venerated monuments dedicated to Sufi saints. Islam in this territory (largely of the Shafi school of religious law) was represented primarily by the adherents of two Sufi *tariqs*-Naqshbandiya (followed mainly in the lowlands) and Qadiriya (followed mainly in the highlands)-further divided into *virids*.²⁰ These were named after Sufi sheikhs and often led by *teyp* elders.

The highland (southern, Ichkerian) Qadiriya *virids* were the traditional bastions of anti-Sovietism. There were conflicts among some *virids* in earlier eras about theological issues which were often later promoted by Soviet security agents. For example, at the dawn of Soviet rule, these forces turned not only the Qadiris and Naqshbandis against one another, but even two highly esteemed Qadiri brotherhoods: the *virid* of Kunta-haji Kishiyev, founder of the Chechen Qadiriya (so-called *Zikrism*), and the followers of Sheikh Bammam-Girey-haji Mitayev, including his son Ali Mitayev.²¹

The Islamic renaissance in Chechnya, around the time of the USSR's fall, was boosted by the constant fear of Russian aggression nurtured both from propaganda by Dudayev's regime and actual incidents. Consequentially, Chechnya experienced a huge growth in nationalism, closely tied to Islam as an integral part of ethnic identity. This was further reinforced by social trends. Georgi Derlugian explains how the Chechen nouveau riche, who began returning to their "liberated" homeland in the early 1990s, "sought to establish prestigious social roles in their native *auls*. They gave presents to relatives, elders, and clergy, including paying for the construction of Italian red brick mosques. Their entourages and bodyguards became like socio-political organisations."²² This abundance of newly-formed parties, all of which used the word "Islamic" as an indispensable adjective in their names and were led by shady "*murshids*" (spiritual guides or masters) who often had criminal backgrounds and a minimal knowledge of Islam, proliferated.

The Russian invasion and the two-year war that followed gave rise to another

powerful stimulus to strengthen Islamic self-awareness in Chechen society. In the Chechen mindset, a war against an external (Russian) aggressor is almost automatically associated with a war for territory, freedom, "national honor," identity, and religion. This was also compared to the heroic exploits of their more pious ancestors in fighting the Russians during the nineteenth century. These Caucasian wars, invoked in stories, ancestral weapons, and religious chants, passed on their Islamic themes to their modern-day counterparts.

Therefore, combining Islam with nationalism as an effective instrument of social mobilization became part of the official "style" and was probably the only tool legitimizing the building of Chechen statehood at the time. There was an obvious parallel to the "golden age" of Shamil's Imamate, the only time in history when Chechnya existed as a legitimate "uncolonized," or non-Russian, state.

Yet Jokhar Dudayev himself being a Soviet-style general was far from an adherent to strict Islamic laws and initially tried to make Chechnya a secular state. Dudayev made his thoughts on the matter clear: "I would like the Chechen Republic to be an institutional secular state. This is what we are fighting for; this is the ideal that we seek to achieve....If religion takes priority over an institutional secular system, a more striking form of the Spanish inquisition and Islamic fundamentalism will emerge [in Chechnya]."²³ After a while, however, he had to turn to Islam publicly. The former Soviet general and then-president of independent Ichkeria, who was fond of Armenian cognac,

emphatically urged his fellow countrymen from television screens to pray three times a day as proper Muslims, while in fact the rules of (Sunni) Islam dictate that adherents pray five times per day. In an interview he gave shortly before his death, Dudayev explained the essence of the country's development: "Russia...has forced us to choose the path of Islam, even though we were not duly prepared to adopt Islamic values."²⁴

From this perspective, the situation after 1996 was the logical continuation of a general orientation towards the politicization of Islam. Its radicalization was quite natural in the context of Chechen society's dismal socio-economic conditions. It was impossible and even undesirable to create a functioning state on the basis of the half-forgotten *adats*. Secular laws did not exist and even their establishment would probably not have guaranteed them enough legitimacy to make them binding to the Chechen population.

No less important was the fact that the implementation of secular legislation certainly would not have solved the problem of the rebellious field commanders and territories that did not acknowledge Grozny's authority. Islam was thus an essential tool in trying to build a stable regime and a strong political structure. According to a fitting comment by Dmitriy Furman, "as it is extremely difficult for a Chechen to execute or put another Chechen in jail isn't it easier if all this happens according to Allah's will?"²⁵

However, owing to an enduring absence of qualified theologians and Islamic legal specialists, the Shari'a norms were implemented either in a superficial manner, or, in some regions, even in their original,

early medieval form. Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, who became Chechnya's second president following Dudayev's tragic death, was aware of this fact. As a confident supporter of the "Islamic model", he declared Islamic law and the Arabic language compulsory subjects in one of his first decrees. He modeled the penal code for the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria on the Sudan's Shari'a-based penal code.²⁶ In comparison, Jokhar Dudayev's original scheme of the Chechen constitution had leaned on the Estonian one. During Yandarbiyev's rule, the statutes of the penal code were enforced through a military-Shari'a tribunal, falling under the Supreme Shari'a Court. Now the sale of alcohol and drugs was forbidden and the authorities started punishing those caught using either substance by publicly thrashing them with a truncheon. In mid-1998, Maskhadov formed a special Shari'a regiment responsible for ensuring individual citizens adhered to the Shari'a norms. Shari'a courts were set up throughout the country and public executions - usually by firing squad - soon followed.²⁷

Aslan Maskhadov, the third Chechen president, acted in a similar fashion. For instance, his very first decree required that all managers in state and commercial enterprises set an extra room aside for prayer in their workplaces. However, Maskhadov's efforts were unable to establish conformity in a society characterized by traditional clan-related power structures. In addition, there was a developing network of Muslims who would not accept the status quo because their goal was a return to the "pure Islam" of Muhammad's era.

WAHHABISM

Wahhabism was a doctrine that originated in the mid-18th century in the Arabic peninsula which called for a return to the purity of early Islam. Wahhabis disapproved of any kind of legal interpretation (*fiqh*) of their faith's original sources - the Koran and the Sunna. They regarded only these sources as being sacred, and allowed nothing but literal interpretations.²⁸ Wahhabism became an attractive alternative to the complicated mystic ideology of "normative" Sufi Islam for a certain segment of Chechen believers. It especially appealed to the militarized and - owing to the war - radicalized youth. Going through the socialization stage of their lives, these young people were in search of their personal identities. In the eyes of the enraged youth, the ongoing disputes between innumerable *virds* did nothing to help traditionalist Islam gain respect; it even alienated the young and the faithful from it. Wahhabism offered an excellent ideological platform for adolescents who not only looked to religion for answers to philosophical questions about the meaning of human existence (which is the traditional domain of the Sufi orders), but also possessed a burning desire to "improve" society immediately and establish justice and order.²⁹

Wahhabism thus became a means of protest against the traditionalist forms of social organization, extricating the individual from the clan alliance structure that binds Chechen society together. The nation's young people were clamoring against the unchanging forms of social ties and "non-Islamic" clan hierarchies. The Sufi brotherhoods, an organic part of traditionalist relations in Chechen society, were naturally unable to voice this dissatisfaction. The

Wahhabi insistence that only Allah be worshipped as a solitary and all-encompassing God, and thus also as the sole fountainhead of holiness, vindicates the individual's effort to disengage himself from the complicated and often psychologically demanding hierarchal systems (*teyps*, *virds*, etc.).

Also, and this is a matter of great importance from a psychological perspective, Wahhabism provides a bewildered individual with the feeling of having his own personal mission and being close to God. Admittedly, such guaranteed individual freedom is, in reality, rather self-deluded because the tenacious discipline of the Wahhabi *umma* constrains the individual's doings at least as severely as a *teyp* or a *virid* does. Yet in post-war Chechnya the egalitarian and militant spirit of Wahhabism seemed to be a desirable alternative to the rigid social structure. This was thanks to, among other aspects, the sense of physical certainty that the individual acquired as a member of a powerful armed society (a "brotherhood") of confident and, in an ideological sense, extremely tight-knit co-religionists subjected to strict discipline.

Incidentally, despite all the injustices and misunderstandings, the people of Chechnya are still reluctant to despise the Wahhabis. They generally make distinctions between a questionable ideology (in essence the north Caucasian variant of Wahhabism) and the common people that adhere to it. In conversations with the author, many of the locals admitted that among ordinary Wahhabis there were open-hearted and honorable young people who neither consumed alcohol nor took drugs, led God-

fearing lives, and wanted relations in the country to change for the better, even if this meant dying for such a cause. Wahhabi emissaries often provided Chechen families and individuals with financial assistance as well. Wahhabi groups enjoyed the goodwill of members of weaker clans in particular.

According to the Chechen scholar Vakhit Akaev:

With only a few exceptions, we can label Wahhabi groups that emerged in Dagestan and Chechnya as protesting religious organizations. Originally, their activities were of an enlightening nature. They directed their critical zeal against local bribers and the official clergymen who associated with them, and this gained them new believers who had become disenchanted with the regime. Wahhabism's critical shots were aimed against the traditionalist clergy of the northern Caucasus, who were being accused of ignorance, of distorting Islam, and of close ties with a corrupt government.³⁰

Typical Wahhabi constituents were reinforced by groups of Islamic volunteers who had fought in the first Russo-Chechen War.³¹ After 1996, several of them married women from Chechnya and Dagestan and stayed in the Caucasus. A classic example is the Emir Khattab, allegedly a Jordanian Arab who supposedly had Chechen roots and was a veteran of the Afghan War. He married a Dagestani Darginian and settled in Chechnya.³² Aslan Maskhadov presented him

with the state's highest military decoration, the K'oman Siy (Honor of the Nation) Medal for his outstanding military merits in the Russo-Chechen War. A substantial number of socially and politically active *mujahids* ("warriors of the faith") were originally either ethnic Arabs or Arabicized descendents of Chechen and other Northern Caucasian refugees and migrants, the so-called *muhajirun*, who had fled or had been forced by Russian colonial authorities to leave for the Ottoman Empire after the end of the Great Caucasian War. In the 1980s, they fought in Afghanistan, where they absorbed the Wahhabi way of thinking propagated by Saudi Arabia. Today, following the annihilation of the Afghani Talibs, it is the only country where this doctrine has an official status. The bonds between a number of highly regarded Islamic volunteers in Islamic (Wahhabi) terrorist groups and foreign patrons, who sympathized with Wahhabis and often provided the Chechen *mujahids* with financial support, also played a role.

As mentioned earlier, the ideological maneuvering of Aslan Maskhadov, originally a proponent of a secular model, in trying to unite the Chechens on the basis of Islam eventually failed. Although Wahhabism engaged the hearts and minds of merely five to ten percent of the Chechen population (the vast majority leaned towards traditionalist Islam), these sectarians possessed a solidarity, fanaticism, economic self-reliance, and military strength that made them a political power. The Wahhabis refused to accept the single centralized national body politic advocated by President Maskhadov. Even Maskhadov's attempts to impose Islam on the republic failed to secure him a

sufficient legitimacy in the eyes of the Wahhabis, because the traditionalist Sufi concept of Islam was as heretical to them as laicism.

In his televised address of January 20, 1999, the Chechen president condemned what he perceived as Wahhabism:

The worst thing about it is the fact that it seeks to divide us according to our faith. And this happens in every place that Islamism wins over. They divide us according to faith, which subsequently leads to civil war.... They say that only they are Allah's chosen ones that only they are walking along the true path. And everyone else is their enemy.... We have always been proud of the fact that we are Chechens. And now they are telling us: '...Do not say that you are the Chechen nation.' They want to deprive us of the faith of our fathers, our sheikhs and *ustadhs*. They want to rob us of our customs and traditions and *adats*.... They are not even content with the fact that we call Chechnya an Islamic state.... They say that the president, the parliament, and the grand mufti are meaningless. Everything is to be in the hands of the Emir. The Emir who, I must add, came here from God knows what country and who furthermore is not even Chechen.... They take the Koran in.. and find words in it that claim it is permissible to abduct people...that they can use them as a source of income.... Their calls for the immediate start of a war in Dagestan

aim to pit Chechnya and Dagestan against one another.³³

Such categorical words were provoked by the bitter experience of the Chechen president, who had been yearning for compromise and social accord. In the spring of 1995, Chechnya saw the rise of a division of predominantly Islamic volunteers (*mujahids*) operating under the name Jama'at Islami (Islamic Assembly), which was originally led by the Jordanian Chechen Ash-Shashani who was openly in opposition to the idea of "National Islam." After Ash-Shashani's death in 1997, his compatriot Khattab succeeded him. The next year, an education and training center called "Caucasian Center of the Islamic Mission" was established (with the help of Chechens in Jordan) near the village of Serzhan-Yurt in the Shali district. Hundreds of Chechens and members of other Muslim nations, largely from the northern Caucasus, were "educated" in this camp, where several months of military training followed two months of instruction in the Wahhabi doctrine. Special emphasis was placed on developing skills in executing diversionary and terrorist tactics.³⁴ The center's activities received generous financial sponsorship from a Saudi-based organization called "International Islamic Support" backed by members of the royal family.

The Wahhabis vigorously expressed their lack of respect for the shrines of Chechen "National Islam." Their unrelenting battle against "Muslim paganism," a syncretic mix of Islam and the *adat*, and its concrete manifestations in Chechen society gave rise

to an increasing number of clashes with adherents of the Sufi orders. In 1995, the Wahhabis attempted to destroy the *ziyarat* devoted to Khedi, mother of the venerated Kunta-haji. Despite the efforts of some highly respected field commanders to mitigate the ensuing conflict, this led to armed skirmishes throughout the entire country.³⁵ In battle, the Wahhabis were not deterred from setting up military positions at memorials and nearby *ziyارات*. They did not even hesitate to murder traditionalist clergymen who spoke openly against Wahhabi sectarians. Additionally, they often reprimanded Chechen women and girls for being "insufficiently clothed" or for not wearing veils. Since the custom of covering women's hands and faces had never been practiced among the Muslim Caucasian highlanders, such censure was beyond the comprehension of even conservative Chechen men. Clashes between Wahhabis and "*tariqists*" soon became a more or less common phenomenon.

Maskhadov tried a policy of accommodation. For instance, in April 1998, he called for the establishment of an Islamic state governed by Shari'a norms. But his intensifying Islamic rhetoric did nothing to earn him the favor of the Wahhabis. Their number and influence among leading representatives of the Chechen military-political elite dissatisfied with the existing distribution of power or with the president himself, gained strength concurrently with society's frustration over the adverse socio-economic situation. Furthermore, the first vice-chairman of the government, Shamil Basayev, began to lean toward the Wahhabis, and Khattab was often Basayev's esteemed

guest during the interwar years.³⁶ On July 10, 1997, Basayev resigned from his post "owing to health problems."

However, within the bounds of the policy of social consensus, Maskhadov continued his endeavors to use this influential field commander and highly respected personality in public life. This task appeared to have been accomplished on January 15, 1998, when Basayev was named vice-president, and later prime minister, although Maskhadov had originally wanted to keep that position for himself, as the constitution required. Shamil's younger brother Shirwani occupied the lucrative post of director of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria's State Committee for Energy Resources. Basayev's clan also controlled a large number of oil wells.

In mid-1998, however, Basayev resigned once again, allegedly because Maskhadov was unable to execute "any of his plans." Of course, the main reason was Basayev's opposition to the president's anti-Wahhabi policies, which also closely affected Basayev's protégé, Khattab. The Jordanian enjoyed the protection courtesy of the powerful and populous Basayev clan living in the Ichkerian highland village of Vedenov. Consequently, Khattab was an enormous influence on the thoughts of Shamil Basayev, who was a hero to Chechens at that time. For a variety of reasons, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, Movladi Udugov, and, after some hesitation, Salman Raduyev, and other highly regarded Chechens chose Wahhabism as their political platforms. The radicals scorned Maskhadov's balanced and realistic approach to Russia, and labeled his attempts to preserve peaceful relations with their mighty neighbor as weak and defeatist. They also accused him of being incapable of putting a stop to the proliferation

of crime and called for the establishment of a "truly Islamic" or Wahhabi state in Chechnya.

A turning point occurred on June 14, 1998, in Gudermes, where defiant armed Wahhabis challenged Maskhadov's units. The ensuing clash claimed the lives of at least fifty people, mostly Wahhabis. The sectarians then fled to Urus-Martan which became the center of Chechen (and Dagestani) Wahhabism. The Wahhabis' armed protest and their debates concerning plans to topple the elected Chechen president actually left Maskhadov with no choice. The "Chechen Lion"³⁷ dismissed ministers who were members of or who sympathized with the Wahhabi order (Khamidov, Udugov, Vahidov, and Shamil Basayev) and urged Chechen believers to expel Wahhabis from their towns and villages. Together with Akhmad Kadyrov, Chechen grand mufti and a dauntless anti-Wahhabi who had been personally appointed by Dudayev, Maskhadov began a systematic effort to discredit the Wahhabi doctrine. In the autumn of the same year, a congress of the Muslim clergy was held in Grozny on Kadyrov's initiative. During the assembly, the Wahhabis were accused of extremism, craving power, and their interpretation of Islam was not deemed genuine.³⁸

A phony war in which both sides avoided direct armed conflict continued until August 1999. Meanwhile, on February 3, 1999, Aslan Maskhadov announced the establishment of a "full-fledged Shari'a government" a day before the Wahhabi opposition was to make a similar proclamation to try to discredit Maskhadov's "unholy regime." In the short term, he

succeeded in undermining the Wahhabis, several of whom returned to the government.

From a long-term strategic perspective, however, the president found himself in an even more complicated situation. On the day Maskhadov issued the decree that rendered Shari'a effective in Chechnya, Basayev stated, "Our president has finally accepted Islam. He is no longer the president; therefore, we should elect an imam." Through his decree, Maskhadov actually divested himself of the safeguards provided by the constitution according to which he had been elected president. The legitimacy of his power was thus contested and, as it soon turned out, the more or less functioning Chechen state collapsed entirely. In Vakhit Akaev's words:

It appears that Maskhadov, who was surrounded and pressured by the opposition, failed to grasp the particulars. In his attempt to snatch the flag of Islam from the opposition's hands, he initiated a game on a foreign pitch, where he in fact suffered a political thrashing. This enabled the Islamic opposition to provoke Russia into waging another war with Chechnya.³⁹

The critical debilitation of Maskhadov's power and legitimacy as president eventually resulted in the Wahhabis' attack on Dagestan—their first step in a far-reaching plan that envisioned the "liberation and unification" of the northern Caucasus under the green flag of (Wahhabi) Islam.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS IN DAGESTAN

The deportation of the Chechens in 1944 delivered a heavy blow to the age-old friendly relations between the Chechens and the Dagestanis. This was due to the fact that after the Chechens had been displaced, several territories with traditionally predominant Chechen populations (the former Aukhov district) and some villages in the Vedeno district of Ichkeria in the mountainous southeastern Chechnya were settled primarily by Dagestani Laks, Kumyks, and Avars. In accordance with a special decree issued by Stalin, these lands were also handed over to Dagestan. The subsequent return of Chechens to these territories often led to conflicts with the new Dagestani settlers. The Akki district, to which thousands of deported Chechens returned in the second half of the 1950s, had been renamed "Novolakskiy District" owing to the number of Laks who had been allocated land there. To this day, it has remained a part of Dagestan (according to some estimates, the number of citizens of Chechen origin in this district, including Chechen refugees who came in the 1990s, is as high as 100,000, which comprises approximately five percent of Dagestan's total population).

Even before the beginning of the war in the northern Caucasus, Dagestani delegates represented in ethnic groups and syndicates, as well as in the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus (CPC), cautioned Moscow against armed intervention in Chechnya. With this warning, as well as with their preventing Russian military convoys from entering Chechnya in September 1992, the

Dagestanis showed the Chechens that the negative feelings of the 1950s no longer remained. An overwhelming majority of Dagestanis sided with the Chechen rebels and some nationalists, or religious radicals, actually called for a united fight for independence. Individual Dagestanis also volunteered to participate in the Chechen War. In the early 1990s, similar to the independence era of 1918 to 1921, certain circles of the Dagestani clergy nurtured hopes--as marginal as they may have been--for a sort of renewed era of Shamil's imamate (1834-1859) that would unite Chechnya and Dagestan.

As in Chechnya, where resistance materialized under a nationalist-religious banner, the Russo-Chechen War also boosted Islam's function in Dagestan to a certain degree, especially in the underdeveloped highland territories of the western part of the country. Dagestani youth, over half of whom were unemployed in the 1990s, were trapped in a kind of ideological vacuum after the demise of the Communist system. Furthermore, they were confronted with so-called "wild" or "mafioso" capitalism, which was (and still is) hardly compatible with traditional highland Caucasian values that centered around the cult of a daredevil, a warrior man (*jigidi*). Therefore, many began to engage in criminal activities within the republic, as well as outside of it. Ethnic criminal networks that were emerging especially in major Russian cities consisted mostly of young people recruited from Dagestani villages. There was an increase in the number of Dagestanis who occasionally engaged in shady business practices. However, to another segment of youths striving to rediscover their ethnic and

spiritual roots, faith obviously appeared to be the only credible idea needed to combat corruption, rising crime, drug abuse, and unemployment. The case of their Chechen neighbors, who had succeeded in defeating Russia's colossal military superiority with only "Islam in their hearts" gave them hope and self-confidence.⁴⁰

THE SPREAD OF WAHHABISM IN DAGESTAN

In the Northern Caucasus in the late 1980s, the Wahhabi doctrine originally nested in Dagestan⁴¹ It found fertile soil in the northeastern Caucasus, because it fit both temporally and thematically into the context of mass demonstrations of Dagestanis demanding an end to the Soviets' persecution of Islam. The population perceived the re-Islamization of society as an integral part of emancipation from its Soviet-strangled ethnic and socio-cultural identity. It was the Dagestanis who formed the core of the Islamic Revival Party, the very first group representing political Islam in a Soviet territory that had emerged in Astrakhan, southern Russia, in the summer of 1990. The party aimed to "defend Muslims' holy right to live their lives according to Allah's commandments".

Dagestan's intensive contact with the world around it, and the uncritical to euphoric perception of political Islam held by some Dagestanis, sparked a dramatic influx of members of Near and Middle Eastern humanitarian and public education organizations. These people openly or covertly distributed propaganda to promote the idea of "pure Islam" in Dagestan. The absence of integrated state policies from Makhachkala and Moscow, as well as the

protesting spirit of the Dagestani believers and the country's thorny socio-economic situation, made Wahhabism a major social force in the early 1990s. Members of Wahhabi *jama'ats* (religious communities or groups) also differed from other Muslims in terms of appearance: the men sported long beards with shaven moustaches and wore shortened trousers while women wore chadors, which covered their entire bodies and faces.

Together with the rising number of (often armed) conflicts between Wahhabis and traditionalist Islamists, the local intelligentsia and the more or less secular populations of Makhachkala and other Dagestani cities were becoming increasingly concerned about the activities of Wahhabi emissaries. The situation escalated especially in the Kadarian Zone in the highlands of western Dagestan in the predominantly Darginian villages of Karamakhi (the birthplace of Khattab's spouse), Chabanmakhi, and Kadar. In these villages, just like in neighboring Chechnya, there was a rash of retaliatory murders of traditionalist and Wahhabi imams, and even of rank-and-file believers. Similar incidents in this district began occurring as early as mid-1996, when the citizens of Karamakhi accused local Wahhabis of killing the head of the village. The murderers received a hospitable welcome from fellow believers in Chechnya. Outraged citizens from several villages in the Buinaksk district organized emotionally charged rallies in the capital city, chanting slogans such as "Out with Wahhabism" and "Death to Wahhabi murderers."

In May 1997, a major armed clash between Wahhabis and traditionalists occurred near the village of Chabanmakhi, claiming the lives of about a dozen people. The formal cause of this conflict was a theological dispute between two relatives loyal to opposing camps. In reaction to this event, the Dagestani government started making a resolute effort to discredit the Wahhabi doctrine and, at the same time, to liquidate Wahhabi cells in western Dagestan. In 1997, the Dagestani parliament passed a law entitled "On the fight against Islamic fundamentalism" which triggered mass hunts for the country's sectarians.

A year later, in early 1998, members of a Wahhabi village in the Tsumadi highland district of western Dagestan announced the birth of an independent Islamic republic in their territory, despite pressure by state authorities not to do so. Although the Kremlin's swift intervention managed to prevent the conflict from escalating, the villages remained outside of Makhachkala's effective jurisdiction from this point forward. This boosted the Wahhabis' confidence, as did the "probe" attack that Khattab's divisions launched against the North Caucasian military district in Buinaksk in December 1998. The federal forces were not able to hold back the assault effectively. In 1998-99, surprisingly disregarded by the border troops as well as by the Russian FSB (the Federal Security Service), an abundance of weapons, munitions, and soldiers were sent from Chechnya to Dagestan for the impending war which was to be waged in the name of the "liberation of Dagestan".⁴² Many commentators later criticized the inactive

position Russian authorities adopted in this matter.⁴³

In late 1997, Bagauddin Magomedov, the Avar leader of the radical wing of the Dagestani Wahhabis, heeded the bidding of Zelimkhan Yadarbiyev, Shamil Basayev, and Khattab, and moved—or rather fled—with his entourage to Chechnya. There he had established close ties with Emir Khattab and leaders of Chechnya's Wahhabi community during the war. In early 1998, Magomedov initiated the relocation of several hundred Dagestani Wahhabis and their families, who were the targets of repression in their native land, to Gudermes in eastern Chechnya. In March 1998, these Dagestanis, together with their Chechen co-religionists, started to drift toward Urus-Martan, where they then began preparations to invade Dagestan.

The years 1998 and 1999 saw the institutional unification of Dagestani and Chechen Wahhabis. The formation of the Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan, headed by Shamil Basayev, publicized the expansive intentions of the Chechen and Dagestani Wahhabis and their partners. In November 1998, Basayev left no doubt as to the Congress' program: "The leaders of the Congress will not allow the occupying Russian army to wreak any havoc in the land of our Muslim brethren. We do not intend to leave our Muslim brothers helpless." In January 1999, Khattab began the formation of an "Islamic Legion" with foreign Muslim volunteers. At the same time, he commanded the "Peacemaking Unit of the Majlis [Parliament] of Ichkeria and Dagestan". Moreover, in April 1999, Bagauddin Magomedov, "the Emir of the Islamic Jamaat of Dagestan," made an appeal to the "Islamic patriots of the Caucasus" to

"take part in the jihad" and to do their share in "liberating Dagestan and the Caucasus from the Russian colonial yoke." According to this prominent Dagestani Wahhabi's vision, proponents of the idea of a free Islamic Dagestan were to enlist in the "Islamic Army of the Caucasus" that he had founded and report to the army's headquarters (in the village of Karamakhi) for military duty. Another notable Dagestani Wahhabi, Magomed Tagayev, formed the "Dagestani Imam's Army of Freedom Fighters." Just at that time, the Russian air force attacked an island on the Terek River (in Chechen territory) where a Wahhabi military base was allegedly located.⁴⁴

In the spring of 1999, it was already quite certain that the attack on Dagestan was just a matter of time.

THE INVASION OF DAGESTAN

On August 2, 1999, a group of Magomedov's soldiers attacked a number of villages in the Tsumadi district. On August 6 and 7, 1999, roughly 1,500 armed Dagestanis (mainly Avars and Darginians), Chechens, and Arabs—predominantly Wahhabis—crossed the Dagestani border from Chechnya and occupied several Wahhabi villages in the border districts of Botlikh and Tsumadi without firing a shot. Three days later, on August 10, they announced the birth of the "independent Islamic State of Dagestan" and declared war on "the traitorous Dagestani government" and "Russia's occupation units." The operation bearing the name of the first Dagestani imam, "Imam Kazi-Mahomed," was led by Shamil Basayev, the head of the "United Command of the Dagestani Mujahids." He also swiftly and solemnly proclaimed himself "Emir of the Islamic State

of Dagestan" During the same period, Khattab made clear his objective to create "an Islamic Caucasian state extending from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea."⁴⁵

However, to the "liberation army's" absolute astonishment, Dagestan's multinational population behaved in a way that went against what the Wahhabis had obviously expected. Instead of a mass anti-Russian uprising, the border areas saw a more or less mass mobilization of volunteers against this army. The villagers considered them occupants and unwelcome religious fanatics. Arzulum Islamov, a 70-year-old elder from the Andi village of Gagatli in the Botlikh district, recalled crossing the Dagestani-Chechen border with three other village elders to take part in negotiations on a hot August day following the invasion:

They tried to put us under psychological pressure. The [Chechen] soldiers pointed their automatic weapons, machine guns and grenade launchers at us. Shirwani Basayev [Shamil's younger brother], who commanded the soldiers posted in our district, refused to meet with us....Through a transmitter he told us that we had no business being in his headquarters. But if we permitted his squad to go through the Andi village to the pass and bridge near the village of Muni, he would leave us alone....After a few days I went to meet with the soldiers again. This time I managed to get a hold of Shirwani Basayev. He spoke with me in a conceited manner. He said that

they were going to teach us Islam. I answered that we could teach him many things about it. I invited him to visit our village unarmed and see for himself just how highly we honor the Muslim tradition. Shirwani, however, said that he did not have time for sightseeing trips. He warned me that if we did not let his squad through the Muni Pass, they would walk there over our corpses. I told Basayev that if they killed our men, then our women would tear at their throats as viciously as wildcats. Basayev wanted to outwit us. So he asked us to let them go through at least to help their dying brothers [Dagestani Wahhabis from Magomedov's divisions] fighting against the Russian army in the villages of Ansalta and Rakhat. I said that the Andis may not permit anyone with bad intentions to set foot on their soil. The soldiers spoke amongst themselves in Chechen. However, I know the language and I understood them—they wanted to kill us. As we were leaving they started shooting at us.⁴⁶

The Dagestani homeland security forces thus fought side by side with regular units of the federal army and the Dagestani militia, and together managed to drive the Wahhabis and their Chechen sympathizers out in less than two weeks of fighting in the mountains.⁴⁷ Soon after quashing the rebellion in the Botlikh district, the Russian troops and Interior Ministry divisions, backed by Dagestani volunteers, concentrated on the

heart of the Wahhabi resistance in the villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi in the Tsumadi district. The operation began on August 29, 1999. In retaliation, the Chechens struck in the Novolaksk district, far to the north of the Botlikh and Tsumadi battlefields, clearly in order to divert the federal forces from launching a concentrated attack on Tsumadi. Taking its code name from the second Dagestani imam, "Imam Gamzatbek," this operation took place at the beginning of September but only fuelled the Dagestanis' anger over the activities of the Chechens as well as of "their own" Wahhabis, who reminded the Dagestani population of their western neighbors' "age-old designs" of territorial expansion. Together with Russian divisions, local units also succeeded in repelling this Wahhabi attack for nearly a month.

Opinions vary on what made some of the erstwhile Chechen rebels decide to attack Dagestan. This concerned only a small, though influential and disciplined, segment of the Chechen army. In contrast, like the majority of the military-political elite among the Chechen anti-Wahhabis, President Aslan Maskhadov publicly denounced the invasion of Dagestan, albeit with some delay.⁴⁸ His hesitation was due to the ongoing collapse of his own regime, concern over the Wahhabi's power and support among field commanders, and sympathy from many Chechens for an "Islamic war."

The attackers themselves apparently expected to win by setting off a mass uprising throughout Dagestan as the first step towards a great northern Caucasian insurgency to overthrow the "despised Russian colonialists". As Svante Cornell points out:

As the fighters...occupied villages, they were genuinely startled to see that they were not welcomed as liberators by the locals, which they obviously expected....Did they really think they could occupy Dagestan with less than two thousand fighters? More likely, their intelligence sources had apparently led them to believe Dagestan was ready for rebellion against Russia, and that their invasion would be the triggering factor in a popular revolt that Russia would have no chance of suppressing.⁴⁹

The attack on Dagestan led to a deterioration of Dagestani-Chechen relations. The nationalistic segment of the Dagestani public saw the invasion not as a consequence of Wahhabi extremism, but rather as a manifestation of Chechen territorial aspirations.⁵⁰ Some Dagestanis rebuked the Chechens for "unprecedented ingratitude" since, following the 1994-1996 war thousands of Chechens had found refuge with Dagestani families.

On the other hand, some Chechens accused the Dagestanis of betrayal, collaboration, and conformism since the latter--unlike their ancestors--were not willing to join the former in Chechnya's fight for freedom against Russia. Yet the majority of Dagestanis saw Chechnya as a bad precedent, which had achieved independence at the price of anarchy, clan conflict, religious extremism, economic catastrophe, and rampant criminality. An additional problem stemming from such an upheaval in Dagestan was communal conflict in what was then a stable multiethnic Dagestan, where it was

common to see several ethnic groups living side-by-side in the same village.

The events in western Dagestan put a considerable damper on pro-Chechen and "national liberation" enthusiasm garbed in the green of Islam in the Muslim autonomous areas of the northwestern Caucasus. This contributed to Chechnya's regional isolation. If the Dagestanis would not join Chechens in a campaign to have an Islamic revolution in the area there would be even less support in the sparsely populated, more remote areas of the Northern Caucasus with their considerable Russian populations. In 1999, it seemed that the Chechen conflict would remain local. Nevertheless, in that era, areas including Kabardino-Balkariya and Karachayevo-Cherkessia experienced a growth in the activities of local Wahhabis, mostly trained in camps in Chechnya. Their controversial methods, however, did not win them the favor of traditionalist-religious or secular fellow citizens. One of the reasons for this was the fact that, unlike Wahhabism, Sufi Islam is an inseparable part of the ethnic identity of the northern Caucasian peoples. Instead, the radicals' activities discredited—at least temporarily—religious radicalism itself in these areas. The dreaded domino effect predicted by many did not occur, at least for the time being.

Triggered by Russian army's invasion of Chechnya in October 1999, the so-called Second Russo-Chechen War has turned into a never-ending military conflict no less brutal than the first war. The liquidation of a considerable number of Chechen military and political leaders in Grozny in the winter of 1999/2000⁵¹, followed by an increase of

severe violations on the part of the federal troops of Chechen civilians' rights, resulted in the strengthening of the Chechens' desperate resistance. Unfortunately, the nationalist and rather secular-minded Chechen-Soviet officers who formed the core of the Chechen army during the first war have now been replaced by ruthless, uneducated youth, infected by primitive religious extremism, and who are too young to have memories of the peaceful Russian-Chechen coexistence within the former USSR. Moreover, a many Chechen fighters are driven by a thirst for revenge rather than by political motivations. Increasing Wahhabi influence and a growing power gap between Chechen separatists and the very large occupation army (the number of federal forces taking part in the operation is estimated at around 80,000 men) led to a rising number of Chechen militants to carry out more terrorist actions; among these attacks, the most notorious included the attack on Moscow's Dubrovka Theater in October 2002 and the siege on the Beslan school in September 2004 organized by Shamil Basayev. Recent developments show that the Chechen conflict is spreading to neighboring areas, Dagestan and Ingushetia in particular. There militant Islamists have become increasingly active, strengthening ties with their "brethren" from Chechnya and the northern Caucasus, as well as from the Middle East.

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studies (terrorism, transnational organized crime, ethno-political conflicts), political Islam, and nation and state-building in the Post-Soviet space, with emphasis on Russia and the Caucasus. He is author of some hundred scholarly and publicist articles published in a variety of Czech and foreign specialist periodicals, recently including OSCE Yearbook 2004 and Jahrbuch für internationale Sicherheitspolitik 2004. He has also provided numerous analyses to Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, and NATO.

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NOTES

¹ Building a functioning state from scratch as early as during the first era of Chechen independence (1991–94) was just as difficult. During Dudayev's presidency, the Chechen Republic was situated under the Sword of Damocles of the Russian invasion, although Chechen society's notorious fragmentation should not be disregarded.

² Charles W. Blandy, *The Federal Response to Chechen Independence: Occupy, Liberate, Obliterate*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, UK Defence Academy, July 14, 2003.

³ John Dunlop, *How Many Soldiers and Civilians Died During the Russo-Chechen War of 1994–1996?* Central Asian

Survey, Vol. 19, Nos. 3–4 (September 2000), p. 338. See also Gunnar Heinsohn, *Lexikon der Völkermorde (Dictionary of Genocides)*, (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1998/1999), p. 330. See, for example, Olga Trusevich and Alexandr Cherkasov, *Neizvestniy soldat kavkazskoy voyny, 1994–1996: Poteri rossiyskikh vojsk: Pogibshiye, propavshiye bez vesti, plenniye. (An Unknown Soldier of the Caucasian War, 1994–1996. Russian Troops' Losses: The Killed, the Last, the Captures)* (Moscow: Memorial, 1997). Online version: <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/N-Caucas/soldat/index.html>. See also Jacek Cichocki, *Konflikt rosyjsko-czeczenski, dzieje konfliktu, woyna rosyjsko-czeczenska 1994–1996 i obecna sytuacja w Republice Czeczenskiej-Iczkerii*, (The Russian-Chechen Conflict, Its History, the Russian-Chechen War of 1994–1996 and the Overall Situation in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya) (Warsaw: OSW, 1997), pp. 11–12. Interestingly, the overall Chechen population before the war (1994) was around 1 million.

⁴ Valeriy Serebryannikov, *Sotsiologiya voyny (The Sociology of War)*, (Moscow: Os-89, 1997), p. 167.

⁵ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 28, 1997.

⁶ For further details about life in interwar Chechnya, see Zura Altamirova, "Zhizn v poslevoyennoy Chechne," ("The Life in the Post-War Chechnya") and also Zalpa Bersanova, "Sistema tsennostey

sovremennykh chechentsev (po materialam oprosov)" ("The System of Values of Contemporary Chechens (According to Questioning Results)") both in Dmitriy Furman (ed.) *Rossiya i Chechnya: obshchestva i gosudarstva (Russia and Chechnya: Societies and States)* (Moscow: Sakharov-Center, 1998). Online version: http://www.sakharov-center.ru/chs/chrus14_1.htm

⁷ Boris Moskalyov, "The Anatomy of the Chechen Conflict," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No.1 (Winter 1997).

⁸ Barayev demanded a ransom of ten million dollars for the release of his captives. Valeri Tishkov speculates that Barayev may have coordinated his operation with the assistance of high-ranking officials in Moscow. This seems probable owing to the fact that, until his death in 2001, Barayev had no problems gaining access to security stations throughout the country--he had an FSB pass, as testimony from Sanobar Shermatova, Petra Prochazkova, Josef Pazderka, and others has indicated. Incidentally, in spring 1998, an armed conflict took place between Maskhadov's "anti-terrorist" units and Barayev's group, which was holding two British citizens--John James and Camille Carr--hostage in Urus Martan. Kidnapping people and holding them for ransom therefore became an endless nightmare for Maskhadov's government. Contributing significantly to the discreditation of Chechnya' image worldwide

⁹ In fact, some members of neighboring ethnic groups consider this feeling of being culturally exceptional and superior as a characteristic unique to the Chechen people.

¹⁰ For analysis of messianic-fantastic models, see Valeriy Tishkov, *Obshchestvo v vooruzennom konflikte: Etnografiya chechensko voyny*. (A Society in the Armed Conflict: Chechen War's Ethnography), (Moscow: Nauka 2001), pp. 462–76. See also Lyoma Vakhayev, "Politicheskie fantazii v sovremennoy Chechenskoj respublike," ("Political Fantasies in the Contemporary Chechen Republic") in Dmitriy Furman (ed.), *Rossiya i Chechnya: obshchestva i gosudarstva (Russia and Chechnya)* (Moscow: Sakharov-Center, 1999). Online version: http://www.sakharov-center.ru/chs/chrus15_1.htm.

¹¹ See Chapter 1 of Emil Souleimanov, *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing Group, forthcoming in autumn of 2006).

¹² In September 1951, Aslan Maschadov was born into a family of deported Chechens in the village of Shakay in Kazakhstan. He was a member of the Aleroy teyp. He graduated from the Tbilisi Artillery College in 1972 and from the Moscow Artillery College in 1981. As an officer in the Soviet army, he served in

the Far East, Hungary, and the Baltics. In autumn 1990, he became the commander of the rocket and artillery troop of the Vilnius garrison, and the deputy commander of the 7th Division. In 1992, Colonel Aslan Maskhadov was released from the army at his own request because of a conflict with a superior. At the insistence of some of his friends, he left Leningrad's military district for Chechnya. President Dudayev personally offered him the position of Commander of the Chechen Militia. As of 1994, he was the head of the Chechen Republic's primary army staff. From August to November 1996, he took part in the Khasavyurt peace talks. From October to December 1996, he held the office of prime minister. On January 27, 1997, Aslan Maskhadov was elected President of the Chechen Republic.

¹³ See, for instance, <http://www.nupi.no/cgi-win/Russland/krono.exe?445>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ In 1996, the city of Grozny was renamed Jokhar-Kala (in proper Chechen *Zokar-Kala*).

¹⁶ In interwar Chechnya the term "Indian" came to describe an armed warrior who did not submit to anyone, did not accept anyone, and waged war according to his changing interests.

¹⁷ Cited according to Valeriy Tishkov, *v vooruzennom konflikte (A Society in the Armed Conflict)*, p. 447.

¹⁸ Alexey Savateyev, *Musulmane Chechni: mezhdu adatom, shariatom i islamskim revolyutsionizmom. (Chechnya's Muslims: Between Adat, Sharia and Islamic Revolutionarism)*. Published by the Moscow Center of Regional and Civilization Studies. Online version: <http://civreg.ru/caucasus/pubonline.html>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sergei Arutyunov stipulates that a *virid* is "in essence a monastery, the difference being that the people forming Sufi virids, honoring oaths, fasting, norms of restraint and a whole range of religious principles, live in their own homes. They live with their wives and they have children, so they are not monks in the European sense of the word for that is something dissimilar. Nevertheless, in terms of religious obedience and the adherence to their canons, and in terms of constant and unconditional observance of the teachings of the faith's book, fasting, ceremonies, given obligations, etc. they are actually monks living normal everyday lives." See Sergei Arutyunov, *Etnopoliticheskiye ozidaniya na Severnom Kavkaze*, Moscow Center for Civilizational and Regional Studies. Online version: www.caucasusmedia.org/pdf/epencroundtables3.pdf.

²¹ Vakhit Akaev, *Islam i politika (na primere Chechni). (Islam and Politics on Chechnya's Example)*. Online version:

<http://www.iea.ras.ru/books/dostupno.html>.

²² Georgiy Derlugian, "Chechenskaya revolutsiya i chechenskaya istoriya" ("Chechen Revolution and Chechen History"), in Dmitriy Furman (ed.), *Rossiya i Chechnya: obshchestva i gosudarstva (Russia and Chechnya: Societies and States)* (Moscow: Sakharov-Center 1998). Online version: www.sakharov-center.ru/chs/chrus10_2.htm.

²³ *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, August 12, 1992.

²⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, November 11, 1999.

²⁵ See, for instance, Vakhit Akaev, "Religious-Political Conflict in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria," *Central Asia and Caucasus*, <http://www.cac.org/dataeng/05.akaev.shtml>

²⁶ Moreover, with this demonstrative measure, Grozny distanced itself from Moscow's authority, stressing its de facto and de jure independence. By taking this step, Grozny emphasized the validity of its own legislature (Shari'a) in its territory, since having one's own legislature is considered an integral attribute of a sovereign state.

²⁷ When speaking of Wahhabism, however, it is important to keep in mind the fact that there is an enormous gap

between al-Wahhab's original teachings and the religious constructs of his later protagonists. This gap makes it more difficult to discuss the authentic character of the theological teachings of those who have devoted themselves to Wahhabism. See, for instance, sources on typically "Neo-Wahhabit" Al-Qaida, such as, Yonah Alexander and Michael Swetnam, *Usama bin-Laden's Al-Qaida: Profile of a Terrorist Network* (New York: Transnational Publishers, 2001). See also Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

²⁸ The other schools are Shafi, which has a long tradition among the Chechens, then Hanafi, which has spread in other parts of the Northern Caucasus, and Maliki.

²⁹ Akaev, *Islam i politika (Islam and Politics)*.

³⁰ Wahhabi emissaries of both North Caucasian and Arab origin had also received higher education at colleges and specialized Islamic schools in a number of Middle Eastern countries.

³¹ No general consensus regarding Khattab's (nicknamed "the Black Arab") ethnic origins has been reached, because he did not like to communicate with journalists, and as a proper Wahhabi, he never spoke of his ethnic origins. It is a known fact that he had a Jordanian passport. However, many said that he

came from the southern part of the Saudi Peninsula and that he was of Arabic origin. Others said that he was a descendant of a 19th century Chechen refugee. Khattab became renowned for his attack on a column of Russian troops in a pass near the Chechen village of Jarysh-Mardy, during which around a hundred soldiers from the 103rd Motorized Regiment of the Moscow military district were killed.

³² Cited according to Igor Dobayev, *Islamskiy radikalizm v mezhdunarodnoy politike (Islamic Radicalism in World Politics)*, (Rostov na Donu: Rostizdat, 2000), p. 143. It is interesting to note that afterwards Maskhadov was heard saying that the Jews had brought Wahhabism to the republic in order to ignite intra-Chechen dissension.

³³ *Sovershenno Sekretno*, October 1999.

³⁴ Vakhit Akaev, *Sufizm i vakhkhabizm na Severnim Kavkaze (Sufism and Wahhabism in the Northern Caucasus)* (Moscow: RAN, 1999), p. 26.

³⁵ Maskhadov's cabinet put this anti-Wahhabi policy into effect following the events in Gudermes (see below).

³⁶ "Aslan" means "lion" in Turkic languages.

³⁷ Also acting on Kadyrov's initiative, the congress blamed Russia for "indirectly supporting the Wahhabis in Chechnya."

³⁸ Akaev, *Islam i politika (Islam and Politics)*.

³⁹ Thomas Valasek, "Hintergründe des Angriffes an Dagestan" ("The Background of the Invasion of Dagestan"), *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, No. 6. (1999).

⁴⁰ See, for example, Sanobar Shermatova, "Tak nazyvayemiye vakhkhabity," ("The So-Called Wahhabits") in Dmitriy Furman (ed.) *Rossija i Chechnya: obshchestva i gosudarstva (Russia and Chechnya: Societies and States)* (Moscow: Sakharov-Center, 1998). Online version: http://www.sakharov-center.ru/chs/chrus20_1.htm

⁴¹ *Moskovskaya Pravda*, August 13, 1999.

⁴² Alexey Litvinenko & Yefim Felshtynski, *FSB vzryvayet Rossiyu (FSB explodes Russia)*. Online version: <http://www.terror99.ru/book.htm>. Kap. 5.

⁴³ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, September 5, 1999.

⁴⁴ Emil Pain, "Chechnya i drugiye konflikty v Rossii" ("Chechnya and Russia's Other Conflicts"), *Mezhdunarodnaya zizn*, October 2, 1999.

⁴⁵ *Novaya Gazeta*, August 5, 2002.

⁴⁶ Uwe Halbach, "Wahhabismus im Kaukasus und Zentralasien" ("Wahhabism in the Caucasus and Central Asia"), *Aktuelle Analyse des BIOst*, No. 6 (1999).

⁴⁷ Reuters. August 9, 1999.

⁴⁸ Svante Cornell, *The Caucasus under Renewed Russian Pressure: Realities on the Ground and Geopolitical Imperatives*, Caspian Brief, No. 10 (January 2001). Cornell Caspian Consulting. Online version: www.cornellcaspian.com/pub/10_0101russianpressure.html.

⁴⁹ Age-old competitiveness between Chechens and Dagestanis and the resulting tensions certainly played a role as well.

⁵⁰ Aslan Maskhadov, the Chechen separatists' formal leader and president who had been consistently calling for negotiations with the Russians, was killed in an operation by Special Forces in March 2005. This contributed to further strengthening of religious hard-liners' uncompromising attitude.

⁵¹ For further details and information on the recent developments in the conflict, see Emil Souleimanov, *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing Group, forthcoming in autumn of 2006).