

THE CHECHEN PROBLEM: SOURCES, DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Introduction

The political, economic and social situation in Chechnya is a matter of concern for all the analysts of the current environment in the North Caucasus. Every day brings about new developments in Chechnya, which can hardly be characterised as encouraging. The more recent events, which culminated with the intervention in Chechnya and the siege of Grozny by the Russian Federal troops in November – December 1999, have raised even more questions about the future of the Caucasus.

The difficulty in any analysis or prognosis about Chechnya begins with getting the right information from the spot and ends with the absence of any serious background study, which would allow proper consideration of traditional elements versus modern inputs in the life of the Chechen society.

The purpose of this study is, first, to provide an overview of those factors that have a primary and profound influence on the political process in Chechnya. However, it should not be expected that the report would give exhaustive answers to the many questions about the future of Chechnya, especially in the long-term perspective. It will rather help those who follow the events in Chechnya understand the ongoing political changes and “read” the news with a fresh eye. Secondly, this paper will try to investigate the newly created circumstances as a result of the second Russian-Chechen conflict. Obviously, the determinants of the situation in Chechnya are far too complex to be covered comprehensively in the narrow framework of this paper.

Most of the available research papers and current information about Chechnya apply the classical instruments of analysis - government, presidency, parliament, majority and opposition, civil society - in order to make sense of the political process. Of course, the democratic institution - the President and the Parliament - have played in recent years a central role in the development of the situation in Chechnya. However, it should not be forgotten that those institutions were created only recently, and that the local customs and traditions of social behaviour had an overwhelming effect on the actual operation of those institutes. The Chechen society is a traditional one, in the sense that extended family structures and clan loyalties have dominated the decision making process during the entire course of the known Chechen history. The events of the past five years have brought into the life of every inhabitant of Chechnya changes that previously would have seemed impossible.

I. A little bit of history

The existence of Chechens was brought to light almost three centuries ago, when the Russian Tsar Peter the Great tried to expand his influence over North Caucasus, realising its geostrategic position on the access routes to the Caspian Sea and Iran. Indeed, even today, all the most important highways, railroads and pipelines connecting South Russia with the Caspian Sea via Azerbaijan cross the Chechen territory. For the Russians, the conquest of North Caucasus and its many peoples was a fundamental strategic objective at a certain point in history. Nowadays, the preservation of the inherited southern territories is to the Russians, rightly or wrongly, a question of national interest and pride. The Chechens, unlike other highlanders, never tired of fighting if not for independence, certainly for the preservation of their territory and lifestyle. The long wars and frequent military campaigns waged by the Russians in the North Caucasus inspired memorable works by Russian classical authors like Tolstoy, Lermontov and Pushkin. They also played a major part in the establishment of the Russian military elites and had a significant impact on the internal political process in Russia itself.

The origins of the Chechens and Ingushs, a closely related people living to the west of Chechnya, are not known precisely. The area they used to live in was subject to disputes among the Arab, Persian and Khazar empires starting from the eighth century A.D. Religion, economy and strategic position were the key words for describing the interests of the three giants in the region, until the Russian Empire stepped in. The Chechen owe to the Russians the earliest documented information on their history in modern times. The price they had to pay, however, for this unsolicited publicity was rather high.

What distinguished the Chechens and Ingushs from the other peoples and nationalities of North Caucasus was the lack of any form of aristocracy and vertical hierarchy. The Chechens were certainly not among the first to adopt Islam as the main religion and the Ingushs embraced it only recently (second half of the nineteenth century). Still, the clan structure of the society and Islam are the key concepts for understanding the history of combined armed and non-violent resistance of the Chechens against the Russians.

The Chechen struggle for independence was mostly a battle against the Russian conquest, and not an attempt to create a state of their own in a modern sense. The religious component was of fundamental importance in the open battles and the organised resistance movement. This first took place in 1785, when Ushurma, a shepherd from the highlands of Chechnya began preaching the *Naqshbandia* Sufi *tarik* (path) and holy war against the Russians. The subsequent insurgency against the Russians was actually a mixture of silent resistance and open struggle, depending on the political and military context of the moment. Ushurma, better known in history as Sheikh Mansur, remained a symbol of organised Chechen resistance against the Russian invaders, although he was quickly captured by the Tsarist army and died in a Russian prison. The essence of the *Naqshbandia* path is the performance of quiet rituals, accessible to every member of the

community, where the worshiper sits whispering verses until he reaches a state of trance. The tenets of this path allow military resistance, or *Ghazavat*, the holy Islamic war, against outsiders who are trying to break the existing religious rules. These norms were successfully applied to raise the social and national consciousness of the Chechen and Daghestani societies which were otherwise quite primitive in terms of state organisation.

The most renowned religious, military and political leader of the Chechen resistance in the nineteenth century, although he was not a Chechen himself, was Imam Shamil, an Avar from neighbouring Daghestan. He skilfully used the religious teachings of the mystical *Naqshbandia* path to unite the family-structured Chechen clans both among themselves and with the more hierarchical Daghestani peoples. He became a legend both among the Russians and the highlanders for his military talent, his personal courage and his dedication to the cause of *Ghazavat*, the holy Islamic war. The military and spiritual resistance organised by him lasted for twenty-five years. In addition to military actions, Shamil took measures to eradicate the traditional norms of behaviour in the day to day life of the Chechen and Daghestani clans, the *adats*, in favour of the *Naqshbandia* path rules. He succeeded in that enterprise, but eventually had to bow to the overwhelming military superiority of the Russian forces. Imam Shamil surrendered in 1859 to the Tsarist army and lived in exile to the end of his days in the Russian town of Kaluga, near Moscow.

The end of the Caucasian war against Shamil, which made it obvious that the natives had no chance to continue their armed resistance, created the conditions for a new religious order to be born. The *Quadiria tarikat*, or path, was introduced to Chechnya by Kuntha-Khaji, a shepherd. He preached non-resistance to evil and acceptance of infidel domination, slogans that became popular with the war-weary mountaineers. The order, which took the name “Kunta Khaji *tarikat*” in the Caucasus, practised the loud *zikr* (mystic dance), as opposed to the silent *zikr* of the *Naqshbandis*, with ecstatic dances, songs and later even instrumental music. The new *tarikat* enjoyed immediate and spectacular success especially in Chechnya, in the Avar country, and in Northern Daghestan, that is in the areas where the war effort had been particularly strong and where the Russian pressure had been especially severe.

Although the new teaching exhorted non-violence, religious uprisings were common during the rest of the nineteenth century. Disturbances on religious grounds took place in 1862, 1863, and 1864. The wars waged by the Russian Empire elsewhere were very often accompanied by new upheavals in Chechnya, almost every one of them being brutally suppressed. Finally, in 1917–1921, the collapse of the Tsarist regime and the Bolshevik seizure of power led to the last common struggle for Islam and independence, which united the Chechens and Daghestanis behind the banners of the *Naqshbandia* and *Quadiria* Sufism.

Although the Sufis had initially been allied with the Red Army because of promises of religious freedom and equal rights, they understood rather quickly that what the Bolsheviks were really after was control over their territory. As a result of bitter battles

against the Chechen resistance, the Bolshevik regime was fully enforced by the end of 1925.

In 1929, renewed disturbances broke out in Chechnya and elsewhere in the Caucasus in protest against agricultural collectivisation. Quelling that movement required the deployment of tens of thousands of Soviet troops. Small-scale guerrilla warfare continued until 1935.

The culminating point in the struggle of the Soviet regime for a final solution of the “Chechen problem” was the deportation of the Chechen and the Ingush, alongside other peoples of the North Caucasus (Kalmyk, Karachai and Balkar). On 22 February 1944, the NKVD (Soviet secret police) assembled and deported at one hour’s notice the vast majority of the indigenous Chechen and Ingush population. The action was designed to uproot the Chechens from their native land, thus solving the problem for good. Still, the *Vainakhs*, as the two peoples called themselves, managed to survive. The cost was high: one third of their population died during the trip to Kazakhstan and because of the harsh winter conditions there. The Sufi orders played again a leading role in the preservation of Chechen unity and in cultivating survival skills. Most Soviet specialists of anti-Islamic propaganda recognised that the attempted genocide through deportation of over a million North Caucasian Muslims had a striking, unforeseen result: far from destroying the Sufi brotherhoods the deportations actually promoted their expansion. For the deported mountaineers the Sufi orders became a symbol of their nationhood in the lands to which they were exiled¹.

II. The Chechens: independence and internal affairs

Chechnya again focused the attention of the mass media and the public opinion in 1991, when it proclaimed itself an independent state. Riding the wave of “independence euphoria” after the events of August 1991 in Moscow, radical forces in Chechnya strengthened their position and overthrew the communist government of Doku Zavgayev, a Chechen by origin, appointed by Moscow. Djokhar Dudayev, a former general in the Soviet army, assumed the leadership of the local political and administrative structures, having been elected Chairman of the Chechen National Congress and later (November 1991) President of Chechnya.

Still, the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the “parade of sovereignties” after its dissolution made Chechnya a marginal subject in media reports. In the meantime, the struggle for power in Chechnya would continue for almost 3 years. Various movements, associations and political parties went on quarrelling over the status of the most legitimate entity on the Chechen political stage. In fact, the pre-conflict period determined the model of the post-conflict period, when democratic institutions were set up and formal elections took place. The traditional way of decision making was still strong at that time. But it was the first time that the Chechen political establishment used a “democratic cover” for its activity.

Chechen independence can be analysed from two points of view:

- a concept in itself, symbolising the struggle for sovereignty waged during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries;
- an instrument for winning the political support of the people at grassroots level (we can talk about electorate only in 1997, when the first democratic elections were organised).

It should be emphasised from the outset that the concept of nation state was totally alien to the Chechens. The structure of their society, which would be analysed further on, had not allowed such a concept to emerge. Nevertheless, a history of permanent resistance to the creeping advance of the Russian Empire into the whole of North Caucasus in the nineteenth century and the deportation of the Chechen and Ingush people to Kazakhstan in 1944 added to their permanent preparedness for defence. All this was bound, sooner or later, to acquire the expression of independence struggle, whatever form it might have taken.

The concept of independence as an ideological tool for the politicians aspiring to reach the pinnacle of the Chechen political Olympus came into view gradually, after the events of 1990–1991, when the communist structures of local government were replaced. The ideology behind the struggle for power evolved from the “democratisation of the

institutions of self-government” to the proclamation of independence shortly after Moscow declared it would not recognise the newly created structures. In fact, all political actors used cleverly the concept of “foreign threat” to demonstrate their usefulness to the Chechens.

Although Djokhar Dudayev came to power in a rather uneventful way, he had to deal both with internal opposition and an obvious unwillingness on the part of Moscow to recognise him as a democratically elected leader. Boris Yeltsin, President of the still Soviet Russian Federation at that time, declared a state of emergency and sent airborne troopers to take control of the situation. The operation ended up in failure, as Dudayev began gathering his own army to defend the territory and his own position of power. The culmination was a public commitment to independence and a strengthening of Dudayev’s power as the defender of Chechen sovereignty. The race for independence began.

III. Traditions in the Chechen society

The social structure of the Chechens is based on two pillars: family and religion. Both of them are worth taking a closer look at, as their features are quite different from everything that is known in any contemporary society in Europe. This is of primary importance for understanding the history and the ongoing political process in Chechnya.

1. The secular component

The family in the Chechen understanding (*teip*) comprises all relatives, even remote ones, and can be viewed as a clan. There are around 160 *teips* in Chechnya, with a total probable population of 700-800,000 people. The Russian authorities claim that around 450,000 people out of the original 1,200,000 migrated from Chechnya during 1991 –1998. From a historical standpoint, the *teips* were created due mostly to the geographical conditions for making a living (mountains with barren terrain), and they included the inhabitants of one location (a valley, a village, etc.). In the past, *teip* membership could be obtained by acquiring land².

A clear distinction must be made between mountain *teips* in the south and east of the republic and plain *teips* living in the northern areas. The behaviour of these clans differs as the Soviet regime and the specific living conditions left their imprints in a different way.

The social life of the Chechen *teips* has always been governed by the *adats*, collections of customary rules and laws. The *adats* demonstrate that the form of Islam practised in that part of North Caucasus very seldom acquired a fundamentalist character. Even at the times when the most strict military discipline and mobilisation were required by the armed resistance against the Russians, the Chechens continued to disobey the most fundamental Islamic norms. In the chapter devoted to religion we shall see how various Islamic ideologies interfered with the ancient local customs and traditions.

The most basic *adat* rule of behaviour applicable to all the *teips* is unconditional respect for the elders. The elders are viewed as the wise ones, and they are the *de facto* decision-makers within the clan and the representatives of the *teip* in the relations with other clans³.

As mentioned before, a striking feature of the Chechen society is the historical absence of any forms of aristocracy. Besides the respect for the elders, the Chechens are *par excellence* deeply egalitarian. The form of democracy they have developed and preserved over the centuries is unique even among the peoples of the Caucasus. The decisions concerning the fate of the entire community or society were made by a Council of the Elders (*Akhsaks*), where the representative of each *teip* had equal rights. However, common rules applied for settling the disputes. One of them, the blood feud, still affects the entire Chechen society.

The egalitarian feature can explain many of the patterns of the Chechen social behaviour, especially when we think about the opponents of the two elected Presidents. Both Dudayev and Maskhadov encountered fierce opposition from various groups, created mostly on a *teip* basis. The presidential rule, enforced by both leaders, seemed to be a direct provocation to the traditional common decision-making mechanism, and the principle of elected democratic institutions was seen as an unnecessary luxury for the Chechen society. The opposition, in both cases, consisted of several leaders of clans, united against the presidents by a common perception of unfairness. The difference between Dudayev and Maskhadov was that the first one had a battle for independence to fight in a socio-economic environment which was acceptable to the population, while the second had to cope with economic recovery after the battle.

Social behaviour in time of peace (Dudayev before the Russian-Chechen armed conflict and Maskhadov after the signing of the Khasav-Yurt agreement) was totally different from the one prevailing at a time of conflict. Russian anthropologist Sergei Ariutinov writes about the Chechens:

“Chechnya was and is a society of military democracy. Chechnya never had any kings, emirs, princes, or barons. Unlike other Caucasian nations, there was never feudalism in Chechnya. Traditionally it was governed by a council of elders, on a basis of consensus, but like all military democracies—like the Iroquois in America, or the Zulu in Southern Africa—the Chechens retain the institution of military chief. In peacetime they recognise no sovereign authority and may be fragmented into a hundred rival clans. However, in time of danger, when faced with aggression, the rival clans unite and elect a military leader. This leader may be known to everyone as an unpleasant personality, but is elected nonetheless for being a good general. While the war is on, this leader is obeyed”⁴.

Other authors and sources on the spot also noted that the election of a leader for military purposes was a spontaneous process. With this we come closer to the second pillar of the Chechen society: religion.

2. The religious component

(a) The origins

The Chechen society, as its leaders claim, is a profoundly religious one. Islam was adopted by the Chechens several centuries ago, but the form of Islam and the traditional structure of the society preserved a certain animist component. In fact, religious leaders and Muslim missionaries from Arab countries sometimes look with irritation upon the religious rituals of the Chechens. The lack of hierarchy within the Chechen society contributed to the adoption of the most unsophisticated, from the point of view of ideology and dogma, form of Islam: the Sufism. Although they lived in the immediate proximity of the Ottoman and Persian empires, which followed the Sunni or Shia branches of Islam, respectively, the Chechens preferred the Sufi branch. The early Sufism,

a synonym of the *tarikāt* (the Path), appeared as an alternative to official Islam, which was split into two main branches, Sunni and Shia, already in the seventh century. The followers preached renunciation, poverty and surrender to God. Many Sufi orders choose to wander through the world and spread their teachings by personal example. This is how the Sufis reached North Caucasus and established their centre, in the eleventh century, at Derbent, a town on the Western shore of the Caspian Sea, in Daghestan⁵.

Apart from the unsophisticated dogma, the Sufis preached love of God and developed spiritual and physical techniques for reaching out to God. The *zikr* ritual, so well known in Chechnya, is in fact a ceaseless repetition of the name of God. On the other hand, the Sufis did not rely on theologians. The priest was replaced by a direct relationship between an initiated master and his disciples. Unlike the “righteous” Islam, the *tarikāt* contains many esoteric elements and relies on a direct and personal religious experience. The compulsory presence of a master leads to an exacerbated cult of the saints, which has been very strong with the Chechens until now. Perhaps the most important consequence of the master-to-disciple relationship, for the purpose of this research, was the possibility of the former to assume also the role of social and military leader in times of war. Here lies the key for understanding the success of Shamil, not even a Chechen by origin, and of other religious leaders who became later symbols of national resistance, in conducting *Ghazavat*, the holy war.

(b) Religion and resistance movements

Two main streams of the Sufi branch of Islam are spread among the Chechens: *Naqshbandia* and *Quadiria*. The first one was brought over, two centuries ago, from Central Asia to various *teips* of Chechnya and partially to Daghestan by Sheikh Mansur, a religious leader and later a fighter against the Russian invasion. Imam Shamil, a fervent follower of the *Naqshbandia tarikāt*, although not a Chechen, is still being considered the symbol of Chechen armed resistance against the Russian conquest of the Caucasus. The *Naqshbandia* code of conduct inspired a sub-culture (in the sociological sense) of its own, and its model of religious organisation expressed the social structures that already existed in the highlands, a perfect type of organisation for guerrilla warfare. What tended to happen was that a Sufi group of thirty to fifty members would include an entire extended family, contributing thus to the strengthening of the *teips* as the basic cell of the Chechen society (a structure that, to a great extent, continues to exist until now).

Sheikh Mansur and Imam Shamil fused their vision of God with a national resistance movement, declaring *Ghazavat* or holy war on Russian invaders with a discipline and strength, which surprised the Russians. When Shamil was defeated, many *Naqshbandi* followers were annihilated: killed, imprisoned in Russian jails or exiled to Turkey or other Muslim countries. The rank-and-file believers, discouraged by defeat, ruthless repression and the military occupation of the country by the Russian army, went over to a new brotherhood, the *Quadiria*.

Quadiria is the most interesting form of religious organisation of the Chechens and Ingush, among whom it was spread in the second half of the nineteenth century. The peculiar tenets of the sect became a way of life for its followers (for most of the Chechens up to the present time) and can be viewed as a key to the understanding of the national psychology of the Chechens.

The *Quadiria* order was brought to Chechnya by a shepherd, Kunta Khadji Kishiyev. He preached pacifism to the peoples of Chechnya and Daghestan. His main concepts – inner realisation, non-resistance to evil and the external acceptance of the infidel domination became popular among the recently defeated highlanders. The holy war only had to be declared if the invaders tried to destroy the language, culture and communities. The loud *zikr* ritual, in sharp contrast to the quiet religious practice of the *Naqshbandia* order, found an extremely fertile soil in Chechnya and, later, in the neighbouring Ingushetia, still pagan at that time.

Although the Tsarist and then Bolshevik and communist authorities tried desperately to wipe out the religious background of the Chechens, the *Quadiria* order, or the *zikrism*, continued to spread out and flourish. Its most definite features were crystallised and became evident almost a century later, during the deportation of the Chechen and Ingush people to Kazakhstan in 1944 and after their return, from 1957 onwards.

The norms of *zikrism* strengthened the already powerful *teip* structure and the intra-*teip* democracy. The whole community was and is still allowed to take part in the rituals. Still, the external acceptance of the norms ruling the people's lives was the most significant part, from a social standpoint, of the *Quadiria tarikat*. Followers were not obliged to admit their allegiance to any particular religious order, a norm that can be traced back to the early Shia Islam. This contributed, in its turn, to the successful survival and even development of the religious component in the Chechen society and, even more, to the transfer of some *Quadiria* norms into the secular segment of social life. Even in the Soviet times, members of the Communist party not only performed the *zikr* but, in some cases, also founded new orders!

A special form of religious resistance has developed after the return of the Chechens from their deportation to Kazakhstan. Although the Soviet authorities did their best to annihilate any form of religious life, by closing and even destroying the mosques and the religious schools, the *Quadiria zikrism* allowed Islam to flourish. The faithful who were already members of the Sufi *tarikats* needed no mosque to pray in. Even today, when the number of mosques has increased tenfold, many *zikrists* take pride in performing the rituals in the open air, or in private homes. The Soviet power was forced to admit the existence of religious communities “who live completely outside the Soviet legal sphere, both in their working activity and in their family sphere”⁶.

By the beginning of the 90's, when Chechen independence was being proclaimed, the *Quadiria* religious patterns of behaviour were deeply rooted in the social

subconsciousness of the various *teips*. On the one hand a drastic observance of the religious norms and rituals, and on the other hand an amazing social versatility prepared the Chechens for the period of the next eight years of struggle for independence.

(c) Sufis, Wahhabis and Islamic Fundamentalism

The authorities of the Russian Federation have been talking for a long time about the spreading in the North Caucasus of *Wahhabism*, a fundamentalist Islamic sect originating from Saudi Arabia. In fact, the Wahhabis bear a great deal of responsibility for what was to happen in Chechnya and the surrounding regions after the Russian troops left in 1996.

For a better understanding of this issue, we shall divide it into two components: ideology and dogma, on the one hand, and its spreading in the area of North Caucasus, which will be analysed further in the chapter "About Adat, Tarikat, Sufis and Wahhabites". The Wahhabi movement emerged during the nineteenth century in the Arabian Peninsula, although it had been founded two centuries earlier. The Wahhabi proselytes claim that they follow the purest Islam ever and stand against all the "novelties" introduced into Islam since the death of the Prophet. All Muslims who deviate from the original message of the Prophet are traitors who should be crushed by any means. The issue of religious purity came up when the founder and the namesake of the Wahhabi movement, Mohammed Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab began a public crusade against what he called heretic innovations. The greatest of these were the worship of tombs, prayers for the intercession of holy men and not directly to God himself, the worship of trees, rock formations, etc., minor pilgrimages, the belief in Mohammed as a religious power, and complex initiation rituals. Al-Wahhab declared these customs as expressions of polytheism, the greatest sin under Islam, and he began advocating a return to the Islam of the time of the Prophet Mohammed. Since those times, the pupils of Al-Wahhab have continued the line of their mentor.

The designation "fundamentalist" is used very often in the Western media as an addendum to the term "Islamic". Various formations, including states, like Iran, and extremist groups, like the one led by the notorious Osama bin-Laden, are assigned this term. The Western public usually associates these names with international terrorism and disrespect of human rights. By definition, Islamic fundamentalism means a return to the traditional norms of the Islam. The point is that nobody can tell us precisely what those traditional norms are. It is a fact that, after the death of Prophet Mohammed, the Islamic dogma, in its ideology and content, was split into several directions. Even the Koran, the written copy of the Prophet's revelations, sees interpretations of its text as equally valuable sources of inspiration for the believers. This is to say nothing about the Sunni and Shiite movements, which dispute among themselves the pure Islamic truth, coming from the interpretation of the Koran, and the "copyright" for the inherited utterings and actions of the Prophet. The Ishmaelite movement, the Sufi orders, the ancient Islamic alchemists, may all be characterised as "traditional", due to their age and dimensions, both from the standpoint of geography and population. The differences in ideology between all

these movements are sometimes so great that their leaders barely recognise the others as Muslims.

That is why a more differentiated approach should apply in outlining the very notion of fundamentalism. In some instances, even the word “fundamentalism” is not appropriate for the analysis of a movement or a group. This applies to our particular case. Let us see where the frontier lies between fundamentalism, seen as a return to the doctrinal traditions, and practical consequences, as reflected in the very actions of the Wahhabites.

The main thesis of the Wahhabi ideology is the Unity of God. “The unity of God is the thesis upon which Islam is founded”⁷. So far, reasserting the core of a monotheistic religion is nothing bad in itself. Only that the interpretation of this key concept, made by Al-Wahhab and promoted by his followers, has been the fundament of an extremist ideology which allows the proselytes to take fanatic steps for the promotion of the movement. The injunction to worship God alone is a directive derived from the Unity of God concept. The next assertion, the intercession, is related directly to the condemnation of those who worship anything else but God.

In the Wahhabi followers’ view, as described above, the worship of anything else but Allah, or God, is equated to polytheism and animism. Moreover, they give an extreme interpretation to the verses of the Koran condemning the polytheists. Polytheists should be punished by any means, including death, because they are outside the Law. “Polytheists are outcasts and the Almighty allows us to kill and deprive them of their property and still remain unpunished”⁸.

History recorded several cases of mass destruction at the hands of the Wahhabites. The Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, Kaa’ba itself and many other sacred Muslim places became the object of the Wahhabites’ anger and devastation. Even today, condemning the “polytheism” and “paganism” among Muslims is a key issue for the movement.

One might ask how this movement, with its very conservative views on the ritualistic side of worship, could take roots in Chechnya, where the Sufi followers have always had an opposite vision in their approach to God. Indeed, the Wahhabism is entirely opposed to Sufism, which admits the cult of saints, honours the tombs, recognises the capacity of holy men to perform miracles. The Sufis were condemned in the course of history by the “official” Islam, in various places in the world, for identifying themselves with God, a sin too serious to be tolerated even by the relatively enlightened Sunni followers⁹. The answer to the question “Why did Wahhabism take root in Chechnya?” lies in the lack of social organisation of the Chechen Sufis after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, in their openness, hospitality and trust in a more sophisticated Islamic “foreign assistance”. The spread of Wahhabism in Chechnya, as well as in other predominantly Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union has had, so far, dramatic consequences.

3. Traditions and religion. A short summary

A summary of the secular and the religious components in the traditional Chechen society presents the following picture:

- the *teip* division, with the more “civilised” clans in the cities (Grozny and Gudermes) and plains (the northern part of the republic) and the “rough” clans in the mountains (the south and south-east of Chechnya) was hardly a fertile ground for the birth and development of the “nation-state” ideal;
- the decision-making mechanism, based on consensus among the leaders of the *teips* was not the best environment for the introduction of the presidential rule. Dudayev tried to create a nation-wide Council of the Elders, shortly after he was elected president, but this initiative had no effect since he assigned to the Council only consultative prerogatives;
- the native heritage of the religious segment had two main features: the blood feud and the social versatility of the Chechens, which still remain important factors for the analysis and prognosis of the Chechen political behaviour;
- a new religious movement, totally opposed to the traditional Sufi Islam of the Chechens, came in and evolved in Chechnya mainly because of the primitive form of vertical integration of the Chechen Muslims.

Although these factors can lead to the conclusion that the Chechens had no reasons to begin a “battle for sovereignty”, other factors, first of all of historical character, prevailed.

IV. A leader's revolution

What determined the first Soviet general of Chechen origin to abandon a promising career in the army, return to his homeland and lead the struggle for independence? As a psychological portrait of Djokhar Dudayev is not the aim of the present analysis, we shall try to unveil only some of the reasons behind the independence battle.

1. A bit of history

Although some forty years had passed since the return of the Chechens and Ingushs to their fatherland, following the deportations to Kazakhstan, the passing of one generation of Chechens was not enough to forget the injustice of the past. In fact, many prime figures on the Chechen political stage were either born in Kazakhstan or knew the stories of thirteen years of deportation from their parents.

In 1994, by the beginning of the Russian-Chechen armed hostilities, the relatively fresh memories of the deportation and the stories of resistance against successive Russian regimes acted as a catalyst for instant recourse to armed struggle and as an element of unity around the much disputed, at that time, President Djokhar Dudayev.

2. "The parade of sovereignties"

The beginning of Chechen independence struggle coincided with the end of the *perestroika* process initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet head of state. Leaders of the Union Republics had already begun the internal procedures for obtaining independence (referenda in Ukraine and Moldova). Boris Yeltsin, at that time President of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Socialist Federal Republic (RSFSR), had begun a strong-hand political game aimed at gaining both more personal power and independence from the Soviet Communist Party. The slogan "take as much independence as you can swallow", launched by Yeltsin in 1990, became extremely popular, in the last year of the Soviet Union's existence, also among the regional leaders of the Russian Federation. After the *de jure* dissolution of the Soviet Union, in December 1991, the independence slogan started causing headaches to the leaders of Russia and other newly independent states. Conflicts on the grounds of inter-ethnic disputes, accompanied by demands for independence by small local entities broke out in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova. It was also thanks to this concept that the Chechen electorate supported by an overwhelming majority the election of Boris Yeltsin as President of the RSFSR in 1991.

After Russia became a successor of the former Soviet Union, in December 1991, leaders of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Yakutia and other territorial units, began their campaign for sovereignty. The Federal centre barely managed to convince them to drop their claims by granting them almost unlimited powers within their respective constituencies. It was at that time that the presidents of the various republics which were part of the Russian Federation were elected, and, much more important, they were granted financial privileges vis-à-vis the Federal Centre.

The Chechen independence initiative, although it looked at the beginning as an innocent protest against the abuses of the Soviet bureaucrats, became differentiated rather quickly and sharply from other similar experiences. Although Dudayev came to power in 1990, his position as a national leader did not become completely secure until the beginning of the armed conflict in 1994. Still, he considerably strengthened his status in 1992, after the failure of a Russian commando to gain control over Grozny and its surroundings. But the extra-parliamentarian opposition and very often the clashes between Dudayev and his political enemies went on growing up to 1994. It is evident that Dudayev, after his return to his native Chechen land, exploited the general anti-Moscow mood of the Russian provinces and especially the independence “thirst” of the Chechens which was displayed especially at moments of evident foreign threat (like the 1992 action).

Since only the events of 1994 produced unconditional support for Dudayev by the vast majority of his people, as a warrior and a symbol of Chechen independence, we cannot give credit to those sources, which assert that the opposition to his power was entirely backed and financed by Moscow. With this we come to the economic grounds of the Chechen independence.

3. The economy

The economic incentives for the Chechen aspirations for independence are often underestimated. Nevertheless, they played an important role at the beginning of the battle for sovereignty. It would be rather difficult to assess the exact amount of the financial and other resources, which became available to Chechnya at the beginning of the 1990's. That is why we shall try to evaluate the natural resources, the state of industry and agriculture, the economic policy of Moscow towards Chechnya, and some of the best known criminal affairs in the sphere of finances.

(a) Resources

Chechnya is well known for its oil resources. They are now estimated at around 55 mil. tons of crude. Although not a large fortune in absolute terms, for a small territory and population like Chechnya's, oil might have become the main product for export and source of income. However, the production costs were and remain relatively high, as the crude deposits are located at a depth of 5,000-7,000 metres. Chechnya has no other considerable resources of raw materials.

(b) Industry and agriculture

A relatively developed oil refining and chemical industry was built beginning with the 1930's. Designed initially to refine the local crude, of very high quality, these facilities were later used for Daghestani and Tatar oil. Strange enough, with the outbreak of the armed conflict, the refineries in Grozny did not suffer much damage. According to various sources, magnate Boris Berezovski made a significant investment in the Chechen refining industry at the beginning of the 90's, which could also explain his subsequent involvement in the hostage-releasing business. Anyway, the property rights on any facilities in Chechnya are highly unclear.

Although at the present time the refining facilities are utilised at 30-40% of the capacity, the business almost certainly looked very promising to Dudayev when he declared the Chechen independence. Should things have developed in a peaceful way, his regime would have had a permanent and stable source of income.

Chechen industry also comprised a high-quality cement factory, a milling factory, a large poultry farm. Drilling equipment was also manufactured, but only on a small scale.

Although many Chechens claim the agriculture in their land was the main source of grain for the North Caucasus, it was not very well developed, even by Soviet standards, taking into account that more than 50 % of the republic is covered by arid highlands.

To sum up, the oil industry was the potentially strong point of the Chechen economy, provided only that export routes and old connections with the suppliers of crude could be preserved.

(c) Transport

The geostrategic location of Chechnya has always been a factor to be taken into consideration by the Russian policy makers. First seen as the key to Azerbaijan, Persia and the Ottoman Empire, the role of Chechnya evolved gradually to that of an important transit point from the North Caucasus and Southern Russia to the Western Caspian coast and the Trans-Caucasus. The Soviet authorities felt secure enough to entrust the Chechens with the main road and railroad connections of Southern Russia with Azerbaijan. Between 1991-1994, the railroad transport became completely unsafe as armed gangs robbed passenger as well as freight trains. Armed robberies on the Rostov-Baku highway, especially of trucks, became almost commonplace.

The oil pipeline Baku-Grozny-Novorossiysk deserves special attention. Built in the Soviet times for the export of about 5 mil. tons of Azeri oil to the world market, it was out of use at the moment of Chechen independence. But that moment coincided with the start of the "Great Game" around the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Sea. The transport routes became a crucial asset of the game in which all major oil companies took part. Taking into account the fact that the first production sharing contract for drilling off-shore in Azerbaijan was signed in 1994, and an agreement on the transport routes for oil was reached as late as September 1995, we may take the liberty to see a certain connection between this process and the beginning of the "re-establishment of the constitutional order in Chechnya". Russia had tried every possible means for persuading its western counterparts that the oil should be transported via its territory, but the only "serious" argument was the existence of the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline, which ran through the uncontrollable Chechen territory. The Chechen campaign was, among other factors, meant to show the international community that Russia was still in control of strategic facilities on its territory.

(d) Economic policy towards Chechnya and the financial incentives for the independence process.

The return of the Chechens from Kazakhstan was decided by Nikita Khrushchev, in 1957. He released figures on the size of the deportation, from which it became clear that almost 70,000 Chechens vanished during the inhuman process of transportation and in the frozen steppes of Northern Kazakhstan. In taking his steps designed to denounce the abuses of the Stalinist regime, Khrushchev faced two problems vis-à-vis the Chechens: taking measures for legal rehabilitation and solving the questions of social reintegration of a people that had been completely “withdrawn” from its native land.

No formal or juridical measures were taken for the moral rehabilitation of the Chechens and Ingush. They were returned to the united Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic, which was already populated by “Russian speakers”.

As for the measures of reintegration, Khrushchev chosen the “soft” method of economic support. The Union authorities, especially through “Gosplan” (State Committee for Planning), enforced a campaign for injecting resources into the Chechen economy. Economic welfare and mixing with the Russian-speaking population should have tempered the warlike inclinations of the Chechens. Which it did, to a certain extent. Soviet planners decided to develop only that part of the industrial sphere which coincided with the economic interests of the Union centre (oil and transport industry). The rest of the economic involvement of Moscow was done through direct subsidies to agriculture and the sphere of services. The city of Grozny was included on the list of the cities financed directly from the Union budget, along with Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev.

Although the political elite was always designated from Moscow, and only in 1989 a Chechen (Doku Zavgayev) succeeded to earn the position of Secretary of the Republican Committee of the Communist Party, the economic administration, in which Chechens were represented, gradually gained control over the financial resources of the republic. They were the first to show and grant their support (first of all financial) to the rising leader of Chechnya. That was also the reason why Dudayev kept Chechnya in the rouble zone, long after independence was declared.

Russian criminal investigators specialised in financial crimes discovered that Chechen mafiosi artfully exploited Chechnya’s ambiguous status to make the republic a big centre for the infamous bank frauds of 1992. This was the case of the so-called *avizo* promissory notes from the Russian banking system. It was discovered that by bribing bank officials or forging promissory notes it was possible to get a spurious slip of paper in one part of the former Soviet Union and cash it in another for huge amounts of money. The practice was especially rife in Chechnya, and some Chechens brought home literally lorry-loads of roubles. The Russian Central Bank only managed to stop the practice in 1992, but by then the damage to the state was estimated at trillions of roubles.

In addition, Chechnya became a place for flourishing business in every area that required avoidance of tax and customs procedures, and financial infractions in general.

Another profitable business for a large number of people was the import of consumer products from Turkey, China, the Arab Emirates. The Grozny airport was very busy at that time receiving cargo and passenger planes filled with clothes, appliances, electronic equipment, and other consumer goods. As there was no customs clearance required in Chechnya, and the borders with Russia were open, Grozny became a propitious route not only for more or less legitimate traders, but also for drug smugglers.

By mere deduction, it is obvious that parts of those amounts were directed to support the Dudayev regime.

To sum up, the economic component was an essential one for initiating the claim for independence. The economic and financial incentives were a prime factor for the formation of the local political and economic elite. The absence of control on the part of the Federal Government made it possible to concentrate in Chechnya huge financial resources and, more importantly, to develop a highly efficient criminal system, in which the Chechen political and economic elite was deeply involved. Since Dudayev had access to those resources, control over the nodal transit road, rail and pipeline routes, and the certitude that the rich oil resources of his country would last even in the case of a total isolation of Chechnya, he apparently saw no reasons to step back from his hard independence line.

V. The 1994-1996 Russian - Chechen armed conflict

The introduction of the Federal troops in Chechnya, at December 11, 1994 and in Grozny in particular changed the situation fundamentally, compared to what it was during that year. Let us see how the beginning of the armed conflict in Chechnya changed the elements of the political situation analysed until now.

1. Morale and ideology

As it could have been predicted, all internal disagreements and conflicts among the actors on the Chechen political scene disappeared instantly with the emergence of a foreign threat. Dudayev won a place that he might have never hoped to achieve while continuing to be the president of a self-proclaimed country with a state system inherited from the Soviet Union and a clear opposition based on both the *teip* principle and personal discontent of the former political and economic elite. As the Chechens were hardly familiar with the concept of nation-state, the foreign threat suited Dudayev perfectly in fulfilling his role of a unifying leader and defender of the fatherland. He gained weight as a politician and became a genuine national leader, with full support from an overwhelming majority of the population. Moreover, his non-Chechen past made him suitable for an “Imam Shamil” role, although his ignorance concerning the obligations of a Muslim was sometimes embarrassing.

2. Participation in the conflict

By the beginning of the conflict, Dudayev had a rather big group of well-trained and well equipped followers who played the role of a regular army. It was not the only one, though. Several armed groups, usually formed by members of the same *teip*, were involved in criminal activities, as described above. The hardware belonging to several Russian divisions, which had to be withdrawn from North Caucasus in accordance with the CFE Treaty, provided plenty of military equipment and ammunition for those groups. As the armed confrontation began, the gangs became the most suitable instruments for guerrilla warfare. The chiefs of those gangs became field commanders and, although they had to obey the orders of General Dudayev during military operations, they never lost their independence. The field commanders, according to the Chechen traditions and especially to the *teip* principle, were highly critical of anything that had little to do with the defence of their fatherland. Moreover, they were demanding recognition of their merits and moral and material compensations for the losses the conflict inevitably caused to their illegal economic activities.

3. Again, about the economy

The conflict had a deep influence on the control of economic and financial resources. While the federal troops gained control over the main transit routes and production facilities, the Chechen gangs lost their potential targets and an important source of income. The transit role of Chechnya diminished significantly. Still, huge amounts of money were spent in Chechnya on behalf of the Federal Government by the Doku

Zavgayev administration which was loyal to Moscow. By the end of the conflict, his government went to Moscow and continued to receive money for the reconstruction of Chechnya for quite a while. This is one of the possible answers to the question why the Russian authorities often complained that their contributions to the reconstruction vanished on the way to Chechnya.

4. The end of conflict. Political and juridical aspects

In April 1996, during negotiations between the Russian Federal Forces and Chechen leadership, Djokhar Dudayev was killed by a Russian missile. The circumstances of his death are still mysterious, but the official Russian version says the Federal electronic intelligence managed to trace the satellite telephone Dudayev was using to maintain connection with the outside world, while hiding in the Chechen mountains.

After the death of Dudayev, the leadership of the Chechen political establishment was assumed by Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, as ad-interim president, while Aslan Maskhadov kept his position as Chief of Staff. Yandarbiyev and Maskhadov were shifting the leadership of the negotiations on the end of the conflict and the status of Chechnya in Moscow and Khasav-Yurt.

In August 1996, the so-called Khasav-Yurt Agreements were signed. The main provisions referred to a complete withdrawal of the Federal troops from Chechnya, a schedule for war reparations to be paid by Russia and the postponement of the negotiations on the status of Chechnya. An immediate solution to the burning problem of the Chechen independence could not be found within reasonable time frames; therefore the parties decided to have it settled until 2001.

VI. About Adat, Tarikat, Sufis and Wahhabites

In order to understand the core of the Chechen problem, after the end of the first Russian-Chechen conflict, we should go back to the traditional norms of the society. The 1996-1999 period brought new elements, fundamental for the comprehension of the determinants of the second conflict. Let us look at the circumstances of the developments in Chechnya after the withdrawal of the Russian troops, in 1996. But first, a new trip into the recent history of the Wahhabism in Chechnya.

1. The strengthening of the Wahhabism in Russia and Chechnya

According to some Russian researchers, the movement designated as Wahhabism was registered for the first time in 1990, shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in Astrakhan, a city conveniently situated in the North of the Caspian Sea, at the crossroads of all major Islamic population groups in Russia, North Caucasus and Central Asia.¹⁰ Tadjik, Uzbek, Tatar, Chechen, Daghestani and Ingush nationals created the so-called Party of Islamic Renaissance. In 1992, a branch of that party was opened in Grozny. In time, its followers gained in Chechnya and Daghestan the name of Wahhabites. Their activity included the creation of schools, distribution of literature, lectures to predominantly young audiences, recruitment of the youth into the movement. Still, the propaganda was carried out in a careful way, as the missionaries did not want to risk an open confrontation with the Sufi practice and ideology.

Their open and successful propaganda began during and especially after the end of the Russian-Chechen conflict. The most well known name connected to the Wahhabi movement, but also to many successful operations against the Federal forces, is Khattab, a Chechen by origin and either a Jordanian or a Saudi citizen. Khattab gained an enormous prestige due to his military successes, and he became later a “counsellor” to several Chechen field commanders, including Basayev.

We investigated previously the differences and incompatibilities in ideology and dogma between Sufism and Wahhabism. In order to get an answer to the question why the Wahhabi movement found such a fertile ground in Chechnya, but also to reveal the ever-growing contradictions that it created in the Chechen society, let us review the situation on the spot in the period 1990-1996.

2. A contemporary Chechen Sufi community: rules and norms of behaviour

The fall of communism left the Sufi orders in Chechnya relatively untouched. The ritualistic part was well preserved, as it was a key in itself for the preservation of Islam in that part of the world. But the veil of secrecy surrounding the Sufi orders did not allow the theological part to be developed. At the beginning of the 90's, there was no official Sufi ideology. Although the institution of the Mufti, the spiritual leader of the Chechens, was revived soon after the claims of independence emerged, the people in charge did very little for the officialisation of the Islam. Even in 1999, the Mufti of Chechnya Akhmad-

Khadji Kadyrov¹¹ complained about the lack of written Sufi texts either in Russian or in Chechen. Nor was anything done for the creation of a Sufi religious youth and adult education. The whole society relied almost completely on traditions.

Here lies the key of the success of the Wahhabi movement, but also of the contradictions that it brought to Chechnya. As the Islam was not at all institutionalised in Chechnya, it had no strong spiritual leader to control the different *tarikats*. The Chechen day to day life and the society in general relied heavily on the *adats*, or the secular *teip* norms and patterns of behaviour. The *adats* are very liberal norms from the point of view of any Muslim, as they allow a very unbounded lifestyle. In the centre of the social and religious life stays the family, the *teip*, and the intra-*teip* relations. The religious rituals are viewed as a personal and then a small community business, but not a social one.

3. The spreading of Wahhabism: key-points of a big success

That is one of the reasons why a large number of Chechens accepted the newcomers. The Wahhabi ideology offered very structured views on all the questions of faith and lifestyle, one thing that the Chechens never had. Taking into account the official Chechen propaganda, which enforced campaigns of turning back to Islam but failed to explain what kind of Islam should the people turn to, many Chechens saw nothing illegal in embracing the “oneness of God” and other precepts of the Wahhabi ideology. They would only later discover the contradictions to their Sufi beliefs that the Wahhabi dogma was bringing.

Perhaps the most obvious reason for the spreading of the Wahhabi movement was the economic disaster and the social insecurity that was left after the first Russian-Chechen conflict. The only legal source of income in Chechnya in 1998 was the payment of pensions and social security compensations by the Federal Government, at a total amount of 250 million roubles¹². The average amount of a pension was 450 roubles (around 20 US dollars). Still, the receivers were very happy, as they had not seen any money in 1997.

Apart from the pensions, the Russian government provided free electricity and gas for Chechnya. But that was not enough. In order to re-establish the social order in an area hit by a destructive war, the residents had to be provided with a minimum of financial resources in order to survive physically. The Chechens were facing the following dilemma: either work in the public sector and receive nothing from the state, stay at home and get the same, or enrol in one of the gangs who made a living for themselves and their families out of oil theft, drug smuggling or kidnappings.

The kidnapping business in Chechnya involved many gangs, the majority having strong Wahhabist support. By getting huge ransom for releasing especially foreigners, the Wahhabites were able to buy more weapons, on one hand, and reward the new proselytes, on the other hand. Several sources in Chechnya provided the information that the newcomers usually got 200 US dollars for their service within the gangs after graduating a two-month course in a military training camp.

The standard portrait of a graduate would be a young long-bearded man, in his early twenties, with only little or no regular school education. Although after his return to his native village the elders and the relatives would disagree strongly with his new religious points of view, the financial contribution he came with, essential for the survival of the predominantly large Chechen families, would calm down the spirits.

Experts estimate that the number of Wahhabi followers may amount to 20,000 in Chechnya alone. This quite scaring figure was reached, first of all, on the account of teenagers, who were left without schools and universities from 1995. They grew up during the 1994-1996 armed conflict, and the daily war scenes became a usual picture for them. They were a very easy catch for the Wahhabi militants, as the fight for independence and for Islamic “correctness” became what Coca-Cola and “Beverly Hills 90,210” represented for the social identification of the youth in Eastern Europe after the downfall of the Berlin Wall. Still, the family and *teip* ties are very strong and may eventually prevail over an ideology, which has been only recently brought to Chechnya.

Last but not least, the Wahhabists recruited to their side the best advertising machine possible: Movladi Udugov, a former propaganda activist with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, later Information Minister in the Dudayev Government and Minister of Foreign Affairs under Maskhadov, until June 1998, when Basayev left the Government. Udugov created his own TV station, “Kavkaz”, which advertised the views of the extra-parliamentary opposition led by Basayev and the Wahhabi ideology, but without naming its roots. “Kavkaz” has been a very efficient tool in the fight against President Maskhadov.

4. The Sharia law

It seemed that the introduction of the Sharia rule, for the first time in 1996, by Executive President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev was meant to be a failure from the start. Sharia (the Law) is a Sunni concept, and it is much wider than any western juridical system. On the one hand, Sharia not only regulates the relations between the believer and the community and the state, but also the relations with God and with one’s own conscience. On the other hand, the Law is an expression of God’s will, as it was revealed by Mohammed.¹³ The Sharia rule in Chechnya has never been a success. Even Imam Shamil complained that Chechens were hopelessly sticking to the *adat* norms. In 1996, the Sharia rule began with the execution, in the public square, of an adulterous couple. Since that time, the Sharia rule has been the central point of Chechen ideological and political struggle. What would make the essentially liberal Sufi Chechens want to introduce a legal and social system which is alien to their traditions?

The Sharia rule was wanted first of all by the promoters of the Wahhabite thinking. It should have been the binding element for a people with a totally opposite mentality and lifestyle. The Wahhabi leaders realised that they did not have the means to fight the “polytheist” Chechens with their traditional methods. That is why they began by expanding their authority over the most influential members of the post-war Chechen

society: the field commanders. Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, Salman Raduyev, Shamil Basayev, are only a few names among the most renowned “independence heroes” closely connected to the Wahhabi movement. Later, their authority, combined with Wahhabi financial resources from abroad and the lack of resistance from the hierarchically weak Sufi majority contributed to a major shift towards a powerful Sharia alternative. In fact, the authority of the field commanders, supporting the creation of a Sharia state with unknown final design, received rather good backing from several *teips* only under the circumstances of total isolation and extreme social poverty. It is likely that, as soon as those conditions change, the mood of the population may swing back to embracing the Sufi precepts.

Another reason for the success of the Wahhabi ideology was the over-emphasising of the importance of Islam for the Chechens on the part of the officials, although none of the key figures on the Chechen political scene had been a fervent Muslim. On the contrary, the vast majority of them had a communist past (Dudayev, Basayev, Raduyev, Udugov, etc.). We may only speculate that Islam was, at the beginning of the struggle for independence, the only ideology available and therefore it came in handy. Since the official doctrine of the Sufi Islam was at a primitive level, any more “advanced” creed could have no difficulty in being successfully implemented, especially if it was sustained financially from abroad. Still, the differences between the two doctrines are so great that the Wahhabites can hardly count on ultimate success, especially now, when the social environment is changing so rapidly.

VII. The end of the first conflict and its consequences

The picture of the domestic political situation in Chechnya at the end of summer 1999 was quite different from what the Federal authorities had left behind after the signing of Khasav-Yurt agreement and the pull-out of the army, at the end of 1996. A confident and relatively united Chechnya, expecting war reparations to be paid by Russia (the amount demanded by the Chechen side was 100 billion US dollars), a package of agreements whereby Russia committed itself to help the Chechen government restore the damaged infrastructure, a president elected democratically and a government formed of “independence heroes”--those were the defining features of the Chechen society in 1996. On the other hand, Dudayev’s death had left the country without a recognised national leader. This had most negative consequences for the subsequent developments in Chechnya.

In February 1997, as a result of general elections monitored by the OSCE, Aslan Maskhadov, former Chief of Staff during the armed conflict and the main negotiator of the Khasav-Yurt agreements, became the first elected President of Chechnya, having won 54% of the votes. His main opponents, Shamil Basayev and Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, had 23% and 15%, respectively.

The cohesive factors of all power structures in Chechnya were, as mentioned earlier, the “independence fever”, the victory over the Federal army and, most important, the expectations of rewards for the merits of the field commanders during the war.

That solidarity broke up in the summer of 1998, after the first armed clash between Chechens since Dudayev died took place in the city of Gudermes. A group of Wahhabi followers, who previously had been loyal to President Maskhadov, attacked the Presidential Guard Squad and tried to gain control over the second largest city in Chechnya. The attack was successfully repelled by President Maskhadov’s men, but it marked the start of a massive migration of the field commanders, together with their supporters, into the sphere of influence of the Wahhabi sect.

In August 1998, Shamil Basayev, Acting Prime Minister, resigned from his position and became the formal leader of the extra-parliamentarian opposition. In time, the ideological component, especially the Islamic rhetoric, became the predominant element of the opposition’s political discourse. The strong financial support of the Wahhabi movement, which was interested in overthrowing the democratically elected president and enforcing an Islamic (Sharia) state, was decisive for the success of the opposition.

The economic and especially the social situation worsened to such an extent during 1997-1999, that criminal activities became the main source of income for the former field commanders, apart from Wahhabi financing. Armed gangs were involved in kidnappings and slave trade, oil theft and illegal refining, drug smuggling, etc.

The Wahhabi followers, who set up their own training camps for guerrillas, prepared for criminal activities in Chechnya and in the neighbouring regions. The gangs involved in kidnappings and other illegal business were located in the same areas (Urus-Martan, Alkhankhala). There was no clear distinction between their ideological background, as their methods for gaining influence in society were very much alike.

Although President Maskhadov had the support of the majority of the population, clearly demonstrated by the number of participants in the meetings in his support, the extra-parliamentarian opposition was *de facto* controlling the situation in large areas of Chechnya. The paradigm of an active minority versus a passive majority fitted that situation very well. Better equipped and motivated than Maskhadov's followers, they benefited from the financial support of the Wahhabi extremists and from their own criminal activities. In a devastated Chechnya, which was only financed by the Federal centre for pension payments, they were constantly getting the upper hand. As breadwinners of their *teips*, they also had the comfortable support of their families, which was essential in the traditionalist Chechen society.

President Maskhadov: a weak personality or a balanced leader?

The worsening of the social and personal security situation in Chechnya contributed to the withdrawal of all major humanitarian organisations from its territory. From 1998 on, till the beginning of the second Russian-Chechen armed conflict, in August 1999, no foreign journalist, including the Russians, stepped into Chechen territory. The only information available about the breakaway republic come through the Russian media, which in turn got it from local journalists. As it should have been expected, the Russian media predominantly reported crimes, kidnappings, President Maskhadov's inability to deal with the extremists. In fact, Maskhadov became a prisoner of this situation, and now it is obvious that he should have taken a stand at least to justify his lack of action. The Russian counterpart made the start of negotiations on the provisions of the Khasav-Yurt agreements conditional on guarantees that the democratically elected president was in control of the situation.

Well, Maskhadov was not. Not only he was not able to control the criminal acts, first of all the kidnappings, but he was literally loosing ground on the internal political scene. He survived four attempts on his life, the last of them very close to the Presidential Palace in Grozny. Although he had counsellors (e.g. the Mufti of Chechnya, Akhmad-Khaji Kadyrov), who advocated decisive actions against the Wahhabites and their supporters, who were to blame both for the criminal activities and for having split the Chechen political arena, Maskhadov never tried to take a decisive stand. He was saying that he would never risk starting an intra-Chechen war¹⁴. Taking into consideration the blood feud and the close family and clan links, the risk was real. On the other hand, when the three British and one New-Zealand ex-pats were found decapitated in December 1998, on the Rostov-Baku highway, near the crossroad to Urus-Martan, the headquarters of Wahhabites and several criminal gangs, it was too much for the international community to swallow. Although Maskhadov realised how serious the situation was and called a rally

of his supporters from all over the country, the majority of them veterans of the 1994-1996 conflict, he missed the opportunity to start fighting his enemies. His authority, both at home and abroad, was further eroded when, two months later, he dissolved the democratically elected Parliament and introduced a transitional period for the adoption of a Sharia law system. That was Maskhadov's way of answering the attempts of his extra-parliamentary opponents, composed almost exclusively of former field commanders and enjoying obvious Wahhabi backing, to introduce the Sharia law system. He tried to outwit them by anticipating their moves.

As a conclusion, within the last two years Maskhadov has been losing credibility both in Chechnya and abroad because of his inability to prevent kidnappings, to fight organised crime and to take a clear stand against the extra-parliamentary opposition.

On the domestic political arena he was a prisoner of the opposition who would blame him for a pro-Russian attitude if he opened negotiation on Chechnya's status. On the external plane he lost a lot of credibility by failing to fight the kidnappers.

VIII. The anatomy of the two recent Russian-Chechen conflicts

At the end of 1994, an assault of the Russian troops on Chechnya seemed inevitable. The Federal Centre had lost any form of control over the situation in Chechnya, and its attempts to regain power by manipulating the local elites failed one after the other. Furthermore, the involvement of Moscow in local Chechen politics became so obvious that Russia had no space for manoeuvre left. It had no other choice but to “re-establish the constitutional order”. On the other hand, the intrusion of the Russian regular troops, in August 1999, into the *de facto* independent Chechnya was quite surprising to the analysts and the international community. Let us take a look at the different circumstances of the two conflicts.

At the end of 1994, Chechnya was the only territorial unit of the Russian Federation, which enjoyed a special regime, free of any duties and obligations to Moscow. Within the 1991-1994 period, the black economy experienced a boom, political parties and lobbies were happy to use the independence rhetoric to impress their electorate, the tensions between the different currents on the internal political stage remained high, but not a degree that could start a civil war. The economic incentives were the main argument for keeping the *status-quo*, uncertain as it was. Dudayev, although he had strengthened his own position, did yet not manage to acquire the status of national leader, since various economic, criminal and *teip* related interests still divided the various parties and grassroots movements.

By the summer of 1994, it became obvious for the Chechens that the Russians were prepared to take some action against what they then regarded as a “no man’s land”. The action came in the form of Chechen “opposition” groups, with financial and military support from the Federal centre. Their attempt to overthrow the Dudayev government not only was a total fiasco, but also had an opposite effect: Dudayev had all the excuses to enforce emergency rule and gather around him all the “patriotic” and pro-independence groups. Thus, he became a national hero and acquired a capability to mobilise the Chechens for a total war of national defence when the Federal troops came into Chechnya at the end of 1994.

By 1994, general Dudayev managed to annoy every political figure in Moscow. His independence bravado, the lack of dialogue and tense personal relations with President Yeltsin caused the Security Council of the Russian Federation, the main agency in charge of the Chechen problem, to take a decision that would be much disputed in the following five years: sending troops into Chechnya under the excuse of the so-called “restoration of constitutional order”. The chiefs of the law-enforcement structures, the Minister of the Interior, the chief of the Federal Security Service and the Minister of Defence were sure that the military operation would end within a very short time and Dudayev would leave the Chechen political stage. That scenario proved to be a mistake. After having had a look at the political situation, let us see the circumstances of the first conflict and compare them to the second Russian-Chechen collision.

1. Military aspects

The strategy chosen by the Russian army in the first conflict was “total war” against the supporters of General Dudayev. As a result, he gained the support of the majority of the population, and he immediately became commander in chief of a large number of guerrillas, who demonstrated an unexpected degree of unity and effectiveness in action. The Russian army was supposed to take the enemy by surprise and to make an impression, first of all, by its numbers (over 40,000 troops). Although it should have had an overwhelming psychological effect, the scale of the operation did not scare the Chechens. The large number of infantry, supported by armoured vehicles and heavy tanks became easy targets in the Chechen towns. The guerrillas, who in due time evolved into a regular army, captured plenty of military equipment and ammunition. The training of the Russian troops was obviously poor, and the Chechens managed to capture also a large number of prisoners. Although the Russian army scored a number of successes, like the conquest of Grozny, the effects were only short term as the rebels always struck back causing a considerable number of casualties.

In 1999, the Russian regular troops chose to be much more careful in their approach to the conquest of Chechen towns and villages. Outnumbering by far the Chechen guerrillas (according to media reports, some 100,000 troops were deployed in Chechnya), the Federal army forced them out of the populated areas by bombarding their strongholds. The Russian generals seemed to have returned to the strategy of some of their predecessors in the nineteenth century, when the army surrounded the villages and waited for the rebels to come out. The Federal army began enforcing a sanitary cordon starting from the north and east. The Russian generals spoke publicly about forcing the guerrillas from the populated areas and driving them into the mountains in the south, where they should be kept through the winter. For a while, the strategy of entering the villages and towns only after the Chechen troops went away proved to be highly successful. The question was if the guerrillas would leave their strongholds like Grozny and Urus-Martan, known for the fortifications built there by the Wahhabi troops.

2. The warring parties

As shown above, in 1994 the Russian troops were facing an army which was united and motivated by a strong ideological element: the fight for independence, fed by historical memories and strong economic incentives. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that all those who did not flee Chechnya took part in the conflict and contributed to the final Chechen victory.

During 1996-1999, the situation changed so dramatically that, discounting the troops of the Wahhabists and their allies who started the confrontation in Daghestan, it was hard to say if there would be any other armed forces available to fight the Russian Federal army. The three years of extreme poverty and social insecurity, the spreading of the Wahhabi movement, which was in fact alien to the Chechen traditions, the loss of power by the democratically elected President disappointed many ordinary Chechens. Besides, the

drama of the first war was so much alive in their memory that perhaps up to a half of the population of Chechnya fled to neighbouring Ingushetia and Daghestan.

One key question of the current conflict is whether the regular troops of President Maskhadov will join the Chechen resistance. Taking into account the fact that Shamil Basayev, who had masterminded the operation in Daghestan, became a chief of operations in Maskhadov's army, although he was his fiercest enemy during the past year, we may speculate that the independence rhetoric is still strong with the Chechen political elite. Still, the regular troops were not large in numbers (perhaps 2-3,000 people). The central question, though, is whether the majority of the combatants of the last conflict, who in the meantime were enjoying the "benefits" of the independence they had won, will join in.

3. Intelligence

One of the explanations for the Russian failure in the first military operation was poor intelligence about the actual situation on the spot. The information coming from various sources was contradictory and there was no unified command centre for the three law-enforcement agencies participating in the operation. Intelligence experts had predicted that the Chechen rebels would give up the fight as soon as they saw the Russian tanks on the streets. Moreover, during the first conflict, Moscow relied on high-ranking Chechen politicians who were thought to be loyal to Russia. They insisted that the military operation should be carried out in the form it was done, and the Russian decision makers did not bother to listen to other opinions.¹⁵

By the end of summer 1999, the Russian decision makers seemed to be much better prepared for a second military operation. The major difference in the planning and execution of the two operations is the differentiation of the Chechens into "peaceful inhabitants" and "terrorist". Apart from the media propaganda, this concept proved to be effective when the Russian commanders negotiated deals with the village or town elders (the leaders of the families and *teips*): stopping the bombardments in exchange for the withdrawal of the guerrillas. The Federal troops seem to be able to exploit the disenchantment of the ordinary Chechens with the Wahhabi guerrillas and criminal gangs who brought so little peace and prosperity to the post-war independent Chechnya. The coherence of the actions taken by the Federal army indicates the existence of a unified command centre. In fact, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, a former chief of the Federal Security Service (FSB), seems to be in complete control not only of the operations on the spot, but also of the public opinion in Russia, who has supported him by an overwhelming majority.

4. The mass media in modern warfare

The events of the first Russian-Chechen armed conflict were influenced to a great extent by the media. It was the Russian media, and not the Western, which were the first to ask questions about the opportuneness of the first use of Russian troops since Afghanistan. The slogan "restoration of the constitutional order" was too abstract to convey the right message. The fact that the Chechens had chosen a different lifestyle did not seem a good

enough reason for the loss of life by young inexperienced Russian soldiers. The electronic media provided live coverage of the conflict and its atrocities. Moreover, the Russian public reacted in an extremely critical manner to the childish declarations made by the officials in charge of the operation, the ministers of the interior and defence, Yerin and Grachev, respectively. They became symbols of unfounded self-confidence and bad management. The situation became even worse for the authorities when some human rights activists and MPs went into Chechnya to negotiate with Dudayev the release of Russian prisoners of war. For the first time, the Association of Soldiers' Mothers made a powerful lobby for stopping the advance of the army into Chechnya. In the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian Parliament, some fraction leaders demanded the immediate termination of the operation. In 1996, only months away from the parliamentary and presidential elections, President Yeltsin and his team had no other choice but to negotiate an end to the conflict. Public support for the operation was so low that the war had to be ended.

In order to analyse the present media environment in Russia around the Chechen problem we should go back to the end of the first conflict. Although most of the criticism for the failure of the military operation and for the decision to start it in the first place was directed against the Government and the President, the fiasco also revealed the low degree of preparedness and combat capability of the Russian army. The Chechens did not enjoy much sympathy among the Russian population just because the term used for the failure in Chechnya was "humiliation". Although the vast majority of Russian journalists had made a lot of good personal contacts among the Chechens and were at least impartial in presenting the events, this came to an end when the first journalist was kidnapped. Stories of abductions and other crimes that were taking place in Chechnya slowly became the only reports from the breakaway republic. The difficulties of getting objective information were generated by a lack of desire on the part of any journalist to travel to a region where a ransom as high as five million dollars might be demanded for his return home. Under such circumstances, by the end of 1998, the only information coming out of Chechnya was about kidnappings, terrorist acts, the spreading of the Wahhabism. In December 1998, when the remains of the four ex-pats were found on the Rostov–Grozny-Baku highway, the reaction of the Russian media could be summarised as "We told you they were not humans".

Thus, before the attack on Dagestan and the explosions in Moscow attributed to the Chechen extremists, the standard media representations of Chechnya were:

- A place where the most abominable crimes take place; no differentiation by *teip* and religious or social background was made;
- President Maskhadov is a prisoner of the extremists; Chechnya is governed either by religious extremists or notorious criminals;
- The Wahhabists are trying to expand their influence into the neighbouring regions;

- The Federal authorities should do something to prevent the spread of terrorism and organised crime from Chechnya to the rest of Russia.

In August 1999, when several explosions took place in Russia, killing hundreds of civilians, the Federal authorities claimed there was a “Chechen link”, and the population and the media demanded immediate action. The Wahhabi attack on the Republic of Dagestan, led by Shamil Basayev, well known in Russia for a terrorist act committed in 1995 in Budionnovsk, on the Russian territory, was the best excuse to start a new military operation. For the newly appointed Prime Minister Vladimir Putin this was also an occasion to prove himself as a tough and efficient leader. This time, the media supported and even praised the intervention meant to eradicate a plague and to stop it from spreading around Russia. An official propaganda office was especially created for advertising the atrocities committed by the Chechen gangs and kidnappers. There was no discussion about the losses of the Federal troops. It seems that no political party is willing to take the risk of criticising a military campaign which is so applauded by the media, a very short time before the parliamentary elections. Moreover, the journalists are discouraged in every way from travelling to the areas controlled by the Chechens. On the contrary, they are shown only the “liberated” Chechen villages and towns. So far, the information war is definitely being won by Russia.

5. Decision making in Moscow: motives for action

One might argue that Russian politics of the past ten years has been largely influenced by the prospects of the elections held once in four years. It was obvious, though, that the end of the first Russian-Chechen conflict was directly linked to the Presidential elections of 1996. The political behaviour of President Yeltsin is known mainly for two things: the successive periods of activity and passivity, and his talent to change the members of his team right in time to avoid a critical public pressure.

Prior to the nomination of the Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister, Yevgheni Primakov and Sergei Stepashin took a lot of trouble to make themselves pleasant to the President. Although both of them had past connections with the Russian intelligence and security structures, it seems that neither of them was able to come up with a plan for solving the Chechen problem, although it was constantly present on the agenda of the Russian Government, Security Council and President. It is hard to say whether the operation was planned before the official reason (fight against the terrorists) was given. Still, the manner in which it is being carried out indicates careful and minute preparation. Moreover, unlike the previous intervention, the present one shows unprecedented co-ordination of the Government, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the Interior and the intelligence services.

Although this might not be the determinant of the operation in Chechnya, we cannot fail to note that the ratings of Prime Minister Putin, officially designated by President Yeltsin as his successor for the presidential elections next summer, have seen a dramatic improvement. The chief of the executive is now a favourite for the elections, according to the opinion polls, whereas he had a very low percentage before the start of the operation.

Coming back to the reasons for starting this operation, we may speculate that several factors concurred with the preparedness of the military to take revenge for the losses and humiliation of the last conflict. First, the debacle in Chechnya dealt a blow to Russia's "great power" image abroad. The problem of Chechen independence had to be solved, one way or another, but keeping three vital signs of Russian sovereignty: foreign policy, armed forces and financial policy should always be decided in Moscow. Secondly, any successful military operation brings additional money to the budget of the Ministry of Defence, even in the case of the Russian budget, which has to be heavily subsidised by IMF. Thirdly, a "small victorious war", although it often becomes a large-scale conflict, is a move often used in modern Russian politics for increasing the internal ratings of the decision makers.

The "fight against terrorism" certainly coincides with the interests of the single Russian monopolistic oil pipeline owner Transneft. Transneft still owes the Chechen Government a great deal of the royalty taxes for the transit of oil through the Baku-Grozny-Novorossiisk pipeline. For that reason the pipeline was shut down by the Chechens several times in 1998 and 1999. But the interests of Transneft go beyond delaying the payments to the Chechens. The agreement with the Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC) stipulates that it will receive a quantity of Russian oil at the Sheskhares terminal in Novorossiisk equal to the quantity of Azeri oil pumped in by AIOC. This kind of switch agreement is currently used in several parts of the world, but this one is special because of the use that Transneft makes of the oil coming from the Caspian offshore fields. The Caspian oil is superior in quality to the Russian Ural oil, and the 5 million tons a year is just enough to blend with another 30 million tons of Ural oil in order to obtain 35 millions tons (maximum capacity of Sheskhares oil terminal) of the "Russian mix" which is valued at a better price on the international market.

The conclusion of an agreement, in November 1999, between the consortia exploring the offshore deposits of Azerbaijan and the Government of Turkey for the transportation of 40 million tons of crude a year to the port of Ceyhan, on the Turkish Mediterranean coast, could not be prevented by the Russian lobby. Although Russia always insisted on the transit of the Caspian oil through its territory, the western partners stressed that North Caucasus, and especially Chechnya, were not secure enough for a strategic pipeline. The new military operation might also be designed to prove that Russia is in control of the whole Caucasus.

IX. Conclusions

A one-sided analysis of the Chechen problem is not enough to get a clear picture of the events in the area. The predominant use of either “independence struggle” or “fight against terrorism” slogans is apt to mislead the course of a proper investigation. Only by taking into account the secular and religious traditions of the Chechen society, the interests of various lobbies in Russia and abroad, the spreading of extremist religious sects in the North Caucasus, the international context and the internal political situation in Russia can value be added to the substance of a study.

The Chechens inherited a painful and complex history of persecutions, which will still affect their relations with Russia for a long time. The further escalation of the conflict or, conversely, a relaxation of tensions depends to a great extent on the Federal centre.

We are witnessing a crucial moment for the future of Chechnya and the whole North Caucasus. It is still unknown if the Chechen society will soon find its place in the world community and especially in the North Caucasus, or if it will be forced to undergo a continued process of painful self-identification.

The following elements should be kept in mind when studying the Chechen phenomenon:

- the Chechen concept of independence is a very specific one, conditioned by the traditions and the economic and social consequences of the 1994-1996 Russian-Chechen armed conflict;
- the concept of nation-state is inadequate for the analysis of the Chechen struggle for independence;
- after the death of General Dudayev, the Chechen society lacks unity, as the various *teips* observe the principles of a military democracy, in which the leaders of each clan are elected spontaneously and do not recognise other authority but themselves;
- the sources of income are a central question for the stability of the Chechen society. The ruined economy and the lack of compensations or war reparations have led to an unprecedented rise of criminal activities and an expanding influence of extremist religious sects financed from abroad.

One of the main consequences of the first armed conflict was the breakdown of some of the traditions in the Chechen society: the elders had no longer the decision-making prerogative, especially in the *teips* where the young field commanders (gang chiefs) were providing a constant income to the members of their clans. Reports from Grozny confirmed, in 1999, that the criminal groups no longer feared the blood feud, a tradition deeply rooted in the social behaviour of the Chechens. The transgression of this norm in

particular has unforeseeable consequences for the development of the situation in Chechnya. President Maskhadov lost control over the situation in Chechnya almost completely, especially with regard to the so-called extra-parliamentary opposition. Thus the democratic institutions, which were introduced only two and a half years ago, were reduced to silence.

Although President Maskhadov was urged several times to take decisive steps against the kidnapers and other criminal gangs, he avoided doing so, fearing that an intra-Chechen conflict might start, according to the blood feud.

Traditions have always acted as an element of feedback and balance in the Chechen society. Their gradual disappearance and the declining importance of the common *teip* decision-making has now led to social chaos and uncontrolled spreading of extremism.

The rapid spreading of the Wahhabi ideology is connected, first of all, with the financial incentives, which its followers continue to receive. The traditional Chechen Sufi *tarikats* are highly incompatible with the Wahhabi branch of Islam, which does not recognise Islamic saints, holy places and other objects of religious cult, popular among the Chechens. The elders of almost all *teips* are trying to limit the influence of Wahhabi supporters, but the financial assistance, which goes to their families is a serious impediment to their actions.

Perhaps the most vital aspect of the Chechen problem for the moment is the disastrous economic and social conditions that the population have to endure. The spread of religious extremism and organised crime in its most excessive forms are a direct result of the lack of financial and human resources which the Federal Russian Government failed to provide for the restoration of post-war life in the Chechen society.

The second Russian intervention in Chechnya and possible outcomes

One thing can be said from the beginning in evaluating the renewed campaign of the “fight against terrorism”: it is going to take a long time.

In order to make predictions and scenarios of the developments in Chechnya the central question remains the performance of the Federal army. For now, it is clear that the Chechen side will not enjoy the unity it used to have during the previous conflict. The factors described above contributed to the division of the population. Although the Russian troops should not expect a warm welcome, recent experience shows that the villagers prefer to negotiate the retreat of the Chechen fighters rather than to see their houses blown up by the raids of the Russian aviation.

So far, the majority of the Chechen armed formations are on the side of the “terrorists”. We can estimate that a force which can amount up to 10,000 people is ready to fight the Russian troops. The largest part of it is stationed in Grozny (around 5-6,000 men). It is composed by fighters led by the so-called field commanders; it is far from being

homogeneous, taking into account that it brings together yesterdays' enemies, including Maskhadov, Basayev, Khattab, Yandarbiyev, etc. Although they seem to react in a united manner, with separate units acting from different directions, a break-up is always possible. We may witness a migration to "the other side", especially in small town and villages, where the elders can put a lot of pressure on them. Still, the conquest of Gudermes, in fact a surrender, was arranged by field commander Yamadayev and the Mufti of Chechnya Akhmad-Khaji Kadyrov. The latter, known as a fierce enemy of the Wahhabists in Chechnya, was recently condemned by Aslan Maskhadov for "national betrayal". A situation where a prudent leader can persuade the others to do the same can be easily imagined. In fact we are witnessing a split of the Chechen society between the dogs of war and the doves of peace.

Several scenarios can be constructed on the principle of the variation of weight between the war hawks and peace doves. The more peace doves, the less efforts to conquer the strongholds of the fighters. The hawks of war can be reduced to a minimum, but not all of them will be converted into doves of peace, given the extreme ideological, criminal and terrorist background of some of the participants. The official strategy of the Federal troops is to surround the populated areas and push out the terrorists, either by bombardments or by negotiation with the peace doves. Let us see how the situation can change taking into account several variations.

(a) The less victims scenario

The number of Chechen fighters is reduced to a minimum. The core of Chechen resistance is made of a handful (1,000 to 3,000) of Wahhabi extremists, led by Basayev and Khattab. They retreat to the mountains and continue a guerrilla war for a long time. It should be emphasised that this has to be expected even in the most optimistic case. There can be no peace between the Russian Government and a wanted terrorist in Russia on the one hand, and the committed Wahhabi extremists versus the "infidel" on the other hand. Although it may take several years to eradicate the guerrillas, this seems to be the option preferred by the Russian officials. A pro-Russian Chechen administration replaces the Maskhadov Government, as he himself joins the "terrorists" in their fight against the Russians.

Whether this scenario will be the viable one it is hard to say now.

(b) Peace doves are not sufficient, yet

Although the forces loyal to President Maskhadov are allied with their recent enemies, a break may always occur. Some field commanders may leave the battlefield, especially if their own villages are in danger. The relative unity of this moment can be explained by the concentration of resistance fighters in a few strongholds (Grozny, Urus-Martan). Still, in this scenario, a significant part of the field commanders continue to fight the Federal troops causing significant casualties. The fighting continues through the winter even in Grozny and other places in central Chechnya. In this case, the Russian troops suffer losses, and the question of administration remains open.

(c) Worst case scenario

The success of the operation in Chechnya depends to a large extent on the Russians' skills in manipulating the local population. The Russian key players should avoid at any price a conflict between Chechens. Even a partial transformation of the peace doves into Chechen-against-Chechen war hawks will have dramatic consequences. Still, the media reported the return to Chechnya of Beslan Gantemirov, a former mayor of Grozny during the Russian presence in the city in 1995. He is reported to have started the formation of his own armed units, with the clear intention to join the Russian army against the resistance fighters. The prospect of civil war is not at all desirable, as it is likely to mobilise an additional significant number of war hawks on all three sides. An intra-Chechen conflict may last decades, as blood revenge has been inherent here through generations.

What should Russia do?

Encouraging the transformation of war hawks into peace doves seems the best possible option. Moreover, the Chechens are by no means to be allowed to fight each other, as the consequences of an intra-Chechen conflict cannot be foreseen.

Although what we witness now is a classic example of the “carrot and stick” policy so much preferred by the Russian decision makers, the balance should not incline toward the “stick” part. The Federal centre should provide the Chechens with all the necessary economic and social incentives for their re-integration into the Russian Federation. The Chechens should enjoy maximum political and religious freedom, as the Islam in Chechnya is more than a “cultural” feature, as it is in many other places in Russia. Most importantly, Russia should pardon and reward all those who give up their fight against the Federal troops. And last but not least, the politicians in Moscow should be very careful and diplomatic when negotiating the future of Chechnya and influencing the formation of the new Chechen elite. The mistakes of the past should be avoided because they can lead again to dramatic developments.

The international community: what can be done?

The two central and most urgent questions to be solved in Chechnya are: (1) the restoration of law and order so as to provide for a tolerable security environment, and (2) the improvement of the socio-economic situation. Financial and humanitarian assistance is of primary importance for limiting the probability of the worst case scenarios and avoiding a humanitarian crises which can be a lot worse than what is already going on at the borders of Chechnya.

Even if the question of financial support could be solved with international assistance, a large-scale humanitarian operation can only be implemented with the co-operation of the Russian Federation. An infusion of financial and material assistance measures in the social system of the republic would help reduce the risks related to the spreading of religious and criminal extremism.

The case of “no authority” is likely to take place in Chechnya in the nearest future. The international community, especially the OSCE, should assist the formation of the new structures of government, when the hostilities will subside according to the first scenario, with few guerrilla groups left in the mountains, and the rest of the country returning to a peaceful situation.

Even most of the followers of the Wahhabi movement may return to the Chechen religious traditions, provided that their families are in a satisfactory economic position. The international community will be well advised to provide the necessary assistance, in case the Russian Federation agrees to implement a long-term programme for the reconstruction of the Chechen society.

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