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## **Killings in the Armenian Parliament: Coup d'Etat, Political Conspiracy, or Destructive Rage?**

*Stephan Astourian*

At 5:10 pm on 27 October 1999, at least five terrorists entered the building of the National Assembly of Armenia. Within half an hour Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsian, Speaker of Parliament Karen Demirchian, two Deputy Speakers, Yuri Bakhshian and Ruben Miroian, and Minister for Operative Affairs and former prime minister of the unrecognized Republic of Mountainous Karabagh, Leonard Petrossian, were dead. Another four members of parliament were killed as well (Henrik Abrahamian, Armenak Armenakian, Academician Mikayel Kotanian, and Andranik Manukian), while about half a dozen individuals were wounded, including Armen Khachatryan, the chairman of the foreign affairs commission. The terrorist attack thus came close to decapitating the Armenian state, the only important official left alive being President Robert Kocharian.

Early interpretations of the events covered a broad spectrum of possibilities. Most editorials or articles in the Western press linked these killings to what looked like a promising turn taken by the Karabagh peace process over the weeks preceding the events (*The Economist*, 30 October, 1999, and articles in *The Independent*, 29 and 31 October 1999). Some hinted at a Russian role. Mark Almond, distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and lecturer in modern history at Oriel College, Oxford, wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* (1 November 1999) that Vazgen Sargsian had become "an unlikely ally" for the West, for he had "shifted his ground and turned against Mr. Kocharian, uniting his power-base with Mr. Demirchian's in this May's parliamentary election." He added that "suspiciously, key allies of President Kocharian were not in the chamber for the shooting." Mr. Almond seemed to point to Russia when he stated that "the only beneficiary of political upheaval in this region is likely to be Russia." On the other hand, a *New York Times* editorial on 30 October 1999 accused Armenian nationalists of carrying out the attack.

In Armenia itself, public opinion differed from that prevailing in the West. A poll conducted by the Center for Sociological Investigations among 600 residents of Yerevan revealed that 18.7 percent of respondents argued that the killings were the deed of a group of fanatics; 44.3 percent believed that unspecified Armenian forces were behind the killers; while only 17 percent attributed responsibility for the events to foreign forces. Of the latter, 38.4 percent blamed the United States; 24.1 percent pointed to Turkey; 14.3 percent blamed Azerbaijan; and 8.9 per-

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cent considered Russia the guilty party. Of those mentioning interior forces, 39.4 percent pointed to the current authorities and 8.9 percent to the former government (Levon Ter-Petrosian's regime and the Armenian National Movement).

Western and Armenian explanations for the events are based not on hard evidence but on suspicions, ideological inclinations, or national biases. While the truth may remain elusive forever, it is highly likely that the killings had something to do with one or more of the key internal and external political developments in Armenia over the six preceding months. The context, then, may shed some diffuse light on these events.

### *The Context*

Three internal developments require cursory comments. First, the parliamentary elections that took place on 30 May 1999 reshaped the balance of power in the country. Won easily by the Unity Coalition led by Vazgen Sargsian and the People's Party of Armenia led by Karen Demirchian, these elections left President Kocharian without any control over the parliamentary majority, or for that matter over any party, except perhaps Country of Laws, which is widely viewed as the creation of the then National Security and Interior Minister, Serj Sargsian. The president's influence was further reduced when Vazgen Sargsian, newly elected prime minister, formed the government in mid-June 1999. He removed Serj Sargsian, a Karabagh Armenian like the president and Kocharian's closest ally, as the Minister of the Interior, leaving him as National Security Minister only. Suren Abrahamian was appointed Minister of the Interior in his place.

The crisis that erupted between Arkady Ghukasian, president of the unrecognized Republic of Artsakh (as Karabagh Armenians have renamed the region after its medieval Armenian name), and Defense Minister Samvel Babaian, the strongman of that republic, from late spring 1999 on constitutes the second major internal development. In Artsakh, Ghukasian had a firm grip neither on the parliament nor on the army. He claimed that Babaian hindered the establishment of a legal-rational type of authority in Artsakh and the development of a modicum of democracy.

In this case, Vazgen Sargsian was able to diminish Babaian's influence to a certain extent by backing Ghukasian. Samvel Babaian thus lost the

defense ministry and was reduced in mid-August 1999 to the status of commander-in-chief of the Artsakh army. President Kocharian seems to have backed Sargsian and Ghukasian in this matter, even though he risked losing the support of the still powerful Babaian as a result. Babaian's meddling into Armenia's politics during the parliamentary elections through the formation and financing of the Right and Accord party may also have something to do with Vazgen Sargsian's decision to back Ghukasian. As that party essentially rejects any kind of compromise on Mountainous Karabagh, it constitutes a hindrance to a peace agreement that might be acceptable to both Yerevan and Baku.

The third important development was Vazgen Sargsian's speech on 28 July 1999 in which he stated that he was determined to attack tax evasion, corruption, and the shadow economy. Although the speech was received with skepticism in Armenia, there are indications that within the limits of what is possible in that country, he meant what he said. Indeed, on 13 October Sargsian announced in parliament that the government would soon present an anti-corruption plan. This was not good news for some elements of the economic elite who had made their fortune in dubious circumstances during President Ter-Petrosian's regime and were subsequently left out of Sargsian's ruling circles.

On the international front, one factor stands out: U.S. pressures on both Armenia and Azerbaijan to settle the Karabagh conflict. These intensified from the spring of 1999, especially during the summer and fall. They led to meetings between Kocharian and Heydar Aliyev, the president of Azerbaijan, in Washington on 27 April during the NATO jubilee, and in Geneva on 16 July and 22 August. Both sides, perhaps with a view to positioning their countries favorably for the forthcoming summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), scheduled to take place in Istanbul on 18-19 November, suggested that these meetings were helpful. It would seem that the "common state" formula, aimed at preserving Azerbaijan's territorial integrity while accommodating somehow the de facto independence of Mountainous Karabagh within Azerbaijan's borders, served as a framework for the negotiations and that some progress had been made. Several hours before his death, Vazgen Sargsian had been discussing the Karabagh issue with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. The gap between the perceptions of

the events in Armenia and in the West is such that no less a knowledgeable and cool-headed analyst of Armenia's political life than Davit Petrossian, columnist of the weekly "Noyan Tapan Highlights" and representative in Armenia of the newly founded Swedish journal, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, believes that the killings were organized by the intelligence services of certain unnamed countries hostile to Armenia—the first stage of a coup aimed at implementing the American mediation plan in Mountainous Karabagh.

What is known about the events in parliament and about the personality of the killers and of their presumed accomplices sheds a rather different light on the events.

### ***Events, Presumed Killers and Accomplices***

The starting point for a short chronological description must be that the terrorists, five of whom were arrested, succeeded in entering and seizing the Armenian parliament without hindrance. Security, it seems, was extremely lax. Based on reports from eyewitnesses and a tape recording of the first hour of the events, the shooting started immediately. Robert Kocharian entered the building of the parliament at 6:50 pm. Slightly more than three hours later, the "Ar" television company broadcast the first interview by phone of the presumed ringleader, Nairi Hunanian. Negotiations between Kocharian and Hunanian, the format of which is unclear, started at some point during the night of 27 October and continued until the morning of 28 October. The terrorists then agreed to surrender and release their hostages at 10:15 am, having received assurances from Kocharian that their trial would be fair and that they would not be killed or mistreated by the security forces. Meanwhile, the morning newscast of the Armenian National Television broadcast statements by both the president and Hunanian. The broadcast was the latter's second condition for surrendering. The mood of the killers inside parliament was one of fury during the killings and until about 7 pm, followed by more than sixteen hours of subdued behavior. During that first hour, Hunanian's recorded words and eyewitness reports about one of his accomplices suggest that a mixture of rage, grandiose fantasy, readiness for martyrdom, and even some self-pity prevailed among the terrorists. Here are some of Hunanian's statements:

"Dear compatriots! People! Those who were sucking your blood, I have killed all their kind. I have killed

them like dogs."

"Everyone to the National Assembly. We shall conquer."

"They took all our wealth. That's enough. All dogs must be destroyed without exception. Everyone to the National Assembly."

"What, have you forgotten the Armenian people have a boss? Whose blood were you sucking for 10 years?"

"People, friends, aren't you sorry for the nation? You are gathered here and you are silent. If I am killed here—that is not important. The main thing is that I lived for my people. The people I killed were not Armenians."

Asked by a group of journalists that he knew how they could leave the building, Hunanian replied: "Through the central entrance. We have our people there." Another terrorist was overheard saying on the phone to an unknown accomplice outside the Parliament, "Please also bring the weapons that are hidden in Yeghegnadzor." These, as well as other details, suggest that Hunanian and the others expected outside armed help and thought that the Parliament building was surrounded by their armed supporters. They were mistaken and most probably misled. The available evidence also indicates that none of these men made any statement about Karabagh.

The background of the five terrorists arrested in the Parliament also deserves some attention. Their leader, Nairi Hunanian, was born in 1965 and is a graduate of the Philology Department of Yerevan State University (YSU). A supporter of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, or *Dashnaktsutiun* in Armenian) in the late Soviet period, he was one of the founders of the Union of Armenian Students and is said to have become the YSU student representative on the Karabagh Committee. In 1991, he joined the ARF. He was expelled from that party a year later for misbehavior, according to one of its current officials. However, an acquaintance of his from his years at Yerevan State University places that expulsion in 1994. During his ARF years, he founded and managed the "Horizon" information agency affiliated with that party. From 1994 to 1997, he lived in Yevpatoria in the Crimea where, some sources state, he was involved, among other things, in trade with Turkey. After returning to Armenia, he had no known stable occupation besides a

short-lived talk show. The above-mentioned acquaintance of his reports that when she chanced upon him near the Opera Square in the summer, Hunanian told her that he was planning bloodshed in Armenia because “this is the only way to force the people in charge to stop sucking the blood of the nation.”

The other four direct participants were Derenik Bejanian, Edvard Grigorian, Karen Unanian, and Vram Galstian, the first of whom seems to have been the most active during the action. Bejanian, a refugee from the city of Kirovabad in Azerbaijan, joined the “Zoravar Andranik” detachment to fight for the independence of Mountainous Karabagh and distinguished himself as a marksman. He is said to be a member of the “Yerkrapah” union of veterans in the district of Shengavit and to have been living in a Yerevan hostel for years prior to the killings. As a doctor in the department of orthopaedics and traumatology at the Yerevan emergency clinic for children, Edvard Grigorian seems to be an unlikely terrorist—all the more so since he was not involved in politics. Grigorian is married to another physician and has two children. His colleagues describe him as a polite, kind, and modest man. The last two terrorists were relatives of Nairi Hunanian, Karen being his younger brother and Vram Galstian his uncle.

By the beginning of January 2000, twelve other individuals had been arrested besides these men. Three of them deserve some attention. The unaffiliated MP from Armavir, Mushegh Movsisian, was arrested on 6 November. Four days later, the National Assembly complied with the request of the Prosecutor-General, Aghvan Hovsepian, to strip the deputy of his immunity. According to Hovsepian, the MP held a grudge against Prime Minister Sargsian for forcing him to withdraw his candidacy in the 1995 parliamentary elections. Movsisian was also convinced that the late prime minister was responsible for the dire socioeconomic situation in the country. The prosecutor-general stated that it was Movsisian who chose the date for the terrorist action and ordered the killers to win time in the Parliament so that he might organize a coup. Two newspapers reported that the terrorists met in the deputy’s home to plan the attack. Subsequently, Chief Military Prosecutor Gagik Jhangirian announced that the raid on the parliament was planned for 13 October.

Something else, however, may have motivated Movsisian for his presumed actions: the fate of his brother. General Arakel Movsisian was a former

commander of the Ararat Division and a participant in the Karabagh war who was said to be close to Samvel Babaian. He was arrested last summer and charged with appropriation of property, forgery, and illegal possession of weapons and drugs. General Movsisian may also have been involved in the assassination of former Deputy Defense Minister Vahram Khorkhoruni. During the three weeks preceding the tragic events in parliament, Mushegh Movsisian met with Karen Demirchian and then Vazgen Sargsian in what appears to have been a vain attempt to have his brother liberated.

In the second half of December it was the turn of Aleksan Harutiunian, President Kocharian’s sometime chief of staff and at that time his foreign policy advisor, to be arrested by Jhangirian on the basis of Nairi Hunanian’s testimony. Supporters of Kocharian have accused the influential leadership of the Yerkrapah Union of Karabagh veterans, especially Minister for Industrial Infrastructures Vahan Shirkhanian, of manipulating both the Armenian military and the inquiry in an effort to undermine the presidency. Similar claims were made less than a month later upon the arrest of Harutiun Harutiunian, the deputy chief of the National Television of Armenia, for allegedly promising Nairi Hunanian access to the national television station. As that station is the only one that provides positive coverage of Kocharian’s activities, some have claimed that Harutiunian’s arrest was aimed at stifling the media. Harutiunian is also said to be a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

It is difficult at this point to assess the extent to which the investigation of the chief military prosecutor is detached from political considerations. Two things are clear, though—Mr. Jhangirian will at some point have to present convincing evidence in a court of law, and that evidence will have to be more than Nairi Hunanian’s testimony.

### *The Consequences*

The tragic events of 27 October have already had significant consequences. The following day, the defense ministry made public a statement about the events in which it referred to previous assassinations that had remained unresolved:

“It was a plot directed against Armenian statehood and the future of the Armenian people. Those who are responsible for this careless negligence are to be

called to account...”

“With deep anger we re-confirm that the demands made public through the statement of the army’s general staff with respect to killings of Major-General Artsrun Margarian and Deputy Defense Minister Vahram Khorkhoruni were ignored by the law-enforcement bodies. As a result, a chain of crimes is continuing. So, we demand that the chief prosecutor, national security and internal ministers be released from their posts.”

Within two weeks, Interior Minister Suren Abrahamian, Prosecutor-General Aghvan Hovsepian, and National Security Minister Serj Sargsian had resigned. President Kocharian then appointed Sargsian chief of the presidential staff and later secretary of the National Security Council. Indeed, the president will need Sargsian’s support in Parliament through the Country of Laws party, as well as his knowledge of both the security apparatus of the country and the “dirty laundry” of the Armenian political and economic elite.

Before resigning, Prosecutor-General Hovsepian let the investigation be carried out by the office of the chief military prosecutor, another indication of the pressure put on civilian authorities by the army. Jhangirian, who holds that office, has a past, however: he was the deputy chairman of the Central Electoral Commission that “organized” the notorious 1995 parliamentary elections and referendum on the constitution and then doctored their results. It is also unclear on what legal grounds, if any, the investigation was given to the military prosecutor.

During the crisis itself, Defense Minister Vagharshak Harutiunian emerged as a leader. He seems to have successfully put a brake on the anger and excitement of the generals. It would also seem that he, as well as his deputy defense minister, took some preventive measures against possible foreign interventions when they learned that the military forces of Azerbaijan and of another country, most probably Turkey, had been brought up to the highest level of combat readiness. Harutiunian may become a key figure in Kocharian’s regime, at the very least in his capacity as a buffer between the army and the president. His rising influence was also made clear in mid-December when he supported Artsakh President Ghukasian in the course of yet another crisis

with Samvel Babaian. Harutiunian’s crucial backing allowed Ghukasian to sack Babaian as commander-in-chief of Artsakh’s armed forces on 17 December, three days after he had assaulted the prime minister of that unrecognized republic near the government building of its capital, Stepanakert.

Political polarization also resulted from the crisis as the talks on the formation of the new government amply demonstrated. Kocharian was forced by the Unity bloc and the military to accept Vahan Shirkhanian in the government, even though the latter reportedly initiated the statement of the defense ministry demanding that the top security officials resign. Even after his re-appointment as a minister, Shirkhanian did not hesitate at the Congress of the Yerkrpah Union of Volunteers on 4 December to call on the president to resign.

The killings left the two ruling parties without their historic and unquestioned leaders. Whether these organizations will survive in the medium-run is a moot point. In order to prevent the nascent, though already intense, struggle for succession from destroying their parties, the respective leaderships resorted to the dynastic principle. Aram Sargsian, Vazgen’s brother, was chosen as the new prime minister and de facto leader of the Republican Party, while Stepan Demirchian, Karen’s son, was appointed acting chairman of the People’s Party of Armenia. Both the ideology of martyrdom espoused by Nairi Hunanian and this dynastic principle of succession reflect the continuity in Armenian political life of medieval mentalities and institutions, particularly those of the Church and the Armenian nobility, or *nakharars*.

The Karabagh negotiations have stalled as a result of these tragic events. In particular, the OSCE summit in Istanbul produced little of substance. More generally, strong leaders such as Vazgen Sargsian and Karen Demirchian could better afford to make difficult, unpalatable choices during negotiations than weaker ones whose position in the political life of Armenia is less secure.

In the coming months, Aram Sargsian will have to demonstrate that his main asset is not merely being Vazgen’s brother. The president will also face difficult times ahead. The Republican Party, some elements of which were unable to force Kocharian to resign, has created a working group within the Unity alliance to speed up constitutional amendments aimed at curtailing the powers of the presidency. Indeed,

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## No Winners, All Losers: Russia and the War in Chechnya

*Edward W. Walker*

*The following is based on a presentation made at a special panel discussion on October 1, 1999 at UC Berkeley entitled, "Crisis in the North Caucasus: Chechnya, Dagestan, and Russia's Territorial Integrity." The summary was prepared and edited by the author. Substantially revised and elaborated versions of presentations made by Johanna Nichols and John Dunlop follow.*

I have only ten minutes and ten points to make, so I will be blunt.

My first point is that I do not see the conflict as a simply two-party conflict between the Russians and Chechens or as a Manichean struggle pitting good against evil, with the Chechens as heroic freedom fighters and Russians as evil aggressors intent upon destroying a hated minority on the one hand, or with radical Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists being confronted by a law-governed Russian state trying to preserve its territorial integrity and defend its internationally recognized borders. Rather, it strikes me as a great tragedy for all peoples involved, with a great many innocent victims on all sides, and all sides responsible for terrible atrocities, and irresponsibility, stupidity and aggression by political actors and militants on all sides. That being said, it is of course also true that the burden of the tragedy is not being equally shared, that the number of innocent victims, in terms of deaths, injuries, and material losses, is much greater among the Chechens than among the Russians in absolute terms, and is greater yet when you consider that there are far fewer Chechens than Russians. Still, the conflict has been a terrible blow for Russia, not only because of the servicemen killed and wounded or the many ethnic Russian civilians who were resident in Chechnya who were killed, wounded, and driven from their homes by the fighting, but also because of the damage the conflict has inflicted on the Russian national psyche and the prospects for Russia's still precarious democracy, as well as its contribution to the powerful anti-Western backlash underway now in Russia that will make normalization and stability in the country even more problematic. Sadly, all parties are caught up in what I consider a tragic cycle of violence that is going to be very difficult to stop.

Second, Chechnya presents Moscow with a profound political dilemma that would be difficult for any political elite to manage, even one in a mature and self-confident democracy. But Russia's political elite, unfortunately, is neither particularly mature nor self-confident. Still, how would the American government react if that there was a region in this country where a secessionist government had established itself, where there was generalized lawlessness, and where so many foreigners have been kidnapped and killed that foreign journalists and humanitarian aid workers, who in most cases show tremendous courage in traveling to extremely dangerous parts of the world, would no longer operate? By the time this latest round of fighting broke out in August 1999, Chechnya had acquired the reputation of being the most dangerous place in the world for foreigners. In addi-

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tion, militants in Chechnya had repeatedly, and openly, made irredentist claims on neighboring regions that are part of the Russian Federation—most notably Dagestan—even before last August. And the leaders of the August incursion announced from Grozny that their aim was to establish an “Islamic state” in the areas that came under their control, despite the fact that the local population was overwhelmingly hostile to the militants. Finally, how would the American government react if it became convinced (regardless of the validity of that conviction) that a series of terrorist bombings, which together killed more people than the Oklahoma City bombing, was carried out by terrorists based in a neighboring country where the government was unable to arrest them or to prevent them from carrying out terrorist acts on U.S. territory?

Indeed, it is worth asking in this regard whether it would have made any difference if Chechnya had been recognized as an independent state by Moscow when the bombings took place last summer. The Russian government would in any case have been under great political pressure to react to the incursions into Dagestan and the terrorist attacks with force. Most governments, not just the Russian government, would have considered the invasion of Dagestan alone, irrespective of the subsequent bombings, an act of war.

I should emphasize that we do not in fact know who carried out those bombings, and it may even turn out that they were organized by Russian officials or economic interests that, for some reason, wanted to precipitate another invasion of Chechnya by the Russian military. I should also add that there is absolutely no evidence that a majority of the Chechen people supported the incursions or approved the bombings. On the contrary, Western journalists who returned to Chechnya after the Russian military began to move in reported that most Chechens they spoke with were highly critical of the Chechen warlord, and hero of the 1994-96 war, Shamil' Basaev, for having led the strikes into Dagestan. Moreover, while many consider themselves Muslim in a way that they did not prior to the 1994-96 war, it also appears that most Chechens are hostile to the militant and “Arabic” (as in, not Turkic) form of “Wahhabi” fundamentalism that is being pushed

on them by people like Khatab (who is ethnically an Arab and reportedly a Jordanian citizen). But the fact is that most of the Russian political elite, media, and public were convinced in August and September, when the decision to invade was made, that the terrorist bombings were carried out by militants of one sort or another who were based in Chechnya and who the Chechen government was unable, or unwilling, to control.

My third point relates to the reaction and mood of the Russian people. To their credit, the Russian people overwhelmingly opposed the invasion of Chechnya and the war the Russian military conducted there between December 1994 and the summer of 1996. Most Russians seem to have felt that the war was wrong, and most would doubtless have been perfectly happy to recognize Chechen independence as long as doing so did not lead to the dissolution of the country as a whole. When the militants led by Basaev and Khatab entered Dagestan in force, the public mood changed. It was now the Chechens who were seen as aggressors, and Russians felt that their soldiers were finally fighting on the side of the “people,” in part because, as I noted earlier, the great majority of local Dagestanis, including most of the ethnic Chechens resident in Dagestan – the so-called Chechen-Akkins—opposed the militants. The public mood then changed from righteous indignation to fear and rage after the terrorist bombings. The authorities in Moscow, at the direction of Yuri Luzhkov, the city's mayor, began stepping up their harassment of all peoples from the Caucasus, to the point where they have been rounding up and sometimes beating and deporting them from the capital. These acts, unfortunately, are apparently approved of by the great majority of Muscovites, even ones who oppose the Russian offensive is now underway in Chechnya.

Fourth, Chechnya is going to be an acute problem for any future government in Moscow, no matter its composition or political orientation. The Russian people might hope that someone like Lebed, should he become president, would be able to bring an end to the conflict, but I seriously doubt that, especially now that there is so much public anger and hatred



directed at Chechens from average Russians. Politically, it will be all but impossible to muster a political coalition large enough to amend the Russian constitution in order to recognize Chechen independence. With the Chechens not willing to accept anything less than independence, and given the fact that the Russians have put themselves in a corner by suggesting that Maskhadov is not the legitimate leader of the Chechens, Moscow now has no one it can negotiate with. All this makes it very difficult to imagine a political settlement in the coming months.

Fifth, even if someone, whether it be Yeltsin, Lebed, or anyone else, were to meet with Maskhadov and agree to a twenty-year cease-fire, as Lebed has suggested (in effect, this would entail an agreement to extend the Khasavyurt agreement for another twenty years), it is very unlikely that any such agreement would be recognized and accepted by the many autonomous armed formations and criminal organizations in the region. While Maskhadov is, in fact, the democratically-elected leader of the Chechens, it is true, as the Russians claim, that he does not have the capacity to control the Islamic militants organizations, paramilitaries, or criminal groups that have proliferated in the republic since the end of the last war.

Sixth, the roots of this conflict are now much more than simply political. The devastation in Chechnya is so extreme, and the social problems in the north Caucasus so acute, that no matter what political solution is reached, social and economic conditions will make it extremely unlikely that there will be an end to violence and instability in the region for decades to come. If Russia were, for example, to recognize Chechen independence, the level of fighting would hopefully diminish, but there would still be militant, decentralized, autonomous, embittered, hostile, and extremely effective fighting forces and criminal organizations in and around Chechnya that would almost certainly refuse to lay down their arms. Moscow will confront a major security threat, and have to deal with periodic terrorist acts in Chechnya, Dagestan, other areas in the North Caucasus, and probably in Russia in general, regardless of

the outcome of this war. The hope shared by many Russians that this latest offensive will decisively resolve the instability in the region and bring "order" to Chechnya is therefore a pipe dream.

My seventh point is that Chechen Islamic militants, such as Basaev, Salman Raduev, and Movladi Udugov, have had little success gaining support from other peoples of the North Caucasus. A partial exception are the Ingush, who have been generally sympathetic to the Chechens and have been doing their best to help the wave of Chechen refugees who have fled across the border into Ingushetia since September. However, by all accounts even the Ingush are not prepared to take up arms in support of Chechen independence or a Chechen-dominated "Mountain" (highlander) or "Islamic" republic. They and the other peoples of the region do want the same degree of anarchy and lawlessness that has prevailed in Chechnya to come to their own territory. Thus the effort by some Chechen field commanders, above all Basaev, to transform what has been from the start essentially a Chechen national struggle in opposition to a "foreign" invasion into an inter-nationality struggle with significant appeal to non-Chechens, either through appeals to Islamic, highlander, or pan-Caucasian solidarity, has failed. That is unlikely to change. Nevertheless, given the appalling economic and social conditions in the north Caucasus, militant ideologies probably will be appealing enough to provide armed groups in the region, and not just in Chechnya, with the cadres of alienated and unemployed youth they need to sustain their struggle.

My eighth and ninth points relate to Russia's apparent strategy for dealing with Chechnya. A great deal has been written in the Russian press about the lessons that the Russian military has supposedly drawn from NATO's campaign in Kosovo. In some respects, this seems to be true. The Russians appear to be trying, at least at this stage of their campaign, to hit "strategic targets" such as television towers, the airport near Grozny, dams, bridges, and so on, and they clearly intend to rely more heavily on air power and artillery than was the case in 1994-96. They are also making a con-

siderable effort to manage the Russian media more effectively, with daily press briefings and videos of successful bombing runs, and so far they appear to be trying to limit the number of civilian casualties. Finally, they are trying very hard to limit access to the war zone, certainly to a much greater extent than was the case in 1994-96.

There, however, the analogy stops. In Kosovo, NATO was confronting a more-or-less conventional military and a relatively coherent state. It also had a clear objective – force Milosevic to withdraw his forces from Kosovo. Indeed, the campaign was successful in realizing that political objective – Milosevic eventually ordered his troops to withdraw. There is no such coherent state or political authority in Chechnya, and nowhere for the Chechen forces to withdraw to. Neither do the Chechens have a conventional military for the Russians to fight. Finally, it is extremely difficult to separate Chechen fighters from the rest of the population because the people in the area they are trying to “liberate” do not support them. In Kosovo, in contrast, the great majority of the population supported NATO.

Most importantly, however, the objectives the Russians have committed to – the “destruction of the terrorists,” the “restoration of order,” and the arrest of those who allegedly carried out the terrorist bombings in Moscow, Volgograd, and Buinaksk – are unattainable. Russia’s campaign is in fact going to make socio-economic conditions in and around Chechnya worse, thereby making the problems of terrorism and crime even more intractable. There is, in short, no obvious “exit strategy” for the Russians.

My ninth point is that Russia might have been better off looking not at Kosovo but at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for a more useful model. Israel has traditionally responded to terrorist attacks by launching retaliatory strikes on areas where militant organizations were supposedly located – in effect, a doctrine of tit-for-tat, or more accurately, of disproportional response, since the number of people killed in the retaliatory strikes were invariably greater than those killed in the original attacks. Russia could have responded to the Dagestani incur-

sion and the Moscow bombings in similar fashion. It could have retaliated against militant strongholds with air power, which would have taken the heat out of the Russian public’s demand for action. It would have been stuck, of course, with trying to control the border with Chechnya, as had been the case in the past. And given the nature of the terrain and the poor quality of Russia’s military, it doubtless would have been able to do so only very imperfectly. But it would nevertheless have been much better off *trying* to do so while working as best as possible with the Maskhadov government. The current campaign is not only greatly disproportional to the provocation, but it is very likely to leave Moscow with an even more intractable political problem than it began with.

My final point is that, while the current situation is appalling, it could get even worse. A different government in Moscow is at least as likely to escalate the war and take an even harder line with Chechnya as it is to be more moderate and inclined to search for political solutions. In fact, government officials in Moscow have been more moderate in their rhetoric so far than the great bulk of the political opposition. Prime Minister Putin has repeatedly insisted that the Russian offensive is directed against “bandits” and not the Chechen people, and he has insisted that ordinary Chechens have been victims of the “bandits” as much as others. The hysteria elsewhere in Moscow, however, is palpable. One of Russia’s most popular newspapers reported the following statement during a parliamentary session on Chechnya: “Chechnya should be presented with an ultimatum: Either they [they being presumably all Chechens-EWW] cease all military action on Russian territory, or they face the physical extermination of the whole republic using strategic air strikes, biological weapons, psychotropic gases, napalm and everything that is at the disposal of our once powerful army.” While I very much hope and pray that it does not come to that, I would not rule it out, particularly under a different government, or even under this one if the military situation deteriorates for Moscow, political pressure builds to “do something,” and a political solution seems as remote as it is today.

## **Guilt and Agency in the Russian-Chechen war**

*Johanna Nichols*

I am a linguist working on the Chechen language and professionally concerned for the survival of the language, culture, and people of Chechnya. Like many other commentators, I have been impressed by traditional Chechen culture with its code of honor which enables any man to achieve high social standing and respect by honorable individual behavior without violence, wealth, or connections (other than connections earned by honor and respect). Chechen political organization is highly distributed (in fact there was traditionally no political organization other than links of kinship and respect), a fact that has enabled it to withstand centuries of bloody centralized oppression, affording to Chechens property rights in Soviet times, justice in the corrupt Soviet and post-Soviet legal systems, and respect and self-respect in a dehumanized society—only to be felled (and I emphasize that the Chechen language and culture, and perhaps the entire nation, are at risk of being felled in short order) by the other powerful decentralized forces of modern life.

The factors pressing on Chechen language, culture, and nationality are different from the chiefly political and ideological ones that pressed on the Chechens before the 1990s. Linguists are well aware of the economic bases for language spreads and extinctions, and it seems to me that the same economic factors are more broadly responsible for the durable state of war and near-war in the post-Soviet Caucasus. The following is an attempt to identify some of these factors. It is based on internet news sources listed at the end.

### ***Background***

For the second time in a decade and the third time in half a century, Chechen society has been utterly ruined by a government that claims it as part of its citizenry. Many, and probably most, Chechens have lost everything they had. Nearly all are bereaved. Thousands have been killed and many maimed. Hundreds if not thousands of civilians, including children, are being held in 'filtration' camps where they are tortured, raped, and sometimes killed. Chechnya itself is an economic and ecological disaster. Everywhere in Russia, Chechens are targets of officially sanctioned ethnic hatred.

Each such event threatens the physical survival of the Chechen nation. At present over a quarter of a million Chechen refugees have fled as refugees. Though exact figures are unknown, over the last few years roughly the same number has formed a diaspora in Moscow and other Russian cities. Both the diaspora and the refugees were drive out by mortal danger and/or threat of ruin. The refugees are still in mortal danger from disease and starvation and because of premature Russian repatriation policies which force them back to the battlefield, to filtration camps, and/or to slaughter by looting Russian troops. Those in refugee camps are a concentrated defenseless population vulnerable to violence by Russian troops (who are equally likely to celebrate a victory with a killing frenzy or a defeat with a vengeance massacre). The diaspora is in danger of eviction and extortion. Those who remain in Chechnya are in mortal danger

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from mass bombings of the civilian population, from massacres by Russian troops in Russian-controlled areas, and from filtration camps.

If the physical survival of the nation is threatened, there is an even greater threat to the survival of the Chechen language and culture. In the 1944-56 deportation, the school-age generation was Russified and many knew Chechen imperfectly: some of these returned and gained full fluency (linguistic and cultural); some have impaired fluency; and some remained abroad. Many of those whose childhood and adolescence were in Chechnya have full fluency, and for a while it looked as though the Russified generation would have only a minimal impact on the entire nation. The post-1994 diaspora is large, however, and the post-1996 diaspora in particular includes many of the educated and prosperous (who left out of fear of kidnapping). Their children are being schooled in Russian and will grow up to be semi-speakers and culturally Russified. As of fall 1999, the diaspora has been forced underground in many ways; expatriate cultural associations which helped transmit the language and culture in the diaspora have found it dangerous to meet, and individuals try to stay indoors at home as much as possible. The refugee population now in Ingushetia has been scheduled for resettlement, variously in northern Chechnya and in Russian cities. Even for those resettled in northern Chechnya, it is unlikely that the showcase schooling, media, and cultural organizations promised by the federal government will (if they materialize at all) give much priority to the Chechen language or culture. Perhaps most important, the aftermath of the last war strengthened the position of paramilitary, criminal, and fundamentalist groups who are inimical to traditional Chechen culture, and the present war seems likely to create a durable militarized criminal fundamentalist presence in the North Caucasus that will further undermine Chechen institutions. The combination of Russified middle elders, a large Russifying diaspora, canned education and media, persistent economic ruin, and powerful criminal fundamentalist interests could well spell the death of Chechen language and culture.

Apart from the threat to specifically Chechen institutions, the two Russian-Chechen wars have been the most destructive in Europe

since World War II in terms of proportion of civilian population killed, civilian destruction, and brutalization on both sides. Why is this happening? Assigning responsibility is done in different ways in different sources, but all implicitly assume intentional agency high up on either the Russian or the Chechen side. Let us call these analyses the Chechen-guilt hypothesis (or analysis or story) and the Russian-guilt hypothesis (or analysis or story).

In the Chechen-guilt story, the Chechens and their government are responsible for various kinds of violence that became commonplace in and around Chechnya after the last war: the execution of six ICRC workers in December 1996, the execution (by decapitation) of four British telephone engineers in 1998, numerous kidnappings (some with brutality), drug and arms trading, and the growth of paramilitary and fundamentalist Islamic groups. They are responsible for the incursion of Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev and his comrade-in-arms, Khattab, into Dagestan last summer, with the intention of spreading warfare across the Caucasus and setting up a secessionist fundamentalist Islamicist state consisting of Chechnya and Dagestan (with wider aspirations). They are responsible for four bombings of apartment buildings in Russian cities last summer. The claim of Chechnya to independence threatens the territorial integrity of Russia, and the fundamentalist warlords are bankrolled by Osama bin Laden and/or other terrorists. Russia invaded Chechnya in order to destroy paramilitaries, terrorists, and crime groups.

In the Russian-guilt story, Russia has long been intent on complete extermination of the Chechens. In this interpretation, the entire bloody history of the attempted Russian conquest of the Chechens and Chechnya is and was genocidal. The 1944-56 deportation and dispossession were steps in this direction. The 1994-96 war was intended to kill many Chechens and scatter the rest as a step toward freeing the land permanently for Russian settlement. The present war is simply genocidal, waged against the Chechen people and intended to destroy them all. After 1996, kidnapping and crime flourished in Chechnya because Russian government payments made them profitable and because the federal government tolerated and even encouraged organized crime; fundamentalists and warlords flourished because the postwar chaos, deliberately cultivated by Russia, produced near-total unemployment

and made young people vulnerable to the influence of these well-financed groups. Kidnappings and executions of foreigners were orchestrated by the Russian government in order to discredit Chechnya, remove foreign observers and sources of foreign aid, and justify invasion. The Russian government carried out or commissioned the apartment bombings and orchestrated Basayev's incursions into Dagestan as pretexts for a genocidal war.

Ordinary Chechens generally subscribe to neither story, holding both the federal government and their own government responsible for failure to control crime and violence. Western media take a mixed stance, holding Russia responsible for a brutal and unjust war and for war crimes but using the terminology of the Chechen-guilt story and some of its analyses of the roles of individual groups and parties: Russia is presented as attacking "Chechen rebels" or "Islamic fundamentalists based in Chechnya" or "Chechen-based militants" who are "not controlled by the Chechen government" and plan a "jihad" or "fundamentalist takeover of Dagestan." The "rebels" are "blamed for a wave of apartment bombings" in Moscow and other cities but have not 'acknowledged' them or been shown to have committed them. The conflict is depicted as between Russia and the "rebel republic" or "secessionist republic," while Chechen soldiers are called "rebels," "militants," or "fighters."

Both stories are essentially conspiracy theories, implausible in their totalities and inaccurate in some of their specifics (though, over time, more and more aspects of the Russian-guilt story prove correct). There is no single orchestrating center, either Russian or Chechen, that conceived, set up, and carried out either the war or terrorism. Nor can the war be stopped by either a Russian or a Chechen surrender. The problem is that there are multiple groups, entities, and parties involved in a distributed network of convergent interests in this war, including shared interests of otherwise inimical parties. Many of the interests are economic, not ideological. More important, attention to the question of guilt as polarized above deflects attention from the more urgent issues: destruction of Chechen society, genocide, war crimes, crimes against peace, brutalization of Russian society, institutionalization of war, state-sanctioned and state-initiated hate crimes, use of national tragedies for political gain—for all of which the Russian federal government and

military bear full responsibility and for none of which do the Chechen people or government bear any responsibility. That is, even if the Chechen-guilt story were true Russia would bear full responsibility for genocide, etc. The following is an attempt to factor out some of the parties to the conflict and account for their interconnections.

### *Organized Crime and Paramilitaries in the North-Central Caucasus*

The first set of parties with economic interests in war is a diverse group of crime rings, paramilitary bands, and militant religious (or quasi-religious) fundamentalist organizations which—like violent and criminal groups everywhere in Russia—are the natural and unchecked outgrowth of Soviet-era corruption and crime rings. Analysts and reporters often confuse the groups with each other and with the Chechen army, government, and/or people, but they are very different kinds of groups and it is important to keep them conceptually distinct. The criminal groups include the following:

*Paramilitary organizations.* The best-known one is associated with Shamil Basayev. I do not know the source of their income, but they acquire weapons, train for war, and aspire to military glory and political power.

*"Wahhabites."* I use this term (in scare quotes) as seems to be typical in the North Caucasus, to refer to fundamentalist Islamist groups that attract outside funding and proselytize aggressively in Dagestan and Chechnya. Not all, and perhaps not any, are genuine Wahhabi sects. Some of the local groups are militarized—i.e., they are simultaneously paramilitary and "Wahhabite" groups.

*Kidnapping gangs.* Kidnapping of hostages for ransom was one of few profitable pursuits in the central North Caucasus after the 1994-96 Russian-Chechen war. There were apparently one or more crime rings specialized in kidnapping, with a few ringleaders and much delegation of responsibilities for capturing, holding, and moving victims around and negotiating with families or governments for ransom. Some of the victims were Russian enlisted men sold to kidnapping gangs by their officers. Most were members of well-to-do Chechen families. A number

were from non-Chechen ethnicities, including Russians, of the nearby parts of the Caucasus. People from outside the former Soviet Union were a small minority.

*Arms traders.* Paramilitary groups have acquired large stockpiles of arms and equipment by illegal purchase, primarily in Russia and primarily from military commanders in and near the Caucasus who were willing to sell their units' arms and ammunition for personal profit. During the 1994-96 war, officers and individual soldiers sold their weapons to Chechen guerrillas in exchange for food, liquor, or money. Well before that war, and during it, larger-scale arms purchases were apparently being carried out by specialists. Certainly by 1992 many individuals and groups in the North Caucasus were armed and/or employed armed bodyguards. Arms purchases by Chechen commanders from Russian commanders, and by Chechen troops from Russian troops, have been reported during the present war.

*Drug traders.* Drugs are said to be a principal currency for which military officers sell arms; to that extent, drug and arms trading groups may sometimes have been one and the same. This trade can at most have been only a tiny part of the vast flow of drugs into and through Russia.

*Oil interests?* In all likelihood, beginning in the early 1990s, organized crime rings throughout the Caucasus-Caspian area began planning to control oil exports. There is no reason to believe, however, that oil-centered groups have been active in the chaos of interwar Chechnya. Distilling of crude oil siphoned off from the pipeline was an important cottage industry in 1996-99 Chechnya, but the market was purely local, and major crime groups were apparently uninvolved.

*One of the above?* It is unknown who murdered the ICRC workers in 1996 and the telephone engineers in 1998. It seems likely that paramilitary groups may have done the killing. It is absolutely unknown who made the decisions to kill.

Not only paramilitaries but also other groups are armed. The "Wahhabites," at least some of the paramilitaries, and perhaps some of the kidnapers present an Islamist exterior. Because of their overlapping functions and interlinked economic interests, all these groups are frequently lumped together as "militants" or "fundamentalists," or (in Russian sources) "bandits" or "terror-

ists." They can legitimately be lumped together as organized crime groups. Importantly, though, there are different kinds of groups, and they do not fall under any unified hierarchical organization. Nor do they have individual hierarchical organizations to any great extent. They seem to be more or less autonomous local groups, in part kinship-based, without any high-ranking leaders anywhere.

### *Are they Chechen?*

Can any of these groups be considered Chechen? Organized crime is pan-Russian and international, and Russian organized crime crosses republican boundaries. Nonetheless, for each kind of group, it can be asked whether its membership, its leadership, and its economic basis are Chechen, and what its connection is to the Chechen republic and government.

Paramilitaries and militarized "Wahhabites," in eyewitness reports, are identified as of mixed ethnicity and include a sizable non-Caucasus component even in their smallest local units. The language of paramilitary, "Wahhabite," and kidnaping groups can be the ethnic language of a dominant or majority component in a local unit, the ethnic language of a smaller component, or Russian. The paramilitary groups that entered Dagestan last summer are said to have used Dagestanian languages and/or Russian as their main languages. In terms of ethnicity and language, therefore, none of the groups and none of the kinds of groups can be said to have a standing Chechen identity. Detailed information is of course lacking, but the point is that there is little evidence that any of the groups have Chechen ethnic or linguistic identity *qua* groups.

In nearly every statement by a Chechen that I have heard or read since 1996 (including published interviews of refugees where the point has come up), kidnaping rings, paramilitaries, "Wahhabites", and those who have executed foreigners are disowned as Chechens on grounds of their behavior. Anyone who kidnaps Chechens, kidnaps others on Chechen soil, holds kidnap victims, kills foreigners on Chechen soil, undertakes actions that might trigger war against Chechens, or initiates non-defensive attacks on neighbors of Chechens, is simply not a Chechen. The Chechen government as well has condemned and disowned these activities.

Some of the groups have Chechen leaders. Shamil Basayev, a paramilitary leader, is a Chechen, as are some “Wahhabite” leaders and some individuals said to run kidnapping gangs (notably, Arbi Barayev). (Recall, however, that the membership of most paramilitary and “Wahhabite” groups is said to be multi-ethnic). The paramilitaries appear to be purely local, autonomous groups with no affiliations outside of Chechnya. The “Wahhabites” are part of a movement that is also active in Dagestan, and may have ties to radical Islamist groups abroad. Kidnapping is a regional phenomenon of the North Caucasus, and it is difficult to say whether it is headquartered anywhere. The drug and arms trades are pan-Russian and worldwide phenomena, and the groups in the North Caucasus are small local cells in a vast network whose largest-scale profiteers are in major world cities.

Like organized crime groups everywhere, those of Chechnya have gradually infiltrated, cowed, and corrupted the legitimate government. Some commentators assume that powerful paramilitary leaders (especially Basayev) are in a position to claim a cut of the take of kidnapping and drug-trading gangs. If this is so, and if the claims are indeed one-directional, then the kidnapping and drug-trading groups have quasi-governmental functions as well, taxing other criminal groups, as it were. (Basayev’s group was reported in news interviews in October to have gained some local favor as a result of supporting orphanages and similar institutions. Support of charitable organizations is another quasi-governmental function).

In the current war, Chechnya is being defended by an army formed by mobilization of citizens (a national mobilization as the invasion began was disregarded by many but still appreciably effective) and incorporation of existing groups. The Chechen army is decentralized in day-to-day conduct and financing, but standard in its hierarchical command structure. When the Russian invasion began, some of the paramilitary groups (and perhaps also paramilitarized “Wahhabite” groups) joined forces with the Chechen army. That is, despite earlier condemnations and disownings, the groups were incorporated, as groups and with their existing leadership, into the Chechen army. Shamil Basaev is now a general in the Chechen army.

Kidnappings continued in and around

Chechnya into October, a fact which suggests that the kidnapping gangs were not incorporated (as groups, with their existing leadership) into the army. (Some individuals joined; Arbi Barayev is now a commander in the army.) To my knowledge, there have been no new kidnappings since October, either in or around Chechnya. No doubt the war has made kidnapping unprofitable and more difficult to carry out. It must be impossible to bring hostages across borders; with villages bombed and abandoned there is no place to hold hostages; the sale of enlisted men and conscripts by Russian officers seems to have ended when the current invasion began; and internally, with many Chechens having fled and most ruined, there is no one and nothing to extort. All of this suggests the kidnapping trade relied crucially on the interwar situation in Chechnya—that is, Chechnya was the key conduit and reservoir for a regional kidnapping industry, but not necessarily the center.

There are reports of Chechen troops buying weapons from Russian troops even now, but no information on whether the larger arms trade continues. Crucially, I have seen no evidence that prices, availability, etc. of weapons have changed either inside or outside of Russia. This supports the claim that the Chechen arms trade was local, serving to arm the paramilitary and Wahhabite groups and perhaps also the legitimate military, but not part of the international arms trade. That is, Chechnya was not an arms-trade conduit.

I have seen no information on the impact of this war on the drug trade in and around Russia. Again, I have not read that drug prices, demand, availability, etc. have changed either in or out of Russia. This suggests that there was no major Chechen drug conduit either.

All in all, then, the Chechen people and society are not interested parties in the conflict. Neither is the Chechen government, except to the extent that it has been influenced or infiltrated by organized crime. Influence by paramilitaries may be considerable; other criminal influences are unknown.

### ***Who Gains?***

Other interested parties are the Russian federal government and the military. Organized crime has infiltrated and influenced the Russian (and earlier Soviet) government and military deeply and

intimately for the last few decades. Of course, local groups from the North Caucasus have little direct influence in Moscow. But consider their local influence on the Russian military as a case of convergent interests. The Russian military bases in and near the Caucasus are the trading partners of the organized crime groups: they sell troops to kidnapping rings and weapons to arms traders, and receive payment in drugs. In a near-war situation such as the one that obtained in Chechnya from 1996 to 1999, when the border was blockaded and entry points staffed by Russian military, trade in drugs, guns, hostages, or other illegal commodities meant bribes for the customs officials and border guards. The trading and the bribes went on during the 1994-96 war, much of which was closer to guerrilla than conventional warfare. All of these considerations mean that a tour of duty in or near the Caucasus, especially in a near-war or guerrilla-war situation, must be, for officers, one of the most profitable in all of Russia. During the current invasion, with troops massed and supervised and with a large active battlefield, the trade in drugs and hostages seems to have mostly ended. Purchase of arms and ammunition continues, including purchase in exchange for food and vodka. Looting of Chechen houses and property has made the current large-scale war profitable for some of the troops, but the profit to officers must be much less than that obtained from trading in arms and drugs.

Thus a situation of near-war or guerrilla war or localized war is highly profitable to both base officers and crime groups, and both have economic interests in maintaining that situation. A spectacular case of cooperation between the Russian military and the paramilitaries was in last summer's invasion of Dagestan, in which the paramilitaries crossed the border (with heavy equipment, in large numbers) with obvious cooperation of customs officers and border guards, and were covered by Russian helicopters on their return to Chechnya.

Mass warfare must be less profitable to both sides, though it offers pursuit of glory and the abstract prospect of seeing the hand of one's trading partner in the adversary society or organization strengthened. Pursuit of individual military glory is evidently a strong motivation for paramilitary groups but is in little evidence among the Russian forces. It took slightly more than two months af-

ter the beginning of the invasion for Russian troops and commanders to start giving media interviews in which they took issue with official statistics on troop losses and complained about conditions, salaries, and the conduct of the war. I take their disaffection to have economic grounds: there is little profit for them in this kind of war. In the same general time frame, military spokesmen began speaking of the possibility of a protracted guerrilla war.

The commissions that put officers on army bases in and near the Caucasus and the kickbacks that keep them there must be expensive, and the upper military command profits accordingly and has an interest in keeping them valuable. The upper command also stands to profit institutionally—in decorations, clout, and prestige—from any victorious war. News reports of mid-October depicted the ranking Russian generals as threatening a coup and/or civil war if they were not allowed to pursue the victory they felt they were entitled to.

At the highest level, the decision to make war was motivated by political considerations. Vladimir Putin's aspiration to the presidency of Russia would be served by a brief all-out war and an easy, decisive victory, but not by the prolonged guerrilla war or near-war situation that best serves organized crime and military graft. High-level planning for some kind of military intervention in Chechnya began nearly a year ago in the Kremlin. The initial plan was to set up a security zone in northern Chechnya and proceed no further. This would have strengthened the position of paramilitary and criminal interests in the south of Chechnya and led to a maximally profitable protracted near-war situation. The war has since escalated into de facto genocide and mass destruction, which serve Putin's political interests better but are also the natural outcome of Russian military commanders failing to get the easy and quick victory they had expected.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the war and its preparation is the ease with which all of Russia—ordinary citizens, media, public figures, government bodies—could be whipped up into mass genocidal rage and hate crimes against Chechens. Here too there is no center, leader, or organized campaign but a resonant mindset in which hatred is an end in itself. And an evil national enemy, if (as now) it does not exist, must be



invented.

To summarize, bloodshed in Chechnya serves many interests, including the interests of supposed enemies. Paramilitary and “Wahhabite” groups gain recruits from war and its aftermath. All organized crime in the Caucasus prospers from the enhanced trade opportunities of near-war and guerrilla-war situations. Russian military officers profit from the same trade, and the higher value on their commissions profits their higher-ups. Border guards extort bribes from refugees. Troops loot villages. The hateful and the angry abuse Chechen refugees, slaughter civilians, and presumably volunteer for torture duty in “filtration” camps. Hatreds that seek a national enemy and scapegoat find a state-sanctioned one in the Chechens. Nationwide, organized crime probably welcomes the diversion, and crime groups in cities with Chechen (and other Caucasian) diasporic populations realize increased chances for extortion as Chechen nationality is de facto criminalized. With a Russian victory, Putin would ride to the presidency and the ideologically motivated would see the military’s glory buffed. Business, criminal and legitimate alike, quickens in Vladikavkaz and Mozdok, the main Russian bases for the invasion.

In the interwar situation, kidnapping and execution of foreigners served the interests of organized crime and the Russian military and government, making law enforcement haphazard during the interwar period and keeping out foreign observers and aid agencies that might help stabilize the society. That effect lasted until well into the present war.

Two months into the war, it was becoming clear that not all interests were equally well served by all kinds of war. Crime rings, Russian base commanders, and Russian troops need a prolonged near-war situation, a protracted guerrilla, or low-scale war. High-level political considerations require a quick victory and all-out war. (Clearly, the media attention to statements of disaffected soldiers represents an ominous threat to Putin, who needs a popular bloodless war.) What will come of this conflict of interests in this type of war is unclear. Both in the last war and the present one, lootings, slaughters of civilians, attacks on refugees, weapons sales, and sale of hostages have been undertaken at the initiative, of-

ten casual, of the troops involved rather than specifically authorized at higher levels. This probably means that, whatever the strategy and course of the larger war, the convergent interests of the various organized crime groups and the mid and lower levels of the military will continue to be realized, to the grave endangerment of the Chechen people. An accurate description of the conflict might be this: The convergent interests of Moscow, the Russian military high command, regional crime gangs of all stripes, and the mid and lower levels of the military destroy the Chechen government, people, society, and land, thereby realizing profit and strengthening the crime-government and crime-military interface. There is no conspiracy and no high-level malevolence plotting genocide but simply various convergent criminal interests. The incidental outcome of these interests, however, is state terror trending in a direction indistinguishable in its effects from planned genocide.

### ***Who Loses?***

The Chechen people and society are the obvious major losers in this conflict. In the interwar situation, they were terrorized by crime gangs, inadequately protected by their own leaders, and devastated by an extreme brain drain, economic and ecological ruin, and public health disasters. In bombings and all-out war, they are killed in large numbers, their land and houses and towns destroyed; in guerrilla and low-scale war, they lose their standing as refugees and have their houses looted as the tug-of-war brings Russian troops into and out of towns behind the front. The language, culture, and social institutions are in danger of rapid extinction. More than half of the population is in refugee camps or diaspora.

The neighbors of the Chechens also suffer. Ingushetia, conceptually lumped with Chechnya in the minds of many Russians and in much federal thinking, is heavily blockaded and threatened with violence. Ingush in diaspora are in nearly as much danger as Chechens. Impoverished to start with, Ingushetia has been devastated by an influx of refugees nearly equal in number to Ingushetia’s own population. Ethnically Chechen refugees are required to go to Ingushetia, and only there, and initially were forced to stay there by federal decree—there are no refugee camps except in Ingushetia.

Dagestan suffered much kidnapping and

growth of paramilitary and “Wahhabite” groups during the interwar period, as well as the destruction of several villages and a flight of thousands of refugees during the foreplay to the war.

Georgia has had some villages bombed and has received threats of Russian military action. The war provided Russia with an opportunity to strong-arm Georgia into closer cooperation, and periodically the Russian government accuses Georgia of harboring and funding Chechen “terrorists.” Azerbaijan has received similar threats.

More generally, the prospects for peace in the Caucasus, and the wellbeing of all the people there, suffer under any near-war or war situation.

### ***Why Chechnya?***

Given the interest of the military and organized crime in a near-war or guerrilla war situation in the abstract, why did this one arise in Chechnya? It arose there not because Russia has an explicit long-term policy of genocide of the Chechens, and not because Chechnya is a terrorist state bent on working havoc on Russia, but as a direct result of the 1994-96 war. Chechnya was ruined after that war, and it was the only part of the Russian Federation and its immediate neighbors that can be described as ruined. The ruin fostered the growth of organized criminal groups, made crime the only profitable enterprise, and created an embittered, unemployed youth ripe for paramilitary or “Wahhabite” recruitment. The Chechens were a convenient scapegoat for the military, the militarily-minded, and the hateful. They were the easiest to paint as a national enemy when resuscitating the old Soviet myth of a national enemy proved expedient.

### ***Prospects***

We have seen that the incidental outcome of convergent corrupt interests is trending in a direction effectively equivalent to terror and genocide. Given the corruption of the Russian government and institutions, the violence of organized crime, and the ease with which much of the Russian population can be incited to hatred, an outbreak of war somewhere in or near Russia was probably to be expected. The aftermath of the last war in Chechnya made it almost inevitable that conditions for the outbreak of war would

arise there.

An important corollary is that organized crime, government sheltering of organized crime, and ruin of people by their own governments can lead to results indistinguishable from genocide. These basically economic activities might well be considered crimes against humanity.

What awaits Chechnya? If Chechen social structure survives at all, it will always be decentralized. But powerful paramilitary and paragonovernmental figures, “Wahhabite” proselytizers, organized crime, and the corruption of government and society by all of these are not inevitable parts of Chechen society; they will exist only in conditions of economic ruin.

The ongoing destruction of Chechen society and traditions is a loss to the world, as well as a tragedy and moral crime in itself. It is also a first step toward what might be called the Talibanization of Russia’s southern fringe, so it is worth considering how it might be averted. The following are three essential conditions for peace and normalcy in the central Caucasus.

*Justice.* A distributed organizational structure, convergent interests among conflicting parties, and outcomes that are incidentally genocidal but not planned top-down do not preclude assigning moral responsibility. Righteous rage will fester in the Caucasus (and outside) until international indictments are passed on those guilty of crimes against peace and war crimes for both the 1994-96 and current wars. The roster of war criminals would include ex-President Yeltsin, Acting President Putin, all prime ministers who have served during wars or their planning, the ministers of defense and the interior, the high command of the army, officers at any level who have specifically authorized or overseen civilian massacres (like those at Samashki in 1996 or Alkhan-Yurt in 1999), the entire line of command from filtration camp torturers on up, and Shamil Basayev, Khattab, and perhaps other paramilitary leaders for their part in the Daghestan incursion that would so clearly trigger a de facto genocidal response from Russia (but not for anything Basayev has done as commander in the defense force in this or the 1994-96 war).

*Reparations.* The Chechens are a self-reliant and hard-working people who can and will rebuild their own country once some basic resources are restored. Compensation for multiple financial

ruin, reconstruction of infrastructure, and demining must come from the outside (and should properly be Russia's financial responsibility). Looking beyond Chechnya, peace and stability in the Caucasus will never be possible until the dispossessions and border disputes resulting from the 1944 deportations and gerrymandering under Stalin are settled through some combination of negotiation, compensation, and reconciliation.

*International guarantees of peace and justice.* The above measures need to be initiated and guaranteed by an international presence or other oversight. There must be direct communication of the various peoples of the Caucasus with the larger world, without Moscow as intermediary. International organizations aiding refugees must be able to donate aid directly to Chechnya (or, for refugees in camps,

Ingushetia) and not (as is now required) to Russia. Justice for kidnappers and other major non-war criminals will not be forthcoming from Russia as long as organized crime is closely involved with the Russian government, and bringing to justice those who are guilty will therefore require an international basis.

If these conditions are met, there can be peace in the Caucasus almost without regard to the political situation in (the rest of) Russia.

*Sources used for this article:*

<http://www.egroups.com/list/chechnya-sl/>

[http://ingush.berkeley.edu:7012/human\\_rights](http://ingush.berkeley.edu:7012/human_rights)

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*Stephan Astourian (Continued from page 5)*

Kocharian's political survival during and after the crisis stems, no doubt, from the extensive powers enjoyed by the president under the current constitution. If need be, for instance, President Kocharian could dissolve the parliament in a few months, assuming he feels secure enough politically to do so. His political survival may also result from the realization by some in the ruling coalition and in the army that the country can ill afford to lose its president as well in the current circumstances.

Whether the ongoing investigation reveals the deeper layers of what looks like a broadly based

political conspiracy remains to be seen. The killers were mere tools, deluded into thinking that their actions inside parliament would receive support from the outside and that their motivations for killing were also the ones inspiring their sponsors. Nairi Hunanian and his accomplices are unlikely to know who the real forces are behind these events. While it may also be that a coup *was* in fact planned, as the chief military prosecutor has suggested, this hypothesis cannot be corroborated given currently available evidence. In due time, Mr. Jhangirian will have to explain how and why it failed.

## Russia's Soft Underbelly: The Stability of Instability in Dagestan

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## Two Incursions into Dagestan and Their Extraordinary Consequences

*John B. Dunlop*

Before the breakup of the Soviet Union in late 1991, Wahhabism had been strictly proscribed as a dangerous religious and political tendency. But after the fall of communism, a number of Dagestanis found themselves free to perform the *hadj* to Mecca. An estimated 80 percent of the Muslims from the Russian Republic who made the *hadj* were reported to be from Dagestan. While on pilgrimage, the Dagestanis would come into contact with Wahhabis from Saudi Arabia and from other Muslim countries, who would attempt energetically to proselytize them.

Most recent estimates of the percentage of Wahhabis to the total population of Dagestan have been quite low. Specialist Robert Bruce Ware, for example, estimated that figure at only three percent as of August of 1999.<sup>1</sup> Other analysts of Dagestani politics, however, believed the percentage had been growing fairly rapidly in the period preceding the August 1999 events. Some Russian commentators began to cite percentages as high as 10 percent.<sup>2</sup>

### *Poverty, Unemployment, and Corruption*

What were the factors influencing a growth of Wahhabism in Dagestan? In an interview appearing in the newspaper *Segodnia*, leading Caucasus specialist Sergei Arutiunov noted that some 20 percent of the populace of Dagestan controlled 85 percent of the republic's natural wealth.<sup>3</sup> The remaining 80 percent of the populace, by contrast, lived far below the Russian poverty line, being three-to-four times poorer than the statistically average citizen of the Russian Federation. Especially significant in this regard, Arutiunov stressed, was youth unemployment—approximately 85 percent of the youth of Dagestan were unemployed.

Ramazan Abdulatipov, a well-known Dagestani Avar, and a former Russian Minister of Nationalities, has commented: "The chief reason [for the growth of Wahhabism in Dagestan] is the qualitative worsening of the social position of the populace, especially in the mountain districts . . ."<sup>4</sup> Much of this populace, Abdulatipov noted, was being forced to migrate down to the lowland regions, where they often received an unfriendly reception from locals. Resentful and alienated, the displaced mountaineers became relatively easy prey for Wahhabi proselytizers.

Another key factor underscored by Sergei Arutiunov was the high birth rate among Dagestanis (second only to Ingushetia within the Russian Federation). Due to this circumstance, each year large numbers of new youths entered the republic's unemployment rolls. In addition to being numerous and unemployed, the Dagestani youth were also, for the most part, uneducated—it had become too expensive for their families to provide them with an education. Unemployed and uneducated Dagestani youths represented a potentially receptive target for Wahhabi preaching.

Flagrant police corruption was another factor promoting the rise of Wahhabism in Dagestan. In the republic, as Sergei Arutiunov has pointed out, "At each kilometer marker there stands a militia post, where you have to pay. Large vehicles suffer from this the most. The majority of the male populace of the Dargin Wahhabi villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi are long-distance truck drivers, and the fact that they adopted Wahhabism is, to a large extent, the result of a protest against police arbitrariness."<sup>5</sup>

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### ***The Recent History of Wahhabism in Dagestan***

By the year 1997, several highland settlements located in the Dargin region of Dagestan (Buinaksk District) had de facto been taken over by Wahhabis. These settlements—Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, and Kadar—were, it should be emphasized, located in the middle of the republic, a considerable distance from the border with Chechnya. (The Dargins constitute the second largest ethnic group in Dagestan, numbering around 310,000 as of 1996).<sup>6</sup>

In mid-May of 1997, a serious confrontation at a funeral occurred between Dargin Wahhabi mourners and adherents of the local Sufi Tariqat (brotherhood). The Wahhabis objected vigorously to the Sufis' praying toward the coffin of the deceased and issued a plea that those in attendance face toward Mecca. A Wahhabi fanatic then shot a Sufi. The result was a melee involving 500 people. The authorities were finally able to control the situation, but only with difficulty.

On 27 May, a public debate was held in the republican capital of Makhachkala between Wahhabis and Sufis, with the debate being broadcast over republican television. This incident showed that the Wahhabi movement was beginning to acquire momentum in Dagestan.<sup>7</sup>

In August of 1998, in the Dargin city of Buinaksk, there took place negotiations between the leaders of the local Wahhabis and the government of the republic. The government delegation was headed by State Council chairman Magomedali Magomedov, himself an ethnic Dargin. In agreements signed by the negotiators, the political leadership of Dagestan pledged to halt the de facto persecution of the inhabitants of the Dargin Wahhabi villages and to allow them to live according to the laws of the *sharia*, while they, in turn, agreed not to disseminate their beliefs beyond the borders of their communities. They also pledged not to speak out against Dagestan's remaining a part of the Russian Federation. Writing in September 1999, journalist Aleksandr Rylkin concluded: "Over the past year the Wahhabis did not once infringe this agreement."<sup>8</sup>

### ***Wahhabism Penetrates Mountain Avar Villages***

It was the spread of Karamakhi-style Wahhabism to other regions of Dagestan, and especially to the Avars, the republic's largest ethnic group (numbering 540,000 in 1996), that seriously alarmed the political leadership of Dagestan and also the Russian government. On 9 July 1999, Dagestani police in the Tsumadin District of Dagestan raided the mountain village of Echeda, located not far from the border with Chechnya, and seized weap-

ons and ammunition. Reacting to this raid, the local Avar Wahhabis took two policemen hostage and demanded that police personnel be removed from Echeda and other nearby villages, and that the searches be ended. After protracted negotiations, the captured police officers were released, and the Wahhabis were able to keep their weapons.

Not surprisingly, tensions in the region continued to escalate. Neither the official Dagestani leadership nor the Russian government was prepared to allow the emergence of de facto independent Wahhabi settlements in the Avar region of the republic, adjacent to unstable Chechnya. On 1 August, however, the Avar Wahhabis announced that *sharia* rule was being introduced throughout Tsumadin District.

### ***The First Incursion***

The following day, 2 August 1999, a large incursion into Dagestan from Chechnya took place. The declared aim of the invaders was to come to the aid of their threatened Wahhabi brethren in the Avar mountain villages. Perhaps as many as 2000 fighters (*boeviki*) took part in this incursion. Sharp pitched battles soon ensued, first with the local Dagestani police and then with the Russian military and MVD internal troops.

It should be stressed that we have little trustworthy information concerning what happened up in the remote mountain villages of Avar Dagestan. Who were these armed men who conducted the raid? There has been a widespread assumption that they were mainly ethnic Chechens, due to the fact that they had come over the border from Chechnya and that a legendary Chechen field commander, Shamil' Basaev, was soon asked to assume co-leadership of the operation, along with the shadowy Saudi fighter Khatab (Habib Abdel Rahman Khatab), who had reportedly been running training camps for Wahhabis in Chechnya.<sup>9</sup> (Khatab, it might be noted, is married to a Dargin woman from one of the Dargin Wahhabi villages in Dagestan.)

Local villagers and other witnesses who saw these fighters up close have reported that most of them were definitely *not* Chechens. Perhaps a majority of the invaders were natives of Dagestan, many of whom had undergone training at Khatab's camp (or camps) located in Chechnya. The initial leaders of the incursion were Bagautdin Magomedov, a native of Tsumadin District, and another Dagestani, Magomed Tagaev, author of the book, *Gazavat, or How to Become Immortal*. When the incursion first occurred, it was reported that: "The authorities of the republic [of Dagestan] state that the

*boeviki* are Dagestanis.”<sup>10</sup> The chairman of the Dagestan State Council, Magomedali Magomedov, was quoted as stating: “We do not say that Chechens attacked us. We say that aggression has been accomplished from the territory of Chechnya.”<sup>11</sup> A French journalist, Sophie Shihab, who writes for *Le Monde*, visited the Chechen-Dagestan mountain border area and reported that the villagers there informed her that there had been many Arabs, Tajiks and even some Africans among the invaders.<sup>12</sup>

The invaders proceeded to declare the establishment of an Islamic state in the Avar mountain region, with Siruzhdin Ramazanov being named prime minister of the new state, and the aforementioned ideologist Magomed Tagaev named information minister.

The incursion was followed by heavy fighting in both the Tsumadin and Botlikh districts. Many of the local Avars appear to have been strongly offended at this attempt to force Wahhabism down their throats. Gadzhi Makhachev, a deputy prime minister of the republic and a leading Avar politician, brought a large force of armed volunteers to the region, while the well-known Lak leader, Nadirshakh Khachilaeve—arrested in early October 1999 by the Russian police<sup>13</sup>—declined to support the invaders and advised them not even to attempt an incursion through the Lak-controlled Novolakskii District. (As of 1996, there were approximately 100,000 Laks in Dagestan.)

One suspects that future analysts and historians will conclude that a great deal of the fighting against the invaders was in fact done by armed Avar volunteers. As one Russian journalist commented in early September: “The soldiers on both sides of this war are Dagestani...”<sup>14</sup> The Russian government, however, eventually poured in large numbers of troops and began to employ air strikes and heavy artillery. The Russian air force made use of highly lethal Fuel Air Explosives (FAE’s) to kill fighters concealed in caves and in other inaccessible locations in the mountains.<sup>15</sup>

On 23 August, Shamil’ Basaev unexpectedly announced that the invading force was withdrawing, and it then retreated back into Chechnya. Many Avars complained bitterly at the time—and perhaps with reason—that the Russian military had permitted the invaders to get away.<sup>16</sup>

This vigorous repulsion of the invasion might feasibly have marked the end of military conflict in the region. The retreat of the invaders constituted a major

victory for Vladimir Putin, who had taken over as (acting) prime minister from the ousted Sergei Stepashin on 9 August. Of course, the problem of the porous border with Chechnya would have to be addressed. Duma deputies General Andrei Nikolaev, former head of the Russian Border Guards, and Aleksei Arbatov, a defense specialist, as well as others, believed that the border with Chechnya could have been effectively sealed (like, say, the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan).<sup>17</sup>

### ***Russia Assaults the Dargin Wahhabi Villages***

Instead of taking such a step, however, the Russian government and the “hawkish” Dagestani State Council, led by Magomedali Magomedov, decided to follow up their victory in the Avar mountain region with an assault on the Dargin Wahhabi villages of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, and Kadar (which had a combined population of 8,000).<sup>18</sup> Nikolai Petrov of the Moscow Carnegie Center has aptly commented: “I think that it was a great mistake, having finished with the... fighters in the mountainous region, to turn to a fight with internal Dagestani Wahhabis. [The Russian forces] started simply to destroy people defending their homes.”<sup>19</sup>

On 29 August, the federal forces commenced an operation to seize these three settlements and to stamp out what they termed “the Wahhabi contagion.” Some 500 Wahhabi fighters emerged to defend their communities. Long fearing an assault, they had constructed elaborate fortifications. Extremely savage fighting ensued, with the Russian forces employing bombers, attack helicopters, and heavy artillery. The fighting became so brutal that on 4 September the Defense Ministry was required to assume control of the operation from the Interior Ministry.<sup>20</sup>

One point made by Russian journalists is that the Dagestani reaction to this move by the federal authorities was markedly different from their reaction to the earlier August events. In September, many leading Dagestanis did not endorse the Russian assault on the Dargin Wahhabi settlements—for example, the aforementioned Avar leader Gadzhi Makhashev, who voiced support for his besieged Dargin “brothers”—while the previously-noted Lak leader, Nadirshakh Khachilaeve, reportedly fought along with the “bearded men” of Karamakhi against the federals.<sup>21</sup>

### ***The Second Incursion***

It was this campaign against the Dargin Wahhabis that provided the rationale for a second major incursion into Dagestan, on 5 September 1999, this time through the Lak region of the republic (Novolakskii District). Once

again, Shamil' Basaev and Khatab served as titular leaders of a force consisting of some 2000 men. By 6 September, the invaders were said to be in control of six settlements of Novolakskii District, plus two in Khasavyurt District. These were both districts, it should be noted, with a significant number of Chechens (the so-called Chechen-Akkins of Dagestan, who numbered 70,000 as of 1996). By 7 September, the invaders had seized all of Novolakskii District, leading Boris Yeltsin to complain indignantly, "How is it that in Dagestan we lost an entire district?"<sup>22</sup>

The invaders on this occasion seemed to be making excellent progress in the midst of heavy fighting. One reason for this improvement in fortune could have been that, as Edward Walker has suggested, the participants in this second incursion, as opposed to the first, may have been largely ethnic Chechens.<sup>23</sup> The Chechens are unquestionably the best fighters in the North Caucasus region. The Dagestanis, Central Asians, and other Wahhabis comprising the bulk of the fighters of the first incursion lacked the battle skills and resourcefulness of the Chechens. (It should be emphasized here that neither incursion enjoyed the support of the elected president of Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov, or of his government.)

Russian intelligence reported that monitored radio traffic indicated that the fighters of the second incursion wanted to seize the town of Khasavyurt and to declare it the Islamic capital of Dagestan.<sup>24</sup> On 12 September, however, Shamil' Basaev suddenly and unexpectedly announced that his forces were pulling out of Novolakskii District. Why the decision to retreat?

The Russian military would have us believe that they had once again achieved a major victory, as they had done in August. The Chechen invaders, however, were apparently doing well, and there was thus no military reason for them to call a halt to their operation. The key factor behind the pullback was almost certainly the 9 September terror bombing in Moscow.

On 31 August, a small bomb was set off in a shopping arcade in Moscow, near the Kremlin. One person eventually died from injuries suffered in the blast. On 4 September, a very large bomb was detonated at a five-story military housing facility in the Dargin city of Buinaksk, not far from where the Wahhabi fighters were being assaulted by Russian troops. Sixty-four persons died and 120 were wounded in this incident. Since most of the victims were apparently Dagestanis and other non-Russians, this incident failed to inflame ethnic Russians.<sup>25</sup> (The bomb may have been set by Dagestani Wahhabis

seeking revenge against a military target for the brutal suppression of their Dargin Wahhabi brethren.)

Five days later, on 9 September, an extremely powerful bomb exploded at House No. 19 on Gur'yanov Street in Moscow. Ninety-four persons were killed and approximately 300 were wounded. This brutal terrorist act served to shock and to enrage ethnic Russians throughout the Russian Federation.

Three days after this, on 12 September, Shamil' Basaev announced a pullback of all his forces from Dagestan. Early the following day, on 13 September, at 5:00 a.m., a second powerful bomb exploded at House No. 6 on the Kashirskii Highway in Moscow. One hundred and nine persons died in the blast.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, on 16 September, a truck bomb exploded in the southern Russian town of Volgodonsk, Rostov oblast', killing thirteen and injuring 115.

My sense is that Basaev, a Chechen nationalist, well understood that the continued presence of his forces in Dagestan, combined with the savage terror bombing campaign being carried out in Moscow, could elicit a towering rage among ethnic Russians. Fed by such a rage, public opinion might have backed even the use of weapons of mass destruction against the Chechens.

By swiftly withdrawing his forces, Basaev callously doomed what was left of the 500 Dargin Wahhabi *boeviki*, and they were physically overwhelmed by the Russian forces. As for the Chechen-Akkins of Dagestan, they became the object of pogroms carried out by vengeful Laks.<sup>27</sup> The newspaper *Komsomol'skaya pravda* reported at the time that the Russian forces had begun to set up so-called filtration camps—notorious for their practice of torture and of summary executions during the 1994-96 Russo-Chechen war—in an attempt to identify (and punish) Wahhabi fighters and their sympathizers in Dagestan.<sup>28</sup>

The end result of the two incursions into Dagestan was not only the repression of Wahhabism in Dagestan but also, of course, the subsequent Russian military invasion of Chechnya. A belief that ethnic Chechens had been behind the terror bombings in both Moscow and Volgodonsk (a charge vehemently denied by President Maskhadov of Chechnya) served to unite public opinion around Prime Minister Putin and the Russian generals. To date, however, no convincing evidence has been produced to support the regime's claim that ethnic Chechens were behind these bombings; indeed many in Russia believe that the FSB itself could have carried them out, especially in light of a highly suspicious incident which occurred in Ryazan' on 23 Sep-

tember.<sup>29</sup> Under such an interpretation, the Moscow bombings would represent bold provocative acts akin to the burning down of the German Reichstag in 1933.

The August and September incursions into Dagestan had a number of extraordinary results. First, they permitted the Dagestani and Russian authorities to crush Wahhabism in Dagestan. Second, they provided a justification for a second major invasion of Chechnya and for the effective annulment of the August 1996 Khasavyurt Accords. And finally, they brought about an awesome surge in the popularity of Prime Minister Putin, who became the odds-on favorite to be elected Russian president in June of the year 2000, as well as a remarkable showing by the pro-regime bloc "Unity," which burst out of nowhere to place a close second to the communists on the party list vote in the State Duma elections of December 1999. The two incursions into Dagestan, thus, served to turn Russian politics upside down.

<sup>1</sup> For an illuminating discussion of the development of Wahhabism in Dagestan, see the article by Magomed Vagabov, a professor of Islamic studies at Dagestan State University, in *N.G. religii*, 25 August 1999. On the same subject, see also Igor' Rotar', "Rossiiskii kavkaz," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 15 September 1999.

<sup>1</sup> From an op-ed appearing in the Los Angeles Times, 27 August 1999.

<sup>2</sup> *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 August 1999.

<sup>3</sup> *Segodnya*, 7 September 1999. See also Sergei Arutyunov, "Kavkazskaya likhodradka," *Itogi*, 24 August 1999, pp. 16-19. For a first-rate analysis of the current political situation in Dagestan, see Edward W. Walker, "Russia's Soft Underbelly: The Stability of Instability in Dagestan," BPS working paper, Winter 1999-2000.

<sup>4</sup> *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 21 August 1999.

<sup>5</sup> *Segodnya*, 7 September 1999.

<sup>6</sup> For this figure and also figures for other major ethnic groups in Dagestan, see Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, "Political Stability and Ethnic Parity: Why Is There Peace in Dagestan?," in Mikhail Alekseev, ed., *Center-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia: A Federation Imperiled* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 100-101.

<sup>7</sup> On these 1997 episodes, see Ware and Kisriev, "Political Stability...," pp. 122-123.

<sup>8</sup> In *Itogi*, 14 September 1999, pp. 15-16.

<sup>9</sup> On Khatab, see the biographical note from the Jordanian Information Center, posted by Thomas de Waal of the BBC on Johnson's Russia List, 14 September 1999.

<sup>10</sup> In *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 4 August 1999.

<sup>11</sup> In *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 10 September 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Report of 20 September 1999, posted in the original French by Joan Beecher Eichrodt on the Discussion List about Chechnya, 27 September 1999.

<sup>13</sup> *Segodnya*, 8 October 1999.

<sup>14</sup> *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 5 August 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Interfax, 24 August 1999, citing an interview with Russian Air Force commander General Anatolii Kornukov.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Quinn-Judge has also confirmed this version from Russian military sources. See *Time*, 11 October 1999, pp. 46-48.

<sup>17</sup> For Nikolaev's views, see *Segodnya*, 4 September 1999; for Arbatov's, see his 19 September interview with NTV posted in translation on Johnson's Russia List, 22 September 1999.

<sup>18</sup> On the background to the assault of these villages, see the article by Vadim Dubnov in *Novoe vremya*, no. 36 (1999), pp. 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted by Reuters, 6 September 1999.

<sup>20</sup> On the assault, see *Kommersant-daily*, 31 August 1999.

<sup>21</sup> See RFE-RL Caucasus Report, 2 September 1999, and *Izvestiia*, 17 September 1999.

<sup>22</sup> *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 8 September 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Walker, "Russia's Soft Underbelly." Identified as commanders of this second incursion were, in addition to Basaev, the Chechen commanders Ruslan Gelaev, Arbi Baraev, and Saiputdin Isaev. See *Izvestiia*, 7 September 1999. A leading Chechen politician, Movladi Udugov, served as information minister for the invaders.

<sup>24</sup> Agence France Presse, 5 September 1999.

<sup>25</sup> On this, see "Osobennosti natsional'nogo traura," *Segodnya*, 11 September 1999.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed chronicle of the bombings, see "Khronika teraktov," *Izvestiia*, 14 September 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Yurii Biryukov, head of the Russian Federal Procuracy for the North Caucasus region, has maintained that: "A majority of the Chechen-Akkins living in Novolakskii and Khasavyurt districts, despite the hopes of the aggressors, did not support them." (*Izvestiia*, 17 September 1999)

<sup>28</sup> *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 27 September 1999.

<sup>29</sup> On the Ryazan' episode, see *Segodnya* and *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 25 September 1999. For a detailed investigative report on the Moscow bombings which casts doubt on the regime's version of events, see *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 24 September 1999.



## Afghanistan: How to Grow an Ethnic Conflict

*David Isao Hoffman*

*On November 2, 1999, BPS hosted a presentation entitled "Afghanistan: How to Grow an Ethnic Conflict." The talk was presented by David Isao Hoffman, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Political Science at U.C. Berkeley. Hoffman had recently returned from a three-month research trip to northern Afghanistan and environs, and presented his findings to the BPS community.*

Hoffman began by explaining that he and a colleague were retained as consultants to the international non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) to research and document military assistance to the warring parties in the Afghan civil war by outside governments. As all of the countries bordering Afghanistan, as well as the United States and Russia (collectively, known as the "six plus two" group) are party to U.N.-sponsored agreements prohibiting the supply of military assistance to any of the factions in the ongoing Afghan conflict, the results of the study were intended to weigh heavily in HRW's advocacy work, which is geared towards pressuring governments to halt the flow of military aid—one of the key enablers of Afghanistan's bloodshed, now into its third decade.

Hoffman asserted that the conflict in Afghanistan, contrary to portrayals in the media and general public, is extremely multifaceted and open to multiple interpretations. The war can be described, with equal plausibility, as (1) a fight among corporate, semi-criminal groups over rent-seeking and control of strategic resources; (2) an ethnic war, pitting a Pashtun plurality against Uzbeks, Hazara, Tajiks, and other ethnic and linguistic groups; (3) a religious war between Sunnis and Shia, the battle lines of which cross-cut many ethnic divisions; (4) an international conflict that results from outside interference by the United States, Russia, Pakistan, Iran and others; or (5) an international conflict indirectly fueled by the world community's lack of attention to the region, the results of which include phenomena such as arms dumping and a lack of will in the international community to support a vigorous peace effort. All these interpretations, to some extent, are valid. Accordingly, the conclusions one draws from the Afghan tragedy will be heavily informed by how one packages the conflict.

In addition to providing an empirical overview of the current situation in Afghanistan (and in particular, in the northern regions still opposing the Taliban government in Kabul), the presentation addressed Afghanistan's relevance to the larger project of comparative social science. As a social science laboratory, Afghanistan can be used to test a number of questions, such as: What happens when a country is completely abandoned by the world community? How do wars that do not begin as such become transformed into ethnic or sectarian conflicts? What are the responsibilities of the world community to an area that was armed for so long by outside powers but that is difficult to "reach" politically, economically, and even physically? Examining the ongoing tragedy in Afghanistan forces social scientists to address these and other difficult questions in an effort to generate fruitful comparative insights.

On August 8, 1998, the opposition stronghold of Mazar-i-Sharif fell

to Taliban forces. In the ensuing “killing frenzy,” at least two thousand and as many as ten thousand men and boys from non-Pashtun ethnic groups, in particular Shia Hazaras, were brutally murdered. The war in Afghanistan, however, had only recently evolved into an ethnic conflict. The original call to arms against the invasion by the Soviet Union in 1979 united Afghans of all political, ethnic, and religious stripes. Islamists, democrats, and monarchists from virtually all of the country’s major linguistic and ethnic groups participated in the resistance war against Soviet forces from 1979 to 1989, when the last Soviet troops crossed the Druzha (“Friendship”) Bridge out of Afghanistan and into then-Soviet Uzbekistan. Following the Soviet withdrawal, fighting continued, albeit no longer against a foreign invader but against the perceived communist puppet regime of President Najibullah. Having been a war of national liberation, the conflict became an extension of the Jihad, but now along ideological lines, until 1992 when the Najibullah regime fell. The years between 1992 and 1996 then witnessed a fight for power and rent-seeking opportunities among fractious warlords, with frequent shifts in loyalties.

The appearance of the Taliban as a credible fighting force in 1994-5, and the militia’s eventual capture of Kabul in 1996, ushered in yet another phase in the Afghan war. Philosophically rooted in a combination of Pashtun tribal customs and Sunni religious doctrine, the Taliban introduced a degree of religious and ethnic puritanism that had not been seen before in Afghanistan. As witnessed at Mazar-i-Sharif, Shia populations were the first to be targeted in the escalating cycle of violence. However, following the mass deportations of non-Pashtun Sunni Tajik villages from the Shamoli plains north of Kabul in the summer of 1999, it became clear that the civil war in Afghanistan had adopted distinctly ethnic overtones.

According to Hoffman, the ethnicization of the war in Afghanistan has crystallized latent ethnic identities that had previously played a relatively minor role in the country’s political life. Whereas the intensity of ethnic self-identification had been relatively low in many

communities in Afghanistan previously, many local inhabitants, after having their village ethnically “cleansed,” have begun to identify themselves as Tajik, Uzbek, or Pashtun rather than “Afghan,” as the previous practice had been. Political and military organizational patterns, in turn, reflect this trend. The conflict in Afghanistan is thus a case study of the evolution of a political conflict into ethnic warfare.

The other main theme touched upon in the presentation was the role played by the outside world in the Afghan war. After being the recipient of huge amounts of Soviet and American aid in the 1980s, Afghanistan has been almost entirely abandoned by the international community. Having been a fulcrum of cold war tensions, the conflict has been all but forgotten. International organizations, meanwhile, have also retreated from the country, driven out by a lack of funding, a lack of security, and a lack of cooperation from the warring parties. For the major powers, both international and regional, attention to Afghanistan is now based on the narrowest of concerns. For the U.S., Afghanistan is significant only in so far as it continues to harbor “public enemy number one”—Osama bin-Laden. Russia and the other post-Soviet Central Asian nations, meanwhile, have attempted to isolate Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, both physically and diplomatically, viewing it as a haven for terrorism, drugs, and Islamic fundamentalism.

The two countries that are most actively involved in the ongoing hostilities in Afghanistan, however, are its two powerful neighbors, Iran and Pakistan. Historical political and sectarian rivals, Iran and Pakistan have traditionally fought for control over Afghanistan, using the country as an arena for power struggles between religious and political proxies. These two countries’ continued military interference in Afghanistan constituted one of the principal focuses of Hoffman’s field research in Afghanistan, and he discussed some of his findings in his presentation.

During his time in northeastern and northern Afghanistan (in particular, in Tahar and Parvan provinces), Hoffman employed a variety of research techniques, ranging from interviews with field commanders and journalists, frontline radio intercepts, documentary evidence, and interviews with prisoners of war. On the basis of his re-

search, Hoffman and his research partner were able to sketch a fairly detailed, thoroughly-documented picture of outside military involvement in the Afghan conflict today.

The evidence suggests wide-ranging Pakistani and Iranian involvement in support for the Taliban and anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, respectively. On the Taliban side, the clearest evidence of Pakistani involvement is the presence of between three and ten thousand Pakistani citizens in Afghanistan, fighting on the side of the Taliban in what constitutes a de facto creeping invasion of a neighboring country. During his visit to territories held by anti-Taliban forces, Hoffman conducted extensive interviews at three separate prisons with Pakistanis who had been captured fighting for the Taliban. Pakistan is also providing extensive material, financial, and logistical support to the Taliban—support that has proven essential to the militia's ongoing military successes.

The anti-Taliban "northern alliance" in Afghanistan, meanwhile, is receiving support from the Iranian government, according to Hoffman. A traditional ally of Afghan Shia groups, Iran in recent years has actively supported all Northern Alliance forces. In addition to official aid—including humanitarian do-

nations, infrastructure improvement, and medical assistance—the Iranian government is involved in the provision of covert military aid as well. According to Hoffman, this consists primarily of military training (through the use of Iranian military advisors) and weapons and munitions deliveries. The latter has proven particularly problematic, as the lines of communication between Iran and Northern Alliance-held territory have grown increasingly long and circuitous in the face of repeated Taliban advances. This was highlighted in October 1998, when a train carrying 20 wagons of declared humanitarian aid from Iran to opposition-held territory in Afghanistan was stopped in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, and discovered to be carrying weapons and munitions for anti-Taliban forces.

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