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A Necessary Monster? Vladimir Putin's Political Decisions Regarding the "Secession" of Chechnya and the Second Chechen War (1999-2009)

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A Necessary Monster?
Vladimir Putin's Political Decisions Regarding the "Secession" of Chechnya and the
Second Chechen War (1999-2009)

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
History

by

Kimberly G. Edwards

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband Michael Edwards and my two daughters Abigail and Cora. They were both patient and supportive and I could not have finished this thesis or my graduate program without them. I am so grateful for all of the nights they cheerfully ate pizza, took over laundry duties and listened for hours as I talked about my subject.

I would also like to dedicate it to my mother-in-law Jo Bolton, without her endless encouragement and help I would never have graduated.

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Abstract

This thesis will examine Vladimir Putin's controversial political decisions regarding the Second Chechen War justifying the conflict both inside and outside of Russia. It opens with Putin identifying with the United States after the terrorist activities of September 11, 2001 and how he used the American War on Terror to explain his own decisions regarding the Caucasus. For further understanding the paper looks at the history of Russian-Chechen relations to show how the centuries of hostility and mistrust culminated in two Chechen Wars within a ten year time period (1994-2004). It will also study the Russian view, held by Putin, which Chechnya was not declaring independence but was attempting to secede from the Russian Federation. It concludes with a look at Putin's solution to the conflict, the Chechnization of the Second Chechen War, where the Russian military withdrew from the region to be replaced by Putin's handpicked regime, the Kadyrovs.

Russia, Chechnya, Putin, Kadyrov, Nord Ost, Beslan

A Necessary Monster?

Vladimir Putin's Political Decisions Regarding the "Secession" of Chechnya and the Second Chechen War (1999-2009)

Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, while rescue workers were still searching for the missing and dust from the fallen buildings still floated in the air, President George W. Bush took the first call from an international leader since the attacks. On the other end of the line was Russian President Vladimir Putin.¹ Putin called to express his condolences and sent a telegram expressing “anger and indignation.” Later that day in a televised address he stated that the attacks, “were not a localized American drama but an event that ‘goes beyond national borders,’”² and “Russia knows directly what terrorism means...and because of this we, more than anyone, understand the feelings of the American people. In the name of Russia, I want to say to the American people -- we are with you.”³ In identifying with the American people in their fight against terrorism, Putin was referring to the recent terrorist

¹ Jill Dougherty, “9/11: A Turning Point for Putin,” *CNN World*, September 10, 2002, http://articles.cnn.com/2002-09-10/world/ar911.russia.putin_1_russian-president-vladimir-putin-dmitri-trenin-moscow-carnegie-center?_s=PM:WORLD (accessed March 4, 2012)

² John O’Laughlin, Gearoid O Tuathail, and Vladimir Kolossov, “A Risky Western Turn, Putin’s 9-11 Script and Ordinary Russians,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 56, no. 1 (January, 2004): 3-34.

³ Dougherty, “9/11: A Turning Point for Putin.”

acts in Russia allegedly perpetrated by Chechen and Ingush rebels, such as the apartment bombings in Moscow, Dagestan and Volgograd that left hundreds dead.⁴

Putin had been waging a “war on terrorism” inside the borders of Russia long before Bush coined the phrase to garner support for America’s decision to use military force in Afghanistan. The U.S. objective behind the decision to enter Afghanistan was to capture those behind the 9/11 plot and to dismantle the Islamic extremist group, al Qaeda.⁵ As one writer put it “Internationally, the need to maintain the US-led coalition against Islamic fundamentalism persuaded foreign leaders to downplay other crucial elements in the complex and multi-layered confrontation.”⁶ In his desire to link the Russian fight against terrorism with the United States War on Terror, Putin pointed to the issue of radical Islam, highlighting the religious aspects of the conflict, as well as the international aspects of global terrorism reaching into the Caucasus. Christopher Marsh, a expert on Russian-Chechen relations with the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military studies writes about that conflict that "Which started as a nationalist independence movement, evolved into a 'jihad,'" and that "religion was a factor from the start, but that it increased dramatically once radical elements within the movement sought assistance

⁴ Preeti Bhattacharji, “Chechen Terrorism,” *The Council of Foreign Relations*, April 8, 2010, <http://www.cfr.org/terrorism/chechen-terrorism-russia-chechnya-separatist/p9181> (accessed April 9, 2012). There is still a great deal of controversy about the apartment bombings, no evidence has conclusively linked them to the Chechen Separatists despite the fact the Russian government placed the blame squarely upon them. There are still a great number of unanswered questions with some political analysts speculating that then President Yeltsin or perhaps even Vladimir Putin may have been involved in an attempt to garner support for military actions in Chechnya. Also at that time Putin was still heavily involved with the Oligarchs and their involvement would not be inconceivable. Nothing has been decisively proven either way. Another source on the apartment bombings is Matthew Evangelista's *The Chechen Wars* where on page 64 he mentions the popularity of the Second Chechen War due to the series of terrorist bombings on Russian territory which, conveniently coincided with the defeat of the Chechens in Dagestan. Suspicions fell on the Chechens although nothing was ever proven.

⁵ Philip Mud, "Rethinking Objectives in Afghanistan," *Foreign Policy.com*, November 17, 2010, foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/17/rethinking_objectives_in_afghanistan (accessed February 16, 2013). The article states the reason behind Bush's decision to invade Afghanistan as "The United States entered Afghanistan to resolve this threat, to hunt those who had orchestrated the 9/11 murders, and to disrupt, then dismantle, the network that would organize future plots. The Bonn diplomatic process that resulted in the creation of Hamid Karzai's government in Kabul supported this goal of uprooting and eviscerating al Qaeda. We would help Afghanistan choose legitimate, competent leaders who would not allow terrorist safe havens on Afghan soil."

⁶ John Russell, “A War by Any Other Name: Chechnya, 11 September and the War Against Terrorism,” *Chechnya: From Past to Future*, ed., Richard Sakwa (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 239.

from abroad, bringing international mujahideen fighters into the conflict."⁷ Radical Islam was growing in the Caucasus and the situation in Chechnya was out of control, prompting one author to write: "...an independent Chechnya...would pose a permanent security threat to Russia's southern marches and for all of its neighboring states."⁸ If radical Islam and terrorist elements were considered to be national security issues, Putin felt he had little choice but to take action. Putin, in his autobiography writes about the situation, "They built up their forces and attacked a neighboring territory. Why? In order to defend the independence of Chechnya? Of course not. In order to seize additional territories. They would have swallowed up Dagestan and that would have been the beginning of the end."⁹

The decision to move the Russian military into Chechnya and prevent the possibility of the "Yugoslavisation" of the Russian Federation is a political study and does not examine the various accusations of human rights abuses that have incurred during the course of the conflict on either side. Russian soldiers, journalists, human rights workers, and Chechens – military and civilian – have noted multiple human rights abuses during the Second Chechen War. The urban conflict aspects have been particularly brutal and bloody. But what occurs during a conflict is not the determiner of the decisions made pre-conflict and should not be used to make a retrospective argument.¹⁰ Putin decided to keep Chechnya inside the traditional Russian borders of the Federation and pursued this decision to completion through the use of military force. In order to garner international support for what would prove to be an extended and brutal

⁷ Christopher Marsh, U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies, "The Desecularization of the Chechen War," written for *Religion, State and Society Journal* (personal correspondence with author)

⁸ Sakwa, introduction to *Chechnya: From Past to Future*, 14-15.

⁹ Vladimir Putin, *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), 142.

¹⁰ This thesis relies on sources not intimately involved with the war, such as first person accounts from Grozny and the writings of Anna Politkovskaya for a reason. This thesis examines the legality and legitimacy of Putin's decision to not grant Chechnya their independence and not what occurred during the actual conflict after the decision to use military force was made. The emotion of first person accounts adds a great deal to the narrative of the conflict, but not to the decision on whether the Russian Military should have been utilized to keep Chechnya within the bounds of the Federation.

campaign Putin used the American "War on Terror" and the animosity toward Al Qaeda and the Taliban to bolster his own case against the Islamic separatist in Russia's troubled Caucasus region. Putin's decisions regarding any particular use of force or war policy, or the accusations that he, the Russian government, or any particular military officers should be viewed as war criminals for incidents that occurred during the conflict remains a separate study.¹¹ The original issues which formed the basis of the decision to employ force to dismantle the separatist movement, protect the borders of other semi-autonomous areas of the Federation, and relieve Russia's fears of a potential Yugoslavisation of the Federation remain the same despite the questionable actions made after that force was deployed.

¹¹ Determining the end date of the Second Chechen War was very difficult. Some scholars put the date as early as 2000, others say 2003 when Akhmed Kadyrov took over as President of the region beginning the Chechnization of the war, others put 2006 when peace accords were signed. The BBC Timeline of the conflict (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18188085>) states that Russia declared the "situation in Chechnya normalized" in 2009. For the purpose of this thesis the 2009 date has been chosen as the end of the conflict, because a conflict cannot be truly considered over until life in the war-torn region begins to resume a sense of normalcy.

Autonomous Areas in Russia



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Figure 1: A map showing the various autonomous regions inside the Russian Federation



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¹² “Autonomous Areas in Russia” [map]. <http://boes.org/child/russia/images/mapruaut96.jpg> (accessed February 12, 2012).

¹³ “Russia” [map]. *BBC News Online* country profile.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/european_languages/countries/russia.shtml (accessed May 21, 2013).

Figure 2: A current map of Russian showing the location of Grozny in proximity to the remainder of the Federation.

History

The problems in Chechnya did not suddenly arise with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Second Chechen War in 1999 did not occur because of any single incident. The tensions that existed between Russia and her annexed Caucasus regions were centuries old.¹⁴ Initial Russian interest in Chechnya dated to the reign of Ivan the Terrible. After his successful conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan in 1552 and 1556 respectively, he married a Kabartay princess and "justified his claim to sovereignty over Kabarda and the entire Northern Caucasus – a justification to which all his successors, including the Romanovs and Bolsheviks, were to cling."¹⁵ Claim to sovereignty and physical possession are not the same thing, however, and in 1732 Peter the Great attempted to conquer Chechnya, but failed. He did, however, secure the land right up to the border and Chechnya became a neighbor of the Tsars. By the mid-eighteenth century, Tsarist Russia occupied most of the border area.¹⁶ But occupation did not bring peace. A writer for *Deutsche Welle*, explains: "When Chechnya's southern neighbor, Christian Georgia, agreed to a union with Moscow in 1783, the Muslim north Caucasus was encircled and a holy war ensued."¹⁷

¹⁴ "Chechnya and Russia: A History of Conflict." *Deutsche Welle*, <http://www.dw.de/chechnya-and-russia-a-history-of-conflict/a-660987> (accessed March 10, 2012).

¹⁵ Moshe Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁶ Lee Banville, "Conflict in Chechnya: Russia's Renegade Republic," *PBS.Org. Online Newshour*, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/chechnya/history.html> (accessed March 20, 2012).

¹⁷ "Chechnya and Russia: A History of Conflict," *Deutsches Welle*, while technically this would seem to be the first Chechen War it is not commonly referred to as such.

In 1785 Sheikh Mansur, a Chechen Iman, began to persuade the Sufi Chechens into "returning to true Islam" to live only according to Shari'a law and to foment a jihad against the infidel rule – particularly the Russians. In 1785 the Russians decided to take Mansur alive, which led to a major conflict between the Chechens and Russians. In September, 1785, after severe fighting, Mansur retreated into the mountains, temporarily abandoning the idea of attacking Russia strongholds, but this only lasted until November of the same year when the skirmishes resumed. However, fighting the Russians was not his only concern; he actively sought to spread Shari'a law throughout the region, by sword if necessary, worked to convert the Ingush and Dagestanis. During Catherine the Great's Russian-Ottoman war (1787-1791) Mansur co-operated with the Turks and convinced the Chechens to join in harassing the Russians. The Russians captured Mansur in 1791 who perished from consumption while in captivity in the Shlisselburg fortress. Mansur became a national hero to the Chechens considered "one of their own who...was the first to preach and lead the struggle against the Russians in the Caucasus."¹⁸

Under Tsar Alexander I, annexation was considered a first step in the further exploration of the Caucasus. After the Napoleonic Wars came to a close Russia had the time and resources to devote to the conquest of the southern mountains. In 1818 the Russians established the fortress of Groznaia and a town grew around the fort – Goznyi, a city that was destined to become the capital of Chechnya under the Soviets. It wasn't until 1840, however, that the Russians attempted to establish direct rule in Chechnya. Chechen hope for independence rose again during the Crimean War, 1853-1856, but when the French, English, and Ottomans failed to inflict a decisive strategic defeat on Russia the Chechens lost morale and considered surrendering their sovereignty. By 1857 Russia gained control over the plains of Greater

¹⁸ Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear*, 17-29, 34-35. 102-103.

Chechnya and by 1859 Chechnya fell under Russian rule. Chechnya was now a part of the Russian empire and under the rule of the Tsars.¹⁹

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) spent some of his formative years in Chechnya, serving in the Tsarist Army in the Caucasus and because of his great sympathy for the Chechens and their cause, a sympathy that grew from witnessing the cruel repression of the Chechen people and devastation of their homeland by the Russians, is even now considered Chechnya's favorite Russian.²⁰ He based three of his books in the Caucasus region, including *The Cossacks* and *Hadji Murad*. Tolstoy's words proved eerily prophetic, they took on an even deeper meaning with the new Russian-Chechen military actions in 1994 and again in 1999. He warned in 1850 of the danger in trying to subdue the Chechens by Russian military force, believing the restive population would never be completely conquered. Even as an outside observer Tolstoy realized the deep hatred Chechens held for the Russians that occupied their lands and lorded over them. He wrote in his book *Hadji Murad*:

It was not hatred, for they did not regard those Russian dogs as human beings; but it was such repulsion, disgust and perplexity at the senseless cruelty of these creatures, that the desire to exterminate them — like the desire to exterminate rats, poisonous spiders, or wolves — was as natural an instinct as that of self-preservation.²¹

In 1860 the Russians separated Chechnya and Dagestan into distinct districts, a separation that endured under both the Tsars and the Soviets. While there were several revolts throughout the Caucasus region the new Russian territories would remain fully under the Tsars' control. The Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-1878 ignited a flame in both Chechnya and Dagestan, but despite a revolt by the people in the Caucasus, they were unable to break free from the

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 17-29, 34-35, 102-103.

²⁰ Banville, "Conflict in Chechnya: Russia's Renegade Republic."

²¹ Sophia Kishkovsky, "Chechnya's Favorite Russian: Leo Tolstoy," *The New York Times*, December 28, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/29/arts/29iht-tolstoy.html?_r=1 (accessed March 10, 2012).

Russian empire and instead faced punishment, up to and including exile. Once allowed to return, those exiled to the Russian interior returned to the Caucasus but the thousands who fled to the Ottoman Empire never returned.²²

In the mid-1880s oil was discovered in Chechnya which has played a major role in its fate ever since. Grozny oil was particularly desirable as it was "rich in petrol and need[ed] little refining."²³ But despite the empire's newfound wealth, the time of the Tsars was nearing an end. In March 1917 the Russian Revolution began and the effects would reach well into Chechnya and the surrounding Caucasus regions. Islamic leaders were most interested in securing Shari'a law over the mountains. After securing power during the October Revolution in late 1917 "the new regime [the Bolsheviks] issued a 'Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia' in which it recognized their right to self-determination and to secession."²⁴ Chechens (and Ingush) were deeply divided into the "secularists" and the "Islamists," causing many of the Caucasus people to join the Bolsheviks. It was indeed a combination effort of Chechens and Bolsheviks who joined forces against the Cossacks that saved the Soviet cause in the Caucasus region. By 1924, the new communist regime, were firmly in control of Chechnya.²⁵ Regarding the transition from Tsarist Russia to what would become the USSR, Anup Shah writes: "After the 1917 Russian Revolution, a declaration of independence by the Chechens was met with occupation from the Bolsheviks who later established the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Region in 1924."²⁶

By the middle of the 1920s the Soviets were confident of their hold on the North Caucasus and began their attempt at restructuring the socio-economic and political landscape of

²² Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear*, 84-86, 101-103.

²³ Gammer, 105-106.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 122.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 128-130.

²⁶ Anup Shah, "Crisis in Chechnya," *Global Issues*, September 4, 2004, <http://www.globalissues.org/article/100/crisis-in-chechnya> (accessed April 3, 2012).

the area. They disarmed the citizens of the region and weakened the clergy's hold on the area. In 1926 the Soviet abolished the Shari'a courts and *muftiates* and "scripts based on the Latin alphabet [which were in turn replaced by the Cyrillic script] were imposed on the languages of the region, breaking the links created by the common use of Arabic. State schools were promoted in an effort to draw children away from religious Arabic-language ones."²⁷ By 1928 the attack against religious leaders was entrenched and occurred alongside a collectivization of agriculture. By the 1930s Soviet authorities were destroying mosques in the region as well as Islamic colleges and elementary schools.²⁸ Yet, while religious identity was being destroyed, obstinately "the Soviet Union was the first state in history to be formed of political units based on nationality."²⁹ It was meant to be a union of republics yet those republics were able to maintain little if any political sovereignty. There was no attempt to "homogenize" ethnicities and in fact, one could not choose "Soviet" as a nationality for their passport.³⁰ But with Islam under fire this would mean little in the Caucasus and the Chechen hope for independence when the Communists first rose to power, was not to be.

The advent of World War II (or in the Russian terminology, "The Great Patriotic War") brought about a reversal of these policies. Once the Germans began moving into Russian territory there was a great fear in Moscow that the mostly Islamic regions might shift their loyalty to the Germans due to the Soviet Union's oppressive stance on their religious practices. Melvin writes: "With the advance of the German forces, the Soviet authorities began to fear that some Muslim communities in the Soviet Union might shift their loyalties. In response, the authorities recanted their earlier policy and officially recognized Islam, although within a tightly

²⁷ Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and The Bear*, 146.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 146-148.

²⁹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, Oxford University Press, 2011, 312-313.

³⁰ *Ibid*,

controlled framework." ³¹ This, however, proved to be a case of "too little, too late." The Germans were willing to go far further than the U.S.S.R. to accommodate the Islamic communities by closing the hated collective farms and even establishing mosques, a significant act after the Soviet authorities had so many mosques destroyed in the Caucasus region only a decade before. There is conflicting evidence whether or not the people of the border regions in the Caucasus collaborated with the invading Nazi Army. ³² Stalin could not prove that the people of the Caucasus aided the enemy but he was highly suspicious of the people in this border region and their relationship to the Germans and so implemented a brutal policy of deportation. As Neil Melvin in his paper for the Stockholm International Peace Institute recounts:

The government of Josef Stalin had entire ethnic groups—including the Balkar, Chechens, Ingush and Karachai of the North Caucasus—rounded up, loaded into cattle wagons, and transported to Central Asia and Siberia. Thousands died. The forced relocations were carried out quickly, on the pretext of mostly unfounded accusations of collaboration with the Nazis. The former republics of the exiled peoples were dissolved and the territory was given to other republics or groups. Their homes were taken over by new inhabitants or left to decay. ³³

Most were exiled to Kazakhstan, and almost one third of them died on the long trek into unfamiliar and unforgiving lands. ³⁴ It would take the death of Stalin and the ascension of Nikita Khrushchev before the exiled Chechens would be allowed to return to their homelands. In 1957-58 50,000 of the exiled people of the Caucasus returned home only to find other people, predominantly ethnic Russians, living on their land, often even occupying their houses. This

³¹ Neil J. Melvin, "Building Stability in the North Caucasus: Ways forward for Russia and the European Union," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, May, 2007, <http://books.sipri.org/files/PP/SIPRIPP16.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2012).

³² Shah, "Crisis in Chechnya."

³³ Melvin, "Building Stability in the North Caucasus."

³⁴ "Chechnya and Russia: A History of Conflict."

created a tension that still exists and cannot be overlooked as a factor in the recent Russian-Chechen conflicts.³⁵

In 1991, seizing the opportunity of a rapidly disintegrating USSR, the Chechens declared their independence from the long resented Russians, an action that would culminate in the 1994 First Chechen War under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin.³⁶ So many of the former U.S.S.R.s and S.S.R's were breaking free from Moscow and Chechnya wanted to be a part of that movement. However, Chechnya, a semi-autonomous region rather than a satellite, was not given that option. As Chechnya's president, Johar Dudayev, became more outspoken in his criticism of the Kremlin as well as in his insistence on independence, Yeltsin's patience was exhausted and he sent in the military. What Yeltsin promised would a quick victory was not, the Russian soldiers were met with fierce opposition and the conflict lasted three years before coming to an end with a peace agreement that left the issue of independence unresolved. With such an unsatisfactory conclusion the Second Chechen War, which flared up within three years of the uneasy peace agreement, was no surprise. What had changed in the intermission was the focus of the conflict, where the First Chechen War was based on independence and politics, the Second Chechen War had a religious focus absent from the first conflict.³⁷ There were tones of jihad and breaking free from the "infidels" that was not a primary issue three years previous. The goals of Chechen Separatists in the modern era, based upon the heavy fighting and brutal violence of both of the Chechen Wars and the terrorist activities outside of the Caucasus, have changed little since the time of Tolstoy, both in religious and political ways. From Tsarist Russia to the Soviet Union to

³⁵ Melvin, "Building Stability in the North Caucasus."

³⁶ Tracey C. German, *Russia's Chechen War* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 114-116.

³⁷ Lawrence Scott Sheets, *Eight Pieces of Empire: A Twenty Year Journey Through the Soviet Collapse* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2011), 180-181.

the Russian Federation of today, Chechnya has been an uneasy and unwilling part of the empire, with tensions sometimes building, sometimes simply smoldering, but never completely diffusing.

Chechens are ethnically, linguistically, and religiously different from Russians. For decades they viewed themselves as subjugated by conquerors, not brought into an empire as equal members. But when the Chechens declared independence, pointing out Yeltsin's willingness to let the various republics and satellites separate from Russia and become their own independent nations – citing Estonia and Moldova – they overlooked a crucial factor. The regions used as examples were either satellite states or S.S.R.s, something that did not apply to the Caucasus region far as Moscow was concerned. According to Moscow the region historically belonged to Russia and was inside the territorial borders of old Russia.³⁸ The Caucasus regions, including Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, have also never been designated as Soviet Socialist Republics (S.S.R.) such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Chechnya was considered a semi-autonomous region, not an S.S.R. (a semi-independent republic), and therefore its move for separation was not considered as a bid for independence but one of secession. With Russia in turmoil due to the collapse of communism and the economy in tatters, Yeltsin was not wrong in his fear that a secession of Caucasus areas had the potential to cause the splintering of his country, the “*Yugoslavisation*” as Putin would later term such a breakdown, along religious or ethnic boundaries. That is why areas such as Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia could not simply be granted their right to be sovereign, autonomous states. They were positioned inside Russia's pre-WWI borders and not designated as satellite states but as part of Russia. Moscow viewed declarations of sovereignty from these regions as secession.³⁹ Secession could not be tolerated and so sparked the first and second Chechen wars. Before those

³⁸ Bhattacharji, “Chechen Terrorism.”

³⁹ Shah, “Crisis in Chechnya.”

wars ended the human cost of the conflict, for both the Russians and Chechens, would be enormous.

Putin and Chechnya

Even before 9/11 many Western powers admitted that with the legacy of lawlessness left by the failure of the first Chechen War, Russia had little choice but to use military force in the area.⁴⁰ No international humanitarian groups would stay in Chechnya after a particularly brutal incident in December of 1996. Someone murdered six of fifteen Red Cross workers in Novye Atagi, Chechnya, while they slept. The Red Cross immediately withdrew all other workers from the region.⁴¹ Dianne Leigh Sumner in "Success of Terrorism in War: The Case of Chechnya" writes: "Hundreds of people have been kidnapped in Chechnya since the end of the war to include foreign aid workers and journalists for whom the captors have netted 'an estimated 20 million.'"⁴²

An incident in May of 1998 revealed that Kremlin officials were not exempt from the violence sweeping the area as Valentin Vlasov, Yetsin's special envoy to Chechnya, was kidnapped while visiting Chechnya on official business and held for six months before being released. Ironically, Vlasov was in the breakaway Republic "on a mission to negotiate a crackdown on kidnappings in the region."⁴³ He was also one of the officials who helped draft the peace agreement that ended the first Chechen War.⁴⁴ The official stance of the Chechen

⁴⁰ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 128.

⁴¹ Dianne Leigh Sumner, "Success of Terrorism in War: The Case For Chechnya," in *Chechnya Revisited*, ed. Yu. K. Nikolaev (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2003), 113.

⁴² *Ibid*, 113-114.

⁴³ Richard C. Paddock, "Chechnya Gears Up to Find Kidnapped Envoy," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1998, <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/may/03/news/mn-45996> (accessed December 12, 2012).

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

government was that the kidnapping was political, not mercenary, and designed to increase the tensions between Russia and the already unstable Caucasus region. This act further strained the relationship between Chechnya and the Russian Federation. Another act of violence later that same year would alienate Chechnya from the Western world – the kidnapping and murder of four Western engineers. Three British and one New Zealand engineers were in Chechnya installing a mobile telephone system despite warnings against travel in the Caucasus region. Taken by Chechen rebels from their home, which was situated only a few hundred yards from a special anti-hostage task force, the four men were beaten, starved and beheaded, their heads found in a bag on the side of a road in Chechnya that October.⁴⁵ While Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov attempted to blame the deaths on the Russians, telling reporters that the murders had been committed only to discredit Chechnya, such conspiracy theories were not considered credible. A wealthy Russian financier who negotiated the release of several hostages, including two British Christian aid workers earlier that same year, pointed the blame for the crime on "wild gangs...impossible to control."⁴⁶ One thing was certain – the situation in Chechnya was boiling over and something had to be done soon. The burden of action fell upon Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, and he was willing to take drastic measures to bring the area back under Russian control.

The final spark to the already smoldering tensions occurred in August and September of 1999 when hundreds of armed Chechen rebels invaded Dagestan with the intent of creating an independent Islamic state.⁴⁷ The invasion of Dagestan was exactly the situation Putin needed to

⁴⁵ "World: Europe Chechnya Kidnap Victims Dead," *BBC News*, December 8, 1998 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/230215.stm> (accessed November 14, 2012).

⁴⁶ Maura Reynolds, "Four Westerners Held Hostage in Chechnya Found Slain," *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1998, <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/dec/09/news/mn-52283> (accessed November 12, 2012).

⁴⁷ Angelique van Engelen, "Chechnya's Troubles Spill Over into Dagestan," *Global Politician*, July 7, 2005, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/21010-chechnya-russia-dagestan> (accessed April 5, 2012)

justify sending in the Russian military. In the interest of maintaining peace and order in the Caucasus region, the rebels, now spreading into the surrounding areas, had to first be contained and then neutralized. Putin did not accept an independent and completely autonomous Chechnya, and he certainly did not agree to Chechnya trying to annex surrounding areas such as parts of Dagestan and Ingushetia.

In August of 1999, Chechen Rebels invaded parts of neighboring Dagestan and also set off two bombs in Moscow apartment buildings. According to author Ronald Griger Suny, "In the midst of the crisis, Yeltsin announced Putin as the new prime minister. A month later explosions tore apart several apartment buildings in Moscow and two towns in the south killing hundreds. As panic gripped the population the former KGB operative immediately demonstrated he was tough and decisive."⁴⁸ Andrei P. Tsygankov writes: "The sheer magnitude of violence was unprecedented, Russians united behind Putin, who was running for president on the platform of "eradicating extremism" in Chechnya and reestablishing a "strong state" throughout the entire Russian territory."⁴⁹ At the beginning of his campaign, Putin's popularity was at 2%, leaping to 58% the following January at the height of the Chechen war. Suny refers to Putin as "reaping a bonanza of popular support."⁵⁰ Instead of costing Putin his political career the war solidified his political capital and gave it a weight and a legitimacy it may have otherwise lacked. His decisive actions and willingness to spend both money and lives to secure Russia's borders was both reassuring to the Russian people and fearful to those seeking independence. Unlike Yeltsin, Putin would rule with an iron fist.

⁴⁸ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 537.

⁴⁹ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 128.

⁵⁰ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 537

The Chechen invasion of Dagestan occurred with the help of some Dagestani rebels but without any act of compliance or encouragement from the Dagestani government.⁵¹ Reports on the number of separatists who crossed the border varied from 300 to 2,000, most Chechens but some Dagestani, with others from Central Asia and the Middle East. They were lead by known terrorist Samil Basaev and an Arab fighter by the name of Khattab who was married to a Dagestani woman. The government of Dagestan requested help from Moscow to expel the unwanted invaders after their borders were breached. This was all that then-Prime Minister Putin needed to act. Putin feared that the trouble in Chechnya would "move up the Volga and spread to other republics and result in the Yugoslavisation of Russia." In Putin's own words he states: "My evaluation of the situation in August (1999) when the bandits attacked Dagestan was that if we don't stop it immediately, Russia in its current state would no longer exist."⁵² Russian military forces with the welcome aid of Dagestani forces moved into the areas held by the Separatists.⁵³

With the invasion of Dagestan in 1999 the separatists were stating their intentions clearly: they desired an Islamic homeland that would be governed by Shari'a law. These rebels saw surrounding Islamic areas as part of their struggle to be free from the Russian Federation.⁵⁴ Putin understood this aim as well as in an interview he stated:

The issue is not succession...Chechnya will not stop with its own independence. It will be used as staging ground for further attack on Russia. Why? in order to protect Chechen independence? Of course not. The purpose will be to grab more territory. They would overwhelm Dagestan. Then the whole Caucasus- Dagestan, Ingushetia and

⁵¹ Matthew Evangelista. *The Chechen Wars: Will Russia go the way of the Soviet Union?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 63.

⁵² Sakwa, *Chechnya From Past to Future*, 18.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ van Engelen, "Chechnya's Troubles Spill Over into Dagestan."

then up along the Volga...⁵⁵

In the article "Chechnya's Problems Spill Over into Dagestan, the writer states: "The ultimate aim of the rebels in Chechnya is to control the entire Caucasus and claim it back from the Russians."⁵⁶

Putin was not yet president of Russia when the second Chechen conflict began in 1999, but as Prime Minister the question of how Russia should respond to recent Separatist terrorist actions was put before him and he did not shirk from it. While some argue that this was not Putin's decision to make but that of then President Boris Yeltsin, Putin himself disagrees.⁵⁷ In Putin's autobiography he stated that the deployment of Russian troops to Chechnya was his decision and one for which he takes full responsibility. He expected it to be the end of his career but he was determined that Russia would not face "Yugoslavisation." Speaking of his decision to move into Chechnya (actually first Dagestan and then Chechnya) to crush the independence movement, Putin states that he saw the problems in the Caucasus as a continuation of the collapse of the USSR, but one that wasn't stopping or resolving itself. "If we don't put an end to this, Russia will cease to exist," Putin wrote, and he felt that if an end was not brought to the troubles in the north that not only the Caucasus but all of Russia would face "a second Yugoslavia."⁵⁸

Putin was determined that Russia would not be divided or split along ethnic or religious lines and the Russian nation would be kept intact at any cost – a cost that the Russian soldiers deployed to the Caucasus along with those living in Chechnya, particularly those in Grozny,

⁵⁵ Sakwa, *Chechnya From Past to Future*, 19.

⁵⁶ van Engelen, "Chechnya's Troubles Spill Over into Dagestan."

⁵⁷ Pavel K. Baev, "Putin's War in Chechnya: Who Steers the Course?" *International Peace Research Institute*, Oslo http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0345.pdf (accessed February 20, 2012).

⁵⁸ Vladimir Putin, *First Person*, 141

would soon pay. And Putin was also willing to pay a personal cost. He went on to say, “It was a question of preventing the collapse of the country. I realized I could only do this at the cost of my political career. It was a minimal cost, and I was prepared to pay up.”⁵⁹ The result would be quite different, however. Authors Roland Dannreuther and Luke March, in an article for *The Institute of Governance*, wrote:

In 1996, in order to ensure his electoral victory, Boris Yeltsin was all but forced to negotiate a humiliating agreement with Chechen rebel leaders granting them de facto independence. In 1999–2000, the strategic dangers of Islamist extremism and expansionism emanating from a lawless Chechnya were central to Vladimir Putin’s presidential campaign. Moscow’s subsequent robust military response conferred the mantle of legitimacy on Putin, who had been almost invisible politically a few months earlier.”⁶⁰

In Moscow, however, Yeltsin's health was failing and there were talks of a successor. Russia was surprised when he chose the virtually unknown Putin. Upon gaining the presidency in May, 2000 Putin quickly set about correcting what he perceived were mistakes made by Yeltsin regarding Chechnya. Now with presidential powers and the political clout that came with them, Putin vowed to hold the Russian Federation together and launched what would become known as the Second Chechen War. The war gained wide support from the Russian people but was also condemned by human rights groups throughout the world.

The conflict became increasingly drawn out with little progress made with seemingly no end in sight and in this light the events of 9/11 was a substantial boon to Putin’s cause, restoring legitimacy to his “fight against terrorism” and “fight against Islamic extremists.” There were strong implications that arms in Chechnya, used during both terrorist attacks and in the Second

⁵⁹ Putin, *First Person*, 140.

⁶⁰ Roland Dannreuther and Luke March, “Chechnya: Has Moscow Won?” *Institute of Self Governance* http://www.institute-of-governance.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/28632/Chechnya_has_Moscow_won.pdf. (accessed March 25, 2012)

Chechen War may have been supplied by Osama Bin Laden, giving some credence to Putin's affiliation with Bush's stance on terrorism after 9/11.⁶¹ When Putin spoke on the phone to George W. Bush after the 9/11 attacks, he was establishing himself as a compatriot in the global war on terrorism with the West. In the chess game of power, sovereignty and world opinion, Putin had gained an upper hand in the conflict that continued to rage in the Caucasus.

Putin stated this is action was counter-terrorism activity, but the press generally labeled this new conflict the Second Chechen War. Putin justified his actions due to recent bombings across Russia allegedly committed by Chechen separatists.⁶² As noted earlier, this conflict had wide support from the Russian people, an aspect vastly different from what President Boris Yeltsin faced in the First Chechen War. Perhaps the difference was in the terminology and the reasoning behind it. Yeltsin sent in troops to prevent Chechnya from becoming a breakaway republic, attempting to stop the loss of territory brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was his proverbial "line in the sand," a statement that the disintegration and fragmentation of the nation had to stop at the centuries-old Russian border in the Caucasus.

While Putin may have been in control of the decision making regarding Chechnya he did not attempt to micromanage the Russian military or their actions in the region. The General Staff of the Army, particularly Chief of the General Staff Anatoly Kvashnin, was given a "carte blanche" to achieve victory by its own means.⁶³ After the humiliating defeat of the Russian Army in the first Chechen War, a war that cost thousands of lives and millions of dollars and played a significant role in the 1998 collapse of the economy, these Generals were determined to make a strong statement in their return to Chechnya. They proceeded slowly, using heavy

⁶¹ Bhattacharji, "Chechen Terrorism."

⁶² Pavel. K. Baev, "Putin's War on Terrorism: A Strategic Dead End," *GLOBAL DIALOGUE* Volume 7, Number 3-4, (Summer/Autumn 2005), <http://www.worlddialogue.org/print.php?id=352> (accessed on March 1, 2012)

⁶³ Baev, "Putin's War in Chechnya: Who Steers the Course?"

artillery fire – always a favorite Russian tactic from the Napoleonic Wars to World War II⁶⁴ – to clear the path of resistance along the way to Grozny. Putin, placing the fate of Chechnya in the hands of the military, assured the generals that he was prepared for a hard won triumph.⁶⁵ In 1999 there was no way they could have known how hard the triumph would be and the cost that both Russians and Chechens would be forced to pay. Russia would pay a heavy cost economically as well as in both casualties and international reputation.

The Second Chechen Conflict was underway, with glaring differences between the current conflict and the First Chechen War in that the war was no longer secular but had taken on a radical Islamic tone by the separatists.⁶⁶ Radicalization had taken hold of the area, and the moderate Chechen leader, Alsan Maskhadov, was no longer able to maintain control.⁶⁷ Although he was only the Prime Minister and not yet the President, Putin was no Yeltsin, and he was willing to take responsibility and control, and this time he had the support of the Russian people. He would not be content to end this conflict leaving issues such as independence unresolved. Lena Johnson, senior research fellow at the Swedish Institute for International Affairs wrote: "What in August 1999 was presented as an operation to deter Chechen aggression against Dagestan; had in October become an effort to seal rebellious Chechnya off along the river Terek; in November to "eliminate the terrorists, and finally in January 2000 a military operation in defense of Russian territorial integrity."⁶⁸ There was clearly three objectives in Putin's decision to use military force, to contain Chechnya within her borders, to eliminate the terrorist threat, and to preserve the borders of the Russian Federation. Putin's aim was to destroy the Separatist

⁶⁴ Geoffery Megargee, *Barbarossa, 1941: Hitler's War of Annihilation* (Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2008), 12.

⁶⁵ Putin, *First Person*, 166-168.

⁶⁶ Lawrence Scott Sheets, *Eight Pieces of Empire*, 180-181.

⁶⁷ Lena Johnson, "Putin and Chechnya: Is This How to Square a Circle," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. VIII, Issue 1 (Winter/Spring 2001): 3, accessed June 4, 2013.

<http://www.watsoninstitute.org/bjwa/archive/8.1/Chechnya/Jonson.pdf>

⁶⁸ Johnson,

movement and to bring the troubled region back firmly under Moscow's control. There would be no open ended Khasavyurt Agreement this time around.⁶⁹ It was time to solve the Chechnya problem and put an end to the terrorism stemming from Chechnya.

By the time that Putin took office as the President of the Russia Federation in 2000 most of the major military offensives in Chechnya were behind him, at least on paper if not in practice, but the worst of the terrorist actions were still to come. In October of 2002, in a theater in Moscow, at a performance of a popular play, “Nord Ost,” Chechen rebels who identified themselves as militant Islamists Separatists, took over the theater holding everyone inside hostage. The rebels held over 850 people hostage demanding an end to the Second Chechen War and a withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya. The standoff lasted for approximately two and half days until the Russian military, in a heavily criticized move, responded by pumping an unknown gas into the theater to subdue the hostage takers. By the time the theater was cleared, 129 of the hostages and 39 of the attackers were dead or dying.⁷⁰ It seemed that perhaps the real Chechen problem was only beginning. If Putin hoped, when he called Bush to offer condolences on the American 9/11 that the terrorist attacks on Russian were past rather than still in the future, he was wrong.

The worst terrorist act was still to come, it would strike in a small town in the South of Russia, one with a mixed Christian and Islamic population. The next terrorist attack revealed to the world what the Separatists were truly capable of accomplishing. On September 1, 2004 it was the first day of school, the “Day of Knowledge,” for the residents of Beslan, a small town of approximately 37,000 located in the Republic of North Ossetia. Shortly after the school’s

⁶⁹ Liz Fuller, “Chechnya: Khasavyurt Agreement Failed to Preclude a Second War,” *Radio Free Europe*, August 30, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1070939.html> (accessed February 6, 2013).

⁷⁰ “Nord Ost: A Year On,” *Gazeta.Ru*, October 23, 2003, <http://www.gazeta.ru/2003/10/23/NordOstayear.shtml> (accessed April 17, 2012).

opening festivities Islamic Separatists seized the school. The attackers – some Chechen, some from the different Caucasus Republics – were under the leadership of Shamil Basayev, Russia's most wanted terrorist. The terrorists demanded an end to the Russian military presence in Chechnya. The terrorists herded the entire population of the school, including many parents and young children who had come to see their older brothers and sisters participate in the festivities, into the school gymnasium. They were kept there for three days in sweltering heat with no food or water. Finally the Russian military, in an effort to free the hostages after the breakdown of negotiations, stormed the building. Unfortunately, the terrorists had anticipated the Russian move and rigged the building with explosives. All but one terrorist was killed as were 334 of the hostages, 186 of them children.

The orchestrator of both the "Nord Ost" and the Beslan terrorist actions was "Russia's most wanted man, Shamil Salmanovich Basayev...a leading Chechen field commander behind some of the most violent and high-profile attacks in the war for Chechen independence," writes Elizabeth Smick for the *Council of Foreign Relations*.⁷¹ One of his commanders was reported as stating: "The Caucasus area does not belong to Russia, it belongs to its Muslim people from the Black to the Caspian sea. The area was savagely suppressed and occupied by criminal Russia about 150 years ago, now is the time for every Muslim to share the reward of freeing the land of the free, Caucasia,"⁷² It was not enough for Basayev to achieve the goal of an independent Chechnya, he and his followers were determined to create an Islamic homeland as evidenced by their invasion of Dagestan, an area that had not invited them in or shown interest as a political entity of joining the Chechen struggle. Emil Pain, Director of the Center for Ethno-Political

⁷¹ Elizabeth Smick, "The Chechen Separatist Movement," *Council of Foreign Relations*, July 18, 2006. <http://www.cfr.org/chechnya/chechen-separatist-movement/p11121> (accessed April 5, 2012).

⁷² van Engelen, "Chechnya's Troubles Spill Over into Dagestan."

Studies in Moscow, writes that: “It remains a mystery how the Basayev detachment of 2,000 men thought it could take Dagestan or even any of its regions when it would have to face the entire Russian military.”⁷³

The Chechen incursion into Dagestan shows that “that the Chechen rebels are simply advancing toward their goal of 'reclaiming' the entire Caucasian region in order to achieve their goal of Islamicising the area.”⁷⁴ However, Dagestan’s government has shown little inclination to be “Islamicised.” Dagestan, though struggling with corruption, achieved some semblance of stability. Though it contains far more ethnic nationalities than Chechnya it has a lengthy history of being relatively peaceful based predominantly on its traditional tribal system, a system quite different from that of its troubled neighbor.⁷⁵ Dagestan did not suffer the same fate as the Chechens who were displaced by Stalin in such large numbers during World War II, perhaps this is one reason for a more amicable relationship with Moscow.⁷⁶ Despite their shared religion, Dagestan did not share either Chechnya’s turmoil or ambitions for full independence. Their close proximity, however, meant that Chechnya’s internal troubles spread across the border into Dagestan. Angelique van Engelen writing for *The Global Politician* goes on to say:

The perpetrators of the violence are mostly Islamic guerrillas and the mafia that have crossed the border from Chechnya as well as members of ethnic minorities from Dagestan that are joining in the battle. Among the professed reasons for their violence are

⁷³ Emil Pain, “The Second Chechen War: The Information Component,” *Military Review* (July-August 2000), <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/secchech/secchech.htm> (accessed March 12, 2012)

⁷⁴ van Engelen, “Chechnya’s Troubles Spill Over into Dagestan.”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

the republic's corruption and abuse. The ultimate aim of the rebels in Chechnya is to control the entire Caucasus and claim it back from the Russians.⁷⁷

Author Moshe Gammer, in the last chapter of his book *The Lone Wolf and the Bear* writes that more and more the conflict from the viewpoint of the Chechens was becoming less about nationality and more about Islam. He quotes from journalist Jeremy Bransten, “Here in the mountains, to an increasing extent the atmosphere is becoming influenced by radical doctrine.” He explains that when he asks young rebel soldiers why they are fighting, many times the answer is no longer ‘independence’ but instead is ‘We want the word of the prophet and the word of God to be the main arbiter in Chechnya. Today Allah requires us to establish Shari’a law.’”⁷⁸ In other words, the reason is radical Islam with the establishment of a theocracy in the Caucasus. A regime the Chechens have proved by their past actions that they would not be content to have only inside their own borders, but a theocracy that would extend across their Islamic neighbor’s borders as well. Putin’s desire for a solution to the conflict in Chechnya required that he find an “inside man” who was Muslim, Chechen, and yet supported his policies toward Chechnya. The “Chechenization” of the conflict centered on the Kadyrovs.

Making a Deal with the Devil: Ramzan Kadyrov

It was through the Kadyrov's, first Akhmed and then after his assassination, his son Ramzan, that Putin would find a way to withdraw the Russian Military from Chechnya. As the war dragged on, and the casualty list grew, the war's public support waned. It was time for the

⁷⁷ van Engelen, “Chechnya’s Troubles Spill Over into Dagestan.”

⁷⁸ Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear*, 271.

Chechenization of the conflict, and to diminish direct Russian intervention. The way Putin chose to achieve this goal was to choose a leader of Chechnya that was friendly to the Kremlin, that proved to be under Moscow's control but was both a Muslim and an ethnic Chechen. What began with Akhmed would continue with his son.

In February, 2007 Ramzan Kadyrov at the young age of thirty took the Presidency of Chechnya with Putin's blessing.⁷⁹ Buildings in Grozny are papered with his picture and his men, known as "kadyrovtsy"⁸⁰ dressed in combat fatigues and black t-shirts, roam the streets. Kadyrov's word is law and those who do not obey that law often end up missing. He is said to be both the destroyer of lives and the savior of Chechnya. He is a man who started out fighting alongside his father as a rebel resisting the Russians – he claims to have led his first militia at the tender age of fourteen or fifteen. Kadyrov followed his father's lead switching his allegiance to the Kremlin and against the separatists.⁸¹ This change in allegiance by the Kadyrovs was a curious thing and one that, at times, made the Kremlin nervous.⁸² A man who switched sides once can do it again and since 2009 Kadyrov has become more demanding of Russian money and also quick to point a finger at the Russian military instead of "rebels" for the destruction of Grozny.⁸³ Where his allegiance lies may be up for debate but it is unquestionable that he rules through a mixture of fear and cult of personality. He is called the Warrior-King of Chechnya is some

⁷⁹ Gammer, 217.

⁸⁰ "Ramzan Kadyrov," *The Moscow Times*,

http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mt_profile/ramzan_kadyrov/433775.html (accessed April 10, 2012)

⁸¹ Megan K. Stack, "Chechen Tiger Without a Chain," *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 2008,

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-kadyrov17-2008jun17,0,1103942.story?page=1> (accessed March 3, 2012).

⁸² Andrew Osborne, "Ramzan Kadyrov: The Warrior King of Chechnya," *The Independent*, January 4, 2007,

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/ramzan-kadyrov-the-warrior-king-of-chechnya-430738.html> (accessed February 22, 2012).

⁸³ *Ibid.*

circles; in others he is called a war criminal and a monster, and refers to himself as the Che of Chechnya.⁸⁴

His personal office is representative of the relationship that Kadyrov desires between Grozny and Moscow. It is adorned with the Russian Federation and Chechen Republic flags as well as photos of Che Guevara, Vladimir Putin, and his father, Akhmed Kadyrov.⁸⁵ Akhmed, the rebel and later the best Chechen friend of the Kremlin, represented everything his son wants to be – Chechen, Muslim, and powerful. Power comes from Putin. In fact, his respect for Putin is so great that when he (Ramzan) was elected to a second term he declined the title “President” of Chechnya as he was before, choosing instead to be referred to as “Head of Chechnya.” He stated as his reason: “A country should have only one president,” further solidifying that Chechnya is a part of Russia and not a completely separate, autonomous region. It would seem that as the Chechen hopes of an Islamic Homeland that would stretch across the Caucasus died, the dream of full independence died with it.⁸⁶

Despite his reputation for violence, Kadyrov has been awarded the Hero of Russia medal, is credited with bringing some sense of calm to war-torn Grozny, and under his watch, the largest mosque in all of Europe has risen from the ashes left by Russian bombs.⁸⁷ Children are returning to school in Grozny, with acts of terrorism under the careful and threatening eye of the Kadyrovsky are becoming few and far between.⁸⁸ Regarding terrorists and rebels Kadyrov, in

⁸⁴ Andrew Osborne, “Ramzan Kadyrov: The Warrior King of Chechnya.”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Majnat Kurbanova, “Ramzan Kadyrov: Father of a Nation,” *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*, April 13, 2011, <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Chechnya/Ramzan-Kadyrov-father-of-the-nation-92026> (accessed April 5, 2012).

⁸⁷ *Radio Free Europe*, “Grozny opens Europe’s Biggest Mosque,” October 17, 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Grozny_To_Open_Europes_Biggest_Mosque/1330690.html (accessed April 14, 2012)

⁸⁸ The Kadyrovsky is the slang term for Kadyrov's men and enforcers (and a term that Kadyrov deploras). They dress in fatigue pants, black shirts, black combat boots and are generally heavily armed.

his own words, states: “My method is simple. Those who disrupt the people’s peace must be dealt with harshly, cruelly even.”⁸⁹

This stance has put him on the watch list of many NGOs including Reporters without Borders. Perhaps with sentiments such as “The press must be in the service of the Chechen people’s unity,” expressed directly by Kadyrov, is for the best. Many look at him with blaming eyes for both the death of outspoken Kremlin and Kadyrov (both Jr. and Sr.) critic and journalist for *Novaya Gazetta*, Anna Politkovskaya and human rights activist Natalia Estemirova, also a vocal detractor. He calls the allegations “bullshit” and “nonsense.”⁹⁰ In Chechnya, Kadyrov is unrivaled, his poster hangs everywhere, slogans praising him are on seemingly every building and his grasp on the small republic seems unlikely to ease in the near future.

Kadyrov was Putin’s handpicked choice for the “*Chechenisation*” of the conflict and now the young leader is in full control.⁹¹ Of course he does not rule completely alone, as a writer for the Economist explains: “Mr. Putin’s policy of “*Chechenisation*” has meant outsourcing most of the violence to local militias—especially the *kadyrovtsy*, who on most estimates number around 7,000.”⁹² As long as Kadyrov and Putin can maintain their alliance more stable days are on the horizon for Chechnya, as long as you are not one of their opponents.

Conclusion

A fundamental question is whether or not the issue of an autonomous Chechnya is one of secession or independence. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, and so many countries

⁸⁹ “RWB: Ramzan Kadyrov is Putin’s Guard Dog,” *Chechen Center*, May 3, 2011, <http://www.chechencenter.info/n/events/1325-1.html> (accessed April 10, 2012).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *The Economist*, “A Thug in Charge: Chechnya Gets a New Prime Minister,” March 9, 2006, <http://www.economist.com/node/5611334> (accessed April 2, 2012).

⁹² *The Economist*, “Putin’s Heroes: A Gruesome War that Never Really Ended May Flare Up Again,” December 1, 2005, <http://www.economist.com/node/5251125> (accessed April 2, 2012).

reverting to independence from the USSR, the question of what makes the Caucasus regions different must be addressed. The answer is found in the presidency of Boris Yeltsin and why he drew the line, as one after the other Satellite states declared their freedom, in the Caucasus in what would become the first Chechen War. Chechnya was not a satellite state of the former USSR looking to regain their autonomy but inside of Russia's territorial borders. Yeltsin, and then Putin, recognized clearly the domino effect that could occur. Russia is a vast country, with many ethnicities, many cultures, even many languages- to let one ethnic group declare themselves free from Moscow's control opened the door to the others following suit- Putin's feared "Yugoslavization." Also, the Chechen's desire to expand past their own borders into neighboring countries posed a large scale national security risk as well as threatened to destabilize completely an already precarious area. The Islamic homeland movement was the largest threat to Russia's stability save one alone, the outbreak of domestic terrorism. The Moscow apartment bombing in particular had struck at the heart of everyday Russians, so much so that Putin secured his presidency by promising action in Chechnya, an action that Russians hoped would bring a halt to the rash of terrorist activities that extended into the Russian heartland. The people wanted a strong, uncompromising leader and strong, heavy handed action, and in Vladimir Putin, they received that very man.

There can be no doubt that there were massive human rights violations committed by the Russian Army (an Army not known for their subtlety or restraint) and there can be no doubt there was great suffering on both sides, but in a philosophy of *RealPolitik*, are those the foundations of policy making and political decisions? Putin did not act on behalf of the individual but on behalf of Russia as a whole. He was determined to hold the country together at any cost- and so he did. Some of his decisions were brutal, some of his reactions were callused,

and there are those who would call him a monster because of them. However, the fact that the Chechnya was a place where kidnapping, murder and even invasions of other republics occurred coupled with the fear of a dissolving Russia where one republic after another sought to break away from the Federation, may very well make President Vladimir Putin a necessary monster.

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