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THESIS

**UNRESOLVED ETHNIC CONFLICT AND RELIGIOUS
REVIVAL IN RUSSIA: THE CHECHEN ELEMENT**

by

Shenequa L. Mitchell

December 2007

Thesis Advisor: Donald Abenheim
Second Reader: Letitia Lawson

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**UNRESOLVED ETHNIC CONFLICT AND RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN RUSSIA:
THE CHECHEN ELEMENT**

Shenequa L. Mitchell
Lieutenant, United States Navy
B.S., Old Dominion University, 2000

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
December 2007**

Author: Shenequa L. Mitchell

Approved by: Dr. Donald Abenheim
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Letitia Lawson
Second Reader

Douglas Porch
Chairman, Department of National Security
Affairs

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis treats a case study of ethnic tension in Russia of the 21st century and the impact of this episode on Russian nationalism in the present. As social, cultural and political issues have resurfaced between contemporary ethnic Russians and members of the Northern Caucasus-Chechen minority group, this centuries-old-ethnic-conflict continues into the present in a battle over territorial integrity and national self-determination. After withstanding two "Chechen Wars" over the past decade, such chaotic events as a restaurant brawl on August 30th, 2006 between Chechens and ethnic Russians continue to fuel ethnic, national, and religious dissension throughout the Post-Soviet Region. This development has fostered the organization of such groups as the "Movement Against Illegal Immigration."

Certain members of Russian society view the conflicts as driven by economic and political factors, while many government officials have refused to even label this crisis as an "ethnic conflict". Nonetheless, it can not be refuted that these ongoing tensions *appear* to be driven by violence with roots in the past—violence that can be traced back to Tsarist Rule. Furthermore, the *present struggle* between ethnic Russians and their "Near-Abroad Others" (i.e., Chechens) has become fertile ground for ongoing scholarly works of ethnic conflict and radical religious revival.

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I. UNRESOLVED ETHNIC CONFLICT AND RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN RUSSIA

A. INTRODUCTION

The fate of Russia in the past and present has been also the fate of its nationalities and their striving for self determination in an age of nationalism. Such a generalization adheres in the 21st century as it did a century ago. The present work examines one aspect of this phenomenon in detail in the hope of generalizing about the whole. Social tensions have given rise to conflict in the Karelian town of Kondopoga, Russia. As social, cultural and political issues have resurfaced between contemporary ethnic Russians and members of the Northern Caucasus-Chechen minority group, this centuries old ethnic conflict now continues in a battle over territorial integrity and national self-determination.¹

After withstanding two "Chechen Wars" over the past decade, such chaotic events as a restaurant brawl on August 30th, 2006 between Chechens and ethnic Russians continue to fuel ethnic, national, and religious dissension (i.e., between Chechen Separatist Rebels and Russian forces) throughout the Post-Soviet region. One result has been such organization as the Movement Against Illegal Immigration

¹ Ben Fowkes, ed. Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis (Great Britain: MacMillan Press, 1998), 90. There are numerous sources documenting the history of Russian-Chechen relations such as Geoffrey Hosking's Russia and the Russians: A History (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), chaps. 3, 4 and 5; Anatol Lieven's Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), chap. 9; and Paul J. Murphy's The Wolves of Islam: Russia and the Faces of Chechen Terror (Washington: Brassey's Inc., 2004), 1.

(DPNI); a facet of the nationalistic uprising that has been a feature of the Putin regime.² Such organizations seek to "protect the interests of Russia's native population" while "cracking down" on the "Caucasus Mafia".³

Some members of Russian society view the conflicts as being driven by economic and political factors, while many government officials have refused to even label this crisis as an "ethnic conflict".⁴ Nonetheless, it can not be refuted that the ongoing ethnic and religious tensions appear to be driven by historical violence-conflict that can be traced back to the days of Tsarist Rule. This appearance is evident in how ethnic Russians and members of the minority group (i.e., Chechen Separatist Rebel forces) continue to seek the assertion of their respective ethnic (and religious) "superiority" and "righteousness".

Incidentally, the *present struggle* between ethnic Russians and their "Near-Abroad Others"⁵ (i.e., Chechens) remain as ongoing contributions to the scholarly works of ethnic conflict and radical religious revival.⁶ As President Putin seeks to "... restore Russia's pride and prestige", the former Soviet Republics are pursuing a less

² "Brawl Erupts into Pogrom in Traditionally Tranquil North," *Moscow News*, September 8, 2006, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil/universe/document> accessed 12 October 2006.

³ "Russia Cracks Down on Illegal Labor Migration," *The Moscow News*, 2006. <http://english.mn.ru/english/issue.hph?2006-46-1> accessed 4 December 2007.

⁴ "Economic, political factors seen at play in northern Russia ethnic riots," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, September 6, 2006, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil/universe/document> accessed 12 October 2006.

⁵ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. New York: Penguin, 2002, 194.

⁶ *Russia's Invasion of Chechnya: A Preliminary Assessment*. Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 1995, 1.

pluralistic national identity based upon self-government and complete separation from "Mother Russia".⁷ And while "major combat operations have ended in Chechnya ... small-scale guerilla conflict is still going on between Russian forces and Chechen rebels".⁸

1. Purpose

This thesis will analyze how the ethnic Russian search for a cohesive national identity affects its relations with neighboring countries (i.e., its former Russian Republics and members of the international community) via the employment of a case study analysis. This thesis also seeks to analyze the foundations of the long standing ethnic and religious conflicts between Mother Russia and Chechnya. In addition, it will also seek to uncover the interests of the parties involved (e.g., Russian leadership, Chechen leadership, U.S. leadership, etc.) from the perspective of U.S. security and defense policy, granted the role of the Caucasus in grand strategy between the great powers in the 21st century.

As Russia and other post-Soviet Republics are struggling to define national identities for themselves, narrower ethnic identities are emerging—following the collapse of the supranational Soviet empire. The following thesis will look at how the ethnic Russian search for a

⁷ "Inside the corporation: Russia's power elite," *Kavkazcenter.com*, 16 October 2007.
http://kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2007/10/16/8970_print.html accessed December 4, 2007.

⁸ "Thousands rally for Putin in Chechnya ahead of polls," *Times Internet Limited*, November 27, 2007,
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-2576449>, prtpage-1.coms accessed 4 December 2007.

cohesive sense of nationalism continues to promote the ethnic federalism that exists today between Russia-proper and its neighbors (i.e., its surrounding republics). In its present state, Russia is promoting a national identity that accommodates ethnicity (which is not surprising given its size and heterogeneity) while other former Soviet republics, being smaller and less heterogeneous, are promoting an exclusive ethnic-based nationalism. And as the demands of the Chechen Minority Group threatens the broad acceptance of a "true Russian nation", ethnic federalism may be the only solution to achieving a constant/consistent peace—without reaching a true political compromise.⁹

This social and political complexion of post-Soviet Russia and its near abroad encourages the fundamental question: Can true unity (and acceptance) as a unified Russian nation become a reality for such an ethnically diverse country? The hopeful answer would be yes; however, the final solution of the nationalities and the Russian nation itself all depends upon the actions (or inactions) of the political and social leaders of this ethnically divided region of the world. This fact brings forth such more specific questions as: What effects have efforts to maintain an ethno-federal national identity had within this region? Furthermore, what are the domestic and international effects of ethnic conflict and religious revival (i.e., Islamic Fundamentalism) within Russia and its surrounding republics (i.e., Chechnya)?

⁹ Henry E. Hale. "The Makeup and Breakup of Ethnofederal States: Why Russia Survives Where the USSR Fell," *Perspectives on Politics*, March 2005.

2. Importance/Significance

Given the size and past power of Russia, as well as its promise for the present century, Russian race/ethnic and religious relations are of considerable importance to the study of ethnic and religious conflicts throughout the world. These phenomena are also germane to the making of U.S. foreign and defense policy, given the role of the southern Caucasus in U.S. defense policy and what in 2007 seems to be a revival of Russian diplomacy and strategy that appears to define itself in opposition to NATO and the U.S. The impact of such domestic conflicts can have long-lasting effects upon both domestic and foreign interaction, intervention, and policy. Thus, the "spill-over effects" of ethnic conflict and radical religious revival are growing concerns throughout the international community. More specifically to the Russian experience, the growing interaction of ethnic conflict and a revived Islamic Fundamentalism (as pursued by Separatist Chechen Rebels) within the Northern Caucasus region is of added concern when dealing with seemingly religious-based-ethnic conflicts.

a. Misconceptions about Ethnic Conflict

With the rise of the unpredictability of global terrorists since 2001, an international understanding of ethnic conflict is a key tool to unveiling the elements of international relations in the present century. However, the concept of "ethnic conflict" for many observers has a tendency to conjure up notions of genocide and ethnic cleansing. It is only by gaining a further/deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in the various forms

of ethnic conflict, that one will be able to see that genocide is just the most extreme expression of ethnic conflict in modern history and present day politics. Race riots, political party infighting, and low-level harassment are also forms of ethnic conflict and can be observed far beyond the limits of Europe in the past and present.

Such events can be motivated by various forms of elite versus mass-level manipulation; the intentions of the state versus those of civil society; individual economic desires; or even ancestrally developed habits or myths about identity, heritage and blood and soil. As one looks at the unsettled state of the world today, one might ask: Is the future of humanity damned because of ongoing ethnic conflicts of today? Are the ethnic tensions *so profound* that the only solution is to have separation (e.g., partitioning or ethnic federalism) as say on the model of ex Yugoslavia and the present day Czech and Slovak Republics?

3. Literature Review

The nature of ethnic and religious identity—in general—encompasses numerous factors in addition to numerous *actors*. A leading scholar suggests that,

... literature on evolutionary theory tends to address questions of ethnicity from two perspectives: (1) macro, or long-term selection processes associated with basic human preferences for individual or group survival, ethnic identity or kinship affiliations; and (2) intermediate selection mechanisms associated with the fitness and adaptability of specific cultures, religions or belief systems in different regions of the world. Comparatively less time has been spent addressing micro-evolutionary questions about the timing, escalation and duration of ethnic

violence – that is, *micro* or short-term selection processes and fitness mechanisms that account for the escalation and/or duration of ethnic hatreds, violence or war at a particular time.¹⁰

--Frank P. Harvey

In his article *Constructivist Assumptions and Ethnic Violence*, author Steven I. Wilkinson implies that the social construct of a truly unified (Russian) nation is a possibility. He stresses that,

[i]gnoring the fluidity of ethnic identities has very definite implications... Once we accept that ethnic identities are multi-dimensional, we ought to develop a healthy skepticism about power sharing proposals...¹¹

It is here that one can see that even in the midst of acknowledging "multiple identities", the *permeability* of identity barriers is a tool to be utilized in the creation of peaceful heterogeneity. Thus, the "permeability" is a result of acknowledging the multiple identities and needs of the various ethnic groups of concern. However, as ethnic and non-ethnic Russians struggle to be acknowledged, the permanent consequences of an ongoing ethnic conflict within and between Russia and members of the former Soviet Republics continue to solidify their identity barriers.

For instance, with the creation of the organization, Movement Against Illegal Immigration, xenophobic (ethnic)

¹⁰ Frank P. Harvey, "Primordialism, Evolutionary Theory and Ethnic Violence in the Balkans: Opportunities and Constraints for Theory and Policy," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 2000,

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=279206> (accessed September 2, 2007).

¹¹ Steven Wilkinson, "Constructivist Assumptions and Ethnic Violence," *APSA-C* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 18.

Russians are now *encouraged* to maintain their ethnic and cultural separation from minority groups (e.g., Chechens). This manner of chosen existence is deemed to be for the sake of preserving a purely ethnic Russia; if not at least for the sake of preserving their (ethnic Russians') economic, social and political wellbeing. Hence, while the "multiple identities" within the Russian Federation are being acknowledged (i.e., by using ethnic federalism); the "needs [all] of the various ethnic groups of concern" are being selfishly addressed and maintained—as by the ethnic Russians.

In his article *Primordialism Lives!*, Stephen Van Evera states,

... in modern times ethnic identities tend to become paramount; and once they become paramount, ethnic identities tend to remain paramount... Those who underestimate the strength and endurance of ethnic identities are bound to blunder in their dealings with nationalism.¹²

As a result, the "permanent consequences" of continuous ethnic conflict throughout Russia and its republics may condemn this region of Eurasia to perpetual conflict which has troubling implications for U.S. foreign and defense policy.

Van Evera also goes on to provide "three claims" and a "fourth point of qualification":

(1) Ethnic identities harden when mass literacy is achieved. (2) Ethnic identities are hardened by violence. (3) The identities of non-immigrant ethnic groups are far more firmly fixed

¹² Stephen Van Evera, "Primordialism Lives!" APSA-C 12, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 20.

than immigrant identities. (4) While ethnic identities can seldom be transformed into new identities, they can often be made more benign, and efforts in this direction can bolster peace."¹³

From this statement, one can conclude that as the identity barriers (i.e., mass literacy, violent conflict, and non-immigrant character) continue to persist, the future solutions to ethnic violence (i.e., in regards to the Russian search for a cohesive nationalism) may never include identity change.¹⁴ Two "Chechen Wars"—and now guerilla warfare—between Russian and Chechen Rebel forces persist in "hardening" the ethnic identities (and all they encompass) as well as "hardening" the individuals against each other.

Current literature concerning ethnic conflict utilizes the following three schools of thought: Primordialism, Instrumentalism, and Constructivism. It is by looking to elements of ethnic conflict ranging from: nature of identity; origins and transmission; how people identify with ethnic identity; and relationship to violence, that researchers are able to label an ethnic conflict. These methods focus on how to categorize the conflict as it presents itself and its matching traits to their respective argument or theory.

As the Primordialist and Instrumentalist approaches have been largely rejected by the research community, debates continue within the Constructivist category. Nonetheless, considerable mention must be made of Kaplan and Geertz's discussion of the emotional ties of Primordialism.

¹³ Stephen Van Evera, "Primordialism Lives!" APSA-C 12, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 20.

¹⁴ Van Evera, 21.

In their findings, deep roots and blood ties are what fuel a strong dedication to family and kinship.¹⁵ Also, in his 1973 essay, Geertz proposed that, "... 1) individuals have a single ethnic identity and 2) this identity is fixed in the present and future."¹⁶ He went on to state that,

The key distinguishing aspect of the [P]rimordialist view is that an individual's ethnic identity becomes immutable once acquired, no matter where it comes from.¹⁷

This model of ethnic identity being "fixed at birth" has been strongly observed by ethnic Russians and members of the Russian Republic minority groups (e.g., the Chechens). This provides a theoretical "causal claim" for explaining why it *appears* to be—within the Post-Soviet regions—that "ancient hatreds" between certain ethnic groups continue to manifest themselves in modern times (i.e., the 2006 restaurant brawl in Kondopoga).¹⁸

Such "basic human preferences" have been countered by Constructivist findings showing that "... ethnic groups are fluid and endogenous to a set of social, economic, and political processes."¹⁹ As a result, Constructivists propose that:

¹⁵ Clifford Geertz. "The Integrative Revolution," Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa, Clifford Geertz ed., New York: The Free Press, 1963, p. 109.

¹⁶ Kanchan Chandra ed., "Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics," APSA-CP 12, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 7.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Hale, Henry E. "The Makeup and Breakup of Ethnofederal States: Why Russia Survives Where the USSR Fell," *Perspectives on Politics*, March 2005.

¹⁹ Kanchan Chandra ed., "Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics," APSA-CP 12, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 7.

... individuals have multiple ... ethnic identities; and ... the identity with which they identify varies depending upon some specified causal variable.²⁰

From this statement, one could see how an individual could simultaneously *choose* to identify as being both ethnically Chechen and a Russian national; or *identify separately* (according to ethnicity and nationality, respectively) at moments that may prove more beneficial to him or her. This theory has also been linked to the beliefs that "ethnic conflicts" are actually driven by political and economic "entrepreneurs" who are selfishly motivated to take advantage of the emotional pull of ethnic identity.

To further support this "conscious choice" of the individual, Glazer and Moynihan have researched the manipulative and malleable nature of Instrumentalism. Highlighting the subjective nature and class affiliation of this particular school of thought, they state:

there has been a pronounced and sudden increase in tendencies by people in many countries and in many circumstances to insist on the significance of their group distinctiveness and identity and on new rights that derive from this group character.²¹

This theory has been set into motion as Russian hatreds have become emboldened by economic and social competition and expectations; while Chechen Rebel forces seek complete independence from "Mother Russia". The increasing minority (i.e., Chechen) monopoly over local Russian markets,

²⁰ Kanchan Chandra ed., "Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics," APSA-CP 12, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 7.

²¹ Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, "Introduction." Ethnicity: Theory and Experience, edited by Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, 3-26. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, 3.

construction, and daily duties has left ethnic Russians feeling disadvantaged in their own homelands.²² On the other hand, Chechen Separatists (fueled by radical Islamic beliefs) see ethnic Russians as "monopolizing" control over the Chechen Republic. Thus, political and economic components of ethnic (and religious) conflict lend themselves to the action (or inaction) from local authorities and the election of deputies who are "not averse to playing the nationalities card."²³

Finally, Benedict Anderson and Fearon and Laitin provide research using the theory of Constructivism. Anderson points to the "imagined communities" characteristic of a socially constructed society.²⁴ Fearon and Laitin look at how "identities" are socially constructed:

Social categories ... [are distinguished by] (1) rules of membership ... [and] (2) ... sets of characteristics (such as beliefs, desires, moral commitments, and physical attributes ...²⁵

This statement is evidenced by the *social grouping* of Chechen Rebels. Led by Chechen Separatist Leader Dokku Umarov, this group insists upon obtaining independence from Russia. In a recent statement (November 22nd, 2007), as

²² "Economic, political factors seen at play in northern Russia ethnic riots," *BBC Worldwide*.

Monitoring, September 6, 2006, <http://web.lexis-nexis.com.libproxy.nps.navy.miluniverse/document> (accessed 12 October 2006).

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1983, p.6.

²⁵ James Fearon and David Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity." *International Organization* 54 (4) (Autumn 2000), p. 848.

Umarov declares himself emir of the North Caucasus he urges the "Mujahideen" (Chechen Rebels) to

... reject any laws, rules and establishments that do not come from Allah ... [and to] wage irreconcilable war with anyone who would oppose the establishment of [a Muslim nation].²⁶

Fearon proposes that "... ethnic war [is] the result of a 'commitment problem'."²⁷

As such, he states that,

... the majority ethnic group cannot credibly commit to protecting the rights of the minority in the future. Anticipating that its rights will be trampled on in the future, the minority group rebels in the present.²⁸

An example of this notion can be found in Chechen Conflicts of the past and the present-day "small-scale guerilla conflict" raging on between Russian forces and Chechen rebels.²⁹ While some members of Chechnya tend to favor Putin (e.g., Chechen President/chief, Ramzan Kadyrov) many members—of the Chechen Republic—are still leery of the promises of the Kremlin government. For instance, a 2007 CRS Report notes:

²⁶ "The official version of Amir Dokka's statement of declaration of the Caucasian Emirate," *Kavkaz-Center News Agency*, November 22, 2007, <http://kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2007/11/22/9107.shtml> accessed 4 December 2007.

²⁷ Van Evera, 9.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Thousands rallied on November 27th, 2007 in the capital of the war-ravaged province of Chechnya in support of President Vladimir Putin and his United Russia party. Chechnya's President/chief, Ramzan Kadyrov is a former rebel who switched his allegiance to the Kremlin." Information and quote taken from: "Thousands rally for Putin in Chechnya ahead of polls," *Times Internet Limited*, November 27, 2007, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-2576449>, prtpage-1.coms accessed 4 December 2007.

Major problems remain: 18% of the population lives below the poverty line, foreign investment is low, and crime, corruption, capital flight and unemployment remain high.³⁰

The above mentioned theories, in reference to ethnic (and religious) conflicts, are of significant value to understanding unresolved ethnic and religious conflict. However, there appears to be a gap in regards to observing how such conflicts transition. Is it possible for individuals to change their motivations over time, while also changing their method for inducing ethnic conflict? More specifically, is it possible for contemporary ethnic groups to revert back to a more "primitive" method of social containment (e.g., ethno-federalism); and yet the end result continues to be ethnic conflict?³¹ Are the religious and ethnic conflicts of today guiding us back to a state of "ethnic backwardness"? I would venture to say yes, while also highlighting the fact that the "primordial nature" of ethnic identity tends to be forgotten in a time of relative peace and security; only to be revived during conflict and turmoil.

4. Methodology

Research has found Chechens to be

³⁰CRS Report RL33407, Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. *Interests*, by Stuart D. Goldman, May 31st, 2007, summary.

³¹ In Henry E. Hale's "The Makeup and Breakup of Ethnofederal States: Why Russia Survives Where the USSR Fell", he notes some of the successes (e.g., India, Spain and Switzerland) for ethnofederalism; and failures (e.g., USSR and the Nigerian First Republic).

... indigenous Caucasian mountain people ... [with existing] clan relationships ... still play[ing] a large role in relations among [them] ...³²

This fact provides a possible indication as to why the actual "evolution" of Russian ethnic/social interactions (and ultimately Post-Soviet ethnic and religious conflict) has not totally "progressed forward" towards a truly peaceful coexistence. This thesis will provide an historical analysis to fill the gap within current literature concerning ethnic conflict theory (e.g., religious-driven ethnic conflicts). It will look at the connection between ethnic and religious identity and the tendencies and motivations of leaders driving the Post-Soviet ethnic and religious conflicts of today (e.g., both Russian leadership versus Chechen leadership). It will also present current (domestic and international) perspectives on Russian ethnic identity, Russian nationalism, and radical religious movements (i.e., the revival of Islamic Fundamentalism); while highlighting certain chosen methods of social interaction/containment as the *causal elements* behind unresolved Post-Soviet ethnic and religious conflicts of today.

5. Sources

A systematic approach will be utilized in this discussion of Post-Soviet ethnic identity, Post-Soviet ethnic conflict, and the Post-Soviet revival of radical religion (i.e., Islamic Fundamentalism). The main focus

³² Christopher Panico. *Conflicts in the Caucasus: Russia's War in Chechnya*. London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1995, 2.

will be the North Caucasus region of Chechnya. Firsthand accounts, published secondary sources and reputable websites will be used in this research.

II. UNRESOLVED ETHNIC CONFLICT IN RUSSIA

Even though "major combat operations have ceased "... small-scale guerilla conflict continues between Russian and Chechen Rebel forces".³³ This provides evidence that *unresolved ethnic conflict* continues to exist within the Russian Federation. This chapter will discuss the elements which make up and/or relate to "ethnic conflict" in Russia such as: the "Chechen Element" of the Post-Soviet ethnic conflicts of the 21st century; the role/influence of political and social leaders in addition to radical elites; domestic and international concerns (e.g., effects upon economic and foreign policy) in regards to Post-Soviet ethnic conflicts; solutions to this problem; and the future of ethnic conflict in Russia.

A. THE CHECHEN ELEMENT

As media coverage has tended to focus on the recent "Chechen Wars" of the last decade, this strife is far from a "new" ethnic conflict. The foundations of this ongoing violence can be traced back to major rebellions against Tsarist Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries.³⁴ As

³³ "Thousands rally for Putin in Chechnya ahead of polls," *Times Internet Limited*, November 27, 2007, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-2576449>, prtpage-1.coms accessed 4 December 2007.

³⁴ Ben Fowkes, ed. *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis* (Great Britain: MacMillan Press, 1998), 90. There are numerous sources documenting the history of Russian-Chechen relations such as Geoffrey Hosking's *Russia and the Russians: A History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), chaps. 3, 4 and 5; Anatol Lieven's *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), chap. 9; and Paul J. Murphy's *The Wolves of Islam: Russia and the Faces of Chechen Terror* (Washington: Brassey's Inc., 2004), 1.

subsequent years saw the massive deportation of Chechens during Stalin's Communist rule, conflicts of the 1990's have led to a surge in major debates regarding legitimate Russian ethnic identity, leadership, nationalism, and territorial integrity.³⁵

At the onset of conflict in the Chechen Republic, Russian leadership's immediate concern was to preserve the national integrity of Russia in the midst of the Soviet collapse. The Chechen conflicts of the mid-1990s resulted in a double win for the Chechen minority group. As the rugged terrain of their mountainous homelands was ideal for their guerilla warfare—they were unstoppable against the disorganized Russian military forces of the early 1990s.³⁶ This "conflict" proved to be a never-ending struggle for both sides.

The Chechens declared their independence from Russia in 1991, but the international community joined Russia in refusing to recognize its sovereignty.³⁷ Nonetheless, oil proved to be an additional interest held by many within the Russian, Chechen and international realms of political and economic leadership. As a result, Chechen oil became an instrumentally vital economic interest as far back as the late 19th century with the rise of the oil economy.³⁸ Such struggles for national identity/self-rule and competition for economic resources continue on today, both domestically—in the Post-Soviet world—and within the international arena.

³⁵ Ben Fowkes, ed. *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis* , 65.

³⁶ "Q & A: The Chechen Conflict," BBC News, July 10, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe>, accessed 13 December 2006.

³⁷ Paul B. Henze, *Islam in the North Caucasus: The Example of Chechnya*, (Santa Monica: RAND Publishers, 1995), 2.

³⁸ Paul B. Henze, *Islam in the North Caucasus*, 2.

B. POST-SOVIET LEADERSHIP AND RADICAL ELITES

Ethnic or religious tensions when joined with mass politics in the past and present may tend to lead to conflict due to their politically charged natures, especially when matters of blood and soil intrude as has generally been the case in Chechnya. For example: in 1991, Chechnya's first president, Jokhar Musaevich Dudaev, led his country to declare its independence from Russian rule.³⁹ Such mobilizing efforts by various political elites, combined with the obedience of the masses, have shaped this deeply divided Russian society in the past and especially in the present. In fact, additional leaders such as Aslan Maskhadov and Russian Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin have also contributed to the ongoing propaganda encouraging this conflict.

Boris Yeltsin—in his time—made a disastrous use of constructive manipulation. As upcoming presidential elections were taking form, Yeltsin used the first Chechen Conflict of 1991 to assert his leadership of the nation. His actions resulted in an embarrassing military defeat for the Russian military; loss of domestic support; and a more intensified ethnic conflict that lurched on for years afterwards.⁴⁰

Today, many Chechens favor President Putin; with Chechen Separatist Rebels (a.k.a. Mujahideens) continuing their charge towards separation from "Mother Russia." Nonetheless, political elites continue to play a catalytic

³⁹ Paul B. Henze, *Islam in the North Caucasus*, 23.

⁴⁰ Gail W. Lapidus and Renee de Nevers, eds., Nationalism, Ethnic Identity and Conflict Management in Russia Today (Stanford, CA: Center for International Security Arms Control, 1995), 11.

role in the progression or regression of ethnic and religious relations. Ethnic activists and political power seekers can build upon and manipulate the fears and insecurity generated within the masses by various incidents. As elites are necessary to interpret and make cultural identity politically significant; ethnic biases can also be shaped by institutional incentives. The result of such elite manipulation is typically a political polarization of society.

As many ethnic groups tend to use deep roots and blood ties to fuel a strong dedication to family and kinship, Russian elites have used this tool as a way of motivating the masses for destructive action—making it easier for them to believe the elite-driven propaganda machines behind the conflict.⁴¹ Such is the legacy of nationalism in modern Russian history and the use of nationalism in post communism generally in Europe as a means of political mobilization. An example of this method was evidenced in how Russian forces, uncertain of their true military purpose or goal, stormed Chechen communities during the recent conflicts in combat that resembled the fighting in Stalingrad in 1942.

This situation can be viewed as evidence to support explanations of how individuals can develop a deep psychological need to belong to a political, social and ethnic group in the face of the us/them dynamic of modern nationalism. This phenomenon provides the rationale and answer to the question: Why do followers follow the leaders of such identity, ethnic or nationalist groups? Such

⁴¹ Clifford Geertz. "The Integrative Revolution." In Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa, edited by Clifford Geertz, New York: The Free Press, 1963, 109.

reasoning brings to light a further understanding of why the Russian "military masses" were so easily coerced into generating massive levels of ethnic violence. The emotional power of ethnic attachments tends to drive—and continues to drive the course of the Russian-Chechen ethnic and religious conflicts.

1. International and Domestic Post-Soviet Perspectives

As politically elite leaders continue to be motivated by social, economic, and/or political gains, the future of the entire Russian nation begs contemplation. A study conducted by the USIA Office of Research and Media Reaction, in 1995, presented 100 Russian teenagers with questions about their future and that of the ethnic conflict between ethnic Russians and Chechens. The results showed that many of the teenagers were doubtful about both their future, and that of their nation. Bleak responses revealed that many of the youth "sympathized" with their parents. As a result, they understood the communist-induced despair and oppression of their parents' backgrounds; but lacked any true sense of self identity.⁴²

In his book, *Russia in Search of Itself*, James Billington states:

[Teens] accept uncertainty, float in and out of politics, and are less concerned with their ultimate destination....⁴³

⁴² Richard Dobson and Anatole Shub. *Russia's Future: Perspectives of Young Russians, 1994-1995*. Office of Research and Media Reaction U.S. Information Agency, March 1995, 5.

⁴³ James H. Billington, *Russia in Search of Itself* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press), 139.

This statement coincides with the visions of the Russian youth of 1995. The same panel of teenagers described their lack of confidence in both the presiding president and the Russian government, as a whole.⁴⁴ Concluding thoughts revealed that the youth of 1995's Russia felt that the ethnic conflict between Russia and Chechnya would continue on for years to come.⁴⁵

With Russian President, Vladimir Putin, the Russian government denies the "human catastrophe" that is internationally perceived as the "Russian-Chechen" conflict. Infact, they have gone as far as to "reject foreign interference in Chechnya".⁴⁶ And while Putin's shift to nationalism has spawned domestic and international concerns (i.e., over the power of a "revived and revitalized" Russian superpower), Russian expert-Michael McFaul-has recently observed that:

Putin has rebuilt autocracy at home by undermining the power of regional leaders, independent media, both houses of parliament, independent political parties and civil society. [His] regime also has made it increasingly difficult for U.S. business and nongovernmental organizations to operate in Russia. As Russia's retreat from democratic values increasingly becomes a source of tension between it and the West, Moscow, in turn, sees less value in trying to cooperate with NATO, the European Union and the U.S.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Richard Dobson and Anatole Shub. *Russia's Future*, 25.

⁴⁵ Richard Dobson and Anatole Shub. *Russia's Future*, 23.

⁴⁶ CRS Report RL33407, *Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests*, by Stuart D. Goldman, May 31, 2007, 8.

⁴⁷ "New Russia, new threat," *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 2007. <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/sunday/commentary/la-op-mcfaul2sep02,0,1062795.story?coll=la-sunday-commentary> accessed 28 November 2007, 2.

Thus, Putin appears to be intensely focused on building upon the strengths of his Post-Soviet "superpower" nation. As a result, the previous U.S.-Russian ties of 9/11 have diminished in the midst of "Putin's increasingly sharp criticism of the United States in 2007".⁴⁸

C. FROM CONFLICT TO SOLUTION: PEACE AGREEMENTS IN THE WAKE OF THE COLLAPSED USSR

1. Peace Agreements

Previous attempts to solve the Russo-Chechen conflict have not been very successful. Past problems with achieving "credible commitments" from leaders of both Russia and the Chechen Republic have left everyone unwilling to compromise. Even as numerous cease fire agreements have been attempted, violence continues to split peace agreements; while the legal status of secessionist-Chechnya remains elusive.⁴⁹ Furthermore, in 1992, Chechnya refused to sign the Federation Treaty that would regulate relationships among Russia's republics and the central government.⁵⁰

Another obstacle to generating true Russian national identity on a peaceful basis—and peace for all ethnic groups within Russia—may be in the manner in which Russian history is understood in blood and soil as well as integral

⁴⁸ CRS Report RL33407, *Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests*, by Stuart D. Goldman, May 31st, 2007, 16.

⁴⁹ Edward W. Walker, *No Peace, No War in the Caucasus: Secessionist Conflicts in Chechnya, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government, 1998, 2.

⁵⁰ Stephen J. Blank and Earl H. Tilford, Jr., Russia's Invasion of Chechnya, 3.

nationalist/romantic terms. To be sure, the Russians are heirs to Herder's ideal of cultural nationalism, which in the 20th century took a turn towards genocide. This fact may have contributed to the way ethnic Russians and Chechens think about themselves and each other still in the integral nationalist terms of the blood and soil thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, by generating peace agreements with the detailed intentions of improving social and economic situations for all members of society, a unified sense of nationalism can be made possible in which the Chechen nationality exists peacefully within the Russian nation state as a whole.

However, as the natural progression of ethnic conflict and ethnic violence between Russia and Chechnya continues, the possibility of achieving a legitimate and lasting peace should not be forgotten. While societal structures often influence which identities come to dominate social cleavages and political identities, the Chechens have already adopted a Constitution, "... entirely free of ethnic or religious particularism."⁵¹ The 2007 Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report states:

In March 2003, Russian authorities conducted a referendum in Chechnya on a new Chechen constitution that gives the region limited autonomy within the Russian Federation.⁵²

Nonetheless, true Russian national unity on an integral ethnic basis will never be achieved until there is a forum for peaceful communicating of ideas about identity and

⁵¹ Paul B. Henze, *Islam in the North Caucasus*, 34.

⁵² CRS Report RL33407, *Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests*, by Stuart D. Goldman, May 31, 2007, 7.

ethnicity in which citizenship loses its blood and soil taint of violence. Strong civic ties are *necessary* in order to unite communities; while eliminating ethnically biased myths and prejudices that all too often degenerate into ethnic violence. Hence, an "imagined" Russian nation can be the starting point for generating a truly cohesive Russian nation. Leadership (and society as a whole) must take a page from the experience of central and Western Europe where former ethnic conflicts have been peacefully resolved without the extremes as seen in the first half of the 20th century and more recently in ex-Yugoslavia.

D. ETHNIC CONFLICT AND THE FUTURE OF THE POST-SOVIET REGION

1. An Immediate Solution: Ethnic Federalism

Research has suggested that the plausibility of a partition or ethnic federalism to achieve a higher level of ethnic peace is within reason—as an answer of policy. Thus, suggestions in regards to mechanisms of conflict regulation, territorial solutions, and federalism have been provided by scholars and makers of policy. However, each suggestion is specifically focused on the mechanisms of conflict regulation; nonetheless, there are two elements of concern. Territorial solutions (e.g., partitioning and federalism) look to separate ethnic groups. Institutional solutions—constitutional structural options such as electoral institutional devices and policy devices—tend to focus on the issue of ethnic identities and potential ethnic conflict.

Territorial solutions assume that groups are geographically concentrated. Partitioning assumes that

ethnic groups will always have incompatible claims and will never get along. This "incompatibility" can be seen within the Russian-Chechen conflict between Chechen Separatists and Russian forces. As a result, the incompatibilities continue to manifest themselves (e.g., guerrilla conflict, race riots, harassment, etc.) And in order to avoid conflict and violence, each ethnic group needs their own state or a territorially distinct and separate manner of existence (i.e., Post-Soviet ethno federalism).

Thus, after considering the method of partitioning, federalism appears to be the most plausible suggestion for achieving a *durable peace* within the Russian Federation. However, in order for the Post-Soviet method of ethno federalism to be "successful", there must be significant decentralization of power. Hence, federated states—seeking a unified nation—must reduce the importance of controlling power at the center by multiplying the entrance points into the governing system. The end result is the promotion of a balance of power between the center and the regions.

Federalism also provides for multiple tiers of power and access to political opportunities. By constructing these tiers in the proper manner, it is possible to reinforce ethnic identities or to cross-cut and ideally de-emphasize ethnic bonds. This method is the *ideal* way of constructively maintaining a multi-ethnic (and multi-religious) Russian Federation.

2. A Durable Peace

The previous suggestions are methods that may guarantee a more lasting and *immediate peace* between ethnic Russians and Chechens. As the current situation continues its

course, violence persists as Chechen rebel leaders wage war against Russian military forces and "anyone who wages war against Islam and Muslims".⁵³ As a result, the possibility of spill-over into other countries has become a major concern.⁵⁴ And as

... Russia remains a nuclear superpower ... [it] will play a major role in determining the national security environment in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia ... Such issues as the war on terrorism, the future of NATO, and the U.S. role in the world will all be affected by developments in Russia.⁵⁵

However, in order to avoid further bloodshed and despair, immediate action must be taken by the leadership within the Russian government and the Chechen Republic. As social and political identities are shaped by the political, social and economic motivations of the elite; the continuing influence of various fears, ancient hatreds and social resentment may result in rage. Thus, destruction can only be avoided by taking immediate action towards peaceful conflict resolution. Both sides must be willing to consider territorial solutions, institutional solutions, or policy choices. While partitioning will encourage peaceful co-existence, care must be taken in that a *haphazard* use of federalism can be constructed in such a manner so as to *reinforce* ethnic identities and *encourage* further conflict.

⁵³"The official version of Amir Dokka's statement of declaration of the Caucasian Emirate," *Kavkaz-Center News Agency*, November 22, 2007, <http://kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2007/11/22/9107.shtml> accessed 4 December 2007.

⁵⁴ "Q & A: The Chechen Conflict," *BBC News*, July 10, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe> accessed 13 December 2006.

⁵⁵ CRS Report RL33407, *Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests*, by Stuart D. Goldman, May 31st, 2007, 3.

Again, it must never be forgotten that the elite play a catalytic role in the progression or regression of ethnic (and religious) relations; such actors are the "architects" of a peaceful Post-Soviet-multi-ethnic-co-existence.

III. RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AND THE EURASIA MOVEMENT

In Russia—and many of its surrounding republics—the significance of religious identity has begun to overshadow previous social issues such as: ethnic identity; the Russian search for nationalism on a secular basis; and self-determination on behalf of the Russian republics. As separatist and radical movements have begun to energize Islamic fundamentalists throughout the Russian federation, Islamic fundamentalism has become a growing concern to makers of policy and citizens of Russia. As supporters for this system of *radicalized religion* seek to reign over a growing insurgency in the northern Caucasus region, a sense of growing destabilization is felt throughout the Russian federation.⁵⁶

As previously stated, the issues of religious and ethnic conflicts throughout the Post-Soviet regions are of considerable importance to the study of ethnic and religious conflicts throughout the world both because this theme has merit in itself and because of Russia's impact on the international system of Eurasia. The impact of such domestic conflicts can have long-lasting effects upon both domestic and foreign interaction, intervention, and policy (e.g., GWOT). In addition to such possibilities, the growing impact of Islamic Fundamentalism within the Northern Caucasus region is of even greater concern to Russian

⁵⁶ "North Caucasus: Analyst Warns of Rising Radical Islam," *Radio Free Europe*, May 5, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/05/3A1DAC8B-4D1D-488A-BBE0-36749AFA816A.html> accessed 14 March 2007, 1.

leadership due to the increased spreading of this radical form of religion (i.e., spill-over-effects).

Far from the Caucasus, on the western borders of the Russian Federation, social tensions have given rise to ethnic conflict in the Karelian town of Kondopoga; such *group distinctiveness* can also be attributed to *religious affiliation* (i.e., Islamic Fundamentalism). And so, in the case of the Russian Federation, the "beliefs and desires" of its peoples, that is, of *nationalities* within the Russian whole, continue to be cause for major concern. Islamic Fundamentalism has taken the "socially constructed identities" of individuals within the North Caucasus region to extremely dangerous levels of organized violence.

This has resulted in the "imagined communities" of Islamic Fundamentalists (i.e., Chechen Separatists) giving rise to religious conflicts within the Russian Federation. Such "contemporary Post-Soviet ethno-religious groups" appear to be using religion to fill the niche of "social justice"; moreover, they are reverting back to a more "primitive" method of social interaction—with less tolerance and acceptance of ethnic and religious differences. The end result continues to be ethnic and religious conflicts.⁵⁷

This chapter seeks to bridge the gap in regards to ethno-religious conflict theory. It will discuss topics such as: Islamic Fundamentalism in Russia; Muslim Revival in the North Caucasus region (i.e., "The Chechen Element"); the

⁵⁷ As Radical Islamists wage jihad against Russia and the West; the allure of this radical religion is drawing in "disillusioned young people" throughout the North Caucasus region. Information taken from: "The Battle for the Soul of Chechnya," *Guardian News and Media Limited*, November 22, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,331329941103495,00.html> accessed 4 December 2007.

reawakening of Russian nationalism as a by-product of the Muslim Revival; Domestic and International concerns about radical Islam; the role/influence of the Russian state in regards to religious and/or ethnic conflict; and the future of Islamic Fundamentalism in the Post-Soviet regions (i.e., Chechnya).

A. ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN RUSSIA

As the word "fundamentalism" implies "the basics", the religion of Islam is intended to be a way of life. The ultimate sacrifice is to rid oneself of sin and reach Heaven. Even though its Five Pillars promote: faith/acceptance, prayer five times a day, fasting, charity, and embarking upon the sacred Hajj/Pilgrimage; the present day international assumptions about this "radical religion" are causing many individuals (and countries) to categorize it as a form of "global terrorism". Thus, its revival within regions such as Chechnya is opening the eyes of the international world (i.e., the U.S.) to the situations present there.

As a result of the growing concerns surrounding *radical religion*, the expression of *religious identity* within the Post-Soviet region is becoming more of a threat than the preservation of *ethnic identity*. Promoted as a cause for "social justice", Islamic Fundamentalism is developing into a domestic and international threat to both peace and security.⁵⁸ In the case of Russia and its surrounding republics: What are the limits regarding the

⁵⁸"The Battle for the Soul of Chechnya," *Guardian News and Media Limited*, November 22, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,331329941103495,00.html>. Accessed 4 December 2007.

influence/effects of Islamic Fundamentalism in the Northern Caucasus region? As fear of this "radical religion" spreads, it is a major concern for the Russian state and society. And as drastic acts (and measures) are being pursued-by both sides of this Post-Soviet conflict-an outsider must surely hope that such conflict will be curtailed for the sake of religious and social tolerance in Russia and beyond.

To be sure, the 21st century appears to be marked by political violence associated with religious awakenings of various stripes. When one analyzes *ethnic conflicts* of today, it is also imperative that one analyze the *religious aspects* of such conflicts. Such an analysis will allow readers to look at how religious elements/perspectives may contribute to the continued ethnic division throughout the Russian Federation. Thus, by examining the limits and effects of Islamic Fundamentalism in the Post-Soviet regions, a greater global understanding and awareness of this *religious revival* can be achieved (and thus utilized) by makers of policy.

The religion of Islam is perceived to have "two faces"- "tolerance and extremism".⁵⁹ It is,

... probably best explained [as a religion] seeking to address secular social problems through the consistent promulgation of an ideal social justice not attainable outside the context of an Islamic state. [However,] ...the true Islamic state derives its strength from the unity of religious and secular power, something that Muslim liberals actively object to.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Stephen Schwartz. *The Two Faces of Islam: Saudi Fundamentalism and Its Role in Terrorism*. New York: Doubleday. 2003, 32.

⁶⁰ Trenin, 71.

Thus, as they are found to exist in the Muslim countries of North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, "... the goal of Islamic Fundamentalists is to create national governments based on the principles and values of Islam."⁶¹ An additional goal is to restore social justice based on Islamic law. And the different trends of Islam differ in the form of government they seek and in how strictly they believe the government should interpret the law.⁶² Nonetheless, Islamic Fundamentalism, in the North Caucasus is—in a regional context—inclusive of, "... ethno-cultural and religious relationships in the Caucasus and the development of Islam in the Russian Federation."⁶³

However, as Post-Soviet Islamic Fundamentalism is perceived as a battle between Russia and Chechnya, research has shown that there are more (Post-Soviet) countries of interest than originally considered.⁶⁴ In addition, notions that the influence/effects of Islamic fundamentalism in the Northern Caucasus region may lead to an "ethno-religious" situation continue to promote the ethnic federalism that exists today between Russia and the Russian Republics. As an ethnically and religiously diverse country, the Russian Federation continues to seek a cohesively unified national identity while the rest of the world awaits a durable political, social, economic and cultural basis for Russian political culture in the 21st century, while asking: What

⁶¹ "Islamic Fundamentalism", Encarta article, 1.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "Islam in the North Caucasus." Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions 115, 93-110, July-September 2001, 1.

are the permanent–international and domestic–consequences of the ongoing religious *and* ethnic conflicts with (and within) Russia?

B. THE CHECHEN ELEMENT

1. The North Caucasus Region

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was established on January 1, 1992.⁶⁵ The breakdown of the Russian Federation is as follows:

89–federative units; 21–constituent republics; 6–territories; 49–regions; and 2–cities of federal importance (Moscow and St. Petersburg).⁶⁶

The battle over self-determination and territorial integrity has been an ongoing issue for members of the Russian Republics (i.e., the North Caucasus). Furthermore, the “collapse” of the Soviet Union has resulted in an “unstable” Russian Federation in which the surrounding republics attempt to remain autonomous–demanding sovereignty and political acknowledgement from Russia.⁶⁷

A considerable amount of global attention has been placed upon the North Caucasus region. Incorporated into the Russian Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries, this area was “perceived as both marginal and dangerous.”⁶⁸ Over time, conflicts such as the Chechen Wars have revived cultural and political interests towards the region.

⁶⁵Graeme Herd. 1998. “Russia In Crisis: The Disintegration of the Federation?” Conflict Studies Research Centre, 18.

⁶⁶ Herd, “Russia In Crisis”, 19.

⁶⁷ Herd, 18.

⁶⁸ Helen Krag and Lars Funch. 1994. “The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads.” UK: Minority Rights Group International, 27.

As the North Caucasus region borders the independent states of Georgia and Azerbaijan, it is an important trading route—strategically positioned for oil pipelines. Secondly, as the “literal and symbolic” border between Europe and Asia, it is also the border between two of the region’s major religions, Christianity and Islam.⁶⁹ This is why the *revival* of Islam (i.e., in radical form) has been a major cause for concern throughout the Russian Federation.

Home to at least 40 distinct ethnic groups, religion is an integral part of the various cultures found throughout the Russian Federation.⁷⁰ Reports have shown that some of the groups are related either by “religion, language, or way of life.”⁷¹ Thus, the *social constructs* of *ethnicity* and *religious affiliation* are used to form “networks” among the inhabitants of the Russian Federation (i.e., the North Caucasus region). Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are the three major forms of religion found throughout the Northern Caucasus region.⁷² Historically, while the Islamic religion has played a unifying role during the long war of Independence against Russian colonization in the 18th and 19th centuries; it was also a medium for ethnic networking during deportations to central Asia.⁷³ (NOTE: Much to the contrary, it has been reported that “religion does not form the basis for hostility between groups.” Nonetheless, they

⁶⁹ Krag, “The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads.”, 5.

⁷⁰ Krag, 5.

⁷¹ Krag, 17.

⁷² Krag, 18.

⁷³ Krag, 18.

are continuously labeled as "Christian-Muslim conflicts"—according to Western reporters.)⁷⁴

The North Caucasus regions are known as Russia's "Muslim republics." They are as follows: Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkharia, Karachai-Cherkessia, Adygea, and North Ossetia (about 20% of the population). The "historical center of Islam in the North Caucasus is Dagestan."⁷⁵ These seven republics join the "Volga republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as part of the,

21 "national" members of the [Russian] federation—all republics with their own constitutions and national autonomy; and [the above mentioned Post-Soviet states] belong historically and culturally to the "Islamic world".... There are also Muslim communities in western Russia, including Moscow, the Volga-Urals region and Siberia.⁷⁶

According to Islamic Specialist, Dr. Mikhail Roshchin, "Islam is the biggest religion in [the] North Caucasus."⁷⁷ In addition, there appears to be a common link between the revival of Islamic Fundamentalism and a surge in ethnic and national awareness within the region. Moscow Institute's

⁷⁴ Krag, 18.

⁷⁵ "The Future of the North Caucasus: Islamic Movements in the North Caucasus," 2.

⁷⁶ "Islam in the North Caucasus", 1.

⁷⁷ "The Future of the North Caucasus: Islamic Movements in the North Caucasus," 2006. The Jamestown Foundation: Federal News Service Washington, DC., 2.

Sergei Markedonov states that, "... ethnic nationalism in Russia's North Caucasus region is beginning to give way to a new ideology—radical Islam."⁷⁸

2 Islam in the Chechen Republic

"The Islamisation of the mountain peoples took place over a period stretching from the 8th to the 19th centuries."⁷⁹ It is the *Islamic Fundamentalism*, within Chechnya, that encourages the use of the "Islamic Factor."⁸⁰ Hence, Chechnya has become an, "... exporter of radical Islam to Muslim regions of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent states."⁸¹ And as Islam has become an,

... extremely secularized religion in which the religious motivations have stimulated and guided political ambitions of radicals... the political and ideological trends [of radical Islam] help Chechnya to stand out from other crises in the Muslim world."⁸²

Thus, separatists have declared jihad on Russia and the West—"proclaiming Chechnya, under the name Ichkeria, an Islamic republic, complete with Shariah law."⁸³

There are numerous internal social and economic factors contributing to the spread of Islamic Fundamentalism

⁷⁸ "North Caucasus: Analyst Warns of Rising Radical Islam," *Radio Free Europe*, May 5, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/05/3A1DAC8B-4D1D-488A-BBE0-36749AFA816A.html> accessed 14 March 2007, 1.

⁷⁹ "North Caucasus: Analyst Warns of Rising Radical Islam," *Radio Free Europe*, May 5, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/05/3A1DAC8B-4D1D-488A-BBE0-36749AFA816A.html> accessed 14 March 2007, 1.

⁸⁰ Trenin, 71.

⁸¹ Trenin, 72.

⁸² Trenin, 71-72.

⁸³ Trenin, 72.

throughout the Russian Federation. To an extent, this has resulted in a loss of loyalty to the Russian Federation and moral degradation within the Russian society.⁸⁴ Even so,

... the transformation of the Chechen ethnic nationalism into a religious movement catalyzed the rise of nationalist and religious sentiments among other Muslim people of the North Caucasus... especially... among the young people. 85

Such radical movements (associated with Islam) are connected to the earlier pan-Caucasian Movement as the political characteristics of Islam—in this region of the world—have taken on the essence of past historic actions in protest of Russian imperialism and Soviet Communism. This has led to present-day social protests that have assumed a religious form—calling for social justice and the establishment of fair government.

C. ISLAMIC TRENDS

Islam reached the Caucasus region in the middle of the seventh century as part of the Arab conquest of the Iranian Sassanid Empire, many centuries before Russian expansion into this region.⁸⁶

The cultural mindset—in regards to religious identity—is represented by a broad spectrum within Russia.⁸⁷ There exists many “faces of Islam”. Such *faces* (i.e., trends) consist of the “traditional and reformist Sufi and orthodox folkloric and academic variations.” In addition, other

⁸⁴ Trenin, 80.

⁸⁵ Trenin, 80.

⁸⁶ Shireen Hunter. 2004. Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security. Armonk:M.E. Sharpe, 3.

⁸⁷ “Islam in the North Caucasus,” 1.

elements along the spectrum of "Muslim" people in the Russian Federation are: Volga Tatars—very strong connections with Russia and the Russians; and ethnic groups in Dagestan—living in traditionalistic local cultures.⁸⁸

Shireen T. Hunter observes that Hanafi has, "[historically been] the dominant branch of Islam" throughout the Muslim Republics. Although, there is one exception—Dagestan, dominated by Shafei tradition. It is within the North Caucasus—especially Dagestan, where mystical traditions of Islam (Sufism) have been the most influential. Thus, the influence of Islamic trends have been felt within the Muslim regions of the Russian Federation over the past 20 years—accelerated due to the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁸⁹

Nontraditional or Radical Islam can be found in the traditions of Salafiyya, Wahhabism. "Wahhabism is an orthodox branch of Sunni Islam, or jihadism."⁹⁰ It is considered to be a, "... local Caucasian promoting fundamentalist movement, which defies Sufi tradition."⁹¹ In this radical version of Islam, social and political goals are to be achieved by violent means or through the waging of holy war. However, the universal appeal of radical Islam within the Russian Federation can be attributed to institutional weakness, social and economic factors, as well as cultural and political causes.⁹²

⁸⁸ "Islam in the North Caucasus," 1.

⁸⁹ Shireen Hunter. 2004. Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security. 79.

⁹⁰ Herd, 21.

⁹¹ "The Future of the North Caucasus: Islamic Movements in the North Caucasus," 3.

⁹² Hunter, 85.

1. The Many Forms of Nationalism in the Wake of the Collapsed USSR: A Revival of Ethnic and National Awareness

Reasons behind the reemergence of Muslim communities vary by country and region.⁹³ Nonetheless, the general factors are quite similar. Economic, political, and social issues top the list of factors contributing to the Islamic conversion of the inhabitants of the Post-Soviet regions. Examples of political factors include: the growing corruption and mismanagement of Russian leadership—yielding a high degree of mistrust between Russia and its surrounding republics.

Other “common threads” include:

... widespread feelings of failure and loss of self esteem in many Muslim societies, combined with overcrowded cities with insufficient social support systems, high unemployment rates, and a growing gap between rich and poor.⁹⁴

Such circumstances have fueled further discontent among minority groups throughout the Russian Federation (i.e., the North Caucasus region)—resulting in a *call for social change*. It is this *call*, which appears to have become the *seed* of radical Islam—Islamic Fundamentalism—in the Post-Soviet era.

As such, several approaches have been taken, in regards to explaining the ethno-religious conflicts of the Post-Soviet regions.

⁹³ “Islamic Fundamentalism”. Encarta Encyclopedia article. http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_701505583/Fundamentalism_Islamic.html accessed 5 March 2007, 1.

⁹⁴ John L Esposito. 2002. Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 83.

1-Islam is not the root cause of the conflict, it is a main factor in its continuation and its main ideological tenant. [Thus, a "clash of civilizations" is deemed more appropriate vice a "clash of religious opponents.] 2-Islam is a cover for very secular pragmatic objectives in the economic and political sphere and that the religious renaissance is merely a convenient tool for attaining separatist ends.⁹⁵

However, both the first and second approaches equate Islam with militant fundamentalism and imply Islam's hostility to Russia. Additional approaches are as follows:

3-As a religion, Islam should not be involved in political squabbles and can be useful only as a peace-keeping force in conflict situations. Lastly, 4-The Islamic factor must play a positive role in the creation of a new Russia.⁹⁶

Although the last approach is ambitious, the "... roots of Islamic radicalism are [not] likely to be eradicated."⁹⁷

As the revival of Radical Islam has led the way to a new "social niche", Kappler points out "three important areas" regarding the consequences of Islamic revival.

By mid-1978 Moscow leaders were confronted by a completely new Islamic situation... First, [a growing self-confidence and] ... the espousal of 'socialist-Islamic' principles... to detach socialism from its materialistic nineteenth-century origins and to attribute it to much older ones—to Islam itself... [making Islam]... [free] of the "taint" with which it was imbued by religious criticism and atheist propaganda. Secondly, [an] increasing sense among Muslim... people that their

⁹⁵ Dmitri V. Trenin, Aleksei V. Malashenko, and Anatol Lieven. Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2004, 73.

⁹⁶ Trenin, 73.

⁹⁷ Trenin, 76.

culture is distinct from Russian/European culture. [And the] ...third area concerns the growing political self-assurance of the Islamic... people... that their unique history is not confined to the past... but continues through the present.⁹⁸

2. The Role of the Russian State

The weakness of the Russian state has a significant influence on religious and ethnic violence. As the state is expected to provide security, this good has not been felt within the Chechen community (i.e., during the "Chechen Conflicts" of the mid-1990's). In addition, information failures combined with problems of credible commitments (from "Mother Russia") resulted in serious security dilemmas for members of the Chechen minority group. Nonetheless, in the midst of being assaulted in the Republic of Chechnya by their fellow Russian countrymen, the Chechens managed to fight back and appear to have made their place among the aggrieved and armed ethnic groups of the 21st century.

As a result, the Muslim Revival has become an opportunity to revive the ethnic and national awareness within the Russian Federation (i.e., the North Caucasus region). Incidentally,

... [[liberalization under Gorbachev, after the mid 1980's altered [the] religious contexts [of the Islamic revival]].⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Andreas Kappeler, Gerhard Simon, Georg Brunner, and Edward Allworth, eds. Muslim Communities Reemerge: Historical Perspectives on Nationality, Politics, and Opposition in the Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Durham: Duke University Press, 171-173.

⁹⁹ Valery Tishkov. 2004. Chechnya: Life In a War-Torn Society. Berkeley: University Of California Press, 168.

As part of the growing ethnic and national awareness featured in his reforms, the North Caucasus was allowed to reassert their ethnic and national identity. In the end, Gorbachev's Reforms contributed to the following:

1-The removal of restrictions on the expression of religious feelings and engaging in religious activities. 2-The removal of barriers to increased contacts between Soviet Muslims and the rest of the Islamic world. [And] 3-The increased flow of funds and Islamic missionaries.¹⁰⁰

D. POST-SOVIET FEARS OF RADICAL ISLAM

There is a sense of growing destabilization within the Russian Federation (and the international community) due to the emergence of Radical Islam. Terrorist activities within the Russian Federation are ongoing examples of the growing destabilization. Such activities within Dagestan have made it the leader in terrorist activities—surpassing Chechnya in 2005.¹⁰¹ With the death of Islamic Fundamentalist Shamil' Basayev in July of 2006, the question arose: "Will the radical extremists be able to continue their campaign of terror and violence without [him]?"¹⁰² The answer is found in the fact that radical Islam is considered to be a "multi-layered [and regenerative] organization which has been constructed and developed over 10 years of war".¹⁰³ It is an element of society that is expected to continue on, even after the death of its infamous leaders.

¹⁰⁰ Hunter, 39.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² C.W. Blandy. December 2006. *Chechnya: Continued Violence*. Conflict Studies Research Centre: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 1.

¹⁰³ Blandy *Chechnya: Continued Violence*. 7.

Another example of the destabilizing effects of this "radical religion" is the emergence of *radicalized women*.¹⁰⁴ As the Chechen wars have "profoundly changed the role of women in Chechnya... [they] comprise a shocking majority (68%) of Chechen suicide bombers."¹⁰⁵ As the attacks are "directly proportional to cycles of violence against civilians in Chechnya", female suicide bombers have taken on new roles in the evolution of Russian cleansing operations."¹⁰⁶ These "strategic tactics" primarily "target military installations and government compounds."¹⁰⁷

The "deadly debut" of Chechen female suicide bombers was initiated by Khava Barayeva. In 2000, she became the first female suicide bomber—killing 27 Russian Special Forces in Chechnya. As some seek "virgin purity" in the afterlife, the motivations of many female suicide bombers include: financial gains for their family and/or revenge for the death of a loved one.¹⁰⁸

In July of 2003 three "Black Widows" (linked to Chechen rebels) were involved in two separate incidents in Moscow—killing 15 people. In October of 2006, a siege took place

¹⁰⁴ "Russia: Nord-Ost Anniversary Recalls Ascent of Female Suicide Bomber," *Radio Free Europe*, October 27, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/acdd90e6-ac42-43ea-8a51-0bafc6a215fb.html> accessed 14 March 2007,1.

¹⁰⁵ John Reuter. 2004. "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?" *The American Committee for Peace In Chechnya*, 2; 5.

¹⁰⁶ Reuter, "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?", 4.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ "Russia: Nord-Ost Anniversary Recalls Ascent of Female Suicide Bomber,"1; 2.

at the Nord-Ost Dubrovka Theater in Moscow. In this case, 19 women were hostage takers—killing 129 civilians; 41 militants were killed.¹⁰⁹

E. THE FUTURE OF THE MUSLIM REVIVAL IN RUSSIA

In 2006, Russia's Muslim population had increased by 40 percent to about 25 million self-identified Muslims. Russian expert, Paul Goble also reported between 2.5 and 3 million Muslims living in Moscow. Most of these residents migrated from the North Caucasus region. This resulted in giving Moscow the largest Muslim population of any European city.¹¹⁰

Data also shows that the number of mosques in Russia has grown from 300 in 1991 to more than 8,000 today. Paul Goble has also predicted a "Muslim majority... within our lifetime", within Russia. However, "... [Islamic] changes have been accompanied by a "rising tide" of anti-Muslim prejudice."¹¹¹ Public-opinion surveys reveal that up to "70% of ethnic Russians" express sympathy with xenophobic slogans. Nonetheless, Goble has predicted that "... the rise of this majority will have a profound effect on the country's foreign policy."¹¹²

Consequentially, Islamic Fundamentalism continues to be a major presence and political force in the Post-Soviet Era.

¹⁰⁹ "Russia: Nord-Ost Anniversary Recalls Ascent of Female Suicide Bomber," 1.

¹¹⁰ "Russia Challenged By Coming Majority, Experts say." Radio Free Europe, March 6, 2006. <http://www.rferl.org/releases/2006/03/389-060306.asp> accessed 5 March 2007, 1.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² "Russia Challenged By Coming Majority, Experts say." Radio Free Europe, March 6, 2006. <http://www.rferl.org/releases/2006/03/389-060306.asp> accessed 5 March 2007, 1.

There appears to be a common link between the revival of Islamic Fundamentalism and a surge in ethnic and national awareness within the North Caucasus region. It also appears to be—the limits for Islamic Fundamentalists (heeding the cause for social justice and fair government reform) are endless. As a result, separatist and radical movements have energized Islamic Fundamentalists throughout the Russian Federation (i.e., the North Caucasus region). Hence, because radical Muslims are operating in a post communist society—the significance of religious identity in the Post-Soviet Era is increasing.

Domestically and internationally, the religious aspects of ethnic conflicts between ethnic Russians and members of the surrounding Russian Republics are of considerable importance. Because the collapse of communism has left opportunities for demanding social justice, Islamic Fundamentalism has become a part of the current ethno-religious situation which continues to promote ethnic federalism between Russia and its surrounding constituent republics. Furthermore, as this situation has continued to evolve, Islamic Fundamentalism has come to overshadow previous social issues such as: ethnic identity; the Russian search for nationalism; and self-determination on behalf of the Russian Republics. And due to the growing insurgency found within the Northern Caucasus region, there is now a growing sense of destabilization being felt throughout the Russian Federation.

As Stefan Wolff writes: "... conflicts are rooted in the perception of threats and the policies formulated to counter

them..."¹¹³ Thus, in order to deal with ethnic and religious conflict in the long term, the Russian and Chechen governments must either reduce ethnicity's (and religion's) salience or acknowledge that ethnicity is an enduring feature within society. Once that decision is made, a set of approaches for achieving durable peace opens up. Through the use of socio-psychological methods, both communities can promote the proper confidence building measures that will encourage a more peaceful coexistence. On the other hand, another focus could be allowing for the institutional structural perspectives to shape individual and group behavior while regulating relations between communities. The immediate goal is to manage conflict. The ultimate goal is to settle it.

¹¹³ Stefan Wolff. "Managing and Settling Ethnic Conflicts." In Managing and Settling Ethnic Conflicts: Perspectives on Successes and Failures in Europe, Africa and Asia , ed. Ulrich Schneckener and Stefan Wolff (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 8.

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IV. CONCLUSIONS

The ethnic Russian search for a cohesive national identity continues to adversely affect its relations with neighboring countries (i.e., members of its former Russian Republics). As historical hatreds continue to fuel the ethnic and religious conflicts between Mother Russia and the North Caucasus region of Chechnya, religious identity in its violent 21st century guise is becoming more of a threat than the preservation of ethnic identity. More specific to the Russian-Chechen conflict is the fact that even as Russian Federal forces (in 2006) were able to stem major military resistance in Chechnya, "... managing to kill many of the remaining top Chechen rebel military and political leaders—the violence continues."¹¹⁴

As the spread of Islamic Fundamentalism makes its way across the Post-Soviet Regions, international concerns are growing among Russia's neighbors, certain of whom have already integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures and among those that aspire still to do so. Even though it is intended to be a doctrine of peace, many individuals (and countries) have chosen to categorize Islamic Fundamentalism as a form of global terrorism. Thus, while only the Western media may point out the religious *and* ethnic elements of the domestic conflicts within Russia, the conflicts will continue to be a manifestation of the motivations of the political and local elites within the Russian and Chechen

¹¹⁴ CRS Report RL33407, *Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests*, by Stuart D. Goldman, May 31st, 2007, summary.

society. As a result, the ethnic and non-ethnic Russian perspectives on Russian ethnic identity, Russian nationalism, and radical religious movements (i.e., Islamic Fundamentalism) will continue to have a dark cloud over them.

As Post-Soviet ethnic and religious conflicts continue to influence U.S.-Russian relations, expert in Post-Soviet Affairs, Michael McFaul states,

... integration with the West is no longer a goal of Russian foreign policy. [In fact] ... American weakness is driving Russian assertiveness."¹¹⁵

Thus, the perception of Russia as a "superpower" has significant influence upon U.S. policy in Europe and Eurasia.¹¹⁶ As international socialism is linked to international economics, American policy makers must continue to seek a connection with its previous foe of the Cold War; even though Americans may feel its territories harbor breeding grounds for global terrorists. And as conflicts such as the "Chechen Wars" have revived cultural and political interests within the North Caucasus region of Chechnya. As Russia is the only country in the world with more natural resources than the United States, including vast oil and gas reserves; U.S. interests in maintaining its global dominance are connected to its ability to "control" this region of the world—if not only from afar.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ "New Russia, new threat," *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 2007. <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/sunday/commentary/la-op-mcfaul2sep02,0,1062795.story?coll=la-sunday-commentary> accessed 28 November 2007, 3.

¹¹⁶ CRS Report RL33407, *Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests*, by Stuart D. Goldman, May 31st, 2007, summary.

¹¹⁷ CRS Report RL33407, *Russian Political, Economic, and Security Issues and U.S. Interests*, by Stuart D. Goldman, May 31st, 2007, 3.

Furthermore, American leadership will continue in its pursuit of an all inclusive counterterrorism policy to combat global terrorism while also attempting to subdue the growing power of its number one economic (i.e., oil and gas) competitor. By "taking the lead" in combating terrorism (be it driven by cultural or religious fanatics), America will continue to preserve its existence as the more dominant and influential global superpower. As globalization is about destruction and creation, the ultimate goal—for America—is to have other countries (i.e., Russia) fall in line with U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

While Islamic Fundamentalism and recognition of ethnic identity in Post-Soviet regions have awakened a new sense of Russian statecraft and nationalism, religion stands to be (historically) the dominant force of controversy for starting a war. Beliefs, desires and mis-understandings will drive individuals to take drastic measures to ensure the continued existence of the individual, the state, and ultimately the nation. Thus, ethnic *and* religious conflict will continue to be consequences of the "basic human preferences for individual or group survival".

It is the *survival* of the Post-Soviet nation (as a whole) which rests with the "fitness and adaptation" of the cultures at hand (inclusive of their various religions and beliefs). This leaves the "micro-evolutionary questions about timing, escalation and duration of ethnic (and religious) violence" to be answered in accordance with the constructs and confines of the macro and intermediate elements of evolutionary theory. Until the *actors* involved seek to peacefully permeate set barriers, unresolved ethnic conflict *and* religious revival (i.e., Islamic

Fundamentalism) will continue to dominate the domestic affairs of this international superpower; in addition to influencing international policy.

APPENDIX. FIGURES



Figure 1. Russian Map

http://us.il.yimg.com/us.yimg.com/i/travel/dg/maps/e5/750x750_russia_m.gif



Figure 2. North Caucasus Region

<http://www.chechenpress.info/g/displayimage.php?album=4&pos=0>



Figure 3. The Republic of Chechnya

<http://www.chechenpress.info/g/displayimage.php?album=4&pos=0>

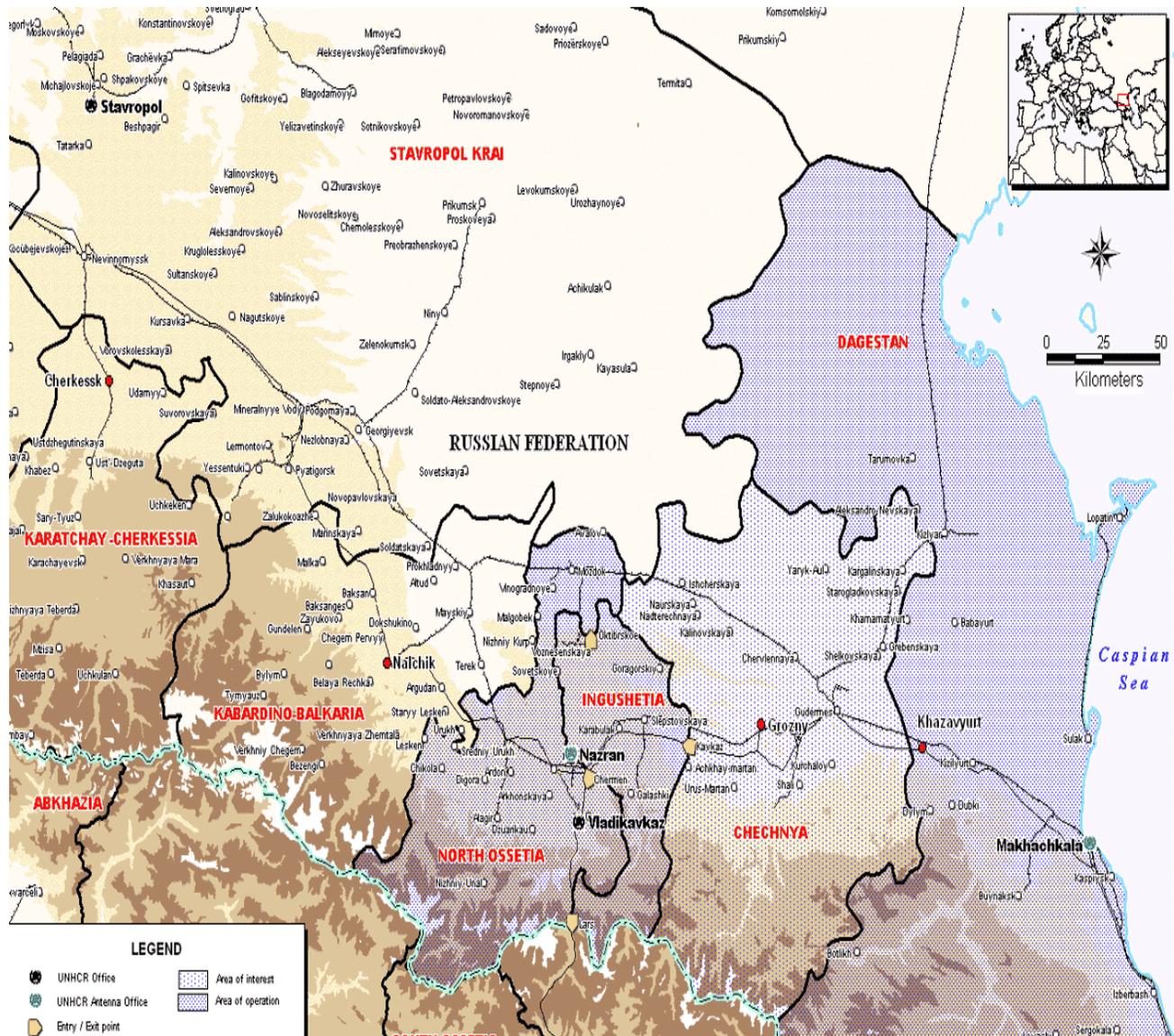


Figure 4. The Russian Federation

<http://www.chechenpress.info/g/displayimage.php?album=4&pos=0>



Figure 5. Russian President, Vladimir Putin

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/12/03/wrussia503.xml>



Figure 6. President of Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/chechnya/Story/0,,2214769,00.html>



Figure 7. Chechen Rebel Leader, Shamil Basayev in September 1999

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/07/290e68ae-54e1-49c3-9fb9-9b4bd72d34a4.html>;



Figure 8. Chechen Rebel Leader, Doku Umarov

<http://kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2007/11/22/9107.shtml>



Figure 9. Al-Mujahideen in Chechnya

<http://imrannazir.tripod.com/islam/jihad/chechnia/chechnya.html>



Figure 10. Chechen Rebel Forces

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20071130/90207757.html>

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