

# **THE REPUBLIC THAT CRIED WOLF: RUSSIAN DISCOURSES ON THE CHECHEN QUESTION IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD (1996-1999)**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis will explore the period between the First and Second Chechen Wars (1996-1999). During this time, Chechnya and Russia were at a standstill, searching for a solution to the question of whether Chechnya would gain independence, and if not, how it would be reintegrated into the Russian Federation. This picture was complicated not only by Russia's structurally complex system of asymmetric federalism, but also by the unique relationship between Moscow and Grozny. This analysis will show that at the outset of the interwar period, a variety of potential resolutions to the question of Chechnya's federal status were available. Nonetheless, Russia opted for a more ad hoc approach, aiming to resolve Chechnya's formal political status via smaller policy initiatives in the social and economic spheres. As these policies failed and conditions in the North Caucasus worsened, however, prospects for resolution decreased. Still, opinions on the Chechen question remained varied even to the end of the interwar period, despite growing pessimism on the matter.

# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHECHNYA: AN INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>RUSSO-CHECHEN ENCOUNTERS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW .....</i>	6
<i>POST-SOVIET CHECHNYA: THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONALISM.....</i>	16
<b>RUSSIAN DISCOURSES ON THE INTERWAR PERIOD.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<i>THE IMMEDIATE POSTWAR DISCOURSE.....</i>	27
<i>TENDING TO KHASAVYURT: JOINT ECONOMIC AND SECURITY INITIATIVES.....</i>	35
<i>THE SPIRAL DOWNWARDS: MOVING TOWARDS WAR.....</i>	40
<i>NEWFOUND PESSIMISM .....</i>	46
<i>A WIDE SPECTRUM OF DISILLUSIONMENT .....</i>	53
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>61</b>

*I was talking with Dzhokhar Dudayev. I said to him, “This is how you want it? There’s a border. Here is Russia. Here is Chechnya. A cow stands there. Her head is here, her udders, there. She eats grass here, but gives milk there? It simply won’t work, Dzhokhar.”*

- Kim Tsagolov, Deputy Minister of Nationalities of the Russian Federation, 1993-1998<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The rebuilding of the Russian Federation after the collapse of the Soviet Union cannot begin to be understood without deep scrutiny of the Chechen question. Although the breakup of the USSR was widely regarded as a peaceful, diplomatic process, Chechnya’s secession movement and the armed conflicts that resulted from this attempt at a national-separatist project stand as a stark counter-example to the reigning narrative of negotiated divorce. Still, focusing exclusively on the bloody events of the two Chechen wars narrowly defines the Chechen question as a military one and obscures broader implications that the pre-war separatist movement and interwar period had on Russo-Chechen relations. Rather, the question of Chechnya’s relationship with Russia in the post-Soviet federation cannot be understood without taking into account the events that preceded and followed the First Chechen War—that is, the republic’s initial calls for secession and its periods of de facto independence from 1991 to 1994 and 1996 to 1999. Chechnya’s radical nationalist movement began taking strides towards independence as early as 1990, ultimately declaring its sovereignty in October 1991 under the leadership of Dzhokhar Dudayev and the Chechen National Congress (OkChN). The three years following this declaration saw a tense coexistence between Moscow and Grozny, during which the Yeltsin regime simultaneously tolerated Dudayev’s attempt to rule Chechnya without Russian interference and attempted to covertly undermine his authority in the region. This precarious balancing act failed, as evidenced by the invasion of Chechnya by Russian troops in autumn of 1994. Still, the

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<sup>1</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Kim Tsagolov,” December 9, 1998,  
<http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12657/>.

military operations of the First Chechen War, which lasted until 1996, ended with an armistice signed in the Dagestani village of Khasavyurt, resulting in yet another period of de facto independence for the Chechen state. The next major disruption of this status quo came in 1999, with the invasion of Dagestan by Chechen general Shamil Basayev, which again raised fears of destabilization in the Caucasus. The war in Dagestan escalated, ultimately providing the impetus for a renewed invasion of Chechnya, setting off the Second Chechen War, which lasted into the early 2000s.

The rise of the Chechen separatist movement and its accompanying wars did not, of course, take place in a political vacuum, but rather coincided with the wave of nationalist agitation that emerged around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although, as mentioned above, most of the nationalist politics of this period was dealt with through peaceful brokering, the demise of the USSR raised broad fears that large, multinational states were by definition unviable entities. It was with this grave concern in mind that the Yeltsin presidency set to the task of rebuilding the Russian Federation. This process, nominally federalist in nature, incorporated an asymmetrical approach, with different regions of the federation holding varying degrees of sovereignty. While Chechnya operated outside the legal federal framework as a de facto state for much of the 1990s, other republics extracted measures of autonomy from the federal government by means of bilateral treaties and local legislation. Because these agreements and laws were region-specific, they in turn reinforced the asymmetry in the interactions between the republics and Moscow. This complicated picture of center-periphery relations in the fledgling Russian Federation made dealing with the Chechen situation more than a simple question of allowing the republic to secede or reintegrating it into the union. Rather, lawmakers faced the more complex task of attempting to find an appropriate place for this non-ethnically-Russian republic within a poorly systematized, young state. Similarly, the question of the “domino effect” loomed large, with those in power anxious about the potential for one successful secession to prompt other

separatist movements. The most fatalist of observers saw Chechnya's potential departure from the union as a step towards the dissolution of the federation entirely.

My thesis will focus on these issues as they developed in the Russian discourse on the Chechen question. Using several media sources, I will analyze how the Russian discourse on potential solutions for Chechnya developed in the period between the First and Second Chechen Wars. My period of focus will begin in 1996, the year the Khasavyurt Agreement was signed, ceasing the formal fighting of the First Chechen War, and end in 1999, when a renewed invasion of Chechen territory following a series of apartment bombings throughout Russia set off the Second Chechen War. This period marks an often overlooked subject of study, ignored in favor of the more gut-wrenching years of war. Nonetheless, these years offered a second opportunity (following that ranging from 1991 to 1994) to resolve the Chechen question through diplomatic means, making it crucial in the development of Russo-Chechen relations. My analysis of this timeframe will focus on several major themes—first, the question of an institutional solution to the Chechen crisis. What suggestions were proposed by various prominent voices in Russia, and what degree of support did each suggestion receive amongst these voices? Did these plans for reintegration or granting of independence evolve as the conflict itself evolved? Which options lasted and which, if any, were eliminated over the course of time? Much of the asymmetry of the Russian federalist structure came about because of the varying demands of republics with non-Russian titular nationalities—to what extent was this factor engaged with in the conversation on Chechnya? I am especially interested in the potential for evolution of this discourse over the course of the late 1990s—i.e., whether the discussion of the Chechen question changed as a result of the changing circumstances of Russo-Chechen relations.

In answering these questions, this thesis will show that a variety of options for solving the Chechen question existed in Russian discourse throughout the entirety of the interwar period. It will demonstrate that the Russian policy towards Chechnya in this period was

marked by ad hocery and that the ultimate failure of Moscow's piecemeal approach to Chechnya's position in the federation, combined with changing circumstances in the North Caucasus, led to greater pessimism in the later part of these years. Nonetheless, I will argue that despite this increase in negative opinions on Russo-Chechen relations, even approaching the Second Chechen War, public discourse still entertained an array of possible solutions to the question, ranging from hardline integration of the republic through armed aggression to simply letting the republic gain independence from Russia.

## Chechnya: An Introduction

Chechnya is a mountainous region of the northeast Caucasus, bordered to the east by Dagestan, to the west by Ingushetia, and to the north by Stavropol Krai. Each of these regions form part of the Russian Federation, situating Chechnya's only international border—that with the Georgian republic—to the south (see Appendix for map). Geographically, it is bounded by the Terek and Sunja rivers in the west and north, respectively. The 'Andi' mountain range provides the physical boundary line with Dagestan, while the Caucasus mountain range separates Chechen territory from that of Georgia. Chechnya's topography can be divided into highland and lowland areas, the former being defined by not only the Caucasus range, but also the smaller Terek and Sunja mountain chains. The lowland region forms the most fertile land area of the territory, standing between the Sunja mountain range and the so-called "black mountains" and intersected by a variety of tributaries flowing from the Sunja river.<sup>2</sup>

Most Chechens practice Sufi Islam, more specifically under the tarikats (smaller subdivisions) of Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya. Chechen Islam significantly incorporates mysticism and local traditions, many of which are pagan in origin and not widely practiced

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<sup>2</sup> M. Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule* (C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2006), 2.

by Muslims outside the Sufi order.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the “brotherhood” Sufi hierarchy works in tandem with clan structures as a means of ordering Chechen social life. In this way, as Scott Radnitz points out, “it is difficult to separate what about Chechen culture is ‘Islamic’ and what is ‘Chechen,’ intertwined as the two are.”<sup>4</sup> Scholars disagree on the extent to which policies of the Soviet period impacted the practice of Islam in the region. Moshe Gammer intimates that Chechens preserved their religious practices throughout the Soviet period, citing Soviet statistics from 1970, which report that greater than 90 percent of Chechens married and buried their dead in line with Muslim traditions. He also makes special note of particular branches of Qaddiriyya Islamic tradition, known as Sufi *ta’ifas*, which offered Chechens opportunities to fill the vacuum left by the absence of formal religious life.<sup>5</sup> However, Anatol Lieven disagrees with Gammer’s assessment that the practice of these ceremonies meant the continuation of devout practice, instead suggesting, “...for many Chechens in lowland and urban Chechnya this role [of religion] had during Soviet rule become largely ceremonial, in a characteristically modern way; that is to say, a matter for rites of passage, for circumcisions, marriages, burials...” Lieven suggests the retention of these traditions stood as a symbol of national pride, rather than as a representation of the population’s continued adherence to doctrines of the faith.<sup>6</sup>

Another striking feature of Chechen society is its clan-based social hierarchy. Known as *vainakh*, the clan system is a multi-level, territorial, socio-political kinship network. Somewhat ironically, until the Soviet period, *vainakh* actually precluded the formation of a singular national identity in Chechnya. Well into the nineteenth century, one of its levels, the *taipa*, served as the primary political-national organization of Chechens, and their resistance

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<sup>3</sup> Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 360.

<sup>4</sup> Scott Radnitz, “Look Who’s Talking! Islamic Discourse in the Chechen Wars,” *Nationalities Papers* 34, no. 2 (2006): 244–245.

<sup>5</sup> Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear*, 192–195.

<sup>6</sup> Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 363.

efforts against the Russian Empire were conducted via this authority, rather than from an overarching “Chechen” position.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, although the importance of clan identity persists—current Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov is still identified by many domestic and international newspapers by his *taipa* affiliation—the nationalist movement of the early 1990s suggests that some form of unified national consciousness existed by the end of the Soviet period.

### **Russo-Chechen Encounters: A Brief Overview**

The history of Russo-Chechen relations, and more specifically the history of clashes between these two populations, long predates the outbreak of the First Chechen War in 1994. Russian incursion into the Caucasus began as an exercise of the tsarist empire, which sought to move into the territory in the face of possible encroachment by the Ottoman Empire, the Crimean Khanate, and Persia. Russia erected its first fort in the region in 1559, but its efforts to take control of the Caucasus were put aside until the reign of Catherine the Great. Upon taking power in 1762, the empress sent a new garrison of missionaries to the Caucasus, whose hostile reception by the various peoples of the Caucasus marked the first moment of tension between Russia and Chechnya. Between 1785 and 1791, in response to Russia’s push southward, part of the broader strategy of Catherine the Great to implement direct rule throughout the empire, a Chechen imam known as Sheikh Mansur led a resistance movement against Russia’s presence in the region. Gaining support from a variety of peoples within the Caucasus, Chechens included, Mansur characterized his movement as a *gazawat*, or holy war, rooted in Islamic belief.

The next altercation between Russian military forces and residents of the Caucasus came in the early nineteenth century, when General Aleksei Petrovich Yermolov took command of Russian forces in the Caucasus and mapped out a strategy to formally annex the

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<sup>7</sup> James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, National and Ethnic Conflict in the 21st Century (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 3.

territory. In response to this new policy, resistance movements similar to the one led by Sheikh Mansur sprang up in the Caucasus region. Two local imams, Kazi Mullah and Gamzat-Bek, led the populations in several semi-successful raids on Russian forces. Later, the most famous resistance leader of the nineteenth century, Imam Shamil, again led a *gazawat* movement against encroaching Russian troops. These two periods of resistance took place during the Caucasian War, which lasted from 1817 to 1864. The territory that makes up present-day Chechnya was annexed in the middle of the conflict in 1859, despite the attempts by the mountaineers to prevent such absorption of their territory into the empire.<sup>8</sup>

With the Bolshevik Revolution came a brief moment of formal self-rule for much of the North Caucasus, the territory now known as Chechnya included. From 1918 to 1921, a North Caucasian Federation enjoyed independence from Russia, gaining recognition from such major powers as Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey, with whom the state conducted a formal alliance in 1918.<sup>9</sup> In 1921, the republic was assumed into the Soviet Union as the Soviet Mountain Republic, which Joseph Stalin, then People's Commissar for Nationalities, assured would be granted a high level of internal autonomy, including the right to a constitution based on Islamic shari'a law and local customary law, known as *adat*.<sup>10</sup> By 1924, however, the republic was eliminated and divided into several Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs), which were to be subsumed within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).<sup>11</sup> Later, Chechnya and neighboring Ingushetia were merged together in 1934 to form the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.

The Soviet nationalities policies that influenced this Chechen-Ingush ASSR in fact shaped the entire territorial structure of the USSR, impacting the lives of both ethnic Russians

<sup>8</sup> John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 12, 15, 24, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov and Marie Broxup, *The North Caucasus Barrier: the Russian Advance Towards the Muslim World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 152.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>11</sup> Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov and Marie Broxup, *The North Caucasus Barrier: the Russian Advance Towards the Muslim World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 156.

and members of non-Russian nationalities. Although multinationality was a characteristic feature of the Russian Empire, long predating Soviet rule, the structures set up to divide the Soviet territory left the most determinant footprint on the nationalities question in post-Soviet Russia. More specifically, the Soviet nationalities policy of *korenizatsiia* organized Soviet land along the lines of nationality, (usually) giving control of these ethnically-defined regions to members of the titular group. According to the policy, initially formalized in 1918 (although subject to evolution throughout the lifespan of the Soviet state), the USSR was broken down into a layered hierarchy of territorial autonomies, with the fifteen union republics (Soviet Socialist Republics, SSRs) comprising the highest level of autonomy. Several of the larger SSRs, including most notably the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, further subdivided into Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs), of which the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was one.<sup>12</sup>

Although Cold War-era scholarship suggested that this policy was thought simply to be consistent with other repressive measures enacted under Stalin, Ronald Suny and Terry Martin indicate a trend in a different direction, showing that renewed efforts to examine the system and its effects have revealed a “paradigm shift” to “...a dialectical narrative of preservation and transformation, both nation-making and nation-destroying.”<sup>13</sup> In his own work, Martin argues that the Soviet Union was the world’s first “affirmative action empire,” which “set out to systematically build and strengthen its non-Russian nations, even where they barely existed,” focusing on the nation-producing capacity of Soviet nationalities policy.<sup>14</sup> Such an approach by extension claims that the nationalism underlying the ethnoterritorial structure of the Soviet Union served as a “masking ideology” to the Marxist-

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<sup>12</sup> Terry (Terry Dean) Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 31-32.

<sup>13</sup> Terry (Terry Dean) Martin and Ronald Grigor Suny, *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 19.

Leninist aim of eliminating national loyalties in pursuit of an internationalized, class-conscious society.<sup>15</sup> Francine Hirsch tempers this view, arguing rather that the intention of this political program was to bring about “state-sponsored evolutionism”, by which the Soviet state could modernize national groups by means of the consolidation of their politico-national identity.<sup>16</sup> Although this attempt fell in line with the Marxist historical timeline (which predicted that modernization and nationalization would ultimately give way to socialism), the end product was instead what Hirsch terms “double assimilation”, a dialectic process by which non-Russians were incorporated simultaneously into both national categories and the broader Soviet state.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the Soviet approach to nationhood did not exclusively construct a set of non-Russian national groups, but instead did so in conjunction with its larger, future-seeking project of integrating national categories into the Soviet state and society. Regardless of the differences in these approaches, what is notable is that each postulates that the structure of the Soviet Union proved instrumental in the crystallization of national groupings and reinforcement of national identity. Rogers Brubaker extends this theme into the post-Soviet period, arguing that “[i]nstitutionalized definitions of nationhood...not only played a major role in the disintegration of the Soviet state, but continue to shape and structure the national question in the incipient successor states.”<sup>18</sup> He adds that, although the Soviet Union was nominally organized in an ethnoterritorial manner, republican boundaries did not and could not perfectly coincide with those ascribed to sub-state “nations”. Rather, political jurisdiction was applied based on territory, but nationality certainly could not be similarly determined by place of residence. In this way, the already

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<sup>15</sup> Terry (Terry Dean) Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 4–5.

<sup>16</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

<sup>18</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account,” *Theory and Society* 23, no. 1 (February 1, 1994): 47, doi:10.2307/657812.

complex picture of multinationality in the post-Soviet space was further complicated by the fluidity of boundaries, both along ethnic lines, and, during the collapse of the Soviet state, on territorial ones as well.<sup>19</sup>

The nationalities policies of the Soviet period spurred the solidification of national identity amongst the various ethnic groups of the North Caucasus, including the Chechens. Prior to this time, the parallel forces of individual clan consciousness and broad identification with other Caucasian mountain peoples superseded any sense of Chechen national identity. Soviet nationalities policies and the realities of deportations and return ultimately pushed Chechens towards a national self-understanding previously eschewed in favor of other identifications.

The mass deportation of Chechens in 1944 forms a focal point in the collective experience of this group during the Soviet period. This deportation can be viewed as a culmination of the growing suspicions of the center towards several of its periphery settlers, Chechens and Ingush included. These suspicions had previously been made manifest through such actions as a 1925 military campaign whose goal was to disarm bands of Chechens deemed “counter-revolutionary”. Similarly, NKVD records indicate that, as of the start of World War II, it had eliminated 963 gangs in the North Caucasus, totaling 17,563 members, the majority of whom were Chechen.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the largest campaign directed towards the Chechen people in this period was without doubt the deportation of the entire population in 1944. Lavrentiy Beria, head of the NKVD at the time, began planning this operation, dubbed “*Chechevitsa*”, or “Lentil”, in January of 1943, as the last of the Wehrmacht troops were clearing out of the North Caucasus. On February 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of the same year, Beria ordered the start of the operation, and troops immediately began rounding up Chechen and Ingush families, moving door-to-door announcing their mandatory departure. The entire

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>20</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-century Europe* (Harvard University Press, 2001), 94.

populations, totaling 496,460 people, barring only a few individuals who managed to escape, were sent to Kazakhstan and Kirghizia for resettlement.<sup>21</sup>

Moscow explained the deportation as a response to the populations in question having collaborated with Nazi soldiers during the course of the war. (It is worth noting that Chechens and Ingush were not the only peoples deported during this period; other groups included, but are not limited to Crimean Tatars and Kalmyks). The official justification accused the Chechens and Ingush of being “...traitors to the homeland, changing over to the side of the fascist occupiers, joining the ranks of diversionaries and spies left behind the lines of the Red Army by the Germans.”<sup>22</sup> Although evidence suggests some support amongst Chechens and Ingush for the German invasion in 1942, nothing yet examined suggests any large-scale collaboration by these populations with Nazi soldiers.<sup>23</sup> Norman Naimark suggests an alternative motivation, consistent with the strengthening of the Russian core that had been in progress from the early 1930s, which, as Terry Martin notes, included the consolidation of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1934.<sup>24</sup> Despite this successful nominal consolidation of Chechnya-Ingushetia, Naimark characterizes the Chechens and Ingush as “unquestionably a thorn in the side of Moscow”.<sup>25</sup> He cites their strong cultural and religious autonomy and deep familial ties and clan leadership, though not traits exclusive to Chechnya, as an unwelcome counterpart to Moscow’s authority. These regional structures went hand in hand with the semi-successful resistance of the Chechen and Ingush populations to many of the policies enacted by the Soviet center. Chechnya-Ingushetia resisted many modernization programs of the Soviet state, which made it especially difficult to recruit members of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 93–96.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>24</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 409.

<sup>25</sup> Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 95.

titular nationalities to work for the oil industry in Grozny, again reinforcing the trouble Moscow had controlling the region.<sup>26</sup>

Life in exile proved trying for the deported Chechen and Ingush populations.

Although the numbers of deaths vary, NKVD records indicate that 100,000 individuals died within the first three years, many on the journey to Central Asia, from starvation and a typhus epidemic. The deportees were given the status of “spetsposelentsy” (special settlers) within a “spetzrezhim” (special regime). As such, many of these individuals were placed in special settlements, removed from the population, although some also lived amongst the residents of Kazakhstan and Kirghizia. Still, this special status meant limits on the movements of members of these populations.<sup>27</sup> Chechens settled most often in Kirghizia and several southeastern oblasts of Kazakhstan, often forming representative colonies (of five thousand people or more) throughout the rest of Kazakhstan.<sup>28</sup> Some authors argue that life in deportation was a formative experience, contributing to the consolidation of Chechen nationhood. Anatol Lieven is one such adherent, claiming based on interviews conducted during the First Chechen War that this collective tragedy provided the impetus for Chechens to work towards preservation of their traditions, thus reinforcing a unified identity rather than one based on disparate clan loyalties.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, it is important to reflect on other unifying forces, including, for example, the process of repatriation. While the Chechens and Ingush lived in exile, Moscow pushed other citizens of the union to settle in Chechnya-Ingushetia in order to promote industrialization in the region.<sup>30</sup> New settlers came largely from the neighboring regions, including primarily Ossetians, Dagestani, and Russians. It is worth noting that this was not the first in-migration of non-Chechens to the region. In the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear*, 176.

<sup>28</sup> an, *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Central European University Press, 2004), 190.

<sup>29</sup> Lieven, *Chechnya*, 1998, 321.

<sup>30</sup> Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear*, 180–181.

tsarist period, Russians migrated to Chechnya as part of the building up of the oil industry in the region. This population made up only 2.9% of the Chechen Autonomous Oblast as of 1926, increasing in 1934 when the borders of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR were expanded to include more regions settled predominantly by Russians.<sup>31</sup> Still, the presence of these residents and the initial efforts at resettlement during the deportation failed to recoup the population losses the ASSR had incurred. Average estimates for deported areas suggest that in most places, 40% of population losses were replaced by new residents; in the former Chechen-Ingush ASSR, now known as “Groznyanskaya oblast”, by May 1945, this proportion was even lower, with only 10,200 new households taking the place of the 28,375 that had existed prior.<sup>32</sup> In order to rid the region of traces of its previous settlers, Stalin’s regime had renamed the autonomous republic “Groznyanskaya oblast”, which not only stripped it of its ethnic name, but also decreased its autonomous status. The regime also replaced any markers of the Chechen language with Russian signifiers.<sup>33</sup> As Naimark aptly describes the situation, “Stalin and Beria’s goal—as best we can tell—was to destroy the Chechen and Ingush nations without necessarily eliminating their peoples.”<sup>34</sup> Still, Stalin’s death in 1953 brought with it the beginning of the repatriation process, with a few settlers illegally returning to the North Caucasus in this year. Khrushchev’s 1956 secret speech denounced the deportations and removed the restrictive special status of exiled Chechens and Ingush, but the right of return came only in 1957, when the Soviet government consented to allow 17,000 Chechen and Ingush families to be repatriated. By the end of this year, all legal barriers to resettlement were lifted, and the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was reestablished.<sup>35</sup> In conjunction with the reestablishment of the republic came an adjustment of its northern border. Two traditionally Cossack raions, Naurskii and Shelkovskii, which had been part of

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<sup>31</sup> Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 1998, 34, 37–38.

<sup>32</sup> an, *Against Their Will*, 159.

<sup>33</sup> Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 1998, 73.

<sup>34</sup> Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 98.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 98–99.

Stavropol Krai, were added to the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, thus tipping the demographic balance further in favor of Russian speakers.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the absence of legal constraints on resettlement, the process of returning to the Caucasus was fraught with hardships. First, many resettled Chechens and Ingush were not allowed to return to their previous homes; the Soviet center resettled them in areas of production in the hopes of preventing the perceived “rebellious” mountaineers from regaining strategic settlements in the highlands as well as in an effort to populate Grozny’s industrial areas to increase the labor force and spur on the region’s oil production.<sup>37</sup> The resettlement of Chechens and Ingush in the urban centers of the North Caucasus resulted in clashes between returning settlers and those who had come to the territory during the time of the deportation. These clashes came to a head in August of 1958, when riots broke out in Grozny. Hostilities between these national groups continued, as did a “curious ethnic divide” in the industrial sector. Whereas urban areas and industrial positions (mostly in the sectors of oil, engineering, infrastructure, and vital services) were largely occupied by Russians in the region, “indigenous” professions generally consisted of those in the agricultural and often, criminal sectors. Numbers suggest that this divide lasted well beyond the period of repatriation; the two largest petrochemical companies of the region, Grozneft and Orgsynthez, which employed 50,000 workers, only staffed a few hundred Chechen and Ingush as of the late 1980s.<sup>38</sup>

James Hughes summarizes well the open questions associated with both the deportation and return of the Chechen population. He writes,

“The deportation, which is within living memory for many Chechens, was a defining event for the reinforcement of a Chechen identity for both Russians and Chechens... The question is the exact impact of the deportation on Chechen identity? Did it construct a new form of identity around the bitter experience of deportation, or

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<sup>36</sup> Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear*, 187.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>38</sup> Valerii Aleksandrovich Tishkov, *Chechnya□: Life in a War-torn Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 41.

did it reconstruct a traditional identity around the idea of a resistance to Russia? How was the impact of identity manifested? Rather than exhibit a ‘propensity’ for violence, the return of the Chechen deportees...seems to have resulted in no significant acts of violence or resistance. Even during Gorbachev’s liberalization of the mid-1980s...Chechen nationalism was a late developer.”<sup>39</sup>

Hughes’ description of late-blooming nationalism is reflected in the historical record, which shows little in the way of nationalist discord in Chechnya during the late Soviet period. The most notable features of this period include demographic shifts, more specifically the drastic decrease in the proportional population of Russians in the region. Whereas in 1959, Slavs (mostly Russians) made up approximately half of the population of Chechnya, likely due in large part to the expansion of the Soviet oil industry at this time, by 1979, this set of individuals made up only about 30% of the territory’s population. By 1989, the shift was even more marked, thanks to the simultaneous processes of remigration by Chechen families from Central Asia and Russian out-migration from the region, referred to as “return” (*obratnichestvo*).<sup>40</sup> More specifically, within this ten-year period, the Chechen population grew by 20%, to total 734,501, while the ethnic Slav population decreased 11.8% to number 308,985.<sup>41</sup>

One important point of contention between the Chechen population and the Soviet state following the deportation seems to have regarded the numbers of Chechens in official positions within the republic. Although members of the titular nationalities of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR did occupy roles in government, key positions remained in the hands of Russians. This reality became part of the cause of a mass demonstration in 1973, during which the Ingush population of the ASSR pushed for inclusion of the Prigorodnyi raion in Chechnya-Ingushetia, while the Chechen population agitated for more representation in

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<sup>39</sup> James Hughes, *Chechnya□: from Nationalism to Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 10-11.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

government posts.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, research on data from 1985-1986 shows that Russians continued to hold the majority of key positions in the republic, including first secretary positions of the city party committees of 67% of all cities, including both major cities, Grozny and Gudermes. Until 1989, when Doku Zavgayev assumed the post, no ethnic Chechen had served as first secretary of the ASSR.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, this agitation did not prompt nationalist mobilization during the Soviet period. Rather, it coincided with environmentally-driven protests, including one against the building of a biochemical plant in the city of Gudermes in 1988, as well as a push for promotion of Chechen language and culture in the public sphere.<sup>44</sup> Only later did these movements grow to the point of a full-scale, nationally-oriented secessionist movement.

### ***Post-Soviet Chechnya: The Emergence of Nationalism***

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a crucial point in the shaping of the Russian Federation, now a sovereign state rather than the bedrock of a larger union. From the perspective of center-periphery organization, the regime under President Boris Yeltsin faced the gargantuan task of reforming the region formerly known as the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic into a new state entity, the Russian Federation. This task seemed particularly difficult given widespread fear, in light of the cases of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union itself, that multinational federations were by definition unsustainable and that the Russian Federation was doomed to similar collapse.<sup>45</sup> James Hughes characterizes this question as it applied particularly to the Soviet case when he writes, “The survival of Russia as a federal state seems all the more unusual given that it

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<sup>42</sup> Lieven, *Chechnya*, 1998, 56.

<sup>43</sup> Hughes, *Chechnya*, 2007, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Lieven, *Chechnya*, 1998, 56.

<sup>45</sup> James Hughes, “Managing Secession Potential in the Russian Federation,” *Regional & Federal Studies* 11, no. 3 (2001): 36, doi:10.1080/714004707.

exhibits many of the characteristics that contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union: its huge size, territorialized ethnicity in complex administrative districts, together with the general dysfunction and weakening of the state during political and economic transition.”<sup>46</sup> To put it in different terms, the management of this multicultural state meant accommodating a population of 142 million citizens from 182 nationalities, no small feat.<sup>47</sup>

The transition from ethnoterritorial Soviet Union to Russian Federation was complicated even further by the April 1990 Law on Secession passed under the Gorbachev regime. This law further articulated the right of republics of the Soviet Union to secede, a right allegedly guaranteed by Article 76 of the Soviet Constitution (in practice only a paper right). More specifically, this law declared autonomous republics to be “subjects of the USSR,” a conceptual shift from the previous hierarchy, which placed autonomous republics in direct subordination to union republics, rather than offering them sovereignty derived from the union as a whole. The legislation released a “parade of sovereignties”, during which the autonomous republics within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic asserted their sovereign status, rejecting the subordination previously afforded by the hierarchical Soviet system of territorial administration. The decentralizing effects of the law and the sovereignty declarations it spurred on were only exacerbated by the political maneuvering of both Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. The passage of the April 1990 Law on Secession marked an attempt by Gorbachev to salvage public opinion in the face of unpopular reforms. By contrast, Yeltsin saw this legislation as an opportunity to undermine the Soviet state and thus encouraged each republic to “take all the sovereignty you can swallow”.<sup>48</sup> As the Soviet Union collapsed in late 1991 and Yeltsin took power over the Russian Federation, he and his

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<sup>46</sup> Hughes, *Chechnya*, 2007, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Cameron Ross, “Reforming the Federation”, in Henry E. Hale, Richard Sakwa, and Stephen White, *Developments in Russian Politics* 7 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 154.

<sup>48</sup> Gail W. Lapidus, “Contested Sovereignty: The Tragedy of Chechnya,” *International Security* 23, no. 1 (July 1, 1998): 12, doi:10.1162/isec.23.1.5.

advisors initially focused on implementing an aggressive shift to a market economy, leaving the question of reconstructing the union momentarily on the backburner.<sup>49</sup> Later, when the Yeltsin government engaged with the restructuring of the Russian state, it attempted to reverse the effects of the “parade of sovereignties”, resulting in the asymmetrically federalized Russian state I will describe shortly.<sup>50</sup>

Ronald L. Watts defines federations as “descriptive terms applying to particular forms of political organization...in which, by contrast to the single central source of authority in unitary systems, there are two (or more) levels of government thus combining elements of shared rule through common institutions and regional self-rule for the governments of the constituent units.”<sup>51</sup> This definition can be applied to the Russian Federation as it existed from 1991 to 1999, but it must be clarified to account for the specificities of the country’s federal structure in this period. Broadly speaking, Yeltsin’s refederalization project resulted in a system of “asymmetric federalism”, but yet again, this designation requires clarification in order to account for the specifics of the Russian case.

James Hughes describes the progression of this refederalization project in temporal terms, identifying three stages of institutional design implemented by the Yeltsin regime. The first of these stages is termed by Hughes “ethnified asymmetric federalism” and marks little deviation from the devolution of power to the periphery enacted by the April 1990 Law on Secession. Because Yeltsin sought the support of Russia’s ethnic republics, his initial position towards the federal structure allowed for a high level of autonomy amongst these republics. This inclination manifested itself in the 1992 Federal Treaty, which formally integrated the former ASSRs of the RSFSR as republics in the Russian Federation. (It should

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<sup>49</sup> Hughes, *Chechnya*, 2007, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Lapidus, “Contested Sovereignty,” 11.

<sup>51</sup> Ronald Lampman Watts, Queen’s University (Kingston, Ont ) Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, and Queen’s University (Kingston, Ont ) School of Policy Studies, *Comparing Federal Systems* (Published for the School of Policy Studies, Queen’s University by McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 6–7.

be noted that Chechnya-Ingushetia and Tatarstan refused to sign this agreement.) The treaty, part of what Hughes calls the “honeymoon period” of consensus amongst political power players on how to institutionalize the state, established three tiers of territories within the federation: titular “ethnic” republics, largely Russian-populated regions, and smaller “ethnic” autonomous regions and districts. The twenty “ethnic” republics retained many powers ordinarily reserved for central governments, including the ability to draft constitutions, control over land and natural resources, and significant autonomy in matters of budgets and finance.<sup>52</sup> Regions, by contrast, were subsumed directly under the central power of the president, with little autonomy to speak of.

The second stage elaborated by Hughes is that of symmetric federalism. This period lasted from March 1992 to October 1993 and was defined by the standoff between Yeltsin and the Russian parliament. During this time, the question of refederalization stood as part of a larger program to determine the separation of powers within the Russian federal government. The “honeymoon phase” of consensus described above had disintegrated, as Russian-dominated regions began to demand the same level of autonomy as their “ethnic” counterparts. Some went as far as withholding tax revenues from the center, negotiating bilateral treaties with other regions, and stopping the export of consumer and agricultural goods to protest what was seen as favoritism by Yeltsin.<sup>53</sup> This agitation coincided temporally with Yeltsin’s attempt to consolidate power in Moscow and end his standoff with parliament. What followed was the October Crisis, during which Yeltsin dissolved parliament and determined that both new parliamentary elections and a constitutional referendum would take place on December 12, 1993. As Gail Lapidus writes on this matter,

In effect, Yeltsin was throwing down the political gauntlet to the republics. Now that the political crisis in Moscow had been resolved, he implied, the center would no longer tolerate violations of its laws and engage in an endless process of bilateral

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<sup>52</sup> Hughes, *Chechnya*, 2007, 41.

<sup>53</sup> Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *The New Russia: Troubled Transformation* (Westview Press, 1995), 96.

negotiations with each of the eighty-nine subjects of the federation over export earnings, tax revenue, subsidies and property.<sup>54</sup>

Because of this shift, the 1993 Constitution declared that Russia be federalized in a symmetric fashion, with all republics and regions considered “equal subjects of the Russian Federation” (Article 5). It declared this equal federation to be made up of 89 subjects, 32 of which were ethnically defined and 57 of which were determined by territory. Nonetheless, despite this difference in the defining features of these regions, symmetry in relations to the center remained the overarching theme of the 1993 Constitution. In keeping with this attempt to equalize the status of all federal subjects, any references to “sovereign” status of autonomous republics were summarily dropped, indicating that the balance of power had shifted towards the center.<sup>55</sup>

Hughes labels the final stage in the development of Russia’s refederalization “partial asymmetric federalism”, which followed the ratification of the 1993 Constitution.<sup>56</sup> Cameron Ross and Gordon Hahn engage heavily with this period, viewing it as characteristic of Russian federalism under Yeltsin. Ross notes that although the passage of the 1993 Constitution was largely viewed as a political victory for Yeltsin as it signaled his successful reclaiming of many presidential powers, in the context of federal integration, such a decisive assertion of triumph must be tempered by circumstances not discernible from the text of the document. First, Ross notes that the 1993 Constitution made explicit references to the 1992 Federation Treaty, indicating that it was still in effect, despite the mutually contradictory provisions of the treaty and the new constitution.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, several republics had passed local constitutions in the period between the enactment of the Federation Treaty and the ratification of the 1993 Constitution. Many such constitutions asserted that the republics

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>55</sup> Hughes, *Chechnya*, 2007, 42–43.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>57</sup> Cameron Ross, “Reforming the Federation”, in Hale, Sakwa, and White, *Developments in Russian Politics* 7, 156.

“retained” their sovereignty and declared themselves as taking precedence over any federal constitution. In addition, the text of the 1993 Constitution itself contained provisions that weakened its clauses on symmetrical federalism. First, it contained no enumeration of legal procedures for regulating power-sharing between federal and regional governments. Second, Article 78 granted the federal center and regional powers the ability to transfer powers between themselves. This clause gave the Yeltsin regime a mechanism by which to alter the terms of the federal structure through bilateral agreements, a practice Ross terms “contract federalism”.<sup>58</sup>

Gordon Hahn explores this contract federalism more deeply, calling Yeltsin’s approach to refederalization “ad hoc”, part of an effort to contain communalism and separatism and largely a response to immediate political circumstances rather than a comprehensive, future-seeking policy.<sup>59</sup> He highlights the discrepancies between the letter of the constitutional law declaring equality amongst regions and the individual treaties conducted between Moscow and regional governments. For example, Tatarstan took an especially strong regional stance in its negotiations with the center, concluding a treaty in February 1994 declaring the republic’s sovereign status. Tatarstan affirmed itself as merely “associated” with Russia and directly a subject of international law. Following suit, 45 other regions conducted similar agreements with the federal state. Hahn notes also that most of these agreements were brought about exclusively on the level of elites, incorporating no measures such as referenda to measure how much popular support they had.<sup>60</sup>

Hahn also engages with the measures taken by individual regions to tamper with the symmetrical structure of the federal system. Even following the 1993 Constitution’s ratification, regions continued to pass local legislation that stood in conflict with its

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>59</sup> Gordon Hahn, “Reforming the Federation”, in Zvi Y. Gitelman, Richard Sakwa, and Stephen White, *Developments in Russian Politics 6*, 6th ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 148.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 154.

provisions. Hahn points out, “As of Putin’s assumption of power in 2000, 62 of the constitutions and charters of Russia’s 89 regions and republics had been pronounced to be in violation of the constitution, together with some 6,000 regional laws and tens of thousands of other legal acts adopted at the regional and subregional level.”<sup>61</sup> These laws allowed for regions to grab extensive powers from the center, including in some cases the ability to build a standing army and engage in foreign policy.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, as this process of federalization unraveled, Chechnya remained largely outside the negotiations. In response to the April 1990 Law on Secession, the newly formed All-National Congress of Chechen People took the example of the Baltic states and in November of the same year declared the sovereignty of the Chechen people over the Chechen republic (the first serious nod towards an institutionalized discrete Chechen national identity).<sup>63</sup> In a more explicitly political move, the congress also declared the Chechen-Ingush ASSR to be separate from both the USSR and the RSFSR, though nonetheless capable of carrying out contractual relations with each of these “unions of states”.<sup>64</sup>

Moving forward, the Chechen national movement gained momentum largely under the auspices of Dzhokhar Dudayev, former Soviet general who stormed the Chechen-Ingush Parliament in September of 1991. This action prompted the dissolution of Parliament and the resignation of Doku Zavgayev, first party secretary of the Communist party in Chechnya-Ingushetia. Parliament was replaced by a Provisional Supreme Council, set to govern until the approaching November 6<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections.<sup>65</sup> A presidential vote took place on October 27<sup>th</sup> of the same year, with Dudayev emerging victorious. Although the election was widely viewed as a farce, not only fraught with voting irregularities but also marked by the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>63</sup> John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 91.

<sup>64</sup> Gail W. Lapidus, “Contested Sovereignty: The Tragedy of Chechnya,” *International Security* 23, no. 1 (July 1, 1998): 12, doi:10.2307/2539261.

<sup>65</sup> Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 1998, 105.

absence of participation by either Ingush or Russian-speaking populations, polling data nonetheless suggests that anywhere between 60 and 70 percent of voters in Chechnya did genuinely support Dудаев at this time.<sup>66</sup>

In response to both the Chechen declaration of sovereignty and Dудаев's power grab, Boris Yeltsin issued a presidential decree entitled "On the Introduction of Emergency Rule into the Chechen-Ingush Republic". This measure allowed for a small-scale armed invasion into Chechnya by Soviet forces. In the face of this troop movement, which was quickly pushed back by Chechen national guard units, a mass of Chechen citizens assembled in Freedom Square, the main square of Grozny, in support of their newly declared independence and the recently elected Dудаев regime.<sup>67</sup> Chechens also voted in a referendum at this time, with 97.4% of participants in favor of independence. (It should be noted, however, that considerable voting irregularities marred this process, and that data on which residents of Chechnya in fact participated remains unclear).<sup>68</sup> Largely because of pressure exerted by Mikhail Gorbachev, Yeltsin rescinded his emergency declaration, ending the first brief phase of armed conflict over Chechen sovereignty.<sup>69</sup>

During the next three years, Moscow and Grozny, and perhaps more specifically Boris Yeltsin and Dzhokhar Dудаев, engaged in a game of political cat and mouse. Chechnya's nominal independence from the Russian Federation resulted in a frozen situation, during which the center, as expected, did not recognize the declared secession of this republic, but simultaneously did little to reabsorb the territory fully into the union. At this time, Moscow imposed a trade blockade on Chechnya and cut off central subsidies to the region. These measures, combined with Dудаев's inability to develop infrastructure within

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>68</sup> Daniel R. Kempton and Terry D. Clark, *Unity Or Separation: Center-Periphery Relations in the Former Soviet Union* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 118.

<sup>69</sup> M. Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule* (London: Hurst & Co., 2006), 204.

the republic, crippled the Chechen economy.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, ties between Moscow and Grozny were not completely cut, as the center continued up to 1992 to send pension payments to residents of Chechnya and lifted its economic sanctions in December of 1993.<sup>71</sup> Dmitri Trenin and Aleksei Malashenko's characterization of this period provides some explanation for the ad hoc Russian response to the Chechen separatist movement. They write,

A protracted war was not on anyone's mind. Moscow politicians were generally amazed by the actions of the rebels and hoped that Dudayev would simply finally come to his senses and realize that claims of independence simply had no future. They believed that Chechen separatism was 'an infantile disease' of the transition period that would pass as soon as the generic problems of the country's federal system were addressed.<sup>72</sup>

Internal turmoil plagued Chechen politics in this prewar period as well. Support for Dudayev quickly waned following the independence declaration, and a strong opposition came about to challenge the president's authority. Opposition leaders attempted their first coup against Dudayev on March 1, 1992, and despite its failure, the anti-Dudayev movement continued simmering. Its adherents demanded a referendum on Chechnya's independence and even called Dudayev's accession to power illegal. In May 1993, Chechnya's Constitutional Court supported this claim, ruling that Dudayev's authority was invalid, to which he and his supporters responded by dissolving the court.

Personal conflicts between Yeltsin and Dudayev are often cited as contributing to the inability of the two sides to come to a peaceful resolution of Chechnya's status. Anatol Lieven notes several personal interviews, which corroborate this hypothesis, suggesting that personal insults exchanged between the two leaders had a hand in preventing an agreement from taking place to reincorporate Chechnya into the union.<sup>73</sup> Still, whether because of personal animosity towards Dudayev, actual deterioration of the Chechen situation, or a

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<sup>70</sup> Lieven, *Chechnya*, 1998, 69, 74.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>72</sup> Dmitri V. Trenin and Aleksei V. Malashenko, *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia* (Carnegie Endowment, 2010), 19.

<sup>73</sup> Lieven, *Chechnya*, 1998, 67–68.

combination of these reasons, Yeltsin launched his “small, victorious war” in 1994, beginning with small-scale armed operations as early as September, when Russian forces bolstered Chechen opposition fighters in an attempt to oust Dudayev.<sup>74</sup> Direct military intervention began in November, when Russian troops began what would prove to be a costly war effort. The first major campaign of the war was the storming of Grozny on New Year’s Eve in 1994, the initial attack of which failed, due to poor planning on the Russian side. After some adjustments and the arrival of reinforcements in the beginning of 1995, the Russian military ultimately took the capital city by January 19<sup>th</sup>. Still, despite the military success of this particular operation, it resulted in the razing of Grozny and significant civilian casualties, including many among the Russian populations making up a large proportion of the city.<sup>75</sup> Following the siege of Grozny, the war spread to Chechnya’s other lowland metropolises and into the highlands.<sup>76</sup>

The later part of the First Chechen War was characterized by guerrilla-style tactics, rather than those of a traditional military conflict. May 1995 saw perhaps the most tragic event of the war, when a group of 127 Chechen fighters led by General Shamil Basayev led an attack on the town of Budyonovsk, corralling approximately 1,460 hostages into the hospital located in the town. 42 victims were killed on the first day alone. Soon, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin began public negotiations with Basayev, as President Yeltsin had left for Canada for a G7 conference. The crisis concluded after a day of negotiations, but not without 124 casualties and a major psychological blow to the Russian side.<sup>77</sup> Although the Budyonnovsk massacre prompted a series of peace talks and even a temporary ceasefire, this fleeting moment ended in October 1995, when a roadside bomb injured Russian General

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<sup>74</sup> Robert Seely, *The Russian-Chechen Conflict 1800-2000: A Deadly Embrace* (Routledge, 2012), 166.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 249–250.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 275–277.

Anatoliy Romanov.<sup>78</sup> Fighting again resumed into 1996, when a new round of peace negotiations ultimately resulted in the signing of the Khasavyurt Accord on August 31, 1996. This agreement drew to a close a conflict that had demoralized Chechen and Russian populations alike, drained the Russian military of resources, and ultimately resulted in the resumption of the status quo of Chechen de facto statehood.

## Russian Discourses on the Interwar Period

In order to delve into the years just after the First Chechen War, I will examine public opinion via two major sources—the radio program *Ekho Moskvy* and the weekly magazine *Vlast'* published by the newspaper *Kommersant*. Although both time constraints and the limitations of accessing Russian print media archives prevented me from examining further source material, I believe these two sources provide a strong basis from which to examine both public discourse and that of Russian leadership. *Vlast'* is the politically oriented weekly published by the general-financial newspaper *Kommersant*. This newspaper, produced by a publishing cooperative *Fakt*, represented the first post-Soviet independent, national Russian newspaper written in the style of the western journalistic canon.<sup>79</sup> Its weekly magazine *Vlast'* serves as a compelling source because, in addition to news analysis, it offers such features as “Question of the Week”, which invites public figures and readers alike to express their opinions on a prominent question in politics that particular week. Although certainly these responses still reflect the editorial choices of the publication, they nonetheless create space for a range of opinions to be expressed on the page. Similar features of the *Ekho Moskvy* radio station give credence to selection of this news source. *Ekho Moskvy* began as the first alternative, non-government operated radio station in the Soviet period, founded in 1990. As Ellen Mickiewicz writes of the station in an analysis of Russian media outlets, “...its

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>79</sup> “Istoriya Russkikh Media □: 1989—2011,” accessed May 23, 2013, <http://www.afisha.ru/article/mediahistory/>.

stubbornly principled director [Aleksei Venediktov] has refused to give in to censorship and organizes debates and gives time to all parts of the political spectrum.”<sup>80</sup> *Ekho Moskvy* also broadcasts interviews with high-profile figures, many of whom had direct involvement working on the Chechen question. Still, recognizing the limitations of using only these two sources, I have focused most readily on commentary coming from political figures, skewing my analysis in favor of official discourses rather than broader public opinion. I have hoped to capture the public discourse as much as these sources have permitted, both offering commentary by editorials and extracting as much as possible from survey material and open questions presented in these publications.

### ***The Immediate Postwar Discourse***

The initial period following the First Chechen War was marked by Moscow’s desire to move forward from the Khasavyurt Accord. Although writers and officials disagreed on the quality of this agreement, its champions and opponents alike sought to build upon the document, which stood largely as a ceasefire, to begin making tangible steps towards resolving questions associated with the status of Chechnya. More specifically, Khasavyurt stipulated that a treaty “regulating the basis of mutual relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic...shall have been reached prior to 31 December 2001.”<sup>81</sup> It also provided for the creation of a joint Russo-Chechen commission to begin efforts to combat crime and promote security in Chechnya, build relations in the financial sector, and work towards redeveloping Chechnya’s economy.<sup>82</sup> The first reactions to the Khasavyurt Accord itself, long before the implementation of any of these measures contained within it, brought forth a variety of strong opinions, among both politicians and commentators alike.

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<sup>80</sup> Ellen Mickiewicz, *Television, Power, and the Public in Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29.

<sup>81</sup> Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear*, 222.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

For some, the Khasavyurt peace agreement marked a political victory for ending the First Chechen War and opening space for further negotiations. One commentator spoke of the work of head of the Russian Security Council General Aleksandr Lebed, who negotiated and penned this agreement, as “a brilliant act of diplomacy, because of which [Chechen president] Maskhadov suddenly became open to agreement, and which made possible in Chechnya, if not peace, then at least a lasting truce.”<sup>83</sup> However, a number of political figures immediately took aim at the agreement as early as two months after it was signed, suggesting that this document was illegal and served as capitulation to the Chechen separatist movement. Leading among these opponents was Minister of Internal Affairs, Anatoliy Kulikov, longstanding member of Yeltsin’s cadre and personal opponent of Aleksandr Lebed. On October 2, 1996, Kulikov attacked Security Council Secretary Lebed in front of the State Duma, claiming, “Lebed betrayed Russia’s interests. The Khasavyurt Accord is fiction, masking humiliating, irreversible concessions made to the separatists.” On the same day, deputies within the Ministry of Internal Affairs brought forth a formal request to the Russian Constitutional Court, claiming not that the Khassavyurt Accord created unfavorable terms for Russia, but rather that it stood in violation of the Russian Constitution.<sup>84</sup> On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, Defense Council Secretary Yuri Baturin joined the clamor against Khasavyurt. Baturin called a press conference on this day, during which he pushed for lawmakers to resolve the question of Chechnya’s status as soon as possible, despite the five-year timeline allowed for in the Khasavyurt Accord. Baturin stressed this point, focusing on Khasavyurt’s “insufficient legal status” as the driving force behind the need for a speedy resolution.<sup>85</sup> The immediate political crossfire, unleashed by the signing of Khasavyurt, although only a short squabble amongst a small group of politicians, foreshadowed further divisiveness on the

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<sup>83</sup> Natalia Gevorkyan, “Syuzhet Nedeli // Lebedyu Mira Khorosho v Nebe,” September 3, 1996, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/12878>.

<sup>84</sup> “Syuzhet Nedeli / Khronika // Byl, Sostoyal, Uchastvoval,” October 15, 1996, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/13017>.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Chechen question at the level of Russian federal politics. The debate on how to resolve the Chechen question continued throughout the interwar period, remaining relevant as the question of Chechnya's status lingered unresolved throughout these years.

Those who were not skeptical of Khasavyurt itself expressed concern over the practicalities of implementing the peace plan. Even individuals who were convinced that General Lebed's negotiation of the Khasavyurt settlement had been productive and successful questioned how the peace agreement would translate into a more long-term solution for resolving Chechnya's status within the Russian Federation. These questions highlighted in particular the importance of individual figures in this resolution process. General Lebed had become a controversial figure, lauded by some for his ability to negotiate with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, who had rejected negotiations in the past, but disdained by those who believed the product of his negotiations proved sorely unfavorable for the Russian side. (This heavy influence of personal interactions hearkened back to the period between 1991 and 1994, during which interpersonal enmity between Dzhokhar Dudayev and Boris Yeltsin is said to have contributed to the failure of Russo-Chechen negotiations).<sup>86</sup> Statements from the Chechen side corroborated the importance of the personal relationship between Lebed and Maskhadov. The prime minister of Maskhadov's coalition government stated upon hearing of Lebed's resignation in October 1996, "With the departure of Lebed, Chechnya lost the only man in Moscow with whom it was possible to properly and honestly negotiate a peaceful settlement of the future. We have already established that it does not make sense to have this conversation about political solutions from a position of force. However, if Kulikov and his supporters get the idea to start a war, then we will as well."<sup>87</sup> Even amongst those confident in Lebed's abilities, skepticism about the future remained. A leader in *Vlast'* written immediately following the signing of the accord reads, "Everyone knows that Lebed has a

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<sup>86</sup> Lieven, *Chechnya*, 1998, 67–68.

<sup>87</sup> Artur Matanov, Gogoriy Brynza, and Andrei Grishkovets, "Syuzhet Nedeli / Chechnya Bez Vragov // Voyna Vnich'yu," October 29, 1996, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/13055>.

peace plan. What kind of plan, he hasn't said. Who will implement this plan, no one is asking. It appears as though Lebed has created a 'Chechen team', made up of thirteen military and civilian officials who have been hastily removed from Moscow to peacefully and quietly sit down and work in Chechnya.<sup>88</sup> The questioning tone of this passage suggests that even upon the establishment of formal provisions to begin talks on the Chechen question, observers remained skeptical about the potential effectiveness of these state structures and "teams". Although many believed in the political process as a means to solve the Chechen question, they struggled still to see the concrete measures that would lead to this resolution, whatever form it might take.

Amongst those not engaging in critical discourse on the Khasavyurt Accord, the primary focus of the immediate postwar period was on a few themes—in particular, resolving Chechnya's economic situation, preventing spillover of the conflict to other areas in the North Caucasus, and devising plans that would be useful not only in the Chechen case, but also relevant for neighboring territories in the North Caucasus. The federal center's first priorities in moving forward, according to *Vlast'*, were twofold: "...on the one hand, to prevent the conflict from snowballing into a Caucasus-wide issue, and on the other, to resolve the Chechen problem in its local context, which is known better by Chechnya's neighbors than by politicians in Moscow."<sup>89</sup> Although contextualizing the conflict in its regional setting remained a prominent theme throughout the interwar period, contrary to this articulated goal, the influence of regional leadership in resolving the question ultimately proved limited.

Survey data from late 1996 provides some insight into public opinion on the Chechen question, showing some perspectives beyond those within the government apparatus. The results of this survey, conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation, reveal quite a split in public opinion on how best to work towards a resolution of Chechnya's status, which as of

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<sup>88</sup> "Andrei Grishkovets, "Syuzhet Nedeli // Chechenskie Peregovory: Voennye Tayny Mirnovo Plana," September 3, 1996, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/12888>.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

the time of the survey, remained largely untouched by government officials who preferred instead to focus on smaller questions of economic development and foreign investment. The survey put forth to respondents the following questions: “In your opinion, which is more important—ensuring peace in Chechnya or ensuring the territorial integrity of Russia? Did you waver in your answer to the previous question? How should the question of Chechnya’s status be resolved?” Particularly regarding the final question, a wide range of answers surfaced. 33% of respondents preferred “to hold a referendum and implement whatever the people of Chechnya choose, even to the point of separation from Russia”, 23% believed that “the question of Chechnya’s status should be resolved in the same way as that of the other republics of the federation”, 18% wanted to “grant the republic special economic privileges and more strictly control the border”, 9% preferred that “until the situation normalizes, Chechnya be governed by an administration appointed by Moscow”, and 2% responded with other options. Yet another 15% considered the question “difficult to answer”, bolstering the notion that popular opinions on the Chechen question at this time remained extremely diverse.<sup>90</sup> The willingness of a sizeable portion of the Russian population to defer to the will of the Chechen population in this matter differed from the majority of official lines coming from Moscow, as politicians seemed unwilling to entertain options orchestrated by any party other than themselves.

This variance in public opinion on the explicit question of resolving Chechnya’s formal status was reflected in the optimism coming from political leaders, who considered the situation to have a variety of viable options at the outset. For much of the interwar period, despite the center’s inability to formulate a comprehensive plan concerning Chechnya’s status, those involved remained optimistic. In early 1997, Russia passed Federal Constitutional Law “On the procedure for changing the constitutional and legal status of a

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<sup>90</sup> Azer Mursaliev, “Syuzhet Nedeli / Mirniy Front // Krovnaya Neft,” November 12, 1996, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/13081>.

federal subject”, through which Minister of Justice and member of the Russian Communist Party Valentin Kovalev invited the Chechen side to negotiations. Kovalev suggested that this law would give Chechnya several options through which to maintain autonomy within the Russian state. Observers saw this step as an important initiation of a process to formally resolve Chechnya’s status, with the hope that such measures would result in this question being solved by the 2001 deadline outlined in the Khasavyurt Accord.<sup>91</sup> In March of that year, First Deputy Minister of Finance Aleksei Kudrin expressed similarly high hopes, predicting that Russia would have its peripheral regions, Chechnya included, under control within six months.<sup>92</sup> A September 1997 article corroborated this optimism, coupling it with enthusiasm for Moscow’s willingness to compromise in the postwar months. It wrote,

The postwar experience of Russo-Chechen cooperation demonstrated Moscow’s continued propensity to compromise. Whether it was the withdrawal of troops, the election of the Chechen president, the signing of a peace treaty or the development of an agreement to recognize the sovereignty of the Chechen Republic, Russia each time made concessions, guided by considerations of political or economic feasibility.<sup>93</sup>

These expressions of optimism for a formal resolution of the Chechen question likely came about not only because of the nods towards such efforts coming from the Kremlin, but also because the 2001 Khasavyurt deadline for resolution remained several years in the distance. This period revealed a range of potential solutions, though in many cases, those offered by politicians differed from those articulated by the public. Nonetheless, both ordinary citizens and ministers alike saw Chechnya as an open, resolvable question at this time.

Accompanying this optimistic approach to the political side of reintegrating Chechnya into Russia came talk of how to do so. Ivan Rybkin, member of the Agrarian Party of Russia and Aleksandr Lebed’s successor as head of the Russian Security Council, the body which

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<sup>91</sup> Vladislav Dorofeev and Azer Mursaliev, “Ambitsii / Chechenskoe Budushcheye // Posledniy Mir, On Trudniy Samiy,” February 4, 1997, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/13263>.

<sup>92</sup> Mikhail Rogozhnikov, “Syuzhet Nedeli / Kak slozhitsya // Aleksei Kudrin: Vzyatki Goschinovnikam Zalozheny v Byudzhete,” March 11, 1997, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/13376>.

<sup>93</sup> “Druzhba Narodov / TRUBA RAZDORA // Chechenskiy Tupik,” September 9, 1997, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/13761>.

had the greatest involvement in Chechnya, suggested in 1997 that the potential existed for Chechnya to be “independent, but on the territory of Russia”.<sup>94</sup> One article from February of this year elaborated on the potential for this type of solution to be agreeable to both sides. It noted that Russia’s insistence that Chechnya is “a subject of the Russian Federation” and Chechnya’s calls for independence were not necessarily irreconcilable, particularly given the loose federal structure in place at the time. It questioned what independence actually means, asking, “In fact, what is independence? Is it having one’s own flag, president, parliament, or constitution? All these features are present in most of the regions of the Russian Federation.”<sup>95</sup> In this way, the article suggested that many of the practical desires for self-government could be accommodated for Chechnya within the federal system. It even wrote, “It is difficult to get rid of the suspicion that these two concepts, ‘a subject of the Russian Federation with the broadest powers’ and ‘independent Chechnya’, imply, if not in fact are, the same thing.”<sup>96</sup> This acknowledgement reinforces the idea that from the start, officials and observers did not view the Chechen question as unanswerable. Rather, a wide range of diplomatic solutions existed as potential options for resolution.

Nonetheless, despite acknowledging the range of possibilities for Chechnya’s status, officials were similarly aware of the exceptionalism of the Chechen case, given its 1991 independence movement and the war that resulted from it. Member of the Constitutional Court and the Russian Party of Unity and Accord, Sergei Shakhrai, for one, spoke with uncertainty on Chechnya, viewing it (as have many scholars post facto) as a true aberration within the federal system. He suggested that the Constitutional Court was in “virgin territory” when it came to the Chechen question. Shakhrai also indicated that the Tatarstan model, which had successfully integrated the restive republic of Tatarstan into the Russian

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<sup>94</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Arkadiy Gukasyan,” October 13, 1997, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12433/>.

<sup>95</sup> Dorofeev and Mursaliev, “Ambitsii / Chechenskoe Budushcheye // Posledniy Mir, On Trudniy Samiy.”

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Federation by offering it expanded republican powers, could have in principle worked in Chechnya, but had not.<sup>97</sup> Even those on the Chechen side, regardless of their hardline positions on independence, saw room for political compromise. One report wrote of Chechen poet and former acting president of the republic Zemlikhan Yandarbiyev and General Shamil Basayev's willingness to entertain certain agreements with Russia, such as one of "good-neighborly relations", one made through a contract, or one that would regard Chechnya as part of the Commonwealth of Independent States. As the report states, "Even Yandarbiyev and Basayev, some of Russia's most rabid opponents during the war, recognize the need to compromise with Russia."<sup>98</sup>

Nonetheless, despite the prominence of discourses on potential options for how to resolve Chechnya's federal status, a parallel conversation took place, reinforcing the irreconcilability of the positions of Moscow and Grozny. The potential for mutual accommodation of these positions articulated by the commentators mentioned above was clouded by stubborn insistence on both sides of the aisle. These rhetorical hard lines continued throughout the entirety of the interwar period, despite changing circumstances elsewhere. Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin put forth such a position in October 1996, claiming with regards to Chechnya, "...the stability, integrity of Russia—this is a question that is not subject to debate and does not need to be discussed."<sup>99</sup> Grozny responded in kind, with Aslan Maskhadov proclaiming in late 1996 that there would be "not a single document signed by me that would limit our sovereignty." Zemlikhan Yandarbiyev, Shamil Basayev, and Movladi Udagov, despite their above-mentioned willingness to compromise with Russia, nonetheless maintained a strong position demanding Chechen independence. They reinforced

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<sup>97</sup> Vladislav, "Syuzhet Nedeli / Samomnenie // Sergei Shakhrai: Menya Snyali; i Cherez Polgoda Nachalas' Voyna," December 17, 1996, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/13186>.

<sup>98</sup> Vladislav Dorofeev, "Terrorizm/ Navstrechu Vyboram // Chechnya: Mir Po Vsemu Frontu," December 24, 1996, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/13218>.

<sup>99</sup> Matanov, Brynza, and Grishkovets, "Syuzhet Nedeli / Chechnya Bez Vragov // Voyna Vnich'yu." October 29, 1996, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/13055>.

that no compelling reasons could be found to push Chechnya back to Russia and that no alternative to independence existed.<sup>100</sup> The situation in 1997 revealed the persistence of these positions, as one article from February of this year noted,

The claims from the past five months that all the parties will soberly consider the pros and cons and come to a mutually justifiable conclusion, it seems, are not justified. Half a year has passed since the signing of the Khasavyurt agreement. Russian politicians have argued and continue to argue that ‘Chechnya is a subject of the Russian Federation’ and ‘it isn’t going anywhere’. The Chechen leaders stand their ground just as firmly: ‘only independence’.<sup>101</sup>

It is likely that these irreconcilable positions contributed to the lack of consistency in the political negotiation process between Russia and Chechnya, which in turn contributed to the ad hoc approach taken by the leaders of these two countries. Where irreconcilable positions in politics meant a standstill in this arena, space opened for potential solutions in the economic and security spheres, in the hopes that these efforts would eventually bring with them answers to the larger looming political questions. Nonetheless, as becomes clear later, the failure even of these ad hoc plans for economic and social cooperation, combined with the onset of conflict in Dagestan, ultimately made the prospect for resolving Chechnya’s federal status more difficult, rather than improving its chances.

### ***Tending to Khasavyurt: Joint Economic and Security Initiatives***

The question of Chechnya’s economic development became one of the most prominent issues associated with the interwar period, consistently remaining at the front of discourses on the Chechen question for these years. General Aleksandr Lebed first brought this question to the fore, urging policymakers to attend to the task of rebuilding the Chechen economy as a first priority, taking into account the experiences of the republic’s neighbors.<sup>102</sup> At this time as well, the Ministry of Finance set to the task of incorporating Chechnya into

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<sup>100</sup> Dorofeev, “Terrorizm/ Navstrechu Vyboram // Chechnya.”

<sup>101</sup> Dorofeev and Mursaliev, “Ambitsii / Chechenskoe Budushcheye // Posledniy Mir, On Trudniy Samiy.”

<sup>102</sup> Andrei Grishkovets, “Syuzhet Nedeli // “Syuzhet Nedeli // Chechenskie Peregovory: Voennye Tayny Mirnovo Plana ,” September 3, 1996, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/12888>.

the 1996 and 1997 federal budgets.<sup>103</sup> In line with these measures, policymakers focused heavily on economic agreements rather than political or legalistic resolutions. Still, the reasons for doing so varied even amongst the politicians and public figures calling for such measures to be taken. General Aleksandr Lebed, one of the first to agitate for Russia to take action in Chechnya's economic sphere, taking into account the experiences of the republic's neighbors, stood in line with the trend of regional contextualization in both political and economic matters, which dominated the discourse on Chechnya in this period. Regarding his insistence on the rebuilding of the Chechen economy, however, Lebed's sense of urgency reflected the necessity of repairing the damage done to the economy of this republic, rather than the potential for auxiliary political benefits to accompany such a project. Others, however, took a more instrumentalist approach to Russian involvement in the Chechen economic sphere. One economist, an expert from the Moscow Technological Institute, took particular note of the interconnectedness of the Russian and Chechen economies. He stated that Chechnya's oil complex "...is so integrated into the Russian economy that the breakdown of these connections would be equally disastrous for both sides. I am certain we can find an acceptable arrangement for all."<sup>104</sup> The Chechen side expressed a similar belief in the fact that the economies of Russia and Chechnya are inextricably tied to one another.

Zemlikhan Yandarbiev, a Chechen political figure obstinately in favor of Chechen independence, spoke directly of this phenomenon, also commenting specifically on the importance of Russia's involvement in Chechnya's oil complex. He said publicly, "We are under no illusions and understand that the development of our oil industry is not possible without the development of a relationship with Russia."<sup>105</sup> Although a *Vlast'* correspondent suggested that this statement reinforced the Chechen regime's desire to prove its control of its

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<sup>103</sup> ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Matanov, Brynza, and Grishkovets, "Syuzhet Nedeli / Chechnya Bez Vragov // Voyna Vnich'yu."

<sup>105</sup> Mursaliev, "Syuzhet Nedeli / Mirniy Front // Krovnaya Neft'."

industries, a means of reinforcing its self-sufficiency, Yandarbiyev's words nonetheless reveal the regime's acknowledgement that Russia and Chechnya must have some sort of relationship in the economic sphere, more specifically in the oil industry. Thus, they reflect the optimism and willingness to entertain cooperation present early in the interwar period.

This relationship in the realm of the economy was viewed by many as an inroad to political resolution. The Moscow economist mentioned above alluded to this, articulating, "If we figure out the economic problems, the political ones will become that much simpler."<sup>106</sup> For a few more calculating voices on the Russian side, economic relations, particularly in the early part of the interwar period, were also seen as a potential avenue for regaining some political leverage in Chechnya. Minister and expert in regional economics Nuraly Rezvanov expressed this intention as a twofold question. He spoke of Russo-Chechen economic relations as follows: "'How can economic methods be used to interest Chechnya in remaining within the Russian Federation?' That's the official question. 'How can these methods be used to deprive fighters of the support of the peaceful population in the region?' That's the unofficial question."<sup>107</sup> A commentator from *Vlast'* reinforced the potential gains to be made from economic partnerships, noting in particular how the potential for cooperation which existed in the economic sphere was absent in the political. He wrote, "It is clear that, in contrast to the policy sphere, in the economic sphere Chechen leaders have embarked on a path of partnership and restoration of relations with Russia. Perhaps we should change out the tactics of Alexander the Great for those of his father Philip, who preferred to fight not with weapons but with gold."<sup>108</sup> Finally, one politician expressed an extreme position regarding potential postwar economic relations between Russia and Chechnya, claiming that Chechnya

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<sup>106</sup> Matanov, Brynza, and Grishkovets, "Syuzhet Nedeli / Chechnya Bez Vragov // Voyna Vnich'yu."

<sup>107</sup> Grishkovets, "Syuzhet Nedeli // "Syuzhet Nedeli // Chechenskie Peregovory: Voennye Tayny Mirnovo Plana."

<sup>108</sup> Matanov, Brynza, and Grishkovets, "Syuzhet Nedeli / Chechnya Bez Vragov // Voyna Vnich'yu."

was in fact too weak economically to achieve de facto separation from Russia. Speaker of the State Duma and then-member of the Russian Communist Party Gennady Seleznyov voiced this opinion: “Chechnya isn’t going anywhere. It doesn’t have the strength or opportunity in either the economic or political spheres to leave Russia.”<sup>109</sup> As in other areas of the discourse on Chechnya, opinions on the role of economic connections between Russia and Chechnya from both politicians and observers formed a wide spectrum. Nonetheless, from the outset, those in control of the situation sought to tackle economic issues as a first step in resolving Chechnya’s status within the federation, rather than trying to determine an economic relationship based on an established federal position.

Economic policy was similarly viewed as a means to help mitigate the growing problems of violence in Chechnya, most notably, the prevalence of hostage-taking in the region. Even during the interwar period, when formal military action had ceased, Chechen insurgents continued kidnapping hostages, including journalists from both Russia and abroad, as well as such prominent figures as Russian General and envoy to Chechnya Gennady Shpigun, who was kidnapped at an airport in March 1999. Wealthy oligarch, member of Yeltsin’s inner circle and Deputy Secretary in charge of Chechnya, Boris Berezovsky was one vocal supporter of working to end these hostage-takings by supporting the Chechen economy. He stated in May 1997, “We have to pay for stability in the region; there are no other options... We will have to pay so that Chechnya can develop its economy, so that those who have weapons will relinquish them.”<sup>110</sup> Aleksandr Lebed, perhaps the strongest proponent of sending economic aid to Chechnya, echoed this sentiment also in mid-1997, when he answered a question about how to solve the hostage problem, saying, “I suggested to the president at the time: let’s give people something to do, some can work on reconstructing paths, others can stand guard with a gun. All people should be given an occupation so that we

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Boris Berezovskiy,” May 9, 1997, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12409/>.

can resolve the problem peacefully.”<sup>111</sup> Still, as with most proposals regarding Chechnya, the notion of fighting terrorism through economic support was not universally supported. One caller to a radio interview featuring Russian general and Director of the Federal Border Service Andrei Nikolaev asked why the Russian government continued to support Chechnya with economic benefits, offering “humanitarian aid, sugar, blankets” even though the republic “violates the border or borders all the time [and]...constantly takes our citizens hostage.”<sup>112</sup> Concerns such as these became more acute as the interwar period progressed and the violence in Chechnya only intensified, rather than abating, as had been expected by observers.

In large part because of the consistently recurring hostage problem, Moscow and Grozny initiated another small-scale policy initiative meant to contribute to Russia’s bottom-up approach to regaining federal control of Chechnya: the institution of joint security operations in Chechnya. Boris Berezovsky described one instance of the formation of such cooperation in May 1997, stating, “It is clear that the two power structures, the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic, needed to work together. At the start, this was not done. This is the gap we filled in when Ivan Rybkin and Movladi Udugov signed this document to set up an investigation commission to look into the circumstances of the explosions.”<sup>113</sup> Although this signed agreement was made in response to a particular event, a railway station bombing that had taken place in the Russian city of Armavir, the practice of joint security operations became a prerogative of both Russian and Chechen officials in between the First and Second Chechen Wars. Andrei Nikolaev, Director of the Russian Federation’s Federal Border Service, reaffirmed this intention, placing it more specifically in the context of securing the Russian-Chechen border. He articulated on this subject, “We must work together with the legitimately elected Chechen leadership to look for

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<sup>111</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Aleksandr Lebed’,” November 6, 1997, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12445/>.

<sup>112</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Andrey Nikolayev,” June 11, 1997, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12415/>.

<sup>113</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Boris Berezovskiy.”

opportunities to fight the criminal elements on the territory.”<sup>114</sup> This comment not only reinforces the desire of Russian authorities to cooperate with Chechnya in the arena of security, but also similarly expresses some recognition of the leadership of Chechnya as legitimate. Kim Tsagolov, Deputy Minister of Nationalities of the Russian Federation and native of North Ossetia, pushed the call for cooperation in the security sphere even further, deeming it not simply a useful practice, but a necessary burden of Russia. He stated, “[The violence] shows the weakness of law enforcement agencies not only in Chechnya, but in the whole of Russia. We say, ‘Chechnya is a subject of the Russian Federation.’ And if we say so, therefore, the responsibility lies with the law enforcement bodies of the Federation as a whole.”<sup>115</sup> For all these figures, working towards cooperation in economic and security policy were an important first step in solving the political piece of the Chechen question.

### ***The Spiral Downwards: Moving Towards War***

The circumstances of 1999 brought with them greater suspicion and pessimism regarding Chechnya than had previously been seen in rhetoric regarding this region. Although plenty of commentators throughout the interwar period maintained a steady level of pessimism, the optimism found amongst others just after the First Chechen War by 1999 gave way to last resorts and desperation in the face of growing conflict. In particular, fighting in Dagestan served as a large catalyst for this change in public opinion. Dagestan erupted into war in August of 1999, when 2,000 insurgents, led by Shamil Basayev and Emir al Khattab, crossed the border from Chechnya and invaded Dagestani territory. This effort was part of Basayev’s larger political vision, the creation of a united North Caucasian Islamic state. Formulated in April of the same year at the Second Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan, this plan for unification became Basayev’s stated goal, in pursuit of which he

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<sup>114</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Andrey Nikolayev.”

<sup>115</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Kim Tsagolov,” December 9, 1998, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12657/>.

began creating “peace-keeping Caucasian forces”. These forces, upon entering Dagestan, were met with strong resistance from the local population. The war in this territory lasted only until September 16, 1999, when the invading militants retreated from the region. Still, the effects of this conflict on Russian relations in the North Caucasus and its impact on the discourses surrounding Chechnya proved to be profound.<sup>116</sup>

The War in Dagestan stood as a particularly important focal point in the development of the Chechen question. The involvement of Chechen fighters in this arena drew the two conflicts together, creating yet another complication to the already muddled picture of Russo-Chechen relations. This conflict hardened some of the already obstinate positions of the Russian and Chechen regimes, providing yet another point of disagreement. Whereas the Russian side laid blame to Chechnya for instigating the conflict, those in power in an official capacity in the republic repudiated any connection to the outbreak of war. Mairbek Vachagaev, a representative of Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov, expressly denied any official Chechen involvement in Dagestan in an interview with *Ekho Moskvy*. He stated, “Everything that is taking place in Dagestan is strictly an internal problem of the Russian Federation,” and emphasized that the majority of those fighting in Dagestan were residents of the Russian Federation, not Chechens.<sup>117</sup> Regardless of the validity of this statement, it reveals that the conflict in Dagestan provided new grounds for disagreement between the Russian and Chechen regimes, in addition to making the North Caucasus an even “hotter” region than before. A correspondent from *Vlast’* corroborated the depth of the impact of the War in Dagestan on Russo-Chechen relations, writing,

Everything would have been fine, had Basayev and Khattab not invaded Dagestan. One may argue about the non-recognition of Chechnya’s sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Russia, but we cannot ignore the obvious fact: Ichkeria de facto is not a Russian territory. Therefore, it committed aggressions against Russia by

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<sup>116</sup> Robert Bruce Ware, and Enver Kisriev, *Dagestan: Russian Hegemony and Islamic Resistance in the North Caucasus* (M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 121–123, 128.

<sup>117</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Mairbek Vachagaev,” August 11, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12882/>.

(according to the UN definition, “the use of armed force by one State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State or its people).<sup>118</sup>

This statement draws out yet another complication brought forth by the conflict in Dagestan—that is, not only did it interfere with the practicalities of bringing a restive Chechnya back under the thumb of Moscow, it also highlighted the difficulties associated with Chechnya’s de facto independence and unresolved legal status. Until the war in Dagestan, this lack of a formal resolution was problematic largely because of the pragmatic obstacles it put forward for the Russian government. Now, however, the manner in which the conflict in Dagestan was carried out became dependent on the status of Chechnya as either inside or outside the Russian Federation, adding yet a new dimension to this problem.

The War in Dagestan also altered the manner in which commentators chose to talk about the regionalization of the Chechen question. With the conflict in Dagestan growing, the regionalization of the Chechen question, previously articulated as a need to adopt policies in Chechnya that would be appropriate in a North Caucasian context, now manifested as a fear of the potential spread of violence throughout the region. Destabilization in one region by extension could have meant destabilization in a neighbor, just as Chechnya’s initial secession was thought likely to provoke secessions coming from its nearby republics as well. Emil Pain, ethnologist and advisor to the Russian President, reinforced this message in 1999, commenting to *Ekho Moskvy* on the increasing destabilization in the North Caucasus as caused by the conflicts in both Chechnya and Dagestan. He stated,

It could happen that the zone outside the control of the federal center comes to include not only Chechnya, but also Dagestan—but, as many say, ‘Let’s get out of the North Caucasus entirely,’—not realizing that, the wider the zone of instability, the harder it is to deal with. The further spread of erosion will become inevitable because all these territories are so closely related.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ivan Safronov, “Tantsy s Volkami // Vopreki Zavereniam Armyeyskovo i Militseyskevo Generaliteta Rossiyskim Voyskam,” August 24, 1999, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/15838>.

<sup>119</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Emil Pain,” August 18, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12784/>.

In this way, Pain highlighted the resurgence of fear that the problems of one area of the North Caucasus would jeopardize the entire region, having potentially dire consequences for the center's relationship with this area. Pain even utilized the particular language of the past, stating,

And the ‘domino effect’...is when the negative consequences that develop in one area quickly spread to another. This cannot be excluded here. The fact is that these territories are related, and the situation in Chechnya is directly reflected in the situation of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict, the zone of Dagestan, and the area of Karachay-Cherkessia. Today, the fact is that the arc of instability is not confined to Chechnya and Dagestan.<sup>120</sup>

By hearkening back to the notion of a “domino effect”, Pain reveals the new focus of Russian discourses on the North Caucasus—no longer on regional solutions, but rather on regional fears. In similar fashion, an article from late 1998 suggested that a new “parade of sovereignties” was taking place in Russia, again drawing comparisons between regional power grabbing following the April 1990 Law on Secession and the seemingly constant shuffling of federal and regional powers taking place under Yeltsin through asymmetrical federalism.<sup>121</sup>

Still, the events occurring in Dagestan were not the only impetus in worsening the situation in Chechnya in 1999. Internal politics in Moscow had come to a head with the forthcoming legislative elections, which caused the situation in Chechnya to become just one in a slew of issues on the political menu. The relationship between the Chechen question and federal politics in general became more acute in the popular discourse at this time, with each of these items impacting one another—that is, while the political situation in Moscow drove much of the policy in Chechnya, so too did Chechnya have the potential to impact the political landscape in Moscow.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Andrei Bragov, “Syuzhet Nedeli / Komandy ‘Vol’no!’ ne bylo,” September 15, 1998, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/14754>.

Several contributors to the discourse point to the weakening of the federal center and its impact on the peripheral regions. Ramzan Abdulatipov, a native Dagestani and Minister of National Policy in the Russian Federation, for one, suggested that the fragility of the regime in Moscow had prompted the regions to consider means of survival less connected to the center. He told *Ekho Moskvy*, “The issue is that, when the federal center becomes weak, activity increases in the federal subjects and amongst these regional leaders. We have all been witnesses of this activation as of late.”<sup>122</sup> Although Abdulatipov did not suggest that these centrifugal forces would necessarily become so strong as to destroy the federation entirely, he nonetheless saw them as a logical consequence of the deteriorating center. Sergei Karaganov, public intellectual and Honorary Chairman of the Presidium of the Public Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, echoed these sentiments, responding to the question of whether the country might collapse by saying, “No. What I see is a normal attempt [by the regions] to partition themselves off from the corrupting influence of Moscow’s squabbles...”<sup>123</sup>

Others, however, did foresee the problems in Moscow as a potential threat to the survival of the country. Here again, as above, discourses hearkened back to the initial post-Soviet period, during which the survival of the Russian Federation stood in question because of its large size and multinational character. Viktor Ilyukhin, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Constitutional Legislation and State-Building and a member of the Communist Party, expressed these fears in August of 1999, when he stated, “What is needed today is stability in government. One cannot play the kinds of political games in Russia that the president is playing. It is unacceptable for 3-4 changes of government to happen each year. The president himself is thus provoking the collapse of Russia.”<sup>124</sup> This renewed

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<sup>122</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Ramazan Abdulatipov,” May 3, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/13275/>.

<sup>123</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Sergei Karaganov,” August 18, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12741/>.

<sup>124</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Viktor Ilyukhin,” August 10, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12724/>.

discourse on the possibility of Russia's collapse also prompted many commentators to call for a stronger center and changes to the federal system. The Russian ambassador to Kyrgyzstan noted this shift in opinion on the part of many, commenting in August of 1999 about the emergence of an electoral bloc known as Fatherland—All Russia (which later joined with the Unity party to form the present-day political party, United Russia). This bloc called for a “united, indivisible” Russia, contrasting the loose, unclear federal system in operation under Yeltsin for most of the 1990s.<sup>125</sup>

This growing commentary on the deterioration of the political center in Moscow dealt not only with the system of asymmetrical federalism in general, but also with the specifics of Chechnya. As in other areas, much of the talk of the impact of politics on Chechnya did not speak directly to its place in the federal structure. Rather, the same political instability that generated calls for greater consolidation in the center also pushed commentators to point to the failures associated with Chechnya’s integration into the union. Emil Pain, for example, pointed to the upcoming elections as cause for pessimism regarding the resolution of the Chechen question. He stated in late 1999, “...the answer to the question, ‘What is to be done?’ is to point to elections. Everyone says, elections, elections will save us...but in the circumstances of an interregnum it is very difficult to make political decisions.”<sup>126</sup> Pain’s words stood hand in hand with the reigning pessimism of the day, about which I will elaborate further later.

The discourse on the relationship between federal-level politics and the Chechen question at this time was certainly not unidirectional. Rather, with an increasing focus on upcoming elections, observers were keenly aware of the impact that politicians’ positions or actions regarding the Chechen question could have on their political careers. Sergei Korzun of Ekho Moskvy suggested this phenomenon in an interview, stating, “It is understood that

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<sup>125</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Valentin Vlasov,” August 6, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12887/>.

<sup>126</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Emil Pain.”

Dagestan and Chechnya will have a lasting impact on events. Is it possible that they can also have a short-term impact on the election process and results?”<sup>127</sup> Sergei Karaganov continued this line of discussion, when he noted, ”I do not want to believe that someone has again decided to launch a ‘small, victorious war’ like that which took place in Chechnya. We remember how that ended, especially for the regime.”<sup>128</sup> An author from the weekly magazine *Vlast'* reinforced this point, highlighting the potential for the Chechen question to impact even individual politicians. An opinion piece from the magazine from March of 1999 writes,

The Prime Minister [Primakov] could not have not understood that relations with Chechnya are a minefield where a politician can only make a mistake once. That in the future, the ‘best defense minister of all time’ Pavel Grachev will never forget his promise to seize Grozny in two hours, which turned into six months of war. Of course, if you’re lucky, you can become a hero-liberator, who not only saved captured generals, but also defeated the terrorists. But this option is unlikely.<sup>129</sup>

From these statements, it is clear that by 1999, politicians were acutely aware not only of their own impact on Chechnya, but of its implications for their careers and the future of the regime and federation.

### ***Newfound Pessimism***

Another related marked feature of the prevailing discourses on the Chechen question in 1999 was the sense of pessimism that shrouded over the conversation like a dark rain cloud. In general, the disillusionment of this period focused on the irreconcilability of the Russian and Chechen positions and how these political attitudes had resulted in no concrete political decisions being made following Khasavyurt. In addition, critics at this time focused on Moscow’s unfulfilled promises to help Chechnya’s failing economy. Finally, the growing destabilization in both Chechnya and Dagestan served as another focal point for growing

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<sup>127</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Sergei Karaganov.”

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> “Prem’er Sygral Otstuplenie // Pokhishhenie Generala Shpiguna Vneslo Yasnost’ v Vopros o Tom, Kto Upravlyaet Strano,” March 16, 1999, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/15266>.

belief in the inevitability of armed conflict and the impossibility of resolution through diplomatic means. An interview from *Ekho Moskvy* with scholar and political expert Emil Pain effectively illustrates the drastic change in the general mood regarding the potential for peaceful resolution in Chechnya:

Interviewer: In 1994, you believed that by the elections of 2000, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Caucasian factor would not be as relevant. Was this a mistake?

Pain: I did not believe that the North Caucasus conflict, the entire knot of conflicts, and the whole arc of instability would resolve itself by 2000, or even 2020. But I thought these conflicts would move to the political periphery, just as the Ulster problem, which may not have subsided, but nonetheless does not determine the elections between the Labour party and the Conservatives. I did not expect the probability of a second war to be as great as it is now.<sup>130</sup>

An article in *Vlast'* singles out the empty rhetoric of the interwar negotiation process, highlighting the ineffectiveness of Russia's unwavering position vis-à-vis Chechnya. It writes, "The entire policy towards the breakaway republic has been reduced to claims that Chechnya is 'a subject of the Russian Federation'. The officials in charge of working with this republic have changed like pairs of gloves, and the sluggish war on her border has continued to the point of spreading over to Dagestan."<sup>131</sup> This commentary focused on the lack of concrete steps taken to resolve either Chechnya's formal status or to implement policies that would have effectively returned it to Russian control. Rather, this writer at present, seeing no progress on the Chechen question during the interwar period, now characterized the entire process as one of empty rhetoric and the verbal reinforcement of a position devoid of the potential to help resolve the conflict. Other figures expressed similar notions, emphasizing that no progress had been made since the signing of the Khasavyurt Accord. Yusup Soslanbekov, Special Representative of the Chechen President for Foreign Policy, reinforced the idea that individuals on both sides worked only in their own national interests, causing the resolution process to make no progress. He stated, "...2.5 years have

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<sup>130</sup> "Ekho Moskvy / Interv'yu / Emil Pain."

<sup>131</sup> Azer Mursaliev, "S Lermontovym Napereves // V Minuvshiy Ponedel'nik Neizvestnye Rossiyskie Hakery "Po Mnogochislennym Pros'b," September 7, 1999, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/15879>.

passed since the Khasavyurt Accords, but Moscow and Grozny have taken no steps to mitigate the consequences of war, to bring together the positions of the two sides...Each political party or movement is trying to promote its own interests as the general, national interest.”<sup>132</sup> Here, a representative from the Chechen side expressed the same discontent with the process as has been seen in Russian discourses. Abdul-Hakim Sultigov, coordinator of national policies and religious organizations for the United Russia Party, bolstered Soslanbekov’s rhetoric, claiming, “...it was necessary to find a resolution to—that is, to fully carry out the democratic principles of the Russian constitution. Unfortunately, officials in the center fell into a complete misunderstanding and inadequate perception of what has been happening, such that...any group of these people talked only of great love for Russia or something like that.”<sup>133</sup> Both Soslanbekov and Sultigov implied that the potential for successful negotiation in the interwar period existed, but was obscured and deemed null by obstinate, often empty political and personal positions and rhetoric.

One commentator went so far as to blame the Khasavyurt Accord itself for the failure to resolve the Chechen problem. This particular target of pessimism was present in the immediate aftermath of the first conflict, articulated largely by political opponents of General Aleksandr Lebed. However, throughout most of the interwar period, discourses were generally neutral towards the ceasefire agreement, portraying it simply as a mechanism to create a timeframe for the resolution process. In 1999, however, criticism of the agreement resurfaced, standing in line with the general disillusionment of the period. A *Vlast’* author wrote in April 1999, “Then Lebed forced out of it everything possible. He signed peace agreements with the Chechens at the most unfavorable time with the most unfavorable

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<sup>132</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Yusup Soslanbekov,” March 9, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/13265/>.

<sup>133</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Abdul-Hakim Sultigov,” August 23, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12875/>.

conditions for Moscow.”<sup>134</sup> This comment, as those mentioned above, looked to the past for answers as to why the situation had deteriorated to what seemed like a point of inevitable violence. Where some found answers in the process, others saw the past peace agreement as the driver of the failure of the previous two years.

A final feature of the prior two years that influenced the increasingly negative rhetoric surrounding the Chechen question was Moscow’s abdication of its economic promises in Chechnya. As I have articulated previously, the federal center’s strategy in approaching Chechnya broadly speaking avoided political arrangements in favor of economic partnerships. Nonetheless, concrete information about the fulfillment of these promises remained sparse, offering yet another reason for discouragement about the situation in Chechnya. An interviewer from *Ekho Mosvky*, in a conversation with Yusup Soslanbekov, raised the following question, both reinforcing the relationship between Chechnya’s economic need and the level of violence in the region as well as questioning the impact of these two factors on the broader political situation. He asked, “Do you agree that the current aggravation of the crisis in Moscow-Grozny relations has arisen not because Moscow has not (and it’s possible it really has not) fulfilled its commitments in the economic, financial, and social arenas, but because people continue to disappear on the territory of Chechnya, one after another?”<sup>135</sup> This statement underscores that even in the areas that were considered most likely to generate concrete progress in improving Russo-Chechen relations—that is, small-scale economic and security projects, there existed a perception that those efforts had failed.

Even as early as 1998, the plan to pull Chechnya up by its purse strings had begun to unravel. In February 1998, Aslan Maskhadov began criticizing Moscow for failing to make good on its promises for economic aid, threatening that the Russian state be judged by

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<sup>134</sup> “Sovyet Dlya Postoronnego // Sekretarya Sovyeta Bezopasnosti Teper’ Zovut Vladimir Putin. On Stal Uzhe Vos’mym,” April 6, 1999, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/15347>.

<sup>135</sup> “Ekho Mosvky / Interv’yu / Yusup Soslanbekov.”

“experts from around the world” for its unwillingness to fulfill its economic promises.<sup>136</sup> This lack of faith in the potential for economic ties to bring about a solution in Chechnya was not limited to accusations of broken promises coming from the Chechen leadership. Also in early 1998, former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin questioned what kind of returns Russia was gaining by sending money to Chechnya, expressing doubts as to the efficacy of this policy.<sup>137</sup> By late 1998, the few voices holding this opinion had become many, with opinions on the prospect for economic policies to have a significant impact on the situation in Chechnya deteriorating even further. At this time, the head of the radio station Ekho Moskvy, Aleksei Venediktov, probed Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin, asking, “You said that creating jobs, financial assistance in Chechnya could solve [the hostage] problem. But funds and pensions have already been transferred there, and just as before, hostages are still taken...Is there a solution to the hostage problem?”<sup>138</sup> This question ties together not only growing exasperation in Russia with the proffering of monetary aid to Chechnya, but also illustrates the growing dissatisfaction with this approach to the question of hostages. This issue remained at the fore of the discussion well into 1999, as targeted acts of violence continued to be the norm in Chechnya. Editor-in-Chief of the daily newspaper, *Novye Izvestiya*, Igor Golembiovsky expressed similar fatigue with the continuation of violence in Chechnya, telling Ekho Moskvy, “And then, beginning in 1996, negative experiences accumulated, as it became clear that any attempt to compromise or settle this problem would not be possible because of the continuation of hostage takings and terrorist attacks.”<sup>139</sup> Here

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<sup>136</sup> Vladislav Dorofeev, “Chechenskiy Bjudzhet // Polmilliarda v Pervom Chtenii,” February 17, 1998, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/14113>.

<sup>137</sup> Vladislav Dorofeev, “Kavkazskiy Politik // Ramazan Abdulatipov: My Zhivem Tem, Chto Bylo Sdelano Staliny,” February 24, 1998, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/14121>.

<sup>138</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Ivan Rybkin,” November 13, 1998, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12369/>.

<sup>139</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Luigi Ippolito, Igor’ Golembiovsky,” October 18, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/11161/>.

again, the discourse proved to be turning towards disillusionment and accusations of a lack of concrete progress on the Chechen question.

The air of pessimism surrounding the issue of Chechnya was not only backwards-facing, focusing on the failures of the past years. In addition to criticizing the policies of the past, commentators focused increasingly on the potential for war and the poor prospects for negotiation. By August 1999, Mairbek Vachagaev, an official close to Aslan Maskhadov, did not even foresee a possible meeting between Yeltsin and Maskhadov. He said that such a meeting “would have nothing to stand on”, indicating not only that the negotiations themselves were unlikely to happen, but even were they to convene, the deadlock would be likely to continue regardless.<sup>140</sup> Others focused their disillusionment on the likelihood of the outbreak of war and the need for armed intervention to resolve the conflict. This expectation appeared to be colored not only by the failure of diplomatic negotiations and policy measures, but also in perceived shifts in the attitudes and actions of Chechen leaders. Emil Pain told *Ekho Moskvy*,

I recently spoke with a man who runs in my circles, an intellectual who not long ago opposed the war. His feelings towards going to war have recently changed...[There is] a general fatigue among the population today. In 1994, some part of the population believed that the Chechen opposition was fighting for national independence. Today so few believe this, as they see mostly gangs, criminal groups associated with international terrorism...Just three months ago, in my own scholarly articles and public speeches, I wrote and believed that it would be impossible to start hostilities of this magnitude. Now I don't rule it out.<sup>141</sup>

This sentiment reveals that the pessimism of 1999 cannot be linked exclusively to the failures of the official Russian and Chechen regimes to progress in their negotiations, but also reflected growing impatience with the violent actions of militant groups in the region. This behavior had the power to sway public opinion towards desperation and a willingness to use force, an option considered to be a last resort. Others, still, seem exasperated with Chechnya

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<sup>140</sup> “*Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Mairbek Vachagaev*,” August 11, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12882/>.

<sup>141</sup> “*Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Emil Pain*.”

and the complications this de facto state had caused for the Russian Federation. One journalist commented on the damage the Chechen problem had caused for Russia's image abroad, stating, "Chechnya is like an abandoned child. He was pampered, spoiled, and then thrown away. Try to ignore him, don't praise him or love him. But this child knows how to attract attention. One needs only to become a bully, and everyone will notice right away."<sup>142</sup> This quotation expresses the growing feelings that Chechnya had become a thorn in Russia's side, not only causing domestic issues, but also able to tarnish its image in the international community.

The newly emerging belief (by some) in the inevitability of the resurgence of armed conflict itself provoked mixed reactions from observers. For some, this action was a necessary next step, perhaps even overdue, given the steadily increasing levels of instability in the region. One report expressed this opinion, stating, "According to official data, there are at least 700 hostages now in Chechnya, a quarter of which are military and police. Why is it only now that for Stepashin, in his own words, 'the level of tolerance is exhausted'?"<sup>143</sup> For Viktor Ilyukhin, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Constitutional Legislation and State-Building, impending conflict marked rather a last resort to preserve Chechnya's waning connection to Russia. He said on the subject, "You see, Chechnya is already sliced off. We try to hold on, but can only do so through force."<sup>144</sup> For others still, the push towards armed conflict did not represent an inevitability, but rather an opportunity for Russian leadership to exact its revenge for defeat in the First Chechen War. Yusup Soslanbekov provides one such opinion (it is worth reminding that he served as Maskhadov's representative, and thus represents Chechen, not Russian interests). He stated in March 1999,

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<sup>142</sup> Igor Svinarenko, "Khuliganstvo v Osobo Krupnyh Razmerah // ...Kuda Oni Denutsya, Vse Ravno Dadut Deneg! Potomu Chto My Bryacaem Oruzhiem," March 16, 1999, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/15267>.

<sup>143</sup> Nikolai Gulko, "Blits-krik Generala Stepashina // "Uveren, Chto My Sumeyem Obuzdat' Terrorizm. Mir i Soglasie v Regione Budut Voss," March 16, 1999, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/15280>.

<sup>144</sup> "Ekho Moskvy / Interv'yu / Viktor Ilyukhin."

“As long as we stumble on the barriers and the negative developments that have come about as a result of the Kremlin’s bad policies in the Caucasus and the aftermath of the war, and while the hawks in the Kremlin crave revenge for the failure of the 1994-1996 campaign, we will be confronted with today’s phenomena.”<sup>145</sup> Here again are revealed the clashing interests of parties on the Russian and Chechen sides. While those in Russia saw the push towards war largely as a function of the actions of Chechen militants, the Chechen side saw this devolution as stemming from the Kremlin and its belligerence.

### ***A Wide Spectrum of Disillusionment***

The overarching sense of disillusionment clouding the discourse on Chechnya in 1999 and the increasing belief in the inevitability of armed conflict still did not lead to a consensus on how to resolve the issue. It produced stronger, more forceful language, but also a variety of potential solutions. Some responded to the difficulties of Chechnya by suggesting that Russia abandon it entirely. Prominent Russian lawyer Boris Kuznetsov was quoted in 1999 as saying, “Aslan Maskhadov has issued a decree to introduce a state of emergency, thus violating the Constitution of the Russian Federation. In order to get rid of the ‘Chechen headache’, it is necessary to kick her out of Russia, strengthen the borders, and impose visa regulations. And all the Chechens living in Russia should be obliged to acquire alien status and gain a residence permit.”<sup>146</sup> Another commentator took this sentiment to a more extreme position, suggesting that Russia should relinquish control of the entirety of the North Caucasus. He wrote, “‘There won’t be a war in Chechnya’—according to Minister of Internal Affairs, Vladimir Rushailo. In fact, the war in the Caucasus has been going on for a long

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<sup>145</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Yusup Soslanbekov.”

<sup>146</sup> “Vam Kakoe Polozhenie Nravitsya? // Boris El’tsin Zayavil, Chto Chrezvychaynogo Polozheniya v Rossii Ne Budet. Mnogie Emu,” August 24, 1999, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/15836>.

time. It's just that no one talks about it. The federal government will only come to its senses when the North Caucasus ceases to be Russian (*rossijskij*).”<sup>147</sup>

By contrast, in this period, there existed the potential for Russia to use stronger measures to bring Chechnya back into the federation, rather than simply letting it go. One report in March of 1999 suggested that Russia adopt a more stringent economic policy in Chechnya and offered concrete measures the Kremlin could take to threaten Chechnya economically and regain control over the territory. In this way, the rhetoric surrounding even economic policy had become harsher by this time, articulated with an express purpose of coercion. Although the coercive power of economic pressure had been acknowledged throughout the interwar period, those calling for economic ties between Russia and Chechnya justified these plans not only because of their power of intimidation, but also because of their potential to build ties between the center and periphery, help redevelop the republic’s industries, and offer its residents a higher quality of life to deter them from violence. Rather, this March 1999 report offered concrete means by which Moscow could “blockade” Chechnya, including cutting off its electricity, oil and natural gas supplies, financial resources, and food supply.<sup>148</sup> This kind of proposal marked a much more hostile approach, in line with the pessimism of the day. Nonetheless, this suggestion, unlike the above calls to simply relinquish control over Chechnya, offered a non-military, economically-oriented potential policy through which to regain dominance in the region.

Oleg Mironov, Russia’s Human Rights Commissioner, offered yet another potential solution to the Chechen question in an interview with *Ekho Moskvy*. Despite the impending threat of war, Mironov suggested an option that had been present in the public discourse even at the start of the interwar period. He referred to the chaotically changing Russian federal

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<sup>147</sup> “Goryachiy Kavkaz // ‘Voynы с Чечней Не Будет’; Zayavil Ministr Vnutennikh Del Vladimir Rushaylo,” August 10, 1999, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/15800>.

<sup>148</sup> Gulko, “Blits-krik Generala Stepashina // “Uveren, Chto My Sumeyem Obuzdat’ Terrorizm. Mir i Soglasie v Regione Budut Voss.”

system of the post-Soviet period and indicated support for some kind of referendum to determine what the people of Chechnya would like their status to be, whether within or outside the Russian Federation. He stated, “We don’t know whether or not they want [to live within the Russian Federation]…And in order to answer this question, whether they want to stay or not, we need to ask each individual. And he must answer honestly, not under pressure or threat.”<sup>149</sup>

The State Duma itself offered yet another proposition in the period immediately preceding the Second Chechen War. The parliament brought forth a piece of legislation that would deem Chechnya a “temporarily uncontrolled territory”. By assigning Chechnya this status, the federal government could “resolve” the Chechen question, at least in legal terms. The bill would have allowed Russia to maintain its territorial integrity by reinforcing Chechnya’s position within the federation, but nonetheless give the region license to operate outside certain norms in operation in Russia. For example, this option would allow Chechnya to preserve its system of shari’ā law without granting it independence. Nonetheless, one potential pitfall of the bill was the possibility that it could be applied to other regions in the North Caucasus, giving regional authorities license to ignore federal mandates and refuse to take actions such as paying taxes to the center.<sup>150</sup> The proposed law did indicate that a political solution to the Chechen question was not a completely doomed prospect, even in June of 1999, just a few months before the outbreak of war. Still, similar to the propositions outlined above, this suggestion to deem Chechnya “uncontrolled” reflected a sense of desperation common to this period.

The end of the interwar period was marked by growing pessimism amongst politicians and observers alike. Whereas a return to conflict was only a small concern at the

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<sup>149</sup> “Ekho Moskvy / Interv’yu / Oleg Mironov,” August 11, 1999, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/12774/>.

<sup>150</sup> Dmitri Kamyshev, “Uprava Na Gubernatora // Na Dnyah Na Rassmotrenie Dumy Dolzhen Byt’ Vynesen Zakonoproekt o “Vremенно Neko,” June 15, 1999, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/15612>.

end of the First Chechen War, by 1999 this kernel of anxiety had grown into widespread concern, and amongst some voices, conflict seemed the only remaining option. Tied to this growing pessimism were the failures of the central government's ad hoc policies in Chechnya, the building drama of internal politics in Moscow, Basayev's invasion of Dagestan, and the continuation of terrorist activity and hostage-takings in Chechnya. Nonetheless, even in 1999, war was not a foregone conclusion. Officials and commentators remained divided in how to resolve the Chechen question, with no single policy option emerging as a clear answer.

## Conclusion

Although the period between the First and Second Chechen Wars lasted a mere three years, this short time held within it a rollercoaster of policy and public opinion shifts. The signing of the Khasavyurt Accord ending the First Chechen War provided Moscow and Grozny a five-year period during which to establish a mutually agreeable formal status for the Chechen Republic. Several initial steps were made to begin this formulation process, including tangible efforts from the Russian Constitutional Court. This initial push to resolve the Chechen question both brought a variety of seemingly viable policy formulas to the fore and generated some early optimism that space for peaceful resolution was possible. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the demands coming from Grozny for independence likely could have been reconciled with the asymmetrical federalism Yeltsin's regime had pieced together in Moscow, the irreconcilable rhetorical positions of these two regimes put such a possibility on hold—that is, although Chechen demands for sovereignty could have been accommodated within the flexible federalist system created by Yeltsin, the obstinacy on both sides regarding the terminology of their demands (“independence” on the Chechen side, “territorial integrity” on the Russian side) prevented such a compromise.

Unable to come to a concrete agreement on Chechnya’s status in (or outside) the Russian Federation, politicians in the Kremlin focused instead on the other policy mandates outlined in Khasavyurt—that is, cooperation on social, economic, and security projects. For many, this effort was expected to bring the two governments closer to resolution. Moscow employed a bottom-up approach, seeking to resolve an overarching political question (that of status) via more narrow economic and social policies. This approach had a variety of supporters, some of whom simply sought to generate closer connections between Russia and the Chechen Republic, others of whom saw it as a coercive mechanism useful for bringing Chechnya back under federal control. Initially, the prospects for such a project seemed strong, with individuals further nuancing it, calling for regionalized solutions to economic

and social issues in the entire North Caucasus and expressing some faith in the potential for cooperation with legitimately elected Chechen officials.

However, this bottom-up approach, in conjunction with the development of unstable conditions in the region of the North Caucasus, proved unable to achieve its political end goal. As economic cooperation failed and aid from the center made no tangible impact on decreasing criminal activity in the republic, observers as well as those politicians involved in the process became increasingly pessimistic towards the prospect of resolution. The invasion of Dagestan and pre-election politicking in Moscow only exacerbated this situation, resulting in even greater exasperation as the Chechen question devolved into a piece of a larger North Caucasian conflict as well as one platform bullet point among many for politicians up for reelection. As these circumstances became more acute, public sentiment became even more demoralized, with many individuals who had previously been against the use of force in Chechnya now viewing armed conflict as a necessity.

Nonetheless, perhaps the most interesting feature of the Russian public discourse leading up to the Second Chechen War is that, despite the overarching sense of pessimism clouding the discussion, there still existed no consensus on how to deal with the Chechen question. Whereas some individuals pushed for simply relinquishing control of Chechnya (and perhaps even the entire North Caucasus), others actively agitated for armed intervention in order to reestablish authority in the region. The State Duma offered yet another potential solution, proposing legislation to deem Chechnya temporarily outside the control of the federal government, though still part of the federal system. These suggestions illustrate the persistence of a wide set of possible solutions floating around the public discourse. Deteriorating circumstances in Chechnya certainly prompted more extreme suggestions from many, such as those who advocated jettisoning the entire North Caucasus or pushed for intervention. Still, in contrast to what might be expected in such a situation of national crisis, these ideas did not gain broad consensus, nor did they unreservedly endorse armed

intervention. To the start of the second war, Russian public discourse remained divided on how to solve the Chechen question, culminating this period that had begun with an ad hoc strategy in perhaps even greater confusion.

## Appendix<sup>151</sup>



<sup>151</sup> Map of Chechnya, Available:  
<http://www.unc.edu/~aneurysm/images/chechnyabigmap.jpg>

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