

Self-Determination Conflict Profile

Overview of Self-Determination Issues in Chechnya

By Robert M. Cutler

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History

Russia's entry into the North Caucasus dates from the military campaign begun in 1783. The resistance was led by Sheik Mansur, a Chechen captured in 1791. From 1824 to 1859, the Muslim peoples of the North Caucasus led by Imam Shamil fought a long, bloody war of resistance, but the Russians won through overwhelming numbers and a policy of total war. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin's collectivization campaign in 1929 led to new rebellion and repression. During 1936-38 the purges led to the

imprisonment and execution of thousands of Chechens.

On 23-24 February 1944, the Chechens and their neighbors the Ingush were systematically rounded up by Russian troops and shipped off to the east in freight trains. In 1956, following Khrushchev's de-Stalinization speech to the 20th Party Congress, the USSR Supreme Soviet abolished legal restrictions on the deported Chechens, but rejected their claims to return to their homeland or have property returned. In November 1990, a Chechen National Congress passed a resolution calling for the "sovereignty" of the Chechen-Ingush Republic and elected Jokhar Dudaev chairman of its Executive Committee.

After the failure of the coup attempt in Moscow in August 1991, leaders of the Russian Federation tried to assert their

authority over the Chechen-Ingush Republic. On October 19, President Yeltsin ordered Chechnya to submit to terms promulgated by the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation. Dudaev announced mobilization and expansion of the Chechen National Guard, and large popular demonstrations in Grozny supported him. Chechnya tried to act like an independent sovereign state, while Russia continued to regard the Chechen Republic as part of the Russian Federation and subject to its laws. Although Russia failed to establish effective control over Chechnya, the two coexisted until mid-1994.

Foreign Policy In Focus

Self-Determination

Regional Overview

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In February 1994, Russia and Tatarstan—the only republic other than Chechnya that did not sign the March 1992 federal treaty—signed a treaty affirming Russian sovereignty but giving Tatarstan great leeway in domestic affairs. Dudaev, however, refused to enter negotiations with Russia until the latter recognized Chechnya as an independent state and subject to international law. A low-level conflict between the two began in July 1994. After various military incidents, Dudaev in December issued a decree calling the Russian forces "illegal armed formations," while on the same day the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Defense reciprocated the gesture with respect to Chechen forces. Two days later, on December 11, Russian troops invaded Chechnya.

Russian forces leveled Grozny, the capital, and other population centers, but Chechen forces held extensive territory outside the urban centers through 1995 and into 1996, fighting from mountain enclaves. After Russian troops used indiscriminate force in attacking urban centers, Chechen fighters shifted to guerrilla and terrorist tactics against Russian forces. A wave of kidnappings hit the Caucasus region soon after Russian troops pulled out of Chechnya in 1996. In July 1996 Russian forces began a new assault. Through the mediation of General Alexander Lebed, the Khasavyurt accords were signed that August, and Russian military units were withdrawn from Chechen territory in December, leaving the separatist forces in effective control of the Chechen Republic.

International organizations estimate that up to 500,000 people fled Chechnya during the war. In January 1997, the Chechen people elected Aslan Maskhadov as the Republic's president. Also that month, Russia approved an amnesty for Russian soldiers and Chechen rebels who committed illegal acts during the 1994-1996 war.

In August and September of 1999, Islamic extremists based in Chechnya, independent of the government of Chechnya, twice staged armed incursions into the neighboring Russian Federation Republic of Dagestan. When Russia began a new incursion into Chechnya in October that year, it presented the operation as a crusade against terrorism and said it merely wished to subdue bandits operating from the mountains. Chechen leaders said war against the Russian troops would continue as a guerrilla operation involving hit-and-run attacks against Russian positions.

On 8 June 2001, Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a decree on the creation of a new, temporary, Chechen administration that will be directly responsible to the Russian president, government, and the president's representative in the North Caucasus, Colonel General Viktor Kazantsev. This new Chechen administration is headed by Stanislav Iliyasov and replaced the Russian government representation in Chechnya headed by Nikolai Koshman.

Neither the Russian nor the Chechen side likes the current, chronic low-level hostilities, where tangible gains cannot be achieved. Moscow seeks to eliminate Chechen field commanders, see weapons decommissioned, and establish a new power structure in the republic, while promoting social and economic reconstruction. The guerrilla forces seek to continue their military hostilities to prove they are still viable, able to resist Moscow's troops, and implement terrorist operations against individual officials.

Profiles of Major Organizations

(Note: All organizations in boldface are listed also in the Sources for More Information section at the end of this profile.)

The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, successor to the Chechen National

Congress, is the now-disestablished government of Chechnya, which still exists in guerilla opposition. Aslan Maskhadov, a firm believer in Chechnya's independence and important commander in the 1994-1996 war, was elected its president in internationally supervised elections on 27 January 1997. President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation has recently declared direct rule of Chechnya, making official the new local administration, headed with Moscow's blessing by Stanislav Iliysov.

International organizations from Europe are involved to varying degrees. The European Union has made occasional declarations but is the least involved on the ground. The Council of Europe re-established a field office in Chechnya in mid-2000. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) inaugurated its Znamenskoye office of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya, marking the organization's return to the Republic, on 15 June 2001. The organization's concern in Chechnya is mainly with human rights.

A number of international nongovernmental organizations also monitor the human rights situation in Chechnya. The most prominent of these include Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Other international nongovernmental organizations, more oriented toward conflict reduction, have set out programs and promoted conferences seeking to

resolve the conflict in Chechnya. The most representative and detailed such program is perhaps that of the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response.

Proposed Solutions and Evaluation of Prospects

States tend to view the Chechnya conflict as an internal Russian affair and, at most, make cool, if any, criticism of systematic violations of human rights and the rules of war. International human rights organizations decry these violations but with little effect upon their continuation. Even Turkey, which has a sizeable population of Chechen refugees and social organizations, has reached a tacit agreement with Russia not to mention Chechnya officially, in exchange for Moscow's maintaining silence over the Kurds. International aid organizations tend to avoid the region following the widespread spate of kidnappings in the mid- and late-1990s.

Of the two evident solutions—*independent Chechnya* or *Chechnya with significant autonomy inside the Russian Federation*—only the latter has a chance to be at all viable. The international network of regional and policy specialists that comprises the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) has identified six directions for promoting economic development, dismantling the war economy, and promoting security. These are: to initiate and coordinate reconstruction efforts, to initiate efforts for a political settle-

ment, to promote the transparency of efforts for a political settlement with media participation, to ensure Chechnya's autonomy, to protect and meet the basic needs of Chechen refugees and displaced persons, and to strengthen law enforcement and the protection of rights in the republic. The near-term possible evolution of the situation includes—in decreasing order of likelihood—the further intensification of hostilities (on a seasonal basis, with late spring through late autumn being the most active), moves toward a political settlement, and a large-scale intensification of the conflict.

Role of the United States

The United States has expressed concern over rights violations, terrorism, and mass violence in Chechnya. However, there is little prospect of the question of Chechnya reaching any prominent place on the bilateral U.S.-Russian diplomatic agenda, or in U.S. *démarches* in international organizations. Indeed, the original invasion of Russian troops into Chechnya, including the unannounced nature of the move, violated the provisions of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, but *ad hoc* redefinitions and adjustments of terms were subsequently agreed by the signatory parties, relieving much of the contradiction.

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