EMERGENCE OF MILITANCY IN RUSSIA

The Soviet Union contained about 50 million Muslims, having the sixth largest population of the Muslims. After the break-up of the Soviet Union a majority of them went to the newly independent erstwhile Soviet republics in Asia, such as Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan etc. the rest remained in Russia. The rest of the Muslims which are now in the Russian Federation are known as 'internal Muslims', while those living in the Central Asia are known as 'external Muslims'. These internal Muslims reside mainly in the region of North Caucasus: Chechnya, Dagestan, Adygey, Karachai-Balkaria, Ingushetia, etc., and in the Volga-Ural region:

1 A, Bennigsen and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State*, (Beckenham : Kent, 1983), pp. 1
Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. When one talks of Islam in Russia, it actually means Islam in these areas.

Religion is an essential component of culture of the people, all over the world. It has an important bearing on the customs, traditions, and life style of the people. Such an important component was undermined during the Soviet era in Russia, both in the case of Orthodox Christianity and Islam. In spite of this, religious consciousness could not be exterminated and this was true for Islam as well. A study of religious consciousness has all the more relevance if it gets people to act, i.e., if it leads to social and political actions. Though religious consciousness exists in other areas of North Caucasus and Volga-Ural region, it developed into a secessionist movement and a movement for demand of sovereignty of a considerable scale only in Chechnya and Tatarstan. Incidentally, Chechnya and Tatarstan house two of

---

2 Chancey D. Harris, Geographical Analysis of Non Russian Minorities in Russia and its Ethnic Homeland", Post-Soviet Geography, Vol 34 No. 9, November 1993, pp. 543-97
the biggest communities of 'the internal Muslims' in Russia, the Chechens and the Tatars\(^3\).

In this regard the policy Boris Yeltsin the President of the Russian Federation added fuel to fire. To garner support for his struggle for the same space with Gorbachev he supported the various regional leaders within Russia to demand greater autonomy. Moreover in his conflict with the parliament in 1993 Yeltsin again sought the support of local leaders and even granted the Republics with considerable economic autonomy. However this had longterm and wide ramifications, ‘once the proverbial genie was out of the bottle it became virtually impossible to put it back’.\(^4\) In fact demands for sovereignty were not confined to Chechnya and Tatarstan alone, it was raised in Bashkortostan or in the lesser-


\(^4\) Sanjay Kumar Pandey "Ethno-Religious Nationalism Among the Minorities In Russia: The Case Of Chechenya" in Shams-ud-Din (ed.), *Nationalism in Russia And Central Asian Republics: Unfinished Democratic Revolution* (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 1999), pp. 120
known cases of Sakha-Yakutia, Tyva and Buryatia. However Boris Yeltsin was successful in getting the 18 of the 20 republics to agree to be a signatory to a treaty of federation on March 13th 1992. A second similar treaty with the Oblasts and Krais followed it up. This was then followed by a third treaty with the autonomous Okrugs and the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. On 31 March 1992 all these treaties were formally signed into law known as the Federation Treaty. Thus by 1992 Yeltsin had succeeded in keeping all, the federal units of Russia within the Russian Federation except Chechnya and Tatarstan, through this Federation Treaty. Which gets us back to Chechnya and Tatarstan. An obvious question that arises is what were the imperatives and conditions existing in Chechnya and Tatarstan that they demanded sovereignty and

5 Mikhail A.Alexseev "Challenges To The Russian Federation", in Mikhail A.Alexseev (ed.), Centre-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia: A Federation Imperiled (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 9
7 Gail W.Lapidus, "The Dynamics of Secession In the Russian Federation" in Mikhail A.Alexseev (ed.), Centre-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia: A Federation Imperiled (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp.56
independence? This question shall be dealt with as we proceed further into the study. Between Chechnya and Tatarstan it was in Chechnya that secessionist movement turned violent and the phenomenon of Islamic militancy came to light. In fact it even spilled into its neighbouring areas in the North Caucasus. This being the scope and focus of the study it is essential that events in Chechnya and the North Caucasus in the post-soviet period be dealt with in great detail.

In Chechnya, the Chechens gradually started regaining control over their republic, after the trauma of deportation. They started returning to their lands in large numbers. The rate of increase of population of any titular nationality of Russia was the highest in Chechnya, about 251%. The year 1990 saw the setting up of an organization called the OKChN, which in English would mean Pan-National Congress of the Chechen people or the ANCC. The agenda of OKChN at that time was raising the status of the ASSR (Autonomous

---

8 Chancey D. Harris, no.2, pp. 543-97
9 The Initial Stand for Obshchenatsional'nyi Kongress Chechenskogo Naroda
10 Sanjay Kumar Pandey, No.4, pp. 117-119.
Soviet Socialist Republic) of Checheno-Ingushetia to a higher level, that of Union Republic, SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic), which would put it outside the Russian Federation. Here it needs to be mentioned that an SSR was a republic comprising the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation of today was an SSR, while ASSR were republics within the SSR. However the pressure of OKChN led to the declaration of sovereignty by Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet, the official parliament of the republic.

In November 1990, an executive committee was formed whose chairman was Dzhokar Dudaev. Dudaev was a Chechen and General in the Soviet airforce who commanded a Heavy Bombardment Division located in the Estonian town of Tartu. Dudaev here witnessed the Estonian drive for Independence and he was greatly influenced by it. Dudaev had been brought up during the time of deportation. He had a charismatic personality and his asset was that he was not

---

attached to any particular Chechen clan and so could claim to unite the whole nation. Dudaev's Pan-National Congress Executive Committee (IK OKChN) engaged in active democratic and nationalist kind of agitation, over the next year. It became more radical with the disintegration of USSR and started demanding a treaty with the USSR on the basis of 'unconditional recognition of the rights of the Chechen nation to independence'\textsuperscript{12} Meanwhile Doku Zavgaev, the official leader of the Chechen-Ingush communist party, preferred loyal caution to the more headlong behaviour of the leaders such as Dudaev, Ardzinba, Shamiev and Rakhimov.\textsuperscript{13} Zavgaev's balancing act came to an end with the putsch of August 1991 when he played a waiting game, neither supporting nor opposing the coup leaders. He was eventually overthrown by Dudaev and the IK OKChN on 6 September 1991. On 15 September 1991, Provisional Supreme Council of 32 was set


\textsuperscript{13} Valery Tishkov, \textit{Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in And After the Soviet Union: The mind Aflame} (Sage Publications: New Delhi, 1997), pp. 45-50.
up in Grozny to rule the republic in place of the Supreme Soviet of Checheno-Ingushetia, though the members still remained the same. But its chairman, Husain Akhmadov, was also a supporter of the OKChN and therefore was in no position to control the activities of the latter body. All attempts of negotiations between the Russian Government and the OKChN ended when the latter through the paramilitary forces under its control seized the local KGB head quarters. Dudaev had now become an eyesore for Yeltsin and wanted to get rid of him. The democratic opposition was of no use. On 8 October 1991, as planned by Yeltsin and his colleagues in the Russian Supreme Soviet, the Provisional Supreme Council proclaimed its authority over the whole of Checheno-Ingushetia, thereby breaking with the OKChN because of the latter's alleged 'excesses'. However, in the course of October, the OKChN strengthened its control over the republic, and organised presidential elections, boycotted by the supporters of the central government, which Dudaev duly won on 27

14 Ben Fowkes, no12, p. 14
October 1991. On 1 November 1991, the Chechen Republic declared independence; Yeltsin, on the other hand, declared a state of emergency on 7 November and tried to overthrow Dudaev by force. But the military intervention proved to be abortive as the state of emergency was quickly reversed. There was strong disapproval from Yeltsin's liberal allies in the Russian parliament and Russia's Supreme Soviet cancelled it after three days. Though the stand off at Grozny, the capitol of Chechnya airport was averted when Russian troops were quickly withdrawn there was counter mobilization by the Chechens and it was indication of things to come. As the Soviet forces withdrew large quantities of Soviet armaments went into the hands of the Chechens and this was to prove very costly to the Russians as these Russian made arms were to be used against Russians themselves in the ensuing Russo-Chechen conflict.

Chechnya, therefore, became the only republic in the former Soviet Union without Russian troops in its territory. The years

15 Sanjay Kumar Pandey, no.4, p. 117
between 1991-94 became a period of unhindered freedom for Chechnya. This also involved separation of Chechnya from Ingushetia as it decided to remain within the framework of the Russian federation. In spite of it, it did not sever the friendship between the two nations. This was demonstrated by the participation of Chechens in the short war between the Ingushetia and the Ossetia over the Prigorodnyi district. The Presidents of the two republics, Dudaev and his Ingush counterpart Ruslan Aushev openly pledged not to establish a border between Chechnya and Ingushetia 'in view of our common Vainakh roots'.

**Chechnya under Dudaev**

Dudaev was thus firmly entrenched in the seat of power at Grozny. This of course was mainly a result of benign neglect on the part of Russia towards Chechen secession. This period was marked by the political struggle waged by Dudaev simultaneously against his opponents within Chechnya and against the Russian Federation. As early as March 1992 there

---

16 Ben Fowkes, no. 12, p. 16
was a failed coup, a group called Coordinating Committee for the reestablishment of a Constitutional System in the Chechen-Ingush Republic had been formed, armed men from this committee tried to overthrow the Dudaev regime by force.  

In November 1992 the Russian Military itself came close to invading Chechnya. Another confrontation between Dudaev and its opponents occurred in 1993 when the Parliament under the leadership of Mamodaev refused to dissolve as wished by Dudaev. Dudaev amended the Constitution and attacked the Grozny City assembly building and its Deputies were dispersed. Thus a Presidential dictatorship was established in Chechnya. Meanwhile Dudaev made Zelim Khan Yanderbiev as his Vice-President. After this Dudaev’s opposition from Grozny moved to the districts. In 1993 there was even a grenade attack on Dudaev. In January 1994 a so-called Committee of National Salvation of Chechnya also tried to overthrow Dudaev by force which too failed. These opposition

18 ibid, pp.150-151
groups were covertly supported by Russia. The next failed attempt to overthrow Dudaev was to result in Russo-Chechen conflict, 1994-96.

Another feature to note during this period was the inability of Dudaev to administer Chechnya. The economy of the republic of Checheno-Ingushetia, Chechnya then being part of this republic, was already in decline when the events related to the collapse of Soviet Union took place. In the case of Chechnya therefore situation was already gloomy given the inherited backwardness of the Republic. According to one source at the time of the break of the USSR more than 2,00,000 people in the Chechen-Ingush republic did not have jobs in certain areas the rate of unemployment was as high as 80-90 percent. The autonomous republics occupied last place, 73rd in almost all vitally important indicators in the Russia federation. It occupied 2nd position in infant mortality. Oil extracted and refined in Chechnya was not a source of wealth

19 ibid, pp.153
for the region but one of ecological disaster. However Dudaev’s inexperience and absence of a coherent policy on his part worsened an already grim situation. The new Chechen political leadership that came up had no prior administrative experience. This Chechen political elite was comprised of local Chechen strongmen (war lords) referred by Russians as Chechen mafia, Chechens who had come over from other areas of erstwhile Soviet Union and a few educated young idealist individuals. This political elite was in no position to deal with the complex problems Chechnya was infested with which were mostly not even its own making. One of the main reasons for the above situation in hindsight we know now was due to Chechnya being caught in the great historical upheaval of the collapse of Soviet Union, which was remarkable both in terms of magnitude and suddenness.

20 Ajay Patnaik, “Demographic process And Ethnic Relations In North Caucasus” in Shams-Ud-Din (ed.), Nationalism in Russia And Central Asian Republics: Unfinished Democratic Revolution (New Delhi: Lancers Books), pp.103
It was particularly the economic plans of Dudaev that were faulty, as he had no prior experience of managing an economy. In spite of it he dreamed of developing Chechnya into a rich country like Kuwait whose wealth would mainly depend on rich petroleum resources. There was another ambitious plan that of supplying water from North Caucasus to Middle East through a gigantic water pipeline. To achieve these goals soon after taking over the regime of Chechnya, Dudaev wanted to appoint a capable economist as his Prime Minister but this could never happen.\(^\text{22}\) In fact Chechnya degenerated into a territory of lawlessness and chaos where its so called government itself survived and thrived on a black market economy based on illegal narcotics, oil and arms trade.\(^\text{23}\) During the Soviet period, Chechnya being an oil-producing region had also big refineries and oil processing industries. Along with it, it was also an oil-producing region with rich petroleum resources. In the post Soviet period these

\(^{22}\text{John B Dunlop, no.17, pp.125-130}\)
\(^{23}\text{Gail W.Lapidus, No.7, pp.56}\)
industries deteriorated as the Russian engineers and workers in the changed environment were not available as before. The oil-extracting units almost came to a halt, mainly the oil processing units were providing work to the Chechens. Oil was coming from other parts of Russia to be processed in Chechnya, it was in this that there developed an illegal trade. Thieves pirated oil moving through the pipeline or replaced high-grade oil with lower grades and sold them in the international market. This fetch them huge profits as domestic prices were less than 45 percent of world prices because of this train robberies and truck highjacking became a common feature. Similarly Chechnya became market for Russian armaments where Klashenikov rifles, grenades were sold in markets like carrots and cabbages. 24 Most of these arms were left over of the retreating Soviet army whose stock piles had went into the hands of Dudaev, besides in the chaotic post Soviet era much of the arms and ammunitions were siphoned

24 John K. Cooley, Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and international Terrorism (New Delhi: Penquin Books.), pp.177-181
off by the Russian army in connivance with higher military officials. Thus by 1994 Chechnya had become a place where most of its industries had shut down, agriculture was in disarray, people simply had no work. This was an ideal place for militancy and religious fundamentalism taking roots as both became popular with the local youth, this was soon to be seen in the events that occurred subsequently. Though the seeds of fundamentalism came to Chechnya from outside it was the period succeeding the collapse of Soviet Union that proved to be a watershed in making Chechnya fertile for a phenomenon to take roots in its territories.

Another aspect to note with regard to Chechnya was the phenomenon of ethnic conflict, which also took its root here around this time. Here it needs to be mentioned that even during the Soviet period ethnic nationalities belonging to the Islamic faith in Central Asia, Caucasus, Trans-Caucasus and the Volga-Tatar region had stubbornly resisted the Russian policy of assimilation and maintain their distinct religious and

25 John B Dunlop, No.17, pp.125-130
ethnic identity. A long period of Tsarist Empire and then the Soviet rule led to the Russians being scattered to all the regions of Soviet Union. These Russians were living in these areas since centuries, in spite of this many factors such as religious and cultural differences kept the Russians and the non-Russians apart. A deep sense of economic and political deprivation among the Central Asians, the Caucasians and Trans Caucasians and the Baltic nationalities compounded these differences. The crisis of Chechnya was preceded by demand for independence by some groups in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse. It looked as if the multi ethnic states were not possible to exist specially if different ethnic groups had different religious identities. Any attempt to preserve the multi ethnic state was looked upon as an attempt to retain the old empire. It seemed that the Russian State had particularly drawn on one legacy of the Soviet Union that is of continuing with an ethno-territorial structure. In the Russia Federation

today people of different ethnic stock and different religious beliefs are living within a single nation. This situation has resulted in consolidation of ethnic identity and chauvinism in some cases and it has also meant that all problems have a tendency to assume ethnic overtones. These ethnic identities have been reinforced by such factors as the birth rate among groups such as Chechens, Ingush, Balkars and Dagestanis being higher than the Russians. Their birth rate is as high as among Central Asians. In North Caucasus indigenous population had a much higher increase Chechen 20 percent, Ingush 21.5 percent, Kabardins 19.7 percent while that of Slav population had been falling especially in the Chechen-Ingush republic. In the North Caucasus along with these differences there is a situation of different ethnic groups living together within a republic, where a single ethnic group is not numerically superior enough to dominate that republic. Except in Chechnya and North Ossetia in no ASSR any indigenous groups constitute more than half the total population.

27 Ajay Patnaik, no.20, pp.103
It needs then to be discussed whether religion has been a unifying factor in the case of the diverse ethnic Diaspora of the North Caucasus. This becomes clear when we see that there were attempts to highlight the North Caucasian *Gorskii* identity and revive the memories of the united mountain republics that existed between 1918-21.\(^{28}\) The attempts to create homogenous entity in the name of Islam did not lead to any concrete conclusion. In this regard the assembly of the mountain people of the Caucasus was created in 1989 and it even drew representation of sixteen North Caucasian national groups but within two years the representative Karachai and Balkar expressed there unwillingness to enter into any Caucasian federation and so did North Ossetia.\(^{29}\) The basic reason for this has been that North Caucasus contains a great deal of cultural diversity and would not give up its ethnocultural distinctiveness. The fear of being hegemonised by the bigger indigenous ethnic groups haunts many smaller groups.

\(^{28}\) ibid. pp. 106-107

\(^{29}\) ibid
Not surprisingly many do not feel safe when a dominant-native ethnic group demand independence. This has exactly what has occurred in the case of Chechnya and vis-à-vis other republics.

It was against this background that Dudaev after having consolidated his position began a policy of ethnic discrimination against the Russians living in Chechnya. Dudaev's justification for such a policy was that it was in response to the similar policy adopted by Russia against Chechens. He in an interview given in 1993 had expressed thus "Look what they are doing to the Chechen in Russia itself. They are depriving them of housing- and whom are they depriving? Shepherds who feed entire hungry Oblasts with their labour. The Cossack Assembly.... Decides to deport the Chechens, to confiscate their property for the benefit of the (Cossack) settlements, to take away their livestock.... We have hundreds of such facts from Astrakhan, Rostov, Volgograd Oblasts, from Stavropol and Krasnador Krais. But our patience
is not limitless." A perception of Russian oppression of the Chechens was thus an important reason for him bothering about the welfare of the Chechens alone and not about Russians living in Chechnya. In Russia the Russians had widespread anti Caucasian attitudes, which were reflected in different forms of ethnic xenophobia and racial negativism. In public opinion polls taken after the collapse of the Soviet Union there was mark rise in the animosity towards Chechens and other nationality of the Caucasus. There was therefore much truth in the allegations put forth by Dudaev. In this regard it was mainly the Cossacks, which had been settled in Southern Russia that were to be blamed. The Cossacks often showed violence against people of Caucasian nationalities including Chechens. In light of this Cossack behavior and their encroachment on the Chechen lands in Northern Chechnya,
was hardly surprising that Dudaev was pursuing such a policy. However Dudaev’s policy did not go to an extent of ethnic cleansing of the Russians or the Cossacks. The policy remained confined to removal of representatives of ethnic Russians from the decision-making spheres. They were squeezed out of leadership post in the sphere of economic administration as well as from the organs of judicial and legislative power. The anti Russian diatribe against Russia by Chechen media also led to a negative attitude towards Russians in Chechnya. The growing crime rate took the form of ‘National selective character’, more and more the Russians started being targeted. The problem was all the more compounded by lack of effective law enforcement organs. With the withdrawal of the Russian forces therefore Russians found themselves unprotected and vulnerable. The Russians in Chechnya had been concentrated in the industrial enterprises and the state budget organizations. The breakdown of economic ties between Russia and Chechnya and economic policy of the Chechen government led to the squeezing out of
Russian from the process of privatization occurring in Chechnya. This was a major cause of migration of Russians from Chechnya. By mid 1993 a majority of 170,000 Russians remaining in Chechnya wanted to leave\textsuperscript{34}. However the accounts of the sufferings of the Russians was extremely exaggerated by the Russian government, which naturally wanted to discredit Dudaev and justify its war in Chechnya.

The Russian response towards the activities in Chechnya during this period was divided. On one side were the hardliners for whom toleration of Chechen independence was an impossible preposition. They therefore raised the anti Chechen rhetoric, vilifying and attacking the regime in Chechnya. They particularly pointed out to the rapid and wide spread criminalisation of Chechnya under Dudayev where there had developed a nexus between Dudaev regime, crime syndicates international arms and narcotics dealers, operating in the Caucasian, trans Caucasian, Central Asian and middle eastern

\textsuperscript{34} John B. Dunlop, no.17, pp.137
region. 35 This was a classic case of pot calling the cattle black as with regards to black marketeering, increased crime rates and lawlessness Russia was no better. 36 The motive of these hardliners and nationalist was to erode the legitimacy of Dudaev regime and to unify Dudaev’s opposition to unseat him. On the other side the Russian government functionaries were playing the dual game of courting Dudaev regime at Grozny while at the same time intermittently negotiating with Chechen leaders opposed to Dudaev. Interestingly there existed a partnership even among the crime syndicates of Chechnya and Russia. The Chechen criminal world and its counterpart in Russia actively utilised the unstable situation existing in the complete region of erstwhile Soviet Union, to profit from trafficking in weapon, oil, narcotics, and money laundering. This had become easier due to unregulated international flights from Grozny airport. In 1992 large cache of Russian weapons ammunition and military technology

35 Gail W Lapidus, no. 7 pp. 59
36 John B Dunlop no. 17 pp. 129
changed hands from Russia to Chechnya and this took place with the approval and knowledge of Pavel Grachev. This was in fact not an isolated incident in the chaos and confusion resulting in the breakup of Soviet Union, such transactions commonly occurred between Russia and many other former Soviet Republics and even bordering countries. As the Soviet forces withdrew large quantities of armaments were sold off which occurred in connivance with corrupt high-level military officials.\textsuperscript{37}

If we compare the situation of Tatarstan with Chechnya we find that similar demands of sovereignty were also raised in Tatarstan. By early 1988, Tatar intellectuals started airing their grievances. In 1989, a political club was formed that dedicated itself to the ideas of Sultan Galiev. In February 1988, a new organization the Tatar Public Centre (Tatarskii Obshchestvenni Tsentr or TOT) was formed. The TOT also initially wanted the elevation of Tatarstan from an autonomous republic to the Union republic. In March 1990, a radical

\textsuperscript{37} Gail W Lapidus, no.7 , pp.59
nationalist group Ittifak (Alliance) National party began to challenge TOT for leadership. It gave the call of 'Tatarstan for Tatars'.\textsuperscript{38} In particular, the most vocal leader of the party was Fauzia Bairamova\textsuperscript{39}. On August 30 1990, Tatarstan in response to 'Declaration of State sovereignty of RSFSR' issued its own sovereignty declaration. Shortly afterwards, CPSU's first secretary Mintimer Shaimiev declared that Tatarstan government no longer considered the republic a part of the RSFSR. Subsequently, in the wake of Yeltsin's Presidential referendum, the Tatar Supreme Soviet amended its constitution declaring itself a sovereign state in 1991. During the time of the brief coup, Shaimiev had sided with the coup leaders, in the hope perhaps that Tatarstan would be separated from the Russian republic. After the coup Yeltstin naturally saw Shaimiev as an opponent. Just as Soviet Union was about to disintegrate Yeltsin in late 1991 declared that there would


\textsuperscript{39} Valery Tishkov, no. 13, p. 45
be a federation treaty on the lines of the abandoned 'Union Treaty of USSR', for Russia. This treaty would govern the relationship with its republics. Tatarstan did not sign this 'Federation Treaty' in 1992 on the grounds that it would not be a party to a treaty, which did not recognize it as a sovereign state. On March 20, 1992 Tatarstan held a referendum of its own which asked for sovereignty for Tatarstan. The referendum was approved by 61.4 percent of those voting which was 81.6 percent.\(^{40}\)

The above account makes it clear that both Chechnya and Tatarstan definitely wanted separation from the Russian Federation. The question then arises what were the factors, which were responsible for such demands from these republics. Some of the factors, which are provided, are applicable to both Chechnya and Tatarstan, while others are peculiar to one of them alone.

In this regard one view holds that the struggle in Chechnya and Tatarstan was a secular democratic struggle.

\(^{40}\) Edward W. Walker, no. 38, pp. 8-17
The movement for sovereignty was not unique to Chechnya and Tatarstan for almost all the republics of the Russian federation declared sovereignty during 1990. In this regard it is mentioned that it was being led in an institutionalised manner. In Chechnya the demand was first raised by the ANCC (All National Congress of Chechen People) or the OKChN a committee headed by Dzhokar Dudayev. In fact, in the beginning, the demand was limited to raising the status of Chechnya - Ingushetia from an ASSR to a Union republic SSR. It was only later that the OKChN pressurised the Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet to declare sovereignty. Further, it is said that the Chechens were not very religious people. Chechnya unlike Bukhara, middle-Volga region and even Dagestan was never known as a centre of traditional Islamic learning. Most of the Chechens drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes, ate pork, Chechen women did not cover their faces and participated in the labour force. Dudaev

---

41 Ben Fowkes, no. 12, pp. 13.
42 Sanjay Kumar Pandey, no.4, pp. 117
43 Ben Fowkes, no. 12, pp. 12-14.
himself was a Sovietised Chechen. He was an ex-officer of the Soviet Airforce and married to an ethnic Russian.⁴⁴

Similarly in Tatarstan, the TOT (Tatar Public Center) led the movement. Its initial demands were also moderate, calling for a Tatarstan that would embrace both Tatars and Russians. It also demanded that the status of Tatarstan be raised from an autonomous republic to that of a Union republic. Though there was the radical Ittifak (Alliance) National Party, but its call was not on religious lines rather it gave the slogan 'Tatarstan of Tatars'. The real leader of the movement however was Mintimer Shaimiev who was a member of the Communist party and he too was a Sovietised person⁴⁵ with no trace of being a religious fundamentalist. In conformity with the above view the factor given for reason of demand of sovereignty is that the separatist demands were a result of the power struggle between the centre and the periphery, over the control of economic and natural resources such as the mines,

⁴⁵ Valery Tishkov, no. 13, pp. 9
forests and mineral deposits and in case of Chechnya and Tatarstan, petroleum. Yet another factor responsible for the Chechen demand of sovereignty, mentioned is the ethnic consciousness of the Chechens and the Tatars. The Chechens and Tatar language, dress, customs, traditions were all unique and different. The Chechens had the highest language retention in 1989. The ethnic consciousness of the Chechens and Tatars was heightened by the Russian attitude. The word 'Tatar' is a Turkish word, which means alien people. Earlier it was used for the people living east of the river Volga, but was later came to be applied to all those professing Islam, Turkic or non-Turkic such as people of Azarbaizan, the Chechens, the Ingush etc. The poet G. Derzhavin in his 'The Lyrical Song dedicated to the Russians on the capture of Izmail' describes these people as vermin, insects and snakes. Soviet Union for many years had been celebrating the fall of Kazan as the day

46 BenFowkes, no. 12, pp. 151
47 C.D. Harris, no. 2, pp. 543-97
48 Kalpana Sahni, "Crucifying The Orient : Russian Orientalism and the Colonisation of the Caucasus and Central Asia", (Oslo : White Orchid Press), pp.17
of liberation for Tatarstan. Finally, there was a feeling among the various republics that the distinction between Autonomous Republics and a Union Republic was often due to arbitrary decisions by the Soviet authorities, which may often date back to as late as 1930's. So, if the sovereignty could be given to the Union Republics at the break up of the Soviet Union, then why could it not be given to the Autonomous Republics? For example, the Chechens felt that Chechnya was a part of Russia by a historical accident. In 1921 the Soviet Socialist Autonomous Mountain Republic was formed with the consent of the native Caucasians, who accepted Soviet sovereignty in exchange for the Republic's full autonomy in its domestic laws and affairs and the transfer back of lands taken by the Tsars. The following year the Soviet Government disbanded the mountain republic and merged Chechnya with neighbouring Ingushetia as the Chechen-Ingush autonomous

49 Edward W. Walker, no.38, pp. 14
Oblast of the Russian Federation. Kazakhstan was more close to Russia than Chechnya. As late as 1936 its status was similar to Chechnya, yet it became a separate country just because it had become a union republic.

After looking at all the above factors one imagines what was the role of religion in the demand for sovereignty by these two republics. All of the factors listed above miss the central theme. It is true that most republics had raised a demand for separation from Russia in early 1990s, yet by 1992 only Chechnya and Tatarstan were left which had not ratified the Russian federation treaty of 1992. Had this purely been a democratic republican struggle fanned by the dissatisfaction of the republics with the central government it would have been resolved like similar other cases. Had it been only a struggle by the regional elites for the control over the resources it could still have been resolved by the promise of more autonomy.

---

51 Ben Fowkes, no.12, pp. 18
52 David Damrel, no. 3, pp. 10
What then was the factor that made these republics take an extremist stand? The answer will emerge only if one looks a bit deeper into the issue of the influence of religion in both Chechnya and Tatarstan. In Chechnya Sufism signifies religion. These Sufis had entered fairly recently in the region. The Sufis 'Sheikhs' often acquired reputation for miracles and their tombs became Mazaar that became places of pilgrimage. Sufism harmonized the religious teachings with many of the pre existing socio political structures such as clan-based organization of society. They also allowed many of the customs and traditions otherwise considered as un-Islamic. It knitted the fractured North Caucasus society into mystical brotherhoods. The influence of these over the people was great. The two most popular Sufi orders were Naqshabandi and Qadiri. The mystical brotherhoods kept the Chechens united even during the deportation. At the height of religious repression during the Soviet era, people did not abandon their faith in Sufism. The Sufi brotherhoods were working clandestinely among the people. In this regard the Sufi's were
helped by the fact that they do not require formal symbols of religion such as Mosques or priests. Sufis believe in faith and worship and venerate the great Sufi saints. The Chechen also continued to venerate the Sufi saints even during the Soviet rule. As late as the 1970s, Soviet authorities testified to the abiding attraction of the Mazaars (tomb of the Sufi saints) listing more than seventy Mazaars in Dagestan and thirty in Chechnya.

Similarly in Tatarstan a sociological study performed by the Atheistic Institute in Penza Oblast shows that among the Russians 28.4 percent were believers, among the Tatars 31.5 percent were believers, In Gorkov Oblast the percentage of believing Muslims was 61 percent among the Tatar women and 40 percent among the men; in 1986. In 1965 various Tatar villages 40 to 50 percent of the parents named their children according to Muslim tradition and had their sons circumcised, 55 to 60 percent had a Mullah performed the marriage

---

53 Sanjay Kumar Pandey, no. 4, pp. 121-22
54 David Damrel, no. 2, p. 10
ceremony and 90 percent had their dead buried according to religious rituals.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, the Tatars in spite of the rigors of the soviet rule were able to preserve their religious beliefs. The Tatars have also been fiercely protective about their culture and are greatly proud of it. The factor that it is ethnic consciousness of the Chechens and the Tatars that was responsible for their demand for sovereignty also becomes clear in this light, as religion and ethnicity are not antithetical. In fact religion reinforces ethnic consciousness, religion is sometimes an integral part of ethnicity.\textsuperscript{56}

Thus religion was an inseparable part of the consciousness of the Chechens and Tatars as a nation. Religion was an important component of the force that kept them united even in the face of repression and exploitation. This expression of nationhood emerged when Soviet era ended and state control weakened. It was hardly surprising then that

\textsuperscript{55} N. Devlet, "Soviet Muslims: Kazan Tatars"
\textsuperscript{56} Shams-Ud-Din, "The Ethnic And Religious Revival in Central Asia" in Shams-ud-Din, Nationalism in Russia and Central Asian Republics: Unfinished Democratic Revolution (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 1999), pp. 189-191
these places demanded sovereignty. What makes these regions unique is their religious consciousness, which survived and played its role in keeping them united as a nation.

In spite of this aspect of religion namely Sufi Islam having survived the Imperial rule of the Tsars and the atheistic Soviet Union, and being integrally enmeshed with the identity of the people of Chechnya and Tatarstan. It is imperative to mention here that Sufi form of Islam was not fundamentalist. This aspect of religious identity was not similar to other movements attributed to political Islam Sufism only provided an identity to the people it did not contain a set idea of the type of society and political system to put in place after the battle to gain sovereignty is won as is the case with other instances of political Islamic movements. Similarly it would be incorrect to view ethnic discord in Chechnya between Chechens and Russians being a result of religious discord. The conflict was not because the two ethnic groups belonged to different religions namely Islam and Christianity respectively. Rather it was caused because the Chechens saw the Russians as
aggressors and as representatives of a community, which was inflicting abuses on Chechens living in Russia. It was thus not a clash between Christianity and Islam. The Russians were therefore not targeted because they were Christians. Moreover there is no dichotomy between the two positions of religion being a part of identity of the people and hence in that sense Islam playing a part in shaping a secessionist movement in Chechnya and the ethnic clash between Chechens and Russians not being a clash between Islam and Christianity as it is not imperative that one with a particular religious identity considers the other person with a different religious identity an enemy. Religion therefore abetted secession by way of being an important component of a separate identity of the people of Tatarstan and Chechnya.

Thus the OKChN, which was headed by General Dzokhar Dudaev, deposed the government in Grozny and seized power in September 1991. After various attempts of reaching a compromise failed Yeltsin sent in the armed forces. The forces were however soon withdrawn. After the collapse
of the Soviet Union the Russian forces deployed there had to leave under humiliating circumstances leaving all their arms and ammunition worth 1.11 billion rubles behind. From the time that Dudaev seized the government till the invasion of Chechnya in 1994, Dudaev's government maintained its tenacious existence. Opposition to Dudaev gradually emerged. In November 1992 Dudaev declared emergency. Next year he had to dissolve the Chechen parliament when a motion to impeach him was introduced. Since 1993 the Russian had started supporting various opposition groups of Dudaev but with the aim of itself not getting involved in armed confrontation. These opposition groups however were unsuccessful against Dudaev. The reason for this was although Dudaev's regime was not democratic other political groups in Chechnya could hardly claim any greater political legitimacy. The Russian government also imposed an economic embargo but was unsuccessful in implementing it. The oil and arms trade continued in the republic. In the subsequent chapter we shall see the genesis and ensuing war in
Chechnya as a result of Russian decision to dislodge Dudaev at all cost. In spite of the repeated attempts by Russians, Chechnya continued with its independent status. In 1992-93, the Chechen opposition to Dudaev acted through the local parliament and the city council. Dudaev eventual answer to this was to dissolve the parliament on 17 April 1993, close down the Grozny city and rule by force. The opposition then went over to military action, making use of forces of 'warlords' each with a different 'fief'. The men in question were Gantemirov, Umar Avtorkhanov and Ruslan Labazanov. The forces behind the Chechen opposition were locales and clan-based, and hence they were unable to counteract Dudaev's national appeal. Thus from 1991 to 1994 Chechnya continued to have an independent existence. Repeated attempts by Yeltsin to dislodge Dudaev failed. He was also able to wade through the economic blockade clamped by Russia mainly by bypassing the Russian officials and selling oil to other countries.