Chapter IV
Movements for Autonomy in the Russian Federal System

Beginning in 1990, many of the constituent autonomous republics and regions, delineated at various stages of tsarist or Soviet control, used the chaos and centrifugal force created by the breakup of the Soviet Union to move toward local sovereignty. The legislatures of most republics made official declarations of sovereignty over their land and natural resources between August and October 1990. Although the declaration of full independence by the Chechen Autonomous Republic was the most extreme result of such moves, some observers felt that the political and economic stability of the Russian Federation was threatened by the separatism of regions that were valuable because of their strategic location or natural resources. The only autonomous jurisdictions that refused to sign the 1992 Federation Treaty were Chechnya and Tatarstan, both of which are rich in oil. In the spring of 1994, President Yeltsin signed a special political accord with the president of Tatarstan granting many of the Tatar demands for greater autonomy. However, Yeltsin declined to carry out serious negotiations with Chechnya.

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the former union republics within the broader Soviet system automatically acquired the status of sovereign, independent states. The affinities of independence, however, were not restricted merely to these union republics. By the end of 1991, more than twenty Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics declared sovereignty and formed national movements with widespread popular support. Under these circumstances, two contradictory trends dominated the transformation process. While the Soviet successor states engaged themselves in national integration as part of nation-building efforts, the self-assertion of the minorities was demanding more than what the ruling elite of the titular nations offered. As a result, large-scale conflicts

2 Ibid.
erupted; filling the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of communism received ethnic overtones.\textsuperscript{3}

The entire development of Russia starting from 1990 until today has been a complicated transitional period the transformation of a unique state into a real federation. State reform coincided with systemic reforms- the transition to democracy and market economy throughout the entire former Soviet Union, and Russian in particular. That represents one of the key differences in the emergence of the model of Russian federalism.\textsuperscript{4}

During 1990-92, the ethnic formations within Russia (former autonomous republics and okrugs) sought to upgrade their political status, to win recognition as independent republic as a part of the Russian Federation. Towards this direction, movements for sovereignties were led by the republic of Tatarastan, Bashkorotstan, Yakutia and others. At the same time the national idea, the idea of the restoration of ethnic states, language and culture clearly prevailed.\textsuperscript{5} It was by all means promoted by small-scale ethnic movements and was taken up by local and regional political elites, which sought to retain power under new conditions or obtain power from the hands of former party nomenklatura. In 1991-92 there existed a real threat of ethnic separatism, a split of the unified country, and because the trend of decentralizing power obviously dominated, and the power of the centre was extremely unstable.

The most complicated issue in the formation of the Russian Federation is Chechnya. This is related to both the history of the Chechen people and to serious mistakes of the current Russian leadership in its ethnic policy. They appear to be two mutually exclusive views on the role and status of Chechnya.\textsuperscript{6} In view of Moscow leaders, Chechnya is an integral part of Russia, one of the subjects if the federation, whereas for the Chechens or at least for their vast majority, the republic is an independent state. The Chechen republic in their belief determines the fate of its own people on its own but retains close ties with Russia.

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
Chechnya adopted a declaration of state sovereignty back in 1990 and during all the years under Dudayev's regime attempted to uphold independence, not having signed any treaties with the Russian Federation, not taking part in referendum on the Russian constitution, etc. In other words, Chechnya remained within the legal space of Russia but functioned by its own laws.

As it enters a new century, the Russian Federation stands on the brink of considerable political and social change. The contours of Russia's political and strategic landscape for the first decade of the 21st century have been shaped by the events of recent months: the first change of president since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the shift in the political environment in the wake of December's parliamentary elections, a renewed vigour on the world stage, together with revised perceptions of threats to state security as outlined in a new military doctrine. These changes are likely to have a significant impact on future attempts to initiate the consolidation of democracy within the Russian Federation.

The Caucasus region in the Federation

The oil-rich region around Chechnya, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, forms a southwestern corridor of Russian territory bounded on the west by Ukraine and the Black Sea, on the south by Georgia and Azerbaijan, and on the east by the Caspian Sea and Kazakhstan. The region north of the Caucasus includes seven ethnic republics and four "Russian" jurisdictions: the territories of Krasnodar and Stavropol' and the oblasts of Rostov and Astrakhan'. With the thirty ethnically and linguistically distinct communities of Dagestan the most extreme example of the region's ethnic diversity, much of the region surrounding Chechnya is a cauldron of nationality and ethnic conflicts among warlike mountain clans. On the opposite slope of the Caucasus, the former Soviet republic of Georgia likewise includes a number of ethnic groups, two of which--the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians--declared outright independence in the early 1990s.

Tsarist Russia conducted a centuries-long process of expansion into the Caucasus region, subduing the nationalities of the area gradually and often at great expense. The region has

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7 Mary McAuley, Russia's Politics of Uncertainty (Cambridge, 1997), p. 258
assumed particular importance in the contemporary era because of its oil, its location astride Russia's transportation and communications arteries leading to the Middle East, and the central government's fear of resurgent Islam along the southern border of the former Soviet Union.

Not far from Chechnya, a self-styled Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the North Caucasus emerged in 1992 in south-western Russia, where the borders of the Russian Federation about the Transcaucasian republics of the former Soviet Union. That confederation, including representatives from Russia's seven republics bordering the Caucasus, aspires to establish a chain of independent, predominantly Muslim states along the federation's southern periphery. It also has provided a forum for Chechen leaders to enlist support against Russia.

Infact, the North Caucasus has always been a source of troubles for rulers in Moscow. Over fifty peoples occupy the Caucasusian mountains and foothills from the Black Sea to the Caspian, organized into seven republics in Russia and two (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) in Georgia. Political divisions, however, have been largely superimposed upon peoples who define themselves in terms of clan, village and extended kinship group. The political divisions, moreover, are to a degree arbitrary, with the North Ossetians separated from their Southern compatriots, the Kabards (from the Adygei group) joined in one state with Turkic Balkars, while natural associates, the Chechens and Ingush were split apart. The 4.7 million North Caucasians differ in language and ethnicity, but they have many features in common. They are predominantly rural societies sharing codes of honour and culture, and, with the exception of the Christian Ossets, they are Sunni Muslims. There are at least thirty areas of inter-ethnic tension in the Caucasus.10

The Chechen

Chechen have been associated with Russia for the past centuries. They are not Slavs and the language they speak has no connection at all with any Slavic language. An indigenous

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Caucasus mountain people, the Chechens belong to the eastern part of the Veinakh people and are closely related to the Ingush. They practice Sunni Islam, which the Sufi Naqshbandyi brotherhood brought to the region at the end of the 18th century; hitherto Chechen has been largely animist. The first official division between Chechens and Ingush came during the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in the mid 19th century, when the western clans of the Chechens did not take part in uprisings against the Russians while the eastern ones (the Chechens) did. This distinction was one that the Russian colonisers made, and the term Chechen is Russian, coming from a village in the area.11

**Genesis of the Russian-Chechen Conflict**

The conflict between Russia and Chechnya has long historical roots, and the war that presently rages in the Chechen Republic can only be understood in view of centuries of incessant struggle between the two cultures. Chechens led to major rebellions against this Russian invasion in the 18th and 19th centuries. Both, however, were eventually suppressed by the Russian forces and weaponry and an utter ruthlessness in their application.12 Sheikh Mansur, a Chechen and a Sufi Naqshbandyi Sheikh, led an uprising that stretched from north Dagestan to the Kuban and lasted from 1785-79. Although his forces annihilated a Russian army in 1785, he was finally captured and died in a Russian prison in 1793. Imam Shamil led a second revolt (1834-59) that posed a more serious threat to Russian domination because it was based on Sufi Islamic brotherhoods (Tariquat) that enjoyed widespread popular support at the time. The crushing of Shamil's revolt 'officially' marked the end of Russia's Caucasian wars, but Tsarist rule was tenuous.13

Since 1772 (when Russian troops first fought the Chechens) Russia has attempted successfully to dominate and control Chechnya, while the Chechens have persistently attempted to reclaim their cultural and political independence. The most important and

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11 Ibid
12 There was also major fighting by Circassians (Adyge) against the Russian incursion in the Western part of the North Caucasus. See Paul Henze, “Circassian Resistance to Russia”, in Arturkanov, Abdurahman and Bennigsen Broxup, Marie, eds, The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance Towards the Muslim World (London, 1992), pp. 62-111.
successful resistance movement in the North Caucasus was led by Sheikh Shamil who established an independent state, which resisted the Russian invasion into the region for almost 30 years. He acquired a legendary status in his time by uniting most of the North Caucasusian Muslim groups in resistance against the Russian and is still today the most important national hero in Chechnya. For the Russian military leadership responsible for the conquest of the Caucasus however, he was the most dangerous enemy. The Russian submitted the Tsar’s authority in 1859 (when Shamil was captured by the Russian forces) only because military resistance had become hopeless. During the Russian Revolution of 1917-18, great numbers of Muslims joined the Red Army, and by 1920 the communists enjoyed widespread support among the Muslim leaders in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. During this period, the Bolshevik leadership was also most eager to accommodate the demands of those leaders. A semi-independent political entity, the Mountain Republic, was formed in 1918 and retained its status until 1921. However, after the Civil War the communists curtailed local political autonomy in the region and the relationship between the Bolsheviks and Muslims deteriorated. In August 1920 an anti-Soviet revolt erupted in Checheno-Ingushetia and Dagestan. After the military struggle, which continued until 1921, the Bolshevik forces crushed the independence movements and established Communist rule throughout the region. However, in some regions of the North Caucasus fighting continued until 1925.

Relations between the Russians and the Chechens were no better during the communist era than that had been during the nineteenth century. In 1929 the Chechen, led by Shita Istimulovin, rebelled against the Bolshevik government. To bring the conflict to an end Joseph Stalin was persuaded, in the spring of 1930, to grant an amnesty to those involved. Such magnanimity was not to last, and in 1937, people in the Chechen-Ingush Republic, most of whom were executed. Stalin’s repressive policies provoked a rebellion in 1939 when the Soviet Union was fighting its ill-fated Winter War (1939-40) against Finland. The Chechen rebellion, this time led by Hasan Israilov, was limited in scope and ultimately unsuccessful. It is unclear what proportion of the population took part in anti-

14 Jane Ormrod, no.9, p. 450.
Soviet operations, but the rebellions supplied Stalin with the pretext for deporting a sizeable portion of the Chechen population took part in anti-Soviet operations, and starting on 22 February 1944 nearly 500,000 Chechens were forcibly transferred to Siberia, a journey during which thousands died from malnutrition and exposure.\(^{16}\) It should be noted that Chechens were not the only nation to be deported, but that the Karachai, Balkar, and Ingush populations were also resettled in Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Siberia.\(^{17}\) In 1956 the Chechens were rehabilitated by Khrushchev and allowed to return to their homes.

The Chechens have never willingly submitted to Russian or Soviet authority. The numerous wars and rebellions, first against tsars and then the communists, are ample evidence of this. However, until 1991 they were unable to divorce themselves from the Soviet empire. When the democratic revolution of 1991 swept away the USSR and ushered in a new political era, the Chechen declared themselves independent of the Russian Federation and effectively terminated Russia’s political ascendancy in the territory of the Chechen Republic.

Therefore, it may be argued that the current war in Chechnya represents only the latest violence episode in the long, troubled history between a Chechen people and a centralizing Russian state, whether Tsarist, Communist, or Post-Soviet. Strategic interests dictated Chechnya’s modern fate. It lay astride the major route to Russia’s Caucasian colonies, and later oil was discovered under its grassy plains. Although Chechnya was a constituent part of the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, cohabitation was never voluntary, and a Chechnya was placed by force of arms in Russia’s jigsaw continental empire. For more than two centuries, ever since Tsarist Russia begin its large-scale pacification of the North Caucasus in the late 18\(^{th}\) century. The Chechen people have suffered war, forced exile, internal deportation, and scorched earth tactics for their resistance to Russian rule. Peace has been the exception.

\(^{16}\) Reportedly some Chechen resistance groups continued to fight against the Soviet forces until February 1951. See Jane Ormrod, no. 9, P. 454.

\(^{17}\) Segodnia, 30 August, p.1
Ethnic awakening in North Caucasus

Until the twentieth century, Islam was the only bond of unity in North Caucasia. The people of the northern Caucasus had no national consciousness in the modern sense of the term. The Soviet period, particularly the Stalin era, has had important consequences for this situation. To destroy regional consciousness and to obscure unionist tendencies that threatened the integrity of the Soviet state, nationalities were distinguished along artificially created ethnic lines through territorial or linguistic principles as in the case of Adygey. Today there are three Caucasian peoples, namely the Kabardians, Cherkess and Adygey, and several other minorities of Adygey origin like the Shapsugs or Abazinians. Under these circumstances, the post-Soviet period inevitably caused an ethnic awakening that was far from being exclusively nationalistic. Rather, the restoration of the old order is the basic political reality concerning the national aspirations of most of the North Caucasian nations today with few exceptions. The first policy preference of such nations thus has dwelt upon unification first and foremost with those of the same ethnic origin. This tendency is particularly alive among the Ossetians of South and North Ossetia and Adygey groups. Dominant Adygey organisations like Adygey Khase, the Kabardin People's Congress and the Adygey National Congress favour the unification of the Adygey in their ancestral lands with the possible inclusion of those lands occupied by the Shapsugs. The Abkhazian desire to be attached to the Russian Federation partly lies in the fact that, in the words of the Abkhazian foreign minister, Smyr Zurab, within the Russian Federation there are living Adygey groups who are ethnically, culturally and linguistically related to Abkhazians. This tendency determines the stance of Adygey and Ossetian groups to Moscow, because efforts to unify mean an unavoidable war with Georgia.

On the other hand, the basic problem concerning the Adygey republics today is closely related to demographic considerations. None of them has a majority within their territories; there is not even one city where they constitute the majority. This creates a sensitive situation about the Russian population and the Cossacks living in these areas. The Adygey are carefully trying to restrain themselves from provoking both groups, and classify their movement as patriotic instead of nationalistic. This was one of the main
reasons why they accused Dudayev of behaving like a general but not a statesman. They also try to maintain a close relationship with Moscow because they believe that the federal structure of Russia has some beneficial aspects in cultural, economic, as well as technical fields.

After the war broke out between Chechnya and Russia, through his call for jihad, Dudayev tried to obtain the support of the Muslim communities of the ex-Soviet Union, and the North Caucasus in particular. However, the only known response came from Tajikistan. Islam still maintains a crucial place in the Caucasus, but faces important restrictions. Besides the regional religious differences, there are even religious divisions among ethnic groups as in the case of Ossetians. In North Ossetia, there is a considerable number of Ossetians of Islamic belief. Muslim Adygey groups, on the other hand, were fighting against Georgia on the side of their Christian brothers, Abkhazians. The concerns of both Adygey and Ossetian groups determined the careful stance of the Confederation to the role of Islam. Besides, the Muslim nations on the northern parts of the region, particularly the Adygey groups, are cautious about a religious revival because such a revival could cause a confrontation with the Slavic population, especially the Cossacks. Dudayev had also tried to calm down the non-Islamic population of the region. He said he did not divide the region into either south or north, regardless of religious belief. As early as 1991, Dudayev stated his intention to create a united armed force, a Caucasian army, which would lead, essentially, to the union of the Caucasian states.

Development in 1990s

In autumn 1991, after the collapse of the August putsch in Moscow, the Chechno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic declared its independence from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), of which it has been a part. Neither the RSFSR nor its successor after the December 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, recognized Chechen independence. On 11 December 1994, after nearly three years of seeming inaction, Russian President Boris Yeltsin ordered the Russian

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18 Paul A. Goble, no. 6, p.
20 Alexander Snopov, “Highlander’s Judgement: Yeltsin Whipping up second Caucasus War”, Komsants, Moscow, no. 43, p. 23.
armed forces to move against the rebel Chechen state and depose its leader, President Dzhokar Dudayev.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia’s military presence in Chechnya was quickly undermined and it had to withdraw its armed forces from the republic under humiliating circumstances. This embarrassing withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya was probably a background factor in the December 1994 attack. Elements in the military establishments were certainly eager to make forced evacuation of the Russian garrison that had taken place in the recent past.

Russia initially welcomed Dzhokar Dudayev’s ousting of the Chechen Communist leader Doku Zavgayev in 1991, but the ex-General proved disruptive and declared independence. Later Russian efforts to topple Dudayev eventually led to the covert and open support of a jumble of anti-Dudayev militias that simply helped the Chechen president to portrays himself as a patriot fighting against Russian domination. He constantly played this card, managing both to discredit his opposition except in their native areas and to draw public attention away from his mismanagement of the economy, violation of democratic norms, corruption and in general from the overall decay of the affairs of state. After fighting broke out, poorly executed and harsh Russian tactics only increased Chechen resistance, evoking memories of earlier repression.

The Rise of Dzhokhar Dudayev
The first round in the present Chechen-Russian conflict occurred as a result of the August 1991 putsch against the then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Chechen democratic national forces, led by the Chechen Pan-National Congress and its chairman Dzhokhar Dudayev, condemned the coup and supported Russian President Yeltsin, while the republic’s communist leaders waffled. Yeltsin and Russian authorities tacitly supported Dudayev’s ousting of local communists, but were then overwhelmed by Chechnya’s presidential elections on 27 October 1991 (which Dudayev won) and subsequent

declaration of independence. Yeltsin imposed a state of emergency on Chechnya in early November, which only served to mobilize Chechnya behind Dudayev.

Yeltsin and his supporters quietly supported the moves to oust Zavgayev, whom they considered a traitor for his silent support of the coup leaders. Yeltsin had been favourably disposed towards Russia's minorities and their ethnically based territorial units in his struggle against central Soviet authorities and the Soviet President Gorbachev. At one point he told the minorities 'to take as much sovereignty as you want'.

On 27 October 1991, Dzhokhar Dudayev was elected Chechen President with 85 per cent of the vote, though the opposition within the republic contested the validity of the elections. On 2 November, Chechnya declared independence from the RSFSR and the Soviet Union. Russia recognized neither Dudayev's election nor Chechnya's declaration of independence.

On 9 November, Russian President Yeltsin instituted a state of emergency decree to protect 'constitutional order' in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. The decree had two immediate effects: first, it allowed Dudayev to mobilize nationalist feeling in Chechnya against a Russian threat; second, it weakened anti-Dudayev opposition within the country.

Most importantly, Dudayev appealed to all Chechens and all Caucasian Muslims to declare a holy war' on Russia. One Dudayev aide commented that, 'We are grateful to Yeltsin for this decree, as it has solved all our inner contradictions. The Chechen leadership blamed several unexplained attacks and killings on 'the policy of terrorism pursued by the Russian leadership', although it had no evidence to back up the charge.

Two days later, after the Russian parliament voted 177 to four to rescind emergency rule, a chastened Yeltsin was forced to back down. Later, the parliament ordered negotiations

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22 Rebel Chechnya Moves to Mend Ties with Moscow, Reuters, 22 May 1993.
with Dudayev. Many in Russia compared Yeltsin’s action to Gorbachev’s use of force to crush nationalist movements in Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

**Dudayev in Power: 1992-93**

Once the immediate threat from Russia faded, Dudayev still did not alter his highly nationalist, ‘Chechen independence or death’ rhetoric. Although he was not particularly popular, he managed to win himself slightly more public support than his rivals with his defiant nationalism. He consistently pointed to Russia as Chechnya’s greatest threat. When unrest struck the republic, such as a coup attempt on 31 March 1992, Dudayev rightly or wrongly had a ready target that immediately found a response in the population and made people forget that they had not received salaries for several months.²⁴

Chechnya’s relationship with Moscow was not regularized, and Moscow imposed an economic blockade. An internal parliamentary blockade arose favouring normalised relations with Moscow while maintaining Chechnya’s sovereign status. It was later crushed by Dudayev. All of those events were played out against the backdrop of struggles among the ruling elite for a share in oil revenues and weapons trading. Two major phenomenon marked this period. The economic situation in the republic became critical as the result of a Russian economic blockade, corruption, and general post-Soviet dislocation. Dudayev’s rule increasingly became anti-democratic, and in June 1993 his national guard violently dispersed the Parliament and demonstrators calling for a referendum. By the end of 1993, many Chechen political leaders who had stood with Dudayev in November 1991 had left him and could be counted in the opposition ranks. Opposition politicians charged that when Dudayev came to power in November 1991, he kicked out all the old power elites but then faced the dilemma of finding individuals to replace the old nomenklatura. Individuals from the ‘shadow economy’ filled these posts with the expressed goal of enriching themselves at the expense of the state. Reportedly there were three ‘political mafias’ in Chechnya: oil, weapons and privatisation.

Economic dislocation and misery hit the republic especially hard. The most obvious economic ill was non-payment of salaries and pensions, which in the past had been disbursed by the local branch of the Russian Central Bank. When Dudayev took power in November 1991, he nationalised the bank renamed it the Chechen National Bank, whereupon the Russian central bank ceased supplying it with cash. The shortage of cash hit the urbanized Russian speaking population especially hard since it did not have the rural support network of relations many urban Chechens enjoyed.

**North Caucasus towards Confederation**

The idea of confederation in North Caucasus was welcomed with high hopes. The initiative of confederation was expected to accomplish three major goals: to unite all the Caucasian peoples in one single state; to create a common defense system against foreign aggression; and to resolve the disagreements amongst the people of the North Caucasus. Although the Chechen leadership insistently pressed for the realisation of the first aim, besides the aforementioned differing policy preferences of member nations, there were two other obstacles of vital importance. First, the radical decisions of the Confederation taken between 1989 and 1991 stemmed from the fact that, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was in a process of transformation and the central government was suffering a lack of authority over its federal subjects. Even in North Caucasian republics like Karbardino-Balkaria or Dagestan, where the old nomenklatura was still in power with their repressive methods, the popular movements faced a considerable degree of freedom of action. The best example for this phenomenon is the September 1992 events in Nalchik. Except for the Chechens, however, none of the national organisations that were at the same time members of the Confederation could use this situation to take power.

**Pre-second War Situations**

During 1991-1994, threats that a Russian military intervention in Chechnya would lead to a new Caucasian war became one of the main tactics the Chechen leadership used. On

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several occasions Dudayev stated that unless all the republics separated themselves from Russia, the independence of Caucasia could not be achieved. The way to realise this was to unify the Caucasian people. After coming to power in Chechnya, Dudayev went on with the consolidation of Caucasian unity. One of the first decisions of the National Chechen Congress following Dudayev’s election to presidency was to set up a political party called the Caucasian Independence Party. Besides, the Chechen leadership also indicated that a Russian intervention could have some implications on other parts of Russia, because, in Dudayev’s words, the Russian Federation was not homogeneous and other ethnic communities would support the Chechens. Following the entrance of Russian troops onto Chechen soil at the end of 1994, various circles in the West as well as within the Russian Federation believed that the war would spread to neighbouring republics. The Confederation and its active involvement in the Abkhaz-Georgian war were strengthening these arguments.

Under these circumstances, the response of the Confederation to Russian intervention in Chechnya differed from that of the Georgian aggression toward Abkhazia. Following the entrance of Russian troops into Chechnya, the Confederation during its extraordinary congress in Nalchik (11 December 1994) described the Russian military intervention as the beginning of the second Caucasian war. It called on the Caucasian people to help the Chechens defend themselves against Russian aggression. It warned President Yeltsin that some circles within the presidential administration had provoked the political and military situation regarding Chechnya. Additionally, it invited the upper house of the Russian parliament, the Federation Council, to help resolve the dispute by negotiations over political settlements with the legally elected Chechen government. Nevertheless, these calls of the Confederation remained vain declarations. During the Chechen war the Confederation continuously refrained from involving itself in the conflict. Even in 1996, when Yusup Soslambekov, himself Chechen, took the presidency, the expected proximity between the Confederation and the Chechen leadership could not be reached.

Indeed, the deep divergence in approach was not between the Chechen and Confederation’s leadership, but between the Chechens and the Adygey members of the Confederation who were supported by the Ossetians of the south and north. The discordant issues between the two sides centred on their approach to the role of Moscow, and, to a lesser degree, religion and nationalism in the region.

The Second Caucasian War
The conflict in Chechnya escalated slowly when various political movements opposed to President Dudayev’s regime were set up. On 10 November 1992, Dudayev established a state of emergency in the republic that has been extended several times since. The republic split into openly warring factions in the spring of 1993 when a motion to impeach Dudayev was set forth in the Chechen parliament. He responded by dissolving the parliament and crushing a minor uprising. On 5th June 1993 Dudayev’s National Guard disrupted a referendum that was to determine the structure of government and the confidence of the Chechen population in the republic’s executive and legislative organs.

Since 1993 the Russian government has been supporting various opposition groups, most notably the Provisional Council, that have been trying to overthrow Dudayev’s regime. Dudayev himself target of five assassination attempts, 40 for which he holds the Russian Federal Counter Intelligence Service (FSK) responsible. The long-term strategy of the Russian government was to support the opposition groups without becoming overtly involved in the military operations. This was the Russian policy up to September 1994, when for the first time Russian servicemen were deployed to support a Provisional Council offensive against Grozny. The Russian soldiers were probably used in the secret operation in order to shift the balance of power to the Provisional Council, which by itself clearly did not have sufficient military means to seize power in Chechnya. It is also possible that Dudayev’s apparent political weakness was tempting to certain elements of the Russian leadership who decided to bring the Chechen crisis to a conclusion to a decisive operation to occupy Grozny.

28 In 1992 Yeltsin broke the KGB into several parts, of which the two most important are the SVR responsible for foreign intelligence and the FSK, which is in charge of domestic counter-intelligence.
The relationship between Russia and Chechnya for the past two centuries has been one of the permanent crisis. The tsars conquered the North Caucasus and their conquest was consolidated during the Communist era, but Chechnya was never thoroughly pacified, as the armed rebellions in the 1860s, 1920s, and 1930s demonstrate. The forced deportations of the Chechen population during the Second World War and the repressive Soviet security apparatus ensured that the Chechen were unable to challenge the central authorities during the post-war years. However, when the Soviet state crumbled in 1991, the Chechens seized the opportunity and declared independence. The immediate response of the Russian government was to crush the rebellion with armed force, but owing to the political chaos that accompanied the break up of the USSR and the opposition of the military establishment, the Chechen republic was not invaded in 1991. In the years that followed, the Russian government (in collusion with various opposition groups) tried to de-stabilize Dudayev's regime through covert operations in an attempt to restore Moscow's authority in the republic. As the initial attempts failed, Russian increased its military role in the secret operations and began to deploy Russian servicemen as 'mercenaries' and supply heavy equipment to the opposition forces in an effort to shift the military balance in the republic. Although five covert operations against Dudayev's regime were orchestrated by the Federal Counter Intelligence Service. The battle for Grozny was the unintended consequence of one such operation.

**Russian Rationale for 1994 war**

The rationale for the Russian decision to attack Chechnya on 11 December 1994 is far from any clarity. The propaganda efforts on both sides of the conflict, which have been a silent feature of the Chechen war, have made an objective and accurate analysis of the events, which led to the Russian invasion of Chechnya extremely difficult. Furthermore, because contemporary Russian policy making is dominated by personalities rather than bodies or institutions of political power, untangling the decision-making process, which led to the Russian operation against Chechnya, is an arduous task. The analysis is further complicated by the fact that much of the reporting on the Chechen conflict has been inaccurate and contradictory. This is partly due to a lack of understanding of the political

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29 Ibid.
background of the Chechen conflict, but it is also a consequence of a desire to oversimplify what is in fact a complex series of events.

The invasion has been variously explained as an attempt to prevent the disintegration of the Russian Federation, a law enforcement effort, an attempt by President Yeltsin to improve his public standing before the next presidential elections, a plot by the Russian military establishment and a measure intended to protect Russia’s strategic economic interests in the Caucasus. None of these considerations was primary in precipitating the Russian attack: these hypotheses are flawed in that they attempt to interpret the Russian invasion of Chechnya as an independent event, divorced from the escalating power struggles between two nations following the collapse of the Soviet Union.30

One official jurisdiction for the Chechen operation was that it was necessary for the protection of the integrity of the Russian Federation and the maintenance of the nation’s constitutional order. Yeltsin’s announced these objectives on several occasions, both before and during the invasion of Chechnya. On 13 December 1994 he stated that ‘the government actions were prompted by the threat to the integrity of Russia and the safety of its citizens both in Chechnya and elsewhere and by the possibility of the destabilization of the political and economic situation.’ He reiterated these points in his national television address on 27 December 1994, when he emphasized that ‘Russian soldiers are defending Russia’s unity’ and had no geographical area has the right to secede from Russia’, adding that Dudayev’s regime is illegal and unconstitutional.31 This assessment was dutifully repeated by various government officials during the initial stages of the conflict.

The statements by Russian government officials emphasized that if Chechnya were allowed to leave the Federation, other constituent republics would inevitably demand political independence. Government spokesmen declared that a dangerous precedent

30 Boris Yeltsin, quoted in Rossiiskie Vesti 14 December 994, p. 4.
31 Boris Yeltsin’s television address, quoted in Russiiskian Gazeta 29th December 1994, pp. 1-2
would be set if the secessionist aspirations in Chechnya went unchecked. More specifically, they expressed their concern that certain mineral-rich republics, such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, which have already expressed interest in expanding the role of their parliaments in political and economic decision making, might be tempted to follow the Chechen example. As Vladimir Todres, a correspondent for Segodnia, pointed out, one of the main arguments of those who supported the Chechen operation was that ‘if we let Chechnya go, the whole Federation will start tumbling down like an avalanche.

It is clear that all the organs of power in the Russian Federation, the President, the government ministries and the Security Council were keen to present a united front. It seems almost as though they spoke from identical scripts, each seeking to convince both Russian and foreign observers that the military operations against Chechnya was absolutely necessary to preserve Russian integrity and prevent a possible civil war that could engulf the entire country with catastrophic consequences for Russia and the entire world.

The official statements giving the preservation of Russia’s integrity as the primary reason for the invasion were accurate to the extent that the military operation was a result of an effort to re-integrate Chechnya into the Russian Federation. However, the official statements, which claimed that civil war or the disintegration of Russia was imminent were dictated by political expediency rather than reality. It is certainly true that Russia’s armed intervention in Chechnya demonstrated to any secessionist-minded republic that the federal government was prepared to take bold action to protect Russia’s territorial integrity. However, the prevention of a civil war, or the preservation of the unity of the Russian Federation were not principal motives for the military operations against Chechnya in December 1994 for the simple reason that no other republic had attempted to secede from the Russian Federation between 1991-94. The constituent republics of the

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32 *Newsweek*, 9th January, p.11.
33 Segodnia 22 December 1994, p.2. This argument was often advanced to explain the Chechen invasion. For example, Duma member Mikhail Malginov noted that the government’s actions in Chechnya were motivated by a desire to ‘scare the constituent republics into submission’.
Russian Federation are more interested in economic autonomy than political independence, and the federal government has been willing to grant a substantial degree of economic sovereignty to those republics that have been demanding it. For instance, Tatarastan signed a treaty with Russia on 3 February 1994, which bestowed on the republic's political leaders substantial powers over economic matters such as taxing, establishing economic contacts with other states, and issuing credits. Similar agreements have been planned with the republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and Bashkortostan and the Kaliningrad Province. The federal government has been willing to enter such agreements despite the fact that republics such as Tatarastan and Bashkortostan transferred virtually no tax revenue to the centre in 1993.  

The Kremlin leadership has clearly been prepared to grant a substantial degree of economic independence to some of the constituent republics in exchange for political concessions, and while control over economic resources is certainly a contentious issue in the Russian Federation, neither it, nor any other political or economic issue, has prompted the constituent republics (other than Chechnya) to seek political independence from the Federation. It is also clear that economically the republics are dependent on the markets and resources of Russia, and that political independence would provide them with few concrete benefits. Indeed, it might be noted that few republic could exist as independent political entities due to the integration of the economic, military and political structures of the Russian Federation. It seems highly implausible that if Chechen independence constituted a grave threat to the Russian federation, the government would not have acted more forcefully at an earlier stage. It seems that, contrary to official's declarations, the Chechen war has little to do with preventing the disintegration of the Russian Federation or the eruption of the civil war, as neither seemed remotely imminent on the eve of the Russian attack against Chechnya.

The Russian government has also tried to justify the military operation in Chechnya on grounds of internal security. Several prominent politicians, Yeltsin among them, have asserted that the Chechen Republic was a breeding ground for criminals and threatened

34 Izvestia 5 January 1994, pp.1-2
the domestic security of the entire Russian Federation. He also accused Dudayev's regime of being involved in arms and drug trafficking in Russia and asserted that military operation would have a positive impact on the overall crime situation in the country. In his television address he also reminded the army that 'the explosion of banditry on Chechen soil threatens our entire country. Your kin could be among its victims.' Other Russian politicians were equally eager to portray Chechnya as a den of bandits. It is also interesting to note that few Russian politicians drew attention to the fact that the Chechen criminal gangs have been able to operate and prosper in part due to the cooperation of corrupt Russian government and military officials.

One can understand why the Russian government attempted to portray the military action against the Chechen Republic as a law enforcement operation. Crime has become endemic in Russian Federation and the police force has been unable to meet the challenge posed by the thousand of organized criminal gangs in the country. The government faces increasing public pressure to take radical action against organized crime. Furthermore, for centuries Russians have associated the Caucasus with banditry and gangsterism. It was opportune for the Russian government to portray the military operation in the North Caucasus as an effort to address the criminal problem in the country, while at the same time restoring political order on the Russian periphery.

However, the official denunciations, which branded Chechnya as a 'breeding ground' and 'roosting place' for criminals and bandits, are somewhat misguided. It is true that Chechen criminal gangs exert considerable influence in the Caucus as well as other parts of the Russian Federation, but there are dozens of powerful criminal gangs in every Russian region. The Chechen criminal organizations were able to use the republic as a safe haven, but they (like other criminal organizations) have been able to prosper largely due to the cooperation of corrupt government officials. These same officials have created 'safe havens' everywhere in Russia by tolerating criminal groups of all ethnic denominations.

35 Yeltsin, quoted in the Christian Science Monitor 30 December 1994, p.2
37 Moscow News 27 January 1995, p.3.
In the foregoing analysis the most often-cited explanations for Russia's attack on Chechnya have been outlined. All the arguments proposed are limited in that they attempt to attribute the cause of the Chechen war to a single political or economic factor, when the conflict can best be understood as the culmination of a series of events which began to unfold with the declaration of Chechen independence in November 1991.

Yeltsin's desire to confirm the authority of the central government over the Chechen republic remains the operational factor that most prominently stands out as the cause for the Russian invasion. Chechen separatism has been unacceptable to the Russian government from the very moment the republic declared independence in November 1991. The Russian military operation against Chechnya during the same year was a clear indication that Moscow was unwilling to tolerate its succession. A military operation against Chechnya was next considered by the Russian leaders in 1993, but the Russian government decided against an armed solution to the problem. The events between 1991 and 1994 indicate, however, that Moscow has continuously contested the independence of Chechnya.

The November 1994 operation against Grozny, like the one, which preceded it, received covert military assistance from the Russian armed forces. In fact, all Russian military activities in Chechnya until the 11 December 1994 attack have been characterized by secrecy and official denial. Only two weeks before the 'official' attack on Chechnya in December 1994, Russians pilot carried out bombing raids against the Presidential palace and Grozny airport in unmarked planes, though reports of such raids were denied by Russian officials. It is noteworthy that a spokesman for the Federal Counter Intelligence Service, Aleksander Mikhailov, emphasized on 4 December that the Russian soldiers who had been captured by the Chechens were not 'mercenaries' but rather 'volunteers'. While the opposite is true, the statement attests that the Russian authorities were keen on deny official involvement in the Provisional Council's operations. The reluctance of Moscow to admit any military involvement in Chechnya by Russian armed forces

38 Segodnia 19 November, p.1
39 Moscow News 3 February 1995, p.3.
testifies that the Russian leadership had not intended to become engaged in a public military confrontation in the Caucasus.

The final catalyst for the military operation in Chechnya was the capture of 21 Russian servicemen in November 1994. These soldiers were captured during the failed coup of 25-27 November by the provisional Council to seize Grozny. The serviceman had been recruited by the Russian Counter Intelligence Service to support units of the Provisional Council in their effort to topple Dudayev’s government. When the Chechen leader threatened to execute the soldiers if they were not recognized by the Russian government as prisoners of war, Yeltsin was cornered into an extremely uncomfortable, politically embarrassing situation. His authority was directly challenged and in order to save his personnel prestige as well as that of the Russian government he had to respond to the challenge presented by Dudayev. Yeltsin’s options, however, were limited. Had the President of the Russian President started negotiations for the release of the servicemen, he, and therefore the Russian state, would have effectively acknowledged Dudayev’s regime and Chechnya’s independence. Such negotiations would also have revealed that Russia had been engaged for two years in an unsuccessful covert war against the Chechen Republic. On the other hand, Yeltsin could not risk having the Russian servicemen executed, and if he took no action to defuse the crisis he risked public outrage, not only from extreme nationalist groups but also from the army, the media and the population at large.

Second Attack, 1994

Even after the capture of the Russian servicemen, Yeltsin’s government planned to solve the crisis without invading Chechnya. Yeltsin was reluctant to deploy the army in a combat mission inside the Federation, and instead he tried to force the Chechen leadership to capitulate through intimidation. In late November 1994 the Russian government entered a hopeless tug-of-war with the Chechen leadership. The first ultimatum was issued to Dudayev on 29 November when the Russian government entered ordered all armed formations in Chechnya to lay down their arms. Dudayev did not flinch. On 9 December 1994, Moscow issued a new threat stating that strategic targets
in Grozny would be subjected to missile strikes if the Chechens did not disarm.\textsuperscript{41} As late as 11 December a Presidential spokesman said that an attack on Grozny was out of question. A day later a government spokesman in Moscow stated that the Russian Army would not begin an assault on Grozny but intended to use its massive military presence to speed up talks aimed at settling the crisis in the North Caucasus.\textsuperscript{42} On 15 December Yeltsin gave the Chechens two more days to surrender. Once again there was no positive response from Dudayev or his officers. Within three weeks Moscow had levied four deadlines upon the Chechens and on each occasion they had called Russia's bluff. Already in early December Dudayev seems to have been confident of Russian inability or unwillingness to take Grozny by force. In his own words, he was convinced that Grachev's assurances of a quick victory were 'simply a bluff'. Once it became clear that the Chechen leadership was unwilling to make any meaningful concessions, Yeltsin was left with two options. He could have backed down, faced political humiliation and risked strengthening the extreme right (and left) wing political movements, which have continuously claimed that the Russian government is not protecting Russia's national interests. The second option was to deploy the troops, which had begun their advance towards Chechnya on 11 December and thereby protect his own credibility and that of the Russian government. Once negotiations had finally broken down, the troops which had been quickly scrambled and moved towards Chechnya in the beginning of December were ordered to begin offensive manoeuvres.\textsuperscript{43} A factor which further contributed to the hasty initiation of combat operations in Chechnya was the notion that Grozny could be occupied within 24 hours. The Russian President was swayed towards a military option as a result of reports from the Federal Counter Intelligence Service, which indicated that resistance in Grozny could be quickly suppressed if sufficient force was used.

It is surprising that the Russian leadership was unable accurately to assess on the one hand the inherent weakness of its forces and on the other the military capabilities of Dudayev's troops. Certainly the Federal Counter Intelligence Service, which had organized several covert operations in the republic, should have had a better

\textsuperscript{41} *Time* 26 December 1994, p.1.
\textsuperscript{42} *Moscow News* 5 January 1995, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{43} *Moscow News* 13 January 1995, p.3.
understanding of the military realities in the region. In this respect it is significant that already in August 1994 Western sources had observed that the Russian forces in the Northern Caucasus region were "wholly inadequate" to solve the Chechen problem.\textsuperscript{44}

Finally, we might note that two months after Russia's attack on Dudayev's forces, in February 1995, Yeltsin admitted as much as in his address to the state Duma when he conceded that the Russian government had 'underestimated' the situation in Chechnya.\textsuperscript{45}

As for Yeltsin's position on the Chechen issue it must be remembered that while he was responsible for ordering the December 1994 offensive against Grozny, he had refused to use military force to subjugate Chechnya for over two years after the failed 1991 military operation. As the foregoing discussion has shown, powerful elements in the Russian military and political elite were keen to crush an independent Chechnya through military means, and between 1992 and 1994 Yeltsin was the only force that prevented them from doing so. Yeltsin decided on a military operation only when the prestige and credibility of the Russian President and government was openly challenged.

It is interesting to speculate whether the Chechen war could have been avoided had the leaders in Russia and Chechnya been more flexible and willing to compromise. Several sources have indicated that Dudayev and members of his government might have been satisfied with something short of full independence, at least after it had become obvious to them that the Russian Army was committed to invading Grozny. This is the view, for instance, of the former chairman of the Russian state committee nationalities, Valery Tishkov, who asserted in February 1995 that the military intervention in Chechnya had been unnecessary because Dudayev had been willing to negotiate with the Russian government about the status of the republic.\textsuperscript{46} In fact, even before the Russian invasion Dudayev expressed willingness to talk to Russian leaders, but always insisted that negotiations take place at the 'appropriate level' - which meant at the presidential level. In

\textsuperscript{44} Chechnya under arms, \textit{Literaturnaya Gazeta}, Moscow, No. 33, 17 August 1994, p.1.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Newsweek} 23 January 1995, p.16. It is interesting to note that Dudayev thought that the pen could solve the Chechen problem, whereas Defence Minister Grachev took the view that the situation would be solved by a regiment of Paratroopers.
\textsuperscript{46} Kostko, p. 36.
January 1995, Dudayev commented that ‘full or partial independence, it’s a relative matter. All these issues can be settled an hour with one stroke of the pen.’\textsuperscript{47}

In retrospect it is easy to see that Dudayev was only moderately inclined towards cooperation with the Russian government before the 11 December 1994 attack, and that his enthusiasm for talks increased only when the military situation in Chechnya began to deteriorate in January 1995. Once the Russian Army had launched its attack on Chechnya, the willingness of Chechen leadership to negotiate with the Russians was reiterated by a close associate of General Dudayev who told Reuters that Chechnya would consider retracting its demand for full independence and agree to an ‘economic, monetary and security confederation with Russia.’

**Russian-Chechen Negotiations**

In general, both the Russian government and President Dudayev became prisoners of their own rhetoric. In spite of the seeming thaw in early 1994, neither side would move away from fundamentals demands. As Dudayev stated upon coming to power in 1991, ‘We will build equal relations with Russia, and only [equal relations].’\textsuperscript{48} Since Dudayev had invested so much capital in creating his image as the defender of Chechen sovereignty against a Russian threat and tarring his enemies as Russian pawns, he could not oppose co-operation with Russia as an equal partner of CIS, but membership of the Russian federation was clearly unacceptable. In March 1994, he told ITAR- Tass that he was willing to meet Russian leaders, but would not move ‘one iota from the idea of the state of independence of the republics.’\textsuperscript{49}

Russia was as equally unwillingly to move away from its fundamental set of demands. Furthermore, both the Russian government and media had painted Chechnya as a lawless state run by a mafia band, which further limited the parameters for concessions to the Dudayev government. The Russian government’s bargaining position was based on a quid pro quo that Dudayev could not accept: Chechnya would sign the federation treaty,

\textsuperscript{47} RFE/RL Daily Report, 2 March 1994.
\textsuperscript{49} Moskovskie Novosti 8 January 1995, p. 8.
thereby acknowledging its membership in the Russian federation, hold election's for Duma and federation Council, and cease 'anti-Russian propaganda in return for Russia's recognition of Dudayev's legitimacy as President'. The Russian government’s position was further limited by decrees of both the Vth and VIIth Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation that did not recognize the elections which brought Dudayev to power.

Assessing the conflict
The Chechen war, which began as a minor regional conflict on the periphery of the Russian Federation, has turned out to be a watershed in the development of modern Russia. It has crystallized the problems Russia faces as it tries to redefine its political and cultural identity in the post-Soviet era, and recently it has also begun to shape that identity. Since December 1994, the impulses towards censorship and authoritarianism have grown stronger in Russia, and while the war in Chechnya has demonstrated the weakness of the Russian state, it has also provided the political leaders of the country with an undeniable argument for recreating a powerful central government as the only means for restoring Russian prestige and power. The Chechen conflict has also illustrated the divisions within the political and military leadership and the confused and eccentric decision-making process in the country.

The war in Chechnya can be viewed as the national liberation struggle of a people who have been under foreign domination for over one hundred years, or it can be examined as a struggle between political elites whose main ambition is power. In this context it might be helpful to note that the Chechens by no means constitute a single political entity as is sometimes attested. Some elements in Chechnya favoured re-integration with Russia, others promoted political independence, while yet others were largely indifferent to the political developments in the country. Dudayev was until his death the leader of the independence movement, but that movement is by no means unitary and was even less so before the Russian invasion. It should also be remembered that the single factor that has

united the various factions and clans in Chechnya has been the Russian invasion, and that without it the low intensity civil war would probably have continued without a decisive conclusion.

The Caucasus marks a cultural and ideological fault line between the West and the East, as well as between Christianity and Islam. It is also a melting pot of ethnic and national minorities, many of them now engaged in violent struggles for the spoils of the former Soviet Union, property and political power. Yet, even in such a region, the Chechens stand out as a special case. Their long history of resistance against Russia and their stubborn independence struggles even during Stalin’s reign set them apart from the other ethnic groups in the region. Chechnya has, throughout its history, been sensitive to the changes in the political climate of Russia and the Soviet Union. The historical parallels between the latest conflict in Chechnya and the wars and rebellions in the region in 1816-59, 1862-63, 1918, 1920-21, 1929, and 1939-44 are obvious. Every time Russia or the Soviet Union has faced either internal or external challenges, the Chechens have asserted their claim to independence. This was the case also in 1991 when they took advantage of the disintegration of the Soviet Union to divorce themselves from the Russian Republic. However, the chaos of the last years of the Soviet Union provoked an independence movement in Chechnya, the subsequent political consolidation in Russia allowed a counter reaction from the centre.

The decision to invade Chechnya was taken in great haste, in a confused environment, with inadequate information and with little thought given to the border implications of the operation. After the covert operations became public, Yeltsin was under increasing pressure to formulate a new policy towards Chechnya. The credibility of the Presidency and the Russian government was daily contested by the continuing captivity of the Russian servicemen and the increased public attention to the embarrassing revelations regarding the government’s role in the failed covert operations. The speed with which the invasion force was assembled and the poor planning of the operation indicate that Yeltsin ordered the invasion of Chechnya in a desperate effort to avoid an imminent political and
public relations crisis.\footnote{Richard Sakwa, no., p. 208.} Thus, while Yeltsin as Commander in Chief must bear the final responsibility for the invasion, those instances, which were responsible for initiating and conducting the covert operations in Chechnya are also responsible for precipitating the disastrous Caucasian adventure. It is clear that Yeltsin received both inaccurate information and poor counsel from his advisers in the initial stages of the crisis, and if it is revealed that he was unaware of the extent or nature of the final covert operations against Grozny or that they were conducted without his express authorization, his responsibility for precipitating the war must be reassessed.

The Chechen conflict will have unseen consequences for Russia. It has demonstrated the weakness of the Parliament, the power of the Presidency and the Security Council, the fragility of rule of law in Russia and the degree to which the Russian leadership has embraced a more authoritarian policy. The war in the Caucasus has also revealed that the final and most powerful argument of the Russian leadership in dealing with hostile political groups in military force. This fact does not bode well for the evolution of Russia as a democratic society, and in this respect the Chechen war marks a failure to develop a stable and legitimate state in Russia.

Moreover, it should serve as a warning example of how easily a regional power can become entangled in a bloody conflict in a distant place without clear objectives and goals. It is also a demonstration of how important political credibility is for any sovereign state. When the credibility of the major international power is challenged to a political duel, the issue over which it is challenged can be reduced to insignificance and the question of credibility can become the real issue of contention. This is what happened in Chechnya. The war in the North Caucasus, while it is a natural result of Russia's desire to defend its territorial integrity, is above all an effort to protect Russia's status as a global (or at least a regional) power. Yet, while the Chechen conflict serves as a warning example to world powers regarding the dangers of regional conflicts, it should also remind smaller states that if they choose to challenge a great power, a conflict can ensue.
which has little to do with the original issue in dispute and more to do with the national and international status of the nations involved.

The war revealed not so much the shortcomings of the new constitution but the failure of the Yeltsin regime to abide by a document that it had itself imposed on a country. \(^{53}\) A domestic military operation was launched without declaring a state of emergency or imposing martial law, thus avoiding parliamentary scrutiny. According to article 87.2, martial law could only be imposed in the event of aggression against Russia, while a state of emergency had to be approved by the Federation Council and the State Duma (article 88). \(^{54}\) Without either, the Russian authorities did not have the right to use arms or disrupt communications networks. In addition, the President did not have the right to use the Russian Army for tasks for which it was not intended, and attempts to suspend aspects of the law of 24 September 1992 ‘On Defence’ were probably illegal. \(^{55}\)

The 1993 constitution provided for the development of a form of ‘asymmetrical federalism’. \(^{56}\) The signing of the bilateral treaty between Moscow and Tatarstan in February 1994 allowed a flexible relationship between the two parties and brought their relationship within the constitutional process. This relative stabilization in centre-periphery relations was jeopardized by the use of force in Chechnya. The crisis revealed the constitutional limits to the powers of the Federation Council in a Presidential system, leaving both regional and republican leaders angry and frustrated and looking for more potent forms of institutionalising their power. The long-term impact of the Chechnya crisis may well be attempts to change the structures of the Russian federal state, above all altering the balance between the executive and legislative branches. Rather than enhancing the unity of the Russian federation, the Chechen war probably contributed in the long-run to centrifugal pressures: in particular, the fact that Chechnya was a Muslim country alienated opinion in other Muslim republics. However, with the exception of

\(^{53}\) Ibid


Ingueshetia, whose President Ruslan Aushev found himself in the front line and unequivocally condemned the war, the Caucasian republics adopted an ambivalent position. Most of their leaders were members of the old-style Soviet establishment and feared that they would be the first to be swept away by any popular mobilization in support of Dudayev. The Chechnya case is unique, a country whose very identity was bound up with the notion of resistance to Russia. 57

There were in effect two wars in Russia from late 1994, one in Chechnya and the other in Moscow for the soul of the reform process. It is still too early to write off the liberal and democratic changes in Russia or to dismiss the enormous transformation that has taken place since the onset of Gorbachev’s reforms. The Russian government was faced by multiple crises and contradictory demands in formulating a nationality policy for the people of the Russian Federation. The analogy between these republics and those making up the former Soviet Union is not accurate. The titular nationalities of the republics in Russia, like the Yakuts in Sakha and Chuvashia, are minorities in the republics that bear their names. Moreover, they are economically much weaker and as enclaves in Russia their trade and industries are throughout part of the large economy. The destinies of their peoples had long been bound up with Russia; but Russia’s destiny, too, was now bound up with theirs. 58

Putin’s Regime

The revelation that the Russian position in Chechnya is far less favourable than had been previously reported threatens to undermine Putin’s elevated reputation amongst the Russian electorate. During the first Chechen war (1994-1996) the Russian authorities saw their positions undermined by media coverage in Moscow, which frequently contradicted official claims and played a major role in shifting public opinion against invasion. Having gained an insight into the crucial role of the media in modern warfare (as demonstrated during the NATO operation in Kosovo), the Russian leadership has taken resolute measures to ensure that this situation is not repeated and consequently the flow of

57 Ibid.
information is rigorously controlled by official sources. This media censorship has worrying implications for the future development of Russian democracy: as the state is becoming increasingly stronger and more consolidated, civil society appears to be weakening.\textsuperscript{59}

**Impact of Chechnya on the leadership of Putin**

Putin was well aware of the importance of the Chechen campaign. On his very first day as acting president he flew to Chechnya to award decorations and present gifts to Russian military personnel serving there. It is therefore likely that Putin will move much more energetically than Yeltsin in seeking to rebuild Russian military power. An on-going need to maintain a military policing operation in Chechnya will require a sustained military involvement, and this will increase the need for a viable military machine.

Although one can argue that Chechnya represents relatively modest opposition, it also represents the first opportunity for the Russian armed forces to claim some glory after a decade of decline and humiliation. If a victory is gained in Chechnya, Putin could face a more confident and assertive military leadership, and it will probably be harder for him to ignore the military's voice on areas of policy (e.g. military reform, and defence and security policy) where it has direct interests. However, if the conflict drags on inconclusively, Putin will be in a stronger position to impose his will on the armed forces.\textsuperscript{60} Intensification of military action is likely to result in a more intolerant and repressive regime in Moscow.

To strengthen Moscow's control over the Russian Federation's regions, Putin intends to create seven new federal districts, headed by presidential appointees. Further, he wants to alter the composition of the Federation Council and to streamline the mechanism for removing local governors. These plans have raised criticism among several governors and politicians, who fear an imbalance of power.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid
\textsuperscript{60} The Economist 24 January 1998.
Other policy plans of Putin concern tax reforms (i.e. the introduction of a single social tax) and the installation of a new Chechen administration, directly subordinate to the Russian President.

Dagestan

The Republic of Dagestan, an autonomous division within the Russian Federation, has been experiencing transitional problems like other Russian regions. Apart from tensions caused by terrorism and mafia dealings in Dagestan, there are recent clashes between the mainstream followers of Islam and Islamic fundamentalists, the Wahhabites, advocating liberation of the Caucasus.61

New religious tensions may be related at least primarily to the economic hardships that Dagestan is going through. Many industrial enterprises have been shut down. At the same time, like elsewhere in Russia, there are sign of new private wealth, causing resentment among the less privileged. Unlike some other divisions within the Russian federation, Dagestan is not ruled by a President, but has a complex power structure, which was originally intended to equitably represent the interest of all ethnic groups. Its special feature is that it is home to more than 100 ethnic groups of which 30 are considered indigenous. According to the constitution, the republic of Dagestan is to be governed by the state council, which was elected five years ago by the people’s assembly. The state council consists of 14 members- one representative from each of the largest ethnic communities and three representatives from Azerbaijan, Russian and Chechen ethnic groups of the Dagestan population. The Chairman of the council is Magomedov, who before the collapse of the USSR, used to hold the position of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Dagestan, a de-facto President.62

However, today the idea of Presidential rule finds supporters among both the population at large and the leadership of Dagestan. It is far from certain that the chairman has enough popularity to win in direct general elections. Magomedov’s chances would

increase if a constitutional amendment can be adopted that would allow the President to be elected by the people's assembly. The issue if Presidency has not yet been put on the people's assembly agenda. However, according to the some sources, the leaders of Dagestan are conducting intensive negotiations with Moscow to get the central authorities approval for possible amendment to the constitution.

Dagestan occupies a unique geopolitical position in the Caucasus, for which it is sometimes called Russia's outpost. The republic has land and sea borders with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Iran and the Chechen Republic. Some of its neighbours are potentially interested in promoting Dagestan's independence, which could definitely affect the federal set up of the Russian federation. Azerbaijan and Georgia would probably like to see its emergence as a buffer zone between their territories and Russia.

Dagestan citizens also complain that the republic does not receive sufficient funding from the central government, and that there are no programs for Dagestan's development and social protection. The Chechen war and the declaration of what Chechans claim to be a 'Sovereign Islamic Chechen State' has also changed the situation in the Caucasus. The outcome of the conflict significantly weakened Russia's positions in the region. The U.S. reacted by going so far as it recently declared the Caspian oil region as their "zone of interest".

On the basis of above descriptions, it can be said that the ethnic uprisings pose greatest threat to the federal system. In any federal set up, co-operation between centre and its constituent parts is not only desirable but also one of the pre-requisites for smooth functioning of the system. Regarding Russia's experience with ethno-nationalism, it is relatively easy to say that the regions which have been demanding for separate statehood on the basis of their ethnic identity has seriously affected the federalization process. Moreover, the emerging ethnic assertiveness has become the stumbling block for the newly federal system. So far, Russia's Chechen problem is concerned; it is true that the military attack by the Russian army, a coercive policy of the President Yeltsin in the post-
Soviet era is the product of long unresolved nationality problem of the erstwhile Soviet Union, which Russia as a successor of the Soviet Union got in legacy.\textsuperscript{63}

However, various developments in the post-Soviet Russian political system have questioned the very existence of the system. On many occasions, it has been seen that the independent initiatives taken by its federating units do not coincide with the policies adopted by the central authority. Hence, to have a unified federal structure, Russian system will and always be dependent upon the steps taken by its republics/regions which would be conducive to Moscow.

At the same time, it can also be observed that the centralized, authoritarian way of governance cannot carry federal structure very long. Federalism is based on the self and shared rule\textsuperscript{64} and definitely not on the unilateral policies imposed by the centre over its federating components. Therefore, solution for the running of the federal system does not lies in Moscow’s authoritarian, centralized control. Instead, Moscow should always try to adhere some policies based on consensus and not on the one sided policies pursued by it so far.

**Human Rights in Russian Federation**

**Use of Excessive Force and Violations of Humanitarian Law in Internal Conflicts**

In the conflict with the secessionist Republic of Chechnya, Russian forces continued to commit numerous, serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Russian forces used indiscriminate and excessive force, prevented civilians from evacuating areas of imminent danger, blocked humanitarian assistance from reaching civilians in need, mistreated detainees who may or may not have had any links with separatist forces, and tolerated incidents involving groups of federal soldiers engaging in

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murder, rape, assault, extortion, and theft. The Chechen separatists also committed human rights violations, though on a lesser scale. Both sides deployed antipersonnel landmines. A cease-fire agreed in August resulted in a dramatic reduction in violence during the final three months of 1996. By year's end, all federal troops had departed Chechnya.

Estimates vary of the total number of casualties caused by the war. Interior Minister Kulikov claimed that fewer than 20,000 civilians were killed while then-Secretary of the National Security Council Alexander Lebed asserted that 80,000 to 100,000 had been killed and 240,000 had been injured. Chechen spokesmen claim that the true numbers are even higher. Human rights groups estimate that over 4,300 soldiers from the federal forces were killed. In addition international organizations estimate that up to 500,000 people have fled Chechnya during the war. Many ethnic Chechens have returned since the conflict ended, but a majority of ethnic Russians are likely to resettle elsewhere. Since many records were destroyed during the war and many of the refugees who departed Chechnya are undocumented, the true numbers of casualties and refugees may never be known.

In numerous well-documented incidents, federal troops used excessive force against the separatist forces and recklessly put civilians in harm's way. Federal use of helicopter gun ships and artillery bombardments were cited as the most frequent causes of death among civilians. Breaking a cease-fire shortly after the presidential election, federal forces launched a "preemptive strike" on July 10 against Geikhi, a village in which Chechen forces said there were no rebel soldiers. The attack, which was preceded by aerial and artillery bombardments, killed at least 20 civilians. Similar attacks were mounted in July against the villages of Mairtup, Kurchaloy, and Artury. The brutality of these actions prompted the ICRC to call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law, "in particular to respect and protect civilians by refraining from launching indiscriminate attacks, spreading terror among the population or using it for military purposes."

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65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 20 January, p. 3.
Attempts by federal forces in August to hold Grozny were also characterized by indiscriminate use of air power and artillery, destroying several residential buildings and a hospital, according to credible sources.

In March, federal forces shelled the village of Sernovodsk while refusing to allow civilians to leave the area, resulting in numerous deaths. Similarly, in an assault on Samashki, the federal forces gave inhabitants two hours' warning to evacuate before shelling commenced. Once the bombardment started, Chechen men were not permitted to leave. The relief organization *Medicins Sans Frontiers* (MSF) reported that civilians were often forced to pay federal forces for permission to escape areas under attack through "humanitarian corridors;" in some cases. However, civilians including women were fired upon while transiting these corridors. In Samashki, the human rights group memorial reported that small groups of federal forces forced civilians to walk ahead of military formations or sit on the outer hulls of armored vehicles, making them "human shields." According to Memorial, during the battle for Grozny federal forces occupied a hospital and used patients as human shields.

Prior to attacks, Russian forces often would encircle a village and issue an ultimatum to surrender weapons, troops, and money or face attack. Often, however, even those villages that complied with those terms were subjected to Russian attack.

Domestic and international human rights groups have compiled a substantial number of credible accounts of torture and other cruel and inhuman or degrading punishment of Chechens by Russian military and internal security forces during the Chechen conflict. These abuses include beatings of combatants as well as of unarmed civilians suspected of involvement with, or support for, the secessionist Chechen rebels. Amnesty International reported that allegations of rape were made against Russian forces.

Federal forces continued to use "filtration centres" to detain suspected separatists and supporters. Detainees were frequently subjected to torture during interrogation in these centres. Memorial reports that Russian forces took hostages through the filtration centre

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69 *Izvestiya*, 10 January 1996.
70 Ibid.
apparatus--including civilians and used these hostages to exchange for federal prisoners held by the separatists.

Incidents were reported in the Russian press of undisciplined federal forces engaging in theft, looting, assault, rape, and murder--frequently while intoxicated. There are many documented cases of junior officers and ordinary soldiers participating in such incidents.

In violation of international humanitarian law, federal forces repeatedly denied aid organizations access to the victims of the conflict. The MSF reported that "during the systematic attacks on villages and civilians, aid agency vehicles, supplies, and teams" were "blocked by the military at the roadblocks" and that during the siege of Sernovosk, "aid was only allowed through 25 days after the bombing ended." The ICRC reported a number of instances in which its representatives were denied access to detainees. Each side claimed that the other was still holding detainees at year's end.

Final responsibility for the conduct of the war in Chechnya by the federal side rests with the military leadership and, ultimately, with President Yeltsin as Commander-in-Chief. Russian military and civilian officials routinely characterized separatist forces as criminal groups or illegal armed formations. Remarks in the press in July attributed to an unidentified major general typify the attitude toward accountability projected by the federal forces: "since we are not waging war in Chechnya, we do not apply the law on criminal responsibility for crimes committed in war and combat. "Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that the Russian military procuracy was said to have convicted 27 servicemen for crimes against civilians, but that "it failed adequately to investigate, let alone prosecute, the most glaring combat-related violations of humanitarian law."

Separatist forces also violated international humanitarian law by taking and executing hostages and using prisoners as human shields. In January, Chechen forces took about 100 civilians hostage in the city of Kizlyar and then transported them to Pervomayskoye

(both in Dagestan). Following a stand-off of several days during which federal authorities claimed that hostages were executed, federal forces bombarded the settlement, resulting in extensive property damage and killing an unknown number of hostages and Chechen rebels. During the crisis, another group of rebels hijacked a passenger ship on the Black Sea with many Russians on board. The Turkish Government resolved the incident peacefully.

After the separatist takeover of Grozny in August, Chechen forces also carried out summary executions of civilians deemed collaborators. Even after the cease-fire came into force, separatist forces detained, tortured, and killed members of the Moscow-backed administration of Doku Zavgayev. During the Pervomayskoye crisis, Chechen separatists tortured, burned alive, and left the remains of three hostages they had previously abducted from the Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs. The separatist commanders, who were effectively functioning as a government by year's end, demonstrated no intent to punish violations committed by rebel forces.

As in 1995, journalists working in Chechnya were subjected to violence by both warring sides. Several were kidnapped and killed, while others were used in prisoner exchanges even though they are noncombatants. International relief workers in Chechnya were often targeted in kidnappings, most likely by local organized crime groups or segments of the rebel forces.

Efforts at producing a settlement, though ultimately successful, were uneven. In May during the final days of Yeltsin's reelection campaign, a cease-fire agreement was reached that lowered the intensity of the conflict for several weeks. Immediately after Yeltsin's victory, however, the federal forces unleashed an offensive that caused scores of civilian casualties, as they had in March. In subsequent weeks, Lebed took over the negotiations and in August he signed an agreement with Chechen commander Asian Maskhadov that called for an end to hostilities, full exchange of prisoners, and joint administration by a coalition government. The agreement stated that Chechnya's political status would be decided within five years. Despite Yeltsin's dismissal of Lebed, the peace

73 Ibid.
process continued during the fall and in November the two sides reached another agreement that called for the withdrawal of federal forces.

Putin’s Regional Reforms

Putin’s policies and public pronouncements, both before and after his accession to the presidency, show that he considers the reversal of this process to be a priority task. Since the beginning of 2000 there has been a dramatic increase in measures designed to restore central power. The most significant development, however, came with the start of Putin's 'federal' reforms. On 13 May 2000 Putin issued a decree reforming the institution of Presidential Representative in the regions, and dividing Russia into seven federal districts. The decree was swiftly followed on 19 May by a package of reform bills which change the way in which members of the upper house of the legislature (the Federation Council) are selected, give the President the right to dismiss regional leaders, and allow regional leaders to dismiss heads of local government. According to Putin, the main aim of his reforms is to strengthen the vertical chain of command through which presidential policies are implemented.

Democracy in Russia is weak and unconsolidated. Pluralist institutions are weak, mass-based interest groups are marginal and institutions like the parliament, the party system and the judiciary lack strength and independence. Putin’s inheritance from the Yeltsin years is a form of governance super-presidential in nature, and democracy for its namesake that warrants mandatory reforms. In an effort to curb the powers of the regional big bosses, Putin in one stroke had curtailed their powers by nominating seven regional governors who, now control the lever of political powering Russia’s far flung regions. He has also successfully pitted the Duma against the regions and by that has deftly and covertly established a sort of central control over the regions. With a small majority and almost from political oblivion, Putin has struck a positive chord in the Duma, resulting in improved relations between President and the legislature.

All of Russia’s 89 territorial constituents have an extremely complicated federal structure with units not having equal rights and powers. In 1996 Boris Yeltsin authorized all regions to elect their Governors. Former Communist leaders, KGB officials and regional
nationalists were elected Governors of their regions. A majority of these executives did not consistently support any political ideology. Yet, they exercised control over the local economy and resources available in the respective regions. These Governors are a powerful voice in Duma elections in both the party list and single-member district vote. They use now and could do so in future their institutional resources to shape the outcome of federal, regional and local elections, thus blocking implementation of federal policies in their regions. Putin felt that these regional power-brokers could not be allowed to enjoy unbridled power and influence.

Having a completely different and clear-cut set of ideas, one of Putin's first priorities as the President the regions into seven federal districts headed districts headed by representatives appointed by the President. Numerous regional-level were abolished. After tough negotiations, Putin succeeded in passing a law on the formation of a Federal Council. The President now has the right to dismiss regional Governors and disband regional parliaments, thus curbing the concentration of power at the local level.

Improving stringent control over the regions and Governors is a laudable move, but of limited value. Sweeping decentralization and excessive restrictions on regional, economic and other policies are finally destined to boomerang because federal norms are almost toothless. The danger lies in regional initiatives being killed before they are born and this may, willy-nilly, leads to unwanted totalitarianism and centratisation of the power structure. At the political crossroads of the millennium, the preference of the people clearly goes in favour of a strong state with a powerful economy. Russia today is large, divided and multi-layered society and re-establishing dictatorship would be difficult and costly, particularly when Putin and his team want to integrate Russia into the Western world. The alliance between financial oligarchs and authoritarian politicians at both the national and regional levels is the biggest threat to Russian democracy. This fact suggests that the future of democracy in Russia is as much uncertain as it in danger of being derailed.

Putin's approach to federal reform reveals that he sees center-regional relations in terms of power struggle. In order to increase presidential power, he has engaged in an attack on
regional leaders. These are certainly some justifications for this kind of approach, since the power of the regional leaders is one of the main factors impeding the implementation of presidential policy. However, the power of regional leaders has grown to such an extent that this attack will always be half-hearted. The President will be forced to play the dual role of the 'strong hand' and the moderate leaders willing to compromise. The 'top-down' conflictual approach is likely to fail in the absence of genuine 'bottom-up' moves for greater integrity and compliance. In his classic work on federalism, Riker describes a 'federal bargain', which provides both sides with incentives for cooperation. Political parties play an important role, providing a link between the Centre and the regions. However, the applicability of this model to the Russian case is questionable. Although the new 'party of power', Unity, does appear to be attracting a large regional element, this seems to be motivated more by the desire of regional leaders to ingratiate with a strong President than by any real bottom-up movement motivated by shared interests.

In the absence of effective institutional reform, Putin will continue to use the kind of informal, short-term mechanisms employed by Yeltsin, such as doing deals with individual regional leaders or influencing regional elections to promote favourable candidates. Viewed from this perspective, Putin's reforms may represent only a brief departure from previous practices, only a temporary swing of the pendulum in favour of central power. Nevertheless, they are a departure, and future developments will reveal whether Putin is able to use his advantage to turn uncertain beginnings into a lasting increase in presidential power in Russia.