

Building Stability in the North Caucasus

Ways Forward for Russia and the
European Union

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Preface

For most people, the notion of conflict in the North Caucasus—a region within the Russian Federation, as distinct from the independent states of the South Caucasus—is synonymous with Chechnya. In reality, for centuries before the outbreak of the first Chechen war in 1994, this mountainous and economically underdeveloped area had been struggling both with conflict of identity among its local peoples and with the tensions caused by the southward extension of Russian (and later Soviet) sovereign authority. Ethnic, religious and political complexity makes it possible to interpret the region's instability from several viewpoints. Since 2001 in particular, Russia's tactic has been to cast its confrontation with local actors in terms of a struggle against terrorism fed by international and external jihadi influences. Under the banner of anti-terrorism, President Vladimir Putin's drive to solve this and all other local problems through forceful centralization has been pursued with minimal foreign involvement and, often, with all too little outside scrutiny.

Even backed with the latest technology, however, and benefiting from both improvements in Russian security coordination and the help of local proxies, Putin's strategy for the North Caucasus manifestly has not worked. Terrorist violence is leaking out into other parts of Russian territory; the absence of real local reconciliation is reflected also in the dubious loyalty of Putin's local henchmen; and the region's underlying economic and social problems are being addressed only belatedly and half-heartedly. The splintering of local Islamic communities and the terrorist methods adopted by certain pro-independence groups are effects as well as causes of a vicious circle of violence. As in Iraq and elsewhere, interpretations that blame everything on incitement by global terrorist movements or, indeed, on some destructive tendency inherent in Islam itself are not only mistaken but dangerously misleading when it comes to considering the way ahead.

In this Policy Paper, Neil Melvin—a former head of SIPRI's research programme on Armed Conflicts and Conflict Management—aims to correct such misunderstandings by a careful historical account of the role of the North Caucasus in earlier Russian and Soviet imperial history and of the evolution of the Russian Government's post-Soviet policies. He pays special attention to the Islamic strand in local resistance movements and in local society generally, showing that Russia's Muslims have been divided among themselves almost as sharply as any other element in the North Caucasus community. He ends by presenting recommendations for urgent shifts in policy towards the North Caucasus, aimed at two sets of actors that can perhaps do the most good in the shortest time in this troubled region: the Russian Government and the European Union and its member states.

This Policy Paper represents the first output of a larger research project being conducted by SIPRI with support from the Swedish authorities on the connections between Islam, terrorism and conflict in selected non-Arab locations. I congratulate Dr Melvin on the results presented here and would also like to thank Caspar Trimmer for the editing.

Alyson J. K. Bailes
Director, SIPRI
April 2007

The North Caucasus



The North Caucasus is a mountainous region in the south of the Russian Federation, bordered by the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov to the west, Georgia and Azerbaijan to the south, and the Caspian Sea to the east.

In this Policy Paper, as in much policy discussion about current developments in the region, the term ‘North Caucasus’ refers to eight republics of the Russian Federation—Adygeya, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Kalmykia, Karachai-Cherkessia and North Ossetia (Alania)—as well as the predominately ethnic Russian territories of Krasnodar krai and Stavropol krai.

Since 2000 the North Caucasus has come under the authority of the Southern Federal District of the Russian Federation, headed by a presidential special envoy. The North Caucasus Military District covers Astrakhan oblast, Rostov oblast and Volgograd oblast in addition to the republics mentioned above.

Data on the North Caucasus and the Russian Federation are presented in table A.1.

Table A.1. Data on the North Caucasus and the Russian Federation

Entity (Capital)	President (Year appointed)	Area (km ²)	Popula- tion (2005)	Unemploy- ment rate ^a (%)	Budget support ^b (%)
Adygeya (Maikop)	Aslan Tkhakushinov (2007)	7 600	444 400	16.7	58.1
Chechnya (Grozny)	Ramzan Kadyrov (2007), Doku Umarov (2006) ^c	15 000	1 141 300	..	79.4
Dagestan (Makhachkala)	Mukhu Aliyev (2006)	50 300	2 621 800	24.9	81.3
Ingushetia (Magas)	Murat Zyazikov (2002)	4 300	481 600	49.1	88.3
Kabardino-Balkaria (Nalchik)	Arsen Kanokov (2005)	12 500	896 900	28.7	73.4
Kalmykia (Elista)	Kirsan Ilyumzhinov (1993)	76 100	289 900	21.9	..
Karachai- Cherkessia (Cherkessk)	Mustafa Batdyev (2003)	14 300	434 500	21.7	62.5
North Ossetia (Vladikavkaz)	Taimuraz Mamsurov (2005)	8 000	704 400	10.9	59.2
Krasnodar krai	..	76 000	..	9.9	..
Stavropol krai	..	66 500	..	11.7	..
Russian Federation (Moscow)	Vladimir Putin (1999)	17 m.	3 474 200	8.0	..

^a Figures for unemployment rates are for 2003–2004.

^b The figures in this column show the share of each republic's annual budget that came from the Russian federal budget in 2005.

^c Doku Umarov is president of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, which was declared in 1991 but has not been recognized by Russia or the international community.

Sources: Turner, B. (ed.), *Statesman's Yearbook 2007* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2006); Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, various reports, URL <<http://www.rferl.org>>; Perovic, J., *The North Caucasus on the Brink* (International Relations and Security Network: Geneva, 2006); and Russian Federal State Statistics Bureau, URL <<http://www.gks.ru>> and URL <<http://www.perepis2002.ru>>.

1. Introduction: instability in the North Caucasus

There is a sharp growth of radicalism and extremism, a widening of the gap ‘between constitutional democratic principles and the processes taking place in reality’. In the end, it ‘could lead to the appearance of a macro-region of social, political and economic instability’ which will include all the Caucasus republics and part of Stavropol Territory.¹

As Dmitry Kozak, the presidential special envoy to the Southern Federal District of the Russian Federation, observed in the mid-2005 report to President Vladimir Putin cited above, the North Caucasus risks descending into region-wide crisis.² This view was reiterated in the summer of 2006 by Nikolai Patrushev, director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and head of the Russian National Antiterrorism Committee, when he expressed concern that the deteriorating security situation threatened most of the North Caucasus.³

There have been important changes in the region’s conflict dynamics since Kozak drafted his report.⁴ Crucially, there was a significant decline in the number of major terrorist incidents during 2006 and the emergence of relative stability in Chechnya. This shift has been read by some, notably in Moscow, as a turning point and a sign that Russia is on the threshold of victory in its ‘war on terrorism’—but this interpretation risks misreading the situation.⁵ The violent incidents of recent years in the North Caucasus are not isolated events: a wave of instability has been spreading across the region for nearly two decades. While the second Chechen war, which began in 1999, shows some signs of coming to an end, the broader insurgency across the North Caucasus, which has fed off this conflict, has been spreading as the daily litany of reports of counter-terrorist operations, captures of militants and insurgent violence across the region in the past few years attests.

¹ Khinshteyn, A., ‘Prodayem Kavkaz’ [We’re selling the Caucasus], *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 16 June 2005, quoting and paraphrasing a special report to President Vladimir Putin on the situation in the Southern Federal District by Dmitry Kozak, presidential representative, May 2005.

² In this Policy Paper ‘North Caucasus’ refers to the republics of Adygeya, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia and North Ossetia (Alania).

³ Riskin, A., ‘Strana nevychennykh urokov: Vlast’ tak i ne sdelala dolzhnykh vyvodov iz tragedii v Beslane’ [The country of unlearned lessons: the authorities haven’t reached the right conclusions from the tragedy in Beslan], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 4 Sep. 2006. On the committee see also chapter 3 of this Policy Paper.

⁴ Baev, P., ‘Has Russia achieved victory in its war against terror?’, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Program on New Approaches to Russian Security (PONARS), PONARS Policy Memo 415, Dec. 2006; and Kramer, M., ‘The changing context of Russian federal policy in the North Caucasus’, PONARS Policy Memo 416, Dec. 2006—both available at URL <<http://www.csis.org/ruseura/ponars/pm/>>.

⁵ Smirnov, A., ‘The illusion of victory: Kremlin proxies mount year-end propaganda drive’, *Chechnya Weekly*, 4 Jan. 2007. The archive of *Chechnya Weekly* is available on the website of the Jamestown Foundation at URL <<http://www.jamestown.org/publications.php>>.

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One of the most important developments is that Chechnya can no longer be considered the sole site of conflict in the North Caucasus—it is now only a part of a web of instability that extends into the neighbouring republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia and North Ossetia (Alania) and to the republics in the west, notably Adygeya and Kabardino-Balkaria. Bombings and attacks have even taken place in the predominately Russian territories of Krasnodar krai and Stavropol krai. The expansion of violence in the North Caucasus has been accompanied by a transformation in the nature of the conflict. The current instability is becoming more complex, with ethno-national, political, socio-economic and, increasingly, religious factors intertwined, a reflection of the great diversity of the region.

In the early years of his presidency, Vladimir Putin sought to meet the challenges of the North Caucasus by intensifying the statist policies that he pursued across Russia. Designed to counter the perceived crisis of governability that emerged in the country in the late 1990s, this approach led to the dismantlement of the federalist arrangements introduced under his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, and their replacement with a strengthened ‘power vertical’.⁶ In the case of the North Caucasus, the Putin Administration has sought to project its political and military authority into the region through the use of overwhelming force, accompanied by structural, organizational and leadership changes. At the same time, it has actively discouraged international engagement in the North Caucasus.

The tragic conclusion to a siege mounted by Russian security forces in September 2004 at a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, in response to its seizure by a group of armed militants strongly suggested that the Putin Administration’s counterterrorism-led policies in the region were not working. According to official statistics, 344 people were killed, 186 of them children, and hundreds more were wounded in fighting between the Russian forces and the militants. Indeed, the failure of the administration’s initial approach to the problems in the North Caucasus began to raise questions about its ability to maintain the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation in the long term.⁷ Some observers have even gone so far as to argue that the relentless expansion of violence across the North Caucasus suggested parallels with failed states.⁸

The inability of the Russian Government’s measures to prevent the emergence of the North Caucasus as a centre of violence, extremism and terrorism challenged Putin’s agenda for transforming Russia.⁹ In particular, the shortcomings of these

⁶ Melvin, N. J., ‘Putin’s reform of the Russian Federation’, ed. A. Pravda, *Leading Russia: Putin in Perspective* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005). The term ‘power vertical’ refers specifically to the centralization of power in Russia under Putin.

⁷ Dunlop, J., ‘Putin, Kozak and the Russian policy toward the North Caucasus’, 14 Sep. 2006, URL <<http://jamestown.org/NorthCaucasus-EventBriefing.pdf>>, p. 1.

⁸ Degoyev, V. and Ibragimov, R., ‘The North Caucasus and the future of Russian statehood’, *Russia in Global Affairs*, Jan.–Mar. 2006.

⁹ Matveeva, A., *The North Caucasus: Russia’s Fragile Borderland*, Central Asian and Caucasian Prospects series (Royal Institute of International Affairs: London, 2000); and Hill, F., ‘Russia’s tinderbox: conflict in the North Caucasus and its implications for the future of the Russian Fed-

policies raised the question of whether centralization and coercion could be successful as the primary methods of state building and modernization in a region so ethnically, religiously and socially complex.

Since the Beslan crisis of 2004, there have been important changes in Russia's approach to the North Caucasus. Most significantly, the central government's hard-line policies towards Chechen militants and the decentralization of power in the republic to pro-Moscow Chechen factions have done much to weaken the insurgent movement—Russia claims to have killed 174 militants and detained another 1171 in 2006.¹⁰ However, while this aggressive approach has restored relative calm in Chechnya, allowing for a certain amount of reconstruction to take place, serious questions remain about the character and durability of the republic's Moscow-backed regime. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that the security measures used in Chechnya have helped spread the Chechen conflict into neighbouring areas. The geographical displacement of the war in Chechnya has intersected with the rise, across the North Caucasus, of a network of loosely affiliated violent groups motivated by a variety of factors—among others, militant Salafism,¹¹ ethnic grievances, criminality, clan rivalry and the region's poor socio-economic situation.

More recently, and in response to Kozak's report in 2005, the Putin Administration has sought to once again alter its policies in the other republics of the North Caucasus. The strategy of combating the insurgency in Chechnya through an ostensibly counterterrorist campaign based on the use of overwhelming force has been supplemented, although generally in a modest way, with new approaches. Russia's improving economic position has allowed the federal government to initiate a programme of state-led socio-economic development in the North Caucasus focused on renewing the region's dilapidated infrastructure. Putin has used new powers to oust some prominent or long-serving regional presidents and directly nominate more reliably loyal figures in their place, in an effort to stamp the federal government's authority on the region. At the same time, a reorganization of counterterrorism in the country has enhanced the federal government's abilities in this area and helped to slow down the spread of Islamist militancy.¹²

eration', Occasional paper, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Sep. 1995, URL <http://bcsia.ksg.harvard.edu/BCSIA_content/documents/Russias_Tinderbox_1995.pdf>.

¹⁰ '174 militants killed in North Caucasus in 2006', RIA Novosti, 1 Feb. 2007, URL <<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20070201/60066727.html>>.

¹¹ Salafism is a radical fundamentalist movement within the Sunni branch of Islam that advocates a return to the 'pure' Islam supposedly practised by the Salaf, the first 3 generations of Muslims, including the Prophet Mohammed. In the North Caucasus and elsewhere, Salafis are often referred to as Wahhabis by non-adherents, after the dominant Islamic sect in Saudi Arabia, which has promoted fundamentalist Islamic ideas in the North Caucasus and elsewhere. Salafism in the North Caucasus includes a wide variety of groups, many of which have grown up and function independently of each other and follow different—often non-violent—agendas.

¹² Despite the changing security environment FSB Director Patrushev noted in Mar. 2007 that risk of terrorist attacks in the region remains high. Fuller, E., 'FSB Director says al-Qaeda cells still exist in North Caucasus', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 Mar. 2007. RFE/RL publications are archived at URL <<http://www.rferl.org>>.

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There is evidence that with the death of some of the top Chechen insurgent leaders in 2005–2006, and following the slaughter of the Beslan school siege, the insurgents have changed their tactics. There has also been a degree of fragmentation of the insurgency in the North Caucasus into local, largely autonomous groups—partly owing to the weakening of the Chechen militants’ leadership of the insurgency—making the organization of coordinated, large-scale acts of terrorism more difficult.¹³ This fragmentation has also largely isolated the indigenous insurgency groups from the global jihadi movement.

While recent developments have done much to ease the sense of crisis that previously prevailed across the North Caucasus, the Russian Government’s new line has done little to curtail the long-term destabilization of the region.¹⁴ In particular, the Putin Administration has yet to acknowledge publicly that the problems in the North Caucasus are not solely the product of terrorism but stem fundamentally from a complex set of socio-economic and political issues.

At the root of much of the contemporary conflict in the North Caucasus is the historical failure of successive Russian and Soviet regimes to forge a nation state capable of accommodating through democratic and peaceful mechanisms the pluralism of interests and the ethnic and religious diversity that exist within Russia.¹⁵ The often violent manner in which Russia conquered and sought to pacify and integrate the territories and populations of the North Caucasus has given rise to deep-seated grievances and ensured the persistence of troubled relations between the North Caucasus and the central government.

The major challenge for Russia in the North Caucasus is not winning a war against terrorism but overcoming nation- and state-building problems similar to those that have confronted a number of European countries as they have struggled with the legacy of earlier territorial expansion—notably France with Algeria, the United Kingdom with Ireland and Spain with the Basques and a variety of other regional challenges have all had enduring difficulties with incorporating outlying territories within the core state where significant groups contest the incorporation.¹⁶ The experience from these earlier conflicts suggests that the current reliance on coercion and centralization by the Russian authorities to resolve the problems of the North Caucasus, while it may bring periods of apparent calm, is unlikely to achieve sustainable peace and stability.

¹³ Fuller, E., ‘North Caucasus resistance reaches tipping point’, *RFE/RL Newswire*, 26 Mar. 2007.

¹⁴ According to survey data, the Russian public remains sceptical about the Kremlin’s stabilization efforts in the region, with 67% of respondents indicating that the situation remains ‘tense’ in the region and a further 10% seeing the situation as ‘critical and dangerously explosive’. Smirnov, A., ‘Levada’s last poll on Chechnya: Russians still skeptical about the success of Putin’s North Caucasus policy’, *Chechnya Weekly*, 1 Feb. 2007.

¹⁵ Hosking, G., *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1998); and Hosking, G., *Rulers and Victims: The Russians in the Soviet Union* (Belknap Press: Cambridge, Mass., 30 Apr. 2006).

¹⁶ For an important study of the conditions under which states expand and contract see Lustick, I. S., *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and West Bank–Gaza* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, N.Y., 1993), particularly chapter 11.

Violence is likely to keep re-emerging in the North Caucasus in new and more virulent forms—and is increasingly likely to spread beyond the region—until the main sources of the conflict are addressed. Indeed, one of the key lessons from the conflicts that have challenged the territorial integrity of Europe's other post-colonial states has been that long-term peace is only likely to be achieved in the context of far-reaching reforms in the political character of the core state itself: the territorial separation of Algeria from France, and broad processes of devolution and decentralization in the cases of Spain and the UK.¹⁷

Failure to address the real problems of the North Caucasus effectively in the near future will in the long term further weaken the integration of the North Caucasus in the Russian Federation and raise the chances of intensified religious and territorial tensions. At the same time, developments in the North Caucasus will cast a shadow over the Caucasus area as a whole, including the states of the South Caucasus—Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia—with their complex of unresolved conflicts and the burgeoning regional hydrocarbon economy. The rise of violent radical Islamist movements and the expansion of criminal groups are among several emerging security threats that have the potential to destabilize Russia significantly and to spread beyond the Caucasus. The international community cannot, therefore, remain disengaged from the unfolding events in the North Caucasus.

The current easing of the conflict in Chechnya presents an opportunity to promote a new direction in policy for the North Caucasus. Indeed, there are signs that the Russian Government may even be prepared to countenance a greater role for the international community in addressing the challenges of the region.¹⁸ The problems that face the North Caucasus today are complex and dynamic and will not be effectively resolved by one-dimensional and quick-fix solutions. Instead, a long-term and comprehensive programme designed to promote stability, peace and development in the region is urgently needed. Such a programme must address as a first priority the diverse sources of instability through a coherent set of social, political and economic policies. Particular attention should be given to addressing the range of factors that are promoting radicalization and recruitment to violent extremist organizations—rather than simply combating terrorism—while at the same time building durable political institutions and encouraging socio-economic development. Such efforts are, however, unlikely to succeed unless they are accompanied by a political process that is based on a democratic decentralization of power across the North Caucasus and includes many of the groups currently seen as hostile to the Russian Federal Government.

¹⁷ The blurring of sovereignty through the transfer of key national authorities to the European Union has also played an important role in enabling former European colonial states to accept new and multifaceted types of territorial identities (European, national and regional) without automatically seeing them as threats to state integrity.

¹⁸ Smirnov, A., 'Russia seeks U.S., Iranian help to settle North Caucasus conflicts', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 12 Dec. 2006. The archive of *Eurasia Daily Monitor* is available on the website of the Jamestown Foundation at URL <<http://www.jamestown.org/edm/>>.

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The prime responsibility for addressing the problems of the North Caucasus clearly lies with Russia. At the same time, given the close relationship between peace and stability in the North Caucasus and the situation in the South Caucasus and other neighbouring regions, including parts of Europe, such a programme should seek to engage a variety of multilateral agencies at a regional level. The strategic challenge presented by developments in the North Caucasus suggests that the European Union (EU) and its member states should, as a matter of priority, take the lead in seeking ways to address the problems in the region as part of broader policies towards Russia and the Black Sea region.

The structure of this Policy Paper

Chapter 2 of this Policy Paper sketches the historical background to the enduring tensions in the North Caucasus, including relations between the region and the Russian and Soviet central governments. Chapter 3 discusses in more detail the policies applied by President Putin to the North Caucasus in the context of his overall efforts to strengthen federal control. The alleged and actual roles of Islamism and terrorist activity in the region's problems are examined at each stage, together with the obstacles faced by actors outside Russia in trying to monitor the situation or to play a constructive role. Chapter 4 summarizes the situation in the North Caucasus today, how it may evolve in the future and the implications for the region, for Russia, for its southern neighbours and for Europe. The final chapter presents a set of recommendations for comprehensive new policy approaches to the North Caucasus situation, addressed specifically to the Russian Federal Government and the EU and its member states.

2. The roots of instability in the North Caucasus

To understand the current crisis in the North Caucasus it is necessary to examine a number of difficult legacies from the Russian imperial and Soviet eras. The mode of imperial Russia's incorporation of the territories of the North Caucasus—and the social, economic and political arrangements it made to integrate and, in many cases, pacify them—established some of the main contours of the region's current conflicts. In the 20th century, the imposition and maintenance of Soviet power created further difficulties in the region—notably laying the foundations for today's ethno-national tensions. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet regime, Russia's failure to develop a viable new programme of nation and state building that could have addressed these legacies and facilitated the peaceful integration of the North Caucasus into the new Russian Federation helped to propel the region towards the current crisis. It also raised questions that remain today about the durability of the region's relationship with the Russian Federation. This chapter briefly surveys the history of Russia's and the Soviet Union's relations with the North Caucasus.

Incorporation and pacification

Imperial Russia's conquest of the North Caucasus took place in the context of the rising power's competition with Persia and the Ottoman Empire and of growing concern about the interests of European states in the region. The strong geopolitical basis of Russia's engagement with the North Caucasus and the long process of conquest and incorporation resulted in a complex set of policies being applied towards the North Caucasus and its peoples. As a result various communities in the North Caucasus have had differentiated relationships with the central government over the past 200 years. While some groups were incorporated relatively peacefully, others put up a sustained resistance, leading to widespread violence and the mobilization and consolidation, for political purposes, of local identities—including religious ones—as part of the struggle.¹⁹

Parts of modern Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia were conquered by Russia as early as the 1780s. A desperate resistance movement emerged in response, under a succession of figures who combined religious and political leadership, the first of which was Sheikh Mansur. This was to become the first organized military action to unify the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus, in this case the Chechens, Cherkess, Ingush, Kabards, Ossetes and various peoples of Dagestan. Perhaps most famously, the North Caucasus was the site of the 1829–59 Great Gazavat, an armed

¹⁹ Broxup, M. B. (ed.), *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World* (St Martin's Press: New York, N.Y., 1992), especially chapters 2–4.

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uprising (*gazavat* is an Arabic term used by the Chechens for holy war) that brought various local communities together to fight for or against Russia.²⁰ The resistance had a number of leaders, the best known of them Imam Shamil, who led it for 25 years until his surrender in 1859. There were regular *gazavats* in the region during the next 60 years. The recent conflicts in Chechnya are also referred to by the insurgents as *gazavats*.²¹

The frequently violent means used by Russia to incorporate the North Caucasus had an important impact on all aspects of life in the region, including religion. As Russia extended its dominion southward, it sought to use religion to assist in the process of conquest. The predominately Christian region of Ossetia (now divided into the Republic of North Ossetia and the Georgian region of South Ossetia) was among the first areas to ally with Russia, coming under full Russian control by 1806. The subsequent Russian expansion occurred simultaneously with the rise of Islam in the North Caucasus. Islam was spread most effectively by the Naqshbandi *tariqa* (Sufi Islamic order), although a variety of other groups were also active. Islam became a means to mobilize resistance against Russian domination. In response Russia designed policies to divide and rule the different Muslim communities in the region. In this way, the Caucasian wars acquired a strong religious dimension and, as a result, damaged Russia's relations with Muslims in the Caucasus and in the Russian Empire as a whole.

The conquest of the Caucasus created a large Muslim enclave in the Russian Empire, but it was neither the first Muslim group in Russia nor the largest. From the time of Empress Catherine the Great in the latter part of the 18th century, Muslims had been an important element in Russian society, notably in the Volga-Urals area. Indeed, the presence of communities of people of different faiths in the Russian Empire played an important role in shaping the character of the imperial state. The Russian authorities sought to use religions as the building blocks of empire—to transform religious authority into an instrument of imperial rule. Russia imposed 'confessionalization' on the population: subjects were legally required to declare their religious allegiance and to submit to the authority of the relevant clerical estate rather than to a national leadership.²² In this way, Russia made Islam a pillar of imperial rule, with the participation of a wide variety of Muslim clerics and lay persons. The Tsarist state became a forum for the resolution of conflict between Muslim communities and was thus able to present itself as a conservative guardian of Islamic piety. This led to a complex intermeshing of sharia law with Russian imperial law. A special regional muftiat (a high council of Islamic jurists, or muftis) was created in Baku through which the political authorities could super-

²⁰ Gammer, M., *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule* (C. Hurst: London, 2006), chapter 5.

²¹ See e.g. 'Russia's tactics make Chechen war spread across Caucasus', KavkazCenter.com, 16 Sep. 2005, URL <<http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2005/09/16/4074.shtml>>.

²² Crews, R. D., *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 2006), pp. 354–56.

vise the Muslim communities of the Caucasus. The character of Islam and its political and social functions in the region were transformed by exposure to broader currents of modernity and tradition that affected the Muslim communities of the Russian Empire during this period while, at the same time, being subordinated to imperial authority.

The wars of the 18th and 19th centuries in the Caucasus drew new dividing lines in the region, and many of these divisions were institutionalized. Following its conquest of the North Caucasus, Russia imposed territorial and administrative arrangements to enhance its control over the region's various communities. Notably, Dagestan was administratively separated from Chechnya. The introduction of new forms of territorial administration was often accompanied by punitive land redistributions in which Cossack and Slavic settlers benefited at the expense of the indigenous population. New policies of economic development were also introduced, centred in particular on the exploitation of oil reserves. Such changes led to the emergence of sizeable towns and cities to accommodate the Russian civil administration and emerging business interests.

Annexation to the Russian Empire brought with it a significant change in the demography of the region. Indeed, population policy was the key to Russian imperial and later Soviet power in the North Caucasus. Conquest and pacification were accompanied by large population movements: from the mountains to the plains; of local people away from the region (and indeed from the Russian Empire); and of Slavs and Cossacks into the region. In the period after the 1853–56 Crimean War, up to 500 000 natives of the western Caucasus were forcibly relocated—many moving eventually to territories in the Ottoman Empire—after a half-century of failure to pacify the region's tribes by less extreme measures.²³

The North Caucasus in the Soviet Union

The collapse of the Russian imperial state after military failure in World War I and the revolution of 1917 plunged the North Caucasus—like the rest of the Russian Empire—into chaos. The intervention of Ottoman and British military forces raised the prospect of the fragmentation of the region and helped to ensure that fighting continued in the area until 1923. Within the North Caucasus, competing groups struggled over alternative political projects for the region. A series of short-lived independent political entities came and went.

Faced with a serious challenge to their control of the North Caucasus, the rulers of the new Soviet Russia courted Muslim communities with promises of national self-determination. This policy proved particularly effective since, while the majority of the former Islamic elite rejected the revolution, the Soviets were able to gain the support of new revolutionary Muslim activists attracted to nationalist

²³ Brooks, W., 'Russia's conquest and pacification of the Caucasus: relocation becomes a pogrom in the post-Crimean War period', *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1995), pp. 675–86.

ideas. These were entrusted with the difficult task of securing the support of the Muslim population for the new regime.

The success of the Soviet military and political strategy secured the North Caucasus but brought with it new difficulties, especially with respect to the region's religious authorities. The Soviets, in a delicate position for the first half of the 1920s, initially exercised caution in the implementation of measures to limit the role of sharia law and religious institutions that had been introduced after the 1917 revolution.²⁴ The new order of the Soviet Union sought to continue the imperial state's policy of divide and rule towards the Sufi sheikhs and other religious leaders in the region.

By the mid-1920s, however, the Soviets felt confident and turned their efforts towards reshaping the political and socio-economic character of the North Caucasus. They launched a drive to disarm the local population, along with moves to weaken the clergy and the nationalists who had initially supported the revolution. Both sharia courts and the imperial system of muftiates were abolished in 1926 and scripts based on the Latin alphabet (which were in turn replaced by the Cyrillic script) were imposed on the languages of the region, breaking the links created by the common use of Arabic. State schools were promoted in a drive to draw children away from religious Arabic-language ones. In 1928 a full-scale assault on religious authorities was launched in conjunction with the campaign to introduce the collectivization of agriculture. These policies led in many cases to resistance, often violent. In the 1930s the North Caucasus was caught up in the wave of political arrests that swept the country.

Still fearful of pan-Islamic influences, the Soviets sought, alongside their efforts to undermine the position of the religious authorities and the Arabic language, to divide the region along broadly ethno-linguistic lines. A process of territorial and administrative delimitation was implemented between 1922 and 1936, establishing new ethno-territorial political entities. This created numerous anomalies, because the diversity of the population ensured that the new borders cut across regional, linguistic, ethno-religious and clan ties.²⁵ This process was followed by a succession of border realignments and territorial transfers, fostering further resentment and, in many cases, promoting hostility between neighbouring communities. The division of the republics—such as the repeated subdivision of the Circassian people of the north-western Caucasus into the 'new' nationalities of Adygei, Cherkess and Kabard; the amalgamation of different nationalities into single territorial units, for example the creation of the Kabardino-Balkaraya autonomous oblast in 1922; and the elimination of some units altogether, such as the dissolution of the Checheno-Ingush autonomous republic in 1944—created particular problems.

²⁴ On the sharia courts of the North Caucasus see 'Mahkamah Syariah', *Encyclopedia*, Caucasian Knot, URL <<http://eng.kavkaz.memo.ru/encyclopediatext/engencyclopedia/id/585447.html>>.

²⁵ Hirsch, F., *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, N.Y., 2005), chapters 3, 4 and 5.

A central part of the Stalinist social engineering project was the creation of a new set of dependable national elites. In the late 1930s most of the Communist Party and government leaders of the North Caucasus were purged and replaced with cadres loyal to Moscow. The new leaders took a central part in the subsequent campaign to extend Moscow's control over the region and to drive forward the Soviet project of transformation and modernization. They were also prominent in the series of anti-Islam campaigns conducted during this period. The destruction of mosques was widespread in the Muslim parts of the Caucasus, which despite the hard-line policies remained the most troublesome zone of the Soviet Union for the central government.

As a result of the anti-Islam campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s, much of the intellectual culture of Islam in the North Caucasus, which had flourished in the late 18th century and persisted until 1917, was destroyed. The destruction of mosques, madrasas (Islamic colleges) and *maktabs* (Islamic elementary schools), in particular, disrupted the system of Islamic confessional education, while the switch from the Arabic script ensured that new generations were cut off from previous Islamic scholarship. The religious life of ordinary Muslims, who were deprived of opportunities to worship openly, became confined to so-called parallel (unofficial) Islam, dominated by Sufism and a focus on local traditional rites and practices.

World War II and Stalin

World War II had a profound impact on the region. With the advance of the German forces, the Soviet authorities began to fear that some Muslim communities in the Soviet Union might shift their loyalties. In response, the authorities recanted their earlier policy and officially recognized Islam, although within a tightly controlled framework. Four new muftiats, named 'spiritual boards of Muslims', were created and charged with supervising the religious activities of Islamic groups in various parts of the Soviet Union. Like the muftiats of imperial times, they were answerable to the political authorities. One muftiat was created for the North Caucasus.

The German Army reached the North Caucasus in 1942, on its way to attempt to secure the Caucasian oilfields, and occupied some parts of the region until 1943. During this period, to curry favour with the local Muslims, Germany closed collective farms, reopened mosques and promised support for sovereignty to those groups that were willing to cooperate.

The mistrust fostered during this period led directly to one of the darkest periods in the history of the native peoples of the North Caucasus. Between November 1943 and March 1944, on the basis of decrees signed by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the government of Josef Stalin had entire ethnic groups—including the Balkar, Chechens, Ingush and Karachai of the North Caucasus—rounded up, loaded into cattle wagons, and transported to Central Asia and Siberia. Thousands died. The forced relocations were carried out quickly, on the pretext of

mostly unfounded accusations of collaboration with the Nazis. The former republics of the exiled peoples were dissolved and the territory was given to other republics or groups. Their homes were taken over by new inhabitants or left to decay.

The exiled peoples were officially rehabilitated in 1957 and shortly afterwards 50 000 families returned to the Caucasus to reclaim their land. Their return provoked tensions in all the republics of the North Caucasus, some of which persist today. In 1958 the ethnic Russians who had been newly settled on the lands of the deported peoples, among others, carried out a three-day pogrom against returning Chechens and Ingush. The Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), the Kabardino-Balkaria ASSR and the Karachai-Cherkessia Autonomous Region, all of which had been dissolved in 1943–44, were re-established in 1957, but not all of their former territory was returned to them. Areas of the former republics that were retained by Dagestan, Georgia, North Ossetia, Stavropol krai and Krasnodar krai were subsequently sources of intense disputes over land ownership. In 1970 ethnic Ingush demonstrated in the disputed Prigorodny district—which had been transferred to North Ossetia—in a bid to join the territory to the Chechno-Ingush ASSR and to reclaim former property in the district, but they were driven out after violent clashes. Ten years later there was another outbreak of violence, and Ingush were forbidden by the North Ossetian authorities to take residence in the district.²⁶ In 1992 a major conflict developed again in Prigorodny, this time involving local Ingush and Ossetian military units. Russia sent troops to establish order, and the Ingush population was expelled from the disputed areas.

The post-Stalin era and perestroika

The North Caucasus entered a period of relative stability after Stalin's death in 1953. However, the Soviet authorities' tight control masked important developments in the societies of the North Caucasus. To a great extent, these were due to the continuing legacy of the Russian imperial and earlier Soviet policies, particularly the relocations. Islam enjoyed a resurgence in the decades after World War II—albeit in new and covert forms—and it increasingly acquired a political character. Adherence to the *tariqas* increased, in particular among the Chechen and Ingush as a result of their period of exile.²⁷ The *tariqas* became symbols of national affiliation and an effective instrument of community survival and solidarity. In this way, religious and ethnic elements were again fused as Sufi identity merged with the social and economic organization of the community. The fact that not a single

²⁶ Krag, H. and Funch, L., *The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads* (Minority Rights Group International: London, 1995), p. 35.

²⁷ Ro'i, Y., *Islam in the Soviet Union: From World War II to Perestroika* (Columbia University Press: New York, N.Y., 2000), p. 407.

registered mosque was allowed to function in the Checheno-Ingush ASSR for 20 years after the return from exile became a cause célèbre—viewed as both discrimination against Islam and a violation of national rights.

Elsewhere in the region, Islamic practices and networks developed covertly, especially among the younger generation. There is evidence that these networks were engaged in strengthening national identities, often in opposition to Russia, and in seeking to deflect young people from communist influences and participation in public life.²⁸ In the 1960s Islam acquired new momentum, in part as a result of the Communist Party's assessment of Soviet reality as 'mature socialism', which allegedly was immune from any anti-communist ideologies of a religious or nationalist nature. It was assumed that Islam and its clerics had been fully integrated into the Soviet system. For a period the muftiats were allowed greater freedom. In the late 1970s, according to official Soviet figures, there were only 300 official registered mosques in the whole of the Soviet Union, but 700 unregistered mosques.²⁹ However, in the 1980s Soviet involvement in the war in Afghanistan raised tensions again and the authorities reimposed stricter control.

The experience of centralized rule from outside the North Caucasus during the Soviet period had a significant impact on social organization in the region. Faced with the apparent complexity of social relations in the North Caucasus, Soviet policy was strongly shaped by a perception of the dominance of social institutions and loyalties defined principally by clan and kin. This understanding of the nature of the region's socio-political character built upon the imperial Russian approach to the region, often itself a reflection of the orientalist tradition in Russian scholarship and colonial policy.³⁰ The manipulation of these divisions for political gain was an important element in both regimes' efforts to control developments in the region. This approach did little to promote the social modernization of the region and instead served to entrench traditional modes of social organization. There is evidence that, in the relative stability of the post-Stalin era, it even promoted conservatism and the informal economic activities that have provided the basis for the rise of corruption in the region following the collapse of the Soviet state.

During the post-Stalin period, the long-standing Soviet policy of promoting national identities in the North Caucasus began to bear fruit. There were signs of a growing national consciousness, and key sections of the indigenous populations started to make important social, economic and political progress. Increasingly, republic-level bureaucracies were staffed with national cadres. Their advancement helped to promote the urbanization and modernization of the region's non-Russian populations. At the same time, rising numbers of the indigenous peoples found

²⁸ Ro'i (note 27), p. 417.

²⁹ Hunter, S. T., *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (M. E. Sharpe: Armonk, N.Y., 2004), p. 34.

³⁰ Jersild, A., *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal, May 2003).

their way into higher education, contributing to the emergence of a national cultural intelligentsia.

These developments, along with the resurgence of Islam, challenged Soviet power in the North Caucasus in a variety of ways. In particular, the advancement of the non-ethnic Russian populations weakened the position of the Slavic settlers, leading to an outmigration of the Slavic population from the late 1960s. The domination of the ethnic Russian settler communities over the predominately rural societies of the indigenous peoples had previously cemented the central government's control. Their departure not only weakened the Soviet Administration's ability to find loyal local cadres but also undermined the position of the Russian language and the centre's control over strategic institutions, the education system, the advanced economic sectors and the republic-level executive agencies.

The breakdown of the Soviet order under Mikhail Gorbachev had another dramatic impact on the North Caucasus. During the era of perestroika (political and economic restructuring), the weakness of central political authority coupled with the decay of the institutions embodying the Soviet Union's domination of the North Caucasus allowed the emergence of political and social movements promoting diverse visions of the region's future. However, it was not Islam that became the primary means to mobilize popular support against Russia, as many experts had predicted. Rather, a variety of nationalist movements that sought to promote political sovereignty and to advance cultural and linguistic demands grew up in the republics of the North Caucasus.

The legacy of Soviet territorial division and nation building affected the whole of the Caucasus region during this period. Border disputes and conflicts erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan; in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia; in North Ossetia and Ingushetia in the Russian Federation; and in several other locations, including along Russia's border with Azerbaijan.³¹ At the same time, efforts were made, backed in large part promoted by Russia, to promote solidarity among the peoples of the region and to overcome the history of division, notably in the form of the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus—an organization founded in 1990, on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, to promote unity in the North Caucasus and which later became involved in the 1992–93 war in Abkhazia, Georgia.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, much of the older Islamic elite, many members of which were tainted by involvement in the Soviet-run Islamic authorities, were challenged by a younger generation. A variety of parties claiming their inspiration from versions of Islam appeared. Political liberalization also brought with it a relaxation of border controls and opened Russia's Muslims to external influences; notably, Salafism began to grow in the North Caucasus, spreading from western Dagestan, where it was first established in the 1980s, and

³¹ Hunter, S., 'Borders, conflict, and security in the Caucasus: the legacy of the past', *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, vol. 26, no. 1 (winter/spring 2006), pp. 111–25.

later from Chechnya.³² Together, these developments initiated a protracted struggle within the community of Islam in the North Caucasus.

The North Caucasus in the Russian Federation

The nature of Russian and Soviet engagement in the North Caucasus provided the backdrop for many of the developments in the region after the independence of the Russian Federation, which followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. In particular, the fact that the political mobilization that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet order was initially channelled along the fault lines of ethnicity and nationalism was due largely to the legacies of the Russian imperial and Soviet projects to promote fragmentation in the region, including separate national identities. The challenge of the new Russian authorities was to overcome this fragmentation and to find ways to promote the new Russia as a common project for all its communities, including those in the North Caucasus. In fact, the policies pursued by the post-Soviet leaders did little to meet this challenge in the North Caucasus and rather served to accelerate the deterioration of stability and security in the region and to promote even further division.

Nationalist mobilization

In the early years of the Russian Federation, it was primarily the structural legacy of the Soviet Union's territorial administration policies that determined the nature of the conflict over political power and access to resources in the North Caucasus.³³ During this period, interlinked tensions and conflicts spread across the region, driven primarily by ethno-national issues. The federal government faced increasing demands for territorial change and structural reform in the North Caucasus, often reflecting disputes created by the repeated border changes and the deportations of the 1940s. Accompanying this was a crisis of leadership at the regional level and in the relationship between the North Caucasus republics and the federal authorities.

In the early 1990s, Boris Yeltsin's appeal to Russia's regional leaders to 'take all the sovereignty they could swallow' accelerated nationalist mobilization in the North Caucasus. The subsequent wave of declarations of sovereignty by autonomous republics, oblasts and districts—commonly referred to as the 'parade of sovereignties'—reached the North Caucasus, where it was led by republics such as Chechnya, which proclaimed its independence in November 1991.³⁴ Furthermore, in 1991 the Russian Parliament passed the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples, which moved the issue of the return of land to former deportees to the top

³² Hunter (note 31), pp. 153–55.

³³ Hill (note 9).

³⁴ Kahn, J., *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002), p. 36.

of the political agendas of the North Caucasus republics and the neighbouring Russian territories. This law was viewed by many as providing a justification for redrawing the borders and redefining the status of many of the administrative units in the North Caucasus.

The separation in 1992 of Ingushetia from Chechnya—they had been joined administratively since 1934 and were formally constituted as the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1936—and the failure to define in law the borders of the new republic of Ingushetia triggered a dispute between the Chechens and Ingush over the district of Sunzhensky and reignited tensions between the Ingush and the North Ossetians over Prigorodny.³⁵ Russia's subsequent failure to clarify Ingushetia's borders led to a violent conflict between Ingushetia and North Ossetia in the autumn of 1992—resulting in nearly 600 deaths and the flight of tens of thousands of refugees—and continued tensions over the issue throughout the 1990s.³⁶ Yeltsin's support for the revival of the Cossacks, who had also been repressed during the Soviet era, within the scope of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples also provoked tensions between the Russian and non-Russian communities of the region. The Cossacks had a history of conflict with the native peoples of the North Caucasus.

Calls for ethnic sovereignty stimulated by this law threatened to split Kabardino-Balkaria ASSR, formed from two ethnic territories—one predominately Kabardin and the other predominately Balkar. The entire Balkar population had been deported by Stalin and their name removed from the name of the republic in 1944. After their return in 1957, disputes over land and the character of the republic were never far from the surface. In 1992 the Balkars—who account for about 8 per cent of the population—voted for secession from Kabardino-Balkaria. While the push for separation failed to gain support from Russia and faced strong resistance from among the Kabardins, subsequent Balkar congresses throughout the 1990s repeated the call for the creation of a Balkar republic and provoked tensions that continue today.

Russia failed to respond to the spiralling conflicts over territory in the country, including the North Caucasus, with a coherent policy. Instead, relations between Moscow and the regions were confused by conflicting pieces of legislation on the distribution of authority between the centre and the regions: the 1992 Federal Treaty, the 1993 Russian Constitution, and a set of bilateral treaties between Russia and the individual regions. There was also considerable institutional ambiguity in Russia, with an uncertain division of responsibility for policy towards the North Caucasus between different ministries, the parliament, the presidential apparatus and security agencies. With no definitive legal base for federal relations and lack-

³⁵ The Ingush and Chechen peoples have close historical, cultural and linguistic ties and both were deported to Central Asia in 1944 for alleged collaboration with Germany. Most of the deportees returned in the 1950s. At the time, the Soviet authorities redrew the boundaries, giving some Ingush land to North Ossetia—an act that sowed the seeds of bitter conflicts over the next half-century, e.g. in the disputed Prigorodny district.

³⁶ Fuller, E., 'Moscow's ostrich policy in North Caucasus', *RFE/RL Newslines*, 11 Aug. 1997.

ing a well-organized institutional arrangement, Russia resorted to improvisation and ad hoc solutions to address the conflicts in the North Caucasus.

The difficulty that Russia faced in formulating a coherent response to the conflicts in the North Caucasus was a reflection of a deeper challenge regarding what kind of state the new Russian Federation should become. At a philosophical level, this battle was fought out between two main positions: the federalist position that the creation of Russia as a genuine federation was a vital part of the development of the country as a modern and democratic country; and the statist argument that the creation of a strong, centralized state was essential to ensure Russia's territorial integrity and was a precondition for the country's re-emergence on the world stage as a great power.

The failure of state building in the North Caucasus

After the fall of the Communist Party, it became imperative to build new political linkages between Russia and the North Caucasus. Russia concerned itself primarily with consolidating its relationships with local elites—rather than institution building—as the principal means for improving conditions in the region. The shortcomings of this approach were particularly evident in the poor progress of democratization in the region. During the 1990s, the North Caucasus joined with the rest of Russia in creating formally democratic regional institutions and in conducting direct elections for regional leaders. However, as a result of the Yeltsin Administration's focus on executive power, these institutions were easily manipulated by incumbent elites. The authorities in Moscow soon retreated from their early federalist and human rights-based position. Lacking any grand strategy to contain local conflicts, President Yeltsin grew more reliant on the elites to guarantee stability—a relationship that was often institutionalized in the form of bilateral treaties between Russia and the republics. Rather than promoting democratization, these arrangements resulted in steady expansion of the prerogatives of the executive leaders of the republics, worsening corruption and patronage politics—all without significantly enhancing the participation of citizens in the public life of the region. The North Caucasus became a collection of fiefdoms, legitimated by pseudo-democracy, that were incubators of criminality and extremist groups, including those drawing on religious ideas.

With the devolution of problem management to the republic level, conflicts were left unaddressed while the local elite had little interest in promoting reform that might harm their positions. As a result, there was little attempt to deal with the deep-seated problems. Notably, there was a failure to resolve the key disputes to emerge from this period: that over the status of Chechnya, and the conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia.

In the final years of the Yeltsin Administration, as the situation in the North Caucasus continued to deteriorate, Russia began to look to policies that could reinstate the balance of power between the centre and the regions that had been

largely destroyed in 1991–93. This agenda was taken up and applied with rigour by Yeltsin's successor.

Religious revival

As ethno-nationalism emerged as the dominant factor determining political conflicts in the North Caucasus in the early 1990s, the region also experienced a religious revival. By the time of Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership, more than six decades of intensive anti-Islamic campaigns had institutionally and intellectually devastated Islam. Nevertheless, Islam and Islamic practices remained popular among significant sections of the population and operated in the illegal and semi-legal institutions of parallel Islam. The revival of religion—both Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity—reflected the strength of nationalist mobilization during this period. The Soviet authorities had tried to construct a legitimate past for religion, especially Islam, by recasting it as a secular attribute of national culture.³⁷ The flourishing of nationalist sentiments thus provided a major stimulus for a religious resurgence that was fragmented along ethnic lines. At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet state weakened Russia's power in the North Caucasus, and as a result the government and security agencies lost their control of the Muslim communities there.

As the Soviet state declined, the four regional muftiats created during World War II splintered into national organizations. In 1989–92 the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the North Caucasus was replaced by independent bodies for the individual republics, as the formerly underground parallel Islam displaced much of the Soviet-era religious hierarchy in the region. A range of groups and versions of Islam emerged and struggled for dominance in the North Caucasus. In particular, a serious and violent conflict broke out between followers of traditional forms of Islam in the region—various branches of Sufism—and adherents to more radical forms, the Salafis.

Faced with this new situation, the federal government tried somewhat half-heartedly to regain its former position and to influence the struggle, siding with the supporters of traditional Sufi Islam. However, a lack of understanding of the complex religious and social situation in the North Caucasus in the 1990s kept the federal authorities on the margins of events. Instead it was the authorities of the republics that came to play a leading role. Chechnya and Dagestan emerged as the key locations for the competition between different strands of Islam in the region.

During the 1990s, both traditional Islam and Salafism flourished in Dagestan.³⁸ Dagestan has historically been the main centre for Islam in the North Caucasus; it is therefore not surprising that in this period the republic became the site of a three-

³⁷ Hunter (note 31), p. 35.

³⁸ Makarov, D. and Mukhametshin, R., 'Official and unofficial Islam', eds H. Pilkington and G. Yemelianova, *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia: Public and Private Faces* (RoutledgeCurzon: London, 2003), pp. 132–63.

way struggle between the authorities, traditional Islam and Salafism. The emergence of Salafist groups in the region began in the late 1970s, predating the collapse of Soviet power and the subsequent economic and social crisis. The origins of the movement were thus to be found not so much in socio-economic discontent as in the destruction of local Muslim culture and the social upheavals to which Muslims in the North Caucasus were subjected in Soviet times.³⁹

The Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan (SBMD) was established in 1990. Tariqatists—the Sufi sheikhs and their followers—quickly seized control of the muftiat and the rapidly expanding system of religious education, effectively giving tariqatism the status of official Islam in the republic. This did not, however, lead to the dominance of the representatives of traditional Islam over the Salafist groups. Traditional Islam in the region is prone to division along ethnic lines, and some groups did not recognize the new muftis, who predominately belonged to Dagestan's Avar ethnic group. As a result, competition for control over the Islamic institutions quickly merged with the republic's internal power struggle, in which ethnicity played a central role. Many clerics in remote mountain regions slipped outside the control of the muftiat and vied for legitimacy and influence with the local secular authorities.

In contrast to the followers of traditional Islam, who sought power through control of the official Islamic institutions, the Salafists stood outside the system and sought to distance themselves from the authorities and from ethnic competition. In particular, the Salafist movement was able to use its radical ideology to muster support by transcending ethnic and clan considerations. Socially active young people were especially attracted to the movement's combination of piety and apparently progressive thinking, for example its rejection of religious hierarchy. The inability of the authorities and the traditional clerics to resist the spread of crime, corruption and perceived moral defects in society helped recruitment to the Salafists. Salafism started to influence the insurgency in Chechnya from the mid-1990s (see below).

Salafist groups made considerable headway in the region during the 1990s. In several localities they were able to seize political power, creating enclaves that were ruled according to narrow interpretations of sharia law. At the same time, Salafism's tough social, religious and ethical demands on adherents proved unacceptable to most of the region's population. The movement's intolerance of national cultural traditions further limited the scope of its expansion.

Faced with the emergence of the Salafists as a serious force in Dagestan, the established religious and secular authorities began to increase their efforts to

³⁹ Bobrovnikov, V., 'Islamophobia and religious legislation in post-Soviet Daghestan', Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *The Role of Religion and Belief in the Fight Against Terrorism*, Report of the OSCE Conference on the Role of Freedom of Religion and Belief in a Democratic Society: Searching for Ways to Combat Terrorism and Extremism, Baku, Azerbaijan, 10–11 Oct. 2002 (ODIHR: Warsaw, 2002), URL <<http://www.osce.org/item/878.html>>, pp. 66–84.

cooperate from the mid-1990s.⁴⁰ In September 1994 the SBMD was officially declared to be the only organization with the right to represent the interests of all Dagestani Muslims. The newly empowered muftis, reflecting their allegiance to traditional Islam, immediately declared their opposition to Salafism.

With the alliance between secular and religious authorities established, a wave of repression of Salafism rolled through the entire North Caucasus and part of central Russia in 1997–99, taking much of its momentum from the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations.⁴¹ By the start of 1999, the struggle over Islam became a major factor in the political instability in both Dagestan and Chechnya, with the radical Salafists receiving financial help from international Islamic organizations.

The authorities in Moscow sent troops into Dagestan after an incursion into northern Dagestan by forces of the Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan, an Islamist-inspired militia based in Chechnya, on 30 August 1999. Federal troops surrounded the Dagestan villages of Chabanmakhi, Kadar and Karamakhi and took them by assault. Arrests of Salafist imams in the North Caucasus began in the autumn and winter of 1999–2000, accompanied by the destruction of their newspapers and books, videos of sermons, prayer houses and mosques. Several Salafist-inspired groups were declared illegal.⁴²

The move against Salafism had several unintended consequences. The repressive actions of the authorities, combined with the influence of Chechen extremists, served to consolidate the Salafist groups and helped them to overcome their internal divisions.⁴³ It also drove the Salafists underground. The Salafists' agenda shifted from a struggle with traditional Islam to one with the regional and central authorities. Furthermore, Salafists in Chechnya and Dagestan joined the masses of refugees fleeing Russia's military operations and entering other republics in the region. In this way, the persecution of Salafists stimulated the strengthening and

⁴⁰ Roschin, M., 'Islam in the Northern Caucasus: Dagestan', Jamestown Foundation, Sep. 2006, URL <<http://www.jamestown.org/docs/Roschin-14Sep06.pdf>>.

⁴¹ The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, Federal Law 125–FZ, was adopted on 26 Sep. 1997. Its provisions include strict requirements for registration and reporting for newly established religious groups; denial to 'foreign religions associations' of the right to 'engage in cultural and other religious activity' and of the 'status of a religious association'; and establishing the right of the state to refuse registration of or (by court decision) to ban a religious group if it, among other things, '[violates] public security and public order and damage[s] the security of the state; [performs] actions directed toward the violent change of the bases of constitutional order and violation of the integrity of the Russian federation; [creates] armed formation[s]; [or performs] propaganda of war and incitement of social, racial, national, or religious enmity and misanthropy'. The list of justifications for banning religious groups was later amended to include 'acts aimed at the performance of an extremist activity'. Translations from Brigham Young University, International Centre for Law and Religion Studies, International Document Database, URL <<http://www.religlaw.org/template.php?id=72>>, and Legislationline, URL <<http://www.legislationline.org/legislation.php?tid=2&lid=584&less=false>>.

⁴² Bobrovnikov (note 39).

⁴³ Makarov and Mukhametshin (note 38), pp. 153–55.

expansion of radical Islamist movements across the region. Communes of Salafists now appeared in the capitals of North Ossetia and Kabardino-Balkaria; in Nogai villages in Dagestan, Stavropol krai and Karachai-Cherkessia; and in communities of Dagestani refugees in Stavropol krai.

The first Chechen war

The first Chechen war, from 1994 to 1996, affected all aspects of life in the North Caucasus and further poisoned Russia's relationship with the region, not least because it ended in a humiliating defeat for the Russian forces. Beyond the immediate casualties of the conflict, the war played a central role in the growth of authoritarian politics in the region and in Moscow, the rise of radical Islam, the spread of corruption and criminality, and the accelerated social and economic decline of the region. The first Chechen war was thus instrumental in the rise to power of Vladimir Putin and the emergence of his centralizing agenda.

The first of the major events leading up to the war was the seizure of power by force in the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Republic by nationalist politician Dzhokhar Dudayev in 1991. Dudayev held an election in October to confirm his presidency and then proclaimed an independent Chechen Republic (the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria), although it has never been recognized by Russia or the international community. Dudayev was able to draw on nationalist sentiment that had been building up in the late 1980s. There was fighting between Chechens and Ingush along the border between the Chechen and Ingush territories, which stopped only after the federal authorities sent troops to the area. In June 1992 Chechnya and Ingushetia were formally separated when the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation passed the Law on the Formation of the Ingush Republic.

In April 1993 Dudayev dissolved the Chechen parliament and Chechnya descended into lawlessness and chaos. Bitter infighting broke out, reflecting its complex social make-up. Between 1991 and 1994, tens of thousands of people, mostly ethnic Russians, fled the republic amid reports of violence against the non-Chechen population. Russian engineers and factory workers were expelled, leading to the failure of Chechen industries. Pro- and anti-Dudayev factions fought for power and at times used heavy weapons in pitched battles.

In December 1994 federal troops were sent in to restore the federal government's authority in the republic, sparking the first Chechen war. Conditions quickly deteriorated as both sides became locked in a cycle of violence that led to the death of thousands of civilians and the commission of war crimes by both sides. The Chechen capital, Grozny, was reduced to ruins.

The Chechens turned to guerrilla tactics and launched a series of high-profile hostage raids. In 1995 they seized a hospital in the southern city of Budyonnovsk, taking around 2000 hostages. More than 100 people died as a result of fighting between Russian troops and the Chechen forces in and around the hospital. Russian forces were unable to contain the Chechen fighters and suffered heavy casualties.

This led to a collapse of morale and growing discontent with Russia's handling of the war. The war drove from their homes hundreds of thousands of people, who took refuge elsewhere in the Russian Federation or abroad, and destroyed the republic's economy. Most of the remaining ethnic Russians there were killed or fled.

During and after the war, a small but determined group of international jihadi fighters were drawn to Chechnya under the leadership of an Arab, Samir Saleh Abdullah Al-Suwailem, with the *nom de guerre* of Amir Khattab. Local leaders such as Shamil Basayev, Arbi Barayev and Movladi Udugov allied themselves with this group and began to look to the international Islamist movement for support. As a result, the war began to shift from its initially nationalist agenda towards more Islamist aims.

Dudayev was killed in a Russian missile attack in April 1996. In May President Yeltsin travelled to Chechnya and invited Dudayev's successor, Zelimkhan Yanderbiev, to the Kremlin. In June Chechen and Russian negotiators concluded an agreement in Nazran, Ingushetia, on a Russian troop withdrawal from Chechnya. After the June 1996 Russian presidential elections, the Nazran agreement was de facto annulled and Russia renewed its military campaign under General Alexander Lebed, who had been appointed national security adviser by the re-elected President Yeltsin. However, it soon became clear that continuing to fight was futile.

Chechen insurgent forces captured Grozny in early August 1996 and on 31 August a peace agreement between Russia and the Chechen leadership was concluded in the city of Khasavyurt, Dagestan. Among the terms of the agreement was a decision to postpone resolution of the question of Chechen sovereignty for five years, until 31 December 2001. The federal government continued to put pressure on Chechnya through political, military and economic means, but from a distance.

During the next three years a struggle for power developed among the fragmented Chechen elite. In January 1997, presidential elections were conducted in the republic. Russia gave its support to Aslan Maskhadov, a relative moderate among the separatist leaders, who won with 60 per cent of the vote.⁴⁴ However, the Islamist guerrilla leader Shamil Basayev, who had participated in the Budyonnovsk hostage taking and coordinated many other terrorist and guerrilla activities during the war, won 20 per cent of the vote and became prime minister. Maskhadov was unable to consolidate control as the country devolved into squabbling among the heads of local *teip* (clan or tribal groupings) and organized criminal groups. The tensions between Maskhadov and Basayev were particularly destabilizing and intensified into a struggle for power. The two men disagreed about relations with the federal government and the nature of the emerging Chechen state.

⁴⁴ Trenin, D. V. and Malashenko, A. V., *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia* (Carnegie Foundation for International Peace: Washington, DC, 2004), p. 30.

The question of the relationship of Islam to the state was especially sensitive and led to clashes between followers of traditional and fundamentalist Islam from the mid-1990s. Radicals, led by Basayev, used this issue to challenge the legitimacy of Maskhadov's leadership. From 1998, clashes between competing groups in Chechnya intensified. Maskhadov tried to consolidate his position, appealing to the Chechen people and using contacts with the federal government and with other North Caucasus leaders, while the radicals looked for support from local opposition forces and called for Islamization of the North Caucasus. In February 1999, Maskhadov introduced sharia law and a shura (Islamic council) primarily in order to challenge the radicals' monopoly over Islam.⁴⁵

Dagestan became a key issue in the struggle for power in Chechnya. Basing their argument in large part on historical claims, radicals argued that Dagestan should be merged with Chechnya to form a single Islamic state. They viewed the creation in the late 1990s of several enclaves under sharia law in Dagestani villages located close to the Chechen border as a sufficient justification for launching a war of Islamic liberation in Dagestan.⁴⁶

On 30 August 1999 a group of Chechen army commanders led a band of Islamist militants (the so-called Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan) into Dagestan. Headed by Shamil Basayev and Amir Khattab, the mostly Chechen and Dagestani forces fought Russian troops in Dagestan for a week before being driven back into Chechnya. Chechens were blamed by the Russian authorities for bombing an apartment building in Moscow on 9 and 13 September 1999 and for several other explosions in Russia.⁴⁷ The federal government also claimed that local terrorist activity was supported with financing and arms from international Islamic militant groups, including al-Qaeda. The new Russian prime minister, Vladimir Putin, ordered Russian forces back into Chechnya, thereby launching the second Chechen war.

⁴⁵ Trenin and Malashenko (note 44), p. 32.

⁴⁶ Souleimanov, E., 'Chechnya, Wahhabism and the invasion of Dagestan', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (Dec. 2005), URL <<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2005/issue4/jvol9no4in.html>>.

⁴⁷ This version of the events has been challenged. Litvinenko, A. and Felshinsky, Y., *Blowing up Russia: Terror from Within* (Gibson Square Books: London, 2007).

3. The North Caucasus in the Putin era

After the appointment of Vladimir Putin as Russia's prime minister in August 1999—making him heir apparent to the presidency—the strengthening of the state rose to the top of Russia's political agenda. From the start, Putin made reshaping relations between the federal government and the regions a key policy aim. The North Caucasus has been a particular focus of his statist programme. Putin has sought to bring the situation in the North Caucasus under control using strategies such as the imposition of a system of centrally appointed key regional officials, administrative and territorial restructuring, and intensive militarization. Despite this, the situation in the region has continued to deteriorate. Moreover, the effort to reduce instability in the North Caucasus, often framed as Russia's own 'war on terrorism', has become the justification for centralization of power and curtailment of political and civil liberties. It has also been a key factor in the rise of racism and xenophobia in Russia.

Putin's new course

Vladimir Putin's surprise appointment as prime minister occurred at a time when there was a growing sense of crisis in Russia and a desire among much of the population for the authorities to exert far more control. The invasion of Dagestan launched by Chechen Islamist militants in 1999 gave Putin the pretext for launching a campaign to strengthen his 'power vertical' through a set of measures, including far-reaching reform of federal relations, that were intended not least to restore Russia's dominance in the North Caucasus.

In an initial wave of reforms, launched on his full assumption of the presidency in May 2000, Putin introduced a set of measures designed to strengthen central executive power over the regions. Seven federal districts—based on the existing military districts—were created, each comprising several regions under the guidance of a presidential plenipotentiary envoy.⁴⁸ Federal institutions in the regions were refashioned to fit the new structure. The republics of the North Caucasus were grouped with a handful of largely Russian regions adjoining them into the Southern Federal District. Russia demanded that the regions' constitutions and other legislation be brought into line with the federal constitution and laws, and the presidential representatives were given the task of ensuring compliance. Putin also gave the Russian Government, for the first time, the power to remove leaders of republics and other regions who breached the Russian federal constitution.⁴⁹ These

⁴⁸ At the time, the Russian Federation consisted of 89 administrative units (regions) arranged in an ethno-federal system composed of 21 republics, 48 provinces (oblasts), 7 territories (krai), 10 autonomous districts (okrugs), 1 autonomous region (oblast) and 2 federal cities (Moscow and St Petersburg).

⁴⁹ Melvin (note 6), pp. 203–27.

and other reforms—notably depriving the regional presidents and governors of their *ex officio* seats in the Federation Council (the upper house of the Russian Parliament⁵⁰)—took the regions’ elites off the national political stage. Thus, the first round of reforms significantly altered the nature of the relations—and thereby shifted the balance of power in the federation in Russia’s favour.

In 2002 Putin launched a second wave of reforms. In his state of the nation address in April of that year, he indicated that the special economic, political and other arrangements that had been agreed bilaterally, usually in the form of a treaty, between Russia and individual regions during Yeltsin’s time would be cancelled and the practice stopped. At the same time, he initiated a far-reaching reform of local government.

The introduction of Putin’s centralizing measures was very much a top-down process. It was designed to destroy the ability of the regional elites to challenge the centre and to address the concern that Russia’s territorial integrity was threatened by the increasing power of the regions. The drive to standardize the structure of executive power in the regions by making it conform to the system at the federal level was illustrated notably by the forcing of Dagestan, in 2003–2004, to abandon the special political arrangements set out in its 1994 constitution that were designed to ensure balanced representation of the republic’s many ethnic groups.⁵¹

The nature of the political situations and problems in the republics of the North Caucasus ensured that the impact of Putin’s new agenda was limited and that many of his reforms were not implemented or were quickly subverted. The federal officials of the Southern Federal District became increasingly involved in crisis management and security matters, rather than modernization and economic management. Moreover, the entrenched positions of power of many of the regional elite and the fear that challenging these figures directly would lead to further destabilization made implementing the centralizing agenda difficult. By the end of his first term as president in 2004, Putin still had not broken the power of the incumbent elite in their own regions and lacked the political leverage to do so. During his second term he changed his approach and stepped up efforts to replace the existing elite in the North Caucasus with his own appointees (see below). Meanwhile, Putin’s government used the growing instability in the North Caucasus to justify ever more authoritarian measures.

Another strategy that Putin employed to strengthen Russia’s hand in the regions was territorial–administrative restructuring. At the end of his first presidential term, Putin launched a controversial policy of merging smaller regions into their larger neighbours. In 2005 the Russian authorities in the Southern Federal District began to circulate the idea of merging the small republic of Adygeya with the predom-

⁵⁰ Russian federal law gives each region 2 seats in the Federation Council, 1 representing the regional legislature and 1 representing the regional executive, the latter appointed by the president or governor and approved by the regional legislature.

⁵¹ Kisriev, E. and Ware, R. B., ‘Russian hegemony in Dagestan’, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Jan. 2005), pp. 26–55.

inately ethnic Russian Krasnodar krai. This initiative was widely viewed as a prelude to further mergers in the North Caucasus, possibly including the reunification of Chechnya with Ingushetia and, most controversially, the unification of North Ossetia (in Russia) with South Ossetia, which had been trying to break away from Georgia since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Georgia's independence in 1991.

The Adygeya–Krasnodar proposal quickly ran into local opposition, and ethnic Adygei held mass demonstrations in Maikop, Adygeya's capital. A subsequent political crisis, including the apparent resignation of the republic's president, Khasret Sovmen, forced a postponement of the initiative and called into question the future of the merger policy.⁵² After this, the leaders of most of the other ethnic republics, and even of the Russian-dominated regions of the Southern Federal District, expressed reservations about restructuring the North Caucasus, given its complex ethnic and social organization.⁵³ The Putin Administration shifted tactics on the merger issue. President Putin ensured the appointment of a new leader for Adygeya, Aslan Tkhakushinov, and began a process of gradually transferring control of Adygeya's institutions to the Krasnodar authorities, while the borders of the region remained formally unchanged.⁵⁴

Replacing local elites

Faced with the growing challenges of the North Caucasus and obstacles to his centralization agenda, Putin set about dislodging members of the entrenched local elites who were not prepared to toe the new line. As early as 2001, Russia moved to replace the long-serving president of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev, who had been a critic of Putin's approach to Chechnya. Aushev resigned in December of that year, making way for a pro-Kremlin figure with a background in the security services but little support in Ingushetia, Murat Zyazikov. The April 2002 presidential elections, which ended with victory for Zyazikov, were widely reported to have been manipulated by the Kremlin in his favour.

Replacing other leaders in the region initially proved more difficult, but the Beslan siege in 2004 gave Russia a pretext to abolish elections for regional leaders and instead to give the president the power to make direct appointments, with regional parliaments reduced to rubber-stamping his decisions. The leaders of

⁵² Smirnov, A., 'Kremlin plan to merge Adygeya meets unexpected obstacle', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 6 Apr. 2006.

⁵³ Perovic, J., International Relations and Security Network (ISN), 'Moscow's North Caucasus quagmire', *ISN Security Watch*, 1 June 2006, URL <<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/>>.

⁵⁴ Smirnov, A., 'Kremlin lets Adygeya keep its virtual autonomy', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 16 Jan. 2007.

Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia were all replaced in 2005–2006 by Putin appointees.⁵⁵

The replacement of some of the long-serving leaders of the North Caucasus republics reflects the growing confidence of the Russian Government in tackling both the entrenched regimes and the corruption and clan-style politics that their continuation has encouraged. At the same time, Russia has been cautious on this issue, carefully choosing the moment to move against incumbent leaders, even after passing the legislation giving the president and his envoys the power to challenge and remove regional leaders.⁵⁶ Russia will find it easier in the future to choose new leaders as the remaining incumbents' terms of office expire.

Putin's new policy of installing loyal local elites through direct intervention marks a return to Russian imperial and Soviet ways of maintaining control in the region. However, it is unclear how successful this strategy will be in breaking up clan structures and extremist networks. In the past, such interventions have only intensified tensions and produced new conflicts, and they have tended to result in power shifts within the system rather than changing the system itself.⁵⁷ Moreover, a focus on loyalty to Moscow has not always achieved the desired results. The replacement of Aushev with Zyazikov weakened the pro-Chechen lobby in the government of Ingushetia, but Zyazikov has faced strong internal criticism and opposition, failed to prevent the Chechen conflict from spilling over into his republic, and been unable to stem the rise of violence and a growing security crisis in Ingushetia.⁵⁸

The situation in Ingushetia highlights the essential weakness of Russia's approach. The new leaders emerging in the region have not gained their positions through a democratic process and thus lack local legitimacy. As a result, they have generally tried to consolidate their positions through patronage politics, thereby

⁵⁵ Dagestan's long-serving leader, Chairman of the State Council Magomedali Magomedov, stood down on 16 Feb. 2006, to be replaced by Putin appointee Mukhu Aliyev, who took up the newly created post of president. 'New Daghestani president says reform is top priority', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 20 Feb. 2006. Valeri Kokov, president of Kabardino-Balkaria since 1992 and chairman of the republic's Supreme Soviet in 1990–91, stood down on 16 Sep. 2005 and Putin nominated Arsen Kanokov to succeed him 2 weeks later. Fuller, E., 'Kabardino-Balkaria: president's premature resignation highlights republic's problems', Radio Free Europe, 19 Sep. 2005; and 'Putin nominates new governor for Kabardino-Balkaria', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 27 Sep. 2005. President Aleksandr Dzasokhov of North Ossetia announced his resignation on 31 May 2005. He was succeeded the following month by Taymuraz Mamsurov, whose nomination, in a presidential decree from Putin, was approved by the North Ossetian Parliament within a matter of hours. Smirnov, A., 'Ossetia and Ingushetia protest Kremlin presidential appointments', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 9 June 2005. See also Peuch, J.-C., 'Russia: could North Ossetian leader's departure herald other resignations?', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2 June 2005.

⁵⁶ Fuller, E., 'Are Ingushetia, North Ossetia on verge of new hostilities?', *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, vol. 9, no. 11 (27 Mar. 2006).

⁵⁷ Perovic, J., *The North Caucasus on the Brink*, ISN Case Studies (International Relations and Security Network (ISN): Zurich, 29 Aug. 2006), pp. 20–21.

⁵⁸ Bransten, J., 'North Caucasus: is a Chechnya-style conflict brewing in Ingushetia?', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 12 July 2004.

exacerbating some of the very problems that Russia is anxious to eliminate in the region and increasing the regimes' reliance on security forces.

The second Chechen war

The second Chechen war, which started after Putin ordered Russian troops back into Chechnya in October 1999, was one of the bloodiest military conflicts in the world at that time.⁵⁹ In the months following the onset of the conflict, the Russian military and pro-Russian Chechen paramilitary forces struggled to dislodge determined Chechen separatist resistance. The full-scale military offensive ended with the Russian seizure of the Chechen capital Grozny in February 2000. However, the conflict continues today.

The apparent success of the Chechnya campaign boosted Putin's popularity in the run-up to the presidential election in March 2000. On 8 June of that year, he declared that Chechnya was under direct presidential rule. He then appointed the chief mufti of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov, interim head of the government in Chechnya. Despite these moves, Chechen guerrilla resistance continued to inflict heavy casualties on Russian forces across the North Caucasus for several years and to challenge the federal government's political control over Chechnya. Meanwhile, terrorist attacks by Chechen separatists against civilians in Russia escalated. The best-known incidents were the taking of hostages inside a Moscow theatre in October 2002 and in a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, in September 2004. Both sieges ended with heavy fatalities among the hostages.

Between the Moscow and Beslan events, Putin introduced a range of further political and administrative measures aimed at restoring federal control over Chechnya. On 23 March 2003, a new Chechen constitution was passed by referendum. The referendum and the new constitution were strongly supported by the Russian Government and challenged equally strongly by Chechen separatists. The constitution, which entered into force on 2 April 2003, grants Chechnya a significant degree of autonomy but still ties it firmly to the Russian Federation and to Russia's rule.

Alongside political efforts, the Russian authorities have sought to consolidate control through the use of unchecked military power to bring about the complete elimination of the Chechen resistance. Human rights violations by both the Russian forces and pro-Moscow Chechen paramilitaries have been widely criticized and human rights organizations have documented the systematic use of torture in the region.⁶⁰ Hundreds of Chechen fighters and federal troops have been killed along with thousands of civilians. Key Chechen separatist leaders have also been killed

⁵⁹ See e.g. Sollenberg, M. et al., 'Major armed conflicts, 1999', *SIPRI Yearbook 2000: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000), pp. 50–58.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch, 'Widespread torture in the Chechen Republic', Briefing paper for the 37th Session of the UN Committee against Torture, 13 Nov. 2006, URL <<http://hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/chechnya1106/chechnya1106web.pdf>>.

during the war, including Aslan Maskhadov (in March 2005) and Shamil Basayev (in July 2006).

A key element of the Putin Administration's peace and stabilization programme in Chechnya has been the policy of 'Chechenization', whereby Moscow has sought to draw Chechens who are loyal to Russia into administration of the region and fighting the separatists. In December 2005 Ramzan Kadyrov, son of Akhmad Kadyrov and leader of a Moscow-backed Chechen militia known as the 'Kadyrovtsy', was appointed Chechnya's prime minister and the republic's de facto ruler. Kadyrov, whose irregular forces are accused of carrying out many abductions and atrocities, has become Chechnya's most powerful leader. He was appointed president in March 2007.

By 2006 Russia's military and political campaign had, after considerable human suffering and a high economic cost, led to the emergence of greater relative stability in the region. Although unable to suppress opposition completely, Russia has succeeded in installing a nominally pro-Moscow Chechen regime. Reconstruction efforts have been stepped up. Russia sought to reinforce the impression that the war in Chechnya was over with a presidential decree on 2 August requiring the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior to draw up plans for a step-by-step withdrawal of the Russian forces under their command, to take place in 2007–2008.⁶¹

Many questions remain about how durable this stability really is since it has been achieved without addressing the original sources of the conflict. Scepticism has also been expressed about the calls for a troop withdrawal: several such announcements during the recent conflict have been followed by increases, not reductions, in Russian deployments in the region.⁶² Indeed, even if the proposed withdrawals take place, it is certain that the Chechens will have to live with a significant Russian security presence for some time to come: the same presidential decree also indicated that the Russian forces' operations centre in Chechnya would become the base for 'counterterrorist' missions in the entire region.⁶³

The Chechenization policy has also brought difficulties for Russia. As a result of its recent history, Chechnya is now populated almost exclusively by ethnic Chechens and is increasingly influenced by Islam in various forms. With the departure of the ethnic Russians, Moscow is deprived of an automatically pro-Russia social community in the republic. Absent the ethnic link that had helped to tether Chechen territories to Russia following imperial conquest, the Kremlin has been forced to rely on federal security forces and local strongmen to maintain influence in the region. This has, in particular, allowed Ramzan Kadyrov to strengthen his own political position in Chechnya.

⁶¹ Smirnov, A., 'Putin's Potemkin withdrawal from Chechnya', *Chechnya Weekly*, 10 Aug. 2006.

⁶² Uzzell, L. A., 'Russia's uncertain military future in Chechnya', *Chechnya Weekly*, 17 Aug. 2006.

⁶³ Smirnov (note 61).

The reliance on powerful local figures has, however, failed to establish a fully stable regime and there are considerable doubts about the degree to which Kadyrov and his supporters are genuinely loyal to Moscow. The policy of Chechenization has thus brought to power a group that reflects many of the nationalist aspirations that fired the initial Chechen militants of the early 1990s. Parliamentarians associated with Kadyrov have proposed moves towards a strong form of Chechen autonomy within Russia and proposed that the republic should be enlarged through ‘unification’ with Ingushetia and parts of Dagestan.⁶⁴ The Russian leadership’s concern about its ability to control Chechnya under Kadyrov and to manage the distribution of the republic’s natural resources has been a key factor preventing agreement on power sharing.⁶⁵

In recent years, Russia attempted to use the more reliably loyal Alu Alkhanov—Chechen president from August 2004 to February 2007—to balance Kadyrov’s influence, but Alkhanov was only able to conduct a holding operation against Kadyrov’s push for power.⁶⁶ At the beginning of 2006, Russia announced new policies for Chechnya evidently intended to undermine Kadyrov—notably the integration of the Kadyrovtsy into the regular Russian Army—and perhaps signalling an intent to abandon the Chechenization policy.⁶⁷ However, events in early 2007 demonstrate clearly that Chechenization, or at least Putin’s support for Kadyrov, is to continue. On 2 March, the Chechen Parliament formally approved Putin’s nomination of Kadyrov as president of Chechnya following Alkhanov’s resignation.⁶⁸ Kadyrov quickly moved to further consolidate his political control through appointment of Odes Baysultanov, his cousin, as prime minister on 8 March.⁶⁹

Russia has been unable to suppress completely the insurgency in Chechnya, despite the opportunities presented by the deaths of Maskhadov and Basayev. Following Basayev’s death, Russia made a renewed offer of amnesty—it has for some years offered periodic amnesties for insurgents who surrender—to the Chechen militants.⁷⁰ However, the dead leaders have rapidly been replaced and in

⁶⁴ Uzzell, L. A., ‘Chechen parliamentary speaker reiterates territorial claims’, *Chechnya Weekly*, 8 Sep. 2006; and Uzzell, L. A., ‘Chechen Parliament floats economic autonomy bill’, *Chechnya Weekly*, 15 Sep. 2006.

⁶⁵ Leahy, K. D., ‘Chechnya’s latest economic initiative: the politics of autonomy’, *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, 4 Oct. 2006, URL <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/>>.

⁶⁶ Vachagaev, M., ‘The increasingly deadly struggle for power between Kadyrov and Alkhanov’, *Chechnya Weekly*, 28 Sep. 2006.

⁶⁷ Smirnov, A., ‘Moscow puts Kadyrov’s private army under its own command’, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 26 Jan. 2006.

⁶⁸ ‘Ramzan gets presidential’, *Chechnya Weekly*, 8 Mar. 2006.

⁶⁹ ‘Chechen republics heads names new prime minister’, *RFE/RL Newslines*, 12 Mar. 2007.

⁷⁰ Smirnov, A., ‘The rebels call for political dialogue while the Kremlin demands surrender’, *Chechnya Weekly*, 20 July 2006. Russia authorities claimed that 550 militants surrendered under the terms of the amnesty. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15 Jan. 2007; and Chivers, C. J., ‘Success of Chechen amnesty is contested’, *New York Times*, 16 Jan. 2007.

early 2007 Russia's top military officer in the north Caucasus, Lieutenant General Arkady Yedelev, indicated that there still were 450 insurgent fighters in Chechnya, a higher number than previous official estimates.⁷¹

In June 2006, Doku Umarov became Maskhadov's successor as president of the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, and thus as leader of the insurgent forces. (Maskhadov's immediate successor, Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev, had been killed in action earlier in June.) Umarov indicated that he would refocus the Chechen struggle on the question of independence and distance himself from international jihadi movements and the use of terrorist tactics. He also indicated that he intended to spread the war against Russia further across the North Caucasus to two new fronts: the Ural and Volga regions. Earlier efforts by the Chechen insurgents to forge a regional coalition of separatist and Islamic movements have, however, faced serious problems because of fears among the other movements that the Chechens would dominate it.⁷²

Russia's policy of Chechenization seems to have failed to mitigate the conflict, while the insurgents' strategy of extending the war across the entire North Caucasus appears to have made significant progress. Chechnya no longer resembles a single black hole of conflict—as was the case under Yeltsin—but more the eye of a storm encompassing the entire North Caucasus.⁷³ Moreover, there is concern that Chechen paramilitaries may be employed in potential conflicts currently developing in the South Caucasus and, in this way, inflame a broader conflict across the whole Caucasus region.⁷⁴

Russia's 'war on terrorism'

Russia has increasingly sought to present its engagement with the problems of the North Caucasus as a struggle with terrorism. Following the al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington, DC, on 11 September 2001, the government was quick to associate the militants in the North Caucasus with the global jihadi movement and to cast Russia's actions in the region as part of the 'war on terrorism' (insurgent groups in the North Caucasus are habitually identified as terrorists, criminals or bandits and accused of links with international jihadi groups). Russia's leaders have adopted an uncompromising tone. Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov has argued, 'whoever hopes we start negotiations [with militants in Chechnya], let them go and start negotiating with Osama bin Laden or Mullah Omar'. President

⁷¹ '450 rebels still fighting in Chechnya: Russian general', 2 Feb. 2007, Mosnews.com, URL <<http://mosnews.com/news/2007/02/02/chechensleft.shtml>>.

⁷² Smirnov, A., 'Political disunity mars Chechen rebel strategy in the North Caucasus', *Chechnya Weekly*, 8 June 2006.

⁷³ Baev, P. K., 'Shifting battlefields of the Chechen war', *Chechnya Weekly*, 20 Apr. 2006.

⁷⁴ Felgenhauer, P., 'The Kadyrovtsy: Moscow's new pawns in the South Caucasus?', *Chechnya Weekly*, 15 June 2006. See also Rettman, A., 'Russia "not neutral" in Black Sea conflict, EU says', EUObserver.com, 12 Oct. 2006.

Putin has also remarked that ‘Russia does not negotiate with terrorists, it destroys them.’⁷⁵ As a result, counterterrorism policies have been presented as the best response to the key challenges of the region.

Terrorism was first defined as a crime in the Russian Federation Criminal Code of 1994. Russia’s first law specifically to address terrorism, the Law on the Fight Against Terrorism, was approved on July 1998.⁷⁶ However, it was with the rise to power of Vladimir Putin and the escalation of conflict in Chechnya in 1999 that Russia started to put a strong emphasis in its public statements on the threat posed by terrorism both to international security in general and to Russia’s security in particular. In an August 1999 presidential decree calling for reorganization of the Federal Security Service, the Department for Combating Terrorism and the Department of Constitutional Security were merged into a single department, the Department for Protecting the Constitutional Structure and Combating Terrorism.

In September 1999 the FSB and Interior Ministry launched Operation Whirlwind, an anti-terrorist operation ostensibly aimed at finding those responsible for a spate of bombings in three cities: Moscow, Vologodonsk and Buinaksk, Dagestan. The bombings were immediately blamed on Chechen insurgents and in the first month of Operation Whirlwind over 100 Chechens were detained in Russia. The Kremlin declared that 17 ‘warlords’ were wanted in connection with the bombings and extended the operation nationwide.⁷⁷ This operation provided the basis for a series of subsequent security campaigns in various parts of the North Caucasus that were often merged with the security operations in Chechnya and continue to the present day.

Russia was ill-prepared to engage in a sophisticated counterterrorism operation in 1999 and has made only slow progress in updating its capabilities and approach since then. Russian counterterrorist tactics have often been ineffective from a military perspective and have resulted in massive civilian casualties—so-called counterterrorism operations in Chechnya and elsewhere have often been little more than a disproportionate and unfocused employment of firepower, including in urban areas, following an attack by militants—perhaps most evident in the security forces’ response to the Beslan school siege. The Russian approach has been based on overwhelming use of military firepower and the belief—which informs Russian operations in Chechnya—that insurgency can be stopped through attrition of the militants. Politically, they have led to life in the North Caucasus being steadily ‘securitized’ and the space for dialogue and for genuine popular political par-

⁷⁵ Litvinovich, D., ‘Russia: the dead and the missing’, *Transitions Online*, Week in Review, 3–9 February 2004, URL <http://www.ciaonet.org/pbei/tol/tol_2004/feb3-9/>.

⁷⁶ The Law on the Fight against Terrorism, Federal Law no. 130–FZ, was adopted on 25 July 1998. See also Smith, M. A., ‘Russian perspectives on terrorism’, *Conflict Studies Research Centre Russian series*, 22 Jan. 2004, URL <<http://www.defac.ac.uk/colleges/csrc/document-listings/russian/C110>>.

⁷⁷ Piper, E., Reuters, ‘Russian swoop on “terrorists”’, *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), 29 Sep. 1999, URL <<http://www.tribuneindia.com/1999/99sep29/world.htm>>.

ticipation squeezed. Many have concluded that this approach is, in fact, exacerbating the problems in the North Caucasus.

Another problem that has plagued Russian counterterrorism operations in the North Caucasus is that of overlapping responsibilities and jurisdictions. During the early years of the second Chechen war, these failings went largely unaddressed, but continuing insurgent attacks in Chechnya and in other North Caucasus republics drove the Russian Government to shift its strategy. In response to the deteriorating security situation in the North Caucasus and especially to the 2004 Beslan school siege, President Putin pushed through a far-reaching reform of Russia's security architecture alongside his other measures to strengthen his 'power vertical'.

In March 2006 a new anti-terrorism law came into effect, which specifies the powers and responsibilities of the military, law-enforcement agencies and the other security organs in the prevention of and response to terrorist attacks.⁷⁸ An important aspect of the legislation is that it permits Russian security agencies to kill suspected international terrorist targets outside Russia's territory—although such action should be limited by the terms of international treaties and agreements signed by Russia.⁷⁹ Another provision allows the military to shoot down hijacked aircraft or sink hijacked ships even with hostages on board.⁸⁰

The new law was designed to supplement Putin's presidential decree on measures for opposition to terrorism of 16 February 2006, creating a new 'counterterrorism vertical' to complement and coordinate federal and regional counterterrorism efforts and organs. The decree created the National Antiterrorism Committee, headed by the director of the FSB, which effectively replaced the Federal Antiterrorism Commission, a largely inactive government body created in 2002. The National Antiterrorism Committee comprises, besides the FSB director, the ministers of interior, defence and justice; the heads of the Foreign Intelligence Service and Federal Guard Service; the prosecutor-general; a deputy head of the presidential administration; top military commanders; and deputy speakers of both chambers of parliament. This initiative, together with a number of further reforms, was designed to streamline decision making on anti-terrorist issues, particularly during crisis situations, and to improve coordination between special forces units from different federal agencies.⁸¹ The FSB, in particular, has gained an enhanced role in anti-terrorist operations.

⁷⁸ The Law on Counteraction of Extremism, Federal Law 35-FZ, was adopted on 6 Mar. 2006.

⁷⁹ This last point did not seem to apply to the murder in Qatar of Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, a former pro-separatist Chechen president, in Feb. 2004, when the local authorities arrested 3 Russian intelligence agents and charged them with involvement.

⁸⁰ Bigg, C., 'Russia: Duma backs antiterrorism bill in second reading', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 23 Feb. 2006.

⁸¹ Trifanov, D., 'Russia boosts counterinsurgency efforts in North Caucasus', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Feb. 2006), pp. 34–37; and McGregor, A., 'Russia reorganizes its war on terrorism', *Chechnya Weekly*, 21 Sep. 2006.

The Interior Ministry announced changes in the security structure of the North Caucasus in August 2006. Under the reforms, the Regional Operational Headquarters responsible for counterterrorism was dissolved and replaced with a series of local operational headquarters in the Southern Federal District led by officers of the Interior Ministry. Thus, regional governors no longer head counterterrorist operations in their republics. The main aim of this appeared to be to ensure that the ministry did not lose control over counterterrorist operations in the region, especially during the mooted withdrawal of federal troops from Chechnya in 2007–2008 (see above). In particular, it ensured that the Chechen authorities did not gain control of counterterrorism efforts in Chechnya.⁸² Furthermore, it was no longer necessary to maintain parallel regional structures after the creation of the National Antiterrorism Committee.

Alongside these reforms Russia has come to rely increasingly on special forces capabilities for combating terrorism. In mid-2005, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov announced that the Ministry of Defence was to set up two special forces brigades for mountain warfare in the North Caucasus. Previously, the focus had been on increasing the deployments of regular troops and improving the ground attack capabilities of the Russian Air Force. In the 2003 Russian ‘Defence White Paper’, military doctrine was upgraded, with special attention to asymmetrical warfare.⁸³

The reform of Russia’s counterterrorism efforts since Beslan has been perceived in Russia as a success, especially in view of the killing or capture of many insurgents, notably when an Islamist-led attack on the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria, Nalchik, was repulsed in October 2005. At the same time, major questions remain about whether the current counterterrorist approach has actually done much to promote stability in the region: the experience of Chechnya suggests that military approaches have ultimately failed.⁸⁴

Reliance on security services continues to bring with it problems, not least corruption inside the services and their general lack of effectiveness. Even the apparent success in Nalchik cost nearly 200 lives and left a bitter legacy of torture, murder and repression of Muslims, according to many observers.⁸⁵ Despite the improved effectiveness of Moscow’s security operations in the region, Russian forces continue to be involved regularly in firefights with insurgents in urban areas of the region.⁸⁶

⁸² McGregor (note 81).

⁸³ See Russian Ministry of Defence, [The Priority Tasks of the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation], URL <<http://www.old.mil.ru/articles/article5005.shtml>>; and Trifanov (note 81).

⁸⁴ Kramer, M., ‘The perils of counterinsurgency: Russia’s war in Chechnya’, *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 3 (winter 2004/2005), pp. 5–63.

⁸⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, North Caucasus Service, ‘Russia: Nalchik raid leaves a painful legacy’, 12 Oct. 2006, URL <<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/russia.html>>.

⁸⁶ ‘Operation in South Russia ends; four militants killed’, RIA Novosti, 11 Jan. 2007, URL <<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20070111/58872710.html>>.

The role of the international community

As conflict in the North Caucasus has developed, particularly during and after the first Chechen war, the international community has become more involved in the region in a variety of ways. From the earliest days of Russian independence, a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with human rights, development, humanitarian aid, conflict resolution and other issues have been operating in the region. Undoubtedly the most significant political engagement was the establishment of a long-term mission to Chechnya by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in April 1995. The OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya, although small, played an important role in the negotiations leading to the end of the first Chechen war and continued to work in the areas of post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction of the economy and infrastructure for several years.

During the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, Russia's bilateral relations with European countries and the United States, among others, also provided forums for discussion of the situation in the North Caucasus. At the same time, even in this relatively favourable environment, military and economic interests often balanced or even overrode human rights concerns, leading some to characterize Russia's relations with the European Union as one of 'utility over norms'.⁸⁷

With the political ascendancy of Vladimir Putin there was a dramatic shift in attitude towards international engagement within the Russian Federation. The Putin Administration now commonly refers to such engagement as 'interference' and invokes concepts such as 'sovereign democracy' to justify its rejection of international interest in—and criticism of—its domestic policies, including towards the North Caucasus, particularly Chechnya.⁸⁸ On 31 December 2002, the federal government refused to extend the mandate of the OSCE Assistance Group, which had returned to Chechnya following a three-year hiatus. Subsequent efforts by the OSCE to mediate in the conflict have been rebuffed by Russia.⁸⁹ The reframing of the region's problems as linked to international Islamist terrorism has also provided new grounds for rebutting criticism. In this climate, the opportunities for an international role in the region have declined precipitously.

Russia's media reporting on the North Caucasus has been a particular target for the authorities, with increased violence against journalists involved in questioning the government's strategies. Journalist Anna Politkovskaya, murdered in October 2006, was one of several leading critics of Putin's policies who have met a violent

⁸⁷ Hughes, J., 'EU relations with Russia: partnership or asymmetric interdependency', London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), LSE Research Online, 2006, URL <<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/00000651>>, p. 8.

⁸⁸ 'Vladislav Surkov's secret speech: how Russia should fight international conspiracies', Mosnews.com, 12 July 2005, URL <<http://www.mosnews.com/interview/2005/07/12/surkov.shtml>>.

⁸⁹ 'OSCE: outgoing chief says Moscow an obstacle', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 12 Jan. 2006.

death. The position of NGOs has also been challenged by the widespread violence in the region and political pressure.⁹⁰ Also in October 2006, the Russian authorities forced the closure of the Russian–Chechen Friendship Society, an NGO that disseminated information about the human rights situation in Chechnya.⁹¹

At the diplomatic level, the rapid emergence of Russia as a petro-dollar power has greatly increased the Kremlin’s ability to silence criticism of its internal policies, particularly from the states of the European Union. This was most starkly evident at the summit meeting of the Group of Eight industrialized nations that was hosted by Russia in St Petersburg in July 2006, when Western leaders showed little appetite for raising the situation in the Caucasus.

Russia has responded aggressively to criticism from the Council of Europe, threatening to end its payments to the organization, and used its chairmanship of the Council’s Committee of Ministers in 2006 to stifle discussion. Russia has also threatened to use its veto in the OSCE to block any discussion of Russian internal affairs. In early October 2006 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak, indicated that restrictions imposed by Russia had forced him to postpone a proposed visit to Chechnya.⁹²

The government’s use of Russia’s international economic and political influence and—apparently—violence to silence its critics has not been entirely successful. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has found against Russia regarding accusations of human rights abuses in Chechnya. For example, in October 2006 it ruled that Russia was responsible for the unlawful killings of five Chechens in 2001.⁹³ This and other decisions concerning rights violations related to the Chechnya conflict has led President Putin to call the court’s rulings ‘political’.⁹⁴ The European Commission has also sought to gain a foothold in the North Caucasus through an initiative promoted by its external relations commissioner, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, to channel funds into EU-backed reconstruction work that goes beyond the immediate humanitarian relief that the EU has so far provided for the region.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Lobjakas, A., ‘Growing instability keeps aid out of Chechnya’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 29 Sep. 2004.

⁹¹ ‘Russia’s supreme court upholds friendship society closure’, *Chechnya Weekly*, 25 Jan. 2007.

⁹² ‘UN envoy says Chechnya visit not cancelled’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 5 Oct. 2006.

⁹³ ‘Strasbourg rules against Russia over Chechen deaths’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 12 Oct. 2006; and ‘Russia loses another Chechnya rights case’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 9 Nov. 2006.

⁹⁴ ‘Putin calls European rights court rulings “political”’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 11 Jan. 2007.

⁹⁵ Lobjakas, A., ‘North Caucasus: European Commission eyes reconstruction work in North Caucasus’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 27 Apr. 2005.

4. Prospects for the North Caucasus

Despite the recent respite in violence, at the beginning of 2007 the North Caucasus still has the potential to descend into region-wide instability—even as the Russian Federation seeks ever more radical initiatives to strengthen central control and enhance security. The insurgency in Chechnya continues despite the recent deaths of some of the prominent insurgent leaders.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, the cost of maintaining the Moscow-backed regime in the republic has been systematic torture and murder.⁹⁷ Militancy, notably that inspired by Salafist ideas, is spreading throughout the North Caucasus. At the same time, there is growing evidence that conflict is expanding beyond the North Caucasus to other parts of Russia, notably the Volga region, which has several large Muslim communities.

A major destabilization of the North Caucasus would have profound consequences for Russia and could eventually call into question the territorial integrity of parts of the region. It would also have serious implications for Russia's immediate neighbours and for Europe.

The future stability of the North Caucasus depends principally on addressing four interlinked clusters of issues: national–territorial issues, Islam and Islamism, governance issues and socio-economic issues. Each of these is discussed in the sections below.

National–territorial issues

While President Putin has sought to weaken the ethno-political movements based on the institutionalized nationalities inherited from the Soviet Union, he has not succeeded in addressing the root causes of local nationalist politics. Five main issues contribute to the continuing destabilizing ethno-nationalist sentiments.

Chechnya

Putin has done a great deal to undermine the operations of militants in Chechnya, but the relative stability of the region has been bought at huge economic and human cost. The policy of Chechenization has brought forth a highly unpredictable Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov. The new confidence and ambitions displayed by Kadyrov's regime have been reflected in a growing assertiveness towards Chechnya's neighbours, manifested in territorial claims and in alleged unilateral operations by Kadyrov's Chechen security forces in bordering republics. In September 2006, growing frictions around the activities of Chechen forces in

⁹⁶ Fuller, E., 'Ministry admits Chechen resistance still poses "serious threat"', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 8 Nov. 2006.

⁹⁷ Osborn, A., 'Murder and torture are the price of "peace" in Chechnya', *The Independent*, 13 Oct. 2006.

Ingushetia were reported to be behind a violent clash between Chechen and Ingush police forces.⁹⁸ The exodus of ethnic Russians and the Chechenization policy have left Russia with little means of control over the region other than through the security services. The long-term prospects for the region and the withdrawal of Russian military and security forces remain uncertain. There is also evidence of the emergence of a continued willingness of young people to join the militant organizations.⁹⁹

Ingushetia and North Ossetia

President Putin has promised to ‘eliminate the consequences of the 1992 conflict’ between Ingushetia and North Ossetia, but all efforts to solve the problem of Prigorodny district have failed and, indeed, have sometimes contributed to increasing tensions. A plan unveiled in May 2005 by Dmitry Kozak for resolving the dispute included proposals for some 10 000 Ingush displaced persons to return to Prigorodny by the end of 2006.¹⁰⁰ After the president of North Ossetia, Aleksandr Dzasokhov, announced that he intended to reject the plan, events were set in motion that culminated in his resignation in May 2005.¹⁰¹ With a new leadership in place, Putin is hoping to push through a settlement.¹⁰² However, with opposition to the plan still strong in North Ossetia, further progress is likely to be difficult.

Territorial mergers

President Putin has sought to overcome the problems of the ethno-territorial system by weakening the regions, initially by the establishment of the seven federal districts. He subsequently sought to use territorial mergers to further undermine the ethno-territorial system and to link non-ethnic Russian republics to predominately ethnic Russian regions. As mentioned above, the plan to merge Adygeya with the neighbouring Krasnodar krai led to a political crisis in Adygeya. Elsewhere in the North Caucasus, Russia’s efforts to weaken the ethno-national principle in this way

⁹⁸ Dudayev, U., ‘Chechen–Ingush battle shocks North Caucasus’, Institute for War & Peace Reporting, Caucasus Reporting Service, no. 358 (20 Sep. 2006), URL <<http://www.iwpr.net/>>.

⁹⁹ Sultanov, R., ‘Between myth and reality: life in Kadyrov’s Potemkin village’, *Chechnya Weekly*, 19 Apr. 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Fuller, L., ‘Are Ingushetia, North Ossetia on verge of new hostilities?’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 27 Mar. 2006.

¹⁰¹ Fuller, E., ‘Dmitrii Kozak—troubleshooter or whipping boy?’, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 20 June 2005.

¹⁰² Gabarayev, M., ‘Ingush–Ossetian dispute worsens’, Institute for War & Peace Reporting, Caucasus Reporting Service, no. 352 (9 Aug. 2006), URL <<http://www.iwpr.net/>>.

have merely promoted a new wave of ethnic demands—for example the Abaza and Nogai communities' calls for local autonomy in Karachai-Cherkessia republic.¹⁰³

Links to the South Caucasus

While President Putin has sought to play down the link between political power and ethno-territorial arrangements within Russia, the government's support for two secessionist (even irredentist) regions in Georgia—South Ossetia and Abkhazia—is having the opposite effect: it is helping to stimulate the renewed growth of ethno-territorial politics in the region, including the North Caucasus. For example, Russian arguments about the application to Abkhazia of the so-called Kosovo precedent for secession—Kosovo, with significant international support, is claiming recognition as a state separate from Serbia against the latter's wishes—also raise questions about the future status of some regions in Russia.¹⁰⁴

Outmigration of ethnic Russians

The Russian Government's focus on the North Caucasus has failed to stem the out-migration of ethnic Russians from the region, a process that began in the early 1970s owing to rising local nationalism.¹⁰⁵ Official Russian figures suggest that the number of ethnic Russians living in the North Caucasus fell by about 27 per cent from 1 359 191 in 1989 to 994 591 in 2002. As a result of this decline, Russians have lost their status as the region's largest ethnic group, accounting for only 15 per cent of the seven republics' population in 2002 compared to 26 per cent in 1989. Chechnya and Ingushetia experienced the biggest declines. Thus, by 2002 Chechens accounted for 93 per cent of Chechnya's population while Russians, as the second-largest ethnic, group accounted for only 4 per cent. In Ingushetia, ethnic Ingush accounted for 77 per cent of the population in 2002, while another 20 per cent were ethnic Chechens, and only 1 per cent Russians.¹⁰⁶

President Putin now appears to be encouraging the immigration of ethnic Russians living abroad to regions such as the Russian Far East and the North Caucasus, where Russian depopulation is perceived as bringing with it security risks.

¹⁰³ Tsei, D., 'Karachai-Cherkessia: small minority asserts itself', Institute for War & Peace Reporting, Caucasus Reporting Service, no. 361 (10 Oct. 2006), URL <<http://www.iwpr.net/>>.

¹⁰⁴ Torbakov, I., 'Russia plays up Kosovo precedent for potential application in the Caucasus', *Eurasia Insight*, 4 Dec. 2006, URL <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav041206a.shtml>>. See also Dunay, P. and Lachowski, Z., 'Euro-Atlantic security and institutions', *SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, forthcoming 2007), pp. 23–54.

¹⁰⁵ Smirnov, A., 'Ethnic Russians in the North Caucasus face decision to emigrate', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 16 June 2005.

¹⁰⁶ See Saradzhyan, S., 'North Caucasus faces demographic instability', *ISN Security Watch*, 25 Oct. 2005, URL <<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=13268>>.

In summary, despite all of Putin's extensive reforms focused on challenging the power of the regions in Russia, the federal government has failed to remove the issue of ethno-territoriality as a basic political challenge. Towards the end of Putin's second term in office, the key ethno-political conflicts of the North Caucasus that emerged under President Yeltsin—Chechnya and Prigorodny district—remain unresolved. Furthermore, ethno-territorial issues have become interwoven with Islamist mobilization. At least initially, Islamist radicalism has concentrated in particular ethnic communities, and ethnic disaffection has provided important support for Islamist movements in Chechnya, Dagestan, Karachai-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria.¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere, small ethnic minorities have been especially susceptible to Islamist radicalization, for example the ethnic Nogai in Stavropol krai.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, a multitude of small but destabilizing disputes have emerged in response to Putin's efforts to reform the ethno-territorial principle and strengthen central control. The effort to promote stability through strengthening central control and the ideology of statism has provoked concerns in the North Caucasus that colonialist attitudes are returning in Russia. In a telling recent example, in September 2006 Putin issued a presidential decree celebrating the 450th anniversary of the 'voluntary' unification of Adygeya, Karachai-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria with Russia. This was criticized as insensitive—many local historians in these republics argue that unification was achieved only as the result of a bloody military campaign that ended in 1864 with the mass deportation of Circassians to Turkey and the seizure by Russia of their lands.¹⁰⁹ Without a clearer effort to acknowledge and address the bitter legacy of Russian policies in the region over the past two centuries, anti-Russian sentiments are likely to persist among significant sections of the people of the North Caucasus.

Islam and Islamism

Under President Putin, Russia has emerged as an important location in the worldwide struggle over the nature of modern Islam. The many reasons for this include the growing interest in Islam within the Soviet Union from the 1960s, the collapse of the institutions of official Islam in the early 1990s, the penetration of Salafist ideas into the region, widespread dissatisfaction with authorities and disappointment among key social groups (notably the young) with traditional forms of Islam, which are often seen as part of the failing and corrupt political order. The rise of radical Islamist groups in the North Caucasus is perceived by Russia as the main security threat in the region. Reflecting in large part concerns about Islam in

¹⁰⁷ Fuller, E., 'Russia: what is the biggest threat to stability in Kabardino-Balkaria?', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 17 Aug. 2005, URL <<http://www.rferl.org/features/>>.

¹⁰⁸ Fuller, E., 'Russia: Stavropol Krai violence highlights Nogai issues', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 17 Feb. 2006, URL <<http://www.rferl.org/features/>>.

¹⁰⁹ Smirnov, A., 'Disputable anniversary could provoke new crisis in Adygeya', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 13 Sep. 2006.

the North Caucasus, in July 2002 Putin signed a law on religious extremism.¹¹⁰ Despite such initiatives and seven years of Russian counterterrorist operations that have targeted them almost exclusively, radical Islamist groups are more numerous and more active in the North Caucasus today than when Putin came to power.

While the conflict in Chechnya has played a crucial role in the spread of Islamism in the region, local groups have become increasingly autonomous and now constitute a wide network. The attack by Islamist militants on Nalchik in 2005 highlighted the growing problem. The challenge of militant Islamism in Russia now extends beyond the North Caucasus, with cells of Islamists, including terrorist groups, emerging in the Volga region and Siberia with support from groups in the North Caucasus.¹¹¹ At the heart of this problem is the local and federal authorities' failure to come to an accommodation with the diversity of groups that currently exist within Islam, including those that are Salafist but non-violent.

Fragmentation of Islam

When the institutions of Soviet official Islam broke down in the early 1990s, a new pluralism emerged within Islam in Russia. Muslim groups increasingly made connections with Islamic organizations and schools outside the country. A wide variety of Islamic groups and beliefs began to flourish, and these included extremist and sometimes violent groups. From the late 1980s, questions of Islamic identity and Islamism became intertwined with the complex ethnic, social and political fragmentation of the North Caucasus. As a result, Islamic groups of all shades were increasingly politicized and became part of the broader struggle for power within the North Caucasus. The rift between traditional Islam and Salafist groups gradually emerged as the central political fault line.

The emergence of violent Islamism

The struggle over Islam in the North Caucasus has grown increasingly violent since the late 1990s. A major factor in this spiral of conflict has been the heavy-handed and sometimes brutal tactics employed by the local authorities in cooperation with the representatives of traditional (now official) Islam. On the other side, the religious communities of Salafists, which were effectively outlawed in the late 1990s, have in many places become the organizational basis for militant groups. The transformation of these *jamaats*—local communities of Muslims organized at an often basic level to share spiritual pursuits—towards violent opposition to traditional Islam and the Islamic authorities and the demand for the

¹¹⁰ The Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity, Federal Law no. 114-FZ, was adopted on 25 July 2002.

¹¹¹ Interview with Sergei Ignatchenko, a spokesman for the Russian Security Service, *The Guardian*, 23 Sep. 2005; and Moore, P. G. and Fuller, E., 'Security chief warns against "terrorist attacks"', *RFE/RL Newslines*, 7 Nov. 2006.

introduction of sharia law has been especially pronounced in the case of Dagestan's Sharia Jamaat, Kabardino-Balkaria's Jamaat Yarmuk and the Saria Jamaat of Ingushetia. Militant Islamists claim to be active in *jamaats* in Krasnodar and Stavropol and in Volgograd and Astrakhan oblasts.¹¹²

The *jamaats* in the North Caucasus are particularly challenging because they are more than a religious phenomenon. Economic and territorial issues are also important factors in the recruitment of young fighters, who otherwise find themselves unemployed and disenfranchised.¹¹³ In recent years, the *jamaats* have made attempts to broaden their ethnic membership to become a pan-Caucasus movement. The attack on Nalchik in October 2005 showed how independent *jamaats* could organize to fight. It is also significant that these groups are increasingly multi-ethnic.

State involvement

The political struggle over Islam in the North Caucasus poses a serious challenge to the Russian Federation's rule in the region. Indeed, in November 2005 Dmitry Kozak warned that the proliferation of 'Islamic sharia enclaves' in remote areas of the Caucasus, notably Dagestan, could promote conflict across the region.¹¹⁴ The local authorities and increasingly the federal authorities have sought to control Islam through legislation and aligning themselves more closely with followers of traditional Islam, as well as cracking down on other forms of the faith. This has only further politicized and inflamed the conflicts within Islam in the North Caucasus.

In attempting to re-establish tight control over the spread of Islamic ideology in the North Caucasus, the federal government is increasingly trying to regulate the nature and content of official Islam.¹¹⁵ In the process Russia has sought to subjugate the structures of Muslim society and bring under its control and patronage less controversial religious leaders in the North Caucasus, particularly through the Coordinating Centre for Muslims of the North Caucasus, which brings together all the region's muftiats.

It seems likely that this organization (or its official replacement) will be moved from Moscow to the North Caucasus, and Russia may designate a single mufti to head it. Another of Russia's strategies has been to isolate, as far as possible, the broad Muslim population of the Russian Federation from foreign contacts. The

¹¹² McGregor, A., 'Islam, jamaats and implications for the North Caucasus: part 1', *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 4, no. 11 (2 June 2006), URL <<http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370014>>.

¹¹³ McGregor, A., 'Islam, jamaats and implications for the North Caucasus: part 2', *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 4, no. 12, 15 June 2006, URL <<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370033>>.

¹¹⁴ McGregor (note 113).

¹¹⁵ Vachagaev, M., 'The Kremlin's war on Islamic education in the North Caucasus', *Chechnya Weekly*, 8 Sep. 2006.

activities of various international Islamic foundations and humanitarian organizations are now seen as contrary to Russia's interests.

The involvement of the Russian state in religious affairs seems set to deepen. The strategy of supporting selected Islamic authorities became a powerful tool in the policing and integration of Muslim populations into the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, but it also drew Muslims and their rulers together in the common enterprise of curtailing liberty of conscience.¹¹⁶ The phenomenon of mullahs acting as mouthpieces for the central government during these two previous political regimes pushed many Muslims away from the official religious leadership of the time, which were seen as too close to the secular authorities. During the final decades of the Soviet order, efforts to promote an official Islam played an important role in driving many believers underground and to seek answers among those they considered to be representatives of purer forms of Islam.

It is far from clear that the state management of Islam in Russia will be successful in promoting a 'moderate' and loyal version of Islam. Muslims in Russia are increasingly linked to Islam around the world through modern communications and thus subject to the uncertainty and flux that is affecting the Muslim world in general. This development, characterized by the emergence of a pluralism of views about Islam promoted via modern communications, is not readily open to state control. By seeking to establish an official Islam based on a reversion to forms of past practice, Putin risks further strengthening support for radical Islamist elements.

Governance in the North Caucasus

President Putin has put considerable effort into replacing the elites of the North Caucasus and imposing centralized institutional control. For the first time, the North Caucasus is coming under the rule of leaders whose positions of power are dependent on the Russian Government. This change has brought some improvements, notably in Kabardino-Balkaria, where the new president has softened the hard line against Islam followed by his predecessor, one of the factors that led to the Nalchik uprising.

The elite-driven approach to imposing control over the North Caucasus, which is typical of Putin's general style of managing Russian society, has not, however, always been successful. Ingushetia, which has the longest-serving of the new generation of pro-Kremlin leaders, Murat Zyazikov, continues to be plagued by violence and instability, including within the region's security forces.¹¹⁷ The Russian leadership now realizes that it cannot rely purely on installing local leaders to control the region and is seeking other ways to maintain its grip on security, for

¹¹⁶ Crews (note 22).

¹¹⁷ Smirnov, A., 'Kremlin loses control over Ingush police', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 19 Oct. 2006.

example moving ethnic Russians into key posts in the security and law and order agencies.¹¹⁸

While such strategies will probably help Russia impose its authority for now, they offer little hope of resolving the long-term problems of the North Caucasus. The new political arrangements emerging in the North Caucasus have little local legitimacy or accountability, are divorced from regional society, and are prone to rely on Moscow-backed force rather than the rule of law to impose policy. Such arrangements have, in the past, tended to promote the mutation of local clan structures to fit the new power realities rather than the emergence of a modern political and bureaucratic order. Centrally imposed governments also risk becoming targets for militants.

Finally, such forms of rule have proved highly fragile in the region. The breakdown of Russian imperial rule and the demise of central Soviet power were followed quickly by a breakdown of authority in the North Caucasus. Today, signs of political uncertainty and weakness at the centre of the Russian political system would immediately call into question the authority of the regimes in the region that were installed by the federal government.

Socio-economic issues

By the mid-1990s, the North Caucasus was in weak economic condition. Many of the republics were among the poorest parts of the Russian Federation. Most of the region was reliant on transfers from the federal budget (for the figures for 2005 see table A.1). With the unemployment rate in some areas reported to be above 50 per cent, and young people particularly badly affected, crime and corruption flourished. Under Putin, the region has not benefited significantly from the oil and gas boom, as have some of Russia's large urban centres, notably Moscow. The war in Chechnya and the spread of conflict across the region has also severely harmed the region's economies.

Russia has been slow to wake up to the need to promote socio-economic development in the North Caucasus. Only after the narrow security approach initially employed failed to prevent the emergence of a new generation of militants has the government begun to realize the complexity of the problem it faces. Following the Beslan crisis, Russia initiated a drive to promote development in the North Caucasus, with the Regional Development Ministry taking the lead role. However, the ministry's progress was deemed unsatisfactory, and on 20 September 2006 Putin issued a presidential decree on the creation of a commission for improving the socio-economic situation in the Southern Federal District, to be headed by Dmitry Kozak.

¹¹⁸ Smirnov, A., 'Kremlin moves to strengthen control over Dagestan', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 20 July 2006.

The main task given to the commission was to develop a mechanism for allocating federal funds that would reflect the effectiveness of the region's governments rather than on their lobbying capabilities. The economic effectiveness of the region will be centrally measured according to 127 economic indicators.¹¹⁹ This solution echoes Soviet-era development plans, when a region's progress was measured according to centrally imposed targets. The weaknesses of this approach are well documented, particularly its tendency to encourage misreporting of economic activity and the lack of flexibility it affords regional authorities to tailor their policies to address local problems. This approach is unlikely to promote strengthening of the rule of law—which is needed to encourage serious private-sector activity in the region—and will do little to promote foreign investment.

More positively, Russia has permitted international agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, to undertake limited operations in the region focused on infrastructure projects. The European Commission is currently providing €20 million to support health, economic and development programmes throughout the region, as well as humanitarian assistance.

While promoting development in the region is certainly important, it is not clear how the federal authorities expect it to improve the security situation. Unemployment and poverty may be factors in the rise of instability, but they do not explain the complex nature of violence in the region. Without addressing the broader sources of discontent, including political questions, efforts to improve the socio-economic situation are likely to have only a marginal impact on the region's instability.

Russia's security policies

Since his election as president, Putin has made imposing stability throughout Russia his main priority. Pacifying the North Caucasus and in particular crushing the Chechen militant movement has been a key goal. The campaign to bring order to the region has provided the principal justification for many of the far-reaching political reforms that Putin has introduced and that have served to consolidate his control and weaken sources of opposition and criticism. Many of these reforms have been instrumental in undermining democratization and the freedom of the media and in weakening the rule of law.

Despite the president's commitment, stability in the North Caucasus seems as elusive as ever. Not only have the Putin Administration's existing policies failed to bring stability, but they have made a major contribution to the large-scale loss of life in the region—especially in Chechnya—while Russia has also paid a high economic cost. At the heart of this failure is a one-dimensional security approach

¹¹⁹ Barakhova, A., 'Dmitry Kozak otkazalsia ot karatel'nykh mer' [Dmitry Kozak declines to use punitive measures], *Kommersant*, no. 199 (24 Oct. 2006).

to the problems of the North Caucasus. The Putin Administration has pursued a security policy based, essentially, on reaction to events in the region. The conceptual underpinning to this approach has been the belief that the insurgency can be defeated by capturing and killing the militants. However, despite the death of thousands of people and arrest of tens of thousands, the insurgency in the region has continued to gather force.

Faced with overwhelming evidence of the failure of this approach, Russia has apparently started to develop a better understanding of, and responses to, the problems. The security forces have been restructured to undertake more intelligence-led operations aimed at breaking up networks rather than simply responding to crises with massive force, but these measures remain tentative. The move to address socio-economic issues also suggests a recognition that insurgency in the region can no longer simply be blamed on bandits, criminals and jihadis. However, the main thrust of the federal government's approach is still to seek greater political control, including through the expansion of the activities of the security services.

It should be clear by now to Russia's policymakers that the quest for central control over the North Caucasus is futile and, indeed, counterproductive. Moreover, characterizing the principal challenge in the region as suppressing international terrorism and banditry is a dangerous oversimplification. Russia must find a more comprehensive, sophisticated and effective approach to the problems of the region. At the heart of these problems is a series of interlocking and home-grown insurgencies that are, to a great extent, driven by a complex of political, social and economic issues with roots in Russia's long and often violent efforts to dominate the North Caucasus.

The North Caucasus and the European Union

With the threat of a long-term destabilization spilling over into the rest of Russia, the South Caucasus and perhaps beyond, the situation in the North Caucasus has become a matter of urgent international concern. The international community must confront Russia's aggressive measures to limit the international presence in the region and can no longer afford to subordinate the matter to other security considerations, for example Russia's role on issues such as non-proliferation and the 'global war on terrorism'.

The problems of the North Caucasus provide Russia with one of its principal justifications for pursuing policies that have undermined Russia's fledgling democracy and been detrimental to human rights. These policies stand in opposition to the approaches and values that have guided the development of an integrated Europe over the past 50 years. As long as the crisis remains unresolved, and Russia does not fundamentally change its approach, it will continue to be pulled off the democratic path. There is a risk that Russia and Europe will no longer be able to find a stable basis for partnership and cooperation.

Instability in the North Caucasus also threatens European interests more directly. The intersection of the risks in the North Caucasus with those in the South Caucasus threatens to create a major zone of instability, comprising semi-autonomous areas controlled de facto by warlords, radical nationalists or religious extremists. This cannot be in Europe's interests at a time when it is looking to the South Caucasus as a transit route for energy supplies from Central Asia.

The challenge of bringing lasting stability to the North Caucasus should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of useful work has already been done to develop approaches to the crisis that could address some of the key issues.¹²⁰ It is a matter of urgency that the international community, and in particular the European Union, begin to focus on the problems of the North Caucasus. An approach to the latter should be integrated into a broader dialogue about stability in the Caucasus as a whole and the security challenges facing Europe. The European Union and the wider international community must find ways to open a political dialogue with Russia that will underline the need for new strategic approaches in the light of Russia's own security interests and those of the immediate region, as well as of normative considerations. While President Putin will not welcome such a dialogue, it is time now to begin exploring options with those who are likely to lead Russia following the 2008 presidential elections.

¹²⁰ See e.g. Ivanov, A. et al., *Strategic Reconstruction and Development Assessment—North Caucasus: Expert Report*, Study commissioned by the Global Conflict Prevention Pool (Forum on Early Warning and Early Response—Eurasia, Peace Mission of General Lebed, and Kardos & Nyheim Consulting: Moscow, 2005), URL <http://www.fewer-international.org/pages/eurasia/publications_23.html>.

5. Recommendations

This chapter presents recommendations for changes in the policy approaches of both the Russian Federation and the European Union to the North Caucasus situation. They are deliberately set out in uncompromising terms. In the first place, nothing is gained by failing to be clear about what norms and principles *should* apply to a situation of this kind. Second, in the absence of such a major policy change, there is a real danger of a serious breakdown of order across the region and the spread of instability into Russia and the South Caucasus, which could have far-reaching security consequences.

A number of the recommendations are broad in scope and political in character. The Russia of today appears to be an inhospitable environment for ideas of far-reaching reform in respect to the North Caucasus, or indeed to the rest of the country. Yet the experience of conflict in other parts of the world strongly suggests that, if Russia is to achieve a sustainable and deep-seated peace in the North Caucasus, it will sooner or later need to introduce substantial political reforms—including democratization, strengthening the rule of law and decentralization—as part of the peace-building effort in the region. Above all, it must be understood that efforts to resolve the conflict in the North Caucasus will ultimately be ineffective if they are confined to policies aimed at the region and leave unaddressed the national context of the conflict and the opportunities for positive international engagement.

The chapter is divided into two sections, the first offering recommendations for the Russian Federal Government and the second recommendations for the European Union and its individual member states. It would, of course, be important that any other actors with potential leverage in the region—including the USA but also, for example, international economic organs—should send messages through their policies that support or, at the least, do not conflict with the guidelines suggested here.

Recommendations for the Russian Federation

Strategic aims

For Russia to end the current conflict in the North Caucasus and foster stability and development, it must transform its long-standing approach to the affairs of the region. The current strategic goal of consolidating control over the region, with coercion as the principal policy tool, will not succeed and, indeed, will only aggravate the situation. Rather, Russia should focus on a more nuanced and multidimensional integration of the region into the Russian Federation. This kind of integration can best be achieved through coherent policies that balance strengthening Russian state institutions in the North Caucasus with respecting the interests and democratic rights of individuals and communities. Integration

should lead to the creation of a web of political, economic, social and cultural ties across the region and from the region to the rest of the country that enhance cooperation, interdependence and a shared commitment to the Russian Federation.

Such a shift in strategic orientation will require the Russian Government to focus on developing loyalty rather than obedience to Russia—not just among the local elites but among the entire population of the North Caucasus—and on enhancing the legitimacy of its authority in the region. To achieve this, the government should initiate a major bottom-up review of the challenges facing the people of the North Caucasus, with a view to developing a comprehensive and long-term programme of stability and development.

Security policy

Enhancing the integration of the North Caucasus within the Russian Federation will not be possible without addressing the key security challenges of the region. The North Caucasus is facing a serious threat from violent extremism, especially inspired by Salafist ideology. The current main focus of security policy on responding to terrorist acts and eliminating terrorists, still with military force as the *ultima ratio*, should be revised: the existing policies are not preventing the rise of violence, nor are they protecting the people of the region.

Reactive security policies should be replaced with policies that aim to prevent recruitment to extremist organizations and to challenge efforts to radicalize individuals towards violence. Such a change will only be possible through work with genuine civil society organizations in the region and a dialogue, including with radical Islamists, about the place of Islam in its different forms in contemporary Russia. The use of force by the Russian authorities should reflect the principle of ensuring the security of individual citizens first and not just the interests of the state. The use of state-sanctioned violence should be properly regulated by law and subject to independent judicial review.

A shift in security policy along these lines will require modernization of Russia's security forces and their tactics, with a far greater emphasis on intelligence-led operations designed to penetrate and break up extremist networks. At the same time, recent experience in the North Caucasus, as well as in Afghanistan and Iraq, indicates that extremists cannot be defeated by security policies alone. The Russian authorities should seek to isolate those advocating and engaging in violence by addressing the sources of the social and political discontent on which militants base their claims of legitimacy and which provide a certain degree of popular support for campaigns of violence.

Governance

The loyalty of the people of the North Caucasus to Russia and the legitimacy of the Russian authorities, including regional leaderships, can only be enhanced by rooting out corruption; by developing a system of governance that is more responsive to the needs of local people and communities; and by creating more opportunities for them, particularly in the areas of education, employment and entrepreneurship. Further centralization of power at the federal level will not achieve these aims. Instead, it will promote inflexibility and bureaucracy, with most decisions made about the North Caucasus taken outside the region. Russia's recent moves to replace local elections for regional leaders with de facto presidential nomination, and to reduce the authority of regional parliaments to merely rubber-stamping decisions made in Moscow, are steps in the wrong direction.

Russia should instead seek to build genuinely popular, representative and accountable local government across the North Caucasus that can serve as a means to channel discontent in constructive directions. This does not mean that the federal authorities should withdraw entirely from the internal affairs of the regions of the North Caucasus, as largely happened under President Yeltsin. An important lesson from Russia's efforts at political reform during the 1990s is that, unless checked, the manipulation of local elections by regional elites will pose a serious threat to the project to promote local democracy. The federal authorities should, therefore, focus their efforts within regions on developing independent and pluralistic local media, challenging corruption, creating the conditions for competitive and open local elections, strengthening civil society, and ensuring the independence of the local judiciary and police force.

Rule of law and human rights

Building good governance and eliminating corruption can only be fully achieved in the North Caucasus by enhancing the rule of law in the region. Russia's use of coercion as its primary policy tool in the region has ensured that power rather than law provides the basis for action by state authorities. This approach has led to serious violations of human rights, notably by security forces in Chechnya. As a result, the security forces have become as much a part of the problem as of the solution in the region.

Measures to promote good governance should help to bring forward more effective laws that are likely to command broad support among the local populations of the region. Nevertheless, Russia must support this process by taking serious steps to create an independent and professional judiciary and to modernize the police forces and prosecution services in the North Caucasus. Russia should establish an independent body to investigate allegations of human rights violations by all sides in the conflicts of the region and provide adequate resources for it to function effectively. Those identified as guilty of such viola-

tions should be prosecuted through a fair and transparent process. Specialized international institutions, for example the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, could make an important contribution to such a process.

External relations

The major political and cultural shifts needed for Russia to address the situation in the North Caucasus will be made easier and more effective by cooperation with the international community. Whether Russia wants to recognize it or not, the situation in the North Caucasus is a matter of legitimate international concern, but by the same token there are international options and resources that have not yet been explored that might help to improve the situation. Representatives of the international community could, for example, play an important mediation and verification role in conflict-resolution initiatives in the region.

Russia should also be prepared to discuss the problems of the North Caucasus within a broader dialogue about the situation in the Caucasus as a whole. Enhancing cooperation with Russia's neighbours in the South Caucasus and with the other Black Sea and Caspian Sea states could be an important part of addressing the situation in the North Caucasus.

Russia should stop promoting measures that could destabilize the South Caucasus, for example by advocating that a plan such as that for the status of Kosovo be applied to the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and continuing to entertain and support the 'government' leaders of such territories as quasi-state partners. Instead, Russia should participate in establishing multilateral mechanisms for conflict resolution and regional cooperation for the Caucasus region, including the North Caucasus.

Russia, national minorities and nationalism

Strengthening the Russian state has been at the core of Putin's presidential programme. However, little has been done to address the complex questions of the Russian nation, particularly the state's relationships with the ethnic Russian majority (and its language and culture) and with the numerous ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation. The Soviet approach to nation building in the regions promoted exclusive ethno-national identities based on an ethno-territorial political architecture (Russia's ethno-federal system). This approach has created lasting tensions between different ethnic communities. Putin has sought to sidestep the ethno-federal system through centralization and regional mergers, but he has not attempted to dismantle it. This makes addressing the deep-seated sources of ethno-political tensions, and resolving conflicts such as those between Chechnya and North Ossetia and Ingushetia, much more difficult. In addition, the lack of a positive Russian civic nation-building project has allowed

extremist Russian nationalism to flourish, manifested in a dramatic upsurge of xenophobia and racism in recent years.

Russia should introduce a programme of measures to promote a national identity that reflects the ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of Russian society. It should acknowledge the equal linguistic, educational and political rights of each person in the North Caucasus, as a way to encourage inclusive and diverse identities. Moving towards a framework for accommodating national minorities' demands based on individual rights rather than ethno-territorial arrangements is likely to considerably lessen inter-ethnic tensions since control of ethnic territories would cease to be the condition for achieving political and other rights. Educational and language policies in the region should be reformed to ensure that all citizens are able to attain a high level of proficiency in the Russian language while members of ethnic minorities also have the opportunity to receive education in their mother tongue.

A genuine effort should be made to ensure the participation of representatives from all of the North Caucasus ethnic communities, including the ethnic Russians and other Slavs, in public service, notably at the local level and in the institutions of law and order. Russian authorities at the national and regional level should actively combat racism and xenophobia, including in state institutions—particularly within the security services.

Developing a more modern and inclusive alternative to the ethno-federal structures will make establishing such an integrated national identity much easier. In the process, Russia should support the creation of new local and regional democratic institutions in the North Caucasus that can cut across the borders of ethnically defined administrative units.

Chechnya

Russia's policy of violent suppression of nationalist and Islamist insurgency in Chechnya has cost many lives, caused much suffering and been financially disastrous. It has also been counterproductive. While many of the original Chechen leaders have been killed, a new generation is emerging to replace them. Russia has been complicit in creating a Chechnya that is today harder to govern than ever and whose stability is reliant on the systematic use of torture and coercion. This is not a recipe for long-term stability.

Russia should aim instead to create peace in Chechnya through a political settlement. This is likely to be a long and complex task. If the settlement is to be legitimate and durable, the future fate and role of the Chechen militants will have to be addressed directly. The international community could provide considerable assistance in such a political dialogue. Decentralization of political power and the creation of national and regional democratic institutions in the North Caucasus, as suggested above, will probably make solving the problems in Chechnya much easier. Building lasting peace and stability in Chechnya will

require national reconciliation, and that will inevitably involve ensuring that justice is done regarding all those involved in the recent history of extreme violence and human rights violations.

Radical Islam

In its national policy towards religion, Russia has sought to distinguish between ‘traditional’ faiths (Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism) and other faiths, which do not receive the endorsement and support of the state. In the North Caucasus, a further distinction has been applied between Sufism, which is now embraced by the local authorities, and fundamentalist versions of Islam, including Salafist movements, which have become the target of anti-terrorist operations. These policies highlight the close relationship between political power and official religion in post-Soviet Russia. Radical Islam does pose a very real challenge in the North Caucasus, but it is clear that simplistic efforts to discredit particular branches of Islam and to foster a form of the religion that is manageable by the Russian authorities—backed by state-approved clerics and state-sanctioned Islamic institutions—will do little to address the complex issue of extremism in the North Caucasus, especially among young people.

Freedom of religion, also for religious fundamentalists, should be a cornerstone of Russia’s policy in the North Caucasus as elsewhere. Those who advocate hate, racism and violence—whether on religious or any other grounds—should, however, be challenged through judicial and, where necessary, legally accountable security mechanisms. Education on human rights, democracy and civic responsibilities, supported by official measures to put these ideals into practice in the region, should be adopted as priorities in efforts to counter violent extremism. The Russian authorities should also be more active in tackling the background issues that feed radicalization and are used to legitimize violence, such as corruption, lack of opportunity and discrimination.

Promoting socio-economic development

Lack of socio-economic development in the North Caucasus is a major obstacle to stability. State-led infrastructure investment in the North Caucasus is starting to play an important role in development in the region, but ultimately a dynamic private sector is most likely to bring greater prosperity and promote investment in the type of activities that will benefit the local population. The Russian authorities should do more to support the role of private business in the process of stabilization and development, including offering tax incentives and low-interest credit for private investors in the region. Increased efforts should be made to attract domestic and foreign investment in the region through reducing bureaucratic obstacles. Assistance in the form of incentives for new investment

(tax benefits and holidays, low rental charges on land and buildings, and assistance in setting up new investments) from the federal and local authorities could also be developed. Carefully targeted state assistance might be provided to local entrepreneurs, for example in the form of micro-credit schemes.

Conflict complexes

Beyond elaborating a vision for the North Caucasus within the contexts of Russia and the Caucasus region as a whole, individual sub-complexes of instability need to be addressed through appropriate combinations of the policies identified above. The problems linking the republics of Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia and North Ossetia are particularly urgent. Russia should implement new, coordinated sets of policies for these regions as the first step towards promoting region-wide stability in the North Caucasus.

Recommendations for the European Union

The European Union and its member states can no longer ignore the instability in the North Caucasus or subordinate the situation there to other interests. The North Caucasus is a cause for concern for Europe on both human rights and security grounds. Furthermore, as long as the problems in the North Caucasus persist, the political development of the Russian Federation will continue along lines that diverge not only from the aspirations of EU member countries but from those of many of its post-Soviet neighbours. The EU should ensure that the points outlined below are included in its bilateral dialogue with Russia and in the EU's policies for the Black Sea and Caucasus region as a whole.

Regional cooperation

The EU should try to use its dialogue with Russia, together with its links to other multilateral organizations and the United States, to foster new regional institutions for the Caucasus, bringing together all of the states in the region to discuss and cooperatively address the region's problems. A major aim of this cooperation should be to reverse the current militarization of the region.

The growing presence of the EU in the Black Sea, Caspian Sea and South Caucasus regions suggests that it may now be appropriate for the EU to promote the idea of a regional agreement for the Caucasus similar to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.¹²¹ The focus of this initiative should be to foster stability and development across the Caucasus as a whole, based on cooperative conflict

¹²¹ The case for a security pact for the Caucasus was most recently set out by the Task Force on the Caucasus of the Centre for European Policy Studies. Celac, S., Emerson, E. and Tocci, N., 'A stability pact for the Caucasus', Consultative document, Brussels, 2000, URL <<http://www.ceps.be/files/Caucasus.pdf>>.

prevention, management and resolution; enhanced cross-border trade and strengthened security cooperation; better energy security; cooperative approaches to address uncontrolled cross-border migration; and strengthened commitment to democracy and human rights. The problems of the North Caucasus should be an integral part of the discussions.

In promoting this initiative the EU should: (a) make clear that it is ready to provide resources additional to the current modest sums for building stability and promoting development in the North Caucasus as part of a new political and security approach to the region; (b) indicate that it supports a stronger role for international organizations in the North Caucasus in the areas of conflict resolution, development, and the promotion of democracy and human rights; (c) advocate that Russia allow a role for civil society in the stabilization of the North Caucasus and offer funding to NGOs working towards this goal; (d) offer Russia a dialogue on the shared challenges facing both Europe and Russia linked to the rise of violent Islamist networks and the best ways to address them based on strengthening social integration, democracy, respect for human rights and, thus, security; and (e) express its support for reform of the territorial administration system in Russia—a change that would have an especially significant impact in the North Caucasus—that enhances stability and promotes national integration, while also protecting the rights of members of national minorities. It should be made clear that the EU does not believe that further centralization is the way to approach this issue. The EU should also seek to develop an open dialogue with Russia about the European experience of addressing national–territorial disputes both within Europe and in former colonial territories, focused on the development of practical, democratic and non-military solutions appropriate to the conditions in the North Caucasus.

Human rights and democracy

The EU and the individual member states should make it clear to Russia that they are concerned about human rights in the North Caucasus. They should press Russia to undertake a full and independent investigation of the human rights situation in the region. They should also demand that international agencies, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and the Council of Europe, be allowed to visit the region and examine these issues without obstruction by local or federal authorities.

The EU and its members states should also stress that they view Russia's approach to the problems of the North Caucasus, insofar as this approach violates accepted norms and values, as related to some of the most fundamental causes of divergence between the Russian Federation and the EU. They should make it clear to Russia that its approach is a source of concern in Europe regarding threats to democracy, rights and freedoms in Russia as a whole. The EU should signal to the Russian Government that bringing its policies towards

the North Caucasus in line with Russia's international commitments in the areas of human rights and democratic values is important for allowing Russia to both deepen and broaden its cooperation with Europe on issues of reform, security and stability.

The EU should make it clear to Russia that the failure to establish stability in the North Caucasus is a matter of real security concern for Europe. In particular, the EU should stress that it is not willing to limit discussion about the situation in the North Caucasus to the issue of terrorism.

Furthermore, the EU should voice its alarm about the prospect of the further spread of conflict, especially into the rest of the Caucasus. It should be clearly stated that the EU sees Russia's actions regarding the South Caucasus, notably South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as contributing significantly to the risk of a major destabilization of the whole Caucasus.

Europe and its eastern neighbours

The German Presidency of the European Union in 2007 has a crucial role to play in shaping the future relationship of the EU with its eastern neighbours. One of Germany's aims is to use the presidency to enhance the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), with a focus on the Black Sea region.¹²² Germany will also lead efforts to negotiate a new mechanism to manage the EU's relationship with Russia, as the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement expires at the end of 2007.¹²³ The linkage between the EU's policy towards Central Asia and its policies towards Russia and Europe's eastern neighbours are also to be considered.

The effort by the EU to consider the former Soviet states within a regional context and to find ways to encourage regional cooperation—along the model of the EU's approach to its Mediterranean partners through the Barcelona Process¹²⁴—is a welcome development. However, the political measures envis-

¹²² Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament 'On strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy', COM (2006) 726 Final, 4 Dec. 2006. The initiative on enhancing the role of the EU in the Black Sea region within the context of strengthened ENP policy—Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, 'Black Sea synergy: a new regional cooperation initiative', COM (2007) 160 Final—will be presented for adoption at the Council of Ministers meeting in June 2007. Ferrero-Waldner, B., 'European Union fifty years on', Speech delivered at the debate on Vision of Europe: the present and future role of Central Europe in the EU, 21 Mar. 2007, URL <http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/cs/article_6876_cs.htm>.

¹²³ Emerson, M. (ed.) et al., *The Elephant and the Bear Try Again: Options for a New Agreement between the EU and Russia* (Centre for European Policy Studies: Brussels, 2006).

¹²⁴ The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, or Barcelona Process, is a framework of political, economic and social relations between the EU member states and partners in the southern Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey), launched at the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 27–28 Nov. 1995.

aged in this area are as yet modest. The EU should seek to build on its current initiatives in the east to shift the discussion of the problems of the North Caucasus into a broader regional context. While the appropriate institutional framework would need to be carefully crafted (the Russian Federation is not a part of the European Neighbourhood Policy but will be able to receive financial assistance under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Initiative), the EU institutions should develop proposals for building cooperative regional relationships that could promote stability in the Caucasus as a whole including the North Caucasus and, thereby, help to secure European interests in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions.

As a first step, the EU should appoint a Special Representative for the Black Sea region. The Special Representative should take the lead in promoting regional cooperation, including in the area of conflict management and prevention. The Special Representative could function in a way similar to the EU Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, working in close cooperation with the EU special representatives for the South Caucasus and Central Asia (similar arrangements between different EU special representatives already operate in the Balkan Stability Pact), with other EU institutions and representatives, and with international organizations. Addressing the problems of the North Caucasus should be an integral part of the Special Representative's mandate.

The post of EU Special Representative for the Black Sea region would complement the focus on the Black Sea countries envisaged under the strengthened ENP and, at the same time, allow the problems of the North Caucasus to be brought into a regional political framework that was not restricted to ENP countries. The new EU members Bulgaria and Romania are already making clear that their national priorities include pressing for a more active and coherent EU strategy in the Black Sea region, and it is worth giving thought to and capitalizing on their potential bridging role in this connection. A deeper engagement between the EU and Turkey and Ukraine on political issues and regional cooperation in the Black Sea region, including conflict prevention and resolution issues in the Caucasus, should also be explored.

The problems that face the North Caucasus are complex, and finding solutions to them will not be easy. The recommendations outlined above offer some ways to begin to deal with the challenges that face the region. President Putin has explicitly rejected much of what is contained in them. It is clear today, however, that the current Russian approach to the region is failing to stem the spread of conflict and doing little to ensure long-term peace and stability in the region. Faced with Russian intransigence on the North Caucasus, many in Europe have drawn the conclusion that it is better to concentrate on issues where Russia has shown a willingness to cooperate. The spreading instability in the region points to the short-sightedness of this approach. With the EU moving to strengthen its presence in the Black Sea region and Russia facing a transition of power in

2008, now is the time to explore new initiatives in this field that can form the basis for a future dialogue with Russia's new president.

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