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The Borders of Islam

Exploring Huntington's Faultlines, from Al-Andalus to the Virtual Ummah

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Chechnya—How War Makes Jihad

James Hughes

In *The Clash of Civilizations* Samuel P. Huntington distinguished "fault line" conflicts from other forms of "communal war" in two key respects: first, they are conflicts defined by religion, and second, they share a propensity for "internationalization" through the involvement of external kin countries, groups and cultural entities. Huntington reasoned that Chechnya exhibited all of the characteristics of one of his so-called "fault line" or "communal" conflicts. It was a conflict for control of territory that involved "ethnic cleansing" and shared the "prolonged duration, high levels of violence, and ideological ambivalence of other communal wars". By categorizing the conflict in Chechnya among those that were defined by religion, between "Orthodox" Russia and "Muslim" Chechnya, Huntington could frame it as one of his "intercivilizational" wars.

The analysis that follows demonstrates that there is little evidence for categorizing the conflict in Chechnya in "civilizational" terms for the period in which Huntington developed his thesis in the first half of the 1990s. The conflict in Chechnya originated not as a historically rooted "fault line" religious war, but as a contingent secular nationalist revolution that was part of the European anti-communist Zeitgeist of the late 1980s and early 1990s that rejected Soviet colonization. As the conflict progressed during the 1990s the degree to which it was framed on both sides as a historically rooted religious

the late 1980s as part of the regional anti-communist "mobilizational cycle" for democratization and national self-determination in Eastern Europe evoked by Gorbachev's liberalization policies.[4] As in many other parts of the Soviet bloc, in Chechnya the first stirrings of nationalism came from secular academic associations. In Chechnya the academic organization *Kavkaz* (Caucasus) was formed as an "informal" group under Gorbachev's liberalization of 1986–1987, and from it dozens of others were spawned as the USSR imploded in 1988–1991. The informal groups mutated into the more obviously nationalist "Popular Fronts", beginning in the Baltic States, which couched their demands for independence under the slogan of "sovereignty". In this period, Chechen nationalists, as with nationalists elsewhere in the USSR, were inspired by and imitated the Popular Front nationalism of the Baltic States, which was secular and western-oriented. The two leading figures of the Chechen nationalist movement in this period, Zelimkhan Yandarbiev and Dzhokhar Dudayev, epitomized its essentially secular character and were great admirers of the democratic nationalism of the Baltic States. Yandarbiev was a teacher and poet who was a member of the Russian Writers' Union and an activist in *Kavkaz*. Yandarbiev's intellectually-grounded form of secular nationalism of this period would mutate into a radical form of Islamism as a result of the conflict with Russia from late 1994.

The radicalization of Yandarbiev is clearly evident from the content of the two collections of writings that he published in 1994 and 1996: the first mostly drawn from works written or published as part of the "national revolution" in 1989–1992, and the second from works written or published in the run-up to and during the war with Russia in 1994–1995.[5] There are many iconic illustrations of the personal, political and religious journey from secular nationalism to Islam. Photos of the clean-shaven secular nationalist Yandarbiev of the late 1980s stand in contrast with the *papkha-* (traditional sheepskin hat) wearing, bearded Islamist of 1994. More substantively, the early writings emphasise the "national freedom struggle" of the Chechen nation (*natsiia*), and the political struggle for "sovereignty". There are references to an eclectic group of great western and Russian thinkers who had influenced Yandarbiev's nationalism: Hegel, Camus, Nietzsche, Berdyaev, Hayek and the Chechen Soviet dissident Avtorkhanov. Yandarbiev wrote seven articles on nationalist political questions in the period 1989–1992 but perhaps the most emblematic of this phase in Yandarbiev's political evolution is his 1989 essay on Soviet nationalities policy, which was published in 1991. The essay reflected his embeddedness in the Soviet intellectual tradition by its concern with

the "dialectics" of social development and its cumbersome title: *Istoki [natsional'nyi vopros: problemy i suzhdeniia]* (Sources [the national question: problems and assessments]). Yandarbiev was part of the multicultural nationalist political ferment in Moscow's academic institutions in the 1980s. Disgruntled with the slow pace of change he and other young radical nationalists broke away from the Popular Front in what was then the Soviet Autonomous Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia to form the nationalist *Bart* (Unity) Party in July 1989. The link between the nationalist movement in Chechnya and those of the Baltic States was such that the first three issues of *Bart*'s newspaper were printed in Riga by the Latvian Popular Front's press. Yandarbiev was first and foremost a Chechen nationalist but he also developed an ideology for a regional Pan-Caucasian secular ethnic nationalism (*Kavkazskost'* [Caucasianness]), framed in anti-Soviet and anti-colonialist rhetoric, which he attempted to spread by organizing the first Congress of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus in late August 1989.[6] Yandarbiev's second book, published in 1996, is bracketed with Islamic rhetoric: an Islamic prayer in the foreword and an Islamic poem at the back. The book is mainly a narrative account of the first years of the Dudayev regime and the struggle for independence from Russia. That Islamism came out of this struggle rather than drove it is never openly stated by Yandarbiev, and indeed his second book contains essays from the period 1989–1991 which illustrate Yandarbiev's secular nationalism of that time. An increasing Islamization of Yandarbiev is evident from certain iconic features and steps mentioned in this book: his visit to Mecca in June 1992 (but apparently he arrived too late to perform the *hajj*); his first mention of *ghazavat* (a synonym for jihad) which came after the Russian invasion of December 1994; during 1994 he refers to Chechen commander Shamil Basaev by the Islamic military title "*amir*"; some photos in the book exhibit Chechen fighters, including Basaev, wearing headbands with the *shahada*. Yandarbiev's rhetoric also shifts to an Islamist vernacular in his writings of 1995.[7]

The indigenous communist elites of the North Caucasus were extremely pragmatic and cautious about calls for independence from Russia for several reasons. They were highly Sovietized and acculturated into a Soviet elite network, and consequently saw their own self-interest and security in a renewed Russian Federation in which they would have greater autonomy. All of Russia's ethnic republics, except for Chechnya and Tatarstan, signed up to a new federal treaty in March 1992.[8] Moreover, the so-called "titular" ethnic republics of the North Caucasus were among the poorest in the whole of the former

and civilizational conflict strengthened, but this framing shift was generated, in the main, by the turn to violent conflict from late 1994 and was a motivational force for only part of the Chechen resistance movement. The key development to be explained in the case of Chechnya is why the secular nationalist movement of the first half of the 1990s was transformed into one which contained a significant jihadist element during the second half of the 1990s. Huntington's indiscriminate imposition of a "civilizational" template on the whole Chechnya conflict obscures rather than explains this transformation.

The infusion of jihadism into the conflict from the middle of the 1990s was, principally, the result of a radicalization of the protagonists following the shift from political to violent conflict. The radicalization of the Chechen resistance in particular is closely correlated with the escalation of Russian military force and its disproportionate use against civilians during the war of 1994–1996. Consequently, the conflict in Chechnya should be understood as a dynamic one, where the key causes, motivations and protagonists change over time. The later development of a jihadist element within the Chechen resistance to Russia should not distract us from testing the plausibility and logical coherence of Huntington's argument within its own time frame of the period 1991–1995. Chechnya is a powerful example of how violence becomes part of the structuring mechanism shaping the radicalization of political conflict and, in particular, the shift from nationalism to jihad.[1]

What is the evidence for an "Islamic" factor driving the Chechen struggle against Russia in the period in which Huntington's thesis was developed? We can explore the salience of Islam in the politics of Chechen secessionism in three main areas. Firstly, we should expect to see the salience of Islam as an *ideological force*, informing the thought, policy and actions of Chechen leaders in the drive for independence. Secondly, we should expect to find Islam playing a *legitimizing function* in how Chechnya was governed by the *de facto* independent regime under Dzhokhar Dudayev, which came to power in October 1991. Thirdly, we should expect to see Islam play a *directional role* in how the Chechen secessionists framed their own case for independence, whether in the bargaining process with Russia or in the attempts to secure international recognition. In sum, if the conflict in Chechnya was a "fault line" war driven by Islam then we would expect to see an Islamist agenda being implemented by the Chechen leadership from the outset of independence, and at the very least during the period in the early 1990s to which Huntington's work referred.

Chechnya's nationalist revolution

Most of the academic and journalistic accounts of the conflict in Chechnya have recurrently framed it in historicist terms, as one that is driven by primordial "ancient hatreds" and historical "ethnic enmity" in the relations between Russians and Chechens that can be traced to the period of Russian colonization of the Caucasus in the early to middle nineteenth century.[2] Russian colonization occurred contemporaneously with the spread of Islam in the North Caucasus. Not for the first time in history, imperialist aggression and expansion and the resistance to it became historically associated with religious differences. The association between Islam and resistance to Russia in this period was strengthened by the fact that periodic anticolonial uprisings by the indigenous peoples against Russia were often led by Islamic religious leaders, *imams*, who were not only local spiritual leaders but also military commanders in the resistance. The Chechens and Ingush are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School, a form of Islam that spread from the 'Abbasid caliphate (present-day Iraq) and that was accommodating of the role of local custom in Islamic law. Sufism, a form of Islam based on orders or traditional paths of mysticism (*tarīqa*) where great importance is attached to the worship of saint-like "holy" figures, and which is organized into brotherhoods became embedded in Chechen society during the turmoil of colonization and resistance in the middle of the nineteenth century. Historically, two orders of Sufism were of importance in Chechnya: the *Naqshbandiia* order, which fused religion and politics to frame the resistance to Russian colonialism in terms of a "holy war" (*ghazavat*) against the Russian infidels, and the more mystical and "otherworldly" *Qadiriia* order. The Chechen Sheikh Mansur who led the revolt against Russia in 1785–1791, and Imam Shamil, who led the "Murid" revolt against Russia in the 1840s were adherents of the *Naqshbandiia* order. Shamil's jihad, moreover, was driven by both the goal of expelling the Russians, and also of purifying and spreading "true" Islam and building an Islamic society based on Shariah.[3] The history of colonial resistance in Chechnya is widely viewed as a critical foundation that shapes the present-day struggle for Chechen independence and the growth of Islamist fundamentalism across the North Caucasus. There was, however, a century of historical development between the resistance to Russian colonialism and the contemporary conflict.

The tendency to view the conflict in historicist terms mistakenly downplays the importance of the context and contingency of the collapse of the USSR in the origins of the conflict. A Chechen nationalist movement only emerged in

Soviet Union and faced bleak developmental prospects without Russian economic support. The success of a nationalist revolution in Chechnya was highly exceptional within the region, and there were a combination of circumstances that account for this. Across the Soviet Union and some parts of Central and Eastern Europe, the struggle against Soviet occupation and for national self-determination was often characterized by generational conflict between radical young nationalist groups led by intellectuals and the indigenous elites of careerist collaborators with the Soviet regime. The secular "Baltic-style" nationalism that drove Yandarbiev and his group in this period is evident from the nature of their opposition ro the indigenous Soviet leadership of Chechen-Ingushetia, installed by Moscow in 1989 imder the leadership of the regional communist party secretary Doku Zavgaev. Zavgaev and his nomenclatura allies favoured preserving union with a reconstituted USSR, or failing that with Russia. From early 1990, in the wake of the Eastern European revolutions and as the USSR began to implode, Yandarbiev opportunistically attempted to intensify the nationalist mobilization for an independent Chechnya. In March he established the Vainalch Democratic Party (VDP), one of the first secular nationalist parties to be formed in the USSR with the express goal of achieving independence.

The emphasis on nationalism as opposed to Islam in the political mobilization in Chechnya is clear from the proceedings of the first Chechen National Congress (CNC) that was convened on 23–26 November 1990, which was nominally under the auspices of the Zavgaev leadership. About 1,000 Chechens and several members of the Chechen diaspora in Turkey and Jordan attended the gathering in Grozny. The event marked the beginning of what became known as the "Chechen national revolution". Zavgaev hoped to steer the CNC in a modetate and unionist direction, but Yandarbiev and a number of close associates (including Movladi Udugov and Sait-Khassan Abumuslimov) led a VDP takeover of the organization.[9] The final resolution adopted by the CNC was thoroughly secular nationalist in content and tone. It provided for the adoption by the Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush Republic of a declaration on "State Sovereignty", which was subsequently passed on 27 November 1990. This declaration was, in fact, one of the last in the so-called "parade of sovereignties," where most of Russia's autonomous republics declared theit sovereignty, though nearly all did so with the proviso that they remained "within the RSFSR." Article 1 of the declaration stated: "The Chechen-Ingush Republic is a sovereign state, created as a result of the self-determination of the Chechen and Ingush peoples." No mention was made of

the RSFSR, though a commitment was expressed to sign a new federal treaty with the USSR, on equal terms with the Union Republics. Provisions were made for protecting and promoting the Chechen language and culture and Islam but these were listed below other grievances such as territorial disputes with the neighbouring republics of North Ossetia and Dagestan, and the demand for compensation from Russia for its historical injustices against Chechnya (notably the genocidal deportation of 1944).[10] Chechnya's first significant statement of a nationalist agenda was, therefore, very much in line with the declarations made by the most Western-oriented nationalisms of the USSR, those of the Baltic States, and focused on the moral legitimacy of the claim to independence through the principle of national self-determinarion, underpinning this claim by reference to the historical injustices perpetrated by the Soviet Union and Russia.[11]

The emergence of Dudayev as leader of the nationalist movement was also inspired by Yandarbiev. A serving Soviet air force major-general, Dudayev had name recognition throughout the Soviet Union because of his open and active support for Baltic nationalism. As commander of the Soviet nuclear bomber air base at Tartu in Estonia, Dudayev found himself at one of the epicentres of nationalist resurgence in the USSR in the late 1980s. The Baltic nationalist Popular Fronts involved the mass mobilization of support around secular nationalism and a commitment to moral pressure on the Soviet authorities based on the legitimacy of the claim to national independence as an expression of democracy. To understand Dudayev's nationalist consciousness we must recognize that it was a late conversion. Any sense of Chechenness was subsumed within a Soviet identity. Although he was born in Chechnya in 1944, just prior to the violent Soviet deportation, Dudayev was raised in Kazakhstan and did not live in Chechnya until late 1990 at the age of forty-six. While he retained a working knowledge of the Chechen language, his first language was Russian. He was thoroughly Sovietized by a military career which had seen him join the CPSU in 1966, marry a Russian military officer's daughter, and serve with distinction against the Mujahedin in Afghanistan in the 1980s. His conversion to nationalism and the idea of an independent Chechnya came about as a result of his observations of the rise of the Estonian nationalist Popular Front while he was based in Tartu in the late 1980s.[12] As the senior Soviet military commander in the district, he was *ex officio* a member of the city party executive committee (*gorkombiuro*), which would have brought him into close contact with local and national politics.

Dudayev was elected leader of the executive committee of the CNC in December 1990 for several reasons but, as the recollections of his wife and others make clear, Islamism played no role whatsoever.[13] His seniority was one factor, but he was also an outsider to the client networks that operated within Chechnya and thus perceived to be a good compromise candidate. Yandarbiev had visited Dudayev in Tartu to encourage him to accept the leadership of the nationalist movement for good logical reasons. Dudayev's military authority and experience would bring strong leadership, charisma, respectability, discipline and organizational skills to the nationalist movement. Most important, Dudayev had proven himself to be a committed nationalist and charismatic speaker at the congress. His nationalist credentials were affirmed when just weeks later Dudayev foiled Gorbachev's violent clampdown on the nationalists in the Baltic States by closing off Estonian airspace, and assisted Yeltsin's security during the Russian president's visit to Tallinn.[14]

When Dudayev retired from his air force commission and returned permanently to Grozny to lead the executive committee of the CNC in March 1991, the struggle within Chechnya was by then polarized into a conflict between the unionist Chechen party nomenclature elite under Zavgaev and the nationalist secessionists. This was a struggle about competing visions of secular Chechen nation-building. The unionist forces under Zavgaev favoured the reinregration of Chechnya into either a reconstituted USSR or, failing that, a reformed Russian Federation. The nationalists aspired to self-determination and independence.

Dudayev accelerated the radicalization of the nationalist movement. In May 1991, on the basis of the declaration of sovereignty, he dissolved the Zavgaev-dominated Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet and declared the executive committee of the CNC to be the only legitimate provisional government in Chechnya until elections could be held. A new "Common National Congress of the Chechen People" (OKChN) was established in July 1991, with Dudayev as chairman. Some have argued that the moderate nationalists and unionists were routed by a "coterie of extremists" led by Dudayev, who advocated "the creation of an Islamic state."[15] There is no evidence for such an intention. As will be demonstrated later, in our discussion of Chechen state-building, Dudayev, Yandarbiev, and other nationalist leaders at this time were driven by a secular vision of nation-state building; beyond occasional Islamic symbolism, such as the traditional cries of "Allah Akhbar!" by the more vocal anti-Russianists, there was no significant Islamic content to the nationalist drive for independence. Dudayev's nationalism was rooted in the Baltic

model, and he was keen to position it within a global experience of anti-colonialism. He rejected "colonial freedom" or any other "hybrid" version of sovereignty, and demanded a treaty with Russia that would legally recognize Chechnya's national independence. The executive committee of the OKChN, headed by Dudayev, declared itself the only legal government of Chechnya (and named the new republic Nokhchi-cho). At this time Dudayev had a tactical alliance with Beslan Gantemirov, a former Moscow-based criminal boss turned leader of the "Islamic Path" party, whose militia formed a hard core of the new National Guard. This appears to have been an Islamic party in name only.[16] In fact, of forty-six political parties and movements identified by Timur Muzaev at this time in Chechnya, only three were self-declared "Islamic" in orientation, and all of these had been dissolved by 1993, including Islamic Path. Consequently, the evidence suggests that the "Islamic" factor in Chechen politics was residual, if not marginal. We should also note, however, that the opening up of Chechnya in late 1991 to the outside world meant in the first instance openings to Chechen diaspora communities, in Turkey and Jordan in particular, countries where strong traditions of secular nationalism were being challenged by the rise of political Islam. The opening up of Chechnya also brought opportunities for proselytizing influences from the wider Islamic world through new funding, mainly Saudi in origin, for religious-cultural activities.[17]

The nationalist revolution in Chechnya occurred with the direct support of the Yeltsin-led democrats in Moscow including the parliamentary speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov (also an ethnic Chechen). When Zavgaev wavered during the August 1991 coup in Moscow, Dudayev seized the opportunity to launch a nationalist uprising. Yeltsin declared a state of emergency in Chechnya and ordered local Russian military garrisons to arm and support the nationalist forces. Leading members of Yeltsin's administration, including Gennadii Burbulis and Khasbulatov, visited Chechnya to support Dudayev and ensure that Zavgaev resigned so that there was a peaceful transfer of power from the Supreme Soviet to an OKChN-dominated Provisional Supreme Council. The international post-communist Zeitgeist of the period 1989–1991 saw nationalist movements in Eastern Europe, the USSR and Yugoslavia legitimize the assertion of independence through the democratic expression of national self-determination. Positioning Chechen nationalism within this broader movement, Dudayev and the OKChN called presidential and parliamentary elections in Chechnya in October 1991. The fairness of the elections was disputed, but according to official Chechen sources Dudayev was elected

president of Chechnya with 85 per cent of the vote on a 77 per cent turnout and even allowing for vote-rigging, most observers accepted that Dudayev was the clear winner.[18]

If Islamism was a significant ideological, legitimizing, or directional force for Dudayev then we should expect his regime, once in power, to act accordingly. In fact, even as Yeltsin's new Russian administration turned against Dudayev in the weeks following the national revolution, the conflict with Chechnya was not framed as a problem with "Islamists". Rather, the Yeltsin regime took the very typical policy response of colonial regimes by criminalizing the nationalist resistance. The discursive process determining the security threat on both sides at the outset made no reference to "Islam" as a factor. For the Russians, Dudayev represented a problem of "separatism" and the seizure of power by "bandits" and "criminals".[19] Dudayev and his ministers in turn increasingly embedded their anti-Russia rhetoric in a historical narrative of Chechen resistance to Russian "colonizers," and often succumbed to racist outbursts against Russians, often likening them to "Nazis."[20] Both idioms resonated vibrantly with the respective national constituencies: with Russian stereotypes of Chechens, and vice-versa, both of which had their origins in the Russian form of Orientalism derived from its nineteenth-century colonial experience in the Caucasus and embedded by its "Golden Age" literature such as Pushkin's *Kavkazskii plennik* ("Prisoner in the Caucasus") and Tolstoy's "moral" novel of the "Murid" war, *Hadji Murat*.

Chechen nationalism and state-building

What did Dudayev and the nationalists do with political power? Was there in any sense an Islamist state-building project? Dudayev's decrees and policies after the formal declaration of independence and his assumption of the presidency on 1 November 1991 through to the Russian invasion of December 1994 offer plenty of grounds for analysing his regime as a classic post-colonial secular nationalist state-building project. Dudayev's overwhelming concern was to achieve recognition of Chechnya as a sovereign state, primarily from Russia but also internationally. Over the next three years of negotiations with Russia on the status of Chechnya he consistently grounded Chechnya's right to independence within a secular legal framework of Soviet constitutional law and international law. In numerous interviews to Russian and other foreign journalists at this time, Dudayev held that the Chechen people had expressed their "will for self-determination and freedom" at the ballot box. He stressed

that the USSR laws passed in April 1990 established the constitutional right of an Autonomous Republic to decide its own fate, whether it was to refuse to sign up to Gorbachev's draft new Union treaty of May 1991, or to secede from the USSR in circumstances when this state was already in the process of disintegration, as was the case after the August 1991 coup. In the absence of a constitutional ratification of the new Union treaty (which Zavgaev had signed, but the ratification of which was pre-empted by the August coup), Chechnya remained *de jure* outside the USSR within the terms of constitutional law. After his election as president, Dudayev pushed through a number of radical decrees to complete the repatriation of Chechnya's sovereignty. By the end of November 1991, all federal property in Chechnya had been nationalized and payments of taxes and revenues to the Russian federal budget were stopped, though Russian state transfers of pensions and social payments were still processed. Russia, for its part, was reluctant to terminate the transfers, since this would compromise its claim to sovereignty over Chechnya.[21]

Following the speedy rout of a Russian military intervention in early November 1991, Yeltsin turned to a twin-track strategy alternating between sporadic military attacks and the isolation of Chechnya by blockade, and the use of Chechen loyalist proxies to destabilize Dudayev's regime. Russian policy on Chechnya became absorbed by propagandistic attempts to demonize Dudayev's government as "criminal" and "terrorist". Comparisons especially favoured by Yeltsin and other Russian politicians were with Panama's former ruler General Noriega and Russian propaganda branded Chechnya a "bandit state." As a former general, and assisted by a former Soviet artillery colonel, Aslan Maskhadov, as his chief military commander, Dudayev devoted much time to the organization and training of Chechen armed forces to resist a Russian attack. The militarization of Chechnya was secured by an agreement between Dudayev and corrupt elements in the Russian General Staff for an equal division of the quite considerable Soviet-era military stocks based in Chechnya, which included huge quantities of infantry weapons.[22]

Dudayev viewed religion pragmatically and instrumentally as one of the potential unifying forces that would assist state-building and the construction of a national identity. He was sensitive to the need for the development of sound social values, and aimed to use Islam among other religions for this purpose. Moreover, there was an understandable desire to rejuvenate religious life in Chechnya, which after all had been suppressed for decades under Soviet occupation. Most importantly, he attempted to harness the authority of societal leaders and religious elders in support of his regime. His establishment of

a Supreme Islamic Council in September 1991, almost immediately following the revolutionary overthrow of Soviet power, was an attempt to unify the religious establishment, which like Chechnya's political establishment, was deeply divided over the question of secession. The Supreme Islamic Council was regarded by the former religious establishment as being too dominated by the Sufi *Qadiriia* order, and the rival *Naqshbandiia* order set up its own "Spiritual Administration of Muslims". Dudayev attempted to create a unified "Muftiate" in August 1992, but when Chechnya became embroiled in a civil war between Dudayev's secessionist presidential administration and a more moderate parliament that was willing to compromise with Russia in the spring of 1993, the religious establishment, including the Muftiate, sided with the parliament against Dudayev.[23]

We should not confuse Dudayev's instrumental use of religion, and the growth of religiosity in Chechnya in the early 1990s with political Islam, in the sense of an ideology to embed Islam within the political fabric of the state. Many Russian and western observers exaggerated the role of Islam under Dudayev, based on a small number of seemingly iconic facts, such as that he swore his presidential oath on the *Qur'ān*. It is logical for a nationalist leader to mobilize forces around ideas that have popular legitimacy and such topics were a natural response to independence from Russia, which brought freedom to express national identity, and an increased consciousness of identity. Moreover, contacts with the Chechen diaspora and the Islamic world intensified the Chechen's search for a post-Soviet identity. Besides, there was a sudden outburst of religiosity across the whole of the former Soviet Union, in reaction to the Soviet oppression of religion. What occurred in Chechnya was part of a wider post-Soviet trend. Some have argued that Dudayev was a Sufi adept characterized by "adherence to Islam and piousness", but without providing any evidence for such assertions.[24] Dudayev's use of Islamic rhetoric, such as the term "*ghazavat*" (holy war) was almost always correlated with moments of extreme urgency such as during the Russian invasion of December 1994. There is no evidence that Islam played a major role in Dudayev's personal life, and even as other nationalists, such as Yandarbiev, adopted traditional dress forms such as the Chechen *papkha* (sheepskin hat) and Islamist rhetoric during the conflict of 1994–1996, Dudayev preferred the Soviet military officer's field hat (*pilotka*) or a homburg or trilby hat. It is important also that we do not confuse religiosity with fundamentalism.

There was no attempt to construct a Shariah state under Dudayev. For Dudayev the chief policy priorities, apart from the constant threat from Rus-

sia, lay in building an efficient secular state administration, organizing the armed forces, and preventing socio-economic collapse and internal disorder. He presided over the drafting of a new constitution for Chechnya, which was approved by the Chechen parliament in March 1992. The Chechen constitution was a standard model of a secular nationalist parliamentary constitution. The preamble states that the constitution is guided by the "idea of humanism" not Islam. Article one states: "The Chechen Republic is a sovereign and independent democratic law-based state, founded as a result of the self-determination of the Chechen people." Article two affirms: "The people of the Chechen Republic are the only source of all power in the state." Many aspects of the constitution would not look out of place in any other constitution informed by the ideals of secular republican nationalism. That the constitutional commitments to democracy and openness were not just a sham is suggested by the report of a fact-finding mission conducted by the well-respected London-based NGO International Alert, published in October 1992, which stated: "Chechen society is characterized by a remarkable degree of political openness and freedom of expression."[25] Even the new official symbol of the Republic, the wolf *couchant* under a full moon, was un-Islamic, supposedly created by Dudayev's Russian wife Alla from traditional Chechen animist iconography.

It was difficult to tar Dudayev with the brush of Islamic radicalism in the face of such a secular nationalist constitution. The separation of the state and religion was affirmed in Article 4, and the constitution provided for complete freedom of worship and opinions. The shift from secular constitutionalism to Shariah in Chechnya occurred much later under president Maskhadov's rule in 1998–1999 and Article 4 was amended to make Islam the official state religion only in February 1999. Dudayev wrote elsewhere that the "ideal" Chechen state would be one based on Islamic Shariah law, where a traditional council of Chechen elders would make decisions, but this was not the principle on which the constitution was formed.[26] He explicitly claims that Chechnya should become a constitutional secular state.[27]

If the use of Islam was anything other than pragmatic and instrumental, one would have expected Dudayev to issue decrees and orders to promote the infiltration of Islam into the state and society. Again, there is no evidence for this. For example, when we examine the sixty presidential decrees, four acts, and forty-seven orders in the critical period of state-building following the revolution and the promulgation of the new constitution in 1992, we find no attempt to Islamize Chechnya's state structures, or public life.

While journalists, in particular, have often stressed the role of traditional kin ties and "clan" (*teip*) in Chechnya, the sociological evidence and political

reality demonstrates that this is a misunderstanding of "patron-clientelism". Dudayev employed clientism in his personnel policy to build a following of loyalists in the state administration. His secular vision of state-building was set out in a long treatise published in April 1993. The text began with a formal reference to the "will of Allah," but that is the only religious reference. His goal was to develop Chechnya into a successful capitalist country, which would be free from Russia's "imperial diktat" and be "enlightened and civilized."[29]

There were several subtexts to the outbreak of war between Russia and Chechnya in December 1994, none of which concerned the "Islamic" factor. Firstly, there was undoubtedly an "oil" subtext. This had less to do with Chechnya's role as an oil producer, as in 1993 its production was some 1.25 million tons (less than 1 per cent of Russia's total output), or even the then current volumes (120,000 tons) pumped through the Russian pipeline from Azetbaijan. Rather, Russia perceived an independent Chechnya to be a strategic threat to its dominance of Caspian energy and its capacity to fend off the escalating western penetration into the region, which was demonstrated by a western consortium's "deal of the century" with Azerbaijan over Caspian oil in September 1994. Secondly, Russia saw in the crushing of Chechnya an opportunity to affirm its own state integrity after the federal destabilization inherited from the Soviet collapse. Negotiations between the Yeltsin and Dudayev regimes were conducted for two years in an attempt to resolve differences, but it proved impossible to reconcile Russia's offer of autonomy with Dudayev's claim to independence. Thirdly, there was also the motive of revenge. Crushing Dudayev by military means would go some way to undoing the humiliations inflicted on small scale Russian military incursions in late 1991, 1992 and November 1994. Furthermore, Dudayev's general arming of the male Chechen population in late 1991 and early 1992 led to an escalation of social disorder and abuses. Many of those armed were unemployed highlanders who faced poverty as a result of the difficulties of finding work in Chechnya or in Russia and the loss of their traditional seasonal work in other parts of the USSR due to the economic crash. Anti-Russian sentiment led to a spontaneous ethnic-cleansing of Russians who did not have kin or clientelist protections. A decade-long process of Slav emigration was suddenly accelerated as about 90,000, about one-third of the total number living in Chechnya, were expelled or left in 1991–1992, and most of these were critical for the proper functioning of the state social sector and oil and petrochemical industry.[30] It seems odd to confuse this ethnic expulsion with

"religious war" when there were so many more valid explanations derived from the political and social context of ethnic power relations and how these were dramatically transformed by the collapse of the USSR and the Chechen national revolution.

Conclusion: the making of jihad

After the invasion of December 1994 Russian leaders began to extend the frame of the conflict with Chechnya to include the "Islamic factor" and even borrowed elements of Huntington's "civilizational" framing device. In his memoirs, Yeltsin blamed the conflict on both Dudayev's attempt to secede from the Russian Federation *and* his goal of creating an "Islamic republic."[31] More recent Russian academic studies of Russian policy in the Caucasus acknowledge, however, that "there was no 'Islamic national project' in Chechnya" and that at the beginning of the 1990s "the Islamic republic in Chechnya seemed to be a myth."[32] Much of the attention on the "Islamic factor," consequently, came from a concern with the growth of Islamic radicalism in Chechnya as a result of the first Russian-Chechen war in 1994–1996.

One of the themes of this book is the impact of violence on faith. There was a well-documented drift to Wahhabist and Salafist jihadism among some sections of the Chechen resistance during the first war, which grew and strengthened in the late 1990s and came to dominate the resistance movement during the second war beginning in late 1999. Under Dudayev, the struggle for Chechen independence was, in essence, a classic example of a secular nationalist and anti-colonialist movement. Once the conflict escalated into a brutal war, both sides gave little quarter and the Russians employed disproportionate military force against civilians, while the Chechens responded with sporadic acts of terrorism. War produced a a shift to Islamism occurred. Dudayev was intent on building a secular state in Chechnya, and it was only after his death and the expulsion of Russian military forces from Chechnya that his successor as president, Yandarbiev, introduced a Shariah court and began the reconfiguration of Chechnya's political structures in a more Islamist direction.[33] We can identify three main factors for this growth. For some of the more radical Chechen field commanders, like Shamil Basayev, the ideological pull of jihadism actually predated the all-out Russian military attack of December 1994. Basayev and a small group of followers traveled to al-Qaeda's Khost camp in the summer of 1994 to undergo ideological and military training. As we noted earlier, Yandarbiev began to refer to Basayev

with the jihadi title "*amir*" (commander) in late 1994.[34] Basayev, however, was a contradictory figure. The depth of his commitment to political Islam remains questionable. Whereas the secularist Dudayev placed a portrait of Mansur (the great Chechen resistance leader of the late eighteenth century) in his presidential office, Basayev reportedly preferred to cast himself in the mould of a Chechen "Che" and placed a portrait of the Argentinian internationalist in his home in the early 1990s.[35] The importance of Basayev lies in the fact that he exercised enormous authority within the resistance movement because of his aggressiveness and success in attacking Russia (notably in destroying the Russian armoured column that attacked Grozny in December 1994), and his drift to jihad lured many others. Secondly, the attraction of jihad as a countermovement to Chechen secular nationalism can also be attributed to disillusionment within the Chechen resistance with the "West" in particular the USA and the EU, which rather than support Chechnya's bid for democratic national self-determination, tolerated or sympathized with the Russian policy of crushing Chechen secessionism. The collapse of the USSR was treated according to the legal norms devised for decolonization, notably the principle of *uti posseditis juris*. Potential for international influences on the early negotiation of a peaceful resolution to the question of Chechnya were sacrificed to the national interests of Western governments in supporting the reformists under Yeltsin and demarcating Chechnya as an "internal" matter for Russia. Even though there were periodic criticisms of Russia's "excessive" use of force in Chechnya, an indelible mark on the reputation of the West among Chechens was left by President Clinton's absurd comparison of Boris Yeltsin and Abraham Lincoln. Thirdly, bin Laden's interest in Chechnya (as with Bosnia) as a front in the strategy to globalize jihad was not sparked until 1995. That is to say, not by the presence of a nominally Muslim community *per se* but by war and what he interpreted as the "destruction and slaughter" being meted out to Muslims in these places by "Crusaders".[36] In early 1995 bin Laden sent financial support to the Chechen resistance, and a small group of well-trained Arab jihadis commanded by the Saudi *amir* Khattab, called the "Islamic International Brigade", came from Afghanistan to Chechnya, mostly via Dagestan. Khattab was certainly welcomed by the Chechen resistance at this critical time in the war, and he was appointed to important military command and training posts by Dudayev. Khattab's principal connection, however, was with Basayev. He became Basayev's deputy commander and chief advisor and remained in Chechnya until his assassination by the FSB in March 2002.[37] Khattab also brought al-Qaeda's skills in the information war to bear

on the conflict in Chechnya. The exaggerated attention paid in Chechnya, Russia and internationally to the role of the jihadis in the conflict was in no small part due to Khattab's deft use of video recordings of successful attacks on the Russian military, which were then copied and distributed and also propagated globally by the burgeoning number of al-Qaeda controlled or influenced websites, including sites specifically devoted to the conflict in Chechnya.[38]

During the second war, and after 9/11 facilitated the Russian propaganda machine's demonization of the Chechen resistance as part of the "global war on terror", Dudayev's former aide and successor as nationalist leader, Aslan Maskhadov, often spoke of how the presence of "international terrorism" in Chechnya was an "invention". By then, however, Islamists linked to al-Qaeda, such as Khattab, played an important role in the resistance to Russia, but the term "invention" is appropriate to the extent that the superior capacity of al-Qaeda to fight an informational war exaggerated the role of its adherents in the conflict in Chechnya and downplayed the part of the nationalist resistance. By then the conflict in Chechnya could more readily be located within Huntington's paradigm of "clash of civilizations". But this was a self-fulfilling prophecy. What had begun as a secular nationalist conflict that was misinterpreted by Huntington, Gurr and others as a "religious" or "fault line" war, became so because of the way that Russian policy opted for a security solution to a political problem of secession, and moreover did so in a most brutal manner that guaranteed a drift into extremism on the part of the resistance.