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A State within a State: the Case of Chechnya

Hanna Zimnitskaya
Macalester College, hannazima@gmail.com

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A State within a State: the Case of Chechnya

Author: Hanna Zimnitskaya

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Hanna Zimmitskaya
Adviser: James von Geldern
Department of International Studies

ABSTRACT

After the USSR's dissolution, Russia struggled to reassert its Great Power status by enhancing its internal might and territorial cohesion. Futile military campaigns against the rebellious Chechen people pushed the Kremlin to strike a bargain with an unorthodox warlord: Ramzan Kadyrov, who was to become a faithful ally, while in return Chechnya received an unprecedented level of autonomy. This thesis examines the dynamics of Kadyrov's ascent to power, specifically the Islamization of public space and the monopolization of Chechen security forces, and concludes that, in the long run, the unwavering consolidation of his rule menaces Russia's re-emerging 'greatness'.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Geopolitics of Boundaries: Territory and Power

"Territorial issues are so fundamental that the behavior associated with their settlement literally constructs a world order."¹

The scholarship of International Relations in the late twentieth century is filled with observers who emphasize the diminishing importance of interstate boundaries. Ken'ichi Ohmae's "Borderless World" (1991), James Rosenau's "Distant Proximities: Dynamics beyond Globalization" (2003), Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson's "Globalization in Question" (1999) and a significant number of other scholarly works advance theories announcing the decline of states' territorial impermeability. Defenders of global interconnectedness and interdependence go as far as to make the state's internal affairs a matter of international concern. One of the most controversial illustrations of this philosophy is Article 73.b in the UN Charter, according to which the members of the United Nations "accept as a sacred trust the obligation" to stay alert to the political aspirations of the peoples that reside in non-self governing territories, and "to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement."² In other words, created to "maintain international peace and security, and to that end to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace,"³ the United Nations legitimized the idea that military force and violation of territorial sovereignty can be lawfully undertaken if they are permissible under the Charter.

¹ John A. Vasquez. *The War Puzzle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.151.

² Charter of the United Nations <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter11.shtml>

³ Ibid.

Despite the increasingly popular belief in a world *sans frontières*, a concurrent counter-trend of thought announces “the growing respect for the proscription that force should not be used to alter interstate boundaries,” known as the “territorial integrity norm.”⁴ Since the establishment of the Westphalian order at the end of the Thirty-Year’s War in 1648, and until the middle of the twentieth century, interstate borders were far from the modern model of fixed geopolitical entities. Territory was a matter of purchase, inheritance, marriage, and most importantly, the underlying objective of many wars.⁵ Consequently, authority over pieces of land constantly shifted and often overlapped. However, the introduction of the delimited territorial state with exclusive authority over its domain comprised part of the transition from the medieval to the modern world, which was a gradual process that took several centuries. For instance, surveyed national borders emerged only in the eighteenth century.⁶ This phenomenon, later characterized as “a basic rule of co-existence,” became a key geopolitical feature of our time.⁷

Furthermore, one can hypothesize that the notions of modernity and territoriality are closely intertwined; imposing territorial limits embodies the modern projects of ordering and clarifying the fragmented human habitat. In his article “The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force,” Mark Zacher offers his personal vision of the extensively codified rigidity of the world’s territorial order, based on a thorough analysis of the major stages of human “co-existence.” In his opinion, the growing importance of the territorial integrity is expressed by a combination of instrumental and ideational interests: instrumental

⁴ Mark W. Zacher. "The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force". *International Organization* 55, no. 2, 2001, p.215.

⁵ Kalevij Holsti. *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648-1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p 307.

⁶ George Clark. *Early Modern Europe from about 1450 to about 1720*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p.144.

⁷ Hedly Bull. *The Anarchical Society*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, p.34.

reasons concern perceptions of how a norm and congruent practices benefit the self-interests of countries and help avoid major wars; ideational reasons pertain to changing views of ethical behavior toward other peoples and states in the process of building human rights regimes.⁸ According to many indicators, the “territorial integrity norm” maintains its role as a central pillar of the international order, despite the arguments about the dubious nature of modern interstate delineation: “Boundaries have not been frozen, but states have been effectively proscribed from altering them by force. The multistate political and security order is clearly stronger than many political observers think in that the society of states has largely eliminated what scholars have identified as the major source of enduring rivalries and the frequency and intensity of warfare.”⁹ If one envisions the modern mosaic of fixed boundaries, it would be logical to identify the parties that take the most interest in preserving the geopolitical status quo. The norm has been crucial for the establishment of the authority of Great Powers in post World War II international society by setting up a framework of “legitimatization of material inequality in the international system.”¹⁰ Thus, the Great Powers have played a central role in instituting and guaranteeing the “territorial integrity norm,” which helped them secure their vast possessions and perpetuate the inequality of territorial rights.

Additionally, in the context of establishing regional balances of power, the norm has proved to be helpful in virtue of its being “a legitimate reason to prevent aspiring states from acquiring certain coveted territories, the possession of which could propel changes in regional

⁸ Zacher, p.237.

⁹ Zacher, p.246.

¹⁰ Oded Lowenheim. *Predators and Parasites: Persistent Agents of Transnational Harm and Great Power Authority*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007, p.28.

and even global balances of power.”¹¹ It follows that territorial integrity expresses the authority of Great Powers, inherently articulating their ambitions to preserve geopolitical hegemony and ensure omnipresent control within their boundaries. In order to explain the origin of such aspirations, John Mearsheimer proposed five assumptions about the international system. According to him, “Sovereignty inheres in states because there is no higher ruling body in the international system.”¹² Consequently, the international system is essentially anarchic since there is no central authority above independent states. Secondly, within this system, Great Powers represent a fundamental danger to each other in light of their offensive military capabilities. Thirdly, states can never be certain about other states’ intentions, resulting in a great number of possible causes of aggression. Importantly, the fourth assumption echoes the principles of the territorial integrity norm, identifying survival and the autonomy of domestic political order as the primary goals of Great Powers: “Survival dominates other motives because, once a state is conquered, it is unlikely to be in a position to pursue other aims.”¹³ Basic survival thus requires preserving intact the Great Power’s domain, producing in turn the fifth principle, according to which Great Powers are cautious, rational actors that “are aware of their external environment and they think strategically about how to survive in it.”¹⁴

Mearsheimer’s theory suggests that states gain Great Power status in the process of calculations and predictions vis-à-vis other states, and that only the most alert and the most cautious can successfully attain it. However, because basic survival remains the prerequisite to complex geopolitical games, internal strength and cohesiveness constitute the key component of

¹¹ Lowenheim, p.28.

¹² John J. Mearsheimer. “Strategies for Survival” in *Perspectives on World Politics*, ed. Richard Little and Michael Smith. London: Routledge, 2006, p.69.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.70.

power. Similarly, A.F.K. Organski argues that one of the most critical aspects of strong states is their ability to establish the monopoly of force in a territory and that such monopoly “must rest in the hands of any effective government.”¹⁵ He adds that thereby an efficient governmental bureaucracy must maintain full control of force, utilizing resources in pursuit of the country’s goals. As these scholars’ works suggest, many indicators remind us of the essential value of impermeable territoriality, as increasing globalization disguises it. A well-guarded vast territory translates to strength; it is a symbol of the state’s internal might and the basis of its ambitions. Since the politics of Great Powers are still in place, the world order upholds a complex territorial framework that has emerged in the course of competition for hegemonic domination.

¹⁵ Abramo Fimo and Kenneth Organski. *World Politics*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 1968, p.172.

1.2. Russia as a Great Power, or the Paradox of Territoriality

Numerous scholars have been perplexed by the many faces of Russia. Often described as impossible to understand, to predict, or to conquer, the country has developed a distinct geopolitical character due to a number of unique historical experiences, and it hardly fits any rigid classification. The simple question “Is Russia a Great Power?” generates a mosaic of concepts: “a great power manqué,”¹⁶ “an aggrieved great power,”¹⁷ “a re-emerging great power,”¹⁸ or even “a prodigal superpower.”¹⁹ The international community has been hesitant about recognizing Russia as a consequential hegemon, largely due to its civilizational differences and despotic methods of governance. Only when Peter the Great imported Western traditions to Russian society and enabled the country to project power externally did European leaders start seeking Russia as an ally. This process accelerated after its victory over the regional top-ranking power of Sweden in 1721.²⁰ However, these alliances stemmed less from increased congruity than wary respect. As Russian vice-chancellor Peter Shafirov (1670–1739) noted, “if they seek our alliance, it is rather through fear and hate than through feelings of friendship.”²¹

On the other hand, Russia has long perceived itself as a strong state, maintaining “greatness” as an essential component of its existence. The state’s hegemonic ambitions were the most visible after the defeat in the Crimean War in 1856, and after the dissolution of the USSR.

¹⁶ Iver B Neumann and Ole Jacob Sending. *Governing the Global Polity: Practice, Mentality, Rationality*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.

¹⁷ Leonid Luks. “Russia: The Aggrieved Great Power”, History News Network, 2009, <http://hnn.us/articles/103288.html>

¹⁸ Roger E. Kanet. *Russia: Re-Emerging Great Power*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

¹⁹ Steven Rosefielde. *Russia in the 21st Century: The Prodigal Superpower*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

²⁰ Neumann and Sending, p.105.

²¹ Paul Dukes. *The Making of Russian Absolutism, 1613-1801*. London: Longman, 1990, p.77.

Following the defeat of the Tsarist troops in the Crimean War, Russian Foreign Minister Gorchakov (1798 – 1883) said: “Rossiia sosredotachivaetsia” (Russia is focussing/concentrating herself).²² After the break-up of the USSR, many Russian scholars repeated this expression to highlight the country’s state of shock after losing its Great Power status. Importantly, the phrase rests upon the anticipated transience of this period of weakness, suggesting that in a short time Russia would return to the international arena as a superpower. To reaffirm the country’s might and to prove that it matters globally, Russia employed a number of strategies that other powers often perceived as aggressive, nationalistic, and threatening: “Whether supporting separatist groups in neighboring states, cutting off gas to Belarus and Ukraine, or standing up for Iran at the UN Security Council, Russian foreign policy often appeared dangerously anachronistic in the West – even before its invasion of Georgia in support of the South Ossetian separatists.”²³ Many observers commented on the difficulties that Russia faces because of its old-fashioned understanding of being a “hard power”, which poses problems in a globally networked world. However, despite the difficulties and critiques that the country receives in light of its hostility, Russia of the twenty-first century has diverged from its relative weakness in the 1990s, regaining its status as a consequential international actor.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly-born Russian Federation’s primary objectives were survival and the preservation of rigid borders, a strategy which echoes one of Mearsheimer’s assumptions. Typically for an aspiring Great Power, territoriality became one of the country’s main preoccupations because, as demonstrated in the previous section, the monopoly of force and omnipresent control buttress internal strength and enable external

²² Luks, <http://hnn.us/articles/103288.html>

²³ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, p.7.

ambitions. For a fragile federation torn apart by the secessionist tendencies of its subjects, there was little to do other than negotiate on the basis of the particular interests of each republic and region. The periphery's responses varied. Most were willing to sign bilateral treaties, thus constructing what came to be known as Yeltsin's asymmetric federalism. However, out of the twenty-one ethnic republics, the level of autonomy allowed by such agreements differed. Tatarstan was the first republic to sign a bilateral treaty and it had received much more independence from Moscow than republics with similar religious, geographic and economic characteristics: "As the first republic to reach an agreement with the Kremlin, this Muslim republic on the Volga became a paradigm for the other ethnic regions."²⁴ In the context of Russia's pursuit of reinforced territorial integrity, the Tatarstan model was a risky journey to undertake, but the center's demonstration of flexibility helped curb the remaining secessionist tendencies. Meanwhile, Tatarstan enjoyed an unprecedented level of autonomy achieved via dialogue and collaboration.

In contrast to the peaceful nature of Tatarstan's re-integration, the Chechen model symbolizes a different path, characterized primarily by violent resistance. The Chechens defied the Russian empire until 1864; Stalin brutally deported them in 1944. So when in 1991 an opportunity to secede emerged on the horizon, the Chechen Republic leaped to achieve its ambitions. Chechnya's capacity to assert its independence was enhanced by its leader's (Dzhokhar Dudaev) close involvement in Russian military corruption and arms trading, which facilitated a rapid militarization process through the seizure and purchasing of Soviet military

²⁴ Nicole Balkind and Graeme B. Robertson, *A Model Republic? Trust and Authoritarianism on Tatarstan's Road to Autonomy*. UNC Electronic Theses and Dissertations Collection. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009, p. 2.

hardware.²⁵ After fighting two wars, Russia technically retained Chechnya's territory within its realm, but in reality the Republic's leader Ramzan Kadyrov "has now asserted a greater degree of autonomy even than was sought in 1991-92, and has been described as the "Warrior King" of Chechnya."²⁶ Kadyrov expresses his most sincere loyalty towards the Kremlin and calls himself Putin's ally. However, under this mask of peaceful collaboration, more characteristic for the Tatarstan model, the Chechen leader seems to hide a more complex set of objectives, including acquiring a domestic Chechen army, building a luxurious infrastructure, and gaining more control over its resources by constructing a major oil refinery.

Given its weakness after the fall of the USSR, the Russian government did the best it could to ensure the preservation of its territory in pursuit of the ambitious geopolitical objectives of a re-emerging Great Power. By managing models that varied from peaceful collaboration to armed resistance, the federation succeeded in taming such key domestic actors as Tatarstan and Chechnya. However, a number of uncertainties challenge the seamless picture. The alleged superpower consciously allowed for the existence of geopolitical enclaves within its territory, and with the help of these "failures" it managed not only to "survive", but to reassert its internal strength. In other words, in the context of Putin's doctrine of state strengthening, outsourcing sovereignty to local agents paradoxically ensured the primacy of territoriality. However, can a country whose sovereignty is a compound of overlapping authorities be a Great Power – a title that assumes internal cohesiveness and omnipresent control effectuated by the government's bureaucracy?

²⁵ Richard Sakwa. *Chechnya: From Past to Future*. London: Anthem Press, 2005, p.273.

²⁶ Marc Weller and Katherine Nobbs. *Asymmetric Autonomy and the Settlement of Ethnic Conflicts*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p.57.

While Tatarstan represents a reliable ally who has been integrated within Russia since 1552 and who consciously made the choice of collaborating with the center, the case of Chechnya is different. The enclave has come to possess a vast autonomy as Ramzan Kadyrov seized control of all security forces in the territory, largely due to the *carte blanche* given to him by the Kremlin. While Chechnya seems to have adopted the peaceful Tatarstan model of Center-Periphery relations, the memories of violent resistance and *de-facto* independence cannot be dismissed. Beneath the promises of loyalty, the Republic is governed as a personal fiefdom, creating a significant threat to the Kremlin's monopoly of force. And yet, the Chechen warlord seems to have greatly contributed to re-establishing and legitimizing Moscow's presence in the Republic in spite of the common perception of warlords as state destroyers. Russia struck a bargain with a deviant warlord: he was to become a "peacelord" and an ally in the federation's pursuit of power, while in return Chechnya received an unprecedented level of autonomy. In the context of this compromise, does keeping Chechnya within the federation reinforce or undermine Russia's acquisition of Great Power status?

2. Theoretical Framework: Who is Great, and Who is Not

"To me, I confess that [countries] are pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a great game for the domination of the world."

Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, 1898²⁷

Two kings, two queens, four rooks, four knights, four bishops, sixteen pawns - there is an unlimited number of ways to manipulate the thirty-two pieces. The goal never changes, though. One strives to mislead the opponent till his king is under threat of capture. To put it in the perspective of our basic instincts, on the chessboard of the world one always strives for power. And what about the strategies that we invent to succeed? Among the great number of debates regarding the nature underlying human actions and desires, two seventeenth century thinkers, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, embody the general dualist scheme of conceptualizing the international arena of humankind's interactions: pessimistic realists versus optimistic liberals.

It all goes back to the hypothetical state of nature. Hobbes argued that a state of nature very easily transforms into a state of war. Where there is no effective Sovereign to keep men's passions in check, one finds a place of "continual fear, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty brutish, and short."²⁸ Hobbes's natural world develops in continual motion since, blinded by his personal desires, man's attempt to acquire power after power never ceases, thus creating a situation of ever-present hostility. Furthermore, to Hobbes, little differentiates right and wrong except for personal opinion or social construct: "For these words of good, evil, and contemptible are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common rule of good and evil to be taken from the

²⁷ John Pilger. *The New Rulers of the World*. London: Verso, 2002. p.101.

²⁸ Steven M. Cahn. *Classics of Western Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 1990, p.502.

nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man.”²⁹ Given moral relativity, there is also a constantly changing pattern of power balance: while there are some who are stronger than others, the weak are capable of forming confederacies to kill the stronger and be strong themselves.³⁰

On the contrary, Locke criticized Hobbes because in his view, the state of nature is “a state of liberty”, and “not a state of license.”³¹ Driven by “peace, good will, mutual assistance, and preservation”, everyone in the state of nature is “bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes in competition, ought he...to preserve the rest of mankind, and may not...take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the life the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another.”³² Since Locke envisions men in a more positive way, he is often said to be the father of liberal, or idealist theory of international relations. In addition to Locke’s philosophy, liberals largely base their ideas on the Enlightenment’s belief in reason’s ability to make the world a better place. The optimistic view of international politics rests on three pillars. Firstly, states are the main actors on the international arena and some of their internal arrangements (e.g. democracy) are inherently preferable to others (e.g. dictatorship), which divides the world into good and bad states.³³ The good ones adopt cooperative policies, whereas the bad ones conflict with other states. Secondly, liberals do not emphasize calculations of power because they deem other kinds of political and economic calculations more important for understanding the behavior of good states. In their

²⁹ Cahn, p.496

³⁰ Kenneth Deutsch and Joseph Fornieri. *An Invitation to Political Thought*. Boston, MA: Thomson Higher Education, 2009, p.238

³¹ John Locke. *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. Macpherson. Indianapolis/Cambridge 1980, p.9.

³² Ibid.

³³ John J. Mearsheimer. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton, 2001.

view, even if bad states were motivated by the desire to gain power at the expense of other states, in an ideal world, where there are only good states, power would be largely irrelevant.

In contrast to such a utopian perception of the world of international affairs, realists rely on Hobbes's discourse on human nature to evidence states' persistent search for power. They agree that a conflict-free world is a desirable asset, but argue that the reality of security competition and war is inescapable. They share their first core belief with the liberals: realists envision states as the principal actors in world politics. Importantly, the focus lies predominantly on great powers and their games of domination. Secondly, realists do not draw sharp distinctions between "good" and "bad" states, because power is the overarching logic that dictates states' actions regardless of their culture or political system. This point opposes liberal tendencies to discriminate among countries on the basis of their goodness and badness. The differences in relative power are the only indicator that matters. Lastly, realists believe that for understanding great powers' behavior, internal factors are irrelevant. The external influences and competition for power determine states' objectives and actions to achieve them, which sometimes necessitates launching a war.

Considering the length of this thesis, it is impossible to cover all the nuances characteristic to the two main directions in the theoretical flow of international relations. Let us go directly to a particular concept that has been developed and utilized predominantly in the camp of realists, but spread to many other discourses – the state as a great power and the special attention its leaders have to pay to the balance of power. One of the fathers of IR realism Kenneth Waltz points out that the number of consequential states is small and historically people reach general consensus on a period's great powers. Only in relations among these great powers can

we assume rough equality of power while the remaining states have to adapt to the existing scheme: “Viewed as the politics of the powerful, international politics can be studied in terms of the logic of small-number systems.”³⁴ What does a state have to possess to win the title of a great power? According to Waltz, states achieve top ranking based on the following criteria: size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence.³⁵ Similarly, one of the foremost IR British scholars of the twentieth century Martin Wight defines a great power’s basic components as size of population, strategic position and geographical extent, and economic resources and industrial production, to which he adds ‘softer’ elements like education, technological skills, and moral cohesion.³⁶

Most concisely, as Paul Kennedy’s argues, a great power is “a state capable of holding its own against any other nation.”³⁷ This description emphasizes a number of aspects similar to Wight’s famous definition of a great power as “a power that can confidently contemplate war against any other existing single power.”³⁸ The majority of the most widely used definitions revolve around the countries’ ability to launch a military attack and to defend themselves, which resonates with Hans Morgenthau’s acute awareness of the material aspects of power: “What distinguishes the superpowers from all other nations, aside from their ability to wage all-out nuclear war and absorb a less than all-out nuclear attack, is their virtual industrial self-sufficiency

³⁴ Kenneth Neal Waltz. *Theory of International Politics*. New York: Random House, 1979, p.131.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Martin Wight, Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad. *Power Politics*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978, p.26.

³⁷ Paul M. Kennedy. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. New York, NY: Random House, 1987, p.539.

³⁸ Wight, p.53.

and their technological capacity to stay abreast of the other nations.”³⁹ As it can be seen on a general level and particularly in Morgenthau’s discourse, among all the criteria necessary for the desired honorable title of greatness, military power is of supreme importance.

The task of identifying the current great powers is a controversial one and is much easier to carry out retrospectively. After the Cold War’s bipolar power division, the world lived through a period of American hegemony, and currently experiences a phase of multi-polarity. The table below presents a projection of bilateral relationships that could develop among great powers (identified by the author) throughout the XXI century. The letters L, M, and H stand for low, medium or high probability of increasing future rivalry.

The New Great-Power Chessboard: Simultaneously Unfolding Military and Economic Rivalries

Table 4.2a Military Rivalry					
	United States	Japan	European Union	Russia	China
United States	—				
Japan	L	—			
European Union	M	M	—		
Russia	H	H	H	—	
China	H	H	H	M	—

Table 4.2b Economic Rivalry					
	United States	Japan	European Union	Russia	China
United States	—				
Japan	H	—			
European Union	H	H	—		
Russia	L	L	M	—	
China	H	H	M	M	—

Figure 1: The Future of Great Powers: Military and Economic Rivalries⁴⁰

³⁹ Hans J. Morgenthau. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1985 p.126.

⁴⁰ Charles W. Kegley, *World Politics: Trend and Transformation*. Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth, 2009, p. 117.

As we see, the chart identifies the USA, Japan, the EU, Russia and China as the leading forces shaping international politics today. Another place to look for the states with a great power status are international organizations. The United Nations Security Council oversees the maintenance of international peace and security, thus playing a key role in regulating the balance of power. Even though it consists of 15 members, they are divided into 10 elected temporary members and the five veto-wielding states that are present in the Council on a permanent basis. In the context of this scheme, the United Kingdom, the United States, China, France and Russia can be identified as an alternative way of defining the world's leading powers. Another interesting example of a locus of power is the G8 – The Group of Eight. It is an unorthodox international institution of eight of the world's largest economies. Its informal *modus operandi* and the fact that it is relatively unburdened by bureaucracy have enabled state leaders to establish strong personal connections during their annual forums, which made the domain of great power politics more visible.⁴¹ According to this economically based framework, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Russia are the modern Titan Atlas holding the world of international affairs on its shoulders.

Finally, Great Power status is hard to win because it is largely based on a vague consensual basis accrued over a long period of time, similarly to an individual's reputation. However, military and economic strength can help a country win a position of privilege more quickly and regardless of the others' unwillingness to disturb the laboriously constructed status quo. Russia's or China's presence among the great powers exemplifies this: no matter how much Western criticism targets these powers, their military and economic strength qualify them to be

⁴¹ Peter I. Hajnal. *The G8 System and the G20: Evolution, Role and Documentation*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007, p.2.

integrated into the modern scheme of international multi-polarity. The remarks regarding such newly-emerged rivals are often based on the fact that in spite of winning the title of a Great Power, they are not “strong states.” However, can a country be a weak Great Power? It seems that in the context of state strength, there has also been two diverging paths of thought. On the one hand, state strength can be rationalized as a force in its own right that pursues its own interests against those of the market, society and the individual. Max Weber’s definition of the state as an entity that successfully “claims the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a certain territory”⁴² and Michael Mann's neo-Weberian definition of the state as “a territorially demarcated, differentiated set of institutions and personnel with a center that exercises authoritative rulemaking backed by the coercive powers of the state”⁴³ resonate with the realist idea of the supremacy of power relations in any social construct. On the other hand, a liberal theorist would characterize a strong state as a defender of individual liberties, rights of property and as a regulator of market relations. Consequently, as we try to understand what one means by a “strong state”, a contradiction emerges: “The former would be a ‘well-ordered police state’, whereas the latter would be a pluralistic society.”⁴⁴ The heated debate between realist and liberal camps of International Relations theorists demonstrates that the concept of a strong, efficient state rests upon the violent-peaceful antagonism of the hypothetical human nature.

⁴² Max Weber. *Political Writings*, edited by Lassman and R. Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.311.

⁴³ Michael Mann. “The autonomous power of the state: its origins, mechanisms and results,” in John A. Hall *The State: Critical Concepts*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p.333.

⁴⁴ Richard Sakwa. *Putin: Russia's Choice*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008, p. 161.

3. The Promises of Federalism: Tatarstan as a Paradigm of Sustainable Center-Periphery Relations

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia witnessed a parade of conflicts resulting from the state's inability to accommodate the demands of its ethnic regions. Federalism proved to be the best solution for a country that was being torn apart by its tense center-periphery relations because "over the course of the twentieth century federalism has gone from being viewed as a weak and transitory form of government to being portrayed as a virtual panacea for states torn by ethnic conflict and even as a pattern for future regional integration."⁴⁵ For an aspiring Great Power, the federal model of governance was essential to manage its internal and external security. As Peter Merkl emphasizes, "most modern federations originated in response to extraordinary challenges from abroad and at home. They sought the greater security and international power of a larger state."⁴⁶ Russia is unique, considering its long-lasting security dilemma: the country's history is saturated with an abundant number of invasions by the Mongols, the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Turks, the French, and the Germans. Thus, rather than creating geopolitical alliances that would augment its defensive capabilities, retaining a single, omnipresent control over its regions seemed the most sustainable strategy. The fall of the USSR demonstrated that federalism was "the way to keep Russia together in the absence of a powerful central government, thus preserving the enhanced security provided by the collective capabilities of all of Russia."⁴⁷

The remarks above explain the reasoning underlying Yeltsin's asymmetric federalism, notably the proliferation of bilateral treaties between the federal center and its subjects. Tatarstan

⁴⁵ Daniel R. Kempton and Terry D. Clark. *Unity or Separation Center-Periphery Relations in the Former Soviet Union*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Peter H. Merkl, *Modern Comparative Politics*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970, p.247.

⁴⁷ Kempton and Clark, p.15.

was the first republic to sign such a power-sharing agreement, which granted it an unprecedented level of autonomy. Consequently, the Republic became a paradigm for other federal subjects, a model of how to obtain vast autonomy without threats of violence or secession. Furthermore, Tatarstan offered a template for sustainable center-periphery relations within a re-emerging superpower. Russia's goal to gain a monopoly of force in its entire territory coincided with the Tatars' willingness to play along. In contrast, Chechnya's violent resistance ran in stark opposition to the rules dictated by the Kremlin. During the crisis of 1992-1993, Tatarstan's President Shaimiyev, unlike the leaders of Chechnya, rejected any discussion of secession and consistently spoke about a new federative relationship with Moscow.⁴⁸

Thus, in April 1992, Shaimiyev announced that signing the Federative Treaty was a matter finding "a new formula of Tatarstan's status, while preserving the integrity of the Russian Federation."⁴⁹ Undoubtedly, the 1994 treaty between the Russian Federation and Tatarstan was a risky compromise since it failed to amend the subject's constitution, according to which Tatarstan was a sovereign state (Article 61). And yet, by signing the agreement, the Republic agreed to define itself as a state "united with the Russian Federation by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan, and by the treaty on the demarcation of areas of responsibility and mutual delegation of powers between the organs of state power of the Russian Federation and the organs of state power of the Republic of Tatarstan."⁵⁰ The legal contradictions did not seem to trouble Yeltsin, who openly invited Tatarstan to take "as much

⁴⁸ Sergio Ortino, Mitja Žagar and Vojtech Mastny. *The Changing Faces of Federalism: Institutional Reconfiguration in Europe from East to West*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005, p.54.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Nikolai Sorokin. "Tatarstan president calls for treaty with Russia", *Tass*, 14 April 1992.

⁵⁰ Preamble, *Treaty between Russian Federation and Tatarstan, Russian and Commonwealth Business Law Report*, 21 March 1994, p. 4.

sovereignty as it could swallow.”⁵¹ To re-establish Russia’s Great Power status through the channel of functioning federalism, Yeltsin was ready to fulfill the Republic’s demands by turning a blind eye on any disparities between the two constitutions.

At the same time, Yeltsin determined that “the preferential treatment of Tatarstan would not be a general “model” for an overhaul of federal relations.”⁵² By convincing the Republic to stay, he demonstrated the extent of his generosity to the remaining deviants, while the federation’s territorial integrity remained intact. According to Monica Toft, the successful cooperation was possible because both Tatar and Russian demands were moderated: Tatar leaders chose to have more control over their economy than their identity, while the Federal government set precedent for the other ethnic regions: “In the Moscow-Tatar interaction, we find the Tatars representing their interests in divisible terms...Their weak demographic presence in the region precluded them from representing Tatarstan as the domain of Tatars only. Economics were at the heart of this conflict, not identity.”⁵³ Importantly, in 1989, 68% of all Tatars in Russia lived outside the Republic. Within Tatarstan, ethnic Tatars were a minority in which Tatars constituted 48.5% and ethnic Russians 43.5% of the Republic’s population.⁵⁴ These statistics manifest the long shared history of the two peoples.

When in 1552 Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan, the capital of the Khanate of Kazan (the legacy of the Mongol Empire), he ensured a strong visible presence of Moscow in the area. In

⁵¹ Quoted in Radik Batyrshin. “How much sovereignty has Tatarstan swallowed? Boris Yeltsin has decided to look for himself”, *Russian Press Digest*, 31 May 1994.

⁵² James Hughes. *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, p.46.

⁵³ Monica Duffy Toft. *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003, p.14.

⁵⁴ Toft, p.48

fact, in the nineteenth century, Kazan became the center of conversion to Orthodox Christianity and other aspects of Slavic colonization: “A working relationship between the two groups developed as the Russian Empire spread eastwards, with the Tatars increasingly functioning as middlemen between the Christian imperial center and the newly conquered Turkic people, facilitating economic and political transactions between the two.”⁵⁵ Consequently, the history of Russo-Tatar relations is one of a long, relatively peaceful co-existence, which explains Tatarstan’s willingness to cooperate in the nineties, and lays the foundation of “The Tatarstan Model”.

The term "The Tatarstan Model" was first mentioned in 1994 during the Republic’s President Mintimer Shaimiev's visit to Harvard University.⁵⁶ In "Qualified Sovereignty: The Tatarstan Model for Resolving Conflicting Loyalties," Alexei Zverev endeavored to define the major components of the model, which resulted in a sum of six factors: (1) Tatarstan’s landlocked position in the center of Russia with the Volga cutting across its territory; (2) the bi-ethnic composition of its population (Tatar/Russian); (3) the existence of a large Tatar diaspora outside Tatarstan. The three remaining factors emphasize the importance of almost 450 years of existence with Russia, the role of a highly experienced leader like Shaimiyev, and the economic component – the Republic’s oil and numerous industries.⁵⁷ In addition, Zverev argues that at the heart of the Tatarstan Model, one should see a peaceful resolution of conflicts between the Republic and the Center and the peaceful resolution of conflicts within the Republic itself.

⁵⁵ Toft, p. 46.

⁵⁶ Ravil Bukharaev. *The Model of Tatarstan: Under President Mintimer Shaimiev*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Alexei Zverev. "Qualified Sovereignty: The Tatarstan Model for Resolving Conflicting Loyalties," In *Conflicting Loyalties and the State in Post-Soviet Russia and Eurasia*, eds. Michael Waller, Bruno Coppieters and Alexei Malashenko. London: F. Cass, 1998, p.142.

Monica Toft, however, comprehends this geopolitical arrangement as a natural consequence of the Republic's geographic position, completely enclosed in Russian territory. Furthermore, her statistics showing Tatar ethnic dilution over time, presented earlier in the chapter, explained why Tatars who were dispersed across Russia did not believe in the idea of Tatarstan as the Tatars' true homeland. Thus, on the one hand, the Tatars chose to demand what they could legitimately demand in the context of their geographic and economic position, which resulted in a "qualified sovereignty." However, on the other hand, even though Tatarstan appeared to have gained more sovereignty than necessary or "safe" within a Great Power, Russia's position remained unwavering, largely manipulating the Tatar independence movement by making a few concessions.⁵⁸

Chechnya presents us with a different set of geographical and historical factors that stand in stark contrast to the reasons underlying Tatarstan's willingness to cooperate. Firstly, unlike Tatarstan, Chechnya inhabits the outskirts of Russia, and shares a border with Georgia and Azerbaijan. Secondly, while the territory of Tatarstan comprises a plain with less forest than any other parts of Russia, most of Chechnya is "an endless space of hills dressed in woods."⁵⁹ Starting from the first contact with the Russian Empire, Chechnya's resistance has been largely defined as armed guerrilla warfare in which the landscape was of crucial importance: "The Caucasus imposes two of the most difficult modes of war on an invading army: mountain and forest warfare... Both give enormous advantages to the defenders... Before any battle the

⁵⁸ Toft, p.45.

⁵⁹ John Baddeley. *The Rugged Flanks of the Caucasus* Vol.1. London, 1940, p.55.

invaders have to overcome nature.”⁶⁰ Thirdly, while in the case of Tatarstan “the centuries that have passed since the fall of the Tatar Khanates created a certain “void” in the history of national statehood,”⁶¹ Chechnya’s traumatic memories of the 1817–1864 Caucasian War and the mass deportation in 1944 were fairly ‘fresh’ in the minds of the local populace at the moment of the USSR’s dissolution. Lastly, according to the census of 1989, 65.7% of the population in the Chechen republic were Chechens and only 24.8% were Russians. At the same time, in 1989, Tatars made up 48.5% of the population in Tatarstan, while 43.3% of the population were Russians, producing an approximate parity between the two ethnic groups. In Chechnya, conversely, the local population outnumbered an ethnic Russian minority.⁶² In the course of our further discussion, these factors will help us understand the violent nature of the initial Chechen struggle for independence, but they will also reveal the paradoxical development of Chechnya at present, notably Ramzan Kadyrov’s loyalty towards the Kremlin.

⁶⁰ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnya and Dagestan*. Moscow, Kronpress, 1998, p.33.

⁶¹ Indus Tagirov. *The history of national statehood of the Tatar people and Tatarstan*. Kazan: Tatknigoizdat, 2000, p.148.

⁶² Valery Tishkov. *On the way to Census*. Moscow: Aviaizdat, 2003, p.503.

4. Yeltsin's and Putin's Presidencies, or How a Centrifuge Metamorphosed into a Tight Fist

The mission of welding a fragmented Russia into a unified state stems from the mosaic of historical periods and rulers in its vast territory over the past millennium. Stalin's overt praise of Ivan IV and Peter the Great, which was shocking at that time because of its potential pro-tsarist agenda, represented nothing more than a realization of historical continuities and recurrent goals in his and their rule: state building, unification, and enhanced control. Stalin actively emphasized the positive effects of state consolidation by these monarchs against the boyars and other forces of decentralization: "Not one country in the world can count on preserving its independence, and on serious economical and cultural growth, if it could not liberate itself from feudal fragmentation and from princely mess".⁶³ Even though Russia's third millennium opened with a new president filled with modernizing zeal, his pursuit of political order drew from the lessons of the past rulers who had emphasized the strength of the country.

Vladimir Putin made his agenda clear from his very first address to the Federal Assembly, which placed him within the historical constellation of state consolidators, with Ivan IV, Peter the Great and Stalin. In his first address to the Federal Assembly in 2000, Putin stressed that "competition for power" between the center and regional powers had been "destructive."⁶⁴ He urged the Assembly members that Russia must not remain a "weak state" and that "the only realistic choice" for it was to be a strong country: "We have to recognize that the state itself was

⁶³Erik van Ree. *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2002, p.145.

⁶⁴"Address of the President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation", The Kremlin, Moscow. 8 July 2000.

largely responsible for the growing strength of the unofficial, shadow economy, the spread of corruption and the flow of great quantities of money abroad... An inefficient state is the main reason for our long and deep crisis – I am absolutely convinced of this.”⁶⁵ Indeed, Putin’s direction emerged like a breath of fresh air after many troubled years of uncertainty about the country’s future, as “someone akin to a Jacobin French republican state builder: seeking to ensure the universal and equal application of the constitution and the laws, accompanied by the homogenisation of political space and the establishment of a stable set of political institutions.”⁶⁶ As often happens in games of power, while the phenomenon of decentralization embodied the deathbed of Yeltsin’s presidency, it became Putin’s springboard.

Yeltsin’s presidency can be characterized as an epoch of asymmetric federalism. In order to contain tensions among the Federation’s subjects, he was obliged to make many concessions to its twenty constituent republics. The Federal Treaty, signed in 1992, epitomized segmented regionalism because it selectively recognized the republics as sovereign entities within the Russian Federation and granted them the right to adopt their own constitutions as well as a vast autonomy over their internal budgets, foreign trade and, most importantly, natural resources. Thus, for instance, Article III of the Treaty granted republics the prerogative to co-determine with Moscow issues concerning the proprietorship, utilization rights, and disposal rights of land, mineral resources, and other natural resources including water within their own jurisdictions.⁶⁷ While Yeltsin’s allies were rendered free to enjoy unchecked power, the provinces remained dissatisfied with such obvious discrimination. Even though the text of the Federal Treaty was

⁶⁵ Richard Sakwa. *Putin: Russia's Choice*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008, p.90.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.91.

⁶⁷ James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse. *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*. London: F. Cass, 2002, p.47.

later excluded from the 1993 Constitution, which proclaimed the equality of all subjects of the Federation, the hierarchy outlined earlier remained intact.⁶⁸ Such a poorly managed process of power distribution between the center, the republics and the provinces proved to be a major barrier to consolidating Russia.

Furthermore, Yeltsin's strategy to garner political support from regional and republican leaders resulted in the "Parade of treaties," a series of bilateral treaties with federal units created in order to manage the center-periphery relationship. Tatarstan became the first federal subject who signed such a treaty with Moscow in February 1994, and eventually forty-six of eighty-nine federal units followed its example.⁶⁹ In the context of this official asymmetric structure, regional leaders gained the ability to exert influence over their jurisdictions and economic resources, thus transferring control over many federal structures. Police, tax collectors, judges, and other federal officials increasingly fell under the influence of local elites who buttressed their power with the help of 'self-made' constitutions. They habitually ignored federal legislation, which resulted in many instances of legal chaos such as Tatarstan's law on citizenship, according to which a resident of Tatarstan could hold Tatarstani citizenship without keeping Russian citizenship – an obvious contradiction with Russian Federal law.⁷⁰

When Vladimir Putin took office as president in May 2000, he introduced a wave of federal reforms, signaling a new stage of re-centralization. Legal distress dictated the introduction of Putin's initiative: out of twenty republics, Udmurt was the only one whose constitution fully

⁶⁸ Ferran Requejo Coll and Klaus-Jürgen Nagel. *Federalism Beyond Federations: Asymmetry and Processes of Resymmetrization in Europe*. Surrey, England: Ashgate Pub. Co, 2011, p.157.

⁶⁹ Timothy J. Colton. *Yeltsin: A Life*. New York: Basic Books, 2008, p.285

⁷⁰ Greme P. Herd. "Russia: Systemic Transformation or Federal Collapse? *Journal of Peace Research* 36, No.3, 1999, p.261.

complied with the 1993 Federal Constitution. Moreover, reports showed that 30 percent of local acts adopted by the republics violated federal laws.⁷¹ In order to ameliorate the status quo, Putin's federal reform attempted to homogenize the juridical space by appointing presidential representatives in the seven newly established federal districts, amend the structure of the Federation Council, and introduce the federal supervision of regional executives and parliaments. By April 2002, Putin nullified thirty of forty-two federal-regional bilateral treaties that had been signed with the forty-six regions.⁷² In addition, to cleanse the country's juridical space of the violations of federal laws, Putin created the mechanism of "federal intervention" that enabled the Russian president to remove regional chief executives or disband regional legislative bodies.⁷³

One of the most controversial aspects of Putin's statism was his desire to establish a 'dictatorship of law.' He employed this phrase for the first time at a conference of chairs of regional courts in 2000. The ambitious president lamented the fact that Russians appeared to have become subjects of different regions rather than citizens of a single country and emphasised that "the dictatorship of law is the only kind of dictatorship which we must obey," arguing that unchecked freedom "inevitably degenerates into chaos and lawlessness."⁷⁴ However, the dictatorial approach spilled over the legal sphere. The strategy became increasingly politicized due to Putin's decision to surround himself with his former KGB colleagues from St. Petersburg and bureaucrats from power ministries (*siloviki*) - elite leaders of the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) and the

⁷¹ Lilia Shevtsova. *Putin's Russia*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003, p.92.

⁷² Gordon A. Hahn. "The Past, Present, and Future of the Russian Federal State," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, No.3, 2003, p.349.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p.351.

⁷⁴ Sakwa, p.91.

Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR).⁷⁵ As estimated by the Russian sociologist Olga Kryshtanovskaya, the proportion of all the 4.5 million *siloviki* in the national and regional leadership rose from 3.7% under Gorbachev to 25.1% under Putin, and in the top leadership the percentages were 4.8 and 58.3 respectively.⁷⁶ These facts demonstrate how unwilling Putin was to work with political groups whose views differed from those espoused by the Kremlin. The members of Putin's *vertikal* of power not only curtailed the independence of regional elites but also suppressed independent mass media and limited the power of oligarchs, even imprisoning dissidents for dubious reasons (e.g. the case of Khodorkovsky).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ John Russell. *Chechnya - Russia's 'war on Terror'*. London: Routledge, 2007, p.40.

⁷⁶ Olga Kryshtanovskaya. "Rezhim Putina: liberalnaya militokratiya?" (Putin's regime: a liberal militocracy?), *Pro et Contra*, 7:4, Autumn 2002, p.162.

⁷⁷ Russell, p.17.

5. Chechnya as a Cornerstone of Putin's state building project

“And the tribes of those gorges are savage/Their god is freedom, their law –war”
M. Lermontov, 1843⁷⁸

When the famous Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov so eloquently captured the essence of the freedom-loving Chechen soul in his poem “Ismail-Bei” in 1843, he could not have imagined how strongly his words would resonate throughout the entire complex history of Russo-Chechen relations. When in 1817 Russian General Yermolov started erecting forts and sending expeditions to destroy Chechen villages and to burn crops, he should have known that conquering a people whose god is freedom is an arduous journey. Defeated by the Russian empire in the long 1817-1864 Caucasian war and ravaged by the deportations of 1944,⁷⁹ Chechnya could not miss the opportunities that opened up with Yeltsin's unstable rule. Consequently, the region plunged into two consecutive wars separated by two periods of *de facto* independence: 1991-1994 and 1996-1999.

At the beginning of the third millennium, Putin's reinforced statist aspirations altered the approach to managing the recurring conflict in Chechnya and attuned it with the mindset of *siloviki*, who believe in full conformity and for whom the ideas of Russia as a great power (*derzhavnost*) and Russia as a strong state (*gosudarstvennost*) are quintessential for the consolidation of federal governance. For instance, in his 2000 Address to the Federal Assembly, Putin characterized Chechnya as the supreme obstacle to keeping the country together: “Russia has received a fundamental challenge to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. It has come face

⁷⁸ Mikhail Lermontov. “Ismail Bei”, <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/text/izmail-bej/izmail-bej-1.htm>

⁷⁹ The “resettlement” began on February 23, 1944, and by March of that year, 496,460 Chechens were moved to Kazakh and Kirgiz SSSRs. (Valeri Tishkov. *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p.25.)

to face with a force striving to redraw the geopolitical map of the world.”⁸⁰ Since the concept of preserving territorial integrity has traditionally been one of the main features of strong governance, it is unsurprising that taming Chechnya became the cornerstone of Putin’s state building project, symbolizing the Kremlin’s control over its subjects.

Interestingly, after dealing with the Chechens for a long time, General Yermolov warned the Imperial Center: “There has been no precedent yet of someone being able to force a Chechen to fight his co-tribesmen; but the first step towards this has already been taken and it has been impressed upon them that this will always be demanded of them.”⁸¹ This statement echoes the official politics of ‘chechenisation’ (investing all power in the Kremlin’s chosen placeman) invented by Putin’s Administration 160 years later. These politics sought to change the nature of the conflict from “Russians against Chechens” to “Good Chechens against Rebellious Chechens” by collaborating with loyal Chechens, notably the Kadyrovs. Ahmad Kadyrov’s dark past as a mufti who proclaimed jihad against the Federation in the First Chechen war and his son’s being a warlord who gave up school at the age of sixteen to fight on the side of Chechen rebels evoked concerns about the limits of their contribution to strengthening the Russian state. Indeed, the Western imagination strongly links evil, disorder, and failing states with the phenomenon of warlords, be it in Somalia or Afghanistan. However, it is never too late to challenge the negative connotations embedded in this concept in order to evaluate to what extent a warlord can in fact be a ‘peacelord’, a figure who can help consolidate the state in places where the central government

⁸⁰ “Address of the President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation”, The Kremlin, Moscow. 8 July 2000.

⁸¹ Moshe Gammer. *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule*, London: Hurst, 2006, p. 39.

lacks support from the local population or simply does not understand the traditional ways of balancing local undercurrents of power.

Interestingly, despite Western fellow feelings toward Germany, the German Emperor was also classified as a “warlord.” The explanation for this is quite simple: in times of war, he was the commander-in-chief of all troops of the empire, which was expressed in his title “Kriegsherr.” As a result, while the literal translation of “Kriegsherr” is “Warlord”, in German it implies that the Emperor received this title only in war, while in peace he was obliged to share his power with the executives of other German States of the Empire.⁸² This example invites us to reflect more thoroughly on our automatic demonization of warlords. Perhaps, we should perceive a warlord as a temporary local *kriegsherr* who comes to fill in the vacuum of state governance in times of trouble and, given his loyalty towards the center, helps strengthen the state. Indeed, the possibility of finding a person with whom the local populace can identify and who knows the intricate traditions of his kinsmen represents a powerful tool that can be used by large states to maintain their territorial integrity, while fulfilling the task of keeping everyone satisfied. Is that what Putin had in mind while making the decision to ‘lease’ Chechnya to the Kadyrovs in order to put an end to the recurring conflict?

⁸² Edmund Robert Otto von Mach. *What Germany Wants*. Boston: Little, Brown, and company, 1914, p.23.

6. The Lesser of Two Evils

«There are two people who horrify people in Chechnya - Shamil Basayev and Ramzan Kadyrov»⁸³

The beginning of Putin's search for a political solution to the Chechen dilemma was quite predictable. It consisted of selecting a relatively legitimate local leader to be President - or rather, a submissive puppet. Akhmad Kadyrov emerged as a product of a major conflict between secular nationalist forces and radical Islamist groups that reached its apogee after the First Chechen War. The influence of the Salafis (radical religious groups) grew steadily after 1996 while nationalism was struggling to remain the leading force of Chechnya's march towards independence. Consequently, even though initially Islam played a relatively insignificant role in the separatist movement, the Chechen nationalist movement switched from being largely secular to being primarily religious. Akhmad Kadyrov was a Sufi Muslim and did not identify strongly with the radicals, even though, ironically, after becoming the Mufti of Chechnya, he agreed to bless the jihad against the Russian state in 1995. Later, Salafis criticized him for being too lenient, which was unacceptable in their "real and pure Islam project". As a result, a conflict developed between the Sufi and Salafi Muslims and eventually Akhmad Kadyrov chose to align himself with the Russian leadership and to reinforce Sufi dominance in Chechnya: "Kadyrov-senior was a "pragmatic nationalist" and a "pragmatic Sufi" not committed to a romantic ideal of Chechen independence, but rather used nationalist appeals as a political instrument."⁸⁴

⁸³Tatyana Lokshina. "There are two people who horrify people in Chechnya - Shamil Basayev and Ramzan Kadyrov," *Caucasus Times* 22.05.2006 <http://www.caucasustimes.com/article.asp?id=9067>

⁸⁴ Presentation by Sergey Markedonov for "Chechnya in Russia and Russia in Chechnya: 20 Years after the Revolution" in Grozny" Center for Strategic and International Studies Russia and Eurasia Program 13.09. 2011. Event summary retrieved at csis.org/files/attachments/Event_Summary.pdf

Unfortunately for the Kremlin, Akhmad Kadyrov was not an efficient puppet: he was despised as a corrupt and cold-hearted politician who quarreled with the political partners and civil administrators Moscow foisted on him. Kadyrov preferred to rely on his relatives and his own security force, led by his son Ramzan.⁸⁵ The politics of chechenization seemed to bear no positive result, since the rebels were raging across the country, flooding the media with Chechnya-related news of instabilities. In October 2002, Chechen rebels seized the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow and held about 800 people hostage, demanding the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya and an end to the Second Chechen War. Most of the rebels along with around 120 hostages were killed when Russian security forces stormed the building. It is important to underline the symbolic message of the performance that people had come to see that evening: *Nord-Ost*, a nationalist musical theatre production which, as its composer Georgi Vasiliev put it “was a sort of protest against tarnishing our history, against not believing in your own strength... a story that elevates us and our history... that enables us to look at our history not as the history of class struggle, wars, and repressions, but a history of people and personal achievements.”⁸⁶ This celebration of the Russian spirit, so in tune with Putin’s unfolding statism, became a national tragedy for the Russian people and a personal dilemma for their President, who found himself in direct confrontation with Shamil Basayev, whose organization Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs (RSRSBCM) claimed responsibility for the siege.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Georgi M. Derluguian. *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.255.

⁸⁶ Peter Baker and Susan Glasser. *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution*. New York: Scribner, 2005, p.158.

⁸⁷ “Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1875 (2009) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities,”

<http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQI10703E.shtml>

After the incursion into Dagestan in 1999, Basayev repeatedly threatened to attack Russian cities and boasted about training an army of “Black Widows” (Chechen female suicide bombers) by himself. Ironically, the rebel was named after famous warrior Imam Shamil, who led the mountain tribes' resistance to Tsarist armies in the nineteenth Century. Echoing the historical legend, Basayev famously said that “Russia is the last empire: it is built on blood.”⁸⁸ Among the attacks for which he claimed responsibility, one also finds the February 2004 bomb explosion inside a Moscow subway car during morning rush hour, which took the lives of more than thirty-nine people.⁸⁹ Basayev took revenge on the ‘traitor’ Akhmad Kadyrov by organizing a bomb explosion on May 9, 2004, two days after Kadyrov gained another term as president, at Grozny’s Dinamo Stadium, where the Chechen leader and a number of other top Chechen and Russian officials watched the World War II Victory Day celebration. Basayev published a message on the Chechen website Kavkaz Center, in which he called the murders “Retribution”, and warned that Putin and his Prime Minister Fradkov would soon meet a similar end.⁹⁰

Despite the magnitude of the threat, the Kremlin did not revise its politics in Chechnya and chose another person to succeed Akhmad Kadyrov – Alou Alkhanov, who had no popular base and was criticized by many observers as the pawn of the government: “The big question ... is whether Mr Alkhanov will be able to run the war-ravaged region at least as well as his predecessor ... Mr Alkhanov obviously lacks Mr Kadyrov's charisma and influence ... [and] has no real power base of his own. He also has little influence over Chechen rebel leaders, and

⁸⁸ “Obituary: Shamil Basayev,” BBC News 10.09.2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4727935.stm>

⁸⁹ Carl Schreck and Nabi Abdullaev. “Warlord Leaves a Trail of Blood,” *The Moscow Times* 11.09.2006 <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/warlord-leaves-a-trail-of-blood/203848.html>

⁹⁰ John Giduck. *Terror at Beslan: A Russian Tragedy with Lessons for America's Schools*. Archangel Group, 2005, p.84.

therefore stands little chance of convincing them to surrender their weapons.”⁹¹ The election of the Kremlin-backed leader took place the weekend before the Beslan school hostage crisis on September 1, 2004, and probably motivated the tragedy that took away the lives of more than 330 people, many of them children. The Beslan Crisis marks a turning point when Putin realized that he must amend his politics in Chechnya, or he risked destroying his vision of a stronger Russia under the pressure from Chechen extremists and their leader Shamil Basayev.

Described as “an astonishingly frank self-portrait”, the book *Putin ot pervogo litsa (Putin in the First Person, 2000)* includes interviews with the former President, his wife, two daughters, a former secretary, friends, and teachers.⁹² The informal setting of the interviews sheds light on a number of personal fears and concerns that lingered in Putin’s mind longer than he expected: “If we don’t stop the extremists now, then some time later we’ll be faced with another Yugoslavia in the entire territory of Russia, the *Yugoslavization* of Russia...First Dagestan will be overrun. Then the entire Caucasus would separate; that’s clear. Dagestan, Ingushetia, and then up the Volga River to Bashkortan and Tatarstan. This means advancing right into the middle of the country.” Four years later, the President delivered a speech acknowledging the failure of his first term, marked by the Beslan school siege: “We have to admit that we failed to recognize the complexity and danger of the processes going on in our own country and the world as a whole. At any rate, we failed to react to them adequately. We demonstrated weakness, and the weak are beaten. Some want to tear off a big chunk of our country. Others help them to do it.”⁹³ In the same address, Putin indicated that Beslan became a turning point in his approach to Chechnya:

⁹¹ “Responsibility lies with Putin,” (a quote from the Moscow Times editorial) *The Guardian* 01.09.2004 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/sep/01/chechnya.russia>

⁹² Vladimir Putin, Natalia Gevorkian, Natalia Timakova and Catherine A. Fitzpatrick. *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President Vladimir Putin*. New York: Public Affairs, 2000.

⁹³ “Putin Tells the Russians: 'We Shall Be Stronger',” (a transcript of Putin's speech) *The New York Times* 05.09.2004 <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/05/international/europe/05rtext.html>

“First, in the near future, a complex of measures aimed at strengthening the unity of our country will be prepared. Second, I consider it necessary to create a new system of forces and means for exercising control over the situation in the North Caucasus. Third, it is necessary to create an effective crisis management system, including entirely new approaches to the work of law enforcement agencies.”⁹⁴ The only fact that the President excluded was that he had already found a new representative to “create a new system of forces and means” – Ramzan Kadyrov, who at that time was heading the Chechen President’s security unit known as SB (*sluzhba bezopasnosti*), or *kadyrovtsy*. Choosing between two warlords, Basayev and Kadyrov Junior, Putin invested his trust and money into the lesser of two evils.

⁹⁴ “Putin Tells the Russians: 'We Shall Be Stronger',” (a transcript of Putin's speech) *The New York Times* 05.09.2004 <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/05/international/europe/05rtext.html>

7. Kadyrov and Internal Governance: Chechen against Chechen

*“No one trusts anyone else anymore, because Putin had a stroke of genius: he let Ramzan Kadyrov do the dirty work. Now it’s Chechen against Chechen”*⁹⁵

Ramzan Kadyrov emerged on the horizon as “a traitor to Chechen nationalism and a man who had been so insignificant during the first years of fighting that he had to borrow gas money for his car.”⁹⁶ Surprisingly, this “ill-prepared thug” eventually managed to monopolize power over Chechen security forces in the territory. When he ascended to power, every public speech was a shameful failure; his infamous public appearance in training clothes for audiences with Putin elicited criticism and laughter. However, very shortly R. Kadyrov invaded the world of media and drastically changed the headlines’ content: “Ramzan Kadyrov inspected a police station; Ramzan Kadyrov visited a school and children hung around his neck; Ramzan Kadyrov visited a hospital, talked to patients and asked them whether he could help.”⁹⁷ In spite of his deficient education, Kadyrov knew how to operate within the Chechen clan network, which explains a lot of his strategic success and his popularity in the eyes of the local population. The great number of *teips* in Chechnya (more than 150) required a subtle way of balancing the power among them, a process Kadyrov had mastered.

The Chechens are a tight-knit society based on extended families, or “*teips*” headed by village elders. On the eve of the first Russian invasion in 1994, there was a total of 7,000 village

⁹⁵ Emma Gilligan. *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, p.88

⁹⁶ Christopher Chivers. “In Chechnya, a former warlord on the rise - Europe - International Herald Tribune” *The New York Times*, 14.09.2006

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/14/world/europe/14iht-chechen.2204798.html?pagewanted=all>

⁹⁷ Tatyana Lokshina. “There are two people who horrify people in Chechnya - Shamil Basayev and Ramzan Kadyrov,” *Caucasus Times* 22.05.2006 <http://www.caucasustimes.com/article.asp?id=9067>

elders in Chechnya who had made the Parliament building in Grozny their headquarters.⁹⁸ This period can be characterized as the apogee of their power. The Council of Elders actively militated against one-man rule, which at that point was practiced by Dudaev, because “the ethnic tradition of Chechnya is the inter-clan consent...on the approximately equal representation in power structure. (According to the Council) Chechnya could only be a parliamentary republic with a parliament elected from single-mandate constituencies parceled out according to clan traditions.”⁹⁹ Certainly, the Kremlin never planned to allow for the existence of such a clan-based Republic within its vast realm. The Center had to remodel this alternative hierarchical order to adapt it to the general Moscow-vertical scheme, and the Benoi clan became the chosen recipient of power. Akhmad and Ramzan Kadyrov, as well as Alu Alkhanov, who was the president of Chechnya while Ramzan was waiting to reach the minimal legitimate age of 30, all belong to this *teip*, which is now often referred to as the Kadyrov clan. Importantly, since the omnipotence of any clan and any warlord was perceived as impossible in the context of the complex social network, in the beginning of this affair, “everyone knew that Akhmad Kadyrov was a doomed man. He knew it, too, as if he were walking a tightrope. He was threatened fighting Moscow, and he was threatened even more fighting his old comrades-in-arms.”¹⁰⁰ Akhmad Kadyrov’s presidency lasted less than a year: it was his son Ramzan who had to face all the risks of dealing with the other clans and eliminating potential rivals.

⁹⁸ John Dunlop. *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 147.

⁹⁹ Khamid Delmayev. “Will Chechnya Become a Clan-Governed Republic?”, *Moscow News*, 34, 1-7 September 1995, p.3.

¹⁰⁰ Lilia Shevtsova. *Putin's Russia*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, p.284.

Granted the extensive support and sympathy of Putin after the Beslan school siege, Ramzan Kadyrov did not have to worry about fighting Moscow – that war ended when his father attained the Presidency. Ramzan could spend all of his energy and resources on consolidating the supremacy of his clan: “In theory, the person appointed would have an unshakeable loyalty to the federal center and not to the dominant clan. In practice, though, a person that adapted to the situation in a senior post in Chechnya became not so much an instrument of the Kremlin but an advocate for the ruling clan.”¹⁰¹ Undoubtedly, this new arrangement destabilized the Chechen traditional law system, used for centuries to regulate everyday life. The unwritten rules supported by the clan system dictate everything from prohibition of clan intermarriages, blood feud, settlement of clans throughout territories to stealing sheep. But a growing number of people worry about Ramzan Kadyrov’s detrimental modification of the intricate power balance because his men “act outside both traditional and state laws, depriving locals of any protection against crime.”¹⁰²

To concentrate all power in his hands, Ramzan Kadyrov engaged in violent power struggles with anyone who questioned his military authority, notably with such influential Chechen warlords as the Yamadayev brothers, Said-Magomed Kakiev and Movladi Baisarov. For Chechnya’s other warlords, his legitimized grip on power and the backing from Moscow “meant the end of the road: Kadyrov was ruthless with enemies and rivals alike.”¹⁰³ Movladi Baisarov was a field-commander who switched over to the federal side in 2000 along with

¹⁰¹ Mark Galeotti. *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Pub. Co, 2010, p.97.

¹⁰² Gregory Feifer. “Traditional Law System Threatened, Chechens Say”, NPR, August 1, 2006. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5596201>

¹⁰³ Masha Gessen. *The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2012, p.224.

Akhmad Kadyrov, who later put Baisarov in charge of his security service. After the assassination of Akhmat Kadyrov in 2004, his son Ramzan reorganized presidential security – Baisarov left the service and formed the *Gorets* security unit, subordinated to the operational-coordination department of the Federal Security Service (FSB) for the North Caucasus. Unwilling to share his grip on power, Kadyrov perceived Baisarov's refusal to obey as a threat reinforced by *Gorets*'s leader's constant critical remarks about the Chechen leader. For instance, in October 2006, Baisarov gave an interview to the Moscow News, in which he denounced Kadyrov as a "medieval tyrant."¹⁰⁴ Kadyrov's response was prompt: in November, Baisarov was gunned down in Moscow by a team of Chechen policemen, headed by Sultan Rashaev. Russian prosecutors promptly judged the actions as "appropriate" while "Rashaev, incidentally, was the chief bodyguard of Chechnya's First Deputy Prime Minister, Adam Demilkhanov, a known confidante of Kadyrov's."¹⁰⁵ To Kadyrov's satisfaction, the *Gorets* unit was dissolved and its fighters were re-integrated within various Chechen Interior Ministry units.

As for the Yamadayev brothers and Said-Magomed Kakiev, they commanded the only ethnic Chechen battalions in the structure of the Russian Ministry of Defence – *Vostok* and *Zapad* – that were not under the control of the Chechen government. The battalions "Zapad" were created in 2003 under the supervision of GRU (Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravleniye - Main Intelligence Directorate). Kakiev's *Zapad* was famously pro-Russian and opposed the separatist leaders Dzhokhar Dudaev and Aslan Maskhadov. In stark contrast, the Yamadaevs' *Vostok* was

¹⁰⁴ Kevin Leahy. "Kadyrov as Russia's Regional Gendarme: a boon for Chechnya's rebel movement?" *Central Asia – Caucasus Institute Analyst*, November 29, 2006.

<http://www.cacianalyst.org/newsite/?q=node/4332/print>

¹⁰⁵ Kevin Leahy. "The Controversial Rise of Chechnya's Young President Ramzan Kadyrov," *World Politics Review*, March 28, 2007, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/662/the-controversial-rise-of-chechnyas-young-president-ramzan-kadyrov>

comprised of former rebels who switched to the Russian side during the second military campaign. In light of their faithfulness and military efficiency, for the first time in the modern history of Russia, three brothers from the same family (the Yamadaev family) were decorated with the Hero of Russia medals.¹⁰⁶ In addition to Moscow's admiration of their courage, the brother's controlled Gudermes – the city that stands on the railroad junction between Rostov-on-Don, Baku, Astrakhan, and Mozdok, making it a key trade center. Sulim Yamadaev, a Hero of Russia and the commander of *Vostok*, embodied the family's success and was the target of Ramzan Kadyrov's rage. The animosity between Kadyrov and Sulim Yamadayev exploded in mid-April 2008, when Vostok fighters under the command of the youngest of the Yamadayev brothers, Badrudi, did not yield the right of way to Kadyrov's motorcade and engaged in a shoot-out with members of Kadyrov's personal guard, which resulted in several deaths.¹⁰⁷ In revenge, the eldest Yamadayev brother, Ruslan, a former State Duma deputy, was killed in Moscow 5 months later. Sulim fled Russia and settled down in Dubai, but in March 2009 Adam Delimkhanov, Kadyrov's right-hand man, assassinated him.¹⁰⁸

Hence, having “pacified” the Yamadaevs, Kadyrov disbanded their unit on counts of forced disappearance, kidnapping, murder, and even patricide in 2004.¹⁰⁹ The Yamadaev family and the Kadyrov family share a long history of bloody feud; only Kakiev, who remained on the sidelines and never questioned Kadyrov's power, survived. In 2008, Kadyrov abolished both

¹⁰⁶ Mairbek Vatchagaev. “The Mysterious Assassination of Sulim Yamadaev,” The Jamestown Foundation, April 17, 2009, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34878

¹⁰⁷ “Who Wanted to Kill Sulim Yamadaev, and Why?,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, April 01, 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Who_Wanted_To_Kill_Sulim_Yamadayev_and_Why/1566142.html

¹⁰⁸ “Dubai Police Accuse Chechen Vice-PM over Yamadayev Murder,” *The Telegraph*, April 05, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/dubai/5111035/Dubai-police-accuse-Chechen-vice-pm-over-Sulim-Yamadayev-murder.html>

¹⁰⁹ Muslim Ibragimov. “Residents of Chechnya Rally in front of “Vostok” Battalion Base,” *Caucasian Knot*, June 12, 2008, <http://rostov.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/7726>

battalions.¹¹⁰ After defeating these major rival forces, Kadyrov has remained unchallenged. As Stanislav Belkovskiy commented, “Kadyrov’s clan has real power, which is being used in its own interests... Kadyrov’s clan is de facto not under Kremlin’s control. In fact, nobody knows what is now going on in Chechnya. Kadyrov’s people monopolized the sphere of administration in the republic, and the federal center is not only uninvolved in the process of administration, but also does not receive any information about the real state of affairs. In a sense, Chechnya is already separated from Russia.”¹¹¹ The lack of knowledge about the circumstances surrounding the murder of Natalia Estemirova, a Russian civil rights activist, corroborates this claim.¹¹² Estemirova was an award-winning activist who documented hundreds of cases of abuse in Chechnya. Importantly, her work for the Russian human rights group “Memorial” focused on alleged human rights violations by government-backed security forces, which made her a *persona non grata* in the eyes of Ramzan Kadyrov. In 2008, he requested to meet Estemirova in person and chastised her for her work. According to the head of Memorial Oleg Orlov, Kadyrov openly threatened Estemirova by confessing his readiness to kill her: “Yes, my hands are up to the elbows in blood. And I am not ashamed of that. I will kill and kill bad people.”¹¹³ Given the Chechen leader’s many threats, there was little doubt about the person behind the murder.

However, the Kremlin’s inadequate reaction to the assassination appalled many Russian and international human rights activists. While Dmitry Medvedev “expressed indignation at this murder and ordered the head of the prosecutor general's investigative committee ... to take all

¹¹⁰ Dzhambulat Are. “Yamadayeys expelled from Chechnya,” *Prague Watchdog*, November 10, 2008, <http://www.watchdog.cz/?show=000000-000004-000001-000248&lang=1>

¹¹¹ Stanislav Belkovsky. “Putin and the Caucasus”, *Caucasus Times*, April 18, 2006, <http://www.caucasustimes.com/article.asp?id=8598>

¹¹² Notably, the killings of Stanislav Markelov in 2009 and Anna Politkovskaya in 2007.

¹¹³ Luke Harding. “Who shot Natalia Estemirova?”, *The Guardian*, July 22, 2009 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/23/chechnya-natalia-estemirova>

necessary steps to investigate the killing,”¹¹⁴ he rejected all claims about Kadyrov’s implication in the crime. Germany’s chancellor Angela Merkel and a number of other public figures in the US and the EU condemned the crime as “outrageous” and urged Russia to clarify the circumstances surrounding it.¹¹⁵ Despite the international pressure to investigate Kadyrov’s involvement, Medvedev said all the theories accusing the Chechen leader aimed to discredit the cooperation between Moscow and Grozny. But could it not also be a sign of the Kremlin’s inability to control the actions of Kadyrov, who knows he would remain unpunished for any crime? Moreover, the halo of sanctity painted by Medvedev above Kadyrov’s head exhibits Moscow’s unwillingness to reveal to the outside world the dark side of the power bargain between the Center and the Republic: Kadyrov received the task of creating the illusion of a peaceful, flourishing Chechnya by any means necessary, which explains his use of violence beyond the Kremlin’s control.

¹¹⁴ “Medvedev ‘indignant’ at Estemirova death,” *Brisbane Times*, July 16, 2009

¹¹⁵ Luke Harding. “Dimitry Medvedev rejects claim Chechen leader ordered killing”, *The Guardian*, July 16, 2009 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/16/natalia-estemirova-killing-russia-chechnya>

8. Chechenization, or Kadyrovization?

“From now on, April 16 will be marked as a national holiday”

In the military domain, Putin’s political project of «chechenisation» as the pivot of the Republic’s normalization program consisted of transferring the responsibility for the anti-terrorist operation (KTO) from the Russian Federal Army to the local Chechen security forces. The end of the KTO in April 16, 2009 formalized Moscow’s military dependence on Ramzan Kadyrov. Sergey Markedonov, one of Moscow’s most famous commentators on the North Caucasus, noted that the end of the operation was “not so much a demonstration of the successes of the (federal) government in the field of the struggle with terrorism as the definition (more or less formal) of the arrangement of forces which had come into existence in Chechnya, one in which radical autonomy was purchased by declarations of loyalty.”¹¹⁶ Indeed, the republic’s authorities consider the end of the operation the main achievement of the last decade due to the reversed balance of power it introduced and consolidated, underscoring Ramzan Kadyrov’s unmasked joy when he told the Chechen media that “from now on, April 16 will be marked as a national holiday.”¹¹⁷ In reality, ending the KTO meant that the Kremlin had “crowned Ramzan Kadyrov to reign in the region and given him total freedom as the rightful and personal master of Chechnya.”¹¹⁸ This enabled the Chechen government to establish effective customs posts, and reduce the number of federal troops in the Republic, leaving public order and law enforcement completely in the hands of Kadyrov.

¹¹⁶ Paul Globe. “Chechnya Less Peaceful Since Russian Ended ‘Counter-Terrorist Operation,’” *Eurasia Review* 15.04.2010 <http://www.eurasiareview.com/15042010-chechnya-less-peaceful-since-russian-ended-%E2%80%98counter-terrorist-operation%E2%80%99/>

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Arkady Babchenko. “Russia’s decision to pull out of Chechnya is overdue and overplayed,” 16.04.2009 *The Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/16/chechnya-russia-analysis>

The gradual redistribution of power in Chechnya has been accompanied by a reduction of the federal military staff stationed in the Republic. In 2003, the number of federal security forces present in Chechnya reached its maximum of 120,000 soldiers.¹¹⁹ Between 2004-2005, this number decreased to 80,000 men. The number of federal soldiers remained the same – around 40,000 – from 2005 until the end of the KTO in 2009, which caused the withdrawal of 20,000 federal troops. However, for those recruited to do their military service in Chechnya, the reduction in number does not mean much – the horror continues due to a clear antagonism between Kadyrov’s forces and the federal soldiers. Afraid to go outside of their military bases, federals live like hostages. The main base of Khankala comprises the only island in the Chechen territory beyond Kadyrov’s control. The soldiers of the other two bases (Borzoi and Chali) are neither as numerous nor as powerful.

Moreover, the decree from Oct 1, 2008 “Regarding the organization of the conscription of citizens born between 1981-1990” signed by Kadyrov, reinforces this antagonism. The first young men were summoned under the flag of Chechnya in August 2010. This process marks the development of an independent Chechen army in the midst of the Russian Federation. The recruited complete their military services in two security forces - Iug and Sever, controlled by the Chechen MVD and created in 2006 to take over from Kadyrov’s ATCs. *De facto*, Ramzan Kadyrov controls all four forces, making the Chechen army resemble the leader’s personal possession.¹²⁰ As the tables below show, all units controlled by the federal center and by the

¹¹⁹ Information from this section was obtained during an interview with Maerbek Vachagayev, A. Mashadov’s former spokesperson (La cour nationale du droit d’asile, Paris, 09.08.2012).

¹²⁰ « Кадыров готовит армию,» <http://www.utro.ru/articles/2008/10/15/774912.shtml> 15.10.2008.; « В Чечне прошел призыв на военную службу » <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/172796/>

Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) found themselves under the watchful gaze of the Chechen warlord.

Figure 2: Chechen security forces controlled by republican authorities

Security force	Year of creation	Leader(s)	Function
1. Security service of Akhmad Kadyrov (<i>sluzhba bezopastnosti</i> (SB), or <i>kadyrovtsy</i>)	2001, dismissed in 2006	Ramzan Kadyrov, Ruslan Alkhanov	Created as a personal army of the head of the Chechen Administration. Certain parts of SB were integrated as smaller units into the official structures of the Chechen Ministry of the Interior during 2004 - 2006. This created legal basis for financing their activities. The majority of SB were amnestied <i>boeviki</i> .
2. ATC (anti-terrorist center)	2005, dismissed in 2006	Muslim Ilyasov	Created to replace SB. After its dismissal, the agents were transferred into the battalions South and North that from 2008 are under R. Kadyrov's control. After its closure, the head Muslim Ilyasov became the leader of the battalion North.
3. PPSM-2 (second patrolling regiment named after Akhmad Kadyrov)	2004	Ibrahim Dadaiev, Vahit Usmaev	Despite being created in order to maintain order in Chechen cities, the PPSM-2 dedicated its activities to anti-terrorist operations. It includes a big number of ex-members of the SB. Described by R. Kadyrov as the cradle of the best leaders of the Ministry of the Interior.
4. PPSM-1	2004	Ibrahim Dadaiev	Created as an auxiliary unit to help PPSM-2. Its leader Ibrahim Dudaev is Kadyrov's placeman who was heading the PPSM-2 in 2004.

5. Neftepolk	2001	Cherip Delimkhanov, Adam Delimkhanov	Created as a regiment of surveillance of petroleum infrastructure, this security force often participates in anti-terrorist operations. The majority of its members are former <i>boeviki</i> . Its leader Cherip Delimkhanov is the successor of Adam Delimkhanov, R. Kadyrov's right hand.
6. OMON	2000	Alikhan Tsakaev, Ruslan Alhanov, Musa Gazimagomadov	Created as one of the original branches of the MVD for the anti-terrorist activities. OMON has a big number of former SB members. After the death of Musa Gazimadov who tried to manage this force independently, nothing prevents R. Kadyrov from controlling this force.
7. ROVD	Different in every district	Different in every district	Created as local police offices in each district. The majority of most ROVD are appointed by R. Kadyrov in order to ensure their full collaboration with the rest of security forces.

Figure 3: Security forces controlled by federal authorities

Security force	Year of creation	Leader(s)	Function
1. Vostok (East)	2002	Sulim Yamadaev	Created by GRU (Glavnoe Razvedyvatelnoe Upravlenie) as a special monoethnic Chechen battalion, attached to the 42 nd division of motorized infantry. This unity is located in Gudermes, a city that was fully controlled by the Yamadaev family – R. Kadyrov’s main rivals. The unity employed exclusively amnestied <i>boeviki</i> . In 2008, after the elimination of S. Yamadaev, the battalion Vostok was dissolved.
2. Zapad (West)	2002	Said-Magomed Kakiev	Similarly to Vostok, Zapad is GRU’s creation that depended on the 42 nd motorized infantry division. The battalion operates close to the western border. Kakiev refused to recruit former <i>boeviki</i> , which made him fall out of R. Kadyrov’s favor. In 2008, after the dismissal of Kakiev, Zapad was dissolved.
3. Sever (North)	2006	Alimbek Delimkhanov	Both battalions belong to the Chechen MVD. They were created to follow the Anti-terrorist centers’ mission and are now controlled by R. Kadyrov. Their function remains the same – anti-terrorist operations and assistance to other security forces to maintain social order.
4. Iug (South)	2006	Anzor Magomadov	

<p>5. Gorets</p>	<p>1999, dismissed in 2006</p>	<p>Movladi Baisarov</p>	<p>Created as a special intervention group under the control of FSB. Movladi Baisarov was one of R. Kadyrov's main rivals who escaped to Moscow and started revealing the crimes committed by the Chechen leader. Gorets was dismissed after the assassination of Baisarov in November 2006.</p>
<p>6. ORB-2 (Operativno-razysknoe buro 2)</p>	<p>2002</p>	<p>Isa Surguev</p>	<p>Created to effectuate anti-terrorist operations under the control of the main office of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. The offices of ORB-2 are in Grozny and Urus-Martan. The former head of this force, Ahmed Khasanbekov, was a major rival of R. Kadyrov who was constantly contesting the Chechen leader's monopoly on the Republic's security forces. The new leader Isa Surguev is a man of R. Kadyrov.</p>

9. Defining Winners and Losers: Who Owns the Laurel Wreath?

Even among the many concerns and questions about the true face of the Russian state and its treatment of the federal subjects, the Chechen wars remain surrounded by conceptual ambiguity. For instance, the Kremlin was unwilling to recognize the The Khasav-Yurt Accord signed by Lebed and Maskhadov in August 1996 as Russia's defeat even though it demanded the withdrawal of all federal forces from Chechnya, thus giving the Republic *de-facto* independence. Moreover, the theoretical existence of the entire second Chechen War remains unclear since in the Kremlin's terms, it was merely a "counter-terrorist operation." It seems that Moscow purposefully avoids the need to proclaim the victor: it would be too shameful to admit losing in the First Chechen War and too undiplomatic to admit crushing the Chechens in the Second War. Nevertheless, the government usually portrays the events that unfolded under Putin's presidency as a success story of how he tamed the unconquerable North Caucasus. However, does the mere preservation of territorial integrity and the placement of a seemingly loyal warlord on top of the local power hierarchy signify a true victory? The choice of the winner is a more nuanced matter, and, in light of many facts, one can say that Chechnya should receive the second champion's laurel wreath as well.

Russian society has survived a great number of national tragedies caused by terrorist operations, which seems to have paralyzed its ability to critically reflect on the actions of the Kremlin in the North Caucasus. The permanent state of panic among the Russian populace enabled Moscow to curb the threats emanating from the North Caucasus by any means possible. At the end of Putin's second term, however, an increasing number of politicians, analysts, and writers started questioning and criticizing the Kremlin. In fact, Andrei Piontkovsky, a prominent

Russian writer and analyst, who famously concluded that “Russia has effectively lost the war... Moreover, Russia pays reparations as the losing side.”¹²¹ His remark emphasizes the dubious status of the “counter-terrorist operation” as a successfully implemented project because the figures suggest a completely different conclusion to the conflict. In recent years, Moscow has financed more than 90% of Chechnya’s budget. According to the Accounting Chamber of the Russian Federation, “the share of inter-budget transfers per capita in the North Caucasus (with the exception of [the Russian city of] Stavropol) is almost twice that of the all-Russian average. Last year, the federal center allocated 41,000 rubles per person in Chechnya, 20,000 in Ingushetia, 17,000 in Daghestan, and 13,000 to Kabardino-Balkaria.”¹²² In 2010, the Kremlin gave 129 billion rubles (\$4.2 billion) to the region, of which more than 40 percent went to Chechnya and the rest was divided among the other five republics of the North Caucasus Federal District. To put it in a larger perspective, the share of federal funds in the budget of Moscow is 3.6%, in Bashkiria 19%, and in the Rostov district 34%.¹²³

Moreover, in April 2011, Kadyrov demanded an additional \$18 billion, which is nearly 10% of the total budget expenditure for all the Russian regions.¹²⁴ According to his arguments, Kadyrov needs the money to continue funding a peaceful transformation of the region, especially improving the infrastructure. Since the federal expenditure on the North Caucasus, especially on Chechnya, is commonly classified as necessary to repair the Republic after the destruction caused

¹²¹ Michael Schwartz. “Russian Anger Grows Over Chechnya Subsidies,” *The New York Times*, 8/10/2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/09/world/europe/chechnyas-costs-stir-anger-as-russia-approaches-elections.html?pagewanted=all>

¹²² Paul Goble. “Russia: Colonial Rule Of North Caucasus Approaching End, Analyst Says,” *Eurasia Review*, 28/03/2011 <http://www.eurasiareview.com/28032011-russia-colonial-rule-of-north-caucasus-approaching-end-analyst-says-analysis/>

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Tom Washington. “\$18 billion to transform Chechnya,” *The Moscow News*, 16/06/2011 <http://themoscownews.com/russia/20110616/188758537.html>

by two wars, the federal government seriously considers Kadyrov's unimaginable demands, which upsets many tax payers. "The North Caucasus is not ballast, but one of the pearls of Russia... Through it, we affirm and defend a significant portion of our geopolitical interests in this part of the world. For us this is very important" – explained Vladimir Putin in August 2011 when the dissatisfied voices of the public became louder.¹²⁵ Despite his attempts to justify pumping large amounts of money into the North Caucasus, a variety of phrases like "Stop Feeding the Caucasus!" resonate more and more in anti-Caucasian protest rallies, like the one held on October 22, 2011 in Moscow.¹²⁶ People find it unfair that while Kadyrov leads a construction boom in Chechnya, including the 45-storey business center, a multimillion-dollar stadium, and an enormous mosque named after Akhmad Kadyrov, many regions in central Russia still lack access to such basic amenities as regular electricity and heating.

¹²⁵ Michael Schwartz. "Russian Anger Grows Over Chechnya Subsidies," *The New York Times*, 8/10/2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/09/world/europe/chechnyas-costs-stir-anger-as-russia-approaches-elections.html?pagewanted=all>

¹²⁶ Mairbek Vatchagaev. "Kadyrov's Chechnya Remains Highly Dependent on Russian Subsidies," The Jamestown Foundation, 27/10/2011 http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=38577

10. The Global and the Local: the Rules of the Oil Game

What makes the pearl of Chechnya so special and expensive, and what makes the Kremlin, the self-proclaimed winner, so willing to pay the price? Despite ostensible post-war restoration and integration, utilized as ‘noble causes’ for receiving subsidies from Moscow, the Chechen unemployment rate soars at 70%. Semyon Rasin, director of the Russian branch of the International Medical Corps, commented that one cannot see a clear pattern in the Republic’s recovery and that “more or less normal life is concentrated in Grozny and Gudermes, while the agrarian population is absolutely poor and lives only from their primitive agriculture.”¹²⁷ Why would the winner subsidize a luxurious ball for the defeated party, which most of the ravaged population cannot attend? There seems to be a different purpose behind the transfer of unreasonable amounts of money to Kadyrov’s personal pocket – oil.

As it can be seen in figure 3 below, in the last twelve years Russia's dependence on oil exports has noticeably grown. While in 2000, the share of oil revenue was at 34.8% of the federal budget and even as low as 32% in 2002, the expected share of 2012 is 46.2%. Russia is on its way towards becoming a petro-state, which suggests an increase in its dependence on natural resources, leading to economic vulnerability because of unstable market prices. This developmental pattern reinforces the country’s acute sense of ownership over every meter of oil-rich territory.

¹²⁷ Anastasia Kirilenko. “Semyon Rasin: Chechnya needs investments not only into construction,” *Caucasian Knot*, 23/02/2010 <http://chechnya.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/12589/>

Figure 4: Percentages of Oil and Gas Revenues in the Russian Budget in the Period of 2000-2013.¹²⁸

Год	ВВП (млрд руб.)	Расходы бюджета (млрд руб.)	Отношение расходов бюджета к ВВП (%)	Доходы бюджета (млрд руб.)	Нефтегазовые доходы (млрд руб.)	Доля нефтегазового сектора в доходах бюджета (%)	Среднегодовая цена на нефть (\$/барр.)	Дефицит/Профицит бюджета (млрд руб.)
2000	7305	1029.2	14,1	1132.1	393	34,8	26,8	102.9
2001	7750	1193.5	15,4	1193.4	405	34,0	23,3	-0.1
2002	10950	1947.4	17,8	2125.7	686	32,3	26,2	178.3
2003	13050	2345.6	18,0	2417.8	785	32,5	28,9	72.2
2004	15300	2659.4	17,4	2742.8	884	32,3	37,7	83.4
2005	18720	3047.9	16,3	3326.0	1087	32,7	50,5	278.1
2006	24380	4270.1	17,5	5046.2	1685	33,4	61,1	776.1
2007	31220	5463.5	17,5	6965.3	2398	34,4	69,0	1501.8
2008	38952	6570.3	16,9	6644.5	2383	35,9	96,3	74.2
2009	38146	9636.8	25,3	7336.8	2984	40,7	57,4	-2300.0
2010	43187	9886.9	22,9	6950.1	3194	46,0	62,5	-2936.8
2011	50389	10658.0	21,5	8844.0	4090	46,2	75	-1814.0
2012	55950	11237.0	20,1	9503.0	4390	46,2	78	-1734.0
2013	61920	12175.0	19,7	10379.0	4653	44,8	79	-1796.0

On a larger scale, it is important to illuminate Russia's interest in the Caspian Sea's vast resources, and how Chechnya came to embody a vital threat to the federation's economic well-being. When, in August 1999, the Islamist militia led by Basayev and Khattab entered the neighboring territory of Dagestan in response to the encouragement of the Emir of the Islamic Jamaat of Dagestan to liberate the Caucasus from Russia, the prospect of an independent Chechen-Dagestani state became more real than ever. At that critical moment, not only could

¹²⁸ "Russian Budget as It Will Be till 2013,"

<http://businesspetersburg.wordpress.com/2010/12/03/russian-budget-as-it-will-be-till-2013/>

Год = Year

ВВП = GDP, billion RUR

Расходы бюджета = Budget Expenditures, billion RUR

Отношение расходов бюджета к ВВП = Budget Expenditures to GDP Ratio, %

Доходы бюджета = Budget Revenues, billion RUR

Нефтегазовые доходы = Oil and Gas Revenues, billion RUR

Доля нефтегазового сектора в доходах бюджета = The Part of the oil and gas sector of the economy in the budget's revenues, %

Среднегодовая цена на нефть = The annual average oil price, USD/barrel

Дефицит/Профицит бюджета = Deficit/Surplus of the budget, billion RUR

Russia see its geopolitical influence in the North Caucasus and in the Caspian fading, but it faced the real economic danger of losing Dagestan with its 249 miles of Caspian coast, which would leave only 66 miles of coastline to the Federation, thus decreasing its share from 18.5% to 3.9% of the Caspian. Significantly, the U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that the Caspian's proven oil reserves of 17-49 billion barrels could contain up to 235 billion barrels of oil, which is equivalent to a quarter of the Middle East's total proven reserves.¹²⁹ Consequently, the price of keeping Chechnya calm and well-fed from the Kremlin's pocket pales in comparison to the political and economic promises of the Caspian Sea.

Nevertheless, at the local level, the rules of the oil game are more nuanced. Chechen oil, though not abundant, is of unusually high quality. The Republic's capital, Grozny, was the site of one of the USSR's largest refineries, which was destroyed during the two wars. Grozneftgaz, a company created in 2000 under the supervision of Mikhail Kasyanov, leads Chechnya's oil extraction. Even though 51% of shares belong to Rosneft, and 49% to the Chechen Republic, all the profits from the sale of Chechen oil goes directly to Rosneft, while Grozneftegaz is simply paid for services as an operator (8-10% of the general profit on the oil).¹³⁰ The federal company's monopoly caused increasing illegal activities, varying from the government's unregistered oil sales to local residents' house-run refineries. Importantly, during Akhmat Kadyrov's presidency, the Republic presented the first draft of an agreement with the federal center, in which it insisted

¹²⁹ John Daly. "Chechnya Oil Pipeline Politics True Underlying Cause for Moscow Metro Bombings," *The Market Oracle*, March 30, 2010 <http://www.marketoracle.co.uk/Article18299.html>

¹³⁰ Lisa Osmayeva. "Chechen government demands to gain control of oil resources," *Prague Watchdog*, 26/04/2006 <http://www.watchdog.cz/?show=000000-000002-000002-000051&lang=1>

that Chechnya should be allowed to control the income from oil.¹³¹ Although the plan was discontinued after the assassination of Akhmat Kadyrov, his son pursues the same goals.

In 2008, when Rosneft was considering building a new oil refinery in Kabardino-Balkaria, Ramzan Kadyrov protested against this decision, claiming that Chechnya needs its own oil refinery more than any other republic - in Grozny. He argued that while the anticipated oil reserves of Chechnya for the next 10 years reached 20 million tons, the hypothetical, undiscovered reserves of Kabardino-Balkaria were estimated at only 7 million tons.¹³² Even though the government of Kabardino-Balkaria and the Rosneft management had already signed an agreement for construction of an oil refinery, Kadyrov's desire to process the Chechen oil « at home » proved successful. In 2010, Rosneft started working on a new project - building a new facility in Grozny with the capacity of one billion tons per year, which is half of Chechnya's yearly oil extraction.¹³³ Coupled with Ramzan Kadyrov's numerous public statements in which he expressed his wish to keep all the revenue from oil in the Republic, the prospect of having such an extensive oil refinery elicits the question of how far the Kremlin is willing to go to keep Kadyrov satisfied.

¹³¹ Vladimir Gelman and Otar Marganiya. *Resource Curse and Post-Soviet Eurasia: Oil, Gas, and Modernization*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010, p. 67.

¹³² "Chechen government and Rosneft management to meet in April," Russian Oil & Gas Equipment and Services 27/03/2008 <http://www.oil-gas.biz/new/990000620/>

¹³³ "Грознефтегаз" в 2010г. начнет строительство НПЗ в Чечне мощностью 1 млн т в год," www.RosInvest.com 14/01/2010 <http://rosinvest.com/novosti/635484>

11. Testing the Limits of Ambition: Kadyrov's Islamization Project

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the North Caucasus was a major battleground between Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia. Faced with the menace of Russia's encroachment, Chechnya's fragmented society sought support from the Ottoman Turks, which led to the populace's eventual adoption of Islam.¹³⁴ The new religion took the form of Sufism, a mystical form of Sunni Islam "particularly amenable to the Chechen's traditional highlander culture, with its village-based individualism, egalitarianism, traditional practices, respect for elders, and opposition to hierarchy."¹³⁵ Furthermore, although originally "the significance of Sufism for political thought lay primarily in the doctrine of political renunciation," the Sufis' "quietist" political stance had evolved into active political engagement over time and became one of the channels of political activity that mobilized the Chechen population in the face of Russia.¹³⁶ At the same time, despite the integration into the multi-faceted self-definition of the Chechen people, Islam was never the most significant part of their identity. Clan (*teip*) membership and regional loyalty were as important as being Muslim. Consequently, after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, nationalism propelled the separatist movement, while the role of Islam remained comparatively weak.

However, the situation shifted after the first war against Russia, and the Chechen nationalist movement became increasingly religious. Edward Walker explained this change in terms of the

¹³⁴ Christopher Marsh and Nikolas Gvosdev. *Civil Society and the Search for Justice in Russia*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002, p.142.

¹³⁵ Edward Walker. "Religion and Spirituality in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," Summary of Berkeley-Stanford Conference, March 13 1998, p.2.

¹³⁶ Antony Black. *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*. New York: Routledge, 2001, p.129.

inspiration that Chechen fighters drew from the Afghan *mujahadin* and their struggle against the Soviet military. The *boeviki* (Chechen guerilla fighters) sought help from Islamic groups and countries abroad. Further, Islam's valorization of martyrdom for 'a good cause' provided "an effective ideology of resistance."¹³⁷ The rapid politicization of Islam laid the foundation for a major change: in 1997, Chechnya declared itself an Islamic Republic, which eventually resulted in the introduction of *Sharia* law as the basis of governance in 1999. At that point, Chechnya was a society torn apart by the rivalries between President Aslan Maskhadov and field commanders who sought to impose their own interpretation of *Sharia*, which rendered the rapid Islamization of the Republic "a highly politicized process, reflecting domestic political struggles, social dislocation, and foreign dependency."¹³⁸ This development was also fuelled by the growing popularity of Wahhabism, a Saudi-Arabian militant version of Islamic reformation, among the Chechen resistance fighters. Thus, in contrast to the pre-first war period, not only did Islam become the main form of self-identification of Chechens, but it was also increasingly perceived as "the symbol of opposition to the contemporary Russian state and Christian civilization as a whole."¹³⁹

The Kadyrov family started their political ascent on the 'wrong side'. While acting as Mufti of Chechnya,¹⁴⁰ Akhmad Kadyrov, who identified himself as a Sufi, declared *jihad* on Russia in 1995. Eventually, he found himself in a conflict with the Islamic militancy because of

¹³⁷ Walker, p.4.

¹³⁸ Bruno Coppieters and Richard Sakwa. *Contextualizing Secession: Normative Studies in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p.177.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Chechnya's main Islamic scholar who expounded *Sharia* law.

their “puritanical inspiration” and their close ties with Saudi Arabia.¹⁴¹ As a result, he aligned himself with the Kremlin in 1999, but viewed this change of sides as a way to advance Sufism in the Republic. After Akhmad Kadyrov’s death in 2004, Ramzan adhered to his father’s vehement critique of Wahhabism, and even tried to present the war in the North Caucasus as a religious confrontation between traditional Sufi Islam of Chechnya and the “Wahhabi heresy.”¹⁴² The young Chechen leader has been criticized for exploiting Islam and distorting Chechen Sufi traditions to serve his own ambitions, as indicated in the 2011 Annual Report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. Moreover, according to the document, Ramzan Kadyrov declared that “Chechnya would be better off if it were ruled by *Sharia* law” even though it “contradicts secular Russian constitutional and legal precepts.”¹⁴³ For instance, while Russia's Supreme Court overturned a 1997 Interior Ministry ruling that forbade women from wearing headscarves in passport photos, Ramzan Kadyrov issued an edict in 2007 ordering women to wear headscarves in state buildings in Chechnya.¹⁴⁴ Kadyrov publicly expressed his support for men who fired paintballs at women who violate the strict dress code. Moreover, the Chechen leader describes women as the property of their husbands and says that their main role is to bear children; he actively encourages polygamy even though it is illegal in Russia.¹⁴⁵ And yet, some of Kadyrov’s statements actively contradict Sharia. For instance, when male relatives murdered a substantial number of young females in 2008 and 2009, Kadyrov justified the “honor killings”

¹⁴¹ Georgi Derluguian. *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 255.

¹⁴² Igor Rotar. “Kadyrov Exploits Ties With Moscow To Build Islamic State,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol.8, issue 90 May 10, 2011,

http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37909

¹⁴³ “2011 Annual report”, US Commission on International Religious Freedom, p.295,

<http://www.uscirf.gov/reports-and-briefs/annual-report/3594-2011-annual-report.html>

¹⁴⁴ “The Islamic veil across Europe,” *BBC*, 22 September 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13038095>

¹⁴⁵ “Chechnya with President Kadyrov: Shariah “Law”, Polygamy and Honor Killings?”, April, 07, 2011. <http://eurasiainlift.wordpress.com/2011/04/07/chechnya-with-president-kadyrovshariah-law-polygamy-and-honor-killings/>

and said that the women were killed rightfully: "If a woman runs around and if a man runs around with her, both of them are killed."¹⁴⁶ However, Shahrzad Mojab, an Iranian-born University of Toronto professor of women's studies, notes that honor killings don't have "any definite connection with religion at all," pointing out that they had been practised before any major religion came into existence.¹⁴⁷ As a result, the Chechen legal space embodies a complex system of Islam, Russian law, and medieval traditions that coexist under Kadyrov's personal control.

Paradoxically, the Chechen leader is on his way to building an Islamic republic within Russia's legally secular political space. Oliver Bullough, a prominent Reuters Moscow correspondent, travelled across the entire North Caucasus and interviewed people that varied from Ramzan Kadyrov to Chechen and Dagestani rebel leaders, trying to trace the dynamics of Ramzan's rise to power. He observed that many radical rebels, who considered the Kadyrov family as traitors in the past, have been changing their minds in light of the recent development: "Kadyrov, though he pays lip service to the Kremlin, has a style of government far removed from the nominal democracy in Russia proper. He has imposed elements of *Sharia* law just like the rebel government before him."¹⁴⁸ When Kadyrov was elected as Chechnya's President, he started engineering a fusion of selected elements of Chechen Sufism¹⁴⁹ and more dogmatic Sunni Islam

¹⁴⁶ "Kadyrov Defends Honor Killings," The Jamestown Foundation, March 6, 2009 http://www.jamestown.org/programs/nca/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34674&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=460&no_cache=1

¹⁴⁷ Timothy Appleby. "Family honor often prized more highly than life, Shafia trial told," *Globe and Mail*, December 5, 2011, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/honour-killings-rooted-in-control-and-cleansing-kingston-trial-hears/article2260536/>

¹⁴⁸ Oliver Bullough. *Let Our Fame Be Great: Journeys Among the Defiant People of the Caucasus*. New York: Basic Books, 2010, p.447.

¹⁴⁹ Predominantly, the Naqshbandi and the Qadiriya brotherhoods.

that was followed primarily by the official clergy and therefore was more state-controlled.¹⁵⁰ The resulting synthesis allowed Ramzan to position himself as a promoter of the traditional Chechen national identity, while also granting him the ability to gain more control over the religious life of the Republic.¹⁵¹ Thus, in 2010, Kadyrov decreed a uniform schedule for daily prayers, instituted the ideological examination of all imams, and dismissed those deemed incompetent. An anonymous cleric later complained that these dismissals were simply a “pretext to enable the Muslim Spiritual Board to kill two birds with one stone: to get rid of those imams who refused to brand as "wahhabis" anyone who expresses the slightest dissatisfaction with or dissent from Kadyrov's policies, and to provide jobs for a surfeit of unemployed mullahs.”¹⁵²

One should also note the growing presence of Islam in the architectural landscape of Chechnya. In 2008, Putin and Kadyrov opened the grandiose Akhmad Kadyrov Mosque, allegedly the largest in Europe. In addition to this, four new mosques were built in October 2009, and many more are still under construction. In 2009, Kadyrov opened the Russian Islamic University and the largest Islamic center of medicine in Europe.¹⁵³ These rapid changes prompt a great number of Russian commentators to hypothesize that Kadyrov has advanced further toward establishing an Islamic state than the leaders of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria ever dreamed of

¹⁵⁰ Liz Fuller and Aslan Doukaev. “Chechnya: Kadyrov Uses 'Folk Islam' For Political Gain,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, December 6, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079237.html>

¹⁵¹ A further exploration of these dynamics would involve Clifford Geertz’s seminal work *Islam Observed* (1968) and his analysis of Islam’s integration into the rule of Moroccan king Muhamad V and Indonesian President Sukarno.

¹⁵² “Holier Than Thou: Ramzan Kadyrov And ‘Traditional Chechen Islam’,” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, June 16, 2010. http://www.rferl.org/content/Holier_Than_Thou_Ramzan_Kadyrov_And_Traditional_Chechen_Islam_/2073626.html

¹⁵³ « В Чечне открылся Центр исламской медицины » *Caucasian Knot*, February 3, 2009, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/149014/>

doing.¹⁵⁴ However, unlike Maskhadov, who proclaimed *Sharia* law in 1999, Kadyrov has not formally done so, and even emphasized the importance of abiding by Russian laws. The contradictions in Kadyrov's discourse were brought to the surface by *Le Figaro's* journalist Pierre Avril in 2010 who published an article titled "Tchéchénie: les deux faces du régime Kadyrov." In this article, he quotes Kadyrov as saying that in Chechnya *Sharia* law is above the laws of the Russian Federation.¹⁵⁵ Kadyrov's press spokesman immediately claimed that Kadyrov had been misquoted and demanded an apology. The Kremlin turns a blind eye on the Islamic renaissance orchestrated by Chechnya's leader, only augmenting the ambiguity of his declarations of loyalty to the federal Center.

In light of the extensive Islamization of the Chechen socio-political space, many Russian Muslims started perceiving Kadyrov as the leader of the entire *ummah*.¹⁵⁶ Based on the reputation of a genuine Islamic politician, he even started competing with Tatarstan for the claim of Muslim leadership within the Russian Federation: "Chechnya is now actively positioning itself not only as a relatively autonomous part of Russia but also as a Muslim center. It is competing for the role of leader."¹⁵⁷ One of the best illustrations of this rivalry lies in architecture: the Akhmat Kadyrov mosque exceeds the size of Tatarstan's main mosque, formerly considered the largest in Russia. Chechnya is also trying to become the new venue of the Islamic Movie Festival, traditionally held in Kazan. The confrontation between the Republics could have dangerous repercussions for

¹⁵⁴ "Holier Than Thou: Ramzan Kadyrov And 'Traditional Chechen Islam'," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, June 16, 2010.

¹⁵⁵ "Selon mon avis personnel, la charia se situe au-dessus de la loi de la fédération russe », explique tranquillement Ramzan": Pierre Avril, "Tchéchénie : les deux faces du régime Kadyrov", *Le Figaro*, 27 May 2010.

¹⁵⁶ Hans-Georg Heinrich, Ludmilla Lobova, and Alexei Malashenko. *Will Russia Become a Muslim Society?* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011, p.114.

¹⁵⁷ Claire Bigg. « Tatar Strongman's Departure Boosts Chechen Ambitions To Become Top Muslim Region,» Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, September 19, 2010.

the Russian Federation's religious equilibrium, promoted by Tatarstan. While 90 percent of Chechnya's 1.1 million people are Muslim, Tatarstan's 3.7 million population is split into 43 percent Muslim and 40 percent Russian Orthodox, whose peaceful co-existence has been portrayed as a successful project of multiculturalism.¹⁵⁸ The neutrality of Tatarstan's religious scene not only stems from the relatively equal numbers of both affiliations, but also from the particular model of moderate "Euro-Islam" that prevails in the Republic. Scholars view Tatar "Euro-Islam" as a consequence of jadidism, a movement that originated among the Volga Tatar intelligentsia in the early twentieth century and sought to continue the traditions of Muslim philosophy, while also integrating Western European ideas of the Enlightenment in their version of Islam.¹⁵⁹

Comparing the role of religion in the political spheres of Chechnya and Tatarstan, the differences are clear. According to Tatarstan's constitution, the Republic is a secular state (Art.11), which means that religion and religious groups are separate from the State.¹⁶⁰ Thus, Muslim leaders do not interfere in government affairs nor does the state try to police their actions. On the other hand, in Chechnya, Kadyrov assumes the role of a spiritual leader rather than remaining a secular politician. Russian analyst Nikolai Petrov interprets his rise as a threat to the entire federation: "If Chechnya, from a de facto autonomous Russian region, becomes the leader of a whole group of regions, we will face a very dangerous situation."¹⁶¹ The stark contrasts between the Tatar and Chechen versions of Islam and the menace that comes from their

¹⁵⁸ Landysh Zaripova, "Multiculturalism works," *The Kazan Times*, March 18, 2012, <http://kazantimes.com/lifestyle/multiculturalism-works/>

¹⁵⁹ Benjamin Forest, Juliet Johnson, and Marietta Stepaniants. *Religion and Identity in Modern Russia: The Revival of Orthodoxy and Islam*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate Pub. Co, 2005, p.101.

¹⁶⁰ Constitution of Tatarstan <http://portal.tatarstan.ru/documents/constitution.htm>

¹⁶¹ Claire Bigg. « Tatar Strongman's Departure Boosts Chechen Ambitions To Become Top Muslim Region,» Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, September 19, 2010.

competition pose a difficult question to the Kremlin: do, or should Kadyrov's ambitious projects have any limits? The fact that the Center allows the Chechen leader to engineer an Islamic republic in the territory that it supposedly controls casts doubt upon the future of the federation as a Great Power.

12. Conclusion

In this project, I reexamined Russia's decision to permit the existence of the Chechen enclave within its territory based on the calculation that it would eventually enable the re-emerging Great Power to enhance its internal strength. Superficially, Chechnya adopted the Tatarstan Model and seems to have embarked on a path of collaboration with the federal center, which would mean that the Kremlin attained what it wanted – territorial cohesion and the monopoly of control, both essential components of being a Great Power. Indeed, Ramzan Kadyrov persistently claims to be Putin's most faithful ally, and Putin's victory in the recent election in March 2012 proves the success of their joint state-building efforts: Chechen authorities reported turnout at 99.5%, with 99.82% of voters backing Putin, while his closest rival Gennadiy Zyuganov won only 0.04%.¹⁶² Based on this statement of overflowing love and admiration towards Moscow, the Kremlin can surely indulge itself in believing in Russia's re-established 'greatness'. In the end, cooperating with Ramzan Kadyrov did ensure the desirable effect of Chechnya's full conversion to the right side, thus putting an end to the centuries-long conflict.

However, my research suggests that the metamorphosis of Chechnya into Tatarstan never really happened – the conflict simply entered a latent phase and thus poses a great threat to Russia's future as a Great Power. The clue to understanding the Chechen menace lies in the circumstances surrounding the birth of the alleged friendship between the Center and the rebellious Republic. Putin's early mission sought to reclaim Russia's eminence as a strong state

¹⁶² Andrew Kramer. "At Chechnya Polling Station, Votes for Putin Exceed the Rolls," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/06/world/europe/fraudulent-votes-for-putin-abound-in-chechnya.html>

in the international arena, which made the resolution of the Chechen question essential for the country's further political and economic development. The limits of the Federation's patience and budget precluded launching futile military campaigns against Chechen territory. Putin had to resort to negotiations with the rebels, hoping to create a local puppet government that would advance his personal interests. Naturally, managing the conflict with the hands of a Chechen was a 'cleaner' solution that would not affect the Federation's reputation on a larger scale. During the Presidencies of Akhmad Kadyrov and Alou Alkhanov, the presence of Moscow in their internal affairs remained significant, which was illustrated by the great number of federal troops stationed in Chechen territory. The situation changed radically with the Beslan school hostage crisis in September 2004. Putin admitted that the tragedy symbolized the failure of his first term, because Russia was still weak and had failed to tame the rebels of Chechnya.

Faced with such a critical situation, Putin decided to sign a 'Faustian pact' with Ramzan Kadyrov: Chechnya would possess an unprecedented level of autonomy, financed by the Kremlin, but in return the unorthodox Chechen warlord was to bring order to the Republic and orchestrate a spectacle of friendship, peace, and prosperity. As if commenting on the results of this power-sharing agreement, Ramzan Kadyrov once said that Chechnya owes its very existence to the efforts of Vladimir Putin: "If it were not for Putin, Chechnya would not exist... He saved our people with his strong-willed decisions... I know this history - I personally participated in it. If it were not for Putin, we would not be here."¹⁶³ In a paradoxical way, the Chechen leader was right - the level of autonomy enjoyed by the Republic at present can be viewed as *de facto* independence.

¹⁶³ "Kadyrov says Putin saved Chechnya," RIA Novosti, April 7, 2009
<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090407/120959179.html>

Having examined the unwavering consolidation of Kadyrov's rule, notably the monopolization of security forces and the Islamization of public space, I conclude that, in the long run, Russia will not benefit from this intricate relationship of political convenience. When in 2004 the Kremlin gave Kadyrov *carte blanche* to tame the Chechen nation, it effectively transferred sovereignty over the Republic to the former rebel, thus transforming Chechnya into a space impermeable to Moscow's control. While Kadyrov is busy rebuilding the war-ravaged country with federal money, he remains interested in being the Kremlin's ally. However, if one day Moscow attempts to restrain his reign in order to restore the cohesion of the Federation's sovereignty, the peace and control bought through the bargain may prove illusory.

One can surely try to explain the paradox of Chechnya by scrutinizing the methods employed by the Russian leaders as they were striving to construct a stronger state: heavy reliance on the "power vertical" and the principles of loyalty resulted in the Center's weakness in the face of Kadyrov, who emerged as the actual winner of Russia's second military campaign. At the same time, our analysis suggests that the Russo-Chechen friendship project has dubious prospects in light of the long history of resistance and the traumatic memories fresh in the minds of the Chechen people. Russia might eventually discover that reasserting its Great Power status and keeping Chechnya on a leash are mutually exclusive geopolitical objectives that, if pursued simultaneously, negate the promise of a trouble-free future.

On a larger scale, we can observe that the peculiar relationship between Moscow and the North-Caucasian Republic challenges the well-established classification of states as strong, weak, failing, or failed entities. Traditionally, such ranking is based on the "ability or inability to deliver

high qualities and quantities of political goods”, the most important of which is security, or “the projection of state power, the state monopoly of violence, and human security.”¹⁶⁴ According to this categorization, Russia can claim the title of a strong state in all of its vast territory except for Chechnya. There, it exhibits the characteristics of a failed state whose legitimacy has gradually eroded over the past ten years. The Republic embodies an “ungoverned space” where the Federal center does not exercise effective sovereignty since territorial control has been ceded to a different political player.¹⁶⁵ For this reason, one can envision the border with the Chechen Republic as a passage into a different socio-political reality with its own laws of lawlessness.

In light of this discrepancy, the rigid state categorization should be reevaluated. Theorists should embrace the new concept of a “failed strong state,” or admit the inadequacy of sharply drawn political distinctions. In fact, the modern state is not a homogenous entity that can ensure full control within its boundaries. It incorporates numerous alternative structures of competing authorities that can vary from the uncontrollable Parisian *banlieue* or Facebook’s virtual space, to a *de facto* independent country like Chechnya. The ideal of achieving the monopoly of violence over a fixed territory is becoming increasingly unattainable, as sovereignties overlap and states’ political spaces look more like mosaics of compromises between key players. The face of sovereignty is changing, and so is the nature of Great Power politics. The leading states of the international arena confront the new political paradigms of post-modernity; they must redefine their methods of internal and external governance and categorization as old antagonistic notions of strong and weak become increasingly blurred.

¹⁶⁴ Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela R. Aall. *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007, p.83.

¹⁶⁵ Anne L. Clunan and Harold A. Trinkunas. *Ungoverned Spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Security Studies, 2010, p.17.

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