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Just Peace Diplomacy Journal's primary areas of interest are peace, security and stability, militarism, energy and international presence in the Middle East and Central Asia.

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Our Vision:

In the beginning all people were one nation (Holy Qur'an, 2:213)
Throughout human history, peace has always been the 'primary state' and war the 'accidental state'. Peace is beautiful, compassionate and constructive, while war is fearsome, merciless and destructive. Unfortunately, despite this, war has been one of 20th century's most major problems, and has proved to be the symbol of the beginning of the 21st century. As portrayed by the contemporary history of international relations, particularly in the Middle East and Central Asia, war is not the solution, nor is it constructive or helpful in solving problems; rather, it causes problems and is the root of the continuation of violence, instability and insecurity.

War is not the solution to the differences between governments and nations. Only with peace which is based on justice, i.e. '*Just Peace*', can we reach a stable and permanent solution to our differences. Diplomacy and constructive dialogue which take into consideration the rights of both parties, is the only path to establishing '*Just Peace*', stability and world security. Our aim is to change international relations with the active participation of nations on the basis of '*Just Peace*'.

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(Holy Qur'an, 3:104)

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1. Establishing justice between the countries of the South and the North.
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4. Thinking globally and acting against extreme nationalism.
5. Realistic understanding of the realities of the world.
6. Upholding and respecting human rights and the principles of democracy.
7. Accepting and moving towards the destruction of weapons of mass destruction throughout the world/on a global scale

Our priorities in the current situation are to analyse the issues and problems of conflict-zones such as those of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

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1. Inviting and facilitating for intellectuals from different parts of the world to engage in dialogue with each other.
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4. Organising international scientific conferences dealing with regional and global issues.
5. Publishing scientific research work on peace studies in the form of books and journals.
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We are a private, non-governmental organisation. Our offices are based in Europe and the Middle East.

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Neo-Islamism in Chechnya and Wahhabism

Abazar Barari

International Peace Studies Centre (IPSC)

Abstract

Chechnya saw the rise of Islam in the 16th century when Avars and Kymyks introduced Islam to this Russian heartland community. Religion has always played a prime role in the lives of the Chechnyan people but the Communist system created many limitations for this nation. Following the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Chechnya, like other former Soviet states, demanded independence, and this resulted in bloody wars in the 1990s in the region. Under these circumstances, the Wahhabis attempted to influence the Chechens through splurging and launching extensive religious campaigns. Notwithstanding all the Wahhabi initiatives; however, Chechen President Ramadan Kadyrov has urged world Muslims to unite against Wahhabism. The present article will focus on reasons why Chechen Muslims turned to Wahhabism following the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. This article will zoom in on the Wahhabi philosophy and the Islamic spirit permeating the Chechens, a spirit intertwined with Sufism and irreconcilable with Wahhabism.

Keywords: Chechnya, Islam, Wahhabism, Russia

Introduction

Located in north Caucasia, Chechnya enjoys relatively fair weather and has three geographical regions:

1. Caucasus mountains: Located on the south of the republic, these mountains separate Chechnya from other republics (one reason why Chechnya is geopolitically important for Russia)
2. Rivers: The longest river is Terek which serves as the biggest source of irrigation and agriculture in Chechnya.
3. Seas: The most important one is Kaznavi located in the south.

Situated in the eastern part of the north Caucasus, partially in Eastern Europe, Chechnya is surrounded on nearly all sides by Russian federal territory. In the west, it borders North Ossetia and Ingushetia, in the north, Stavropol Krai, in the east, Dagestan, and to the south, Georgia. Its capital is Grozny which was established in 1818 with the aim of serving as a fortress to defend the country.

Throughout history, north Caucasia has twice been attacked by the Muslims. First, Arab troops led by Marvan ibn Mohammad and later Teymor invaded this country after the collapse of the Moguls. These invasions paved the way for the Chechens to become familiar with Islam. Gradually, the Chechens on the eastern side of the Caucasus Mountains converted to Islam after it was propagated in the land through the Avars and Kymyks (Akiter, 1987, p. 213) after having followed an unknown religion which involved worshipping animates. Russian tsars and Georgian rulers made extensive efforts to convert the people to Christianity by building churches that at times dated back to the 8th century. These efforts, however, were not fruitful. The important point is that religion in Chechnya has been completely political since the get-go while inclining toward Sufism so much so that half the Chechens believe in one of the two major Sufi schools, namely Naghshbandi and Qaderian.

Even though during the former Soviet rule, Russia had 185 ethnic groups that spoke 147 languages (Bashirieh, 2001), what sets the Chechens apart from others in Russia is their zest for independence, a feature that has had a big toll on them such as the two major wars they had to fight with Russia in the final decades of the 20th century. The Chechens' zest for independence is manifest in that firstly they were the first republic to officially declare their independence from the former Soviet Union and secondly they did not sign the federal agreement or any other agreement for that matter with Russia. (Koolae, 2002, pp. 188-189).

Various factors contributed to the two bloody wars in Chechnya, one of the most important of which was Wahhabi influence among Chechen combatants. Recent developments, however, speak of a rift between the Chechens and these groups. The present article attempts to elaborate on the reasons behind this rift. Apparently, the country's conditions after the collapse of the former Soviet Union paved the way for the rise of radical groups in Chechnya. With their extensive financial resources, the Wahhabi groups attempted to influence the Chechen Muslims. But the Islamic spirit rampant among the Chechen Muslims was linked with Sufism which in the long run could not adapt with Wahhabi dogmatism.

After briefly discussing the political history of Chechnya in the post-Islamic era, the present article will elaborate on the reasons behind challenges between Russia and Chechnya. Arab Chechen combatants will be discussed as the most important Wahhabi group and reference will be made to how these groups have wielded influence over the country. The next section will elaborate on the thesis of this article which is why we are witnessing the Chechens averting from Wahhabism. It should be borne in mind that this region's religious leaders have always been political trailblazers of the combat with tsarist Russia and some even gave their lives for this cause. Chechnya's geographical distance from the world of Islam has created two distinct features for Islam in this area: First, the link between Islam and Sufism and second the rise of tribal Islam. The next section will discuss the features of neo-Islamism in Chechnya. Finally, an overview will be presented on Chechnya.

Political History

Even though archaeologists have found traces of life in Chechnya dating back to 2000 BC, Chechnya, like other north Caucasian areas, had no political movement until 16th century. In fact, the Chechens led a peaceful tribal life in the mountains until in 1556, Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible fought Tatars at Astrakhan and Kazan to the southeast, and he won their lands, when his eyes caught sight of North Caucasus. Life in the mountains had made the Chechens a free, brave and combatant people who did not want to yield to Ivan's rule. As such, there was a correlation between the Chechens' mode of life and their invincibility and resistance movement. Ivan's successor, namely Tsar Fyodor, unsuccessfully attempted to invade the Caucasus. Another attempt at invading the Caucasus took place by Tsar Boris Gudonov in 1604, resulting in a heavy defeat for the Tsar's army. Between the years 1604 to 1722, the then big powers, namely Russia, Iran and the Ottoman Empire, did not have their eyes set on the region. But Chechnya was facing profound developments caused by the rise and spread of Islam among the people. Even though Tsar Peter's invasion of Chechnya was defeated, Catherine II was finally able to occupy north Caucasus in 1783. From this point on, uprisings started against the invasion of Chechnya. The first leader of consolidated uprisings against Russia was Sheikh Mansour Usharma who decided to unite the Muslims who sporadically fought against Russia and who was supported by the Ottoman Empire for this endeavor. Due to the perfidy of the Ottomans, Sheikh Mansour was arrested in 1790 and passed away after being in detention for four years. The Chechens faced many hardships between 1794 and 1829 under Russian leadership. In 1818, Russian general Yermolov launched a massive attack on the region and committed horrible crimes.

Between the years 1828 and 1859, also known as "the period of religion and national resistance" in Chechnyan history, the country saw three prominent leaders leading the uprisings: Ghazi Mohammad, Hamzeh Beig, and Sheikh Shamil. All these uprisings were suppressed by the Russian government. During the Russian Revolution (1859-1917), Chechnya faced problems such as lack of unity among political

groups and absence of an effective leader. Following the Russian revolution and its ensuing anarchy, Caucasus nations declared independence and were even recognized by governments such as those of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Ottoman Empire, and Britain. This, however, ended with the Russian government's rise to power. The 1920s is known as the end of "last wars" in Chechnyan history when Ozan Hassan and Najmuddin Gostinki led the uprising. This period ended with the execution of Najmuddin. During the Soviet rule, Chechnya united with Ingush to set up an autonomous government. This unity lasted only until 1991 when the Chechens more definitively demanded independence. Moscow which left no stone unturned to establish its authority, including threats of military attacks, faced a major contender in Johar Dudayev when he became president with a majority of votes. Despite the Russian President Boris Yeltsin's demand, Duma prevented a military attack on Chechnya, and Yeltsin used the threat of economic embargo against this region. Russia did not take any practical measures in Chechnya until 1994 due to extensive problems it was facing in other parts of the country, especially in Karabakh and Georgia. (Monfared, 1995, pp. 31-33).

The 1994 Russian intervention in Chechnya was stirred by domestic conflicts between Dudayev and his opponents. Yeltsin issued an ultimatum to both parties to put their weapons down within 48 hours or else Russia would intervene to prevent bloodshed. The first war ended after Dudayev was killed. There were supposed to be negotiations to set up an agreement for Chechnya's independence by the year 2000. During the first round of wars, Russian intervention in Chechnyan affairs met severe criticism, and this paved the way for a peace treaty. (Karami, 2002, p.143) and resulted in Chechnya being recognized as an independent, democratic, and legal state in the Russian Federation. Measures by the Wahhabi groups, however, created a turn in the events. In fact, the Wahhabi sabotage lead by Shamel Basayev paved the way for the second Chechnya – Russia war in 1999. Among such sabotage, reference can be made to Basayev's invasion of Dagestan which took place against the will of President Maskhadov. In addition, a series of terrorist moves in Moscow and St. Petersburg which claimed 300 lives prompted Russia to again attack Chechnya. Using experiences gained

from the 1994 war, the Russians launched a massive publicity war against the Chechens and, by stirring public opinion, negatively impacted their morale. This war proved the peak of Russian savagery and violence so much so that it took the lives of one fourth of Chechen population. Of course, the survivors had a worst fate and led miserable lives in the camps (Ibid, 84).

The second round of Russia – Chechnya wars coincided with September 11 (2001). The priority to combat terrorism, presence of Arab forces among Chechen separatists, presence of Chechen forces in Afghanistan during the Taliban era, and their collaboration with the Al-Qaida provoked the public opinion against Chechnya. On the other hand, the hostage taking scenario in Moscow’s Central Theater which was dubbed the “Russian September 11” further escalated the Chechen crisis. (Vaezi, 2004, pp. 20-24).

Russia – Chechnya Challenge: Reasons and Backgrounds

As already noted, the main reason behind Chechnya – Russia conflicts was the Chechens’ demand for independence. In fact, the Chechen quest for independence can be traced back to some 300 years ago, around 1707 when the Chechens, in their first war, invaded and destroyed the Russian Darkness Fortress (Omalatov, 2003, p. 45). While there are currently 21 republics in Russia, Chechnya insists on separatism. Domestic and foreign factors contribute to the backwardness of Chechnya. There are numerous reasons within each of these two categories that have culminated in separatist movements in Chechnya.

Domestic factors: These are the overall factors and conditions that serve as motivation for the people of Chechnya to combat Russia and try to become independent. What factors prompted the Chechens to opt for separatism? The answer to this question can help shed light on why other Russian republics and in particular minorities across the world are not looking for separatism. Three factors contributing to this situation will be discussed below:

Cultural factors: These pertain to the specific mental and emotional state of the people of this land and their tribal lives. As such, members of the tribes strive to safeguard their tribe's survival. In addition to combating the aliens, Chechnyans are characterized by revenging blood for blood, opposing the Russian race, relying on themselves, and being independent. (Rasekh, 1990, p. 81)

Economic Factors: Discrimination, unemployment, poverty, and the central government's disregard for the livelihood of the minorities are issues that nations have complained about. The same holds true for Chechnya whose people have been driven toward independence due to their demands being disregarded.

Ideological – Religious Factors: Republics with Muslims tend to opt more for independence (Koolae, pp. 172-3). In this region, religious leaders have always led combat movements. Relying on Islamic principles, Muslim leaders invited the people to rise up against the Russian government and endeavor to establish Islamic tenets.

Foreign Factors: Even though domestic events spark the start of uprisings, foreign factors play an important role in advancing the uprisings. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, foreign factors had a minimal role in the region thanks to the power wielded by the central government. After 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union and instability in the Russian government, efforts were made to influence the Chechen movement. In this scenario, the US would benefit from weakening Russia. Russia in turn always reprimanded governments such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey for their support of the Chechens. (Koolae, 2002, p. 192).

This is while Russia does not intend to lose grip over Chechnya due to the latter's geopolitical location. In other words, Chechnya has been politically and militarily suppressed to prevent it from becoming independent, and this is because of its strategic location in the region, serving firstly as the crossroads between Asia and Europe and secondly linking the north, south, east and west and serving as the crossroads for major civilizations. In addition, Chechnya is the neighbor to the world

of Islam and Christianity. Ultimately, it is one of the routes for oil and gas transit to Europe (Vaezi, 2003).

The Arab Mujahideen

Known as Chechnya's Arab Mujahideen, this grouplet operates internationally in Chechnya and other north Caucasus areas to combat Russia. The grouplet was established by Ibn Al – Khatab in 1995 concurrent with the first round of Russia – Chechnya wars and played an important role in both wars between Russia and Chechnya (Williams, 2003, p 23).

This group is also known by other names such as the troops of Islam, Arabs in Chechnya, and “Ansar” in Chechnya but they are mostly called the Chechen Arab Mujahideen (Wikipedia). There were several factors that paved the way for Wahhabi presence in the region. As already noted, following the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Yeltsin who originally failed to use military muscle resorted to economic clampdown. As such the Chechens faced tough economic times until the end of the first round of war. In addition to the economic problems, reference should be made to political and ethnic groupings in Chechnya on the one hand and Dudayev's suppressive policies against the opposition on the other. As such, Chechnya faced a crisis. Even though Russian attack on Chechnya resulted in national unity, the country still faced economic hardships. This is where the Wahhabis entered. They brought money and weapons with them and fought alongside Chechen troops. At the end of the first round of wars, differences arose between the Wahhabi troops and Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov.

From this period on, Chechen combatants divided into two groups: followers of Maskhadov who wanted the fulfillment of the 1995 agreement and the Wahhabi groups led by Shamil Basayev that alongside Wahhabi groups such as Mujahideen led by Ibn Al-Khatab chose violence and terrorism. According to Wahhabi thought, “jihad” is defined as the Muslims' combat with an oppressive group. History is rife with this kind of combat. Maskhadov tried to keep this group on his

side to meet his political needs. But continued operations of these groups resulted in the second war for Chechnya. Akhmad Kadyrov became the Chechen president after the second war but his presidency was short lived as he was assassinated by Basayev and his group for wanting to compromise with Moscow. As such, Wahhabi groups, including Arab Mujahideen remained as guerilla groups in Chechnya and embark on anti – Russia measures every once in a while and called it “jihad”. (Haqqani, 2005, p.5).

The Arab Mujahideen groups mainly consist of Arab and Turk forces. Among them, there are even Arabs who only speak Arabic. (ICT’s Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, 2010, p. 20). These groups entered Chechnya after the Afghan war and immensely helped the Chechens (Paz, 2005, p. 6) and decided to stay in the country after the end of the war. As such, Ibn Khatab, the leader of this group, married a woman from Dagestan. He also established friendship with Basayev in order to pave the way for his presence in Chechnya. He channeled enormous help to Chechnya from individual and Islamic charity donors. Wahhabi assistance to Chechen groups had various dimensions including setting up an organization to organize different assistance sent to Chechen combatants. An instance is from February 2000, when an individual based in Egypt sent \$150,000 in “khums” (one fifth levy tax for Muslims) to Bank ul – Haramayn to be donated to Chechen combatants. This received wide media coverage so much so that during the second Russia – Chechnya war, the Al – Haramayn website posted news in both Arabic and English on the latest developments pertaining to Chechnya’s “jihad”. (Immergut, 2004, pp. 6).

Ibn Khatab led the Mujahideen until March 2002 when he was killed in a clash with Russian troops. He was succeeded by Abu Al – Walid who was from Saudi Arabia as well and who became the leader of the Mujahideen and the new Ibn Khatab. He too was killed in April 2004. Abu Hafs al – Ordoni then became the Mujahideen leader but he too was killed in November 2006. Muhannad from United Arab Emirates (UAE) then took the helm of this group (Wikipedia).

Other Wahhabi groups are also active in Chechnya. It is widely believed that one reason for the Al – Qaida interest in Chechnya is its vast geopolitical resources and location, especially its shared borders with Kazakhstan which allows access to nuclear weapons. (Salama, 2005, p. 620).

Evidently Wahhabi ideology is not the reason why Wahhabi groups are popular among Chechen combatants. Their popularity rather stems from the fact that they oppose Shiism and Sufism and they are viewed as a refuge from economic problems caused by Russian embargoes slapped on Chechnya. In addition, Soviet policies toward Chechnya have forced the Chechen combatants to recruit forces and get more equipment to continue their fight. This is while since 1995, Islamic charities and non – governmental organizations have provided massive financial aid to Chechen groups. One example is the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF) that has helped Chechen combatants extensively, especially by providing them with clothes and equipment. An example is from January to April 2000, when Chechen groups received some US \$700,000 (Technical Analysis Group, 2003, p. 6).

Chechnya Turning Its Back on Wahhabism

As already noted, a series of events lead to the presence of radical and extremist fundamentalist groups in Chechnya, the major one of which was the country's dire economy. After the two wars between Russia and Chechen combatants, the latter gradually saw a rift with Wahhabi groups. Of course, radical Wahhabi ideology is still popular among some Chechen fighters. Overall even though the people of Chechnya demand independence, they would like to resolve the issue in a non-violent manner. In fact, alongside socio – political suppression, geopolitical location, people's urge for freedom, one of the most important reasons for Chechens' demand for independence is extremist fundamentalism. (Pakatchi, 2009, p. 25). The fundamentalist ideology, however, is gradually diminishing due to the following reasons:

- People getting tired of tension and confrontation: The quest for Chechen independence dates back to three centuries ago. Over this time

period, the Chechens, led by their religious leaders, have embarked upon armed combat and uprising against tsarist Russian regimes and later Soviet dictatorship and oppression. After this period, they went through two major wars against Russia. The wars and Stalin's forced exile caused a dip in the country's population. Inter – family marriages helped keep the Chechen race pure but this vertical population growth did not help replace the people who lost their lives in the wars. Long-term tension caused the people to support the current political system led by Ramadan Kadyrov, son of former Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov who was killed by extremists. Ramadan Kadyrov is supported by Kremlin. This is how they show their opposition toward the Wahhabis who demand continued campaigns.

- Post September 11 developments: September 11, 2001 marked a turning point in global relations in general and freedom and independence movements in particular. After September 11, combat with terrorism became a major global priority. In fact, the project to combat political Islam was commenced. Even though major global powers, especially the US had a role in the rise and perpetuation of fundamentalist groups such as Taliban and Al – Qaida, they started clamping down on them. Combating terrorism became a main priority worldwide, overshadowing even human rights. As mentioned before, Russia used this as a pretext to fiercely suppress the Chechens. This move, however, helped boost the Chechen freedom fight. Even though over the past years, the Chechens, led by Sheikh Mansoor and Sheikh Shamil, rose up against Russian rule, they aimed at being liberated from Russian oppression and suppression. In this juncture, however, the main Chechen liberation fighters were dark horses whose motives were also unknown to the people. Also their ideology was different from that of the people of Chechnya, a feature that created many questions for the Chechens. As such, the people of Chechnya had no intention to be victimized by anti-terrorism slogans which would preclude any foreign aid and assistance and to place their country in the hands of leaders whose ulterior motives were not clear. There were even rumblings about Wahhabis acting in Chechnya in tandem with Al – Qaida objectives of accessing nuclear weapons located in

Kazakhstan. It is believed that they are actually using Chechnya as a means to reach their objectives (Salama, 2005, p. 620)

- Improved living conditions: Economic troubles were one of the main worries of the Chechens. The Chechen economy is based on two main pillars: industry and agriculture. (Williams, Chechnya and Economics Consequences of Secession). Even though this region is favorable for agriculture due to its optimal land and climate, agriculture has not thrived due to all the conflicts and tensions in the country. Another pillar of Chechen economy is mineral resources, especially oil but this has also faced many setbacks during this timeframe. The Chechens believe that oil is the main reason Moscow attempts to continue dominating the region and claim that 90 percent of fuel for Russian airplanes is provided through oil from his region. Nonetheless, it appears that Russia which has its own oil and gas resources is mostly eager to control the country for its strategic importance. After the second war and Putin's rise to power, Russia has been paying more attention to people's economic situation and livelihood. In fact, Russia realized how wrong Yeltsin was in slapping economic embargoes on Chechnya as this paved the way for the rise and growth of radical ideologies, especially Wahhabism. As such, it took measures to help improve the peoples' economic situation.

- Existing gap between Wahhabi dogmatism and interpretations of Islam in Chechnya: Wahhabism has its own features, especially strong financial assets. As such, it has found a foothold in areas where people are struggling economically, namely Afghanistan and Pakistan where they have attempted to convert Muslim youth by establishing religious schools and use them to promote their own objectives by stirring their feelings. These youth groups have various branches most of which are rooted in Al – Qaida and Wahhabism. This is while Islam in Chechnya is mainly based on Sufism and does not accept the Wahhabi dogmatism (Walker, Islam in Chechnya). An example of this is the terrorist activities that the Mujahideen have launched in various parts of Moscow, such as the 2004 developments in Boslan which led to the death of 355 students and civilians (Vidino, 2005, p. 1) None of these is

commensurate with the Islamic teachings and ideology of the Chechen Muslims. In any event, the fight between Wahhabism and Islamism will continue in future in Chechnya (Vidino, 2006, p. 7).

Rise of Neo – Islamism in Chechnya

Chechnya might be on its way to see the rise of a new kind of Islam due to the following reasons:

- Attempt to collaborate with the Russian government in place of tensions and confrontation: This was more seriously pursued especially after the coming to power of Akhmad Kadyrov but was left unfinished with his assassination. His son, however, is following up on this project now. In 2009, Putin made an unscheduled trip to Chechnya, meeting with the president and visiting the Chechen main mosque which is the largest mosque in Europe. Putin's visit to Chechnya and his speeches can be viewed as efforts of the Russian government to collaborate with the Chechen Muslims and government. Putin also decided to eliminate the anti – terrorist regime in Chechnya in 2009 and to actually grant further autonomy to the Chechens by allowing them to run their own security affairs.

- Priority of economic affairs over attempts to gain independence: Even though the Chechens have traditionally sought independence, they currently attach more importance to reconstruction and economic improvement.

With the violence and fight between Moscow and Grozny subsiding, Wahhabism is losing its foothold in the region while genuine and traditional Islam is becoming more popular.

Future of Chechnya

In order to foresee the future of Russia – Chechnya relations, several factors should be taken into consideration: Firstly, Chechnya's inclusion in the Russian Federation has a direct correlation with the

survival of Russia. As such, Russia will make every effort to keep Chechnya as one of its republics. This is because Moscow is well aware that Chechnya's secession will have a "domino effect" and will spread the penchant for independence among other parts of the federation, namely the remaining 20 republics such as Dagestan, Ingush, ... all of which will demand independence. On the other hand, the future of Chechnya depends very much on the negotiations between the leaders of both countries. In case people are granted political rights, civil liberties, and enjoy equal distribution of economic wealth, there will be a prospect for agreements and peace in the region. The important determining factor is the role of foreign groups that are in Chechnya. Whether or not these groups are allowed to stay in Chechnya plays a determining role in shaping the future of the country.

In Russia, there are two outlooks toward Chechnya: First, the radical nationalists and military who, for their interests, want a military solution to the issue of Chechnya and believe the issue has to be settled once and for all. Second, there are the Russian politicians who would like peaceful resolution. This is in tandem with how Putin started out with the iron fist policy toward Chechnya but then reverted to solving issues through negotiations. There are two tendencies among the Chechens as well: First, political leaders who have the support of Moscow and majority of Chechens opt for dialogs with Moscow. Second, there are views such as those shared by Mirzayev, Chechnya's religious leader: US and British security organizations are behind the events unfolding in north Caucasus and, through supporting extremist groups in various countries including Wahhabism, attempt to destabilize this part of Russia (Islam in Europe website). Also speaking at a news conference at Russia's Interfax News Agency central office, he noted that the Wahhabis who call themselves mujahid are really not mujahid and embark on terrorist activities. He stressed that the Wahhabis have distorted Islam, Quran and the "sunnah" (tradition) of (Prophet) Mohammad (peace be upon him). Based on Mirzayev's estimates, there are between 15,000 to 20,000 people in Chechnya who consider themselves as Wahhabis and who are currently under investigation. Mirzayev further stressed that anyone who proclaims to be Wahhabi has declared war on the Muslims and noted that the

Muslims will make a similar decision and embark on “jihad” with the Wahhabis.

Earlier during the general assembly of the clergy of Chechnya, imams, and Chechen troop leaders, it was officially declared that from that day on war against Wahhabism would be regarded as “jihad”. This meeting was held in the main mosque in the birthplace of former Chechen president Kadyrov who was assassinated by the terrorists. Among those taking part in this meeting were then first deputy prime minister Ramadan Kadyrov, interior minister Ruslan Al-Hanoof, and representatives of clergy and command staff. Sultan Mirzayev, the Chechen mufti, noted that this “fatwa” (religious ordinance) will be declared to all Chechens based on the rules of “shariah” (religion) and Quran. He added that the Quran interpreters have come to the decision that fighting such wrong thinking is imperative (Khosravi, Ayandeh Roshan website). These statements indicate that there are major changes occurring among religious clerics and politicians in Chechnya. In return, the fundamentalist groups with Wahhabi tendencies enjoyed foreign support and financial – weapons facilities, thus demanding war and embarking on terrorist activities throughout Russia to rekindle the flames of war. (Cornin, 2003, p. 7).

As such, the future of Chechnya appears to be determined by a series of interrelated factors. The current trend indicates compromise between Russia and the Chechen ruling regime. When these ties are formed and strengthened, they will curb radical ideologies and thus cause the Wahhabi mode of thought to become lackluster day by day and only followed by guerilla forces whose goal is to combat Moscow.

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