

1994–2003: Chechnya and Daghestan

The more than ten-year military and political conflict that took place in Chechnya can be divided into several stages—a brief flare of hostilities followed by relative peace from 1991 to 1994, the first Russian campaign from 1994 to 1997, peace from 1997 to 1999, and the second Russian campaign from 1999 to 2003—that varied in terms of the intensity and geography of clashes, the structure of the opposing forces, and the fluctuating allegiances of the Chechen population. The conflict can be described as ethnopolitical in nature, since both participants and observers consistently identified the parties in ethnic terms, both formally (politically) and informally (within the realm of public opinion). However, the limitations of viewing the conflict purely through the prism of ethnicity became increasingly evident as it developed, the parties to it reconfigured, and large groups of Chechens became increasingly inclined to remain part of Russia.

The conflict began to take shape in the fall of 1991 when the United Congress of the Chechen People forcibly ousted the government of the Chechen-Ingush Republic, declared the independence of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, and took possession of a significant portion of the Soviet army's weapons and equipment within the republic's borders. The political regime that took shape between 1991 and 1994 under President Jokhar Dudaev essentially seceded from Russia, creating what Moscow considered a dangerous precedent for the integrity of the Russian Federation throughout the rest of the North Caucasus. In December 1994 federal forces launched an ill-conceived military campaign, which resulted in a wide range of Chechen society rallying around Dudaev and turned the political conflict between Moscow and Grozny into a full-scale war. The broad civilian participation and massive casualties alienated the population (both the local Chechen population and Russian society overall) from what was seen as an occupying federal army, and led eventually to the "Khasavyurt defeat" in August 1997—a derogatory term for an accord signed in Khasavyurt ("On the Principles for Determining the Bases of Bilateral Relations between the Russian

Federation and the Chechen Republic") that in essence provided for a ceasefire, the withdrawal of federal troops from the territory of Chechnya, and de facto recognition of Chechnya as a sovereign state: the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

During the 1997–1999 interbellum the de facto independence of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria only served to compound the contradictions in Grozny's (Jokhar's) domestic and foreign policy and thus deepened the rift with Moscow without bringing the republic any closer to becoming a viable nation-state. (In 1998 the Chechen parliament renamed Grozny Jokhar-Kala [Djovkhar Ghaala] in honor of Dudaev, who had been slain in 1995. This new name was not recognized either by the Russian authorities or by the pro-Russian Chechen authorities, who returned to power in 2000 when the republic again became part of the Russian Federation.) The government of Aslan Maskhadov, who took power in 1997, could not combat the extreme decentralization that had characterized the structure of Chechen resistance during the first military campaign. The Chechen elite appeared to be unready to come up with internal resources needed to rein in the criminal violence that was sweeping the republic itself and adjacent regions of Russia after the 1994–1997 war. The organizational structure of the national movement and ethos of the past war became the basis not so much for statehood as for the legitimization of private, often criminal, business conducted by various clan networks and field commanders. The widespread practice of hostage-taking undermined the viability of the separatist movement from the perspective of both Chechens themselves and the other peoples of the North Caucasus. An attempt to spread the movement to neighboring regions of Russia began to be associated in the minds of these regions' local populations with violent criminal activity.

Lacking the internal resources to centralize authority and quell criminal violence, a few leaders of the Chechen political elite turned to radical politicized Islam as one way of overcoming the internal crisis. However, the republic's move toward Is-

lamic statehood, and especially attempts to overcome or cover up the crisis through the spread of "pure" (Salafi or Wahhabi) Islam, only served to further fracture Chechen society. Salafism came into conflict with Chechnya's "national" (Tariqah or Sufi) Islamic traditions and came to be perceived by some of the Chechen political elite as an even greater threat to Chechnya's cultural heritage than being within the orbit of the developing Russian state.

This conflict between Tariqah traditionalism and Salafism became apparent when important and influential Tariqah Chechen clans broke with Maskhadov and abandoned the separatist movement. These clans began increasingly to view a return to Russia as the lesser of two evils and to perceive Russia as the only force capable of helping Chechnya out of its crisis and postwar destruction. They viewed Salafism as a negative influence that neither promoted the formation of Chechen statehood nor served to enhance the republic's standing among its neighbors. This attitude became politically decisive during the next Russian military campaign, when the conflict underwent what was known as "Chechenization," a term used to describe the changing focus from Russian-Chechen "antagonisms" to an internal struggle among Chechen factions, some of whom were starting to favor the republic's reintegration into Russia. In 1998–1999 the tensions brought about by the internal crisis and functional failures of the republic's government institutions as well as the country's regional isolation led Chechen leaders to determine that salvation could be found only through the export of Islamic revolution to neighboring highland regions of the Russian Caucasus, Daghestan first and foremost. The ideology and organizational infrastructure for such an endeavor had been taking shape in Chechnya since 1996, primarily in military training camps, where a significant number of trainees were from Daghestan and trainers were from a number of Arabic countries.

By the mid-nineties relations between Chechnya and Daghestan, both official and local, were strained. Daghestan's territory