The issue of Chechnya barely featured in the Russian parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007 and 2008. This contrasts starkly with previous elections when the Chechnya conflict was either an embarrassment to be disguised by a propaganda of ‘success’ or a recognised failure demanding concrete decisive new action. In 1996, in order to ensure his electoral victory, Boris Yeltsin was all but forced to negotiate a humiliating agreement with Chechen rebel leaders to grant them de facto independence. In 1999-2000, the strategic dangers of Islamist extremism and expansionism emanating from a lawless Chechnya were central to Vladimir Putin’s presidential campaign. Moscow’s subsequent forceful military response conferred the mantle of legitimacy on someone politically almost invisible a few months earlier. In 2003-4, Putin sought to present his Chechen policy as an unqualified success but found it best to draw a veil over some developments in the region, given the difficulties of disguising the continuing conflict within Chechnya itself and increasingly cruel terrorist atrocities which culminated in the horrors of the Beslan siege in September 2004.

The elections in 2007-08 were different. Certainly, as in the previous elections, both national and Chechen state-controlled media poured forth exaggerated propaganda claims of success. However, now even respected political scientists were willing to proclaim that:

the war in Chechnya has ended. We won. The main heroes of this war are its political leaders and also the several thousands of young lads: Chechens, Russians and others, who gave their lives for the territorial integrity of Russia, for the security of the citizens of Russia and for the reduction of the threat of terrorism’.1

What is more, this time, there is some significant truth to this. Although there undoubtedly remain many problems in Chechnya, the situation in the republic has greatly improved over the last few years. The Russian security forces have had a string of successes in eliminating the most effective and well-known of the rebel leaders. The death of Shamil Basayev in 2006 - the charismatic “Che Guevara” of the Chechen resistance - was the most important breakthrough. The policy of “Chechenization”, forcefully promoted by Putin to devolve responsibilities from Russian federal forces to local Chechens, has resulted in the consolidation of power of President Ramzan Kadyrov and his armed formations. Kadyrov might be a brutal ex-bandit but he has shown sufficient strategic sense and flexibility to encourage other former rebels to move over to the side of the government and to gain a genuine popular support (albeit mixed with a degree of fear and loathing) from his war-weary population. His self-projection has also been aided by the fact that substantial federal funds for reconstruction have finally made a marked impact on the ground and the local economy is showing signs of improvement. The popular appetite for secession has, as a consequence, declined significantly.2

The Russian success in Chechnya, little recognised in the West, is not just important in itself but for the way it has structured and legitimated the political changes that Putin has introduced during his Presidency. Accordingly, whilst the first part of this paper concentrates on Putin’s aims and achievements in Chechnya, the remainder then provides a broader forward projection, assessing the continuing regional, national and international risks emanating from the North Caucasus even despite the relative success in Chechnya.

We argue that new Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, would be foolhardy to assume that the problems in the North Caucasus can now be conveniently forgotten. However, these problems are likely to be of a different nature to those which faced Putin. They are also likely to be the unforeseen and the unintended consequences of earlier policies. First, there is the likely problem of Ramzan Kadyrov and his ambitions. The issue here is whether in Kadyrov, Russia has created a political Frankenstein, to use the colourful image of one commentator, whose over-zealous loyalty to act as Russia’s proxy in the North Caucasus has raised wider concerns over an unrequited Chechen expansionist agenda. Secondly, relative stability in Chechnya appears to be structurally linked to growing instability in the rest of the North Caucasus. It is now not Chechnya but Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria which are increasingly unstable. The third set of problems is of a more generic nature. This is the broader impact on Russian politics of Putin’s strategy for dealing with the Chechen problem, which has so emphasised territorial integrity, the “war against terror”, and the threat of foreign penetration. In pursuit of victory in the North Caucasus, there has been an implicit state legitimation of a more assertive and xenophobic Russian nationalism where distrust of Caucasians, of Muslims and a more general anti-Western sentiment have grown significantly. Like other authoritarian leaders, Putin has sought to ride the tiger of nationalism to support his centralisation and consolidation of power. There are doubts, however, that this Russian tiger is so easily tameable.

**Putin’s Caucasian War on Terror**

It is no overestimation to say that the North Caucasus defined and moulded Putin’s presidency. Putin’s democratic legitimacy was indeed ‘forged in war’. It was in the North Caucasus that Putin’s prestige and popularity were initially grounded, reaping the rewards for a military campaign which was deemed by most Russians to be both necessary and successful. Remarkably, his popularity never subsequently waned, except briefly after the Beslan hostage-taking incident in September 2004. Moreover, Putin always understood the critical importance of the perceptions of victory and success in Russia’s “war on terror” in the North Caucasus, noting as he came to power that ‘my mission, my historic mission – it sounds pompous, but it is true – is to resolve the situation in the North Caucasus’. The fact that in 2007 he and his associates could reasonably justifiably declare that victory had been won in Chechnya provided a vital source of legitimation for the distinctly less free and more authoritarian political structures which Putin had constructed in the intervening period.

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It was not just the direct threat that Chechnya posed in the late 1990s to Russia’s integrity and its security which was important. It was also the way that Putin consciously framed his response to the conflict to set a clear psychological distance from the presidency of his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin. For Putin, the North Caucasus was reflective of the larger problems facing post-Soviet Russia - the threat of disintegration, the perceived penetration and subversion by foreign forces, the weakening of state structures as a result of criminality and terror, and Russia’s basic inability to stand up for itself and secure its core national objectives. There is no doubt that Putin, whose background was in the KGB, was deeply offended by the chaotic state of Russia in the late 1990s of which the North Caucasus was the most flagrant example. Yeltsin’s unpopularity at this time demonstrated that this also reflected a broader popular revulsion. The succession of bomb attacks on apartment blocks in Russian cities in September 1999, which caused over 300 deaths, had a traumatic impact on Russians, not unlike that felt by the Americans after 9/11. This provided the ideal strategic moment to respond with decisive action.

There are certain parallels between Putin’s response to the 1999 events and how President George W. Bush utilised 9/11 to frame a radical strategic shift in US security policy. Like Putin’s implicit representation of the Yeltsin period, Bush sought to define the Clinton era as one of weakness, indecision, pusillanimity and lack of moral probity. Instead of meekly appeasing Iraq or lobbing an intermittent cruise missile to Iraq, as Clinton was wont to do, Bush launched a full-scale invasion as a part of the ‘war on terror’. In essence, Putin sought to do something similar in re-starting the campaign in Chechnya in 1999. This intervention, unlike the earlier Chechen war (1994-6), was similarly defined purely and simply as a counter-terrorist operation.

Russia’s own ‘war on terror’ started two years earlier than America’s but like that war, it had new rules of engagement.

First, as against the perceived constant political meddling of politicians in the Yeltsin period, Putin gave the military a carte blanche to conduct the war in order to bring decisive victory. Compared with the occasionally tragi-comic evolution of the first war, the second campaign was far more professional and effective. This helped to ease the deep sense of alienation in the Russian military caused by the conviction that politicians had ‘pulled the rug from under their feet’ by denying a military victory in the earlier campaign.

Second, the constant mantra of the second war was that there would be no negotiation with the ‘terrorists’. Putin resolved any remaining ambiguities on the issue of independence, by confirming that it not open for discussion. His uncompromising line established new rules

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7 This became doctrinally encoded in the US National Security Strategy of 2002. For the text of the strategy and for commentary on this, see Roland Dannreuther and John Peterson (eds), Security Strategy and Transatlantic Relations (London: Routledge, 2007).


9 For an interesting memoir reflecting on this from one of the leading Russian generals, see G. Troshev, Moya Voina: chechenskiy dnevnik okopnogo generala (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000).
for dealing with major terrorist incidents. In the response to the terrorist hostage crises in Budennovsk in 1995 and Kizlyar in 1996, the image of leading government figures negotiating with hostage-takers, agreeing to their demands and even facilitating their escape presented an image of a Russia abjectly humiliated. When Putin was confronted with similar challenges, most notably the hostage crises in the Moscow “Dubrovka” theatre in 2002 and in Beslan in 2004, he brooked no negotiation and was willing to use deadly force (toxic gas in Moscow, flamethrowers in Beslan) to end the sieges, even at the cost of substantial loss of innocent life.

The third new set of rules was that the Chechens were no longer to have the ‘oxygen’ of media exposure. Unlike the first war, the international media was given almost no freedom to report on developments in the second. As well as the media being excluded, the Russian government also paid little or no attention to international criticisms of their actions. Indeed, the attitude was one of barely disguised contempt, seeing such criticisms as further evidence of Western hypocrisy. Sergei Ivanov, the Russian defence minister’s typically robust reaction was that ‘to those who recommend that we launch talks with Maskhadov, I always invite them to start talks with Mullah Omar. It’s the same thing. Currently on Chechen territory there are around 1,200 to 1,300 active rebels, uncompromising bandits, with whom you can only have one conversation – their destruction’.

But probably the most important decision taken by Putin was to assume full responsibility for Chechnya and the Chechen campaign. This contrasted with Yeltsin who habitually sought to devolve responsibility and hide from any unpleasant repercussions emanating from the North Caucasus. It was this act of decision which, perhaps more than anything else, moulded the popular conception of Putin as a decisive and strong leader. It provided the popular ballast for subsequent decisions made to counter what were perceived as the root causes of anarchy in the region – such as excessive federalisation, the devolution of power, and excessive prerogatives assumed by the super-rich, resulting in Putin’s successive rolling back of regional autonomies, and the persecution of the ‘oligarchs’ by the state and power ministries. The most famous and notorious of the oligarchs was Boris Berezovskii whose links to the Chechen separatists made him vulnerable to the claim that he had the blood of innocent Russian victims on his hands. Overall, the sources for the legitimation of the establishment of an authoritarian state structure by Putin are found in the crucible of the North Caucasus. This link was made explicit in the aftermath to Beslan, when gubernatorial elections were abolished and the electoral system centralised in the name of anti-terrorism.

Nevertheless, Putin’s highly personalised engagement with Chechnya and the North Caucasus was far from risk-free. There was clearly a problem that the conflict might not be

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10 Agence France Press, 16 July 2003. For a good general assessment of the discourse used over Chechnya, see Edwin Bacon and Bettina Renz, Securitising Russia: The Domestic Policies of Putin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), ch. 3.

11 See an evaluation of the claim that Berezovskii was lobbying for separatist Chechen interests in Trenin and Malashenko, ‘Russia’s Restless Frontier’, p. 23. Berezovskii is now based in London and the British refusal to agree to his extradition is one of the main causes of UK-Russian diplomatic hostility.

overcome and victory could not be proclaimed. Indeed, by 2005 a dominant view among most independent analysts was that Putin’s Chechen policy had been an unmitigated disaster.\textsuperscript{13} While Chechnya was partially subjugated, a succession of deadly mass casualty terrorist attacks had been unleashed throughout Russia. Similarly, pacification in Chechnya appeared only to spread the problem to the rest of the North Caucasus and make Islamist extremism an ultimately more dangerous regional and even national problem. Both Western and Russian critics began to talk about Russia facing a widescale “Islamic threat”.\textsuperscript{14}

By the end of 2006, however, such alarmist scenarios had significantly dissipated.\textsuperscript{15} The causes of certainly include elements of luck, of which the killing of both rebel president Aslan Maskhadov in 2005 and Basayev in 2006 were the most notable. The loss of such key rebel leaders undoubtedly depressed the morale and spirit of the resistance. Simple war fatigue was also important as popular sentiment in the North Caucasus increasingly opted for peace and stability and with little appetite for a political vision of secession. High oil prices and Russia’s economic regeneration have also played a vital part, providing the funds for reconstruction which were never previously available or which were simply siphoned off. And in 2004 Putin appointed a reasonably competent representative to Russian’s southern federal district, Dmitry Kozak, who succeeded in ousting some of the most corrupt and ineffective leaders of the region and bringing some (albeit limited) order and transparency to the clannish neopatrimonial practices of the region, which is the source of much of the endemic resentments and violence.\textsuperscript{16}

However, it is the policy of “Chechenization” which has undoubtedly also played a significant role in transforming Russia’s fate in the Caucasus. Central to this has been the devolution of power to Ramzan Kadyrov.

The ‘Ramzanisation’ of Chechnya

Although Putin strongly supported the use of military force to achieve the desired political objectives in Chechnya, he also became increasingly aware of its limits. The evidence of the previous war was that military counter-insurgency operations, which inevitably tend towards lack of discrimination and extensive collateral damage, only exacerbate the situation unless married with a political process and a policy of devolving


\textsuperscript{16} For the best account of the neopatrimonial structures of power in the North Caucasus, see Georgi M. Deluguian, \textit{Bourdieu’s Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography} (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003).
power and providing ‘local ownership’ of the political settlement. The problem with the Yeltsin period was that policy oscillated variously between negotiating with the rebels, promoting pro-Russian Chechen leaders who had no popular base, and seeking a purely military solution. In the early part of the second war, Putin faced the opposite problem of potentially too few options, since the military leadership was determined to pursue a purely military victory. In practice, Putin gave the military free license up until the 2002 Moscow theatre siege, when it then became clear that the Russian military simply lacked the sophisticated counter-terrorist capabilities of a country like Israel, needed for an efficient military response to a large-scale mass casualty terrorist offensive. The only practical alternative was to pursue a political path, seeking to localise or de-internationalise the conflict through gaining a genuinely pro-Russian support base within Chechnya. Against the wishes of much of the military, this would require devolving both political and security responsibilities to the Chechens themselves, including those who could be tempted to switch sides from the rebels.

The choice of Ahmad Kadyrov, the father of Ramzan and former Mufti of Chechnya, as the designated pro-Russian leader was astute. Kadyrov was distinguished, in comparison to previous ‘puppet’ leaders promoted by Moscow, by his express disloyalty in having supported and fought on the rebels’ side in the first war. Indeed, it was Kadyrov who as Mufti had declared holy war (gazawat) against Russia in 1995. However, he became disillusioned with the rebel movement as it became increasingly influenced by salafist and radical extremist Islamic viewpoints, which was antithetical to his more traditionalist and sufi-influenced religious stance. In June 2000 he was appointed by Putin as head of administration in the republic. But power only seriously began to be devolved in 2003 when there was a (manipulated) referendum on a new constitution, paving the way for presidential elections in 2004 which confirmed Kadyrov’s power. Parallel to this was the process of devolution of security responsibilities, first from the Ministry of Defence to the Federal Security Services (FSB) and then to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). As the federal forces declined in numbers, the local armed formations loyal to Ahmad Kadyrov and his clan, under the command of his son Ramzan Kadyrov, were given increasing powers, including taking control of a number of the informal but lucrative economic resources and markets of the war economy. This process of ‘Chechenization’ nearly became derailed by the assassination of Ahmad Kadyrov shortly after the presidential elections in June 2004. But power was retained within the Kadyrov clan, with his son becoming de facto strongman of the republic despite the election of a new President, Alu Alkhanov. In 2007, even this partial balancing was removed by Putin’s decision to enforce Alkhanov’s resignation and for Ramzan to be promoted to the Presidency. As one commentator has noted, Chechenisation has become in practice “Ramzanisation”.

What has this process of “Ramzanisation” achieved? First, it has provided a vital element of the narrative of progress and success which has been critical to Putin’s

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19 For how taking over these markets involved clashes with federal military and interior forces, see Aleksandr Kots and Andrei Rodkin, ‘The Ambush’, Komsomolskaya Pravda, 3 March 2003
20 Baev, ‘Has Russia Achieved a Victory in its War against Terror?’, p. 2.
consolidation of power. By the time of the 2007-08 elections, Chechnya was consistently been presented as a rosy reconstruction site, with official websites such as www.chechnyatoday.com highlighting the miraculous rebuilding of the capital Grozny under a benevolent Ramzan and increasingly its viability as a normal tourist destination. Moreover Ramzan enjoyed a ‘younger brother’ personality cult analogous to that provided for his more senior and avuncular Putin. Given that Kadyrov is all but an uneducated thug, this is an impressive exercise of what in Russia is called ‘political technology’ or what is elsewhere called public relations. In reality, Kadyrov is proving to be a more effective and capable leader than his unprepossessing exterior might suggest. The sources of his power certainly include brutality and repression, including a pervasive recourse to torture, and Chechnya’s reconstruction has a definite Potemkin village element. But unlike earlier Russian proxy leaders, Ramzan has been reasonably efficient in finding the necessary balance of inducements (joining his security forces, the so-called kadyrovtsy, and benefiting from the associated spoils) and threats (to family and extended family members) to get insurgents to switch sides. Along with the general demoralization of the resistance, particularly due to the assassinations of Maskhadov and Basayev, this has had a marked impact on reducing the levels of insecurity within the Republic.

**Ramzan – Russia’s Faithful Client?**

However, there are clear dangers for Moscow of this new enthusiastic proxy in the North Caucasus. The first is that the process of devolution of power will result in Moscow ultimately losing its levers of influence. Senior figures in Putin’s administration, including Dmitry Kozak and Igor Sechin, Putin’s deputy chief of staff, privately recommended replacing Kadyrov and fear that he might be accumulating too much power. Many siloviki (forces people), including FSB head Nikolai Patrushev are concerned that ‘Chechenization’ ultimately represents a victory for the rebels – gaining independence through imitating loyalty rather than rebellion. Traditionally, the Russian security services have sought to prevent such concentrations of local power by the classic tactics of ‘divide and rule’. In Chechnya, this policy is evident in the two pro-Russian Chechen Zapad and Vostok battalions being under the control of Chechen family-clans independent from Kadyrov. However, Kadyrov is waging a skilful and relentless campaign to consolidate power and to undermine the power of alternative Chechen and federal centres of power. A favoured tactic is to claim that these other security groups, like the Vostok battalion under the control of the Yamadaev brothers or the notorious investigation unit of the Russian interior ministry forces, are responsible for human rights violations and should thus be disbanded. Assassination and other more forceful gestures are used in parallel with these softer measures. As one Russian commentator has remarked, for Kadyrov ‘the methods for dealing with enemies, fighting with arms, and political opponents are the same’. Relations between federal forces in Chechnya and Ramzan’s kadyrovtsy are understandably hostile. At the same time, Kadyrov is locked in a longstanding dispute with Moscow over the distribution of the oil revenues from

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Chechen oil and the location of oil refineries. Putin’s judgement, supported by influential presidential administration deputy head Vladimir Surkov, is that Chechnya needs a strongman, that Kadyrov provides this, and that the neo-patrimonial and personal links between Putin and Kadyrov will ensure his fidelity. Whether this will remain to be the case under Medvedev’s presidency, and whether intra-Chechen resistance to his centralisation can be contained, are open questions since Medvedev allegedly shares with Kozak a distaste for lawless despots. However, Medvedev’s warm words to Kadyrov on their first official meeting after his election indicated that Moscow still needs Ramzan, for the short term at least. Ramzan, in turn, has been obsequiously loyal to his Moscow patrons, so far, emphasising that Chechnya’s successes result both from Russian and Chechen joint endeavour, and Putin’s personal input.

However, even if he does remain loyal, Kadyrov still represents a challenge. The key question is whether his clearly expansive ambitions will be satisfied with the territorial limits of the Chechen Republic. Kadyrov sees himself, to a certain extent, as an eagle in a canary’s cage. The enormous resources, both economic and military, which have been dispersed to Chechnya have created a sense that Grozny is becoming the new centre of Russian power in the North Caucasus. There is also a strong belief amongst many Chechens of the legitimacy of a ‘Greater Chechnya’. This involves a Chechnya incorporating both Dagestan, where there is a common Muslim identity and a strategic link to the sea, and Ingushetiya, where there is a common Vainakh nationality, a history of unity during the Soviet period, and a recognition that a combined Chechen-Ingush political force might be better able to resolve the dispute over the Prigorodnyi district in North Ossetia to the advantage of the Ingush. Shamil’ Basayev, the charismatic Chechen rebel leader, was transparently open about such Chechen ambitions in the guise of an Islamic ideal, claiming that ‘we are fighting for the proclamation of an Islamic empire and the establishment of a greater Chechen empire in Chechnya, Dagestan and later Ingushetiya’. It was not surprising that Kadyrov raised regional hackles when he confirmed that Chechnya’s security and law-enforcement agencies were ready to offer whatever help they could to their ‘brothers’ in Ingushetiya. Both Dagestan and Ingushetiya have vocally rejected Ramzan’s advances. Kadyrov has not hesitated to intervene further afield: the Chechen president has 25 official representatives in Russia’s regions. However, Ramzan’s forays outside domestic politics (e.g his closure of the Danish Refugee Council in retaliation for the publication of controversial cartoons of Mohammed), were viewed in Moscow as exceeding his authority. Many in the liberal intelligentsia remain convinced that Ramzan was somehow involved in the murder of the investigative journalist Anna Politovskaya, one of the most vocal critics of his rule.

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Stability in Chechnya: Instability in the North Caucasus?

However, one of Moscow’s most pressing domestic issues is that the greater its success in Chechnya, the worse its hold appears on the surrounding republics. True, Basaev’s death has apparently consigned the most large-scale regional atrocities (e.g. at Beslan in 2004 and Nalchik in 2005) to the past, but low-level political violence (assassinations of law-enforcement and local government officials, explosions, shootings and kidnappings) have become so frequent both in Dagestan and formerly placid republics like Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria are in a state of ‘unstable stability’, little short of open civil war.29

Developments in Chechnya have long had a direct impact on other republics of the North Caucasus. The experience of the first Chechen war radicalised Chechen resistance from national-separatism into international jihad organised through a network of combat jamaats (Islamic communities) across the region and co-ordinated by Chechen fighters in the North Caucasus Front.30 The impact of the second war has been more ambiguous: under Maskhadov’s successors Saidullaev and Umarov, the Islamist opposition has been largely expelled from Chechnya and has essentially severed its ties with the Chechen national cause; in October 2007 Umarov declared ambitions for an Emirate in all of the North Caucasus. This Emirate has, however, provoked deep schisms in the Chechen insurgency between Chechen nationalists and international jihadists: for instance, five Chechen field commanders rejected Umarov’s proclamation almost immediately.31 Moreover, Iraq and Afghanistan now represent far more propitious arenas for foreign mujahedin and foreign support has declined accordingly. On the other hand, the emergence of the Ingush ‘shariah’ jamaat under ‘Magas’, who has also succeeded Basayev as military commander of the North Caucasus Front, indicates that Jihad in Russia has, as in other parts of the world, been transmuted into a more pervasive, rootless and potentially less controllable form.

Ramzan’s wider ambitions have also impacted on the insurgency elsewhere. On one hand his prestige has translated into integrative trends within the Chechen diaspora within Russia as many Chechens seek to ride on Ramzan’s coat-tails to secure greater federal funding, attention and influence. On the other, younger Chechens in particular are more radically inclined likely to see Ramzan as an unambiguous traitor to their cause, and continue to support resistance from afar.32 Among the populations of the broader North Caucasus, Ramzan is a far from universally loved figure: the frequent sorties of the Kadyrovtsy into neighbouring Dagestan and Ingushetia in pursuit of their targets have alarmed local officials and contributed to popular dissatisfaction with regional and federal administrations alike.

It would clearly be a simplification to see the entire North Caucasus as succumbing to an ‘Islamic Threat’ emanating from Chechnya with international genesis. Indeed, the region

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30 For the recent developments, see Mairbek Vatchegaev, ‘2007 Summed Up: Ichkeria gets the Emirate’, Chechnya Weekly, 9:2, 17 January 2008. For a more general survey of the regionalisation of Islamist extremism in Russia, see Hahn, Russia’s Islamic Threat.
is such an intractable problem for Moscow precisely because most of the causes are domestic, and deeply embedded with problems of regional governance that Moscow has been tardy to recognise.\textsuperscript{33} In a remarkably frank analysis of the roots of regional instability in 2005, Dmitry Kozak identified socioeconomic collapse, the unpopularity and corruption of elites and their transgressions on democratic practice as perfect incubators for extremism and the collapse of Russian statehood.\textsuperscript{34} The logical approach from Moscow’s point of view was to appoint clean and competent leaders (such as Mukhu Aliev in Dagestan, Taimuraz Mamsurov in North Ossetia), and to increase federal control and funding of the region simultaneously.\textsuperscript{35} Alongside a greater share of federal attention and finance, Moscow has dramatically (if unofficially) increased its troop numbers in the region.\textsuperscript{36} Such policies have not been without effect, as in across the region, economic growth has improved remarkably, without however significantly reducing endemic poverty, entrenched corruption and mass unemployment, as a result of which extremism and political violence has, if anything, increased.

Whilst Kozak’s report was rare in putting political governance issues at the centre of analysis, it reflected a broader failure to consider federal policies and the linked question of political representation as broader drivers of radicalisation. First, the use of military means to deal with a political problem replicated problems in Chechnya: A vicious circle has been created whereby the lack of negotiation with insurgency leaders has produced radicalised leaders who know only war, and so can’t be negotiated with, only killed. Ill-informed and heavy-handed anti-terrorist ‘cleansing operations’ tend to stereotype Muslims as ‘extremists’ and ‘a single enemy that can be eliminated by military means’, victimising men with beards or women with headscarves, in particular rounding up young men (who may subsequently disappear), and raiding mosques.\textsuperscript{37} However, here the military’s aims coincide with those of local authorities, who have a vested interest in demonising radical Islam, which (originally at least) presented a powerful critique of the corruption and authoritarianism of the local politico-religious establishment, as ‘Wahhabism’.\textsuperscript{38} It is only latterly that Moscow has begun to develop a more nuanced view of ‘Wahhabism’, but with little substantive effect. Military victimisation has characteristically had a reverse effect to that intended, creating a prison-camp atmosphere and driving many towards extremism. Whilst the numbers of fighters are constantly depleted, federal policies encourage ever more locals to replace them, even in traditionally pro-Russian areas without a strong history of Islamic extremism, like Kabardino-Balkaria. As noted on the opposition site Ingushetiya.ru:

\textsuperscript{33} For nuanced views of the role of political Islam in the region see for example Sagramoso, ‘Violence and conflict’ and Elise Giuliano, ‘Islamic Identity and Political mobilization in Russia; Chechnya and Dagestan compared’, \textit{Nationalism and Ethnic Politics}, 11: 195-220, 2005.
\textsuperscript{36} Sagramoso, ‘Violence and conflict’.
Dozens of young people, who understand that tomorrow they may number among the “suspected” or “killed while offering armed resistance”, already speculate about armed struggle against the FSB and Ingushetian law-enforcement system, and seek contacts with Emir Magas...Only the republican authorities have the power to stop such dangerous tendencies, by defending their own population from extrajudicial executions and repressions.\textsuperscript{39}

Second, Moscow’s stated policies have been inconsistently pursued: outside Chechnya, the centre often lacks leaders with comparable rootedness, ruthlessness and autonomy even to impose a façade of order like Kadyrov: the epitome of this is Murat Zyazikov, a Moscow-imposed leader who replaced the popular but independent Ruslan Aushev in 2002. A former FSB general, Zyazikov’s appointment was intended to give the federal security services free rein in the republic.\textsuperscript{40} However, Zyazikov lacked local elite backing, is seen as corrupt and weak, and has consistently struggled to command widespread respect. Moreover, the interdependency of the local political and federal security establishment in Ingushetia risks discrediting regional and federal authority alike. However, despite Kozak’s efforts at elite rotation, Moscow appears to prefer loyalty to effectiveness, and Putin’s personal patronage of Zyazikov has so far prevented his removal. Moreover, given that what passes as ‘Islamic terrorism’ in the North Caucasus is often part of an entrenched criminalized and militarized elite conflict for power, merely replacing the top echelon can do little to allay problems, and may even exacerbate them.\textsuperscript{41}

Third, Moscow’s centralising efforts have been largely counter-productive, by removing the local level ‘safety valves’ that prevented disaffected populations defecting to the Islamic insurgency in the 1990s For instance, Dagestan’s consociational governing system was replaced in 2006 by an appointed presidency that might threaten its delicate ethnic balance. The increasing emergence of local one-party systems dominated by the pro-regime United Russia party (UR) has further limited the scope for expressing intra-system political dissent. The Communist Party which in the 1990s had played a positive, integrative local role as a socially-oriented, internationalist organization with strong roots in civil society, has been almost entirely marginalised.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{39} Quoted in Gennadii Chufrin, ‘Kommentarii k vystupleniyam’, www.ca-c.org/journal/cas-10-2000/22.chuf.shtml.
risking discrediting federal policy in the region). Worryingly however, Kozak’s September 2007 replacement by Grigory Rapota seemed to indicate Moscow’s view that the main, problems were solved, and offered few new initiatives.

The Caucasus’ inter-ethnic complications and vulnerability to external factors poses additional complications for the Kremlin, particularly in the context of Kosovo’s independence and Moscow’s fraught relations with neighbouring republics like Georgia. Russia has traditionally been caught between its adherence to principles of international sovereignty and the wish to act as a lobbyist for Russian interests within neighbouring states, often (in the case of unrecognised republics like South Ossetiya and Abkhaziya) appearing to promote border inviolability and secessionism simultaneously, a secessionism that of course Russia refuses its own regions. After Kosovo’s independence declaration in February 2008 the Kremlin backtracked markedly on its public support for secessionist entities, while NATO’s refusal in April 2008 to offer Georgia and Ukraine immediate membership defused the possibility of Moscow further encouraging regionalist and separatist tendencies within these states as a spoiling tactic, and even allowed the marginal thawing of relations between Moscow and Tbilisi beginning since early 2008 to continue. However, the danger clearly remained that a decade of quietly encouraging regional assertiveness outside its borders might eventually provoke Caucasian separatism that Moscow so feared. It was notable that Russian republics like Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetiya and Karachai-Cherkessiya supported South Ossetiya’s claims for independence, and it was unclear how South Ossetiya might deal with its inevitably disappointed hopes. Whilst local pro-Moscow sentiments and regional political and ethnic divisions mean a separatist ‘domino effect’ remains unlikely, it would be short-sighted to pretend that regional security problems have been resolved, and not merely postponed.

‘Chechenization’ and Russian nationalism

Moscow’s Chechen conundrum has long had a wider, indirect but significant impact on Russian politics more broadly. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that Russian politics has been ‘Chechenized’, in as much as the centralisation, securitisation and electoral manipulation practised in Chechnya are far from unique, but have impacted on, and in turn been affected by developments in the wider political system. We have already referred to the intimate links Putin has made between terrorism, territorial disintegration, and foreign support (implicit in the term ‘Wahhabism’), and the need to combat terrorism with centralisation, self-reliance and non-compromise. Allied to the anti-terror theme, there has been an implicit state utilisation of a more assertive and xenophobic Russian nationalism in aim of centralisation and consolidation of power. As a consequence, distrust of Caucasians, Muslims and ‘foreigners’ more generally has grown to the degree that Moscow’s attempts to integrate the North Caucasus within the Russian political space may be significantly compromised.

This threat should not be overstated: Russia’s leaders have become attuned to the dangers of ethno-religious intolerance; for example by de-registering the most egregiously nationalist parties in the 2007 elections, and by bowing to opposition (including by the official Muslim muftiyat) to oppose the Russian Orthodox Church’s proposed state school
course ‘Foundations of Orthodox Culture’. However, the problem with the state’s approach is that it deals with the problem administratively (by banning the symptoms not the cause) and inconsistently (by encouraging xenophobic attitudes at the same time as it voices its approval of ‘extremism’ and ‘nationalism’). This is a delicate attempt to balance on the back of the ‘nationalist tiger’, utilising it to support the key objective of strengthening the state, but trying to ensure that freedom of nationalist expression does not cause longer-term damage to inter-ethnic or inter-confessional relations, always a possibility in a state with nearly 20 percent who are not ethnic Russians. A case in point is the officially sanctioned concept of ‘sovereign democracy’, which is not explicitly nationalistic and indeed claims to be multi-national, saying relatively little about inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations. However, as Moscow’s criticism of the West during the 2007 elections revealed, the principal aim of this concept is to insist on Russia’s special developmental path as an alternative to ‘liberal’ democracy. Accordingly, it encourages an ‘enlightened’ national self-assertion while dismissing the relevance of a culture of tolerance or individual rights which might provide adequate safeguards against chauvinistic nationalism, and legitimates the view of Russia as a besieged fortress’ at the mercy of Western-inspired security threats. Moreover, the state’s ‘toying’ with nationalism acts as a ‘code’ whereby the Russian bureaucracy and security services implicitly understand the ‘approved’ targets (e.g. migrants, Caucasians) for observance and harassment.

That such nationalist reassertion has led to wider xenophobic and chauvinistic sentiments in Russian society at large is now well documented. Analysts have noticed a significant increase in support for the slogan ‘Russia for the Russians’, and an increase in Caucasophobia and Islamophobia, encouraged by stereotypical images of the Caucasus and radicalized Islam in the media and popular culture. Interestingly, whereas Chechens were clearly and perhaps logically the feared group in the aftermath of the 1999 bombings, the ‘Ramzan’ effect has apparently begun to improve Chechens’ image within Russia as loyal Russian patriots. However, increasing migration into European Russia from the North Caucasus, Central and East Asia has led to ‘migrantophobia’ becoming ethnic Russians’ biggest bugbear: moreover, the migrant is usually a Caucasian and invariably a Muslim. Nor have these sentiments remained merely abstract: attacks on Muslim immigrants are on the increase, epitomised by the ‘Movement against Illegal Immigration’ which first rose to prominence by exploiting a restaurant brawl between ethnic Russians and Chechens at Kondapoga in Karelia in September 2006. Therefore, rather like the North Caucasus

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44 For extensive coverage see: Suverenitet (Moscow: Evropa, 2006), Suverennaya demokratiya: ot idei k doktrine (Moscow: Evropa, 2007), Pro suverennuyu demokratiyu (Moscow, Evropa 2007).


47 Vatchagaev, ‘The Chechen Diaspora in Russia’. 
insurgency itself, xenophobia has become more less focussed on the Chechen national, but correspondingly more diffuse and pervasive.

The impact of such discrimination on Muslims themselves is difficult to judge, in part because its targets are often ‘illegals’, in part because of insufficient official attention to the issue. Clearly, the idea of an all-pervasive ‘Islamic threat’ borne by a network of battle-ready jamaats across Russia is exaggerated. However, in Moscow and other large Russian cities, there is evidence that Russian nationalist self-assertion and its evident anti-migrant orientation, alongside increasing authoritarianism and limits on other vehicles for expression of difference, is fostering increased disenchantment amongst the large indigenous and migrant Muslim communities that can certainly lead to greater interethnic tensions, and potentially greater, more widespread Islamic radicalisation.

Moreover, increased Russian nationalism presents a potential poisoned chalice for the new Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev. Medvedev has sought to project a more ‘liberal’ image than Putin, emphasising the rule of law, political freedoms and even his disapproval of qualifiers on democracy like ‘sovereign democracy’. Nevertheless, even if these sentiments are more than just image (which can clearly be doubted), Vladimir Putin’s tenure as prime minister will remain (as intended) an important guarantor of policy continuity and a restraint on any domestic ‘thaw’. Moreover, Russia’s utilisation of nationalism is structurally interlinked with its increasingly authoritarian political system and as such will be difficult to reverse: on many occasions in the post-Soviet era, the Russian authorities have used mobilisation against a ‘significant other’ (communists, Chechens, terrorists, oligarchs, the West) to ‘rally the population round the flag’ in the face of perceived threats. However negative the unintended consequences, the temptation to employ such a useful tool in maintaining uninterrupted elite rule will remain great indeed.

Conclusion

Far more than is generally acknowledged outside Russia, Russian policies towards Chechnya have succeeded in their aims; the republic is now a relatively placid, fast developing, and unswervingly loyal member of the Russian Federation for the first time in the post-Soviet era; moreover, its leader Ramzan Kadyrov, although a divisive figure, has succeeded in presenting himself as Russia’s most faithful servant in the North Caucasus, and by doing so begun to overcome some of the many negative anti-Chechen stereotypes in Russian society.

Of course, whether Russian achievements in Chechnya can be self-sustaining or are simply dispersing problems elsewhere is an open question; Moscow now finds itself in the curious position of being dependent on one of its own appointed proxies as one of its few regional success stories. Moreover, this proxy looks like presenting a troublesome legacy for Dmitry Medvedev; his interventions into regional and even federal policies have scarcely helped pour oil on troubled waters, whilst the overspill of the Chechen conflict has contributed to wider regional destabilisation. Whether the Kremlin wants to, dares to, and

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48 Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat*.
49 See Dannreuther and March, ‘Russia and Islam’.
even can remove Kadyrov without reigniting conflict within Chechnya itself may be doubted, even if he inspires deep distaste in some governing circles.

Elsewhere in the North Caucasus, Moscow’s policy is in far more of a quagmire as it attempts to impose militarization, centralisation and subsidisation through proxies who lack Kadyrov’s combination of autonomy, local support, guile and sheer brutality. Moscow instead faces an Islamic opposition increasingly diffuse, decentralised and uncontrollable, which has significant mobilisation potential through exploiting local grievances at dire socioeconomic and political opportunities, and most of its policies to date (Kozak’s initiatives excepted) have simply served to exacerbate the problems.

Against this background, Putin’s attempts to exploit nationalism to reinforce the consolidation of power provide a more diffuse but perhaps even more intractable problem for resolving the North Caucasus conundrum than the policies of local elites: not only does this nationalism raise barriers to the greater integration of Islamic communities within Russia itself, but its focus on self-assertion against external malevolence and national unity against territorial disintegration denies Russia a sufficiently flexible discourse to engage with many of the direct causes of its Caucasian headaches (principally issues of political governance and representation). Arguably at present, Moscow has two alternatives to present policies: first, the appointment of several Kadyrov-like strongmen with license to govern their North Caucasus republics autonomously and autocratically. This option would offer the prospect of regional pacification at the significant risk of displacing resistance beyond the North Caucasus and of greater human cost. However, even were the Kremlin to find leaders of the right ‘qualities’, experiences to date with Kadyrov’s Frankensteinian potential are unlikely to convince notoriously control-freakish Kremlin elites to contemplate ‘Chechenisation’ on a wider scale. Nevertheless, the obvious alternative, greater regional devolution, transparency and democracy is, unless there is a quite astonishing volte-face under Medvedev, entirely off the agenda for the foreseeable future. This leaves the Kremlin with the (quite possibly forlorn) hope that its current policies of ever greater regional subsidies and military presence combined with occasional rotation of regional cadres will placate the region and not further exacerbate both elite and military corruption and local grievances as they have so often done to date.