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S U M M A R Y

The Bush and Putin administrations have misleadingly folded Chechnya into the global war on terror. Their critics have done little better by defining Chechnya as a human rights challenge. Beyond terrorism and war crimes, the war in Chechnya has become a massive roadblock on the way to Russia's modernization and transformation. The perennial conflict in the Caucasus affects the Russian polity, Russian society, and Russia's quality as a U.S. ally. It hampers the formation of a civic Russian nation, gives undue influence to the military and security services, and blocks meaningful military reform. No early solution to the conflict is in sight, and there is little that outsiders can do. However, ignoring Chechnya or focusing primarily on human rights misses the larger issue, which is not what happens to Chechnya, but what kind of Russia emerges from that forgotten war. ■

The Forgotten War: Chechnya and Russia's Future

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Chechnya is the forgotten war, overshadowed by Afghanistan and Iraq. Those in the United States who embrace Russia as an ally in the global war on terror mistakenly see Chechnya as just another battlefield in that war. Those who are primarily concerned about Russia's domestic development focus on the human rights issue in Chechnya but miss the larger strategic dangers of the Chechen situation. What is needed is a hard look at Chechnya to answer the question: How does the perennial conflict in the tiny Caucasus republic affect the Russian polity, Russian society, and Russia's quality as a potential U.S. ally?

Putin's Folding Operation

When President Bush declared war on terrorism following the al Qaeda attacks in New York and Washington, Russian President Putin saw his chance. He promptly declared solidarity with the United States, offered practical support to the U.S.-led effort, and generally moved Moscow closer to Washington. Even as he was doing it, Putin managed to subsume the war in Chechnya within the global fight against

terror. From the Kremlin's point of view, it was both a necessary and a natural thing to do. Moscow was not joining Washington's war on terror, but exactly the other way around. The second Chechen campaign, launched in the fall of 1999, was officially dubbed a counterterrorist operation soon after some 300 Russian civilians, many of them in Moscow, had perished in apartment house bombings that were blamed on Chechen-connected terrorists. It took the 9/11 disaster for the United States to see the danger of terrorism, according to the Kremlin. No matter: in the view of the United States, Russia was transformed almost overnight into an *ally of the (Western) alliance*. Putin himself came to be regarded as a worthy partner for George W. Bush.

Yet, in the months that followed, the U.S. administration, contrary to Russian expectations, did not "pay" Moscow for its support in the war on terrorism. Washington believed this broader war was also in the Russian interest. The only reward that the White House deemed appropriate was toning down U.S. government criticism of the conduct of the Chechen war. The revealed links



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between Chechen rebels, on the one hand, and the Taliban and al Qaeda, on the other, served as a clear indictment of the Chechens. Terrorist attacks in Moscow in 2002 (the music theater takeover) and 2003 (rock concert suicide bombings) were widely seen to confirm the nature of the threat Russia was facing from the North Caucasus. Essentially the Bush administration was coming around to agreeing that Chechen terrorism posed a threat to Russia not dissimilar to the one that Osama bin Laden's organization presented to the United States. Thus, Putin managed to fold Chechnya into the U.S.-led war on terrorism and largely escaped U.S. government scrutiny and criticism for the Russian federal forces' behavior in the rebellious province.

Chechnya's Real Problems: Separatism, Banditry, and Integration

The post-9/11 rapprochement between the United States and Russia is squarely based on the idea of an anti-terrorist coalition. Of course, a friendly U.S.-Russian relationship is valuable in its own right. There is also a hope that, over time, a partnership built on security issues can be expanded to other areas and become firmly grounded. Yet, reducing the situation in Chechnya to an episode in the global war on terror may well erode the common ground under the United States and Russia in the future. That the situation in Chechnya contains an element of terrorism is beyond question. That Chechen terrorists have international connections and receive part of their funding and some of their recruits from Muslim extremist groups has also been proven beyond reasonable doubt. There are two important caveats, however: Chechnya is not all about terrorism, and Chechen terrorism is in a different category from that of al Qaeda.

As elsewhere, terrorism in Chechnya is a method of warfare, not an end in itself. Chechen terrorism has two principal roots: separatism and common banditry. It is almost forgotten that the first Chechen war (1994-1996) was provoked, among other things, by a series of bus hijackings in southern Russian

towns. The hijackers were Chechen criminals after money, not independence. During the war itself, separatist commanders freely resorted to terrorist tactics, at times holding hundreds of Russian civilians hostage at hospitals and maternity homes. The hostage-takers demanded independence. When Chechnya finally obtained quasi-independence, however, its leaders tragically failed at state building. Kidnapping for ransom became a thriving sector of the economy. What had appeared as a movement of national liberation degenerated into warlordism. Secularism was put on the defensive by the rising forces of Islamic radicalism. Jihad against Russia was not only proclaimed, but attempts were made to turn the North Caucasus into an Islamic republic.

Russia's Future at Stake

Moscow's second campaign in the North Caucasus, begun in 1999, aimed to defeat Chechen separatism and the safe haven it provided for terrorism. But after the Russian government declared "victory over terrorists" in the spring of 2000, acts of terror intensified. Outgunned on the battlefield, the rebels resorted to acts of sabotage (called "terrorism" by the authorities)—a continuation of war by other means. In addition, the brutal actions—indeed war crimes—committed by Russian soldiers against the local Chechen population mobilized revenge-seeking, would-be Chechen terrorists en masse. Thus, after Moscow regained nominal control over Chechnya, the situation became even more precarious than in the brief period of Chechnya's independence. The situation also became more complicated, as the Russian military and the warring pro-Moscow Chechen factions were added to the already messy picture.

This picture includes a number of ugly aspects. Official and unofficial corruption is widespread in the Chechen reconstruction effort managed by Russia, benefiting both officials and government-connected entrepreneurs. Rebel commanders, "loyalists," and federal Russian officials closely cooperate in the illicit trade in low-grade petroleum pumped in Chechnya. Russian soldiers

manning checkpoints watch passively as tanker trucks swoop through the checkpoints. The soldiers use the checkpoints as toll booths, charging all vehicles and waving them through, often uninspected. Even the loyalist Chechen administration complains to the Kremlin that the federal forces are taking young Chechen males during anti-terrorist “clean-ups.” Some of these men are later released for ransom; others remain missing or are found dead. Many of the loyalist Chechens are Russia’s former enemies from both wars. Having made peace with Moscow this time, they view Chechnya as their own fief, on Moscow’s mandate, and are essentially unrestrained as they settle old scores or take over lucrative businesses. No wonder they resolutely oppose any talk of power-sharing.

president. Putin’s strategy, or rather his gamble, has been that Russian firepower, the Chechens’ war-weariness, and the infusion of federal reconstruction funds would somehow ensure Chechnya’s eventual pacification.

Why the United States Should Care

Will this approach work? Despite the adoption of a new Chechen constitution by a popular referendum in February 2003 and the presidential election in October 2003 (to be followed by a parliamentary one in December 2003), more fighting in Chechnya and more acts of terrorism throughout Russia can be expected. Muscovites are not yet as frequently bombed as the inhabitants of Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, but they have experienced far more casualties from terrorism than both Londoners and

The U.S. must understand the Chechnya war for what it is, not for what it is convenient to label it as.

Is President Putin aware of all this? The information delivered to the Kremlin is certainly filtered. Few senior members of Putin’s administration care or dare to spend more than a few hours in Chechnya, and then usually confined to the heavily guarded Russian military headquarters there. Putin’s own rare trips to Chechnya have been public relations stunts, devoid of real political—as opposed to electoral—content. Yet, the Russian president probably knows enough about the real situation in Chechnya, because some of his comments suggest that he understands the dangers the continuing conflict pose to his presidency. Most likely, Putin simply feels powerless to make the federal agencies, and especially Chechen loyalists, discipline their forces. Putin probably sees no credible alternative to continued reliance on Anatoly Kvashnin, the chief of the General Staff, and Ahmad Kadyrov, the newly installed Chechen

Parisians. They still blame terrorism on bearded extremists and inept security services, calling for more action to crush terrorism, which hardly reflects well on the authorities’ four-year-long record of fighting terrorism.

The fallout from the Chechen war, however, reaches wider. In the course of the war being fought on its periphery, Russia as a whole has become subject to negative impact, shaping its polity and society. Outside observers usually criticize the human rights situation in Chechnya, but such a focus is too narrow.

Of the deformations that Russia is experiencing due to the war in Chechnya, none is more important than the further erosion of what has remained from the ex-Soviet community of men and women that the Russian constitution describes as the “multinational people of the Russian Federation.” With the civic Russian nation still to be built, serious

Chechen and Russian Opinions of the War

Why Do Chechens Kill Russians?

Chechens responding to an August 2003 poll

Reason	Why Chechens Become Suicide Bombers	Why Chechens Continue Armed Resistance toward the Russian Forces
Revenge on the federal forces for their brutality toward Chechens	69%	56%
Struggle for Chechen independence	8%	24%
Jihad	8%	6%

Source: ValiData, http://www.validata.ru/e_e/chechnya/.

Do Chechens Want to Secede?

Chechens responding to an August 2003 poll

Chechnya should be part of Russia ^a	78%
Chechnya should be independent	19%

Source: ValiData, http://www.validata.ru/e_e/chechnya/.

^a Among the percentage of Chechens who think Chechnya should be part of Russia, 61% believe Chechnya should have more autonomy than any other part of the Russian Federation.

Do Ordinary Russians Support the Kremlin Policy on Chechnya?

Russians responding to a May–June 2003 poll

Yes	No
31%	52%

Source: <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d032208/printable>. Poll conducted in 100 localities in 44 out of 89 Russian regions.

and potentially fateful fissures have opened between ethnic Russians, on the one hand, and Russian Muslims, on the other. In the years of building and expanding their empire, Russians were among the least ethnically minded ethnic groups anywhere. The shock of the collapse of the Soviet Union did not turn them into nationalists overnight, but the Chechen war has resulted in many Russian civilians, hundreds and thousands of miles away from the Caucasus battlefield, starting to view all Caucasus people—and by extension all Russian Muslims—as aliens rather than compatriots. At present, this is merely a trend that can be arrested. After all, Chechens continue to flee the war, mostly to Russia proper, in hopes that their luck will eventually get them to Moscow, which now counts some 100,000 Chechens and some two million Muslims among its total population of eleven million. Should the trend toward ethnic division within the Russian Federation be allowed to prevail, a very different Russian polity will emerge.

The war in Chechnya has obviously raised the profile of the military and the security services. Never before has the Russian government included so many active-duty and reserve generals in senior positions. This has already had important repercussions for the government's worldview, decision making, and modus operandi. Civil–military relations were debauched under Yeltsin: The top brass gave loyalty to the president in return for *carte blanche* in managing the armed forces. Under Putin, senior military commanders are allowed to operate with maximum leeway in Chechnya. Once outside of the war zone, however, their activities are severely restricted. For many soldiers and policemen, Chechnya has become an area of extreme vulnerability but also of unprecedented freedom from the usual restrictions. The rules of engagement are determined by circumstances and are left to the discretion of the relevant commander. Too often, the military operate under the motto, *a la guerre comme a la guerre*, which they loosely trans-

late as no holds barred. As long as the war continues, the High Command will have a powerful argument and political clout against a radical military reform. Yet, without major reform, not only will Russian military forces have a severely limited capability to interact with United States and other Western forces in any future security partnership, but more important, they will continue to be oriented toward countering the Cold War–era threats and adversaries.

The war on terror, of course, should have provided a golden opportunity for U.S. and Russian security services to cooperate more closely. In reality, despite some useful contacts and exchanges, both would-be partners are

The formation of the Russian *demos* (that is, a popular base for democracy) has also been retarded by the war, which bred cynicism and apathy. Not only human rights but the value of human life has once again been downgraded. For security reasons, Chechnya was effectively sealed off to investigative reporters, and Russian media were brought back under government control. Not only do the politically correct media report the war scantily and selectively, but much of the Russian public today does not want to hear about the war.

With many people withdrawing into private life, Russian society as a whole has become further atomized. War has become of

The corrosive effect of the Chechen war becomes a roadblock for Russia's transformation.

likely to remain averse to sharing sensitive information and highly valued assets: There is still too much Cold War spirit within the security communities, and too many internal restrictions preventing international action. Intelligence agencies need as much reform as the armed forces. Those who hope that a full-fledged security partnership can be built around security services' cooperation should seriously reexamine this assumption.

More broadly, the war in Chechnya has contributed to a wide-ranging securitization of the Russian political system. It was not only Putin's KGB background but also the ongoing war in the Caucasus that resulted in many senior positions in the federal government being filled by military and security personnel, both active-duty and retired. Predictably, the instincts of these appointees made them emphasize centralization over civil society and political liberty.

interest only to those directly affected by it. Despite the nominally universal system of conscription, only one draft-age youngster in ten is actually called up to serve under colors. Some of the much older volunteers who go under contract do so because the official pay in Chechnya can be augmented by looting, which generates enough to buy an apartment in a small town, otherwise out of reach for an ordinary policeman. This extends the breadth and width of corruption.

The divisive and corrosive effect of the Chechen war on Russian society as a whole becomes a massive roadblock on the way to Russia's modernization and transformation. Military reform gets stalled. The fight against corruption rings hollow. Political securitization and centralization in the long term contribute to stagnation, not a breakthrough.

These domestic liabilities in turn limit Russia's value as a partner to the United States.

Bush on Putin: Repressor to Ally

Before 9/11

“We could cut off IMF (International Monetary Fund) aid and export/import loans to Russia until they heard the message loud and clear, and we should do that. It’s going to be a very interesting issue to see how Russia merges....This guy, Putin, who is now the temporary president, has come to power as a result of Chechnya. He kind of rode the great wave of popularity as the Russian military looked like they were gaining strength in kind of handling the Chechnya situation in a way that’s not acceptable to peaceful nations....[We should impose economic sanctions] until they understand they need to resolve the dispute peacefully and not be bombing women and children and causing huge numbers of refugees to flee Chechnya.”

—Governor George W. Bush, on what the U.S. could do regarding the Russia/Chechnya issue, OnLine NewsHour, February 16, 2000.

After 9/11

“Our position on Chechnya is [that] we hope this can get solved peacefully, that this is an issue within Russia and that I will continue to work with Vladimir Putin as best as I can to encourage him for there to be a peaceful resolution with the Chechnyan issue, the larger issue. On the other hand, I recognize that any time terrorists come to take life, a leader must step forward. And the fact that 800 citizens could have been killed by terrorists put my friend Vladimir Putin in a very difficult situation. And he handled it as best he could. He did what he had to do to save life...the people to blame are the terrorists. They need to be held to account. I believe you can do both. I believe you can hold terrorists to account, killers to account, and at the same time solve difficult situations in a peaceful way.”

—President George W. Bush, on whether the hostage crisis in Moscow changed the U.S. position on Chechnya, Interview of the President by Russia’s NTV, November 18, 2002.

An unreformed, overworked, and ill-disciplined military is a poor match for the U.S. forces. An ally with a questionable record of domestic conflict suppression is a political liability for any champion of democracy.

Chto Delat: What Needs To Be Done

Chechnya is, first of all, Russia’s responsibility. At some point, Moscow will have to recognize that entrusting Chechnya to a single “friendly” clan leads nowhere. Instead of letting loose its allies and helping would-be terrorists to find useful recruits for their causes, Russia’s policy should be to bring together all relevant Chechen leaders for peace, under the right set of material incentives. The goal of this “big tent” or “round table” exercise would be to help a credible Chechen authority to emerge. The authority should have access to reconstruction funds, subject to outside control and supervision, but it should also be held accountable for the actions of its members and those it represents. What is needed for conflict resolution, above all, is Chechens, ready and willing to take joint responsibility for the republic and capable of delivering results. Before Grozny and Moscow finally put the issue of status to rest, Chechnya must be made ready for home rule.

To achieve this goal, the Russian authorities should reduce the Russian military and police presence in the area, discipline the contingent that remains as part of a genuine military reform effort, and be ready to turn over governing functions to a Chechen government when it is formed. Concerning the final status of Chechnya, for Russia, security is critically important; for Chechnya, it is economic development. Some kind of a compromise taking these interests into account should be possible, but only after an *internal* Chechen settlement is reached. The current Chechen constitution could then be amended or, if need be, replaced.

The United States would do well to understand the war in Chechnya for what it

is—that is, a deadly cocktail of armed separatism, terrorism, and common banditry—not for what it is convenient to label it as at a given moment. There should be no illusions about easy solutions to the Chechen issue. Demanding an immediate Russian troop withdrawal, peace talks with Aslan Maskhadov, or a UN mandate for Chechnya makes little sense. There is precious little that outsiders can do in and about Chechnya that would affect the situation there positively.

For the short and medium term, however, the United States needs to be aware of the connection between the Chechen war and the unstable situation in neighboring Georgia,

the first generation of national leaders there have begun to leave the stage.

In the longer term, U.S. leaders need to realize that the mess in Chechnya is hampering Russia's modernization drive and limiting Russia's usefulness as a partner to the United States and the West. They need to be patient, but watchful, as to the long-term effects of the protracted war and to the opportunities to help end it. Although there is little that they can do immediately, at the very least they must pay attention to what is happening and where this is taking Russia. When they make their views known to the Russian leaders, they would do well to do so as friends. The main point, after

For conflict resolution, Chechens should take joint responsibility for the republic and deliver results.

where President Eduard Shevardnadze's time is rapidly reaching its end. With Russian and U.S. military personnel deployed in the country and many Georgian leaders expecting the United States to protect their country from falling under the Russian sphere of influence, Georgia is becoming a potential area of U.S.–Russian friction and, perhaps, collision. In the current environment, a military incident in the Pankisi Gorge, believed by the Russian military to be a rear base for Chechen terrorists, could spark a crisis. Before it is too late, Washington and Moscow need to be urged to discuss their respective interests and concerns with respect to Georgia in order to avoid a damaging collision. This raises the broader issue of the United States and Russia sharing responsibility for maintaining stability and providing security in the Caucasus and Central Asia as

all, is that the war is denying Russia both the international prestige it wants to enjoy and the role it wishes to play. On the one hand, sweeping awkward facts under the carpet is a short-sighted policy—a prescription for “losing Russia” in the end. Self-righteous criticism and loud accusations, on the other hand, may be satisfying, but they are essentially sterile. What is needed is a critical approach, aimed at helping Russia improve itself and facilitating a realistic settlement in Chechnya. ■

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CHECHNYA: TOMBSTONE OF RUSSIAN POWER, *Anatol Lieven* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), available at www.yale.edu/yup.

THE END OF EURASIA: RUSSIA ON THE BORDER BETWEEN GEOPOLITICS AND GLOBALIZATION, *Dmitri V. Trenin* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 2002).

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