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Post-Soviet Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine: Society and War

What factors contributed to the evolution of Chechen militant groups from a nationalist orientation to one based on Islamic nationalism?

Whether in Ukraine against the Russian Army as part of the Dzokhar Dudayev battalion[1] in the battle of Bakhmut, or within a certain cell of the Islamic State as part of Insurgency in the North Caucasus, the Chechen rebellion, though weakened, has not disappeared and takes various forms, ranging from anti-Russian nationalist struggle alongside the Ukrainians armed forces to jihad.

The Chechen rebellion against Russia (whether imperial, Soviet or current) is ancient. The Chechen territory has been part of the Russian Empire since the late 18th century, yet Russian rule was established amidst strong resistance, leading to several uprisings in the 19th century. Among these, the most prominent was led by Imam Shamil, a Dagestani warlord who rallied Chechens and other tribes of the North Caucasus against the Russian army between 1830 and 1860. The motivations of his fighters appeared to be a combination of a quest for independence and religious reasons.

While certain historical elements can explain the Chechen nationalist sentiment in the post-Soviet context, such as these earlier struggles that have deeply resonated in collective memory, or notably the mass deportation of the entire Chechen population from 1944 to 1956 by Stalin[2], historical roots alone cannot elucidate the radicality of the Chechen struggle and especially its Islamist radicalization process.

The Islamization of the Chechen struggle is exemplified by contrasting two events. The first is the declaration of independence of Chechnya on November 1, 1991, by Dudayev[3], the first president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, and the desire to create a democratic secular state. The second is the dissolution, 16 years later, of this same republic by the last president, Doka Umarov, and the parallel proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate, aimed at establishing Sharia law in the North Caucasus, of which Chechnya was a "wilaya" or an administrative subdivision.

This paper aims to explore the various factors that have contributed to the evolution of the Chechen independence struggle from primarily nationalist to Islamic dimensions.

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[1] Query, Alexander. Farrell, Francis. "Meet the Chechens fighting Russia in Ukraine". Kyivindependent. 25 November 2022.

[2] Williams, B. G. “Commemorating “The Deportation” in Post-Soviet Chechnya: The Role of Memorialization and Collective Memory in the 1994-1996 and 1999-2000 Russo-Chechen Wars”. History and Memory, 12(1), 101–134 (2000)

[3] Chechnia (Russie) ; Stanford Libraries (1993). Collection de décrets du Président de la République tchétchène du 1er novembre 1991 au 30 juin 1992 (en russe). Kniga. p. 3.

In this specific context, by "nationalist struggle" we refer to the ideologies, motivations, and claims that emphasize Chechen specificity as a whole (its distinctiveness, history, territory, and cultures), leading to the demand for the formation of a secular Chechen nation-state. Conversely, by "*Islamist struggle*" we refer to the ideologies, motivations, and claims that prioritize Islam as the source of legitimacy for the struggle and aim to establish a theocratic Chechen state, or even a caliphate without a national identity.

We will analyze the Islamist radicalization of the Chechen independence struggle, attempting to highlight various social factors, noting that this Islamization has been a gradual process over several years. Finally, we will examine the specific but illustrative case of the 2010 Moscow Metro bombings as an extreme aspect of the Islamization of the Chechen struggle.

I. A nationalist struggle gradually incorporating political Islam (1990-1996)

1. From independence to the first Chechen war (1990-1994)

In 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a series of independence movements swept across its territory ranging from Estonia to Kyrgyzstan. Chechnya was no exception, as it unilaterally declared its independence, forming the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in October 1991 under the leadership of Dzhokhar Dudayev after a popular referendum. This drive for autonomy was motivated by anticolonial and socio-economic motives. The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria's appeal to nationalism and secularism reflected this struggle.

Chechen separatism was at first unrelated to Islam, but its claims were rather centered on the opposition to the Russian regional presence and the locals' socio-economic marginalisation. Indeed, the Russian attempts to consolidate control over the Caucasus Region since the 19th century led to the immigration of many Russian settlers to Chechnya. This fuelled resentment as local populations often viewed this immigration as a form of colonisation and a threat. In the 1980s, the socio-economic exclusion of Chechen populations was apparent as 20% of the population was unemployed[4]. Social mobility was often limited as Chechens could not access high-ranking offices in the government. As governmental aid was scarce, economic exclusion often resulted in criminality and poverty. Against this backdrop, the Chechen society's deep-rooted values, emphasizing concepts like "Marsho" or freedom[5], fueled the resistance to Russian rule and encapsulated the rejection of Russian colonialism and a socio-economic impasse.

In 1991, this context allowed the Chechen independentist movement to emerge under Dudayev's leadership by establishing the secular Chechen Republic of Iskeria. Dudayev was the first President of this Republic and had been greatly influenced by the Estonian independence movement as he served as the head of the Tartu garrison. The Chechen Republic

[4] Shinar, Chaim "Chechens: Freedom Fighters or Terrorists?," European Review 27, no. 1 (October 16, 2018): 131–42, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1062798718000625.
[5] Ibid.

was secular as the Constitution adopted in 1992[6] made no mention of Islam and stipulates that "*Freedom of conscience is guaranteed. The citizens of the Chechen Republic have the right to profess any religion or profess none*" (Article 43.1) and that "*Political parties and other public associations propagating [...], religious, [...] are forbidden*" (Article 4.4)[7].

Finally, the lack of international support for the Chechen cause gradually led to the belief that Islam could serve as a rallying cry for the movement's objectives. The growing influence of Islam in the struggle for independence gradually appeared as in November 1991, Dudayev signed the Decree N°2 aiming "*to turn Moscow into a disaster zone in the name of our freedom from kufr*"[8], underscoring this shift. However, the inclusion of religious elements in this political struggle did not yet signify the inclusion of Wahhabist elements in Chechnya but foreboded the rise of fundamentalism.

2. The First Chechen War: the first sign of the islamization of the chechen struggle (1994-1996)

In December 1994, Boris Yeltsin decided to launch a surprise attack on Chechnya, which at the time enjoyed de facto autonomy. The objective was to swiftly achieve an unconditional surrender of the Chechen regime and its leader, Dzhokhar Dudayev. However, Russian political and military leaders underestimated the resistance capacity of Chechen fighters and became embroiled in an unsuccessful rural and urban counter-guerrilla campaign. This led to a Chechen victory, with Russian troop withdrawal and the maintenance of a de facto Chechen independence by August 1996.

However, the consequences for the civilian population were catastrophic. According to NGO estimates, 80,000 civilians died, Chechen cities were completely destroyed due to indiscriminate Russian bombings, and civilians were victims of torture and summary executions. This conflict encapsulates the early signs and prelude to the Islamization of the Chechen independence struggle. It also serves as the catalyst and creator of the conditions that facilitate the subsequent reinforcement of this Islamization process in the following years.

Initially, references to Islam in politics were extremely rare, limited to symbolic gestures such as Dudayev's oath on the Quran his investiture as president in 1991. However, throughout the conflict, references to Islam and its incorporation into political discourse became increasingly prominent. Islam was politically utilized by nationalist leaders as an ideological mobilization

[6] Constitution of Chechen Republic, -, 12 March 1992, https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1992/en/18825
[7] Ibid.
[8] Speckhard, Anne, and Khapta Akhmedova. "The New Chechen Jihad: Militant Wahhabism as a Radical Movement and a Source of Suicide Terrorism in Post-War Chechen Society." Democracy and Security 2, no. 1 (2006): 103–56. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48602568.

tool during the conflict[9]. During these speeches, Dudayev also used references to Islam such as "*Allahu Akbar*" or "*rise Chechnya, rise for the gazavat*". The word "*Gazavat*" is used to denote the resistance of Muslims and this term was later directly correlated with the term "*Jihad*"[10]. This Islamization of references is also reflected in Chechen war songs, notably those of Imam Alimsultanov[11] such as "Gazavat", "Allahu Akbar" or "La ilaha illa Allah" (There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah) who was widely promoted as a 'national singer' by the Dudayev regime.

Moreover, the religiosity of the Chechens appeared to strengthen during the conflict. Whereas leaders and many nationalist fighters like Dudayev were previously Muslims more by a sense of belonging than by practice or belief, they seemed to turn to religion during the conflict.

The conflict attracted the first contingents of foreign mujahideen and jihadists, seeing this war as one of the fronts of global jihad. This was exemplified by the arrival of Saudi Ibn Khattab in Chechnya in spring 1995, along with several other Arab mujahideen. Khattab, who had previously fought in Afghanistan against Soviet troops and the communist regime in Kabul, and then in Tajikistan against the post-Soviet regime of Emomali Rahmon, fought Russian security forces and served as a financial intermediary between foreign funding sources and Chechen fighters.

Despite being relatively few, the fighters were important in terms of funding the struggle due to their connections in the Gulf States and know-how linked to their participation in previous conflicts, particularly in Afghanistan. They also helped import wahhabism and salafism in their militant form from the Middle East into Chechnya. These mujahideen from abroad also developed strong relations with nationalist islamists like Shamil Basayev.

During this conflict, the Mujahideen and nationalist Islamists like Basayev gained in popularity due to the latter's victory in Grozny. As a result, Islamic militancy emerged and strengthened from the conflict, gaining respect and attracting young people in particular. This popularity manifested itself in the 1997 presidential elections,in which Basayev obtained 25% of the vote[12].

During the First Chechen War, a noticeable trend towards radicalization emerged within Chechnya. The use of Islam as a political mobilization tool by nationalist leaders, the presence and help of foreign mujahideen units, and the euphoria following the unexpected victory

[9] Hughes, James. *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2007, p. 98.
[10] Khodeev, F. P. Isaev, A. K. "Jihad and gazawat: concept and correlation. Education Development", (1), 91-93. (2018)
[11] "Imam Alimsultanov: Melodic Voice of Chechen Valor and Undying Legacy", abkhazworld. 2 October 2023
[12] "Chechen rebel leader claims presidential victory". CNN. 28 January 1997.

contributed to a shift away from secular nationalism towards a heightened religious and cultural awareness regarding the conflict's nature.

II. Transition of the Chechen struggle through Islamist nationalism (1996 -)

This Islamic radicalization primarily affected a small minority of the population, with the majority remaining aligned with a moderate Sufi Islam. On the battlefield, the majority of units continued to uphold nationalist ideals, and the prominent figure to emerge at the conflict's end was Aslan Maskhadov, a moderate nationalist who served as Chief of Staff of the Chechen army. However, the period between conflicts and the second Russian invasion of Chechnya in 1999 shifted the nationalist struggle towards an Islamic-nationalist paradigm. Certain aspects of this conflict even transcended their nationalist roots to align with the framework of transnational jihadism.

During the period between 1996 and 1999, the islamization of the struggle had not yet reached an irreversible stage, as seen by the rising tensions between nationalists and Islamists after the first war[13].

1. Inter-war Chechnya: the choice of radical Islamism to oppose the social order and meet security challenges

The aftermath of the First Chechen War resulted in shifts and divisions in Chechen society[14]. Chechnya was in ruins after the war, with complete destruction of industrial infrastructures and cities, non-operations of public health care and education, and nearly total unemployment. The Chechen state was unable to provide basic services or control the territory, which was predominantly under the authority of warlords who refused to recognize the central authority in Grozny and the presidency of Aslan Maskhadov.

This socio-economic context, within a specific social structure (tribal, conservative, and hierarchical), pushed certain segments of society to embrace Wahhabism and its violent expression, jihadism[15]. This was also made possible by the fact that in this vacuum of disorganization and lack of resources, Wahhabism and Salafism were able to gain a foothold through mosques and madrasas easily, many of them fell under the influence of Salafi missionaries from the Middle East due to the need for funding and personnel destroyed by the war.

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[13] Akaev, V. C. Religious-Political Conflict in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Political Islam and conflicts in Russia and Central Asia, 47-58. (1999)

[14] Domitilla Sagramoso. “Violence and Conflict in the Russian North Caucasus.” International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 83, no. 4 (2007): 681–705. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4541805.

[15] Delong-Bas, Natana J. *Wahhabi Islam: from revival and reform to global jihad*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

First, Wahhabism and jihadism appeared as solutions to overturn the social order. Traditionally, Chechen society has been organized along clan lines, with each clan having a hierarchical structure. This social structure was irremovable, with a hierarchy of clans and ages, and in the context of Chechnya's anarchy, this clan structure was reinforced.

For some Chechens who had experienced wartime traumas, Salafism became a viable protest identity against the clan-based social order. Salafism indeed rejects clan-based organization and especially the 'veneration' of elders to promote an egalitarian relationship among Muslim brothers[16]. Thus, those willing to challenge established social norms often gravitated towards jihadists, and became supporters of their social reform.

As mentioned before, in a situation of anarchy and state inefficiency, clan membership is essential to provide security, and economic resources. However, not all clans were equals, and some were very weak in terms of social ties and economic resources, making their members particularly vulnerable to theft and difficulties in accessing scarce resources. Joining a jihadist group often provided members of weakened clans with the opportunity to boost their security and obtain protection[17].

2. The Second Chechen war and repression as a catalyst for radicalization

In 1999, the security situation in Chechnya deteriorated further. Radical elements, led by warlords Shamil Basayev and Khattab, launched an incursion into Dagestan on August 7, 1999, under the pretext of helping local Islamist rebels against Russian forces. Additionally, a series of bombings in Moscow, attributed to Chechen rebels by Russian authorities, provided Russian authorities and the new Prime Minister Vladimir Putin with the opportunity to invade Chechnya again on October 1, 1999. The second war, officially called the "anti-terrorist operation", began. Russian forces, allied with certain Chechen groups, notably the Kadyrov clan, took back control of the territory within six months.

This new war, with the defeat of the Chechen nationalist movement as a *de facto* sovereign entity and its atrocities against civilians, reinforced the Islamist and jihadist aspects of the Chechen struggle.

The dynamics of this conflict, marked by a gradual loss of territory for Chechen independence fighters and the transformation of the struggle into guerrilla warfare where fighters must hide in difficult conditions in remote and mountainous areas, led to the disengagement of some

[16] Souleimanov, Emil A. "Jihad or security? Understanding the Jihadization of Chechen insurgency through recruitment into Jihadist units." Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies 17.1 (2015): 86-105.
[17] Ibid

combatants. However, this disengagement affected different groups in different ways, with nationalist groups being the most affected, contrary to Islamist groups and especially jihadist factions[18].

This can be explained by the fact that individuals who joined armed units with the aim of establishing an independent Chechen state were more susceptible to external pressures to disengage than those who joined jihadist groups.

These pressures were diverse. Firstly, there was pressure on the relatives of combatants: many Chechen insurgents, especially high-ranking leaders, witnessed their relatives being abducted by government forces[19] in waves of forced disappearances that were common in Chechnya during this period. One of the most famous examples is Magomed Khambiyev, Chechnya's Minister of Defense, who surrendered to pro-Russian forces in March 2004, partly because some of his relatives were detained by the pro-Russian Kadyrov clan.

On the contrary, faced with the immense pressure of their captured relatives being threatened with murder, many jihadists chose to stand their ground, seeing this as a way to turn their relatives into martyrs.

The second form of pressure was the rationality of the combat strategy. With successive defeats on the battlefield, rebels were pushed to retreat into the mountains within six months. For nationalist fighters, the diminishing likelihood of victory made the choice to continue fighting increasingly less appealing. However, this criterion of victory plausibility is less important in the logic of jihad. Jihad, in Salafist and Wahhabi ideologies, is an end in itself[20], which is rarely the case for armed struggle in nationalist ideologies.

Moreover, the option of disengagement was more readily accessible for nationalist fighters than jihadists, as jihadists faced the loss of familial ties and rejection by their community. Leaving a jihadist group to re-enter civil society, unlike leaving a nationalist group, is very difficult. Contrarily to nationalist insurgents who have maintained deep connections to their families and home communities, jihadists have forsaken their old social ties by ideology, which now boil down to Muslim brotherhood within the group, replacing family and other social affiliations.

Thus, the radicalization and Islamization of the Chechen struggle were also the result of an internal process that is not solely related to the radicalization of combatants themselves but rather to the departure of nationalist elements and the remain of Islamist fighters.

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[18] Souleimanov, Emil Aslan, and Huseyn Aliyev. "Ideology and disengagement: A case study of nationalists and islamists in chechnya." *Europe-Asia Studies* 72.2 (2020): 314-330.
[19] Saidazimova,Gulnoza. “Chechnya: Kidnapped Relatives Of Slain Leader Released”, RFE/RL, June 03, 2005
[20] Bar, Shmuel. *Jihad ideology in light of contemporary fatwas*. Washington DC: Hudson Institute, 2006.

Finally, radicalization and Islamization are also the result of multiple war-related traumas: deaths, destruction, and human rights violations[21]. According to research by the World Health Organization in 2002, a significant portion of the Chechen population experienced such psycho-traumatic events. Faced with this, a minority of Chechens likely saw radicalization as a new response to traumatic events. Wahhabists were already prepared to offer an ideology, training, and call to arms for those willing to engage in a new form of warfare: jihad involving terrorism against Russia.

This radicalization as a response to personal traumatic events is particularly evident in the case of Chechens who carried out suicide attacks[22]. Martyrdom can become an attractive idea for traumatized individuals. Jihadist ideology proposes martyrdom and self-sacrifice in exchange for forgiveness of sins, salvation, and entry into paradise. Studies have shown that the majority of suicide terrorists carried out their attacks several years after traumatic events, suggesting that the militant Wahhabi ideology of martyrdom provided short-term psychological relief for their post-traumatic stress.

The most well-known case is that of Elza Gazueva[23], who sought personal revenge. She detonated herself alongside District Commandant Geidar Gadzhiev, who had arrested and tortured her husband and brother.

III. Suicide attacks, the implementation of the Chechen jihadism: 2010 Moscow Metro bombings

In 2006, in the aftermath of the Russian government's armed response to the Chechen insurgency, including the capture of Grozny in 2000 and large-scale counterterrorism operations, the Caucasus Emirate was formed. Led by Doka Umarov, its first emir, this entity's objective was to expel the Russians from the North Caucasus and to establish an Islamic emirate governed by Sharia law. This marked a significant shift of the Chechen separatist strategies from the nationalist rhetoric of the First Chechen War to an Islamist separatist movement.

The Caucasian Emirate brought about various ideological, strategic, and operational changes compared to previous insurgent efforts. Examining large-scale terrorist attacks at a local and national focal point can help better understand these new dynamics. The 2010 Moscow Metro

[21] FIDH, Memorial, Investigation report on war crimes and crimes against humanity Humanity in Chechnya. October 2000

[22] Speckhard, Anne, and Khapta Akhmedova. "The new Chechen jihad: Militant Wahhabism as a radical movement and a source of suicide terrorism in post-war Chechen society." *Democracy and Security* 2.1 (2006): 103-155.

[23] Speckhard, Anne, and Khapta Akhmedova. "Black widows and beyond: Understanding the motivations and life trajectories of Chechen female terrorists." Female Terrorism and Militancy. Routledge, 2007. 114-135.

bombing is a pertinent example. This attack occurred on March 29, 2010, targeting two Moscow subway stations. The attacks were perpetrated by two female suicide bombers from Dagestan named Dzhanet Abdullayeva and Maryam Sharipova[24]. These attacks resulted in 40 casualties and over 100 injuries. Doku Umarov claimed responsibility for the attacks, presenting them as revenge for the recent deaths of Chechen and Ingush individuals at the hands of Russian security forces.

This case offers several key aspects to be analyzed, such as the use of female terrorists, the importance of ideology to instill a culture of martyrdom after two decades of conflict, and the shift in the Caucasus Emirate's geographic influence.

1. The black widows, an example of the religious instrumentalisation of trauma and revenge

The Moscow Metro bombings brought attention to a specific aspect: the involvement of female perpetrators. Indeed, in most conflicts, as well as jihadist insurgencies, women are rarely seen as warriors. However, in the Chechen conflicts, women played a significant role. From 2000 to 2005, 47 Chechen female bombers, identified as black widows were identified[25]. These women were characterized by their traumatism, their desire for revenge, and their strategic role as female fighters.

Women jihadists can have a strategic role in insurgent movements due to common perceptions of women as less threatening and protective. For instance, in Palestine, female terrorists have been used against Israeli targets as they arouse lesser suspicion[26]. Similarly, in Chechnya, these women served to pursue the psychological objectives of insurgents by instilling general paranoia and confusion regarding the gender of terrorists.

The term black widow not only signifies the women's loss of their husbands but also of their brothers, sons or other relatives, leading to a cycle of vengeance fuelled by ideological beliefs. Indeed, the traumatic experiences faced by Chechen women can be illustrated through the example of Dzhanet Abdullayeva, the widow of 30-year-old insurgent Umalat Magomedov, who was killed by Russian forces. This trauma added itself to the preexisting violence women experienced from Russian forces during the Second Chechen War. This partly fuelled the women's need for revenge which was deeply rooted in Chechen revenge-seeking traditions. Indeed, Chechnya lives by strong moral codes and traditions, among them the concept of self-serving retribution. Indeed, "*when a loved one is harmed or killed, it is the responsibility of the family members to locate the evildoer and exact due recompense*"[27]. This traumatic and cultural backdrop can explain the women's anger and motivations to kill. Still, their action of targeting

[24] Andrew Monaghan, "The Moscow Metro Bombings and Terrorism in Russia," June 2010, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/wps/nat/0031909/f_0031909_25905.pdf.
[25] Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, "The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists," Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 31, no. 11 (November 5, 2008): 995–1023, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100802408121.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

the entire Russian community instead of a single person cannot solely be justified by emotions and tradition.

The traumatic experiences and the need for revenge likely facilitated the women's attraction to Salafism. Salafist ideology likely provided an alternative worldview to women by integrating the Chechen identity and promising revenge, thereby associating itself with the victims' process of reconstruction from their traumas. These women were often introduced to this ideology by *charismatic trainers*[28] who tapped into these feelings to create resentment towards the Russian community as a whole. Introducing them to religious narratives, a divine purpose, and a firm conception of divine justice, the trainers likely incited women into further radicalising and volunteering to sacrifice their lives through suicide bombings.

2. Moscow Metro attacks, an illustration of shifting insurgency tactics in the context of the decline of the Chechen insurgency

The Moscow Metro attacks underscore elements indicating the decline of the Chechen jihadist insurgency. Indeed, following the Second Chechen War, the widespread destruction of the region and the displacement of populations, the Chechen insurgency significantly weakened. In the 2000s, the Salafist minority of insurgents gained dominance due to the exile or death of leaders and militants. For instance, Akhmed Zakayev, the exiled Chechen Deputy Prime Minister, opposed the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate but could not act[29]. This paves the way for strategic and geographic shifts operated under the Caucasus Emirate and resulting in the Moscow attacks.

The dire situation of the jihadist insurgents in 2006 led to a strategy of attrition prioritizing terrorism by attacking soft targets. Indeed, Matthew Dixon theories that "*militant groups do become more "terrorist" operationally, as strategies aimed at mobilising support tend toward violence against softer targets*"[30]. He also claims that this trend reinforces itself when terrorist groups are weakened. Indeed, from 2002 to 2006, a compliance strategy was used in Chechnya, to deter Russian operations in the Caucasus. However, from 2006 onwards, insurgents pivoted towards attrition, targeting economic and political sites in the Caucasus as their armed forces couldn't match Russia's military power. The 2010 attacks marked another shift in these dynamics, as they occurred at a distance from the Caucasus unseen since 2007. This attack can be understood in the light of President Putin's call for an end to counter-terrorism operations in 2009. These attacks also highlights Umarov's changing objectives, focusing "*on global jihadist grievances rather than narrower local issues*"[31]. Indeed, this attack was followed by

[28] Combating Terrorism Center, "Beyond the Moscow Bombings," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, April 3, 2010, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/beyond-the-moscow-bombings-islamic-militancy-in-the-north-caucasus/.
[29] Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Chechen Rebels Order Separatist Leader's Death," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, July 25, 2009, https://www.rferl.org/a/Chechen_Rebels_Order_Separatist_Leader_Death/1806928.html.
[30] Matthew Dixon, "Militants in Retreat: How Terrorists Behave When They Are Losing," Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, July 7, 2020, 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610x.2020.1751460.
[31] Derek Henry Flood, "The Caucasus Emirate: From Anti-Colonialist Roots to Salafi-Jihad | Combating Terrorism Center at West Point," web.archive.org (Combating Terrorism Center, October

several others on Russian soil in the next 2 years, illustrating a shift away from separatist to jihadist terrorist tactics.

The consequences of the Emirate's establishment were also geographical, impacting the recruitment of militants and the future of the Chechen insurgency. Indeed, the Emirate extended its influence in the neighbouring regions of Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Karabino-Balkaria. The two perpetrators of the Moscow Metro Bombing were originally from Dagestan, showing the Emirate's reach. The Caucasus gained control over militants in other regions through umbrella factions such as Vilayat Dagestan. Under Doku Umarov, the Emirate was divided into vilayats or provinces divided into jama'ats or communal cells. Dagestani fighters gained prominence after 2013, as they conducted major attacks like the Volgograd bombing and the Domodedovo attack[32]. This shift was linked to the political and strategic objectives of the Emirate but was also the result of pragmatic thinking as Vladimir Putin-backed Akhmad Kadyrov was gradually regaining control of Chechnya as part of the Kremlin's "Chechenization" policy, leaving reduced space for militant consolidation in Chechnya[33].

Therefore, the Moscow Metro bombing illustrates the political, strategic, and geographical shifts of Islamist Chechen insurgents. Despite enduring social and familial traumas, the instrumentalisation of black widows through ideology helped the Caucasus Emirate's detachment from separatism towards jihadism.

Conclusion

The evolution of the Chechen militant separatist movement from a nationalist to and Islamic nationalist orientation is rooted in historical grievances, an opposition to Russian 'colonisation' and a strong Chechen identity. Despite adopting a secular stance during the First Chechen War, Dzhokhar Dudayev gradually adopted an increasingly religious viewpoint as the first Islamist tendencies in Chechnya took form. As the Second Chechen War played out, Wahhabism and Salafism had considerably grown through civilian resentment and trauma, foreign funding as well as the importation of foreign militants aiming to fight a jihad. In the aftermath of the Second Chechen War, the gradual weakening of the separatist movement led to a shift in political and strategic objectives through the establishment of the Caucasian Emirate. The war-related traumas impacted an entire generation leading to increased radicalisation and violent attacks until the 2010s, such as the Moscow Metro Bombings. This brought to light a destructive cycle of hate fuelled by religious ideology but also precluded the decline of the Chechen militant movement. Ultimately, the example of the Chechen militant movement helps in understanding the risks and destructive consequences of ideological radicalisation on repressed populations, as can also be observed in Syria and Palestine.

9, 2017),https://web.archive.org/web/20171009185250/https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-caucasus-emirate-from-anti-colonialist-roots-to-salafi-jihad.

[32] Ibid.

[33] John Russell, "Chechen Elites: Control, Cooption or Substitution?," Europe-Asia Studies 63, no. 6 (2011): 1073–87, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27975611.

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13. Query, Alexander. Farrell, Francis. "Meet the Chechens fighting Russia in Ukraine". Kyivindependent. 25 November 2022.
14. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. "Chechen Rebels Order Separatist Leader's Death." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, July 25, 2009. https://www.rferl.org/a/Chechen_Rebels_Order_Separatist_Leader_Death/1806928.html.
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