

# Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Islamisation of the Chechen Separatist Movement

JULIE WILHELMSSEN

THE CONFLICT IN CHECHNYA and its consequences are among the most serious challenges currently facing Russia—draining the country of valuable human and material resources, impeding democratic development and contributing to stall military reform. The most dramatic consequence of the nearly ten-year conflict is perhaps the radicalisation and Islamisation of parts of the separatist movement, with international Islamist organisations apparently gaining a foothold on Russian territory.

One can get the impression that Islam in itself is *the* key conflict-generating factor in Chechnya. This article argues against that notion. Although there was a religious revival in Chechnya at the time, Islam initially played a marginal role in the ideology of Chechen separatists.<sup>1</sup> After nearly ten years of conflict and chaos both Political Islam and Radical Islam, trends quite alien to the Sufi Chechens, have become part of the ideology and working method of many Chechen fighters and politicians.<sup>2</sup> This article aims to address two different but closely related questions. First, how did Radical Islam gain a foothold in the Chechen separatist movement? Second, why are the moderates in the separatist movement losing ground to the radicals? To answer these questions three developments that run parallel in time and mutually influence each other are analysed.

- (1) The first war between 1994 and 1996 led to a radicalisation of a few central warlords and politicians, who came to play a crucial role in the interwar period and in the second war (1999–?). The article addresses why these individuals adopted Radical and/or Political Islam.
- (2) Foreign Islamists and organisations have attempted to co-opt the Chechen conflict. The article traces how and why these actors have gained access to the Chechen separatist movement.
- (3) Russia's policies towards Chechnya in the interwar period and during the second war are analysed. How have these policies influenced the balance of power between moderates and radicals in the Chechen separatist movement?

The reasons for the Islamisation of the Chechen separatist movement are thus sought at the local, the regional and the global level. The main thrust of the argument

in the article is that increasingly radical Chechen warlords in alliance with international Islamist forces on the one hand and hard and uncompromising Russian policies on the other have worked in tandem to trap the moderates in the Chechen separatist movement.

### *The Chechen conflict and Islam*

The Chechens have a long history of opposing Russian power. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Islam played an instrumental role in mobilising the Chechen population to fight Russian conquest. Even the uprising in Chechnya and Dagestan in 1920–21 was led by the Naqshbandi Sufi brotherhood and the ideology of the rebels was that of *ghazawat* (holy war).<sup>3</sup> However, many years under Soviet rule and the deportation of the Chechens to Central Asia in 1944 reduced the impact of Islam on Chechen society dramatically. Malashenko claims that Islam was not a decisive factor for the survival of the Chechens in deportation.<sup>4</sup> National Chechen traditions, such as burying the dead in their native land, however, were. The Chechens became rather indifferent to Islam. *Adat* played a more important role in Chechen society than *Shari'ah*.<sup>5</sup> The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries *ghazawat* had little connection with the separatist movement of the early 1990s. The Chechen separatist movement's ideology in the early 1990s was one of ethnic nationalism.<sup>6</sup> The proclaimed aims of the National Congress of the Chechen People (1990) were to resolve problems the Chechen 'nation' was facing. These included the elimination of discrimination against the Chechens in their own country and the gathering of all Chechens on their own territory.

The National Congress of the Chechen People invited the Soviet Air Force Major-General Dzhokhar Dudaev to be their leader, a choice that testifies to the limited importance placed on Islam. In October 1991 Dudaev became President of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (CRI).<sup>7</sup> Dudaev ruled out any talk of an Islamic state in the first two years of his presidency. When he finally did start referring to Islam as a basis of legitimacy for his actions, it was in response to growing internal opposition and in the face of the Russian invasion in November 1994. Dudaev discovered that adopting Islamic slogans was a useful mobilising tool.<sup>8</sup> Like the nineteenth century hero Imam Shamil, he encouraged the Chechens to fight the Russian invasion under the slogan of *ghazawat*. Although the notion of *ghazawat* probably appealed to young Chechen men more in the interpretation of a fight against the *Russians* than against *infidels*, the Islamic phrases were taken into use and were thereafter an ever present ingredient in the Chechen separatists' struggle.

During the first war between 1994 and 1996 Islam acquired a more prominent role in Chechen society and particularly among some Chechen warlords and politicians. Moreover, in 1995 the first foreign *jihadi* fighters arrived to fight in Chechnya. The outcome of the first war was a humiliating defeat for the federal forces, and the 1996 Khasavyurt agreement rendered Chechnya de facto independent by postponing a decision on the question of Chechnya's status for five years. The moderate Aslan Maskhadov, who was Head of Staff during the war, was elected president in 1997. However, Zelimkhan Yandarbiev had attempted to establish an Islamic state in Chechnya in the short period he acted as president after Dudaev's death in April 1996.

Also, there was no decommissioning of the various warlords and their troops in Chechnya after the war. The radical warlords and politicians gradually formed into an opposition to the Maskhadov regime. In 1999 Maskhadov was forced to introduce Islamic law and had obviously lost control over the radical forces. The incursion into Dagestan in 1999 was led by the warlord Shamil Basaev, with the declared aim of establishing an Islamic state in the North Caucasus. When the second Chechen War was launched in October 1999 it was a response to this incursion and to the September 1999 explosions in Moscow, Volgodonsk and Buinaksk, blamed on Chechens. The second war was labelled an anti-terrorist operation.

### *Warlords*

The internal impetus toward Islamisation of the Chechen separatist movement did not come from the Chechen population in general but rather from a group of warlords and politicians who acquired prominent positions in Chechnya because of the war. This group included Shamil Basaev (b.1965), Salman Raduev (1969–2002), Arbi (1973–2001) and Movsar Baraev (1979–2002), Movladi Udugov (b.1962) and Zelimkhan Yandarbiev (1953–2004). These individuals all underwent a process of radicalisation/Islamisation during the first war.<sup>9</sup>

Judging from interviews with Basaev before and at the beginning of the first war, his main goal and motivation for fighting was Chechen independence and the idea of uniting the North Caucasus, particularly Chechnya and Dagestan. He had few ideas of an Islamic state, nor did he employ the rhetoric of Radical Islam.<sup>10</sup> However, by the end of the first war Basaev claimed ‘I was the first to introduce *Shari’ah* courts on Chechen territory’ and ‘we see ourselves as warriors of Islam and therefore don’t fear death’.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Salman Raduev’s rhetoric initially focused on the uncompromising fight for an independent Chechnya, and hate for the ‘empire’ Russia.<sup>12</sup> He also gradually adopted the rhetoric of Islamism. Just a few months after the arrival of his first *jihadi* fighters in Chechnya in 1995 he was talking about ‘jihad as Allah’s path’ and the ‘duty of every Muslim to die while following that path’.<sup>13</sup> Arbi Baraev, who was more of a gangster, did not have any articulated ideology to start with; he is also said to have despised all Arabs. Nevertheless, during the interwar period he started to employ Islamist phrases.<sup>14</sup> When his nephew Movsar, who ‘inherited’ Arbi’s troops, took several hundred people hostage in a theatre in Moscow in 2002, it was in the name of Allah.

Both Movladi Udugov, the chief propagandist and spin doctor of the separatist movement in the first Chechen war, and Zelimkhan Yandarbiev went through an ideological transformation. Udugov’s transformation was evident in his propaganda and also in a dramatic change of drinking habits.<sup>15</sup> His ideas are today close to the tenets of Radical Islam. Articles posted on his website *Kavkaz-Centre* portray not only Russia as the enemy of Chechnya but the whole of Western civilisation as a threat to the Islamic world. Yandarbiev started out as a radical Chechen nationalist. This worldview was clearly expressed in his book published in 1996, *Chechnya—the fight for freedom*, which contains little Radical Islamic rhetoric but many references to the ‘nation’. After the first war, however, Yandarbiev promoted the establishment of an

Islamic state in Chechnya and eventually he represented the violent fight as a Muslim duty. Yandarbiev felt strongly enough to resign from the post of Personal Envoy for the President of CRI because Maskhadov had criticised the hostage taking in Moscow in October 2002. In Yandarbiev's eyes Movsar Baraev and his men were 'a heroic group, who gave their lives on the righteous way of Allah'.<sup>16</sup>

One should note that the individuals in the group of radical warlords and politicians mentioned here do not all seem to hold the same version of Radical Islam. While Yandarbiev and Udugov went all the way and eventually interpreted their fight as part of the global Islamic fight against the 'distant enemy', this does not seem to be the case with Basaev.<sup>17</sup> Basaev adopted the ideas of Radical Islam, but they are mainly interpreted in the context of liberating the Caucasus. In Raduev's and Baraev's case it is doubtful whether Radical Islam ever became anything more than useful slogans. It is therefore crucial to point out that Radical Islam to a large extent has been adjusted to the local context, it has not been 'directly imported'. Basaev, for example, sometimes refers to himself as a Sufi, despite the fact that Sufism is seen as heretical by Wahhabis and in most Radical Islamic milieux.

#### *Why did they become Islamists?*

On a general level, the strengthening of religious faith during a war is effected by a well-known mechanism: when in trouble, people turn to God. In the Chechen case, however, Islam was not only a source of comfort on the personal level; it also became politicised and served as a means of interpreting and organising an extreme situation. This is the same function that Islam had served in the nineteenth century Caucasian wars. Self-sacrifice in war was always inseparable from religious fervour in Chechnya.<sup>18</sup>

The moral code of a stricter Islam was particularly suitable in a war situation, where discipline and order were vital. Hence, Lieven claims, the establishment of *Shari'ah* courts in the conservative south during the first war partly reflected a greater conservatism but was also motivated by the need to discipline the soldiers.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Yandarbiev's attempt to turn Chechnya into an Islamic state after the war should be understood against the background of the chaos and devastation that reigned in Chechnya at the time. The total collapse of functioning state structures in Chechnya allowed the introduction of Islamic policies, and Yandarbiev, at the time acting president, used Islam as a tool to try to revive the state.<sup>20</sup>

A similar motivation clearly lay behind Udugov's adoption of Radical and Political Islam. During the electoral campaign in Chechnya after the first war in 1996 he established the union Islamic Order and in summer 1997 the movement Islamic Nation. The vision he presented was that Islam would make up the new 'cement' of society, not only in Chechnya but also in Dagestan.<sup>21</sup> Thus Political Islam could serve his ambitious political goal of uniting Chechnya and Dagestan into one state. The argument that since 'communism collapsed, orthodoxy in the present situation is doomed to fail and democracy obviously doesn't work in Russia . . . we have to fill the vacuum with Islam' attests to Udugov's instrumental motivation for adopting Islam.<sup>22</sup>

Islam was an expedient tool not only on the structural level but also on the personal level. Politically oriented individuals such as Udugov, Yandarbiev, Basaev and

Raduev put Political and Radical Islam to use in their own fight for power in Chechnya in the interwar period, seeing ideologies as effective weapons to boost their own position and discredit their rivals. For example, Yandarbiev's attempt to create an Islamic state must be interpreted against the background of his weak position as acting president and his need for additional support and legitimacy in the run-up to the election in 1997, when he would face the moderate and popular Maskhadov. Yandarbiev is said to have been very ambitious and eager to keep his post as president. He several times proposed delaying the election, well aware that he was not the people's choice.<sup>23</sup> Stricter Islamic rule was presented as the salvation of the devastated republic.

Similarly, Raduev made no secret of his ambitions of becoming Dudaev's successor in the interwar period, and Islam was employed as leverage against the newly elected Chechen President Maskhadov.<sup>24</sup> When describing the difference between himself and the Maskhadov regime, he said 'My fight is for Islam, while they are just going for power' ... 'I am a man of deep religious conviction. I don't drink, I don't smoke'.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the interwar period Maskhadov was constantly criticised by these radicals for not being 'Islamic enough', and this is still the case today. In Arbi Baraev's case it was the very threat of being arrested on the orders of Maskhadov that triggered a closer coalition with Islamist actors and attempts to enlist the support of various Islamic militants, notably Khattab.<sup>26</sup>

A key motivation behind adopting Political Islam and Radical Islam was clearly also that willingness to commit to these ideologies paid off in financial and human resources. Although the primary reason for Basaev's 'brotherhood' with the Afghan-Arab Khattab was probably not money, the alliance between the two did bring Basaev an opening to big money, international contacts, training skills and recruits. For other warlords such as Raduev adoption of Islamist ideology had a lot to do with the fact that adopting this kind of rhetoric would supply him with funding. According to his own account he received money from several different Arab countries.<sup>27</sup> By pledging allegiance to Islam, Raduev also managed to strengthen his forces with foreign *jihadi* fighters.<sup>28</sup> For Arbi Baraev financial resources were probably the key motivating factor for pursuing what seemed like an Islamist agenda. He was more of an ally or a hireling of the Radical Islamic extremists than a devotee to the cause. Both an attempt to kill Maskhadov and the beheading of four British and New Zealand telecommunications workers in 1998 were carried out by Arbi, but these actions were probably ordered and paid for by Islamic extremists.<sup>29</sup> Movsar's adoption of Radical Islam can probably to a large extent be ascribed to economic motives too. It was crucial that Movsar and his fighters were steadily financed through Khattab and later Abu Walid, who were connected to sources from further afield. According to some sources, he received as much as \$600,000 from Khattab in 2001.<sup>30</sup>

Udugov openly stated that the Chechens could use the Afghan and Central Asian Mujahideen in their fight against Moscow. There are indications that certain Wahhabi circles in Saudi Arabia chose Udugov, together with Islam Khalimov, as potential advocates of their ideology in Chechnya during the first war, and that money from Saudi funds was channeled to Udugov.<sup>31</sup> There was also well-founded speculation that his campaign money in the first presidential election in 1997 came from Saudi sources.<sup>32</sup> After fleeing Chechnya in 1999 Udugov has travelled extensively to Saudi

Arabia and Egypt and is said to have received large amounts of money from the Arab world.<sup>33</sup>

For Yandarbiev too there were resource incentives for betting on Political and later Radical Islam. The creation of an Islamic state in Chechnya would attach Chechnya to the Islamic world, thereby triggering solidarity from Islamic states and/or Islamic international organisations and movements. Yandarbiev initially sought financial support from Muslim states.<sup>34</sup> After being rejected at the state level, however, he turned to more Radical Islamic organisations.<sup>35</sup> An interview Yandarbiev gave to a Russian journalist in 2001 shows the kind of motivation that lay behind his overtures to Political and Radical Islam. In the interview he stated: 'Islamic fundamentalism is not dangerous. It's a partnership, international relations. You don't consider it a problem that Western investors tour Russia, do you? One cannot divide help into help from Wahhabis and help from others . . .'.<sup>36</sup>

Thus money can buy ideas. Finding themselves in a very isolated position, these Chechen warlords and leaders chose to tap into the resources offered by Islamic organisations and networks in the Middle East and Asia. This also explains the adoption of Wahhabism—a strand of Islam foreign to Chechen tradition.

Thus there clearly was a logic of expediency behind the adoption of Radical and Political Islam by Chechen warlords and politicians. However, the motivation behind the adoption was by no means purely instrumental. The specific war situation and the individuals who became warlords help explain why these radical ideologies took root. In the Chechen case the appropriateness of the radical and uncompromising Islamic worldview must be understood against the background of the particularly brutal behaviour of the Russian forces.

The atrocities committed during the military campaign are well documented. The bombing of Grozny in winter 1994–95 has been labeled 'terror bombing'. It killed tens of thousands of civilians and devastated the city. Warfare against the Chechen villages was no less brutal.<sup>37</sup> Well-documented atrocities during the first war were systematic use of torture in so-called filtration camps, rape and extra-judicial killings. Although the Chechen fighters too were responsible for atrocities, the experience of the Russian warfare cannot but have influenced the separatists' worldview. All fighters and warlords were witnesses to this Russian warfare, and most were directly affected. Basaev, for example, lost his wife and six children in a Russian attack on their village in 1995. When confronted with the question why he was willing to commit terrorist acts that harmed innocent Russians, such as the Budennovsk hostage taking in 1995, he retorted that he no longer considered any Russian innocent.<sup>38</sup>

A radical interpretation of Islam with an emphasis on the uncompromising fight against the infidels thus emerged as highly relevant when faced with Russian warfare. The ideas of Radical Islam also fitted with the traditional Chechen notion of *ghazawat* (holy war) as the only way to survive Russian suppression.<sup>39</sup>

On a more person-oriented level we must take into consideration what kind of people these warlords were, in order to understand why they were susceptible to radical worldviews. For many of them, fighting had become their way of life even before the Chechen war. Basaev, initially a computer salesman, had founded and commanded a Special Forces Company in 1991 and had fought on the side of the Russians in the 1992 Abkhaz war. By the end of the war he was said to command 11 battalions and to be



responsible for organising the basic military education of all new recruits.<sup>40</sup> Arbi Baraev lost his parents at an early age. He was unemployed before he was helped to a post in the traffic police and eventually started his career as a bodyguard in 1991.<sup>41</sup> In 1996 Baraev formed and commanded the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR).<sup>42</sup> By the end of the first Chechen war Baraev was a Brigadier General in the Chechen army and commanded approximately 1,000 fighters based in Urus Martan. Raduev, an economist by profession, was a Komsomol representative and served as the Administrative Chief of Gudermes until 1991. He married Dudaev's niece and was the warlord most devoted to Dudaev. In the interwar period he commanded a number of forces which he named 'Army of General Dudaev'. In the case of Movsar Baraev, war and violence totally dominated his experience of adult life. Most of these men, then, were nobodies in peacetime: it was fighting wars that made their careers. The Radical Islamic concept of violent *jihad* as a holy duty was thus highly amenable.

To sum up, the warlords and politicians analysed here adopted Radical Islam both because they saw Radical Islam as an expedient tool for furthering their own interests and because Radical Islam was appropriate in the specific Chechen situation. To claim that Radical Islam initially was adopted for instrumental reasons does not necessarily imply that these individuals were not 'true' Islamists. Ideas that a person initially adopts for instrumental reasons can with time become an integrated part of that person's worldview.

#### *International Islamists co-opt Chechnya*

The radicalisation of the Chechen warlords was closely tied to international Islamists' attempt to infiltrate the Chechen separatist movement. Basaev's 'choice' of ideology was clearly tied to his encounter with the international Radical Islamist milieu already before the war.<sup>43</sup> Apart from the war itself the Afghan-Arab Khattab, who became like a brother to Shamil, probably was a key source of influence on Basaev's views.<sup>44</sup>

Global Jihad is a relatively new trend among Middle Eastern Islamist groups and implies the globalisation of the Islamist struggle—aimed against what is perceived as the global conspiracy against Islam, both as religion and as culture. In the global struggle, violent concepts such as *jihad* are perceived as a religious duty.<sup>45</sup> Following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan many had rallied to defend their fellow Muslims, inspired by the ideas of the Palestinian-born scholar from Jordan, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 Azzam called for the creation of trans-national brigades to defend frontline Muslim communities around the world. The result was the establishment of the Ansar brigades or Azzam brigades, made up of holy warriors of the Afghan conflict. These brigades went to fight in several parts of the world, including Algeria and Bosnia. Eventually, some of these holy warriors also came to Chechnya.

The first Afghan-Arabs to arrive in Chechnya were probably the group that came with Ibn al-Khattab in 1995.<sup>46</sup> Saudi-born Khattab (1965) reportedly adhered to the extreme interpretation of Islamic Jihad developed by Azzam.<sup>47</sup> He had fought in Afghanistan from 1988 to 1993 and also took part in the war in Tajikistan.<sup>48</sup> According to some accounts, as many as 300 Afghan-Arabs fought in Khattab's International Islamic Brigade (IIB) during the first Chechen war.<sup>49</sup>

After Khattab found a native partner in Basaev, Chechens began entering the IIB. A certain Sheikh Abu Umar from Saudi Arabia, who joined the ranks of Khattab in 1995, is said to have ‘set about teaching Islam with the correct *Aqeedah* to the Chechen Mujahideen, many of whom held incorrect and distorted beliefs about Islam’.<sup>50</sup> Basaev for his part obtained an opening to big money, warriors and international contacts. Khattab probably drew on various sources, but the Al Haramain foundation that belongs under the umbrella of the Muslim Brotherhood is deemed to have played a special role in Chechnya. The foundation, which has its headquarters in Riyadh, was originally established to support the *jihād* movement in Afghanistan and to spread Wahhabism. It is said to have supported fighters in Chechnya through Khattab in the first war.<sup>51</sup>

Other Chechen warlords also had a few foreign *jihadi* fighters in their troops during the first war. Among both Raduev’s and Arbi Baraev’s troops foreign *jihadi* fighters were observed. All in all, however, their numbers remained small and their influence is considered to have been limited at this stage.<sup>52</sup> Still, the help the foreign *jihadi* fighters supplied during the war obliged the Chechens to give them entry and recognition. In Maskhadov’s words, ‘Defending our freedom, many of them have become Shahids [martyrs]. The Chechens will always remember them’.<sup>53</sup> Thus after the recapture of Grozny in summer 1996 Khattab was decorated as Brigadier General of the CRI. Rather than expelling the foreign *jihadi* fighters, as was done in Bosnia after the Dayton Accords, they were free to stay in Chechnya. It was also of crucial importance that during the war they had acquired native partners.

After the war Wahhabi missionaries also arrived in Chechnya and the Urus Martan region developed into a stronghold of Wahhabism.<sup>54</sup> In many places in Chechnya *Shari’ah* courts were established and in some of these foreign Wahhabis were given the positions of judges.<sup>55</sup> As acting president until February 1997, Yandarbiev aided this development. So did the warlords Basaev, Raduev and Baraev. The protection of the foreign Wahhabis by Chechen radicals was decisive for their influence, because on the popular level they had very weak support. Most Chechens disliked the Wahhabis.<sup>56</sup> They did not provide valuable social services; rather they were associated with crime.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, although there was a revival of Islam in Chechnya during the war, the majority of Chechens, being Sufis belonging to either the Naqshbandiya or Qadiriya *tariqat*, had little in common with the type of fundamentalist Islam preached by the Wahhabis. Many of the customs the Wahhabis wanted to introduce—such as a ban on music and traditional feasts and weddings, special ways of dressing for men and women—directly contradicted the strong traditions that regulate Chechen society. The Wahhabis did find some recruits among young, unemployed men, however,<sup>58</sup> not least because money was offered to those who chose to follow the principles of Wahhabism or enlist in their troops.<sup>59</sup>

On the whole, the mainstay of Islamism in Chechnya was on the elite level, in the alliance between Chechen warlords and foreign Islamists. In the chaotic situation after the first war the radical warlords and politicians were free to pursue their agendas. For Basaev, Udugov and Yandarbiev the creation of a North Caucasian state that would include both Chechnya and Dagestan was a main goal. This was an ambitious plan, especially when Maskhadov, who gained a majority of the vote in the presidential election in 1997, strongly opposed such visions, placing his bets for Chechnya’s future



on improving relations with Moscow. In these circumstances the resources commanded by the foreign Islamists became a means of realising the dream.

Some sources say that as many as 2,000 Chechen fighters were sent to Taliban camps in Pakistan in August 1996 for three months' training, which also included instruction in the basics of Islam and the *Shari'ah*.<sup>60</sup> At this time training camps financed by Islamic charities were also established in Chechnya under the leadership of Khattab in cooperation with Basaev.<sup>61</sup> Approximately 1,600–2,500 persons—Chechens, but also Dagestanis, Arabs and Muslims from Central Asia and other parts of the Northern Caucasus—are said to have passed through these training camps from 1996 to 1999, according to Russian sources.<sup>62</sup> Other accounts give much lower figures and it is difficult to draw any firm conclusion. At any rate, the men who came to these camps received both religious instruction and combat training. The aim propagated was the establishment of a North Caucasian Islamic state; this aim suited the foreign *jihadi* fighters but also served the ambition of Basaev and Yandarbiev.

It is reasonable to suggest that the foreigners involved in this activity over a long period were probably as much co-opted for the cause of ambitious Chechen warlords as the warlords were co-opted for the Global Jihad. Khattab was a clear example of this. He became a driving force in the effort to realise the Chechen radical opposition's dream of uniting the Caucasus. Thus Khattab and Islamic radicals from the villages of Kara-Makhi and Chaban-Makhi, the stronghold of Wahhabism in Dagestan, carried out the December 1997 attack on Russian troops in Buinaksk, Dagestan. This was perceived by Khattab as a first step towards the creation of an Islamic state in Chechnya and Dagestan.<sup>63</sup>

The 'Congress of Chechen and Dagestani People' was convened in April 1998 by the efforts of Basaev, Khattab and Udugov and was another initiative towards achieving unification of Chechnya and Dagestan under the banner of Islam. Basaev was elected chairman, and was hoping to become the Imam of Dagestan and Chechnya. The Congress was partly financed by foreign money<sup>64</sup> and with the help of Khattab's troops the 'Peacekeeping brigade of the Congress of Chechnya and Dagestan' was established. In the ranks of this brigade were people of Middle Eastern and North African descent.<sup>65</sup>

The August 1999 incursion into the Tsumandin and Botlikh districts in Dagestan by forces under the command of Basaev and Khattab was one of the events that triggered the second war in Chechnya. It was also a clear illustration of the symbioses which had developed between Chechen warlords and foreign Islamists. The incursion was the next stage in the plan to unite the Northern Caucasus and was at the same time authorised by a *fatwa* (an opinion on a point of law) issued from a Sheikh Abdullah in Pakistan and a Saudi named Abdul Omar. Apart from the 'authorisation' from outside, they are also said to have received \$25 million from abroad to finance the incursion.<sup>66</sup> Although there clearly was foreign financial assistance for this action, the figure of \$25 million is probably inflated. Moreover, French intelligence sources have claimed that Basaev was lured into invading Dagestan by the Russian authorities.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, the event illustrates much of the logic by which the foreign Islamists gained entry into the Chechen conflict. Ambitious Chechen warlords in opposition to the elected Chechen president Maskhadov sought support wherever they could get it—and, increasingly, such support was to be found in the Islamic world. This aid, both

moral and financial, was made conditional on adherence to Political Islam and the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.

Other Chechen warlords became entangled with foreign Islamists by a similar logic in the interwar period. Raduev obviously understood that adopting Islamist rhetoric would gain him financial support from abroad. He received substantial funds from the Middle East, although he clearly also had other sources of income. Consequently, the military structure he built up in the interwar period was strong enough to pose a challenge to the Maskhadov regime. In his Kadi-Yurt camp Raduev boasted of having a body of armed support numbering between 1,000 and 3,000 men in the interwar period. He had his own intelligence and security service, educational structures and even his own laboratories.<sup>68</sup> By 1998 Arbi Baraev was not only a hireling for foreign Islamists; he also headed *Shari'ah* courts in which foreigners were working. His alliance with foreign Islamist actors came about because of funding and the need for allies in the fight against Maskhadov in the interwar period.<sup>69</sup> In return Baraev supported the Wahhabis in their effort to take over the city of Gudermes in July 1998 and, most importantly, protected the foreigners when Maskhadov tried to expel them. Most of them were not sent out after all.<sup>70</sup>

In general one may conclude that the success of Radical Islam in the interwar period hinged on a close alliance between Chechen warlords and foreign *jihadi* fighters and funds. The radical Chechen opposition used the ideological and material resources<sup>71</sup> the foreign *jihadi* fighters offered to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the moderate Chechen president. The assistance bought not only an increase in Islamist rhetoric but also protection from the attempts by Maskhadov to throw the foreign Islamists out.

#### *New war, new foreign jihadi fighters and funding*

With the outbreak of the new war in 1999 fresh recruits from abroad arrived to fight the Russians.<sup>72</sup> The Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, some 40 miles south of Chechnya, is considered to have become a meeting point for both foreign *jihadi* fighters and Chechen fighters. There were also indications that al-Qaeda was trying to establish a base in Pankisi.<sup>73</sup> Funding from abroad also increased with the outbreak of the new war. Several Islamic charities dispatched substantial amounts of money.<sup>74</sup> So apparently did bin Laden.<sup>75</sup> Al Haramain opened an office in Azerbaijan in 1999 and created the Foundation for Chechnya fund to support Chechen guerrillas. Fighters in Chechnya reportedly received \$1 million from this fund in 1999.<sup>76</sup> All in all, Russian security services have estimated that funding to fighters in Chechnya—largely from countries in the Gulf—amounted to \$6 million a month in 2000.<sup>77</sup> The Russian analyst Aleksei Malashenko has suggested that between \$10 million and \$200 million a year reached Chechnya from foreign Islamic groups.<sup>78</sup>

To some extent radical Chechen actors invited the influx of *jihadi* fighters and funding from 1999 onward. Former Chechen President Yandarbiev, who left Chechnya in 1999, continued to support the radical opposition in Chechnya from abroad and actively sought help from the international Islamic community.<sup>79</sup> However, the influx of foreign *jihadi* probably got its primary impulse from foreign actors with a global *jihad*s agenda, be they al-Qaeda or others. Ever since the mid-1990s Radical Islamic media outlets in many Arab and North African countries have

commented on the Chechen conflict and portrayed it as 'theirs', encouraging Muslims to defend their brethren in Chechnya. These attempts have become even stronger with the second war. Extremist Imams in Europe have directed 'devout Muslims from their mosques to defend the Chechen realm from the Russian Infidels'.<sup>80</sup> Osama bin Laden employed video footage from Chechnya to recruit people for al-Qaeda and has made frequent references to the Chechen struggle as part of his broader struggle.<sup>81</sup> Chechnya is also constantly invoked by fundamentalist leaders in Pakistan.

It would be a mistake, however, to equate moral support and propaganda with real support and influence. Although Osama bin Laden might try to give the impression that the international terrorist network is controlling the Chechen resistance that is not necessarily the case. The number of foreign *jihadi* fighters in Chechnya is actually not very big.<sup>82</sup> According to both Russian and Chechen sources there have been approximately 200 foreign *jihadi* fighters at any given time in Chechnya.<sup>83</sup> Although it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions about the total number of fighters on the Chechen separatist side, they today probably amount to between 1,500 and 3,000. Thus the number of foreign *jihadi* fighters is too small to have any major impact on the fighting. However, the enduring war creates fertile soil for their message among the Chechen fighters.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, what seems to be important in the second war is the continuation of the alliance between Chechen warlords and foreign *jihadi* fighters in command roles, and also the fact that these foreigners have acquired positions in the top stratum of the Chechen resistance.

Khattab's influence in Chechnya was strengthened by the outbreak of a new war. Many of the foreign *jihadi* fighters who arrived in Chechnya joined his ranks and he commanded valuable training and fighting skills.<sup>85</sup> With his death in spring 2002 there were speculations as to whether the influx of money and fighters would cease. This did not materialise, however, as Khattab's deputy and fellow countryman Abu al-Walid (b. 1967) took over his position.<sup>86</sup> Like Khattab, Abu al-Walid is considered by Russian sources to be the envoy of the Muslim Brotherhood and the connecting link between activists belonging to this association in the Pankisi Gorge, Azerbaijan and Turkey and the centres in the Middle East.<sup>87</sup> Abu al-Walid initially 'inherited' Khattab's close relation to Basaev and also proved a valuable partner in the fight against the Russian forces.<sup>88</sup> Although Maskhadov has rejected both the ideology that Walid stands for and the terrorist methods at times employed by Walid and Basaev, he chose to align with them in the fight against the Russian forces. Thus in a summer 2002 broadened session of the State Defence Council, Maylis al-Shura, Maskhadov named Walid commander of the eastern front. The individual units of the Islamic International Brigade consequently joined the eastern front of the regular troops of the armed forces of CRI. In the Maylis al-Shura there were several foreign Islamists and during the Council steps were taken to bring the Chechen constitution more in accordance with *Shari'ah*.<sup>89</sup> Walid, his troops and their sponsors further afield can thus plead that they represent the Chechen separatists, although their aims clearly differ from those of Maskhadov. This development was to a large degree the result of the marginalisation of Maskhadov, who finally had nowhere else to turn.

To sum up, there have been increasing efforts on the part of foreign Radical Islamists and organisations to make Chechnya part of the Global Islamic Jihad. The immediate reason for this interest and urge to help 'fellow believers' can be found in

the Russian attacks on Chechnya in 1994 and 1999. The foreign *jihadi* fighters initially gained access because they were needed as combatants in the war. However, their numbers have been and still are quite limited and they have not gained any broad support among the Chechen population, as demonstrated in the interwar period. Their influence has been limited to the young Chechen fighters and hinges on a few central figures who have aligned themselves with Chechen warlords. This alliance came about not least because Chechen warlords and politicians who were deprived of their former status in the interwar period still had ambitious goals and needed the ideological, military and economic resources supplied by the foreign *jihadi* fighters.

Even if one can question how successful the foreign sponsors have been at co-opting Chechnya, it is clear that the flow of funds and fighters has had an impact on the balance between radicals and moderates in the Chechen separatist movement. Maskhadov has not been receiving *jihadi* funding.<sup>90</sup> It is also clear that funding has been short for Maskhadov in the second war.<sup>91</sup> Thus, although Maskhadov has not tapped into the sources directly, he has become dependent on well-funded and equipped radicals in the fight against the federal forces. This has no doubt increased the leverage of the radical Chechen warlords over Maskhadov in the second war, as well as paving the way for actors such as Abu al-Walid into the State Defence Council. The war itself, then, not only triggers the flow of *jihadi* fighters and money but also creates the very setting where such resources gain influence.

#### *Moscow's hand*

Despite the fact that Maskhadov was elected president by an overwhelming majority in February 1997, his position was weak. There was a division of the Chechen territory into fiefdoms, with each warlord controlling his own bit of territory and his own troops.<sup>92</sup> Maskhadov controlled only Grozny and its immediate surroundings. Moreover, he chose a moderate political line; he wanted a secular state and close cooperation with Moscow to rebuild Chechnya after the war. This triggered a gradual coming together of the radical warlords and politicians into what can be termed a radical opposition to President Maskhadov's moderate line. In their view Maskhadov was a puppet of secular Russia.<sup>93</sup> Disappointed in their expectations of power, still equipped with arms and strengthened by the foreign *jihadi* fighters and funding from abroad, these individuals posed a serious challenge to the new Chechen regime. In this situation Moscow's strategy was decisive. The Maskhadov regime was dependent on a handling by Moscow that would prove that the line of cooperation did not seem like 'betraying Chechnya'. First and foremost, funding to rebuild the republic and bolster state institutions that were facing general lawlessness and radical opponents who were armed was crucial.<sup>94</sup>

#### *No substantial reconstruction aid, no oil deal*

Moscow supported the election of Maskhadov. Of the candidates running, he was definitely the one with whom Moscow could talk and cooperate.<sup>95</sup> The official Russian side warmly greeted the Russo–Chechen treaty signed by El'tsin and Maskhadov in May 1997. However, as time went by, Moscow did not seem to be pursuing a strategy,

economic or political, that honoured the promises of that treaty and strengthened Maskhadov's regime.

As in many other places in Russia at the time the federal centre had limited capability to deliver funds to cover the basic needs of society. In the case of Chechnya, it may also be questioned whether Moscow actually had the will to cover those needs, bearing in mind that the regime in Grozny kept underlining that Chechnya could not be part of the Russian Federation. Maskhadov complained repeatedly that Moscow was seeking to make economic aid contingent on the signing of an agreement that would define Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation.<sup>96</sup> In practice Moscow treated Chechnya as a de facto independent state. This was particularly evident in the economic field. Of the 40 billion rubles promised for wages and pensions after the end of the war only 5 billion had actually been disbursed by the time of the election in 1997.<sup>97</sup> Wages and pensions were usually not paid in the interwar period and funding for resumption of education, schooling for children and health care from the federal centre was minimal. Moreover, a significant amount of the money allocated disappeared into the black hole of corruption on the part of both Russian and Chechen officials. No funding was allocated to Chechnya for economic reconstruction in the 1998 Russian federal budget.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, the deal on the oil pipeline, running through Chechnya to the port of Novorossiisk on the Black Sea, was never honoured. The deal would have provided Chechnya with a share of the tariffs from oil exports and was envisaged as the foundation stone of the Chechen economy in the May 1997 treaty of peace and friendship.<sup>99</sup> Although the radical warlords in Chechnya did their best to thwart the oil deal through abductions and threats,<sup>100</sup> the Russian government carried heavy responsibility as well. The Russian government eventually decided to build an alternative pipeline through Dagestan and Stavropol and in October 1998 Moscow stopped pumping oil along the Baku–Novorossiisk pipeline via Chechnya.<sup>101</sup> In contrast to El'tsin's efforts in 1997 to maintain negotiations with Chechnya on the question of status, Russian activity around the Chechen border in 1997 amounted to a de facto blockade and served to undermine the Chechen economy further. The blockade was a precautionary measure taken to prevent chaos in Chechnya from spreading to other parts of Russia, but it has also been interpreted as an attempt to starve Chechnya back into the Russian Federation.<sup>102</sup>

All in all, the amounts of economic aid for reconstruction were small, the oil pipeline income was meagre and the blockade placed major limitations on economic reconstruction. Even the Russian presidential envoy to Chechnya, Valentin Vlasov, said that Moscow should have provided more economic and political support to President Maskhadov in accordance with the agreements signed in May 1997. He criticised El'tsin for not having monitored the government's implementation of those agreements.<sup>103</sup> It was not necessarily a deliberate strategy in Moscow to undermine the Maskhadov regime's economic base, although some circles probably had such a plan.<sup>104</sup> Given the extent of crime in Chechnya and Maskhadov's lack of control over the radical opposition, Moscow's uneasiness over implementing the deal was in many ways understandable. The result of Moscow's policy was nevertheless to weaken the Maskhadov regime, which had few other economic resources to build on. Maskhadov had little to show in terms of rebuilding; his line of cooperation had failed to bring

prosperity to Chechnya. The strong support that Maskhadov enjoyed among the population was never converted into a political weapon, not least because the improvements in living standard that people had hoped for after the war never materialised. The lack of economic aid from Russia allowed Islamic organisations to increase their influence over CRI. Khattab stated in 1998 that it was not a problem that they didn't receive the money they were promised from Moscow, as other countries stepped in to fill their accounts. Amongst the countries he mentioned were Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>105</sup> For Maskhadov, however, this was a serious problem. Faced with growing opposition from the radical warlords who could subsidise their small armies with funding from abroad, he had no money to counter this opposition. Although he threatened to crack down on kidnappings and to throw out foreign Wahhabis, he simply lacked the resources to establish control. Maskhadov's security forces several times failed to apprehend Raduev and Baraev, despite sentences passed against them.<sup>106</sup> He issued threats of arresting Khattab but could not put the decision into force.<sup>107</sup>

#### *Maskhadov discounted by Moscow*

Moscow's policy toward Chechnya in the interwar period also contributed to undermining Maskhadov politically. Throughout 1997 there were several rounds of Russo–Chechen consultations in which El'tsin seemed to be treating Maskhadov as an equal partner. He even defended Maskhadov against attacks from Russian critics.<sup>108</sup> In September 1997 El'tsin signed a directive that provided for drafting a treaty with Chechnya on the mutual delegation of powers. It was clear, however, that the distance between the negotiating parties was considerable. Although the parties seemed to reach agreement during talks, drafts submitted by Moscow after the talks were often substantially amended and included references to Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation.<sup>109</sup> The Russian media increasingly criticised El'tsin for being 'soft' and giving in to Chechen pressure instead of stating firmly that Chechnya was part of the Russian Federation. Also, Russian officials, making no distinction between the moderates and the radicals in Chechnya, accused Maskhadov of using the hostage takings and crimes as a policy of blackmail against the Russian authorities.<sup>110</sup> Finally, in December 1998 El'tsin annulled the 1997 directive on negotiations on the mutual delegation of powers. This was a blow for Maskhadov, who only days before had underlined that, although he stood firm on the question of Chechen independence, he was ready for any dialogue with the Russian government, and hoped for the signing of a 'full-fledged treaty' between Moscow and Grozny.<sup>111</sup> Maskhadov's line of cooperation with Moscow also lost credibility because of the blockade, consisting of a ring of troops, ditches and *blokposty* between Chechnya, Dagestan and Stavropol *krai*. This implied the threat of Russian use of force, and undermined Maskhadov's claims that Moscow was set on reaching a deal with Chechnya by peaceful means. As a rule, the threat of military action always acted to push Maskhadov into alliance with the warlords.<sup>112</sup>

All in all, Moscow's waning economic and political support for Maskhadov resulted in loss of ground to the radical opposition in Chechnya. The radicals could rightfully claim that the line of cooperation had failed. At the end of 1997 Maskhadov dismissed



his government, and Basaev was asked to form a new government which included also Udogov and Shirvani Basaev, Shamil's brother.<sup>113</sup> Maskhadov's strategy to deal with the radical opposition always vacillated between trying to include and co-opt them and cracking down on them. However, by summer 1998 it was clear that neither strategy had succeeded. There was an assassination attempt on Maskhadov in July and after this event the radical warlords launched an offensive against him. The strength of this offensive clearly did not lie in any support from the Chechen population.<sup>114</sup> Rather, the Supreme *Shari'ah* Court, together with the military forces of the warlords, became important means to put pressure on Maskhadov. After putting up resistance,<sup>115</sup> Maskhadov finally gave in to the demands of the radical opposition. In January 1999 he established a commission to draft a new Islamic constitution and on 3 February he imposed *Shari'ah* law throughout Chechnya, stripping the parliament of its legislative powers.<sup>116</sup> In another concession to the radical warlords Maskhadov decreed the establishment of an Islamic council of warlords with consultative powers, a *Shura*.

Maskhadov never received any support from Moscow during this period. When Interior Ministry General Gennadii Spigun was abducted in Chechnya on 5 March 1999, Maskhadov sought to cooperate with Moscow to solve the case, as he had done in similar circumstances before.<sup>117</sup> This time, however, Maskhadov was clearly discounted by Moscow and criticised for not having cracked down on crime.<sup>118</sup> Instead of consultation and cooperation, a plan for military action against Chechnya was worked out, beginning in March 1999.<sup>119</sup>

Russian Interior Ministry forces started to launch pre-emptive strikes against Chechen fighters in late June, under the pretext of hitting Basaev and strengthening Maskhadov. The result, however, was instead to undermine Maskhadov, substantiating accusations from the opposition that Maskhadov was Moscow's puppet.<sup>120</sup> The talks set to take place between El'tsin and Maskhadov in June/July were never held. In now familiar concessions to the radicals, Maskhadov in July 1999 decreed the establishment of a State Defence Council as the highest organ of state power. In the Council the radical warlords were given seats together with Maskhadov; decisions would be taken in a 'collegial manner'. According to *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, Maskhadov had been threatened at gunpoint by Basaev and Khattab only days before: act as they wanted or be killed.<sup>121</sup>

Maskhadov distanced himself from Basaev's and Khattab's attack on Dagestan in August 1999 and held a rally in Grozny, gathering 5,000 people against the invasion. He also declared a state of emergency and dismissed Udogov from the State Defence Council.<sup>122</sup> In the final event, however, he had no power to stop Basaev and Khattab from attacking Dagestan. In the eyes of the Russians, the radicals were now the face of the entire Chechen leadership. Moscow did not choose to align with Maskhadov against the radical forces. Rather, it opted for full-scale war against Chechnya and thus forced Maskhadov into an alliance with them. Maskhadov initially desisted from joining his army troops with the Chechen field commanders who were resisting the advancing Russian troops. He also offered to hand over Basaev and Khattab, as Moscow had demanded. On the same day, however, Putin stated that he did not consider Maskhadov the legitimate president of Chechnya.<sup>123</sup> It was only then that Maskhadov countered by calling on the religious leaders of Chechnya to declare a holy war 'to defend the country's sovereignty'.<sup>124</sup>

*No negotiation with terrorists*

Russia's policies in the second war, together with the influx of *jihadi* money and fighters, have contributed to tilting the balance within the separatist movement further in favour of the radicals. Moscow chose not only to target but also to label the entire Chechen resistance as one. The Chechen enemy was portrayed as either a terrorist or a bandit.<sup>125</sup> Not only government officials but also other prominent members of the Russian political elite, such as Communist Party leader Gennadii Zyuganov, State Duma speaker Gennadii Seleznev and Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov, and the Russian media helped foster the conception that the war against Chechnya was solely an effort to contain the putative 'Islamic terrorist threat'.<sup>126</sup> By casting the moderates also as 'terrorists', the option of negotiating with them and strengthening them has been excluded.

The events of 11 September 2001 have reinforced Moscow's irreconcilable policies. Moscow has exaggerated the role of international Islamists in Chechnya and tried to link the war to the broader context of fighting international terrorism.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, the Western states acquired a new understanding for Russia's war in Chechnya, and demands for a peaceful, negotiated solution to the conflict became muted.<sup>128</sup> A statement by Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov serves to illustrate how the new global war on terror has influenced the interpretation of the Chechen conflict and served to marginalise the moderates further. 'To those who recommend we launch talks with Maskhadov, I always invite them to start talks with Mullar 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'.<sup>129</sup>

It is a fact that Maskhadov, during the five years that the war has now lasted, has repeatedly called for negotiations to end the war. He has even said that he is prepared to reconsider long-standing demands for Chechnya's independence.<sup>130</sup> Apart from brief talks between Putin's Envoy to Southern Russia, Viktor Kazantsev, and Maskhadov's representative, Akhmed Zakaev, in November 2001, Moscow has never said yes to such a dialogue. This irreconcilable stance probably stemmed from Putin, who had invested considerable prestige in putting Chechnya in order once and for all. There has, however, also been strong pressure from the side of the Russian military not to negotiate with Maskhadov but rather neutralise the enemy completely this time, as they had failed to do in 1996.<sup>131</sup>

The strategy of non-negotiation and the alienation of Maskhadov both from Russia and from the Western states as well was probably an important factor in tipping the balance of power in favour of the radicals within the Chechen separatist movement. Without negotiations there is only violent resistance left and Maskhadov has become dependent on the resources the radicals command in this field. Clear signs of Maskhadov's weak position in comparison with the radicals were the naming of Basaev as head of the State Defence Council in July 2002, Udugov as head of the Department for External Information and Yandarbiev as Chechnya's official representative in the Middle East. Zakaev presented the move as a means of gaining control over the radicals.<sup>132</sup> Judging by the events that followed in October, however, this was evidently not the result.

The theatre siege by Chechens in Moscow in October 2002 dealt a final blow to Maskhadov's legitimacy in the eyes of the Russian population, Russian liberal politicians and the West as well. Maskhadov became inextricably linked to the radical wing of the Chechen separatist movement.<sup>133</sup> The hostage taking was promoted as final proof that the war in Chechnya was one against the international terrorist network. Putin compared Maskhadov with Osama bin Laden.<sup>134</sup> Zakaev, the very person who had taken part in talks with Moscow in November 2001, was arrested in Copenhagen on charges of terrorism. Video footage showing Maskhadov planning the siege together with Movsar Baraev and Abu Omar was shown on Russian television.<sup>135</sup> Although it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions, the footage appeared to have been faked. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine that Maskhadov had known nothing about the siege in advance. It is possible that, although not initiating the siege, he accepted it, hoping that it would yield dividends in the war, as the Budennovsk hostage taking had done in 1995. This highlights the dilemma of a weak separatist leader who, although initially disagreeing with both the ideology and the methods of the radical actors, becomes dependent on them to win the war. Although Moscow had reason to fear that Maskhadov would become a hostage of the radical warlords, it is precisely the launching of an all-out war and the policy of alienation and non-negotiation with Maskhadov that has forced him into a coalition with them.

During 2003 Moscow launched a 'political process' consisting of a new constitution, an amnesty<sup>136</sup> and the election of a new Chechen president. The new constitution, adopted through a highly controversial referendum on 23 March 2003, was written in Moscow and stated firmly that Chechnya was a secular state and an 'inalienable part of the territory of the Russian Federation'.<sup>137</sup> In the presidential election on 5 October 2003 Moscow's candidate, Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov, won with the help of obvious vote rigging and after his opponents had been removed from the race.<sup>138</sup>

This forced political process, which has sidestepped both the question in contention and the adversary, has served to further polarise the conflict. The choice of Kadyrov as president has contributed to casting the war as a war against religious extremists.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, considering his strong animosity toward Maskhadov and the brutal methods employed by his troops against the Chechen population, Kadyrov was not a figure to promote concord in Chechnya.<sup>140</sup> This was amply demonstrated by the killing of Kadyrov during a celebration at the Dinamo stadium in Grozny on 9 May 2004.

Moscow's efforts to sidestep Maskhadov in the political process have once again forced him into an alliance with the radical warlords at the top level. After the hostage crisis in Moscow Maskhadov not only dismissed Basaev from government but also opened a criminal case against him. However, by June 2003 there were indications that Maskhadov and Basaev had met face to face, and that they were joining forces again.<sup>141</sup> Further, it seems that the political process, rather than satisfying the Chechen population, has left them with the feeling of being deceived yet another time. The upsurge of suicide bombings in 2003, mostly carried out by Chechen women in the name of Allah, is not only a sign that Basaev is setting the agenda within the Chechen separatist movement but also a sign of the population's desperation.<sup>142</sup> Although it is difficult to verify such reports, there has allegedly also been an increase in the number

of young Chechen men wanting to fight on the separatist side.<sup>143</sup> The attacks on security structures in Ingush towns in June 2004 carried out by several hundred fighters suggest that this might be true.<sup>144</sup> As has been noted in this article, it is precisely in the ranks of the warlords that the ideology of Radical Islam most easily can gain a foothold.

Today the prevailing image of Chechen separatists is that of Radical Islamists. A regular guerrilla war is still going on—indeed, more lives are lost in regular fighting than in suicide attacks—it is the terror attacks we hear of, and it is Basaev we hear from. The Putin regime keeps embellishing the picture in which the radical Islamists occupy centre stage. After a suicide attack at a pop concert in Tushino, Moscow, on 5 July 2003 Putin said: ‘Suicide attacks not only prove that Chechens are part of a global terrorist network but that they are perhaps the most dangerous part of the international terrorist web’.<sup>145</sup> Evidently, both the ‘rock’ and the ‘hard place’ have an interest in keeping and nurturing the image of the Chechen conflict as one between ‘Islamist terrorists’ and ‘infidels’. A serious problem is that this image is becoming true, largely as a consequence of the efforts by the Radical Islamists on the separatist side and Moscow’s handling of the problem.

### *Conclusion*

The conflict in Chechnya is still a separatist conflict—not a religious war, not a war against international terrorist networks. As the conflict has dragged on, however, Islam has come to play an increasing role in the Chechen separatist movement. Several Chechen warlords and politicians turned to Radical Islam and Political Islam as a consequence of the first Chechen war. At times they adopted Radical Islam and Political Islam because it suited their interpretation of the world. Mostly, however, there were more pragmatic reasons, such as funding and fighters, and their version of Radical Islam is still dominated by their personal or local agendas. The radical Chechen warlords are not global *jihadis* they are still pursuing the Chechen separatist cause.

The radical warlords and politicians would probably never have managed to gain the upper hand over the more moderate actors in Chechnya had it not been for the attempts by international Islamist actors to co-opt the Chechen conflict. The wars sparked these actors’ interests in Chechnya, and ever since, they have tried to make this conflict ‘theirs’. *Jihadi* fighters, missionaries and money have been dispatched. Although the amount of aid supplied has been exaggerated, it has had an important impact on the separatist movement. The growing influence of the radical warlords in interwar Chechnya and in the second war has not rested on their popularity among the Chechen population, but on their guns and money. Moreover, the close alliance between Chechen warlords and a few well-funded foreign *jihadi* fighters has secured positions for these foreign Islamists at the top of the separatist movement.

The limited but still significant success of the international Islamist actors in co-opting the Chechen separatists’ agenda in the interwar period coincided with a misguided Russian policy on Chechnya. The failure to rebuild Chechnya economically and to support the moderate Chechen president elected in 1997 reinforced the tilted balance of power between moderates and radicals within the republic. As such, the

first part of the interwar period represented a lost opportunity. Maskhadov and his policy of cooperation initially enjoyed very wide popular support. However, both Maskhadov's own lack of skill and Moscow's failure to back him up prevented this support from being transformed into political and military control over the radical warlords. Instead, already in the interwar period, Maskhadov increasingly seemed to become a hostage to the radicals and was forced to implement their agenda.

Moscow's launching of an anti-terror operation that took the form of an all-out war secured the re-alliance of moderates and radicals on the Chechen side. The war itself has tilted the balance further in favour of the radicals, because of Maskhadov's reliance upon them to resist the Russian forces. Moreover, Russia has pursued a policy of non-negotiation, branding all Chechen separatist leaders as terrorists, and this policy has acquired legitimacy in the West after the events of 11 September. The final component of the Russian policy on Chechnya has been the promotion of a political process that has excluded the adversary, seeking instead to settle the issue by dubious democratic procedures. The consequence of these policies has been a further marginalisation of the Chechen separatist leader. On top of that, the combination of these policies and the brutal way in which the war has been waged has created fertile ground for further recruitment into the ranks of the radical warlords.

Although not all Chechen warlords and fighters have fully adopted the Radical Islamist ideology, continuation of the war might ensure that they do so. The appeal of this ideology increases with the war, as does the demand for Islamist funding and fighters. The problem with the Radical Islamist ideology is that it operates with vague long-term goals, propagating an eternal global mission. This ideology gives little space for pragmatism in compromising and settling conflicts. Similarly, the problem with the Russian policy on Chechnya is that it has excluded any possibility of communicating and negotiating with the enemy. According to official rhetoric there is no other way out than to fight to the bitter end. Russian policy and Radical Islamist ideology thus fit neatly together. In between this rock and this hard place any possibility of a peaceful solution to the conflict is trapped. There can be no viable solution to the intractable Chechen conflict as long as Radical Islamists and uncompromising Russian policies continue to define the *modus operandi* in the conflict.

*Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*

<sup>1</sup> See for example Carlotta Gall & Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: A Small Victorious War* (London and Basingstoke, Pan Original, 1997); Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, CT and London, Yale University Press, 1998); or John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

<sup>2</sup> Two Sufi 'roads to God' or *tariqat*, have been dominant in Chechnya: Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya. During the Russian conquest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Sufi movement was turned into a more radical resistance movement. Although the Chechens were subjected to secularisation during Soviet times, the underground character of the Sufi brotherhoods secured their survival. Radical Islam is the trend within Islam that 'demands fulfilment of violent *jihad* as a duty, rejects rival interpretations and makes war on governments, even when their rulers are Muslims'. This trend is distinct from Political Islam, which can be defined as 'the politicised doctrine of Islamic movements that seek a state governed by Islamic law'; see Reuven Paz, 'Middle East Islamism in the European Context', p. 2, <http://gloria.idc.ac.il>. Although it is difficult to put one label on the type of Radical Islam that is influential in Chechnya today, the Radical Islamists in Chechnya are often

referred to as Wahhabis or Salafis. I have opted to use the term Wahhabis in this article simply because it is the one most commonly used. Wahhabism (or Salafism) is a puritan Muslim reform movement that developed in Saudi Arabia in the eighteenth century, propagating a return to the pure version of Islam that existed at the time of the prophet Mohammed. The Wahhabis consider Sufism heretical, as it often merges with local customs and allows the worship of saints and mysticism.

<sup>3</sup> Marie Bennigsen Broxup, 'The Last Ghazawat: The 1920–1921 Uprising', in Marie Bennigsen Broxup *et al.*, *The North Caucasus Barrier* (London; Hurst and Company, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Igor Malashenko, 'The Glitter and Poverty of Chechen Islam', in Genady Chufirin (ed.) *The Security of the Caspian Sea Region* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 297. Note, however, that the Chechens kept a form of legal system which was a hybrid between the *Shari'ah* and Chechen customs. Disputes were to be judged by a council of elders. This council would often consult a mullah in command of Arabic, who would give advice on how to settle the dispute according to the Koran.

<sup>5</sup> *Adat* are the customs, customary law, local norms and traditions working in Muslim life alongside the *Shari'ah*, which is the Islamic jurisprudence (list of Arabic terms posted on the website of *Central Asia and the Caucasus, Journal of Social and Political Studies*, <http://www.ca-c.org/>).

<sup>6</sup> See for example Gall & De Wall, *Chechnya: A Small Victorious War*; or Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*.

<sup>7</sup> Ichkeria is the Chechen word for Chechnya.

<sup>8</sup> Julie Wilhelmsen, 'Konflikt i Den russiske føderasjon', NUPI report no. 249, 1999. Dudaev is also said to have mustered support for his regime by engaging the Qadiriya brotherhoods in Chechnya (Gurya Murklinskaya, 'Islam i politika v sovremennoi Chechne', 13 August 1999, [www.avar.narod.ru](http://www.avar.narod.ru)).

<sup>9</sup> Aslan Maskhadov (b. 1951) is a former Soviet colonel. He became chief of staff during the first Chechen war and was elected President of Chechnya in February 1997. He did not become a radical Islamist during the first war. On the contrary, he was considered a moderate, reasonable actor by Russian officials and by the Russian press as well as in the scholarly literature. Concerning Wahhabism, he firmly stated that this ideology was destructive for Chechnya and foreign to the Chechen nation; see 'Chechnya na poroge grazhdanskoi voiny?', *Trud*, 18 July 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, pp. 33–39; Vakhtang Dzhanaşya, 'Komanduyuschim voiskami KNK naznacheni Shamil Basaev', *Segodnya*, 1 February 1994.

<sup>11</sup> 'Chechnya: po obe storony fronta', *Izvestiya*, 24 November 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Dmitrii Belovetsky, 'Salman Raduev: s pervomaiskim privetom', *Ogonek*, 8 May 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Aleksandr Kolpakov, 'Polevye komandiry', *Moskovskii komсомоlets*, 28 March 1995.

<sup>14</sup> 'Manery Aslana Maskhadova', *Russkii vestnik*, 23 July 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Yo'av Karny, *Highlanders, A Journey to the Caucasus* (New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> 'Yandarbiev Explained the Reason for his Resignation', <http://kavkazcenter.com>, 19 November 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Basaev's warnings in November 2002 to member states of OSCE, PACE, EU and NATO that they could become targets for future attacks were explicitly grounded in these states' pro-Russian stance in the conflict. Moreover, any future attacks on these other states would be directed against their embassies or other representation on Russian soil; see 'Chechen Terrorist Organisations: Statement of the Case', [www.peaceinchechnya.org/](http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/), 28 February 2003.

<sup>18</sup> See Georgii Derlugiyani, 'Chechenskaya revolyutsiya i Chechenskaya istoriya', in D.E. Furman (ed.), *Chechnya i Rossiya: Obschestva i gosudarstva* (Moscow, The Andrey Sakharov Fund, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, p. 365.

<sup>20</sup> In August 1996 he took decisive steps to establish an Islamic state in Chechnya by decreeing the establishment of *Shari'ah* courts in which foreign Arab missionaries were invited to work. He introduced a new criminal law code copied from Sudan, opened an Islamic Youth Centre in Grozny where young people were taught the Wahhabi creed, and established a 200-strong Islamic Guard and Islamic security regiments; see N.V. Volodina, 'Islam: problemy ideologii, prava i politiki', *Sotsial'no-gumanitarnye znaniya*, 31 December 2002.

<sup>21</sup> 'Musulmane Chechni i Dagestana poshli v politiku', *Segodnya*, 18 July 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Udugov, 'My vzorem Rossiyu iznutri', *Sobesednik*, 23 November 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Inessa Slavutinskaya, 'Kazhdyi Chechenets-Prezident', *Profil*, 8 January 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Ilya Maksakov, 'Maskhadov pytaetsya spasti svoyu vlast', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 17 July 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Belovetsky, 'Salman Raduev: s pervomaiskim privetom'.

<sup>26</sup> See Armond Calgar, 'In the Spotlight: The Special Purpose Islamic Regiment', [www.cdi.org/terrorism](http://www.cdi.org/terrorism), 28 March 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Belovetsky, 'Salman Raduev: s pervomaiskim privetom'.



<sup>28</sup> Already in the raid on Kislyar in 1996 eight Arabs were observed among Raduev's fighters; see 'Syuzhet nedeli marshrut zalozhnika', *Kommersant*, 23 January 1996.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Galeotti, 'Chechen Militants Bring Their War to Moscow', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 December 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Vladimir Barinov, 'Klan ubits', *Gazeta*, 30 October 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Aleksandr Zhilin, 'Chechenskaya filosofiya po-Kremlevski', *Nevskoe vremya*, 17 September 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Gall & de Waal, *Chechnya, A Small Victorious War*, p. 366.

<sup>33</sup> 'Boevichki', *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 14 March 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Yandarbiev requested assistance from Saudi Arabia to establish an Islamic state in September 1996. The request was rejected by the Saudi government, which opposed both Chechnya's independence from Russia and the establishment of an Islamic state in Chechnya; see Zhilin, 'Chechenskaya filosofiya po-Kremlevski'.

<sup>35</sup> For example, in 2000 Yandarbiev toured Pakistan's radical Jamaat-i-Islamiya mosques to gather funds for the Chechen militants. He is said to have collected a fair amount of money from groups such as Jamaat-i-Islami, Al Badr and Sipah-e-Sahaba; see Vinod Anand, 'Export of Holy Terror to Chechnya from Pakistan and Afghanistan', [www.idsa-india.org/an-jun-700.html](http://www.idsa-india.org/an-jun-700.html).

<sup>36</sup> 'Zelimkhan Yandarbiev: Islamskii fundamentalizm bezopasen', *Vremya novostei*, 17 December 2001.

<sup>37</sup> See for example the account of the attack on the village of Samashka in April 1995 in Gall & De Wall, *Chechnya, A Small Victorious War*, p. 242.

<sup>38</sup> 'Chechnya: po obe storony fronta', *Izvestiya*, 24 November 1995.

<sup>39</sup> See Broxup *et al.*, *The North Caucasus Barrier*.

<sup>40</sup> Hans Krech, *Der Zweite Tschetschenien Krieg 1999–2002* (Berlin, Verlag Dr. Köster, 2002), pp. 214–216.

<sup>41</sup> Barinov, 'Klan ubits'; and Evgenya Krutikova, 'Semeika Baraevykh', *Versiya*, 28 October 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Sanobar Shermatova, 'Glavnyi rabototorgovets', *Moskovskie novosti*, 29 October 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Basaev ventured to Khost in Afghanistan via Pakistan before the war in 1994 and received military training; see Krech, *Der Zweite Tschetschenien Krieg 1999–2002*, p. 215.

<sup>44</sup> According to Sanobar Shermatova, 'Tak nazyvaemye vakhaby', in Furman (ed.), *Chechnya i Rossiya: Obschetsva i gosudarstva*, Basaev came into contact with Khattab through the Tajik opposition. Later Shamil's father, Salman, invited Khattab to his home and made him his 'son'; see Evgenii Krutikov, 'Khattab: chelovek niotkuda', *Izvestiya*, 3 December 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Reuven Paz, 'Middle East Islamism in the European Arena', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 6, 3, September 2002.

<sup>46</sup> Other names used are Habib Abd al-Rahman or Samer ben Saleh ben Abdallah al-Sweleim.

<sup>47</sup> Brian Glyn Williams, 'Freedom Fighters or Ethno-Terrorists? Critically Assessing the Pre-Sept. 11th Links Between the Chechen Resistance and Al-Qaeda', paper presented at the ASN World Convention, New York, 2003, p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> Reuven Paz, 'Al-Khattab. From Afghanistan to Dagestan', [www.ict.org.il](http://www.ict.org.il), 20 September 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains. Politics and Warfare in the Caucasus* (London, I.B. Taurus & Co Ltd, 1998), pp. 152–153.

<sup>50</sup> Article on Chechnya in *Global Muslim News*, <http://www.islam.org.au/>, December 1997.

<sup>51</sup> 'Vtorzhenie v Rossiyu', *Voennyi vestnik yuga Rossii*, 10 September 2002.

<sup>52</sup> Indeed the scant attention paid to these foreign Islamic fighters in the literature on the first war indicates that they were seen as merely a subordinate part of the resistance; see for example Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*; Gall & de Waal, *Chechnya. A Small Victorious War*; Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*; and Venora Bennett, *Crying Wolf: The Return of War to Chechnya* (London, Picador, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Maskhadov, [www.chechenpress.info](http://www.chechenpress.info), 23 October 2002.

<sup>54</sup> According to Shervanik Yasuev, the pro-Russian Chechen administrator of Urus Martan, Arab strangers from all over the Middle East began arriving one by one in 1997, until they numbered 500 or more; see Sharon LaFraniere, 'Moscow Eager to Tie Rebels in Chechnya to bin Laden', *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 26 September 2001; Shermatova, 'Tak nazyvaemye vakhaby'.

<sup>55</sup> In 1997 *ITAR-TASS* reported that at least 20 *Shari'ah* courts were operating in Chechnya (*ITAR-TASS*, 24 April 1997). By 1998, 30 *Shari'ah* courts had been established in Chechnya, according to Islamist Internet sites; see <http://www.as-sahwah.com/>

<sup>56</sup> See Malashenko, 'The Glitter and Poverty of Chechen Islam'.

<sup>57</sup> Ilya Maksakov, 'Tikhii gosudarstvennyi perevorot v Chechne?', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 15 July 1999.

<sup>58</sup> 'Regional Early Warning Report on North Caucasus', <http://www.fewer.org/>, November 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Francesca Mereu, 'Islam Plays a Fundamental Role in North Caucasus Life', *Johnson's Russia List*, 5 January 2002.

<sup>60</sup> 'Vedomosti', *Kommersant-Daily*, 17 October 1996.

<sup>61</sup> It is difficult to determine the extent of these camps. According to the Russian Secret Services, more than ten training camps existed, the main base being the Kavkaz camp in Serzhen-Yurt. The well-informed journalist Igor Rotar has claimed that at least four camps were operational; see 'Chast' Muselmanam gotova k Gazavatu', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 27 December 1998. Al Haramain, the charity Zam-Zam as well as other charities in Arab countries and in Europe are deemed to have financed these camps; see Oleg Kutasov, 'Nashelsya Sponsor Chechenskikh boevikov', *Kommersant*, 20 May 2000; 'Chechenskaya piramida', *Gudok*, 13 November 1999; Viktor Paukov & Eduard Lefko, 'Voiny Allakha vybirayut Kavkaz' *Vremya MN*, 30 August 1999; and interview with Dagestani vice-premier Ramazan Abdulatipov, *Ogonek*, 23 February 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Paukov & Lefko, 'Voiny Allakha vybirayut Kavkaz'.

<sup>63</sup> Shermatova, 'Tak nazyvaemye vakhaby'.

<sup>64</sup> 'Chechenskaya piramida', *Gudok*, 13 November 1999.

<sup>65</sup> Ilya Maksakov & Igor Rotar, 'Basaev podal v otstavku', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 7 July 1998.

<sup>66</sup> Viktor Khlystun, 'Koran ili dollary', *Trud*, 28 August 1999.

<sup>67</sup> They claimed that Basaev had received \$10 million from Aleksandr Voloshin, chief of staff for President El'tsin, in order to fund the invasion of Dagestan; see Matthew Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars. Will Russia Go the Way of the Soviet Union?* (Washington, DC, The Brookings Institution, 2002), p. 79.

<sup>68</sup> Belovetsky, 'Salman Raduev: s pervomaiskim privetom'.

<sup>69</sup> Khattab is believed to have supplied Arbi Baraev with sizeable sums of money; see Timofei Borisov, 'Khattab predali', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 30 April 2002.

<sup>70</sup> Vakhit Akaev, 'Religious-Political Conflict in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria', in Lena Johnson & Murad Esenos (eds), *Political Islam and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia*, Conference Papers No. 24 (Stockholm, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 1999).

<sup>71</sup> According to a senior State Department official in Washington, DC, radical Muslims have funnelled close to \$100 million to Chechnya since 1997; see Ariel Cohen, 'Russia and Religious Terrorism: Shifting Dangers', <http://www.eurasainet.org/>, 7 January 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Testimonies from Islamic militants caught in the anti-terror campaign show that fighters from countries such as Algeria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Sudan, Australia and Bosnia came to or intended to travel to Chechnya in 1999; see 'France Uncovers al-Qaeda bombers', *Insight on the News*, 15 April 2003; 'Lebanese Army Ousts Islamic Militants', *ICT News Up Date*, 5 January 2000; *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (in Arabic), 12 December 2002, p.7, via FBIS.

<sup>73</sup> After the mop-up operation by Georgian security forces in Pankisi in May 2002 two mid-level al-Qaeda leaders were arrested; see 'Al-Qaeda Flourishes in Far Off Spots', *Time*, 20 October 2002.

<sup>74</sup> Russian sources claim that funding came from the Saudi charitable funds Al Haramain, Khayatul-Iga-Sa and Islamic Congress, the Kuwaiti Society for Social Reform, the Yemeni International Islamic Organisation and various other charities in Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Central Asia, the USA and Europe; see 'Vtorzhenie v Rossiyu', *Voennyi vestnik yuga Rossii*, 10 September 2002; Yurii Tyssovsky, 'Islamskie den'gi v Chechnyu', *Vek*, 15 October 1999; and 'Chechenskaya piramida', *Gudok*, 13 November 1999.

<sup>75</sup> According to Russian Secret Services and now also according to US accounts as well, representatives of Basaev and Khattab travelled to Kandahar province in October 1999 to meet bin Laden, seeking military assistance, additional financial aid and fighters; see 'Chechen Terrorist Organisations: Statement of the Case', <http://peaceinchechnya.org/>, 28 February 2003. It has also been revealed that some charities with links to bin Laden have been supporting Khattab financially; see Gregory O'Hayon & Triffin Roule, 'Wahhabism Creates Rifts in Chechnya's Rebel Government', *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, 1 June 2001; and 'U.S. gets OK to Pursue Trial of Islamic Charity', *Chicago Tribune*, 14 May 2002. However, several prominent analysts, e.g. Thomas de Waal, Paul Wilkinson, Rohan Gunaratna, Mark Galeotti and Aleksei Malashenko, have seriously questioned the existence of a close connection linking Basaev and Khattab with Osama bin Laden.

<sup>76</sup> Kutasov, 'Nashelsya sponsor Chechenskikh boevikov'.

<sup>77</sup> 'Sredi Chechenskikh sponsorov oligarkhi ne znachayut', *Izvestiya*, 26 January 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in 'Islamic Groups Aiding Rebels in Chechnya', *Baltimore Sun*, 30 October 2003. The flow of funds has diminished since US and Russian intelligence began jointly clamping down on terrorist financing after the 11 September attacks. Further, since the war in Iraq, some funds have reportedly been redirected to forces opposing the US-led coalition in Iraq; see *RFE/RL Newslines*, 13 August 2003. Despite this new development, Russian Security Services say that between \$500,000 and \$1 million a month still reaches Chechnya; see LaFraniere, 'How Jihad Made Its Way to Chechnya'.

<sup>79</sup> Anand, 'Export of Holy Terror to Chechnya from Pakistan and Afghanistan'.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Abu Hamza al-Mizri, Imam of the Finsbury Park Mosque, London; see Brian Williams, 'Unraveling the links between the Middle East and Islamic Militants in Chechnya', *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 12 February 2003.

<sup>81</sup> For example Osama bin Laden acknowledged the Moscow hostage takers in a November 2002 audiotape message, saying to the Russians, 'If you were distressed by the killing of your nationals in Moscow, remember ours in Chechnya'; see text of Osama bin Laden's audio statement broadcast by Al-Jazeera television, <http://www.robert-fisk.com/>, 12 November 2002.

<sup>82</sup> Many of the foreign *jihadi* fighters who arrived actually left after a short while due to harsh conditions and lack of popular support; see *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (in Arabic), 12 December 2002, p.7, via FBIS; or Andrew Jack, 'Links between Chechen Rebels and al-Qaeda Questioned', *Financial Times*, 21 February 2002. Moreover, the US campaign in Afghanistan cut off much of their support and the 2002 Georgian clean-up in the Pankisi scattered them; see 'Chechnya: Amir Abu al-Walid and the Islamic Component of the Chechen War', *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 26 February 2003. In the wake of the US-led war on Iraq have come reports that foreign *jihadi* have relocated to Iraq.

<sup>83</sup> Colonel Ilya Shabalkin, in 'Islamic Groups Aiding Rebels in Chechnya', *Baltimore Sun*, 30 October 2003; Aslan Maskhadov, interview, <http://www.chechen.org>, 23 October 2002.

<sup>84</sup> The journalist Andrei Babitsky, who reported from the separatist side during the first war, revisited the Chechen fighters in 2002 and concluded that there had been a significant shift toward Radical Islam among the fighters. Whereas the young fighters before would answer the question 'Why are you here' by referring to Chechen independence, they today refer to the word of Allah above everything else; see Jeremy Bransten, 'Chechnya: Babitsky Says Rebels Better Armed, Leaning Toward Fundamentalism', *RFE/RL Newline*, 14 August 2002.

<sup>85</sup> *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (in Arabic), 12 December 2002, p. 7, via FBIS.

<sup>86</sup> Abu al-Walid's real name is Abd al-Aziz al-Ghamidi. Abu Walid fought in Afghanistan together with Khattab and in Bosnia until he was expelled in 1995. He appeared in Chechnya shortly after Khattab in 1995 and led a group of fighters under Khattab in 1995–96. His group took part in the storming of Grozny in summer 1996. He also helped build up the 'Kavkaz Institute' and training camps after the first Chechen war, and was Khattab's *naib* (deputy).

<sup>87</sup> Andrei Mashukov, 'Kto ubral Khattaba?', *Stringer*, 19 February 2003.

<sup>88</sup> Among the 'deeds' attributed to Walid are the April 2000 successful attack on the Russian 51st Paratroop Regiment and the downing of a Russian MI-26 helicopter carrying 132 passengers in August 2002.

<sup>89</sup> For example, apart from Walid, Abdul-Halim ibn Adbus-Salam and Abu Omar Muhammad As-Seif took part; see 'An Interview with the Mujahideen Command in Chechnya', [www.as-sahwan.com](http://www.as-sahwan.com), 30 February 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Even the prominent FSB General Aleksandr Zhdanovich has said that Maskhadov gets his money from quite other sources than Khattab, Basaev and Omar; see 'The Terror in Chechnya is Directed by Arabs', *Trud*, 28 February 2002, FBIS translated text, [www.toolkit.dialog.com](http://www.toolkit.dialog.com).

<sup>91</sup> Sanobar Shermatova, 'Priznayut li Chechnyu arabskie gosudarstva?', *Moskovskie novosti*, 15 April 1997.

<sup>92</sup> See 'Chechenskie rodovye priznaki', *Kommersant*, 30 June 1998; or 'Lidery Chechni i ikh storonniki', *Segodnya*, 25 June 1998.

<sup>93</sup> Vladimir Yachenkov, 'Khattaba mogut vydvorit' iz Chechni', *Trud*, 15 July 1998.

<sup>94</sup> That Maskhadov opted for economic cooperation with Russia as the lifeline for Chechnya's future was made clear many times. After signing the May 1997 agreement Maskhadov said: 'Russia is a great power. She is close to us and today we are linked to her economically in every way. That is why I am committed to Russia, much more so than to the West and the Muslim world', quoted in Smith, *Allah's Mountains*, p. 267.

<sup>95</sup> *RFE/RL Newline*, 13 January 1997.

<sup>96</sup> *RFE/RL Newline*, 3 April 1997.

<sup>97</sup> Bennett, *Crying Wolf*, p. 512.

<sup>98</sup> Felix Corley, 'Domestic Dissent Impacts on Region', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 1998.

<sup>99</sup> *RFE/RL Newline*, 5 June 1997.

<sup>100</sup> Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars*, pp. 52–53.

<sup>101</sup> Dmitriy Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2002), p.172.

<sup>102</sup> Charles Blandy, 'Chechen Status-wide Differences Remain', <http://www.csrc.ac.uk/> (1998), p. 21.

<sup>103</sup> Valentin Vlasov, speaking on *Ekho Moskvy* and cited by *RFE/RL Newline*, 18 January 1999.

<sup>104</sup> Dmitrii Trenin has claimed that several Russian government officials believed that the failure of Chechen state building would naturally lead Chechnya back to the Federation. Chaos in Chechnya would allow Moscow to win in the second round; see Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization*, p. 172.

<sup>105</sup> See 'Khattab: seyat yzhas sredi tekh, kto prodal Allakha', *Kommersant*, 25 April 1998.

<sup>106</sup> See *RFE/RL Newslines*, 18 February 1998; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 5 November 1998; Ilya Maksakov, 'Maskhadov pytaetsya spasti svoyu vlast', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 17 July 1998; Vladimir Yanchenkov, 'Chechnya na poroge grazhdanskoj voiny?', *Trud*, 18 July 1998 and *RFE/RL Newslines*, 16 July 1998.

<sup>107</sup> *Interfax*, 10 March 1999.

<sup>108</sup> Russian Security Council meeting, 21 August 1997, cited in *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 29 August 1997.

<sup>109</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, 1 April 1997.

<sup>110</sup> See for example former presidential press secretary Vyacheslav Kostikov, 'Chechnya utratila simpatii rossiiskikh demokratov', *Izvestiya*, 21 August 1997.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Aslan Maskhadov, *ITAR-TASS*, 2 December 1998.

<sup>112</sup> For example, the threats of launching pre-emptive strikes against Chechnya made by Interior Minister Anatolii Kulikov in the wake of Khattab's attack on a tank depot in Buinaksk in December 1997 prompted Maskhadov to engage the warlords in the Field Commanders Council to reinforce the borders; see *RFE/RL Newslines*, 9 January 1998.

<sup>113</sup> *Interfax*, 1 January 1998.

<sup>114</sup> A rally organised by the radical opposition in November gathered no more than 1,000 people (*RFE/RL Newslines*, 10 November 1998).

<sup>115</sup> Attempts were made by the parliament to get the Supreme *Shari'ah* Court decision to impeach Maskhadov declared unconstitutional. Maskhadov also issued a presidential decree disbanding the armed formations not under the control of the republic's General Staff and tried to replace the head of the Supreme *Shari'ah* Court. However, the decrees were not carried through; see 'Chechnya na poroge mezhdudobnoi voiny', *Izvestiya*, 23 October 1998.

<sup>116</sup> 'Netverdaya postup' sharyata', *Nazavisimaya gazeta*, 9 February 1999; and *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, 10 February 1999.

<sup>117</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, 10 March 1999. Maskhadov had sought to work together with Moscow to find the perpetrators when a group of Russian officers were killed in April 1998, and likewise in May 1998 when the representative of the Russian president Valentin Vlasov was kidnapped.

<sup>118</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, 9 March 1999.

<sup>119</sup> Former Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin, quoted in 'The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms', *Johnson's Russia List*, 2 February 2001.

<sup>120</sup> *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, 9 July 1999.

<sup>121</sup> Maksakov, 'Tikhii gosudarstvennyi perevorot v Chechne?'

<sup>122</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, 31 August 1999.

<sup>123</sup> *Interfax*, 1 October 1999; and *RFE/RL Newslines*, 5 October 1999.

<sup>124</sup> *Reuters*, 6 October 1999.

<sup>125</sup> According to Sergei Kovalev, military reports from Chechnya used expressions such as 'A group of three thousand terrorists has been surrounded in Gudermes' and 'two and a half thousand terrorists were liquidated in Shali'; see Sergey Kovalyev, 'Putin's War', *The New York Review of Books*, 47, 2 February 2000.

<sup>126</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, 4 October 1999. There were, however, some Russian politicians who kept calling for negotiations with Maskhadov, among them Grigorii Yavlinsky and the Ingushetian President Ruslan Aushev.

<sup>127</sup> Immediately after the 11 September attacks Russian prosecutors passed on data to European states that allegedly linked Chechen rebels to Osama bin Laden; Russia TV, Moscow, in Russian 1300 GMT, 13 September 2001, in *BBC Monitoring*.

<sup>128</sup> See for example 'Straw backs Russia over Chechnya', *The Times*, 1 November 2001; and Jeffrey Thomas, 'Rice sees New Impetus to US-Russia Relations', *Johnson's Russia List*, 5 October 2001.

<sup>129</sup> No Talks with Chechen Rebels; Russian Defence Minister, *AFP*, 16 July 2003.

<sup>130</sup> 'Chechen Leader Gives Up Independence Claim, Seeks Kremlin Talks', *AFP*, 17 June 2003.

<sup>131</sup> Major General Vladimir Shamanov threatened that if the military was not given the chance to fight the war to the end, civil war could erupt in Russia; see Vladimir Gutnov, 'Rossiya ne dolzhna opravdyvatsya za svoe stremlenie pokonchit's terrorizmom', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 4 November 1999.

<sup>132</sup> *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, 4 September 2002.

<sup>133</sup> The West's understanding of the Russian version of 'Maskhadov the terrorist' was expressed by a senior US diplomat in this way: 'Our policy on Chechnya has moved closer to the Russian. This attack has substantially damaged the Chechen cause'; see Nabi Abdullaev, 'There are No Rebels Left for Peace Talks', *Moscow Times*, 1 November 2002.

<sup>134</sup> 'Khasavyurta ne budet', *Izvestiya*, 11 November 2002.

<sup>135</sup> 'Ne ostalos' somnenii v prichastnosti Maskhadova k teraktu v Moskve', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 4 February 2003.

<sup>136</sup> The 6 June 2003 amnesty excluded the separatist leadership, at the same time as it included federal service men accused of atrocities against Chechen or Russian civilians. By the time the amnesty ended on 1 September 2003 some 143 members of 'illegal armed formations' had received amnesty, according to head of Northern Caucasus directorate of the Russian procuracy Sergei Fridinsky. The main beneficiaries were pro-Moscow servicemen accused of military atrocities or other crimes; some 226 soldiers and police were granted amnesty in the same period; see 'Chechnya ne proshchaetsya', *Kommersant*, 2 September 2003.

<sup>137</sup> *Chechnya Weekly*, 13 February 2003.

<sup>138</sup> See for example *Chechnya Weekly*, 14 August 2003; and *RFE/RL Newslines*, 6 October 2003.

<sup>139</sup> Kadyrov, being a Sufi Mufti, had developed a relation of deep animosity with the Wahhabis in Chechnya and depicted the war against the joint separatist forces as a war against the Wahhabis. In his view, all Wahhabis have to be extinguished: it was either 'they or we'; see *Vek*, 28 April 2000.

<sup>140</sup> After Maskhadov had offered to negotiate in June 2003, Kadyrov stated that any compromise was 'impossible as a matter of principle. What compromise can there be with a criminal and a terrorist who ... is the cause of the Chechen people's tragedy?', he asked; see *ITAR-TASS*, 16 June 2003. Kadyrov took to using methods of waging war that inevitably made young Chechens more susceptible to Radical Islam. According to several accounts, Kadyrov's troops stand responsible for many of the *zachistki* in which young men disappear and they are accused of committing crimes such as the use of torture and extra-judicial killings; see Tanya Lokshina of the Moscow-Helsinki Group, quoted in 'Vote for the Devil', *Economist*, 9 October 2003; see also several articles in *Novaya gazeta* during summer 2003.

<sup>141</sup> Conclusions about this reunion were drawn from a taped statement by Maskhadov given to AFP; see *Chechnya Weekly*, 19 June 2003.

<sup>142</sup> Results of investigations into the motivation behind the suicide attacks mostly point to 'domestic roots': the women committing these acts have had their families and lives destroyed by the war and seek revenge. Some of them have, however, been married to radical Islamic fighters and have allegedly been 'indoctrinated' with Radical Islam; see for example 'Deadly Secret of the Black Widows', *The Times*, 22 October 2003; 'Female Suicide Bombers Unnerve Russians', *New York Times*, 7 August 2003; 'Young, Female and Carrying a Bomb', *International Herald Tribune*, 8 August 2003; 'Wish Me Luck', *Sunday Times*, 17 August 2003.

<sup>143</sup> For example, former Council of Europe rapporteur for Chechnya Lord Frank Judd said his sources indicated that young recruits joining the rebel guerrillas in the districts of Chechnya adjoining Ingushetia had doubled in number since the crackdown on the refugee camps in Ingushetia in 2003 (quoted in *Chechnya Weekly*, 26 September 2003).

<sup>144</sup> *Grani.ru*, 22 June 2004; and *Gazeta.ru*, 23 June 2004.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in *Chechnya Weekly*, 10 July 2003.

Copyright of Europe-Asia Studies is the property of Carfax Publishing Company and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.