

Introduction

Many works have analyzed the Chechen war.¹ This book differs from most other treatments. Its main focus is not so much on the conflict itself, but rather on its wider ramifications. As a prominent Russian politician once despaired, “We’ve got Chechnya everywhere!” This remark clearly calls for an explanation. Ultimately, Chechnya remains the only example of armed rebellion and large-scale military action in the Russian Federation. However, lawlessness and a propensity to use force are commonplace across the country as a whole.

We proceed from an apparent paradox. Whereas the war is largely peripheral to Russia and is largely perceived that way (except after each new terrorist attack in Moscow), the conditions that have either been created or greatly amplified by Chechnya have spread all across Russia. Those conditions affect Russia’s politics, its ethnic environment, the circumstances of its military, and the course and conduct of its foreign relations.

The first war in Chechnya (1994–1996) truly broke the back of Boris Yeltsin’s presidency. The second one (1999 to the present) governed the Kremlin’s choice of a successor to Yeltsin and provided a political springboard for Vladimir Putin. By the end of his first presidential term, however, the lingering conflict had become a liability that threatened to mar Putin’s political legacy.

The conflict has also become a hard test for Russia’s territorial integrity within its post-Soviet borders. The authority of the current Russian state was never so weak as in the years of Chechnya’s *de facto* independence, which culminated in the rebels’ invasion into Dagestan in the summer of 1999. To many observers, Russia, having ceased to be an

empire but not yet a working federation, was on its way to becoming a loose confederacy. Moscow was shifting from a center of power to a place for interregional bargaining.

The first phase of the Chechen war was fought under the slogan of ethnic separatism. That led to the emergence of a new and potentially even more serious challenge to Russia's security. Radical Islam began to spread across the North Caucasus, with links to extremist organizations bent on toppling post-Soviet regimes in Central Asia. Those extremists enjoyed support from the Afghan Taliban and Muslim groups throughout the Middle East. Since the late 1990s, Islamic extremism has developed in Russia parallel to, and often feeding on, the wider Islamic renaissance.

As a result of the war, hundreds of thousands of people (both Chechens *and* ethnic Russians) were internally displaced in Russia. As post-Soviet Russia was struggling to create a nation within its new borders, relations between its dominant but declining Slavic majority and its fast-growing Muslim population—often referred to as people of Caucasian extraction—became progressively tenser.

The conflict in Chechnya has made terrorism a fact of daily life in contemporary Russia. The border provinces in southern Russia between the Caspian and the Black seas have become a restless frontier. Ever since the apartment bombings of 1999, which killed three hundred people, Muscovites have been learning to live with a constant threat. This message of ultimate vulnerability was powerfully reinforced by the hostage crisis in a Moscow theater in 2002.

While the war isolated Russia politically and diplomatically from the West, the events of September 11 enabled Russia to use Chechnya as a stage for achieving rapprochement with the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Without Chechnya, Moscow probably would not have joined the antiterrorist coalition. Yet the issue of Chechnya continues to block Europeans from perceiving Russia as "one of us."

Chechnya, as Anatol Lieven wrote after the first campaign, has become a tombstone of Russian power. That is a powerful symbol of the passing of imperial glory. The Soviet Union was, in a sense, a continuation of the czarist statehood tradition. Although the new Russian Federation has taken several important steps away from that tradition, it is still far from being a truly democratic federation. The problem of Chechnya lies between two models of Russian statehood, and, like a spanner thrown into a machine, it blocks a much-needed transitional

phase. When and how Russia can make that transition largely depends on the principles and the timing of the settlement of the Chechen issue.

The conflict in Chechnya is often compared to the French war in Algeria. Algeria had also been an integral part of a metropolitan area rather than an outlying colony. Another oft-cited comparison is with Northern Ireland. Both analogies are seriously flawed. Algeria is separated from France by a wide stretch of water, whereas landlocked Chechnya sits in the center of the Russian North Caucasus. On the one hand, a simple “cut-’em-loose” solution is hardly a feasible option in the case of Chechnya. On the other hand, unlike Grozny, Belfast has never been a target of blanket air and artillery bombings, and the Irish have not been driven to refugee camps in, say, Ireland or Scotland.

The second campaign in Chechnya was waged under the rubric of a counterterrorist operation. After the terrorist attacks in the United States, the Chechen crisis has been increasingly considered in the context of a global antiterrorist campaign. Yet while terrorism is certainly present in the republic (it is sufficient to recall the names of Shamil Basayev and the late Salman Raduyev, men who rose to fame, or infamy, as hostage takers), it is not the dominating element in Chechnya. Rather, terrorism exists alongside separatism and ordinary banditry. Failing to distinguish terrorism from banditry leads to policy distortions and a loss of credibility.

The antiterrorist campaign forms new international alignments. After September 11, a global alliance has formed against terrorism that includes all the major powers, from the United States and the European Union to Russia, India, China, and Japan. This new international lineup, however, has not erased differences in national perspectives. The Russian government had hoped that Chechnya would be subsumed within the global antiterrorist effort. Those hopes have been only partially realized. Whereas criticism in the United States of the methods and behavior of the Russian federal forces has become muted, much of the European public has continued to press Moscow on Chechnya. A postmodern Europe that judges and condemns actions by a modern Russian state over the largely traditional social environment of the North Caucasus illustrates the difference in historical time zones in which countries continue to live, even in an increasingly globalized world.

This book’s title refers to Russia’s restless border and implies the authors’ deep conviction that the most serious security challenges that Russia faces now and in the foreseeable future exist along its southern boundary. More than the smoldering conflict in Chechnya, many

problems are in the North Caucasus as a whole, including the long-term development of other Muslim enclaves within the Russian Federation, such as in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.

Moreover, the importance of Chechnya can be fully understood only in a wider context that there is a similar potential for conflict to develop in nearby oil- and gas-rich regions. Just south of the Russian Federation border, for example, Kazakhstan, with its Muslim-Slav population, is immensely important to Russia. Should relations between the two largest ethnic groups in that new nation deteriorate, Russia would likely be drawn into the gathering conflict. Although Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country representing a vital interest for Russia, the situation there is immediately influenced by developments in Central Asia, particularly those portions of the Ferghana Valley that lie across the boundaries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The destruction of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has won Central Asian rulers a reprieve, but it does not guarantee the longer-term stability of the region, for its problems are chiefly domestic. Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan all remain essentially vulnerable and potentially unstable. Their territories are more often sources of danger rather than stability.

The choice of a strategy in Moscow's relations with its southern neighbors is critical, not solely in terms of national security and foreign policy. Its strategy will also help to shape the emerging post-Soviet Russian nation. An intelligent choice must be based on a critical assessment of Russia's historical relations with the Muslim world.

The legacy of the Russian Federation on its southern flank (or, strictly speaking, its southern and southeastern flank), is a controversial one. From the storming of Kazan in 1552 by the troops of Ivan the Terrible to the end of the nineteenth century (when the White General Skobelev won the final victory in Turkestan), the Turkic-speaking Muslim south has been steadily subjugated by the Orthodox Christian north. For four hundred years the Russian state expanded from the banks of the Volga and the Oka to the Crimea, the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus, and Turkestan. Entire Muslim khanates (such as Kazan, the Crimea, and Astrakhan) were abolished and replaced by Russian provinces or protectorates (such as Bukhara and Khiva), and local elites were absorbed into the imperial nobility. Still, the people of the annexed regions were neither exterminated nor driven away from their indigenous lands. In spite of sporadic attempts to convert some Muslim peoples to Christianity, religious tolerance by the state and by the general public was a dominating reality in czarist Russia.

During the Soviet period, Moscow's policy toward exporting communism changed repeatedly and drastically. Initially, Moscow encouraged a "class consciousness of the toiling masses of the East" in support of the Bolshevik revolution by assisting the national liberation movement in British India and the nationalist renaissance movements in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. Later, beginning in the mid-1920s, Moscow emphasized a rigid unification of Russia's Muslim borderlands within the framework of the USSR, which resulted in the establishment of proto-state institutions in Soviet border republics. Finally, since the 1970s, it became routine for Moscow to subcontract the day-to-day administration of those republics to local clan-based elites, which were becoming increasingly influential as the power of Moscow waned. Then came the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Beyond Soviet borders, after World War II Muslim Arab countries became Moscow's important resource in its global confrontation with the West.² From the 1950s to the 1980s, when the Soviet Union was engaged in bitter competition with the United States for influence in the Arab world, the Caucasus and Central Asia served as both a showcase and logistic springboard for Soviet policy in the region. The main objective of that policy was to turn radical Arab regimes into staunch allies in a confrontation with "world imperialism and its agent in the Middle East, Zionism." That approach is still alive in some parts of the Russian establishment and informs the doctrine of the multipolar world that came into fashion in the mid-1990s.

Stalin's failed attempt to turn Israel into a tool for fighting British colonialism caused Moscow to shift its attention to Israel's defeated Arab neighbors, who were looking for revenge. In 1954 Soviet arms began to flow to the Arab world (initially to Nasser's Egypt). The Suez crisis of 1956 established Moscow as a military ally and political protector of radical Arab regimes. Before the 1990–1991 Gulf War, Moscow had developed close relations with what it called *countries of socialist orientation*, which for much of the period included Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

At the same time, the Soviet Union experienced intense hostility from conservative or pro-Western governments, including NATO member Turkey and U.S. allies Israel, Iran (under the shah), and Pakistan. Saudi Arabia and most of the oil-rich Gulf States did not even have diplomatic relations with the USSR. Even though the Baghdad Pact, and later the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), never solidified into permanent structures like NATO, the battle lines between the West and the East

were clearly drawn in the region to Russia's south. Afghanistan remained the one traditionally neutral area in the entire region.

For the first time since the feudal anti-Soviet opposition (*basmachi*) was defeated in Turkestan, the 1978 Islamic revolution in Iran caused Moscow to pay serious attention to the social and political processes and to the ethnic and religious situations in the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, Moscow's analysis was shallow and its conclusions arrogant. To many in the Communist Party Central Committee, it seemed the Soviet Union had gone on a counteroffensive, first by supporting the radical leftist coup in Afghanistan (1978) and then by sending in troops "to defend the revolution" (1979). Although the coup surprised the Soviet leadership and the subsequent invasion of a neighbor was largely a forced step, a rigid communist ideology interpreted the developments in Afghanistan as evidence that the "world revolutionary process" was becoming "broader and deeper." Afghanistan's joining "countries of socialist orientation" contrasted sharply with the fall of the pro-American regime in neighboring Iran—and America's public humiliation during the 444-day-long crisis when U.S. diplomats in Tehran were held hostage by Islamic revolutionaries.

During the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, the superpower rivalry was superimposed on a confrontation between two trends within the Muslim world itself: one moderate (traditional and promodern) and one radical (nationalistic and fundamentalist). The United States, guided by the logic of global confrontation and drawing support from the moderate trend, sometimes found it necessary to enter into tactical alliances with fundamentalists in order to contain the spread of Soviet influence. In turn, the Soviet Union, which supported nationalists in their struggle against moderate pro-Western regimes, was becoming an enemy of religious radicals who saw communists above all as militant atheists. In the final days of the Cold War, however, the more farsighted politicians began to realize that Muslim radicalism (fundamentalism) threatened the long-term interests of both Moscow and Washington.

Ironically, the last attempt to support (a genuinely spontaneous) radical leftist coup in a Muslim country—and thus expand Moscow's security zone even farther toward the Persian Gulf—turned out to be the first step in the disintegration of the global Soviet system of alliances and, ultimately, of the Soviet Union itself. Although the Soviets did not suffer a military defeat in Afghanistan, strictly speaking, it took Moscow too long to realize it had driven itself into a deadly trap, and more time and pain than Moscow had been needed to break free from that trap. When it started a pullout in 1988, it was already too late. The Soviet

withdrawal from Afghanistan intensified a fundamental change that was already under way. Developments in Eastern Europe and inside the USSR itself unfolded at a breathtaking pace. The Berlin Wall fell within a year, and the Soviet Union ceased to exist only thirty-three months after its undefeated army had finally made a safe comeback from across the Oxus (Amudarya) River.

The war in Afghanistan brought about a deep crisis in Moscow's Middle Eastern policy. Having failed to suppress militarily the armed opposition supported from abroad, the Soviet Union was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1989. The political and military defeat of the Soviet Union, which had failed to protect a client regime in a neighboring country for the first time since 1945, accelerated the erosion and, ultimately, the disintegration of the Soviet presence in the region from Damascus to Aden. The so-called Afghan syndrome—the fear of engaging in a new military conflict with a Muslim enemy—appeared and affected both the ruling elite and society as a whole. That fear had implications for the Soviet Central Asian republics, where ideas of an Islamic renaissance and Muslim solidarity started to spread.

Russia's new leadership viewed the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which soon followed the Soviet war in Afghanistan, as the shedding of an imperial burden and particularly of "the Asian ballast." The process, however, resulted in armed conflicts and in the fragmentation of the former Soviet south. Former Soviet troops, which were already under jurisdiction of the new Russian Federation, became involved in those conflicts. In the early 1990s, the Afghan syndrome demanded that Russia continue its geopolitical retreat northward. At that time, the Kremlin and the Russian Foreign Ministry had a simplistic approach to addressing southern-flank security issues: "Get out of the hot spots." The pro-Moscow Najibullah regime, which held power in Kabul for three years after the Soviet troops were withdrawn, fell after the Russian leadership finally denied it all financial and technical support.

The post-Soviet leadership in Moscow took it easy after it relinquished the Baltic States and withdrew from Transcaucasian and Central Asian republics. Fundamentally important is that by the late 1990s the Russian leadership, elites, and general public were finally reconciled to Ukraine's independence and to Kiev's sovereignty over the Crimea. The significance of that reconciliation as a factor in European security can hardly be underestimated. Equally important is that despite Moscow's official policy of integration with Belarus, the Russian leadership has not been at all enthusiastic about further expansion. While deciding the issue of a state merger, Moscow was careful to look first at the cost and the other

practical implications of taking over Belarus. Simple expansion is out of fashion and would represent a historic change in Russia's political stance.

Against this background of a remarkable transition from being a great power to a more "normal" international actor, Russia's policies in its southern provinces stand out as highly traditional. The retreat to the north was never completed, partly for so-called objective reasons, due to logistical problems and financial constraints and partly because of the stubborn resistance of the Russian military, which saw further retrenchment as a threat to national security. Until the first campaign in Chechnya, the Ministry of Defense in Moscow was effectively the only agency ensuring the Russian presence in the southern republics of the former Soviet Union. Embassies were still being created, and the Foreign Ministry was on a desperate search for experts and volunteers. More important, military commanders from the Ministry of Defense and General Staff in Moscow, all the way down to local unit commanders, had effectively become autonomous, if not totally independent, makers of the Russian policy regarding the southern flank.

By the spring of 1992, when the Najibullah regime was overthrown and Kabul fell to the mujahideen, civil war in neighboring Tajikistan had already started and Soviet-Russian troops stationed in the republic had become involved. In the fall of 1992, Moscow made a policy decision to support one of the warring Tajik clans over the others. The resulting suppression of local Islamists by the Russian army started the "Tajik" round of Russia's involvement in Central Asian conflicts.

Meanwhile, inside the Russian Federation itself, the situation grew progressively tenser. In 1991–1992 the standoff between the central government in Moscow and the nationalist government of the Tatarstan republic stopped short of evolving into a full-blown armed conflict in the very center of the country. The balanced and moderate position of the Tatar president, Mintimer Shaymiev, and the federal government's restraint made it possible for the two sides to reach a compromise that gave a serious boost to upgrading the Muslim republics' formal and actual status within the Russian Federation. Tatarstan and neighboring Bashkortostan adopted constitutions proclaiming their sovereignty and entered into special agreements with Moscow. Thus, the very real threat of Russia following the Soviet Union along a path of disintegration was removed, but it was at the price of tolerating confederate elements within the federation.

Moscow, of course, had to deal with the consequences of the breakup of the Soviet Union, but those consequences were largely confined to such peripheral areas as the Caucasus. While the Soviet government,

trying to exploit the growing regional tensions in a last-ditch attempt to salvage the Union, had counted on Azerbaijan's conservative leadership to be its main ally in the region, the new Russian authorities, concerned about Turkey's growing influence, placed their bets on Armenia and, covertly, on Armenians in Karabakh. When an armed conflict broke out between Georgia and its separatist province Abkhazia in August 1992, influential Russian political and especially military circles supported the Abkhazians. That fateful choice had important long-term implications. Not only did the Russian government indirectly facilitate a victory of separatist ideas on the Russian Federation's southern border, but it also turned a blind eye to the military and political mobilization of extremist forces in the North Caucasus and their infiltration across the Caucasus's porous borders. It was in Abkhazia that Chechen guerilla leader Shamil Basayev and his fighters first engaged in combat.

From mid-1992, the Russian government had abandoned its policy of retreating northward and tried to consolidate the former Soviet military and political activities under the rubric peacemaking. By then, the products of Soviet and Yugoslav disintegration had already formed an arc of instability from the Adriatic Sea to the Pamir Mountains. Moscow's immediate aim became to ensure a ceasefire across the post-Soviet territories under the Russian army's control. In early 1993, President Boris Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev claimed Russia's special role as the ultimate guarantor of stability within the former Soviet Union's borders. In the same year, peacekeeping forces from the twelve nations comprising the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were deployed in Tajikistan and, in 1994, in Abkhazia. In the summer of 1992 Russian troops marched into the Georgia–South Ossetia conflict area. While doing so, Russia still enjoyed the authority of a country that had managed to avoid armed conflict within her sovereign territory.³ Georgia joining the CIS in late 1993, a move that had been forced under conditions of civil war and by strong pressure from Moscow, and the simultaneous improvement in Russia–Azeri ties following a coup in Baku in mid-1993, apparently confirmed the efficacy of Moscow's new proactive approach.

Since 1993, the oil factor has contributed significantly to Moscow's increased interest in the Caspian region. Competition with Western (chiefly U.S. and British) oil companies and Turkey for the right to produce and transport Caspian oil became so acute that a ghost of the "Great Game"—the confrontation between the Russian and British empires, between St. Petersburg and London, in the nineteenth century—was almost visible. The clash of ideologies was being replaced by a clash of

interests. Moreover, many believed that the new conflict was more fundamental and longer lasting than the opposition between communism and the Free World had been. It seemed that the traditional geopolitics of the nineteenth century had finally triumphed.

In that context, many Russian traditionalists, who liked to call themselves Eurasianists, agreed with Zbigniew Brzezinski, who called the power vacuum the main characteristic of the Caspian region.⁴ To be sure, they offered different conclusions. General Andrei Nikolayev, the first director of the Border Service and from 2000–2003 the chair of the Duma Defense Committee, warned that “in the conditions of instability, chaos, and a lack of elementary order,” the countries of the region were being “drawn into internal strife and a fight against terrorism” and thus “became vulnerable to external pressures. External forces whose desire is to use an extremely complicated internal situation for their own benefit would always exist.”⁵ It goes without saying that Brzezinski and his fellow thinkers in Russia had fundamental differences when it came to the qualitative characteristics of “external forces.”

In real life, though, the image of the Great Game had little in common with the realities of the twenty-first century. Instead of the sophisticated game that the great powers had played on the regional chessboard, Russia faced a totally different challenge. The problem now was not which of the competing powers would fill the power vacuum and thus win a coveted prize, it was the vacuum’s very existence and the fact that it could not simply be filled from without—at least by the traditional means—which created a permanent instability threat. Nation building, rather than old-fashioned imperialism, had to be the answer. Moscow had first faced that challenge even before the Soviet Union broke up, but the Russian leadership failed to understand it and thus chose to ignore it.

Initially, Moscow paid little attention to the international implications of Chechnya’s unilateral declaration of independence, made on September 6, 1991. On that very day, the newly created State Council of the crumbling Soviet Union (in fact, the council was its funeral-organizing committee) recognized the independence of the Baltic States. Future relations between Russia and Ukraine topped Moscow’s political agenda at the time. After the Russian leadership’s half-hearted and failed attempt to suppress the “Dudayev mutiny” in October 1991, Yeltsin’s Moscow realized it was helpless in the matter. The good news, however, seemed to be that Chechnya would be a marginal issue. Such thinking allowed the Russian government to recognize *de facto* Chechen independence. In the spring of 1992, Moscow not only withdrew regular army units from Chechnya, but also transferred to General Johar Dudayev

large amounts of military hardware, including tanks, artillery, and aircraft, stationed in the republic. Thus, in terms of sharing the Soviet Union's military legacy, Moscow proved to be much more accommodating in its relations with Grozny than it was with Kiev, Tbilisi, or Baku.

Moreover, Moscow consciously but not altruistically turned a blind eye to the state's becoming an unrecognized internal offshore zone, a channel for large-scale contraband and other illegal economic and financial transactions. Chechnya's, and thus Russia's, borders were open and under neither's control, in either direction. The well-known meter-long private international border (in reality, comprising the whole Grozny airport, which had become an international gateway that the federal authorities could not control) generated huge profits to Chechen leaders and their business partners in Moscow. In general terms, the existence of a *de facto* independent Chechnya between 1992 and 1994 became tangible evidence of the Russian government's political impotence both at home and abroad. Owing equally to the government's weakness and its corruptibility, Russia failed to respond to the Chechen challenge, thus sending a clear message to neighboring countries and beyond that a power vacuum existed inside Russia from the Caucasus to the Kremlin.

In Central Asia, Russia acted more decisively. During the 1992 civil war in Tajikistan, Russian troops engaged in combating Islamic fighters for the first time on territory that had once been part of the Soviet Union. Soon Islamists were driven from Tajikistan to neighboring Afghanistan, where local military and political groups gave them shelter and support. To prevent the Islamists from re-infiltrating Tajikistan, Russian troops set up a cordon sanitaire along the Pyandzh River. At the same time, lacking long-term objectives or clear-cut guidelines, the Russian policy vis-à-vis Tajikistan succumbed to the interests of the Dushanbe regime (that is, the Kulyab clan led by the Russian army-installed Emomali Rakhmonov).

Even though too little distinction is often made among the countries of the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States, the member countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia stand in stark contrast to Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The collapse of the Soviet Union has led to the emergence of six new Muslim states: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. All are secular, but none is stable. Demographic dynamics have changed the population ratio, to the detriment of Russia's Slavic populations. Today, the 60 million people of the six new states are still dwarfed by Russia's 145 million. Yet, even as Russia's population shrinks, most of its southern neighbors are growing.

Inside the Russian Federation itself ethnic elites in the Muslim republics of the Volga and North Caucasus regions felt resurgent self-awareness as the USSR dissolved. Tatarstan and Bashkortostan declared their sovereignty (although carefully stopping short of outright independence), effectively claiming a confederate status vis-à-vis the rest of Russia. While these claims were downplayed later, they have never been truly forgotten. More important, the power systems in both enclaves largely serve the interests of local Muslim clans.

The Islamic renaissance that has been under way in Russia since the late 1980s has inevitably politicized Islam and spawned nationwide and regional Islamic parties and movements. These parties and movements have become (formally or otherwise) legitimate players in the political process. They are not only instruments of communication among various Muslim enclaves, they also coordinate Islamic activities inside what may be termed the Russian segment of the global Muslim world and are therefore conduits of the interests of Muslim communities.

The Islamic factor influences both Russia's domestic situation in Russia's and Moscow's foreign policy. This trend was amplified by an upsurge of radical Islam at the end of the twentieth century. Chechnya is its prime example but it is not exceptional. In Central Asia, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, the Greater Middle East, and elsewhere across the Umma, conflicts are gestating in which Islam is the prime factor in motivating massive ethnic and social forces.

In their turn, such conflicts affect the policies pursued by neighboring states, including Russia. Over a period of about twenty-five years (at truly short intervals), Soviet, and later Russian, troops have been fighting Islamic forces in Afghanistan (1979–1989), Tajikistan (1992–1993), Chechnya (1994–1996), Dagestan (1999), and Chechnya once again (since 1999). The U.S.-led international coalition against terrorism, of which Russia became a proud member in the fall of 2001, has been targeting terrorists and radicals from the Islamic world. American troops operate inside Afghanistan and in the frontier provinces of Pakistan; U.S. military advisers are training government forces in Georgia and the Philippines to fight local Islamic terrorists; and Iraq has become the target of America's largest military campaign in decades. Even leaving aside Iran, Palestine, Kashmir, and Xinjiang, it has become clear that those who must deal with Islamic separatists, extremists, and terrorists must emphasize, even as they continue to fight, the nonmilitary dimension of their policies in order to prevent isolated conflicts from developing into a clash of civilizations.

Over the years, the seemingly endless war in Chechnya has become an emblem of post-Soviet Russia. Indeed, the Chechen problem came to the fore in the heady months between the August putsch and the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Former Soviet general Dudayev unilaterally declared Chechnya's unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) in November 1991, with himself as its first president. Yet over the following three years Chechnya remained on the periphery of Russia's political developments. Powerful vested interests in Moscow were using Grozny's UDI for self-enrichment. The first Chechen war, begun in December 1994, initially seemed an absurdity, with military commanders negotiating passage along with local women and old men. This image was abruptly replaced by horror as hundreds of Russian troops were killed in a brutal battle in the streets of Grozny on New Year's Eve 1995. Despite all the horrors of war and war victims' sufferings, however, for many in the Russian capital and beyond, the war in Chechnya remained a distant and unrelated development—at best, a never-ending and gruesome soap opera. It might as well have been waged on the moon. After the Khasavyurt peace accords (1996), which left Chechnya in the hands of Dudayev's successors, many Russians preferred to forget about Chechnya altogether.

Yet the three years of Chechnya's de facto independence brought no peace to Chechnya, the North Caucasus, or Russia as a whole. The Russian government neglected developments in the enclave. The Federal Security Service (ultimately the successor to the KGB) sought to prevent the separatists from consolidating their power, while the military yearned for a rematch. On the other hand, Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov could not establish control over the republic. These trends indicated the trouble to come. The virtually lawless enclave soon became a safe haven for Islamic extremists and terrorists, who often had international connections. A single major provocation was all that was needed to re-ignite the war. In August 1999, forces from Chechnya invaded the Russian republic of Dagestan. The war, on hold for three years, restarted.

At almost exactly the same time, Islamists based in Afghanistan made a far-reaching raid into Central Asia. Both sectors of Russia's southern flank were simultaneously ablaze. Central Asia was back on Moscow's radar screen for the first time since the civil war in Tajikistan, which had reached its peak in 1992. The threat had manifested itself and had to be confronted with force.

As Russia moves into the twenty-first century, it continues to have the Chechnya problem in tow. President Putin denies there is a war. Yet although combat has indeed subsided, bombings, sabotage, and terrorist

attacks have not stopped. Rather, these attacks have reached new levels of daring and intensity. As a result, the human toll continues to mount. The conscript army and the practice of sending police officers across the country for tours of duty in Chechnya ensure that the war is anything but an isolated element of the Russian situation. Chechnya has entered Russia.