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Chechnya's Russia Problem

MATTHEW EVANGELISTA

In October 2002, armed Chechen terrorists seized control of the Dubrovka Theater in downtown Moscow and held nearly 800 people hostage. They demanded an immediate end to Russia's war in Chechnya and withdrawal of the Russian army. Eighteen of the fifty Chechens were women, veiled and dressed in black robes, with explosives strapped to their bodies. They threatened to blow up the building if their demands were not met. After a tense 58 hours, Russian special forces piped in an incapacitating gas and then stormed the theater. They killed the Chechens and freed the hostages, although more than a hundred of those freed later died from the effects of the gas.

Russian President Vladimir Putin characterized the hostage taking as entirely about international terrorism—and nothing else. He linked the Chechens to the Al Qaeda terrorist network. He said that the Chechen republic president, Aslan Maskhadov, whose election Russia had recognized as legitimate in 1997, was complicit in the hostage operation and therefore could not be part of a negotiated solution to what had become known as the second Chechen war.

In the months that followed, even as Chechen suicide bombings of Russian military and civilian targets mounted—both inside Chechnya and elsewhere in the Russian Federation—Putin declared victory over the secessionists and began to implement his preferred postwar policy. A March 2003 referendum ostensibly demonstrated overwhelming popular support among Chechens for a new constitution that would reaffirm the region's status as a republic of the Russian Federation, thereby repudiating the separatist government of Maskhadov and the armed opposition to Russian occupation. A presidential election was scheduled for October 2003.

But no one believes that the situation in Chechnya will become stable anytime soon. Hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled the war are struggling to remain in camps in neighboring republics such as Ingushetia, even though the Russian authorities have sought to cut off international humanitarian aid and force the refugees to return home. Their reluctance to do so speaks more eloquently than the referendum results about the prospects for peace in Chechnya. As long as President Putin insists on framing the war in Chechnya as a struggle with international terrorism, as long as he refuses to consider a negotiated or internationally sanctioned resolution, and as long as the West tacitly acquiesces to his approach, there may be no end to the bloodshed.

TERROR AS TACTIC

In the past nine years Russia has fought two wars in Chechnya. The first occurred between 1994 and 1996; the second resumed in autumn 1999 and continues today. Both wars have entailed massive indiscriminate bombing of cities and villages; high civilian casualties; and sweep operations (*zachistki*) in which soldiers search house to house, rounding up males for interrogation and often looting homes and abusing villagers. Many Chechens have been herded into so-called filtration camps, with credible evidence of extrajudicial killings, torture, and disappearances. An estimated 100,000 or more people—mostly civilians—have died in the wars, and several hundred thousand remain refugees or internally displaced persons.

Russia's military campaigns in Chechnya have broken many international and European laws and agreements, including the Geneva Conventions, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the European Convention for the Prevention of

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Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. A plausible case can be made that Russia has also violated the Genocide Convention for "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group," although the matter of intent would have to be established.

It is thus not surprising that human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, the Red Cross, and Human Rights Watch have criticized Moscow's policy. European organizations and governments have also, at least intermittently, called attention to the wars in Chechnya and so has, if less often, the United States. European institutions have called on Moscow to pursue negotiations in good faith to end the war, to protect the civilian population, and to bring to account the perpetrators of crimes against innocent civilians. Europe has sometimes reinforced its demands with stronger, albeit largely symbolic measures. In April 2000, in the midst of the second Chechen war, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe suspended the Russian delegation's voting rights for a time and threatened to expel Russia from the body if it did not impose a cease-fire and "initiate political dialogue without preconditions or prior restrictions with a cross-section of the Chechen people, including the elected Chechen authorities." Russia did not comply with those demands, but its voting rights were still restored. This episode captures the dynamic of the international reaction to the Chechen situation: a series of ups and downs, with little apparent effect on Russia's behavior. And then came the American "war against terrorism."

The Chechen conflict was not always seen—even by Russia's leaders—as a question of terrorism.

It has become a truism that the events of September 11, 2001, changed a great deal in international politics. Their effect on the Chechen war was not, however, immediately obvious. Terrorism has been part of the Chechen conflict since long before the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. If we define terrorism as the use of random violence against civilians for political motives, then many of the actions of the Russian armed forces in Chechnya would qualify: wholesale destruction of villages, mass bombing of the Chechen capital of Grozny and other cities, indiscriminate roundups of civilians, torture, and extrajudicial killings.

The Chechen side has also engaged in terrorism, starting with the first war and continuing today, with a recent escalation of suicide bombings by young women. Among the more dramatic terrorist attacks of the first war was the June 1995 seizure of a hospital in the Russian city of Budennovsk, when Chechen fighters took more than 1,000 people hostage. That action was justified as a response to a well-documented massacre of civilians by Russian troops at the village of Samashki. The Budennovsk crisis was resolved when Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin negotiated a release of the hostages in return for safe passage of their kidnappers. The Chechen terrorists did not achieve their main stated objective—ending the war with a withdrawal of Russian troops—and the war dragged on, inspiring further terrorism from the Chechen side.

A January 1996 attack on Kizliar, over the border in the republic of Dagestan, was apparently intended to capture a Russian helicopter base. When Chechen fighters could not find it they seized another hospital instead. Not satisfied with keeping the patients and medical staff captive, they rounded up more people from their homes until they had assembled between 2,000 and 3,000 hostages. Russian forces quickly attacked the hospital but stopped when the Chechens began to execute their captives. Local Dagestani officials then negotiated safe passage for the terrorists, on the Budennovsk model, but Russian forces reneged on the deal and attacked the Chechen convoy just as it was about to cross a bridge into Chechnya. The Chechens retreated into the village of Pervomaiskoe with their hostages.

Meanwhile another armed group—Turkish citizens of Abkhaz and Chechen origin—hijacked a passenger ferry in Turkey's Black Sea port of Trabzon, demanding that the Russian army free their "Chechen brethren." Instead the Russian troops bombed Pervomaiskoe with Grad rockets. Many of the Chechen fighters managed to escape, taking 80 hostages with them. The hostages were later released to Dagestani authorities at a press conference that highlighted the Russian special forces' humiliating failure. The Russian attack yielded a huge death toll, including hostages.

With its army in shambles and its citizens thoroughly demoralized, the Russian government in 1996 finally began to take seriously the need to end the war. Russian popular support for a military resolution of the conflict, already low to begin with, fell to such depths that President Boris Yeltsin felt

his chances for reelection were in serious jeopardy. He recruited retired General Aleksandr Lebed, a rival for the presidency, to negotiate a cease-fire in time for the second round of elections in June 1996, which Yeltsin then won.

The lessons learned by many Chechens—at least the ones with guns—were that Russia is vulnerable to terrorist acts, that the Russian people are easily demoralized, and that their leaders will heed their views and withdraw as the costs mount. The major exception to this generalization was the spate of apartment bombings in Russia in September 1999 that killed nearly 300 people. Although never convincingly linked to Chechens, these terrorist acts solidified support for Yeltsin's chosen successor, Vladimir Putin, and helped secure his election in March 2000, as Russian bombers pounded Grozny into rubble.

9-11 DIPLOMACY

Given that terrorism was always a part of the Chechen wars, can we say that 9-11 changed how the West views the situation in Chechnya? Should the West—that is, the United States, its allies in Europe, and the international organizations they dominate—now accept Moscow's military actions as part of the international war against global terrorism? If so, does Moscow deserve less criticism of its ongoing human rights abuses and more sympathy for its attempts to end the war?

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, President Putin was the first foreign leader to telephone President George W. Bush to offer his country's condolences. Among the cynical, the former KGB agent's motives raised suspicions. September 11 offered to Putin, as it did to other leaders who were facing insurgencies, the opportunity to cast his war in a new light, as part of a common struggle against international terrorism. He was quite explicit on this point when he told American television journalist Barbara Walters that, "in 1999, we were the victims of a terrorist attack. And I'm not just referring to Chechnya and the Caucasus. I'm referring to the explosion of residential buildings in Moscow and other cities as a result of which hundreds of innocent people died."

But until the Moscow hostage crisis in October 2002, not much really changed in the West's approach to the Chechen conflict. Human rights groups kept up the pressure on Russia. Some international organizations tried, with mixed success, to pass resolutions condemning Russian behavior. And governments continued to behave inconsistently. The US State Department's annual report on human rights for 2002 devoted considerable space to criticizing Moscow's prosecution of the war, as it had in previous years. The United Nations Human Rights Commission, however, defeated a resolution condemning Russian behavior. (Many of the members, responsible for human rights violations in their own countries, probably feared setting a precedent that could later put them at risk.) The European Parliament passed a resolution expressing concern, but it was watered down from what leftist and Green Party parliamentarians had in mind.

Even with this mixed record, it was apparent that if Russia was anticipating a deal on Chechnya—whereby the West would remain silent or even support Moscow's war effort—it did not get what it expected. More surprisingly, Moscow did not seem interested in exerting the leverage it held regarding the US war against the Taliban in Afghanistan. What kind of leverage did Russia have? It could, for example, have threatened to limit US access to air bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, former Soviet republics within Moscow's sphere of influence, the so-called near abroad. Instead, the Kremlin welcomed the US presence in Central Asia and in the former Soviet republic of Georgia as well.

This posed a puzzle. How to explain Russia's apparent willingness to give the green light to an extensive US presence in its near abroad without an obvious quid pro quo? The prospect of a US-led war in Afghanistan against international terrorism evidently led to a serious rethinking of Russia's understanding of its own security. In trying to justify the harsh measures that Moscow imposed on Chechnya, President Putin had highlighted the connections between the Chechen rebels and the Al Qaeda terrorist network based in Afghanistan. He achieved only limited success in making Europe and the United States complacent about Russian atrocities in Chechnya. But he may well have convinced himself that the connection between Chechnya and the Afghan terror network had to be disrupted—and the US war represented the best option for doing so.

The Chechnya–Al Qaeda link was objectively no different before 9-11 than after, but Putin's effort to reframe the Chechen war led to a reframing of Afghanistan and the near abroad as well. Whereas US bases on Russia's periphery and US military action in a neighboring country would have seemed intolerable in early September 2001, they seemed desirable only a couple of weeks later. Putin explained his position in his 2002 state of the nation address in a manner consistent with this interpretation:

"For our state, which has long been confronted with terrorism, there was no difficulty in deciding whether to support efforts to destroy its lair or not—especially as these measures did indeed help to strengthen security on the southern borders of our country and, to a considerable extent, helped to improve the situation."

A BLOODY STALEMATE

Although Russian cooperation in the international campaign against terrorism apparently did not hinge on the West's attitude toward Moscow's war in Chechnya, the past year has seen a significant change in the US government's perception of the Chechen conflict—including much more sympathy for Russia's official position and greater tolerance for its methods, no matter how brutal. That change was evidently the result of two factors: the hostage crisis in Moscow and the Bush administration's desire to recruit Russian support in the UN Security Council for war against Iraq.

The Moscow hostage crisis provided a vivid image to reinforce Putin's framing of the Chechen conflict as an international terrorist conspiracy: bearded men in combat fatigues toting machine guns and veiled female suicide bombers issuing communiqués to the Al-Jazeera TV network. Despite the heavy toll of the rescue operation, President Putin received high marks from popular opinion in Russia. He also received a phone call from President Bush expressing his support and sympathy—an obvious effort to reciprocate Putin's telephone call after 9-11.

US and British leaders appear to have been motivated subsequently by a second factor: they wanted Moscow's support for launching a war against Iraq, a policy option that had become both internationally and domestically a rather unpopular prospect. On the brink of "Operation Iraqi Freedom" in March 2003, for example, the Bush administration declared three Chechen groups to be terrorist organizations, something the Russian government had long been requesting. The timing was clearly connected to Iraq.

Even though the administration failed to win Russia's endorsement of the war, it continued to seek Moscow's support for US postwar policy in Iraq. In August 2003, a month before Putin's scheduled visit to the United States, US Secretary of State Colin Powell declared Chechen warlord Shamil Basaev an "international terrorist." The designation should come as no surprise. Basaev himself has made no secret of his terrorist activities, including the Budennovsk hostage raid, or of his links to such notorious figures as the late Saudi *mujahad* known as Khattab. In fact, the roles of Basaev and Khattab had already figured prominently as justification for the administration's March decision on the three Chechen groups. As with the March designation, the pronouncement regarding Basaev allowed the US government to seize his bank accounts in the United States (although no one seems to know whether any exist). A source in Putin's administration characterized Powell's statement as "purely political," but told Russian journalists that it "paves the way for joint efforts against international terrorism." Most media accounts viewed the US gesture as a transparent attempt to elicit Russian cooperation in Iraq.

Moscow's framing of the Chechen conflict exclusively as a case of international terrorism, while denying that any legitimate grievances drive the resistance to Russian military occupation, has resulted in a bloody and hopeless stalemate. Official US acceptance of Moscow's position has weakened whatever leverage Washington could have exerted to help bring the conflict to a peaceful resolution.

THE ROOTS OF WAR

The Chechen conflict was not always seen—even by Russia's leaders—as a question of terrorism. Chechnya was one of many regions that sought greater autonomy from Moscow in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. The Soviet Union was nominally a federation and it split into its 15 constituent units, the union republics, each of which became an independent country, many for the first time in history. Russia too is formally a federation, made up of 89 so-called subjects, 21 of them, including Chechnya, known as national republics because they are considered the homeland of a major nationality. During the late 1980s several of the republics, such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, as well as Chechnya, sought greater independence from Moscow. Both Chechnya and Tatarstan refused to sign the Federative Treaty that formed the basis for relations between the center and the regions, and Bashkortostan only did so after appending a separate bilateral agreement.

In all of the cases except Chechnya, the poorest of Russia's 89 regions, the Moscow authorities pursued a compromise solution that kept the republics from seceding. In the Chechen case, President Boris Yeltsin chose war, supposedly for fear that Chechen independence would provoke a rash of other secessions. As he put it in one of several volumes of ghost-written memoirs, "We cannot stand idly by while a piece of Russia breaks off, because that would be the begin-

ning of the collapse of the country." In 1999, Vladimir Putin renewed the war in response to an incursion of rebels across the Chechen border into Dagestan, led by Basaev and Khattab. In one of his own quasi autobiographies, Putin justified the new invasion and bombardment of Chechnya with the same argument that Yeltsin had used. He spoke of the possible "Yugoslavization" of Russia.

Yet there was little danger that Russia would go the way of the Soviet Union and break up into its constituent units. Yeltsin's administration was willing to negotiate with the leaders of republics that were demanding greater autonomy and made numerous concessions. Many of those leaders were the former Communist officials who had headed their republics in the Soviet period. Their nationalism was of a moderate, if somewhat opportunistic, variety, and they managed to keep their more extreme nationalists at bay. The "treaties" they signed with Moscow helped undermine the extremists.

Again Chechnya was the exception. In that case, the Kremlin backed an idiosyncratic radical nationalist, Dzhokhar Dudaev, a former Soviet air force general, at the expense of the former Communist leader, whom Moscow abandoned. Dudaev's mercurial personality and provocative rhetoric would have made it more difficult for Yeltsin to strike a deal with him than with the leaders of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, for example. But Yeltsin did not try: he refused even to meet with Dudaev. Yeltsin thought he could easily overthrow the upstart Chechen's regime in short order. Two years and tens of thousands of dead later—including Dudaev, who was targeted by a Russian missile while talking on his cell phone—Yeltsin withdrew the Russian army, leaving the status of Chechnya unresolved. Putin's renewal of the war in autumn 1999 has produced more devastation while bringing peace and stability no closer.

Highlighting the connection to international terrorism serves to downplay the deeper sources of the conflict and reveals the glaring absence of any constructive solutions on Moscow's part. Some Chechen fighters have presumably received aid from Islamic fundamentalist groups, along with considerable moral support from the Muslim world (much as the US-backed Kosovar Albanians did in their struggle against Serbian domination). Yet at least some US officials have been careful not to overstate the case. In May 2002, for example, Steven Pifer, a State Department official, reported in congressional testimony that "contrary to some media reporting, we have not seen evidence of extensive ties between Chechens and Al Qaeda in Chechnya, but we have seen evidence of individuals or certain factions linked to terrorist elements."

The more relevant point is that the Chechens were driven to seek external support only after Moscow chose military force as its preferred way to deal with Chechen aspirations for greater autonomy. Without addressing those aspirations, Moscow will not be able to solve its Chechen problem. This view has been expressed even within the Russian defense ministry by its former press chief, Colonel Viktor Baranets. He compared militant Islam to "a tiger in a Moscow zoo, obediently dozing in the iron cage of Soviet power." It was "released into Chechnya, set free and enraged by Moscow" when Yeltsin unleashed the war. But the main sources of the Chechen war, as in Moscow's conflicts with the other regions, were economic and political, not religious.

The past year has seen a significant change in the attitude of the US government toward the Chechen conflict—including much more sympathy for Russia's official position and greater tolerance for its methods, no matter how brutal.

Even today, committed holy warriors make up a small proportion of the Chechen resistance, despite the impression we have from the Moscow hostage-taking and subsequent terrorist attacks. Consider, for example, the images of women in head-to-toe burkas with explosives strapped to them. Chechen women do not typically dress in this fashion. Chechnya has no tradition, and until recently no practice, of suicide bombers or martyrdom. In fact, according to Russian journalists who were members of the captive audience, the terrorists who seized the Dubrovka Theater had ample opportunity to blow themselves and the building up, but did not do so.

Unfortunately, subsequent events have demonstrated that Chechen women, dubbed "black widows" by the Russian media, are ready to kill and to die in suicide bombings. In June 2003, in an obvious bid to bolster his international credibility, President Maskhadov ordered his military forces to adhere to the Geneva Conventions and avoid targeting civilians. But on July 5, suicide bombers attacked a suburban Moscow rock festival, killing at least 16 people

and wounding dozens more. The actions of the black widows undermine Maskhadov's efforts and suggest that much of the violence on the Chechen side of the conflict remains out of his control.

MAKING PEACE AN OPTION

A useful way to think about ending the violence in Chechnya is to distinguish among the types of people who wield it and the prospects for negotiating a peaceful resolution of the conflict with them. First, there are common criminals and bandits. These are the people who benefit from the chaos of a wartime situation, have easy access to weapons, and engage in kidnapping, smuggling, and theft. They should not be parties to negotiation but should be arrested, tried, and put in jail—a task beyond the means of the local government, or the federal government for that matter, especially when Russian military and civilian officials are often implicated in the criminal activities. If peace and stability were restored to Chechnya, along with some measure of economic recovery, the opportunities for rampant crime would diminish.

Second, there are the committed terrorists and Islamic holy warriors, including some foreigners. They would not be satisfied with an independent Chechnya but at a minimum seek an Islamic republic stretching across the Russian North Caucasus. They also might want to use the region as a base for endless jihad. Obviously, such demands should be nonnegotiable and the main response to the extremists should be to defeat them. But these groups have never been very popular among ordinary Chechens and they only thrive under the current conditions of desperation and lawlessness. A peace settlement and economic revival would undermine whatever support they enjoy.

Third are the nationalists, those who initially took up arms when Chechnya's demands for greater autonomy or outright independence from the Russian Federation provoked a Russian military onslaught. Their leaders, even the eccentric Dzhokhar Dudaev and his successor, Maskhadov, had always been willing to seek compromise solutions that would keep Chechnya integrated with Russia, even if nominally autonomous. A year before the first Russian invasion of 1994, for example, Dudaev declared, "we do not see strategically a place for the Chechen Republic outside the single economic, political, and legal space which covers the current Commonwealth of Independent States," the loose alliance of former Soviet republics led by Russia.

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The fourth category of those wielding violence is by far the most troubling. These are the people whom Mikhail Alexseev, a specialist on Russian regional politics, has called seekers of vengeance. The Chechens, like many "mountain peoples," maintain the tradition of vendetta or blood feud (recall the Hatfields and McCoys of West Virginia). Families feel obliged to avenge the murders committed by Russians against their kin. Given the indiscriminate nature of the Russian *zachistki* and the fact that perpetrators of atrocities deliberately hide any identifying markings on their vehicles or uniforms, a number of Chechens have pursued vengeance randomly against any Russians.

The most prominent and disturbing trend is for young women to become suicide bombers. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov has described them as zombies, brainwashed and trained abroad. Kremlin spokesperson Sergei Iastrzhemski was more explicit: "The use of female suicide bombers, which is not characteristic of the Chechen resistance, is a direct borrowing from the Middle East terrorist pattern," he said. "This also confirms that mercenaries from Arab states and people representing the Al Qaeda terrorist network there are acquiring more and more authority in making decisions on terrorist methods." More plausible is the account offered to journalist Fred Weir by Zainap Gashaeva of *Ekho Voiny*, an antiwar coalition of Chechen and Russian women, and echoed by many others familiar with Chechnya's traditions. "In our culture," she explained, "both suicide and women joining in combat are unthinkable. But Chechen women who have lost all their menfolk and all their reasons for living may see no other way out. The fact that they attack Russian targets shows who they blame for the destruction of everything that matters to them."

President Putin has cast the Chechen conflict in the light of international terrorism. If the situation in Chechnya is not brought under control, he argues, the region could become like Afghanistan under the Taliban, a base for worldwide terror. As Putin told journalists in April 2002, "international consolidation and support are no less important here

than in other regions which have to tackle problems like terrorism." Putin characterizes Chechen terrorism as an international problem, yet he refuses to countenance an international solution.

Putin is undoubtedly reluctant to "internationalize" the Chechen conflict for fear that such a move would raise the possibility of eventual independence for Chechnya. Given the disastrous record of kidnapping, slave-trading, economic corruption, and general lawlessness that the de facto independent Chechnya witnessed between 1996 and 1999, no one should want to see a Chechnya like that again. Under those conditions, one could plausibly credit Putin's concerns that Chechnya might become "another Afghanistan." But if Putin believes the results of the March 2003 referendum carried out by his government in Chechnya, he should have no worries about a Chechen bid for outright independence. According to the Russian government, an overwhelming majority of Chechens voted for a constitution that would maintain Chechnya's status within the Russian Federation.

No easy solution

Putin unfortunately has demonstrated through his words and actions of the past four years that he is incapable of addressing the Chechen conflict in any way that could lead to a peaceful resolution. He apparently has trouble controlling his emotions when the subject comes up. He came to power in 1999 vowing to "rub out" the Chechen "bandits" in the "toilet" (it sounds rather stronger in Russian). At a press conference in November 2002, in front of the leaders of the European Union, when a critical question about Chechnya arose, Putin added a new threat to his repertoire: castration. He said, "if you want to become a complete Islamic radical and are ready to undergo circumcision, then I invite you to Moscow. We are a multidenominational country. We have specialists in this question [of circumcision]. I will recommend that they carry out the operation in such a way so that afterward, nothing else will grow." Such crude talk might play well among certain domestic audiences, but it implies a poverty of imagination when it comes to realistic solutions to a conflict that has killed tens of thousands of people and has no end in sight.

Suspicion of any international involvement in coping with the Chechen crisis is rife within Putin's administration. In July 2003, for example, Abdul-Khakim Sultygov, President Putin's human rights envoy for Chechnya, expressed official Moscow's views when he accused nongovernmental human rights organizations of links to terrorism. "Chechnya clearly demonstrates that terrorist activities go hand in hand with the psychological war, propaganda and moral terror conducted by human rights NGOs," he stated. "There is a need to investigate the sources financing these organizations, including those with international status, for their potential ties to the international terrorist network." At a time when the international aid group Doctors without Borders was pleading with the Putin administration to make some effort to account for one of their colleagues kidnapped in Dagestan a year ago, such inflammatory statements only contribute to the dangers that humanitarian workers face in Russia.

What form could international involvement take? There are many possibilities, although none inspires great hope. One idea put forward by Maskhadov in a proclamation this July calls for "conditional independence under an international administration," an implicit recognition that Maskhadov's government is not capable of maintaining a secure and stable Chechnya by itself and certainly not in confrontation with a hostile Russia. Ivan Rybkin, leader of the Liberal Russia political party and former head of the government's Security Council, has advocated negotiations with Maskhadov—an option supported by a majority of Russians, according to recent polls—and the deployment of international peacekeeping forces. The model that many observers have in mind would be the one that operated in East Timor and Kosovo, where disputed territories have been administered by NATO and the United Nations. At a minimum, international observers should be present to monitor elections and referenda that are to determine Chechnya's future.

There is no easy solution to the Chechen conflict. A history of neglect and abuse by Moscow, including two punishing recent wars, has sharply diminished the prospects for reconciliation and reconstruction. Yet, the longer Russia's leaders delay in pursuing a peaceful resolution to the war, the more damage they do to the institutions of their state and to their society. If Putin is convinced that the Chechen conflict is fundamentally an international problem—the product of a global terrorist conspiracy—then he should welcome attempts at an international solution. ■