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THE FUTURE OF CHECHNYA

How Strong is the Insurgency?

During the summer of 2006, the Russian government claimed that it had finally broken the back of the insurgency. The reason for this announcement was the deaths of Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev and Shamil Basaev – two leaders of the insurgency. A few months later, this statement seems premature as the security situation in Chechnya has once again begun to deteriorate. The new top Chechen field commander is Doku Umarov and is one of the few remaining insurgents from the old guard. It is believed that Umarov has successfully regrouped forces, appointed new commanders, and reorganized their posts by zones. In addition, Umarov has supposedly opened up two new fronts, “Urals” and “Volga Region”, which indicates he is prepared to launch hostilities in central Russia. Umarov is also bringing a different perspective of what the insurgency is fighting for. While Umarov’s predecessor Sadulaev spoke about creating an Islamic state in Chechnya through gaining freedom from Russia, Umarov puts freedom as his only goal. He wants to create a Chechnya based on the agreement signed between Chechen and Russian leaders in 1997. He is also unique in emphasizing the need to conform to standards of international law and stresses the importance of human rights. This reflects a more widespread shift in the Chechen insurgency to a more secular rhetoric. Leaders of the insurgency have realized that the heavy Islamic tone has alienated many supporters. It is crucial for the insurgency to widen its support as it gets no more than 10 percent in funds from outside of Russia. Most of their funding comes from Chechen officials in the pro-Russian government, village chiefs, and crime.

According to President Alkhanov and Russian Colonel-General Baryaev, the militants have become more active in Chechnya. Recently, rebels have gone as far as to set up checkpoints on Chechen roads to search for officers from local law-enforcement agencies. They have also begun to employ new tactics in addition to roadside bombs that include more frequent ambushes of military and police jeeps and attacks on military and police facilities. Russian troops and pro-Russian Chechen authorities are having a hard time responding to this revival of the insurgency. Cooperation between security bodies in

the North Caucasus is very limited and the cut back on Russian troops has left parts of Chechnya unsupervised.

How Free is Chechnya?

According to Freedom House, Chechnya has grown increasingly 'unfree' during 1990s and is currently a 7 on the Freedom House scale. There is no pluralism in Chechen politics and political candidates that actively promote Chechen independence are marginalized from running and even working. Television and radio programming is run by the Russian state, which also controls most of the print media. Domestic and foreign reporters have extremely limited access to Chechnya. Those that are allowed in must always be accompanied by Russian troops. Recently there has been a crackdown on non-profit organizations that deal with sensitive issues such as human rights and torture. For example, the Russo-Chechen Friendship Society located in Nizhny Novgorod has experienced continued harassment and was shutdown in mid-October. The rule of law is practically nonexistent and mass abuses are committed by Russian and Chechen troops. Russian soldiers have been accused of many crimes such as rape, beatings, murder, and the maintenance of illegal filtration camps. Despite numerous accusations, Russian soldiers enjoy almost complete impunity in Chechnya and only a small percentage have ever been formally charged. On the other side, Ramzan Kadyrov's private militia has also been accused of preying on the population and has also enjoyed total impunity.

How Has Russian Strategy Changed?

The Russian government is taking significant steps to reorganize their fight in Chechnya. The most important step was taken in August 2006, when the security of the North Caucasus became the exclusive domain of the Russian Interior Ministry. This was an important step as this will eliminate the inter-agency fighting and overlap that has plagued the North Caucasus. Colonel-General Rashid Nurgaliyev has been appointed to head this new network and promises that he will use new and more far-reaching tactics in fighting terrorism in Chechnya including: creating databases, monitoring approximately 200 websites, sting operations, and elimination of financing networks of armed groups. Also, he plans to phase out Russian conscript troops by 2008 and replace them with contract servicemen. During the summer, the Russian government has announced a six month amnesty for Chechen militants. Although, heralded as an important tool in getting militants to come out of the woods, the amnesty does not forgive any serious crimes. Therefore, any militants active in the insurgency have no incentive to use it.

Public Health:

The two Chechen wars have created severe health problems for the Chechen population. The healthcare system is conversely very underfunded, leaving most of Chechnya's people without help for their physical and psychological illnesses. According to the Russian government there is approximately 33,000 maimed/disable Chechen victims from bombing and exploding mines. Still, many suffer illnesses from being exposed to highly toxic substances the Russian troops used in the wars. Tuberculosis and mother mortality rates remain extremely high. In addition, drug addiction is prevalent. There are about 10,000 heroin addicts in the region of which more than 10 percent are HIV positive. It is estimated through voluntary testing programs that

5 percent of the population is HIV positive – this statistic being on the rise. Psychological disturbances are by far the most widely shared illness – 86 percent of the population suffers from them. The wars have orphaned at least 26,000 children – most of them cannot attend school due to psychological trauma. These statistics are highly troubling for Chechnya's future because the children make up 40-50 percent of the population.

Environmental Concerns:

The severe environmental crisis that Chechnya is facing exacerbates the listed healthcare concerns. During the wars, many oil and chemical plants were abandoned or closed down in Chechnya. They have now been plundered all the way down to the stones they were made of. Chechens have taken apart contaminated and hazardous buildings and then have built their homes with the material. This is extremely dangerous and many Chechens are living among hazardous material. There is a need to educate the people about waste sites and hazardous buildings in order to prevent further contaminated materials from spreading throughout Chechnya. The water coming into Grozny has been cited as dangerous to use as it doesn't meet sanitary norms and requirements. The land around water intakes has been severely contaminated with oil which seeps into the water supply. The quality of the water is so low that officials cannot guarantee that boiling it would suffice to kill the harmful agents.

Although there are tremendous under-funding for the numerous issues outlined above – the Russian government and international organizations have taken steps to develop the nascent healthcare system. The Russian government has stated that it will give more than 2.5 billion rubles for Chechen state healthcare. These funds are meant to sponsor rehabilitation, equipment, and salaries. The World Health Organization and USAID are leading an initiative that promotes healthcare education and provides technical support and supplies for certain medical equipment. In addition, the WHO has put aside 3 million dollars to fight Tuberculosis in Chechnya and its neighbor Ingushetia. The International Rescue Committee and the Polish Humanitarian Organization have been working to fix the water supply problem and provide clean water for Chechnya. Finally, the European Commission has committed 22 million Euros of aid for the 200,000 refugees/displaced people of Chechnya.

Humanitarian Aid:

In August 2006, the United Nations has finally reduced the risk level in Chechnya to "Security Phase IV" which allows wider access to Chechnya for relief workers (for instance, staying over night). There have been 9 UN agencies and 13 non-profit organizations conducting joint operations in the North Caucasus under the umbrella name of Inter-Agency Transitional Workplan for North Caucasus. The reduction in risk level gives hope that the UN will finally set up offices in Chechnya in the near future.

What is Supporting Chechnya's Economy?

The Russian government has pledged its commitment to rebuilding Chechnya and has set aside billions of rubles to accomplish this goal. The aid's goals are to create thousands of jobs, construction of residential and commercial buildings, agricultural support, education and health system renewal, environmental improvements, and new

cultural and sports facilities. Yet, the funds allocated have had little to no effect in Chechnya due to the widespread corruption by Russian and Chechen bureaucrats. Since 2000, Russia has allocated approximately 62 billion rubles to Chechnya. It is estimated, that only 40 percent of the aid actually reached Chechnya. Every time the funds get passed from one bureaucratic institution to another they get depleted. When the funds finally get to Chechnya they are once again siphoned off through Chechnya's client-patron structure. Although nominal progress has been made in battling this corruption, the 'efficient implementation of programs' has decreased every year.

Chechnya is a key location for oil pipelines that come from the Caspian Sea and are meant for the West. Many have argued that oil has been a dominant reason why Russia has fought so hard to keep Chechnya under its control. Money from illegal oil manufacturing and oil wells has also been a good source of funding for the Chechen rebels. In addition, American and British oil companies have vested interests in Chechnya maintaining its independence from Russia. International oil companies have been investing heavily in Russian oil companies, but have grown afraid as the Russian government has imposed greater control over its natural resources. The fear of nationalization by the government of the oil industry is a great fear and control over Chechnya is deemed a crucial step in this trend.

Conclusion:

Fifteen years after Chechnya proclaimed its independence, the Russian government claims that it has crushed the insurgency and has brought Chechnya once again under its sphere of influence. Although the government has killed most of the original rebel leaders, the insurgency has proven effective in regrouping itself under new leadership and new rhetoric. Russia does exercise full control over the Chechen executive and legislative branches by co-opting powerful leaders such as Ramzan Kadyrov. But, Russia has failed to create good will among the Chechens by blundering humanitarian aid and by creating virtual impunity for human rights violations by Russian troops and pro-Russian police forces. The Chechen population's psychological and physical health has been severely compromised due to the two wars. Tremendous funds are needed to rebuild the Chechen health infrastructure and to clean up the environmental damage. Russia must increase the transparency and efficiency of its aid in order to maximize Chechen development. The future of Chechnya is uncertain and the latest developments in its political and economic spheres point to troubled times ahead.

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