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NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS AND TRANSNATIONAL JIHAD: FRACTIONALIZATION OF THE CHECHEN SEPARATIST MOVEMENT

by

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASSR	Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic
GKChP	The State Committee for the State of Emergency
IRP	Islamic Renaissance Party
OkChN	Common National Congress of the Chechen People
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, the mobilization of Muslim foreign fighters is a persistent factor in many of the local conflicts and wars in the Islamic World.[1] In Syria during the Arab Spring, secular protests quickly took on sectarian tones and radical Islamist groups became major players in the conflict to oust Bashar al-Assad. In Chechnya, the separatist movement increased in religious rhetoric and rebel elites embraced alliances with transnational jihadist networks. Nationalist movements in the Islamic world such as these have sought assistance and alliances with transnational jihadist groups. However, other movements have discouraged the involvement of foreign fighters. What causes nationalist struggles to be co-opted by transnational jihadist groups?

This research paper focuses primarily on the case of the Chechen nationalist movement from its inception to the start of the second Russo-Chechen War in 1999. In Chechnya, local rebel elites welcomed Muslim foreign fighters, who increased in influence during the inter-war years (1997–1999) and led Russia to represent the second war as a "war on terror." This thesis analyzes the causal factors that explain the rise in jihadist influence in the Chechen nationalist movement, with a particular focus of looking at the internal dynamics of the nationalist movement itself. To test the causal factors identified from the case of Chechnya, the contrasting case of Palestine is introduced as a negative test. In Palestine after Hamas' electoral victory, Hamas diligently smashed cells of opposition that pledged loyalty to transnational jihadist groups. By better understanding the conditions that allow or block the spread of transnational jihad, policymakers can better predict whether local conflicts will become a platform for the jihadi struggle. In turn, identifying the conditions that allow transnational jihadists to co-opt a local conflict could offer policy considerations for how to prevent the spread of global jihad in future conflict zones.

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[1] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (2010): 57, doi: 10.1162/ISEC_a_00023.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

Attributing descriptive names to Islamist activism that accurately represents groups' ideology, objectives, and tactics is difficult.[2] A "Salafi" could be a quietist who chooses to withdraw from society or a reformist who engages the political system.[3] A "jihadi" could be someone who defends his homeland or someone who commits acts of international terrorism in the name of jihad.[4] In response to these hard-to-define terms, Thomas Hegghammer suggests a typology of militant Islamist actors based on their preferences of rationale—why fight?—and their non-violent or violent expressions.[5] With this typology, we can distinguish between the specific actors in the cases of Palestine and Chechnya. Irredentist groups are those who are fighting for control over occupied territory. Both Palestinian and Chechen resistance groups fall under the nation-oriented type of Islamist actor.[6] In their non-violent form, groups can be categorized as nationalists, while their violent manifestations can be classified as violent irredentists. Hegghammer classifies both Hamas and the Chechen mujahidin as violent irredentists.[7] In contrast to nation-oriented groups, other Islamic activists are *ummah*-oriented, those who focus on a broader Muslim community that transcends national borders. Pan-Islamists are their non-violent grouping, while classical and global jihadists are the violent manifestations. Hegghammer distinguishes between classical jihadists, for example the Arab Afghans in Chechnya, and global jihadists—al-Qaeda being the quintessential example—based on their focus on the near enemy or the far enemy respectively.[8] For the remainder of the paper, I will group the two under the overarching term "transnational jihadists."

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[2] Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), 244–45.

[3] Ibid., 248–50.

[4] Ibid., 246.

[5] Ibid., 258.

[6] Ibid., 257.

[7] Ibid., 259.

[8] Ibid., 258–60.

Additionally, in picking these cases and actors, I am trying to hold the variable of Islam and strategic objectives close to constant. This is beneficial because it allows analysis of intra-Islamist competition. Focusing on Islamic irredentists and transnational jihadists provides insight into the interaction between two groups with different desired end-states but very similar short-term objectives. Both irredentists and jihadists want to defend the Muslim community from an occupier. However, in the long term, nationalist movements desire to establish a homeland and national political structure, while jihadists may seek to establish an Islamic state or emirate with its own specific governance structure. Additionally, groups differ on how they define and enforce Islamic law, encourage or discourage particular forms of Islam such as Sufism and Salafism, and define the "jihad" and the enemy. These points of contention make jihadists a potential short-term ally but a questionable long-term asset for the nationalist movement. A local group may invite foreign fighters to increase resources, manpower, and leadership to the local conflict but find the jihadists bring ideological baggage that fails to resonate with the local populace or enforce standards of piety that are unpopular. In a populist struggle, this could have negative effects on group cohesion. But, if a group is strong enough, it could force the acceptance of its viewpoint through coercion, as has been witnessed with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

1. Foreign Fighter Literature

The literature on foreign fighter mobilization primarily focuses on two dimensions: why foreign fighters themselves are motivated to join a struggle in a country that is not their own for no expectation of significant repayment,[9] and what resources the foreign fighters bring to a local conflict. In David Malet's landmark study of foreign fighters, he demonstrates that insurgencies recruit foreign fighters by framing the conflict as a defensive mobilization to protect a threatened transnational community whether that

[9] This definition is defined by both David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9; and Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters," 57–58. Hegghammer adds the condition for an individual to be qualified as a foreign fighter: must join an insurgency, lack citizenship and kinship ties within the conflict state, have no affiliation to a military organization, and is unpaid.

community's identity is based on ethnicity, religion, or ideology.[10] While he recognizes the instrumental reasons insurgents recruit foreign fighters including the desire to broaden the scope of the conflict and to increase resources,[11] Malet's research is primarily focused on the recruitment mechanisms related to foreign fighters.

Similar to Malet, Thomas Hegghammer's research on foreign fighters traces the historical context in which Muslim foreign fighters mobilized to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and how many of the same actors joined the fight in other foreign conflicts afterwards. Hegghammer contends that the Muslim foreign fighter phenomenon emerged in the 1970s from Saudi Arabia as a strand of Islamism, "populist Pan-Islamism," which resulted as, "strategic action of a marginalized elite employed in nonviolent international Islamic organizations."[12] These Pan-Islamic activists, in the pursuit of political influence and greater resource mobilization, started promoting the message of a threatened Islamic world and a need for Muslim solidarity globally, which established the networks and norms for foreign fighter mobilization to Afghanistan in the 1980s.[13]

Hegghammer's hypothesis was self-admittedly focused on understanding the "first movers" of the Muslim foreign fighter movement, but the world has witnessed transnational jihad continue to spread to more conflicts since the war in Afghanistan.[14] Neither Malet nor Hegghammer's research explains under what conditions foreign fighters are unwelcome, nor do their arguments have full explanatory power for the timing of when insurgents seek transnational assistance. To understand that, this research begins by flipping the equation and looking at what is going on within the local conflict and the local resistance groups, rather than the transnational movement, to identify causal mechanisms for these groups to be co-opted or seek transnational jihadist support.

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[10] Malet, *Foreign Fighters*, 11–12.

[11] David Malet, "Why Foreign Fighters? Historical Perspectives and Solutions," *Orbis* 54, no. 1 (2010): 100, doi: 10.1016/j.orbis.2009.10.007.

[12] Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters," 56.

[13] Ibid., 56–57.

[14] Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters," 77.

2. Civil War Literature

In analyzing when civil wars become religiously oriented, Monica Toft defines four conditions in which actors will seek the assistance of transnational religious networks: a threat to local elites, religious networks associated to resources, religious division, and governmental control over the media.[15] Two of these conditions are present in nationalist movements in the Islamic world. First, as noted above, Hegghammer's research explains the historical appearance of Muslim foreign fighter networks attached to resources—financial and material—that are now available for pan-Islamic causes.[16] Certainly, structural considerations may prevent these pan-Islamic networks from accessing certain areas, such as strong border security, monitoring of international financial transactions, limited access to information technology, and others. Second, Islamic nationalist movements in opposition to a non-Muslim regime often equate to a division based on religious grounds, such as the Chechens against Orthodox Russia or the Palestinians against Jewish Israel. Even if a group is against a nominally Muslim regime, with sectarian rifts and *Takfiri* ideology allowing certain Muslim groups to deem other Muslims as infidels, a religious division could still exist. Toft identifies the causal mechanism for the sacralization of a local conflict as a process of religious outbidding in which "elites attempt to outbid each other to enhance their religious credentials and thereby gain the support they need to counter an immediate threat."[17]

3. Movement Fragmentation

Movement fragmentation, understanding when groups fall apart or stay together, may be the key to understanding when foreign fighters are, and are not, invited to take part. If elite competition is a significant factor for local actors to seek assistance from transnational religious networks, then conflict literature on movement fragmentation could inform our understanding of the conditions in which groups will split and pursue

[15] Monica Duffy Toft, "Getting Religion?: The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War," *International Security* 31, no. 4 (2007): 103, doi:10.1162/isec.2007.31.4.97.

[16] Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters," 56–57.

[17] Toft, "Getting Religion?,"103.

affiliation with global jihadist networks. Although nationalist or irredentist movements may have a singular objective of establishing territorial autonomy for a specific group of people, nationalist movements are not inherently singular actors but most often a configuration of multiple actors.[18] As evidenced by the Palestinian movement or the struggle in Syria, multiple actors may be fighting the ruling regime, establishing alliances, fighting each other, dissolving, reforming, and evolving in various ways.

When do additional resources—this includes external support, whether state sponsorship or foreign fighter mobilization—strengthen a movement? Common sense may suggest that the acquisition of additional resources will strengthen a movement, but in the real world, external support is beneficial in some cases and harmful in others.[19] Researchers have attempted to understand this puzzle and have postulated several hypotheses. Paul Staniland draws a connection between institutional strength and the social networks and ties an institution is based on. He concludes that, if there are pre-existing cleavages in the social base of an institution, then added resources such as external support will exacerbate the cleavages. It follows then that when there is social unity or "overlapping social networks," external support will be beneficial.[20] While Staniland focuses on the social base, other scholarship focuses on the distribution of power within movement organizations. For example, Theodore McLaughlin and Wendy Pearlman suggest that if an organization has "institutional equilibrium" when the majority of participants are satisfied with the distribution of power, then external resources strengthen group cohesion and state repression leads to greater group unity. When there is dissatisfaction within an institution over the distribution of power, then repression and external resources will lead to factionalism.[21]

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[18] Wendy Pearlman and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Nonstate Actors, Fragmentation, and Conflict Processes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 4, doi: 10.1177/0022002711429669.

[19] Henning Tamm, "Rebel Leaders, Internal Rivals, and External Resources: How State Sponsors Affect Insurgent Cohesion," *International Studies Quarterly* (Aug 2016): 1, doi: 10.1093/isq/sqw033.

[20] Paul Staniland, "Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia," *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012): 148, doi: 10.1162/ISEC_a_00091.

[21] Theodore McLauchlin and Wendy Pearlman, "Out-Group Conflict, In-Group Unity? Exploring the Effect of Repression on Intramovement Cooperation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (Feb 2012): 42, doi: 10.1177/0022002711429707.

Victor Asal defends a similar argument with an emphasis on how leadership structure matters. He argues that, "organizations with a factionalized leadership structure are much more likely to split than organizations with a hierarchical and centralized leadership structure."[22] According to Asal, competing leadership indicates the presence of conflicting ideas and objectives. This results in division because there is space for leaders to disagree, which will be exacerbated by external factors whether for support or repression.[23] Although proposing that competing leadership leads to division is not profound, Asal's findings suggest that nationalist movements with political institutions that have a centralized leadership will avoid splits. Applied to the present research question, his conclusions could suggest that local conflict will not "go global" if the irredentists have strong institutions because splits would be reduced. Or, in contrast, the nationalist movement with centralized leadership would be able to harness the benefits of outside support, rather than splitting into factions.

A unified social base and centralized leadership of an institution is not enough when we are looking at a nationalist movement because movements are rarely unitary actors and they are certainly not devoid of intra-movement, inter-institutional power dynamics.[24] Peter Krause applies power distribution theory to analyze how specific movement structures affect the ability for a nationalist movement to achieve its strategic objectives.[25] He finds that only in hegemonic movements in which one group has total leadership over a movement can the nationalist agenda make significant progress. When movements are split between a leading group and competitors or even an alliance structure, actors within the movement will focus on increasing their own power in relation to others rather than pursue strategic goals that progress the movement towards

[22] Victor Asal, Mitchell Brown, and Angela Dalton, "Why Split? Organizational Splits among Ethnopolitical Organizations in the Middle East," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 96, www.jstor.org/stable/23207773.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Pearlman, "Nonstate Actors," 4.

[25] Peter Krause, "The Structure of Success: How the Internal Distribution of Power Drives Armed Group Behavior and National Movement Effectiveness," *International Security* 38, no. 3 (Winter 2013/2014): 74, doi: 10.1162/ISEC_a_00148.

autonomy or nationhood. In part, Krause argues this is a natural result of what national movements are about: achieving statehood that carries with it particular benefits, which Krause terms "goods" ranging from the rights of citizenship, the end of an occupying force, and the wealth and status that come with public office.[26] The strategic objective of statehood is difficult to achieve, requires resources, and entails the danger of being targeted by the ruling state. Likewise, as Krause argues, "a group will pursue strategic goals (1) when these private and club goods are the best resources for a group to increase its power and (2) when the group is more likely to capture these private and club goods. A group's position in the movement hierarchy drives both of these considerations."[27]

In line with Krause's argument, Tamm found the effect of state sponsorship dependent on the position of the recipient rebel leader within the power structure of the rebel group. If the external support was given to a dominant rebel leader, this aided in reinforcing the imbalance of power in favor of this rebel leader. If given to a rival rebel leader, it undermined the balance of power and weakened group cohesion.[28] We can see in the case of Chechnya how jihadist support of Shamil Basayev, a rival Chechen militant, undermined the ability of Aslan Maskhadov, the elected Chechen president, to unify the Chechen separatist movement.

4. Social Mobilization Literature: Framing

Social movement theory analyzes the factors behind movement emergence and development that are typically categorized into at least three categories: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes.[29] "Political opportunities" refers to the opportunities and constraints social movements face in their particular

[26] Ibid., 81.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Tamm, "Rebel Leaders," 1.

[29] Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, *Comparative Perspectives On Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

environment or national context.[30] "Mobilizing structures" addresses how groups organize for collective action.[31] And "framing" analyzes the strategic efforts by groups or movements to create "shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action."[32] In a similar vein, the social scientist Sidney Tarrow describes social movements as, "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities."[33] By analyzing these three factors, social movement theory can address both the "structural potential for action" found in the categories of "political opportunities" and "mobilizing structures," and also the cultural aspects of movements through consideration of the processes of framing. Social movement theory closely intersects with the organizational theories addressed above in its focus on mobilizing structures, but it adds the nuance and particularities of local culture by looking at the framing and collective identity behind movements.

For people to mobilize, they must have both grievances and optimism, a reason to act and a belief that something can be done about their grievances.[34] The articulation of the diagnosis (the problem), prognosis (the solution), and motive constitutes the mobilizing frame.[35] Culture is not an autonomous force but must be expressed through people.[36] Thus, social actors shape how culture is used to frame a conflict and the ways these cultural elements become part of a contentious discourse can be seen as "intentional decisions taken to increase popular support…strategic decisions."[37] In different situations, the amount of strategic intention in conflict framing varies. In comparison to

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 3.

[32] Ibid., 5.

[33] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

[34] McAdam, 5.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Hank Johnston, "Ritual, Strategy, and Deep Culture in the Chechen National Movement," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 3 (2008): 337, doi: 10.1080/17539150802514981.

[37] Ibid.

the emergence phase of a movement, framing the conflict in the development phase is increasingly a strategic endeavor of the movement actors and a point of internal competition.[38] Part of the framing process can be trial and error to determine what framing will resonate. The environment in which the framing occurs also has an impact.[39] "Framing contests" will not only be affected by the movement, the state, or countermovement groups but also by the sympathies and biases of the media.[40] Movement framings are particularly vulnerable to lose resonance when coalitions are forming or when counter movements are attacking the framing.

Some scholarship on the intersection of nationalist movements and transnational jihad specifically analyzes the role of framing. Foreign fighters often bring with them a new narrative for the local conflict and tactical innovation, which may or may not be received by the local population.[41] Vidino, in his study of the sacralization of the Somali conflict, highlights the necessity of propaganda efforts to shift a civil conflict into an arena of global jihad whether that is seen in the media or rebel leaders' rhetoric.[42] Several studies suggest that the acceptance of foreign fighter groups and a new framing of the conflict lies in the local elites' ability to persuade the population through norm diffusion processes.[43] Toft's previously discussed theory of religious outbidding emphasized control of the media and information as a precondition for elites to increase the religiosity of a conflict.[44] The media and public information is an arena for elites to strategically use rhetoric to distinguish themselves and influence the norms of the population. Lisa Blaydes and Drew Linzer, in their research attempting to explain anti-

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[38] McAdam, 16.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 17.

[41] Kristin M. Bakke, "Help Wanted? The Mixed Record of Foreign Fighters in Domestic Insurgencies," *International Security* 38, no. 4 (2014): 153, doi: 10.1162/ISEC_a_00156.

[42] Lorenzo Vidino, Raffaello Pantucci, and Evan Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: Al Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict," *African Security* 3, no. 4 (October, 2010): 216–238, doi: 10.1080/19392206.2010.533071.

[43] Bakke, "Help Wanted?," 160.

[44] Toft, "Getting Religion?" 103.

Americanism in the Islamic world, propose that the phenomenon is a result of elite rhetoric that trickles down anti-American sentiment to the populace. This anti-American rhetoric increases particularly when the domestic political landscape has greater competition between Islamists and secular nationalists.[45] Scholars seem to agree that elites play a significant role in influencing the views of the public.[46] When competition is absent and a group enjoys a monopoly, whether that is over religion or political support, elites are not as active in shaping public opinion or adherence to an ideology—the "lazy monopolist" phenomenon.[47] Bakke, whose research focused on the case of Chechnya, insists local rebel elites are essential in the process of framing a local conflict as a global jihad in order to effectively integrate foreign fighters with the local populace.[48]

5. Literature Review Conclusion

Nationalist conflicts and the spread of jihadist ideology involve many complex dynamics that are not easily summarized in one theoretical framework. Combining social mobilization theory, civil war literature, and organizational theories allows a more encompassing view of the internal dynamics of nationalist movements and what causes them to split and seek foreign assistance. This research helps test some of the highlighted theories' explanatory power for the case of Chechnya.

B. HYPOTHESES

In analyzing the case of Chechnya, this thesis aims to trace the causal mechanisms for the fractionalization of the nationalist movement and entrance of jihadists into the local conflict. The dependent variable for this research is the rising influence of transnational jihadists into a nationalist conflict. In Chapter III, Palestine is used as a negative case to see if the causal factors hold for a movement blocking the entrance of

[45] Lisa Blaydes and Drew A. Linzer, "Elite Competition, Religiosity, and Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (May 2012): 225, doi: 10.1017/S0003055412000135.

[46] Ibid., 230.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Bakke, "Help Wanted?," 162.

transnational jihadists. Below are three hypotheses derived from the literature that this research will test.

1. Hypothesis 1: Resource Mobilization

As postulated by Toft, threatened elites in a conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims will seek to bolster their religious credentials and appeal to pan-Islamic networks. This theory of religious outbidding seems to imply two things: first, that the process begins with a threat to local power holders, and second, that framing a conflict as a religious struggle, such as jihad, would be symptomatic of a group seeking to build transnational alliances with co-religionists to garner resources. In the context of Chechnya, this would imply that the entrance of transnational jihadists would be during a time of intra-Chechen competition or threat from Russia, followed by an increase in religious rhetoric, and confirmed by alliances or obtained support from transnational networks. In the broader view of resource mobilization, perhaps this hypothesis can be simplified to: Muslim nationalist movements will seek transnational jihadist support when they need the additional resources whether that is manpower, expertise, finances, or international publicity due to some threat. This hypothesis may have a bias of only viewing religious framing as strategic messaging to the outside, rather than based on true faith or the ties religion has to local identity.

2. Hypothesis 2: Movement Structure

A nationalist movement's organizational structure matters. Groups or local elites will seek transnational jihadist assistance when they are dissatisfied with the distribution of power within a nationalist movement and when they have the ability to rebel under a weak or decentralized movement structure. In contrast, hegemonic nationalist movements that have strong, developed institutions and centralized leadership will work to undermine the entrance of foreign fighters or transnational jihadist groups. Strong institutions will enable a movement to control local elites and maintain greater control over the use of violence.

3. Hypothesis 3: Collective Identity and Framing

Transnational jihadist groups will gain influence when an Islamic identity is stronger than a national identity or when framing the conflict as a nationalist struggle resonates less than framing the conflict as a religious struggle. This hypothesis looks at the role framing has in mobilizing collective action and tests the debate between the efficacies of religious mobilization versus ethno-nationalist mobilization.

C. THESIS OUTLINE

This research does not refute one hypothesis over another, but is looking for the decisive factor(s) that led to an opening in the Chechen separatist movement for rebel elite to seek transnational jihadist support. Was it the efficacy of an Islamic collective identity or framing of the conflict as a religious struggle? What role did the structure of the movement play? Was the main impetus for seeking jihadist support to garner resources? Each of these hypotheses may be one piece of the puzzle.

Chapter I explores the socio-historical context for the emergence of a Chechen national identity and the conflict framing. This chapter emphasizes the utility of Islam as an oppositional identity from the onset of the separatist movement, which refutes the common misunderstanding of the conflict as being radicalized by non-Chechen actors.

Chapter II examines the inter-war years of the Chechen conflict from 1997 to 1999, which is often considered the key period in which the movement increasingly took on an Islamist character as a result of transnational jihadist influence. This chapter emphasizes how the fractionalization of the movement domestically led to increased influence for the transnational jihadists. It was local elite in alliance with the foreign fighters that co-opted the nationalist struggle, rather than the foreign fighters themselves.

Chapter III presents the negative case of Palestine during Hamas' dominance in Gaza after 2006 in which Hamas actively worked to destroy and dismantle opposition groups allying with transnational jihadists. This comparative case helps test the conclusions found in Chapter II about the role of a movement's structure. A strong hierarchy and strong institutions seem to undermine the ability for local elite to align with transnational jihadist groups. In conclusion, the final chapter provides a synthesis of the

research findings and addresses their policy implications for the United States and international community.

II. FRAMING THE CHECHEN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT: ISLAM AS AN OPPOSITIONAL IDENTITY

Chechnya experienced two bloody wars with Russia. The first, from 1994 to 1996, was the Russian attempt to block Chechen moves for independence. The second, from 1999 to 2009, was the Russian response to the incursion of Dagestan by Chechen and Dagestani rebels allied with transnational jihadists. How did the movement seemingly transition from one where the dominant narrative was a nationalist movement to an arena of global jihad?

The above summary of the conflict is flawed: it is from an external perspective, rather than looking internally at the structure, rhetoric, and framing of the Chechen separatist movement itself. By focusing on the evolution of the framing of the conflict and the timing of shifts in Chechen rhetoric, this chapter traces the cultural and strategic role Islam played inside the movement from the start. This chapter begins by tracing the Chechen cultural toolkit and development of a Chechen national identity to grasp the ways the separatist movement resurrected and used Chechen history, culture, and identity to mobilize support for independence from Russia. The chapter then focuses on conflict framing as it developed throughout the two wars.

The Chechen nationalist movement had Islam as part of its discourse from the onset because of the close link between Islam and pre-Russia Chechen identity, which was one among several possible framings—especially in light of a broader shared experience with other peoples of the Northern Caucasus. The need to justify Chechen independence from Russia and the historical precedent of *gazavat* (holy war) against Russian occupation increased the utility of Islam as an oppositional identity for the Chechens. Later on, internal competition among Chechen elite also reinforced the need to maintain an Islamic identity for the nationalist movement. The transnational jihadist framing of the conflict in Chechnya, which will be addressed in the next chapter, was the result of weak movement hierarchy, which allowed rebel Chechen warlords to partner with transnational jihadists, attempt to widen the scope of the conflict, and provide justification for a re-invasion of Chechnya by Russia.

A. WHO ARE THE CHECHENS?

The Chechens are a historically tribal people of the North Caucasus who call themselves *Nokhchii* (Chechens).[49] Chechnya consists of the area between the Terek River to the west, the Andi mountain range to the east, the Sunzha River to the north, and the Caucasus range to the south.[50] Chechens have a long history of resisting foreign invasion starting with the Sassanid Empire, the Arab Caliphate, the Byzantine Empire, the Mongols, the Russian tsars, and the Soviets.[51] In pre-Russian history, Chechnya and the North Caucasus region as a whole was of little geopolitical importance until Tsar Ivan the Terrible conquered the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates in 1556, thus spurring competition between Moscow, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and other local powers vying for control of the region for military and trade routes.[52] Chechens encountered Russian troops starting with Peter the Great's 1722 campaign into eastern Chechnya, followed by Catherine the Great in the eighteenth century, and General Yermolov, Russian commander-in-chief of Georgia with jurisdiction over the Caucasus, in the nineteenth century.[53] Russia struggled to annex the Caucasus region facing local guerilla resistance groups from 1817 until the surrender of Imam Shamil, a famous Muslim and resistance leader from Dagestan, in 1859, at which point the eastern North Caucasus became part of Russian imperial territory.[54]

1. Ethnic Identity

In interviews with Chechen refugees, Aurelie Campana found that Chechens agreed on two common attributes of the Chechen identity—in Campana's words, the

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[49] John Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

[50] Ibid., 2.

[51] Moshe Gammer, "Nationalism and History: Rewriting the Chechen National Past," in *Secession, History and the Social Sciences*, ed. Bruno Coppieters and Michel Huysseune (Brussels: VUB Brussels University Press, 2002), 121.

[52] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 4.

[53] Ibid., 7, 13.

[54] Ibid., 27–29.

"Chechen collective imaginery."[55] First, Chechens viewed themselves as a uniquely free people that had never known monarchy or slavery. Second, they saw themselves as untamed, sacrificial, loyal, and fearless, which was symbolized by the image of the wolf. These self-identifiers have historical and modern roots. Chechen society was historically clan-based, with clans as part of extended families that were part of clan alliances.[56] Instead of an aristocracy, the Chechens made decisions through a council of elders.[57] In the nineteenth century, the Chechen tribes did not identify on the basis of a Chechen nationality but rather, viewed themselves as Caucasian based on the geographic location of the North Caucasus and the common way of life they shared with other Muslim peoples in the region.[58] Tribal identity and loyalty seemed to supersede any form of wider ethnic solidarity.[59] However, some scholars see the harsh policies of the Russian tsars, starting with General Yermolov and the first deportation of Chechens, as a significant factor in strengthening the national identification of the Chechens.[60] Feuds between Chechen tribes and clans had been commonplace, but Russian aggression initiated a slow development of national consciousness for the Chechens and also prompted the Chechen support for the Naqshbandi Sufi leaders during the Caucasus War and later the Qadiriya brotherhood, which will be discussed further in the section on religious identity.[61]

Traditional Chechen folklore that eulogizes the Chechen mountain people who resisted aggressors focuses on two main characters: the *abrek* and the wolf. *Abrek* originally referred to the men who hid in the mountains to escape blood revenge but later

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[55] Aurélie Campana, "Collective Memory and Violence: The Use of Myths in the Chechen Separatist Ideology, 1991–1994," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 29, no. 1 (2009): 43, doi: 10.1080/13602000902726756.

[56] Ibid., 44.

[57] Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 26.

[58] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 20–21.

[59] Ibid., 20.

[60] Ibid., 16, 36.

[61] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 36.

represented those who valiantly resisted the Russian and Soviet incursions into Chechnya.[62] The *abrek* was a "bandit of honor," similar to Robin Hood.[63] Chechen lullabies extolled the bravery of these men—for example, the famous twentieth-century *abrek* Zelimkhan Kharachoyevski—in which Chechen children are encouraged to "grow up fast so you may serve your homeland . . . be dauntless and selfless just like Zelimkhan."[64]

2. Religious Identity

Religion can easily accompany nationalism, especially when attached to an ethnic identity, as in the case of the Chechens and peoples of the Northern Caucasus. Islam came to the Caucasus region in the eighth century, but Chechens did not widely convert to Islam until the seventeenth or eighteenth century.[65] Before Islam, Chechens were primarily animists, although some medieval Christian monuments have been unearthed in Western Chechnya.[66] Chechens in the seventeenth or eighteenth century were largely Muslims yet much of their religious practices were mixed with local pagan beliefs and customs. These local traditions, known as *adat*—for example, the Chechen system of blood feud—coexisted with other orthodox Islamic practices. These local traditions became the target of reform for historic religious revivalists.

Chechens primarily belong to one of two Sunni Sufi brotherhoods: the Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya orders.[67] The famous Chechen resistance leader, Imam Shamil, used Islam as an inspirational force to draw the tribes together against the Russians in the Caucasus War (1817–1864).[68] Mohammed Yaragskii, a contemporary of

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[62] Campana, "Collective Memory and Violence," 45.

[63] "Undying Enmity; The Chechen Leaders Thrive on Perpetual, Idealized War." *The Washington Post.* Published: 1999/10/10. Date Accessed: 2017/02/06. www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Scott Radnitz, "Look Who's Talking! Islamic Discourse in the Chechen Wars," *Nationalities Papers* 34, no. 2 (2006): 244, doi: 10.1080/00905990600720328; Gall and De Waal, *Chechnya*, 31.

[66] Gall and De Waal, *Chechnya*, 31.

[67] Ibid., 32.

[68] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 28.

Shamil and Naqshbandiya ideologue, preached that the Caucasian Muslims would only be able to conduct holy war, *gazavat*, and be free of the Russians once they started living as pious Muslims.[69] Although Imam Shamil is praised for officially establishing Islamic law for the first time in the North Caucasus, including Chechnya, he ultimately surrendered to the Russians in 1859 after decades of a devastating war.[70]

Several decades after Shamil, the Qadiriya *tariqats* also brought a religious revival to the Northern Caucasus.[71] In contrast to the more puritan Naqshbandiya order, the Qadiriya practiced the loud *zikr*, a melodic chant of God's name or other religious phrases, and accepted music and dance in worship.[72] Despite initially preaching a message of mystical asceticism and non-violence, it became necessary for the Qadiriya to determine their posture against the Russian occupation of Muslim land, especially after the Russian arrest of key leaders and the prohibition of several Sufi practices, such as the *zikr*, in the early 1860s.[73] Over twenty thousand Chechens decided to emigrate to the Ottoman empire in 1865 to escape religious persecution. Qadiriya groups later allied with the Naqshbandiya for the 1877 rebellion against the tsarist regime which led Russia to adopt a marginal level of religious tolerance towards Muslims in the region until the era of the Soviets.[74]

B. CHECHNYA UNDER THE SOVIETS

The Red Army occupied Dagestan in the spring of 1920 and was opposed by the Dagestanis and Chechens in the Said-Bek rebellion that looked much like previous *gazavat* rebellions in the region.[75] With numerical and technological superiority, the Red Army crushed the rebellion by May 1921, slaughtering and deporting the local people

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[69] Ibid., 22.

[70] Radnitz, "Look Who's Talking!" 245.

[71] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 21, 31.

[72] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 31–32.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid., 32–33.

[75] Ibid., 40.

along the way.[76] Stalin offered amnesty to the Said-Bek rebels and internal sovereignty to the mountaineers in exchange for recognition of the Soviet government. The Mountain Republic, which included Chechnya, Dagestan, Ossetia, and Ingushetia, agreed to the terms and became the Soviet Mountain Republic with the condition that the *shari'ah* be recognized as the basis of the Republic's law.

Only a year after the establishment of the Soviet Mountain Republic, the Bolsheviks reneged on the agreement and pursued a "divide and rule" strategy by severing the Chechens from the Republic and creating the Chechen Autonomous Oblast.[77] In part, this was a Soviet attempt to undermine a wider mountaineer identity and accelerate Russification of the people of the North Caucasus, which in-turn came with the aim to decrease the influence of Islam among the Chechens.[78] In 1924, the Soviets shut down religious schools in Chechnya.[79] From 1929, the Soviets pushed a campaign to collectivize agricultural land, which eroded many Chechens' traditional way of life and livelihood and ultimately led to another round of Chechen revolts followed by Red Army crackdowns.[80] In 1944, the Chechens were accused of collaboration with Nazi invaders and deported to Central Asia en masse in train cars—a common strategy of Soviet domestic policy.[81] Many Chechens died en route and in the harsh conditions they faced after their arrival in various Central Asian soviet republics.[82] The Soviets subsequently abolished the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR), re-drew borders of the region, created the Groznyi Oblast (a "supra-ethnic territory"), renamed Chechen districts with Russian names, and encouraged the settlement of the region by ethnic Russians.[83]

[76] Ibid., 41–42.

[77] Ibid., 43–44.

[78] Ibid., 48.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., 49.

[81] Ibid., 61, 63.

[82] Ibid., 68–69.

[83] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 61, 73.

After the death of Stalin in 1953, Chechens and Ingush people that had useful labor skills were allowed to return to the North Caucasus. However, large numbers of Chechens in Central Asia began returning to their homeland without permission. Although the authorities actively opposed the return of Chechens to their land, the Soviets conceded to allow the vast majority of Chechen and Ingush people to return by the late 1950s and reluctantly restored the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.[84] The Soviets framed the ordeal as a "voluntary unification" of the Chechen and Ingush people with Russia.[85]

C. THE CHECHEN EXPERIENCE OR THE NORTH CAUCASUS EXPERIENCE?

Russian and Soviet policies towards the people of the North Caucasus, as described above, have created a complex relationship between the territory and various people groups. The above focus on the "Chechen" experience to describe and identify particular ethnic, religious, and nationalist characteristics is in part projecting a modern development—a distinct Chechen national identity—on to the past. The Chechen response to the Russian invasion could also be relevant to most areas of the Northern Caucasus. Islamic mobilizations by the Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya brotherhoods centered out of Dagestan and included a number of Caucasian peoples. As discussed above, Chechens could identify as *Gortsy* (Caucasian Muslims), *Vainakh* (Ingush and Chechen), *Nokhchi* (Chechen), a tribal identity, or on the lines of their particular Sufi brotherhood and religious leader.[86] Certainly, cultural differences between the ethnicities did exist. Circassians and Dagestanis both had an aristocracy and class divisions that Chechen society did not.[87] Factors such as geography and Russian policy amplified people groups' differences and similarities. The resettlement of the Ingush in the plains made them more vulnerable to Russian conquest, while the Chechens' mountain home

[84] Ibid., 75, 77–78.

[85] Ibid., 83.

[86] Ibid., 36.

[87] Gall and de Waal, *Chechnya*, 24.

allowed them a degree of autonomy. Both the Ingush and Chechens shared the experience of mass deportation to central Asia in the 1940s.

The discussion that follows looks at how the Chechen separatist movement and the two Russo-Chechen Wars accelerated formation of a Chechen national identity. The understanding of the construction of this collective identity also provides understanding to the intersection of Chechen nationalism and transnational jihad. The possibility for the Chechens to identify with a wider community warrants consideration in discussing the "foreignness" of widening the scope of the conflict against Russia by invading Dagestan. Looking at what has occurred through the lens of hindsight as specific to the Chechen people is a limited perspective but also evidence that modern developments, which largely revolve around the Chechen separatist movement and war with Russia, have created a distinct Chechen identification and national consciousness.

D. GLASNOST AND THE RISE OF CHECHEN IDENTITY

Under the Soviets, the Chechen identity had been largely repressed. One Chechen man remembers his school days under the Soviets: "I searched through all our school textbooks and there was no mention of Chechens. There were wild tribes, indigenous peoples, but no Chechens."[88] Overt worship was also suppressed during the Soviet era, but after 1985 during the *glasnost* period when religious restrictions were lifted, mosques began to reopen in Chechnya.[89] Concurrently, Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* campaigns also provided space for Chechen *intelligentsia* to re-explore a suppressed Chechen cultural and ethnic identity and created opportunities for the emergence of civil society organizations in the Chechen-Ingush Republic, in the form of informal organizations (*neformaly*), that would become the roots of the Chechen separatist movement.[90] In 1989, the Communist Party committee in the Republic,

[88] Ekaterina Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya (1997-1999)," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huérou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey, and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (New York: Routledge, 2014), 101.

[89] Radnitz, "Look Who's Talking!," 245.

[90] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 88.

declared the 1944 deportation of Chechens and Ingush as “our shared tragedy.” Previously, this topic had been a taboo subject, so the overt discussion within the local Communist party seemed to indicate a change in political consciousness and public dialogue.[91]

E. VAINAKH IDENTITY

The first organizations working for Chechen independence from Russia actually organized around the Vainakh identity, which included both the Chechen and Ingush peoples.[92] Historically, Vainakh were the considered the “descendents of the Hurrians” and “one of the [ancient] civilizations of the Near East.”[93] This initial choice in identity seems to demonstrate a direct reaction to a political opportunity. Under the Soviets, Chechnya and Ingushetia were administered as the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Political structures, such as the local Supreme Soviet, governed the area as one. By seeking Chechen-Ingush independence, these early separatist groups were hoping to transform current political institutions and borders into a government independent from Russia. Bart, meaning “unity,” was one such political organization established in 1989 by young Chechens set on creating “a federal statehood of the peoples of the Caucasus.”[94] It later took the name the Vainakh Democratic Party. Within the Vainakh Democratic Party a group of young Chechens called the “national radicals” by the opposition started advocating for a “sovereign Vainakh republic,” affirmative action programs for Chechen and Ingush, and an end to the influence of Soviet atheism in the Republic.[95]

Yet, by the summer of 1990, Chechen intelligentsia called for a Chechen National Congress, and by November 1990, the first Chechen National Conference assembled and “declared the sovereignty of the Chechen Republic Nokhchi-cho” for the Chechen

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[91] Ibid., 88–89.

[92] Ibid., 91.

[93] Gammer, “Nationalism and History,” 120.

[94] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 89–90.

[95] Ibid., 90–91.

people.[96] The Congress selected a Chechen Soviet general, Dzhohar Dudaev, to be the leader of the Chechen nationalists and announced that the group was thenceforth to be known as the Common National Congress of the Chechen People (OkChN). This change in political goal and identity as a separate people marked the transition from a combined Vainakh identity to a Chechen national identity. The separation of these two people groups was confirmed when Ingushetia seceded from the republic after Dudaev declared Chechen independence from Russia in 1991. The Ingush had a different opportunity cost than the Chechens. They had long desired to have historic Ingush lands—the Prigorodnyi Region—returned to them from Ossetia by Russia and saw pledging loyalty to the Russian state as a sign of good faith in hopes of receiving back the land.[97]

F. CHECHEN SEPARATISM

The 1991 August Coup against Gorbachev by the State Committee for the State of Emergency (GKChP) provided the chaos and political opportunity for Chechen political groups to take a clear stance.[98] In Chechnya, the National Chechen Congress and the Vainakh Democratic Party immediately set up headquarters, and Dudaev began framing the GKChP's ambitions for a "war on crime" as an impending genocide of the Chechen people if the GKChP were to come to power, while the local Communist party faltered to respond with communications cut off to Moscow during the coup.[99] Chechen nationalist groups began emphasizing the necessity for Chechens, as announced by Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, a leader of the Vainakh Democratic Party, to "create underground organizations and armed formations. We have to raise the people to repulse the GKChP."[100]

[96] Ibid., 91.

[97] Jeri Laber and Rachel Denber, *Russia: The Ingush-Ossetian Conflict in the Prigorodnyi Region* (Helsinki, Finland: Human Rights Watch, May 1996), https://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Russia.htm; Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 122.

[98] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 100.

[99] Ibid., 100.

[100] Ibid., 101.

The National Chechen Congress and the Vainakh Democratic Party united under the banner of the Common National Congress of the Chechen People (OKChN) with Dudaev as its chairman.[101] The OKChN advocated for a labor strike on 21 August 1991 and general civil disobedience until the GKChP was removed from Moscow. The local Communist party wanted the coup in Moscow to be successful and started to forcefully oppose the OkChN, but it soon became clear that the August Coup had failed.[102] Dudaev demanded the resignation of most Communist officials, seized the Republic's television center, and broadcasted across the area the nationalists' ambitions to overthrow the Communist party.[103] Dudaev's supporters amassed in Grozny and included the rural poor who hated the Communist party leadership, business entrepreneurs who thought they might gain a greater profit from the oil industry, and Muslim fundamentalists who thought Dudaev would create an Islamic republic—a revolution was emerging.[104]

By September 1991, the OKChN had control of most of Grozny and had established its own national guard to maintain security in the capital.[105] On 6 September 1991, Dudaev and the OKChN staged a coup that temporarily deposed the local government and ushered a new round of elections for the Chechen presidency and the Republic's parliament to be held on 27 October 1991. Dudaev was subsequently elected president in an election that was highly suspect of fraud.[106] After Moscow began denouncing the elections as unlawful, Dudaev announced the decree for Chechen independence on 1 November 1991. Despite a localized focus on Chechnya, Dudaev's long-term vision was on an independent Mountain Republic or North Caucasus State to resist Russian imperialism on a larger scale.[107] Dudaev made several attempts to garner the support of regional neighbors. However, by 1994, other nationalist movements in the

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[101] Ibid., 95.

[102] Ibid., 101–102.

[103] Ibid., 102.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., 104.

[106] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 113–114.

[107] Ibid., 140.

region chose to remain in the Russian Federation, and the Chechen separatist movement remained at a national scale.[108]

G. CHECHEN NATIONALIST FRAMING: 300 YEARS OF GENOCIDE

In the 1990s, the Chechen separatists framed the Chechen experience with Russia as a three-century-long "genocide" for several strategic effects. The separatist's historical narrative of the 300 years of genocide starts with Peter the Great's Persian campaign of 1722 and emphasizes the intentions of the Russians to wipe out the Chechen people first in the Russian conquests of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, then in the Soviet conquest of the 1920s and 1930s, then in the deportation of the Chechens to Central Asia from 1944 to 1957, and finally in the Russian invasion of Chechnya in 1994.[109] The internal motive behind this framing was to bolster the domestic legitimacy of Chechen nationalist leaders, to justify the need for Chechen independence and its high cost, and to mobilize the people to support the Chechen leadership.[110] On Chechen television, Dudaev proclaimed, "It's a war for life or death."[111] Chechen separatism was at direct odds with the Russian Federation's claim to protect the integrity of its territory and statehood.[112] The diagnosis was that Russia had subjugated the Chechen people for centuries and was aimed at their destruction. The prognosis was that Chechnya must seek independence and self-determination.

Additionally, this framing worked to warrant the drive for Chechen independence on the international stage condemning Russia for unjustified violence against a people group.[113] It painted the Russian and Soviet treatment of the Chechens as oppressive imperialism and highlighted the colonization of the North Caucasus region and displacement of native people groups from the most fertile land. This framing portrayed

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[108] Ibid., 147.

[109] Gammer, "Nationalism and History," 131–132; Campana, "Collective Memory and Violence," 47.

[110] Gammer, "Nationalism and History," 123.

[111] Radnitz, "Look Who's Talking!," 247.

[112] George Garner, "Chechnya and Kashmir: The Jihadist Evolution of Nationalism to Jihad and Beyond," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 25, no. 3 (2013): 419, doi: 10.1080/09546553.2012.664202419.

[113] Campana, "Collective Memory and Violence," 48.

Russia as both a physical and existential threat to the Chechen people's survival and identity, thus evoking emotions of fear, vulnerability, and humiliation fed by the Chechen collective memory of Russian repression and the high moral-value Chechen society gave to freedom and equity.[114]

H. SYMBOLS OF CHECHEN NATIONALISM

In agreement with the conflict framing, the Chechen elites attempted to construct a Chechen identity and history that was "de-Sovietized"—reactionary to their history of secession from Russia—so identity formation focused on pre-Russia and pre-Soviet identity stemming from two categories of heritage, the Sufi Islamic heritage and the ethnic Chechen heritage.[115] After Dudaev's declaration of independence in 1991, the loud Sufi *zikr,* a communal religious practice of the Qadiriya brotherhood, was performed in the main square in Grozny, as well as at the time of the Russian invasion in 1994.[116] Some scholars described the celebratory public *zikr* as a "political spectacle" or an "independence dance,"[117] while others see it as a spontaneous and organic manifestation of Chechnya's deep culture.[118] As noted in the section on framing theory, conflict framing and the use of symbols is more spontaneous at the emergence of a movement than when the movement is developing. It is hard to determine which public demonstrations were spontaneous versus deliberate, but official national symbols are clearer reflections of strategic framing.

In 1989, the All-National Congress of the Chechen People unanimously passed a resolution to make the wolf the national symbol of the Chechens.[119] In 1991, after Dudaev announced the declaration of independence, the Chechen coat of arms with a

[114] Ibid.

[115] Gammer, "Nationalism and History," 119–120.

[116] Gall and De Waal, *Chechnya*, 32–33.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Johnston, "Ritual, Strategy, and Deep Culture," 321–342.

[119] Campana, "Collective Memory and Violence," 46.

wolf in its center was placed on the national flag.[120] In Grozny, the statue of Lenin was torn down and replaced with this Chechen flag.[121] Additionally, the first postage stamps issued in the Chechen Republic in 1992 (see Figure 1) show some of the key symbols used by the Chechen separatist government. The top row of Figure 1 includes the famous figures of Chechen resistance: Sheikh Mansur (1760–1794), Imam Shamil (1797–1871), and Dzhohar Dudaev.[122] Mansur and Shamil are wearing the traditional Caucasian headdress called the *papakha,* a furry lambskin hat, with a turban on top to denote their religious authority.[123] Dudaev is wearing his Soviet uniform. Later Chechen leaders, particularly Aslan Maskhadov, shed their Soviet uniforms—as many were previous Soviet military officers—and donned traditional Chechen dress including the *papakha*. Dudaev, in contrast, was adamant on creating the appearance of legitimacy in response to the Russian framing of Chechens as bandits and criminals and continued to wear his Soviet uniform until his death in 1996. The bottom row of Figure 1 shows the Presidential Palace and Chechen flag with wolf emblem. The Presidential Palace was a symbol of the successful overthrow of the Communist Party by Chechen nationalists—a blatant sign of defiance.[124] The Communist Party's headquarters had previously been located in the building, until deposed by Dudaev's 1991 coup attempt.

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[120] Ibid.

[121] Gall and de Waal, Chechnya, 103.

[122] His first name is also transliterated as Djohar, Dzhokhar, Jokhar, and Zhohar, and his last name is also transliterated as Dudaev

[123] Gall and de Waal, *Chechnya*, 22.

[124] Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains: Politics and War in the Russian Caucasus* (New York: IB Tauris, 1998), 155.

Figure 1. 1992 Chechen Republic Postage Stamps.
Source: Russland Republik Noxciyn (2012).

I. ROLE OF RELIGION IN CHECHEN NATIONALISM

Despite the rhetoric appearing primarily nationalistic, Islam played a role in the Chechen conflict from the beginning. This chapter already discussed the connection between Chechnya's religious history surrounding the historic Caucasian *gazavat*s, as well as the use of the *zikr* in public demonstrations in support of Chechen nationalism. Islam emerged early in the movement as an identifying characteristic for the broader Chechen society.[125] Dudaev, although not an observant Muslim, grasped the symbolic power Islam could have for the Chechen separatist movement. He swore into his office of the Chechen presidency on a Quran, frequently referenced the famous religious resistance leaders Shamil and Mansur, and declared Chechnya an Islamic state with its law based on the *shari'ah* in 1994 before the Russian invasion.[126]

Religion also acted as a mobilizing structure for the movement. Some scholars have suggested that the religiosity of the Chechen mountain clans influenced Dudaev's use of Islamic references.[127] Dudaev's power base greatly depended on the clans from the southern mountainous region, especially as the majority of anti-Dudaev opposition

[125] Johnston, "Ritual, Strategy, and Deep Culture," 337.

[126] Ibid., 334.

[127] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 151.

came from the capital, Grozny, and the lowland regions of Chechnya.[128] In naming the Chechen Republic "The Chechen Republic-Ichkeriya" in January 1994, Dudaev was giving an overt gesture to these mountainous clans whose districts were historically known by the same name, Ichkeriya.[129] This area geographically aligned with another support base of Dudaev, the Kunta-Hadji order of the Qadiriya Sufi brotherhood, of which his brother, Bekmurza Dudaev, was a religious leader (*ustazy*).[130] Dudaev tried to consolidate his "conservative power base" by supporting the construction of mosques and religious schools, including the attempted construction of an Islamic University in the capital.[131] In the first Russo-Chechen War, Chechen units based their names on their respective Sufi brotherhoods (*virds)* and religious leaders, such as the Sheikh Kunta-Khadzi Unit. Sometimes the village origin of these units' members aligned with their religious affiliation, but sometimes the commonality between the unit members was strictly based on their Sufi brotherhood.[132]

J. ANTI-DUDAEV OPPOSITION

Despite a landslide electoral victory for Dudaev in the questionable elections held in October 1991, the existence of a number of opposition groups points to a lack of faith in Dudaev's government and a lack of unity surrounding the issue of Chechen separatism from Russia. These anti-Dudaev groups' objections included state policy decisions, Dudaev's stance toward Russia, the dismal state of the economy, and the increase in crime and corruption in Chechnya.[133] A sociological survey conducted in Chechnya in mid-1991 recorded that only twenty-four percent of those surveyed supported full

[128] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya,* 151.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Uwe Halbach,"Islam in the North Caucasus," *Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 46, no. 115 (2001): 101–2, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30127239.

[131] Johnston, "Ritual, Strategy, and Deep Culture," 334.

[132] Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Sufism in Chechnya," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huérou, Aude Merlin, Amandine Regamey, and Elisabeth Sieca-Kozlowski (New York: Routledge, 2014), 226.

[133] Emil Aslan Souleimanov, and Huseyn Aliyev, "Blood Revenge and Violent Mobilization: Evidence from the Chechen Wars," *International Security* 40, no. 2 (2015): 172, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00219.

independence and sixty percent supported remaining with the Russia.[134] However, opposition groups were disjointed and struggled to maintain a strong stance that was oppositional to Dudaev but did not portray themselves as sellouts to Moscow.[135] Two quotes from Chechen citizens help describe the thought process of some at the eve of the first war with Russia. One Chechen man was quoted as saying, "I don't like the mess we are in but I don't want Russia to come in and impose order."[136] And, in an interview with another Chechen man he said, "The fact that Dudayev and Yeltsin had problems reaching an agreement didn't mean we had to kill each other. We could have agreed, since there were many Chechens who could still benefit from access to Russian markets. . . . When the war broke out, many young people were euphoric about expelling the Russians, but there were lots of mature and thinking folks who resented those [political elites] in Grozny as much as those in Moscow."[137] Even throughout the conflict, many Chechens "accused these elites not only of engaging in infighting, corruption, and clientelism, but of sparking wars and bringing the Chechen people to the brink of physical extinction because of their myopic policies with regard to Moscow."[138]

K. RUSSIAN SPONSORSHIP OF THE OPPOSITION

Leading up to 1994, Dudaev claimed Russia organized and attempted several coups and assassinations against him, but it was difficult for the Chechen population to distinguish between the truth and rhetoric. Ilyas Akhmadov, later appointed as the foreign minister of Chechnya, notes in his memoirs about this time that,

> Before the first war, there were many fiery speeches from Dudayev and his supporters proclaiming the imminent threat of war with Russia. I did not believe it would ever go that far. Dudayev's style of rule was very secretive; knowledge of the inner workings of his administration did not spill out beyond a very small circle of insiders, and decisions were made behind closed doors. I concluded that the rallies and shoot-outs between

[134] Ibid.

[135] Gall and de Waal, *Chechnya*, 105.

[136] Ibid., 139.

[137] Souleimanov and Aliyev, "Blood Revenge and Violent Mobilization," 172–173.

[138] Ibid., 172.

> the government and the opposition had to do with internal power struggles. Many people assumed that Dudayev had exaggerated the Russian threat and falsely cast his political rivals as traitors, so most of us ignored his exhortations.[139]

Anxious Russian officials who wanted a quick end to Dudaev and Chechen independence soon made it very clear that Russia indeed was behind some of the anti-Dudaev groups. In August 1994, when Russian officials believed Dudaev's popular support was decreasing, Russia recognized the Chechen Provincial Council, an anti-Dudaev opposition group led by Umar Avturkhanov, and began to arm it.[140] Avturkhanov led his group to overtake Grozny on 15 October 1994, where he successfully took the city but unexpectedly abandoned the mission and left Grozny the same day, supposedly on orders from the Kremlin.[141] Only seven Chechens died in the whole incident.[142] Russia's first attempts at undermining Dudaev strategically utilized Chechens so as not to spark ethnic tensions. However, frustrated by another failed invasion of Grozny by the Chechen opposition on 26 November 1994, Russia shifted to the use of Russian military personnel for its operations in Chechnya.[143] The type of equipment used in the invasion attempts made it clear to most Chechens that Russia was meddling in the background to bring the opposition to power.[144] Dudaev's insistence that Russia was meddling in Chechen affairs was confirmed when Russia invaded Chechnya on 11 December 1994 with over twenty thousand Russian troops and hundreds of armored vehicles from neighboring republics.[145]

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139 Ilyas Akhmadov and Miriam Lanskoy, The Chechen Struggle: Independence Won and Lost (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

140 Dunlop, Russia Confronts Chechnya, 161.

141 Ibid., 204.

142 Ibid., 161–62.

143 Ibid., 204.

144 Ibid., 204–5.

145 Ibid., 209.

L. UNITY IN THE FACE OF RUSSIAN THREAT

Regardless of the presence of opposition groups, the Russian invasion of Chechnya in 1994 under the direction of Boris Yeltsin played into the Chechen separatists' narrative of Russian aggression and the need for Chechens to resist and seek independence.[146] In response to the Russian invasion, Chechnya witnessed a mass mobilization in support of Dudaev and in opposition to Russia. The initial mobilization after the 1994 invasion of Chechnya by Russia was a chaotic surge in Chechen volunteers with a shortage of weapons and minimal centralized command.[147] Volunteers seemed to form groups based on previous acquaintances or village ties, but the Chechens soon achieved a chain of command and organized groups into "fronts and sectors" with military units maintaining a significant degree of autonomy.[148]

M. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this first period of analysis from the late 1980s to the start of the first Russo-Chechen War, domestic political contention largely surrounded the relationship of Chechnya with Russia. Dudaev and nationalist supporters advocated for full independence, while the opposition was willing to negotiate Chechnya's status as an autonomous republic with Russia. With this political debate as the backdrop, the nationalists framed the conflict in opposition to Russia emphasizing the narrative of a 300-year Russian genocide of the Chechen people and created a collective identity and repertoire of symbols that highlighted the ethnic and religious history of Chechens and the North Caucasus. Islam fit into this narrative as an oppositional identity that had a historical precedent for resisting the Russians. Although Chechen society was divided over its support of Dudaev leading up to the 1994 Russian invasion of Chechnya, Russian repression throughout the war led to Chechen solidarity and made the nationalist narrative of a 300-year Russian genocide of the Chechen people resonate with Chechens' daily lives and personal experience.

[146] Campana, "Collective Memory and Violence," 49.

[147] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya," 101.

[148] Ibid.

These findings allow for partial analysis of the three hypotheses. First, was the increase in religious rhetoric a case of resource mobilization in the first phase of the Chechen separatist movement? Initially, Dudaev and Chechen nationalist supports seem to have primarily used Islam as an oppositional identity with the domestic and regional audience as the target, rather than the international or greater Muslim world. Instead of using Islamic rhetoric for purposes of religious outbidding and resource mobilization, Chechen nationalists used Islam to build an oppositional and collective identity within Chechnya and to garner domestic and regional support. Dudaev attempted to widen the scope of the opposition to Russia by building alliances with neighboring republics that shared a common Muslim identity. However, this "Islamic solidarity" was a very localized framing of Islam centered on the North Caucasus *gazavat* and Sufi brotherhoods that resulted in practically no political support from neighboring republics—a framing more akin to an anti-imperialist or anti-colonial stance than a call to transnational jihad.[149]

Second, how did movement structure and institutions affect the unity or fragmentation seen in this time? Dudaev and the separatists were better organized and more effective mobilizers than the local Supreme Soviet as demonstrated by their ability to take advantage of key political opportunities such as the August Coup or botched assassination and invasion attempts by Russia and the opposition. Despite many being on the fence about complete independence from Russia, Chechens mobilized en masse in support of Dudaev at the invasion of Russia. Before that point, Dudaev did not have control over increasing crime, had struggled to build the Chechen economy, and did not have wide support from the Chechen populations. To a certain extent, his use of religious motifs could have been targeted to garner legitimacy with the more religious clans of the southern mountains. It was not that strong institutions carried Dudaev to unify the nation, rather the threat from Russia that spurred Chechens to collective action.

Third, was mobilization more effective along religious identity or ethno-national identity? In this period of analysis, the two need not be separated. The Chechen

[149] Halbach,"Islam in the North Caucasus," 101–102.

nationalists constructed a collective Chechen identity that drew from both religious and ethnic histories. Islam was used as an oppositional identity to mobilize Chechens to support separatism.

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III. PERIOD OF INCREASING ISLAMIZATION: FROM THE FIRST TO SECOND RUSSO–CHECHEN WAR

As described in Chapter II, the Chechen separatist movement was relatively unified under the first Chechen president, Dzhohar Dudaev. Although a pro-Russian and anti-Dudaev opposition existed, the threat of Russia unified the Chechens to mobilize for war. Transnational jihadists entered the war in 1995 and fought as a separate unit in the first war under the hierarchy of Dudaev's military structure. Following Dudaev's death in 1996 and the presidential election in 1997, the separatist discourse increasingly employed religious rhetoric. The third Chechen president, Aslan Maskhadov, gradually enacted Islamist policies in concession to radical Chechen elites who allied with Muslim foreign fighters and advocated Islamist demands. In 1999, the incursion of Dagestan by these rebel Chechen elites and their jihadist allies acted as the *casus belli* for the Russians to initiate the second Russo-Chechen War framing it as Russia's "War on Terror." This period from 1997 to 1999 was a period of increasing Islamization of the Chechen conflict. What allowed for the transnational jihadists to gain so much influence during this time?

Several dynamics seem to be at work. The effects of the first Russo-Chechen War and many of Dudaev's state actions led to the disintegration of state control in Chechnya. The Chechen government also was facing the difficulties of state building in view of a highly militarized society. A framing contest emerged over the nationalist and Islamist aims of the movement. The increasing influence of transnational jihad in Chechnya was the result of weak movement hierarchy, that allowed rebel Chechen warlords to partner with transnational jihadists, attempt to widen the scope of the conflict, and provide justification for a re-invasion of Chechnya by Russia. This chapter begins by walking through the progression of religious rhetoric and increase in jihadist influence. It ends by looking at how the internal dynamics of the Chechen nationalist movement, particularly contentious Chechen politics marked by movement fragmentation, allowed for rebel Chechen commanders to publicly ally with the transnational jihadist groups.

A. INDICATIONS OF HOLY WAR

As early as 1995 during the first Russo-Chechen War, not only were religious structures used for mobilization, but also the framing of the conflict was taking on a religious character both domestically and beyond the borders of Chechnya. In 1995, Chechnya's mufti, Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov publicly declared a holy war on Russia.[150] In February 1995, a religious leader in Ingushetia is quoted as saying, "At the start, no one connected Chechnya's choice of independence with religion, but as the war continues, political interests are pushed to the background, and voices are raised to the effect that what is being destroyed is not Chechnya politically but Muslims as a people."[151] It is difficult to determine if this pan-Islamic framing of the conflict first originated from domestic or foreign sources, but it is an indication that a message was going out to mobilize based on a frame of Pan-Islamic suffering—one of the key ingredients for foreign fighter mobilization.[152] Russia's indiscriminant use of force against Chechen civilians during the war contributed to the publicity the conflict received, and these human rights abuses against a Muslim population played into the jihadist narrative making Chechnya a good fit for Afghan *mujahideen* veterans looking for a new arena of jihad.[153]

In a December 1995 interview with Western media, Dudaev "defended possible intervention by foreign fighters on moral grounds but more recently urged them 'to struggle against Moscow in your own place,' apparently to avoid discouraging U.S. and European pressure on Russia to halt the offensive," while "Chechen Foreign Minister Shamseddin Yusef insist[ed] they are barred: 'Once you let them in, it's hard to get them out.'"[154] Russian commanders publicized the presence of 3,000 foreign fighters in

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[150] Vatchagaev, "Sufism in Chechnya," 226.

[151] Richard Boudreaux, "Faith Fuels Chechen Fighters; Islam has Inspired Young Soldiers and Elderly Villagers," *Los Angeles Times,* February 9, 1995, http://articles.latimes.com/.

[152] Malet, "Why Foreign Fighters?," 99–100.

[153] Anne Speckhard, and Khapta Akhmedova, "The New Chechen Jihad: Militant Wahhabism as a Radical Movement and a Source of Suicide Terrorism in Post-War Chechen Society," *Democracy and Security* 2, no. 1 (2006): 106, doi: 10.1080/17419160600625116.

[154] Boudreaux, "Faith Fuels Chechen Fighters."

Chechnya by December 1995. Although such high numbers are unconfirmed, it is generally accepted that 1995 was the year that Muslim foreign fighters entered the conflict in Chechnya in the midst of the first war. Both the Chechen and Russian leadership seemed aware of the negative effect the public presence of Muslim foreign fighters could have on the international community's stance regarding the conflict, with the Russians wanting to exaggerate and the Chechens wanting to downplay the jihadist presence.

B. ISLAMIST NETWORKS IN CHECHNYA

The roots of the Islamist networks that facilitated the entrance of Muslim foreign fighters date back to the 1980s when the Soviet Union began relaxing religious restrictions.[155] At the same time that Chechen *intelligentsia* were re-exploring a Chechen identity and separatist groups formed political parties as described in Chapter I, Gulf-based Muslim missionary groups began efforts to spread Salafist interpretations of Islam to nominally-Muslim Chechens competing with local Sufi brotherhoods that were also growing in this period of relative religious freedom.[156] Saudi Arabia sponsored Muslims from the North Caucasus to go on the hajj for the first time and offered numerous scholarships for students to study at Islamic universities abroad.[157]

In 1990, local Caucasians established the first Islamist political party, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), in Dagestan, and its members included some Chechens. Immediately, the IRP began seeking informal ties with other Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Pakistan's Jama'at-i-Islami. The IRP and other Islamist groups "advocated the Islamization of North Caucasian society with the ultimate aim of yoking the republics into a single imamate."[158] While these "indigenous Salafists" emerged in Dagestan and Chechnya, a significant number of Arab-Afghan *mujahideen* migrated to

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[155] Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya: A Critical Assessmen," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 5 (2008): 415, doi: 10.1080/10576100801993347.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Garner, "Chechnya and Kashmir," 421.

[158] Moore and Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya," 416.

the region to fight in Tajikistan against the Russians and to Azerbaijan to fight in their struggle against Armenia. Subsequently, they brought Muslim charity networks and resources with them.[159] According to Moore and Tumelty, "these initial alliances between emerging indigenous Salafists in both Chechnya and Dagestan and their Middle Eastern counterparts at this critical historical juncture following the Soviet collapse was one of the key enablers that opened up the region to foreign fighters once the Russo–Chechen war erupted in December 1994."[160]

One of the key individuals that facilitated the entrance of foreign fighters to Chechnya was Fathi Mohammed Habib, commonly known as Sheikh Ali Fathi al-Shishani, an ethnically Chechen Jordanian citizen and veteran of the war in Afghanistan. Fathi moved to Chechnya in 1993 and established a Salafist congregation known as *al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya* that brought together ethnic Chechens from Jordan and local Chechen adherents to Salafism.[161] At the start of the first Russo-Chechen War in 1994, Fathi began recruiting *mujahideen* from Afghanistan including Salih Abdallah al-Suwaylim, commonly known as "Emir Khattab," who was to become the primary military leader of the Muslim foreign fighters in Chechnya.[162]

C. KHATTAB AND THE FIRST FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN CHECHNYA

Khattab, a Saudi citizen, had fought against the Soviets in both Afghanistan and Tajikistan after forming "The Khattab Group" with several experienced Arab commanders. These Arab *mujahideen* fought in support of Tajikistan's independence as an Islamic state, and the war in Chechnya had a similar appeal to Khattab and his fighters.[163] After receiving an invitation from Fathi to join the *jihad* in Chechnya, Khattab traveled from Azerbaijan to Chechnya in early 1995 with a group of eight Arab

[159] Moore and Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya," 416.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid.

Afghans to assess the situation.[164] Khattab quickly decided to stay and fight in Chechnya and used Fathi's Salafi congregation as the first pool of foreign and Chechen recruits to establish his own military unit, the International Islamic Brigade.[165] Khattab is often construed as a direct agent of al-Qaeda, particularly by Russian sources.[166] Although it seems clear that he did meet Osama Bin Ladin as a teenage *mujahid* in Afghanistan, a direct subsidiary relationship to al-Qaeda seems unlikely.[167] Khattab never declared a jihad against the "far enemy"—the United States—and maintained a relatively tolerant stance towards local Sufi practices by personally staying out of local political and religious disputes: Khattab was much more a guerilla commander than an ideologue.[168]

Khattab's ability to foster and maintain local support and propaganda prowess made him the linchpin for the foreign jihadists' enduring ability to influence the local Chechen resistance. Khattab formed a strong relationship with the radical Chechen commander, Shamil Basayev, "who symbolically claimed Khattab as a 'brother,' a gesture that signaled to fellow Chechens that he was free to operate in the region as Basayev's guest. This had additional significance given the fiercely independent character of the Chechens, who traditionally display hostility to leadership from outside."[169] Similar to foreign jihadists in other geographic areas, Khattab married a local Dagestani woman and settled in Basayev's village in Chechnya as a way to embed himself in the local population.[170] Additionally, Khattab shaped the conflict in Chechnya through his propaganda and media efforts. Khattab had all military operations conducted from Chechnya filmed. This footage and other propagandistic material were then

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[164] Ibid., 417.

[165] Moore and Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya," 417.

[166] Ibid., 420.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid., 420–421.

[169] Ibid., 417.

[170] Garner, "Chechnya and Kashmir," 425.

disseminated on CDs and various Internet websites such as "Jihad in Chechnya" and "Arab Voice of the Caucasus."[171]

Khattab's propaganda campaign attracted more jihadists from other fronts, such as Georgia, and secured funding for the jihadists. According to al-Shishani's research, 45 percent of Arab fighters entered Chechnya during the inter-war years (1997 to 1999), while only 29.5 percent entered during the first war.[172] It is estimated that roughly eighty Arabs fought with the Chechens in the First Russo-Chechen War. Al-Shishani's demographic analysis of foreign fighters in Chechnya finds that they consisted of "59% Saudis, 14% Yemenis, 10% Egyptians, 6% Kuwaitis and 11% from other countries," and of those "51% participated in the Afghan war, 11.7% began their experience in Bosnia and Tajikistan, while 13.7% of them are participating in Jihad for the first time in Chechnya."[173] Hegghammer's conservative estimates put Muslim foreign fighter numbers in Chechnya at between 200 to 300 participants from the years 1995 to 2001.[174] Although Dudaev publicized that he did not want foreign fighters to join the war in Chechnya, it seems clear that he tolerated their presence in the conflict for their connections to transnational networks—varying from Islamic charities and political parties to wealthy Gulf donors—that could raise and deliver material and financial support.[175]

1. Ideological Influence

Ideologically, the Muslim foreign fighters in Chechnya could be categorized as Salafi Jihadists. In a newspaper interview, Khattab framed his commitment to fight

[171] Moore and Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya," 417.

[172] Murad Batal Al-Shishani, "The Rise and Fall of Arab Fighters in Chechnya," *Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation* (2006): 10, http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/2846366/Al-Shishani-14Sep06.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1489910399&Signature=OmkngyAfy1OvvJ82Mm9XcgEpGWs%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DThe_Rise_and_Fall_of_Arab_Fighters_in_Ch.pdf.

[173] Al-Shishani, "The Rise and Fall," 3.

[174] Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters," 61.

[175] Moore and Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya," 418.

against Russia saying, “the Islamic nations are now able to live independently, without Russia, according to the laws of Allah . . . the moment has arrived when all nations must chase the Russian army from their countries.”[176] Khattab’s framing here is regionally specific to the countries of the former Soviet Union, but it is also a framing that fits in line with the famous jihadist ideologue Abdullah Yusuf Azzam’s call for Muslims worldwide to create transnational brigades to “defend frontline Muslim communities.”[177] Both Khattab and Azzam advocated that jihad was an obligation for all Muslims.[178] Khattab’s foreign fighters were proponents of the establishment of an Islamic state and the enforcement of *shari’ah* law in Chechnya and the Caucasus.[179] Their presence in Chechnya and alliance with radical, Chechen field commanders calling for those exact demands seems to indicate ideological impact on the Chechen resistance to Russia.

Later, especially after the incursion into Dagestan that triggered the second war with Russia, the foreign jihadists and their Chechen allies were accused of caring more about establishing an Islamic state than actually freeing Chechens from Russian oppression.[180] Here we start to see some tensions in the framing of the conflict by nationalist fighters and transnational jihadists. Additionally, many Chechens scorned attempts by these groups to enforce conservative standards of piety, although fundamentalist missionary efforts and the jihadist training camps did successfully spread the Salafist ideology to certain segments of Chechen society. Moore and Tumelty summarize the impact of the jihadists well in saying, “Although their military influence was negligible within the larger war effort, the foreign fighters’ militant ideas and religious influence began to percolate through war-torn Chechen society after August

[176] Radnitz,”Look Who’s Talking!” 248–49.

[177] Julie Wilhelmsen, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Islamisation of the Chechen Separatist Movement,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 1 (January 2005): 41, *Business Source Complete*, EBSCO*host* (accessed January 8, 2017).

[178] Ibid.; Sokirianskaya, “State and Violence in Chechnya,” 217.

[179] Al-Shishani, “The Rise and Fall,” 5.

[180] Ibid.

1996, in part hastening the divisions in Chechen society and ultimately inspiring some of the events that led to the resurgence of the Russo–Chechen war in 1999."[181]

2. Military Influence in the First War

The foreign jihadists' propaganda spread awareness of the war efforts in Chechnya, but it is debatable how much military impact they had in the first war. The foreign jihadists maintained their own unit separate from the Chechens under the command of Khattab. The Chechens esteemed the foreign fighters for being experienced militants, but the foreign fighter brigade played a minor role in the first war in comparison to the Chechen military, probably due to comparative numbers of fighters.

Some see the increasing use of civilian hostage-taking in the tactics of the Chechen resistance during the first war as evidence of foreign fighter influence, but elements of the Chechen separatist movement, most notably Shamil Basayev, had used similar strategies for publicity and to create political pressure on Russia to concede to Chechen demands. The most notable examples of this argument are the Budyonnovsk hospital hostage taking incident in 1995 led by Basayev and the Pervomayskaya hostage taking incident in 1996 led by Salman Raduev, another radical Chechen field commander, in which Chechens killed dozens of the civilian Russian hostages.[182]

Before the arrival of Muslim foreign fighters in 1995, Chechens had employed quite radical tactics in their struggle for independence and in criminal operations with kidnapping and hostage taking being commonplace.[183] In November 1991, Basayev hijacked a plane in Turkey to bring attention to the Chechen call for independence.[184] These rash tactics are more emblematic of guerrilla warfare between a relatively weak and small Chechen force in comparison to the conventional Russian army than they are a

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[181] Moore and Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya," 418.

[182] Speckhard and Akhmadova, "The New Chechen Jihad," 107.

[183] James Hughes, "The Chechnya Conflict: Freedom Fighters or Terrorists?" *Demokratizatsiya* 15, no. 3 (Summer, 2007): 301, http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/237208273?accountid=12702.

[184] Ibid.

transplanted tactic from abroad. Not until the second war is it possible to distinguish tactical innovation that seems markedly foreign—for example, suicide bombings.

The foreign fighters did influence the Chechen resistance by establishing training camps that equipped Chechen fighters with both military tactics and the jihadist ideology. Together, Khattab, Basayev, and other foreign fighters founded a training camp near the village of Serzhen-Yurt in Chechnya. It was called "Kazkav," and young Chechens and Dagestanis received ideological, guerilla warfare, and explosives training from foreign teachers.[185] In his research on the sacralization of the conflict in Chechnya, Lorenzo Vidino suggests Basayev pursued the establishment of this training center as a Chechen government-sponsored project, although few other sources confirm that information.[186] Kazkav was an institution that produced and multiplied militant Islamists. It was the foreign fighters' "train and assist" role that probably had the most systematic influence on Chechen society and tactics.

D. DUDAEV'S DEATH AND YANDARBIEV'S ISLAMIC STATE

On 21 April 1996, a Russian missile killed President Dudaev, and Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, the Chechen Vice President, became the acting president immediately after his death.[187] Yandarbiev had been part of the Chechen separatist movement from its infancy representing the "radical faction" within the 1990 Chechen National Conference that called for a fully independent and Islamic state for Chechnya years before the arrival of foreign fighters.[188] Upon assuming the presidency in 1996, Yandarbiev declared Chechnya an Islamic state and announced the establishment of *shari'ah* courts, enforcing an Islamic legal code that had been used in Sudan.[189] With a lack of local Chechen

[185] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya," 107.

[186] Lorenzo Vidino, "The Arab Foreign Fighters and the Sacralization of the Chechen Conflict," *al Nakhlah* (2006): 2, http://fletcher.tufts.edu/~/media/Fletcher/Microsites/al%20Nakhlah/archives/2006/vidino.pdf.

[187] Al-Shishani, "The Rise and Fall," 8.

[188] Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, 93, 100.

[189] Garner, "Chechnya and Kashmir," 422.

jurists, many Arab missionaries were given judgeships in these *shari'ah* courts.[190] Some scholars postulate that Yandarbiev did this to garner more support from the Arabian Gulf.[191] In 2001, Yandarbiev is quoted as saying, "Islamic Fundamentalism is not dangerous. It is partnership, international relations. You do not consider it a problem if Western investors tour Russia, do you? One cannot divide help into help from Wahhabis and help from others."[192]

From a movement hierarchy perspective, Yandarbiev's policies possibly mark the period that the Chechen nationalist project created an opening in its structure that gave the radical Islamist elements a foothold to co-opt the struggle. Dudaev, known as a charismatic and strong leader, had kept a short leash on the foreign fighter units and his own field commanders supposedly by implementing a centralized distribution of material support to them in order to maintain command and control over the resistance force.[193] Yandarbiev's policies may have undermined this monopoly over funding by opening the door for Islamic charities and jihadist groups. As described previously, some of these religious networks had existed in Chechnya before this time. However, the interwar years saw a rise in the activity of Islamic groups within Chechen society, such as the al-Haramain Islamic Foundation offering stipends to religious converts and the opening of training camps run by Khattab and associates.[194] In their research on the impact of foreign fighters in Chechnya, Ben Rich and Dara Conduit argue that, "such activities eroded the state's monopoly on employing members of the resistance and further curbed its authority as welfare provider. At the same time, using their newfound authority, these same NGOs disseminated their alternative framing of the conflict as a struggle for an Islamist state through preaching."[195]

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[190] Ibid.

[191] Al-Shishani, "The Rise and Fall," 8.

[192] Bakke, "Help Wanted?," 171–172; Garner, "Chechnya and Kashmir," 422.

[193] Al-Shishani, "The Rise and Fall," 8; Rich, "The Impact of Jihadist Foreign Fighters," 116.

[194] Ben Rich and Dara Conduit, "The Impact of Jihadist Foreign Fighters on Indigenous Secular-Nationalist Causes: Contrasting Chechnya and Syria," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 2 (2015): 116. doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2014.979605.

[195] Ibid.

E. END OF THE WAR

The Chechen separatists were partially victorious in the first Russo-Chechen War, which ended with the signing of the Khasavyurt Peace Agreement on 31 August 1996.[196] By then, Russia had lost its political will to continue in a long and costly war with the Chechens, especially in the face of domestic pressure after the hostage taking incidents and the raid of Russian forces in Grozny by Maskhadov.[197] Additionally, morale was low and corruption was high among the Russian troops fighting in Chechnya. Many had sold their own weapons to the Chechens for money.[198] Russia, under Boris Yeltsin, agreed to end the violence, withdraw troops, and resolve disputes with the Chechens in accordance with international law.[199] However, the agreement postponed any decision on the issue of Chechnya's political status until 2001. From the signing of the Khasavyurt Peace Agreement until the start of the second Russo-Chechen War in 1999, Chechnya operated with *de facto* independence, but to many of the radical field commanders, *de facto* independence was not enough.[200]

F. 1997 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Unlike the 1991 electoral victory of President Dudaev, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) recognized the 1997 Chechen election results as free and fair.[201] Aslan Maskhadov, who had been a field commander in the first war and represented Chechnya in the signing of the Khasavyurt Accord, won the presidency in 1997 receiving 59 percent of the votes.[202] Shamil Basayev came in second with 23.5 percent of the vote, and the acting president, Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, received

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[196] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya (1997-1999)," 93.

[197] Speckhard and Akhmedova, "The New Chechen Jihad," 107.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya," 93.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid., 94.

[202] Ibid.

only ten percent of the vote.[203] Maskhadov campaign slogan was: "Islam, independence, order."[204] Basayev represented a more radical candidate. In comparison to Basayev who had a reputation as an aggressive military commander, Maskhadov was seen as a moderate candidate who could negotiate with the Russians because of his participation in the Khasavyurt Peace Agreement.[205] Although Maskhadov at the time of his election enjoyed the majority of popular support, the thirty percent of the vote he did not receive indicated that a significant number of Chechens favored a more radical president.[206]

G. MASKHADOV AND ISLAMIC GOVERNANCE

In expounding on the increasing Islamization of the Chechen conflict, journalist and researchers point to Maskhadov's declaration of Chechnya as an Islamic Republic in November 1997, public executions carried out in September 1997, and the decree for a new constitution based on *shari'ah* law in February 1998.[207] It is a little confusing though, because both Dudaev and Yandarbiev are attributed with making the same gestures toward Islamist aims. How to interpret Maskhadov's actions is a matter for debate. Were these actions a symbol of the growing importance of Islam in Chechnya? Were they a reaction to more radical Islamist opposition? Was Maskhadov using religion to bolster legitimacy?

In line with his campaign slogan, Chechnya needed the restoration of order, and Maskhadov was offering Islam as part of the solution. Another 1997 presidential candidate, Movladi Udugov, commented on the situation: "If Russia and other countries want stability in the Caucasus, they must understand that it's only possible through Islamic order . . . We now have thousands of people with weapons, and only Islam will

[203] Ibid.

[204] Radnitz, "Look Who's Talking!," 246.

[205] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya," 94.

[206] Ibid.

[207] Robert W. Orttung,, Danielle N. Lussier, and Anna Paretskaya, *The Republics and Regions of the Russian Federation: A Guide to Politics, Policies, and Leaders* (New York, ME Sharpe, 2000), 72.

be able to keep this problem under control."[208] Of course this quote is just one strategic frame of the solution for Chechnya at this time, but it demonstrates the perception of Islam as a solution for the Chechens' predicament. The first Chechen War with Russia between 1994 and 1996 left Chechnya in ruins: Chechnya's three universities had all been destroyed in bombings, fifteen percent of arable land was covered in land mines, unemployment was widespread, and crime was increasing.[209] International aid and investment was at a standstill after the murder of six International Red Cross workers in 1996 and an increase in hostage taking in the region.

The Chechens had been able to unite under Dudaev, particularly rallying around the common enemy and threat of Russia, but the inter-war period from 1997 to 1999 exposed the weakness of Chechen unity, and local interests and weak governance emerged as a growing obstacle for the fledgling Chechen state to gain territorial control—exemplified in Maskhadov's inability to control or channel Chechen field commanders from the first Russo-Chechen War, particularly Salman Rudaev and Shamil Basayev who were conducting operations in neighboring regions, increasingly adopting terror tactics, and partnering with jihadist networks.[210] By late 1999, both Russian troops and local warlords controlled various areas within Chechnya. Chechnya was neither a republic of Russia, nor an independent state.[211]

By looking chronologically at many of Maskhadov's state actions, his Islamic rhetoric looks less spiritually motivated and more strategically implemented, especially in light of the weakness of the central state described above. Table 1 shows major policy decisions enacted by Maskhadov's government in chronological order from the 1997 ceasefire to the start of the second war with Russia in 1999. Maskhadov's motivation for these policies could have stemmed from the need to establish law order, build legitimacy in the face of rebel commanders such as Basayev accusing him of being a "Moscow

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[208] Radnitz, "Look Who's Talking!," 246.

[209] Orttung, *The Republics*, 72.

[210] Orttung, *The Republics*, 72.

[211] Ibid.

sellout" by competitors, and avoid civil war with local Islamist opposition.[212] Unlike Dudaev, Maskhadov was not seen as a strong man, and is often characterized as a weak president that made concession to the Islamists in order to bring them into the fold of the elected government.

Table 1. Important Dates for Maskhadov's Government

Date	*Action*
February 12, 1997	Maskhadov's Inauguration
May 12, 1997	Khasavyurt Accord signed by Russia and Chechens
September 3 and 18, 1997	Public executions
November 5, 1997	Declared Chechnya an Islamic Republic
February 3, 1998	Decree for new constitution to be based on Islamic law
February 10, 1998	Establishment of *shura* council
February 19, 1998	Banned rallies
February 25, 1998	Banned bearing of arms
May 30-31, 1998	First confrontation between state and fundamentalists in Gudermes Basayev Resigns
June 23, 1998	State of Emergency after battle in Gudermes
July 14-15, 1998	Second Clash in Gudermes Maskhadov dissolves Sharia Guard and Islamic Regiment
December 8, 1998	Beheading of British engineers Anti-criminal campaigns Rebel commanders call for Maskhadov's impeachment
June 1, 1999	Criminal Code of Ichkeria Passed

[212] Bakke, "Help Wanted?" 174.

In the case of the public executions, we can see how the aims of law and order, religious legitimacy, and opposition to Russia can all be combined in some of these actions that appear overtly "Islamist." Footage of the September 1997 executions in Grozny show a man wearing fatigues and a traditional Chechen hat sitting in a police car reciting the Quran on the car's loud speaker while two prisoners pray for the last time before being shot by a firing squad.[213] The two prisoners were convicted of murder in an Islamic court and the execution was televised.[214] The Chechen government could have broadcasted the executions for both a Chechen and a Russian audience. It could have been a message to the Chechens that the state was prepared to enforce rule and order: Murderers will be executed. Alternatively, the overtly Islamic nature of the execution demonstrated that the state was executing capital punishment in a way permissible in Islam. Furthermore, it could also be interpreted as a gesture of Chechen independence—and perhaps defiance—to Russia. In response to the televised executions, Boris Yeltsin and other Russian leaders denounced the executions as contradictory to the Russian constitution.[215] In response to Russia's denouncements, the Chechen Vice President supposedly indicated that Russian cabinet members should be executed for their "genocide" against the Chechens after they sought independence and stated, "I spit on Russia. Russia means nothing to us. We are an independent state."[216]

H. PARTIAL DEMOBILIZATION OF THE CHECHEN RESISTANCE

After the first war, the majority of the Chechen combatants returned to their previous lives, but some groups did not disband and remained as paramilitary groups.[217] Many ex-combatants were given "national hero" status and enjoyed material and social benefits such as payments from the state or employment benefits that led to a sense of

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[213] "Chechnya Public Execution, Death, Firing Men First Chechen War BN23 18/09/1997," YouTube video, 2:47, Posted by "RussianFootageCom," March 26, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=of8l2Yswuxw.

[214] Edmund Andrews, "Russian-Chechen Agreement on Rebuilding a Major Oil Pipeline is Beginning to Unravel." *The New York Times*. September 13, 1997, www.nytimes.com/.

[215] "Chechnya Public Execution, Death, Firing Men First Chechen War BN23 18/09/1997."

[216] Ibid.

[217] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya," 101.

entitlement for power resources.[218] Maskhadov attempted to demobilize the military progressively, but he had to maintain a balance between incorporating key commanders and actual disbanding of armed groups to keep the Chechen movement from disintegrated into an inter-Chechen conflict. Soon after entering the presidency, Maskhadov founded the National Guard in March 1997, which was an attempt to completely reorganize the Chechen armed forces.[219] The Chechen government passed legislation such as the "On Weapons" law passed by parliament in May 1997 and attempted several programs to disarm the general populace with little success.[220] Numerous field commanders refused to demobilize and militant groups continued to spread and split with little to no recognition of state authority.[221] The July 1998 clash between Maskhadov's National Guard and armed Islamist groups during a disarmament operation in Gudermes exposed the weak loyalty behind the Maskhadov government. In the aftermath of the clash, it became clear that the Shari'ah Guard and Islamic Regiment, both government entities, fought on the side of the Islamists.[222]

I. ATTEMPTS TO INCLUDE THE RADICALS

Maskhadov greatest fear was a civil war among Chechens, and he continuously attempted to integrate the rebel field commanders into his government. He offered Basayev the position of prime minister, which Basayev held for only a short period of time. Unfortunately for Maskhadov and the moderate Chechen nationalists, there was little for people to gain by joining his government. The 1997 Khasavyurt Accord included an agreement for reparations to specific villages for reconstruction of homes destroyed in the first war.[223] Russia only paid a tiny percentage of these funds and held Chechnya in

[218] Ibid., 102–103.

[219] Ibid., 103.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid., 104.

[222] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya," 111.

[223] Ekaterina Sokirianskaya, "Governing Fragmented Societies: State-Building and Political Integration in Chechnya and Ingushetia (1991-2009)," (PhD diss., Central European University, 2009), 205, http://stage1.ceu.edu/sites/pds.ceu.hu/files/attachment/basicpage/478/sokirianskaia.pdf.

an economic blockade, which further crippled the Chechen economy.[224] The agreement that was supposed to create a buy-in for various warlords and their respective clans and communities failed to do so. Ben Rich and Dara Conduit suggest it was this lack of material incentive on the side of the government—a "financial vacuum"—that allowed groups associated to the foreign fighters to have influence in Chechnya by "functioning as a pseudo-state by providing jobs, welfare economic stimulus, and law and order" and which then normalized their ideology among Chechens.[225]

In June 1997, several of the prominent field commanders, including Raduev and Basayev, left the Chechen government.[226] The veteran field commanders led the anti-Maskhadov opposition. Their criticisms of the Chechen government centered on several issues: the privatization of the economy, Chechnya's stance towards Russia, and the role of Islam.[227] They advocated for a speedy settlement with Russia over the independence of Chechnya and overt government action to signal full independence, such as issuing Chechen passports and license plates.[228] They insisted on an Islamic state with the enforcement of Islamic law. The Maskhadov government's aim was to not allow any domestic schism to pull the Chechens into a civil war, but that led the president to take a compromising stance toward the radical field commanders. [229] These groups were able to garner financial resources from external sponsors whether transnational jihadist networks, hostage-taking ransoms, or illegal oil sales.[230] By 1998, private enforcement of Islamic norms by Islamic fundamentalists spread across Chechnya: bearded men inspected the length of girls' sleeves and inquired into the relationships of men and women together, and *shari'ah* courts issued judgments against drunkards.[231]

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[224] Ibid., 219.

[225] Rich, "The Impact of Jihadist Foreign Fighters," 116.

[226] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya," 104.

[227] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya," 104–105.

[228] Ibid., 105.

[229] Ibid., 109.

[230] Ibid.

[231] Ibid.

In reaction to the Islamists, the Maskhadov government began directly framing the "Wahhabis" and their "Arab lifestyle" as in direct opposition to Chechen nationalism and Sufi traditions.[232] Maskhadov announced, "Chechnya is for Chechens. We do not need…Arab advisors." However, Maskhadov could not integrate and control the radical field commanders and his concessions to their Islamist policies reinforced the growing influence of the Islamist agenda. Akhmadov, the foreign minister of Chechnya, commented on the alternative to Maskhadov's conciliatory approach saying, "In the post-war society, taking an opposition in an aggressive manner would have meant killing them all. Thus, to accuse Maskhadov of weakness is to blame him for not becoming a ruthless dictator and physically destroying his opponents."[233]

J. THE INVASION OF DAGESTAN

After the Battle of Gudermes, Basayev stepped down from his position as Prime Minister in protest to Maskhadov's crackdown on the fundamentalists and became increasingly active in Islamist circles.[234] In April 1998, Basayev established the "Congress of the People's of Chechnya and Dagestan" aimed at reviving the historical Imamate of Imam Shamil and to liberate the North Caucasus from Russia.[235] He was setting himself up as a political competitor to Maskhadov and up-scaled the scope of the conflict to include Dagestan. In September 1999, Basayev and Khattab's forces, alongside of a significant number of Dagestani radicals, invaded Dagestan and declared the establishment of an Islamic state giving Russia a pretext to re-start the war with Chechnya as a "war on terrorism."[236]

[232] Ibid., 105.

[233] Akhmadov, The Chechen Struggle, 100.

[234] Sokirianskaya, "State and Violence in Chechnya," 110–111.

[235] Ibid., 111; Elise Giuliano, "Islamic Identity and Political Mobilization in Russia: Chechnya and Dagestan Compared," Nationalism and Ethnic Politics 11, no. 2 (2005): 213. doi: 10.1080/13537110591005711.

[236] Al-Shishani, "The Rise and Fall," 9; Giuliano, "Islamic Identity and Political Mobilization in Russia," 213.

K. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Under Maskhadov, the Chechen separatist movement fragmented with rebel Chechen field commanders going their separate ways and many undermining the president's attempts at state building. A number of factors played into the movement fragmentation: a broken economy, a severely limited government budget, increased crime, a conciliatory president, a highly militarized society, unfavorable Russian policies, and emerging warlordism. With outside funding from the foreign fighter networks, the radical field commanders undermined the centralization of the state, refused to demilitarize, and co-opted the struggle themselves from the moderate stance of Maskhadov. It was Basayev and the rebellious field commanders that co-opted the once unified Chechen nationalist movement by allying with transnational jihadists and pursuing an Islamist platform, not the transnational jihadists themselves that co-opted the conflict. This highlights the important role that local elite and local politics play in the spread of global jihad. Rather than the Islamization of Chechen domestic politics being about a radicalizing or increasingly religious society, it seemed largely a political ideology espoused to counter Maskhadov and attack his legitimacy as well as a shift towards the Middle East for political recognition and backing.[237]

Toft's religious outbidding theory does have some explanatory power for what was witnessed in Chechnya from 1997 to 1999. In light of intra-Chechen political contestation, the rebel field commanders largely seem to have allied with the transnational jihadists for the purpose of garnering resources such as funding and military expertise. As a result of their alliance, the Chechen opposition began rallying around a similar ideology to the transnational jihadists calling for the establishment of Islamic law in Chechnya and increasing the use of religious discourse in local politics.

It was the movement's structure and hierarchy, though, that allowed this to happen. Dudaev maintained control of the field commanders during the first war through his near monopoly over funding and uncontested role as the leader of Chechen separatist movement. Although Maskhadov won the 1997 presidential election, many of the local

[237] Al-Shishani, "The Rise and Fall," 10.

Chechen elites did not submit to his leadership and the lawlessness of the post-war Chechen society undermined the centralization of the state. Maskhadov's limited budget hampered him from purchasing the buy-in of local elites. The funding from foreign fighter networks allowed for the Maskhadov opposition to establish parallel militias and social services, undermining the state's monopoly over violence and distribution of public goods.

The third hypothesis has limited explanatory power for the period from 1997 to 1999. Although a Salafi Jihadist ideology did spread through the training and missionary efforts of groups in Chechnya, mass mobilization along religious identity played a limited role in the rise in influence of the transnational jihadists within Chechnya. Rather than a popular, domestic mobilization, the jihadists depended more on the role of local elites to gain influence in Chechen politics. However, collective identity did play a significant role in the recruitment of additional foreign fighters.

IV. AL-QAEDA AND HAMAS: A LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP?

After looking at the evolution of how transnational jihadists gained influence in the Chechen nationalist movement, Chapter IV turns to a counter example where a nationalist movement is blocking the spread of transnational jihad: The Gaza strip where Hamas is eliminating oppositional groups that pledge allegiance to Salafi Jihadist organizations. This negative case builds on our understanding of how strong hierarchy and institutions work to undermine the spread of transnational jihadist influence.

The Israel-Palestine conflict is a major focus in global jihadist propaganda because it is one of the clearest illustrations of Pan-Islamic victimhood by the "Jewish-Crusader alliance," of Israel and the United States. Some indications point to al-Qaeda's desire for the growth of affiliate groups to participate in violent jihad against Israel from within Palestine. At the same time, Hamas, an Islamic nationalist group that has used terrorist tactics under the banner of *jihad*, is currently the dominant political party in Gaza. Media and some scholarship highlights the potential danger of an al-Qaeda-Hamas alliance or the danger that the ideology of al-Qaeda, or similar Salafi-jihadist groups, may encourage Hamas to take a more radical stance, particularly around the issues of greater violence against Israel and enforcement of *shari'ah* law. What has been the historical relationship between Hamas and al-Qaeda? How do we explain the interactions between these groups, one an Islamic nationalist party, the other a global jihadist organization?

In this chapter, I argue that the relationship between al-Qaeda and Hamas is a strategic interplay between competing Islamic actors that criticize and oppose each other, but to a rational extent. Al-Qaeda is limited in its ability to harshly criticize Hamas because of the importance of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the global jihadist narrative of pan-Islamic suffering. At the same time, Hamas has been quick to suppress opposition groups within Palestine that identify with Salafi-jihadist groups because Hamas and al-Qaeda's objectives in Palestine are in direct opposition. I start this chapter by briefly introducing the historical development of Hamas and then chronicle the historical interaction between Hamas and al-Qaeda. At some points in describing this interaction, I am going to be unfaithful to holding my focus on al-Qaeda and Hamas and include

Salafi-jihadist groups similar in ideology to al-Qaeda because of the likelihood that Hamas would treat future al-Qaeda affiliated-cells similarly to how they have dealt with other Salafi-jihadist groups. Then, by focusing on the dialogue of criticism between the groups I will explain their differing ideologies and aims. I will conclude with a discussion of the two causal factors that I identify as key to understand the interaction between Hamas and al-Qaeda: different support bases and different external limitations.

A. HAMAS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Hamas stands for the Islamic Resistance Movement (*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*) and emerged as an offshoot of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood at the outbreak of the first *intifada* (uprising) against Israel in December 1987. The younger generation of Palestinians in the Muslim Brotherhood disagreed with the core Muslim Brotherhood conviction of waiting for the Islamization of society starting from the bottom up. Hamas formed as an active resistance movement with an ideology that openly combined the Palestinian nationalist discourse with an Islamic identity through the concept of Palestine as a religious endowment (*waqf*) from God that needed to be liberated through *jihad* from the Israeli occupation.[238] The Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas merged after the Muslim Brotherhood became convinced that "Hamas had staying power" after several months of fighting in the first *intifada*.[239] Hamas grew in popularity in a period when the secular nationalist groups, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), were moderating and seeking reconciliation with Israel through an abandonment of armed struggle. By the 1990s, Hamas was the key proponent of armed struggle against Israel, not the PLO or Fatah.[240]

Hamas, as does any other resistance movement or political party, struggled with internal divisions, especially after the establishment of a new Palestinian Authority in 1993 as a result of the Oslo Accords. Hamas had originally joined an Oslo-rejectionist

[238] Peter G. Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 289–291.

[239] Ibid., 277–8.

[240] Reuven Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists: Al-Qa'ida and Hamas," *Fault Lines in Global Jihad* (2011), 207.

coalition, but internally, members of Hamas debated the group's appropriate response. Those members that rejected the Oslo Accords did not want Hamas to get involved in the Palestinian Authority, while more radical members wanted to take advantage of the renewed animosity towards Israel and undermine the Accords. On the other hand, the moderate and pragmatic members of the group supported participation in the Palestinian Authority. Ultimately, those against participation in the Palestinian Authority prevailed, but Hamas still strategically restrained itself from escalating violence, as the group knew that undermining the Oslo Accords could alienate the section of Palestinian society that was hopeful the new Palestinian Authority might improve the Palestinians' situation.[241]

After the Oslo Accords and until 2000, Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, pressured by Israel, significantly limited Hamas' ability to be involved in politics and to operate freely, but Hamas gained popularity after increasing the use of suicide bombings against Israel in the second *intifada* and after the Israeli assassination of its iconic leader Sheikh Yassin that garnered wide-spread sympathy.[242] In 2006, Hamas participated in the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Counsel, won by a landslide, and assumed control of the Palestinian Authority Government.[243] Hamas' participation in the 2006 Palestinian Authority elections constituted a strategic change in approach for the group that was now willing and determined to work through established political institutions, even if those very institutions were the product of the Oslo Accords and modeled after Western, democratic institutions.

B. HAMAS AND AL-QAEDA SINCE 2006

Several scholars have identified Hamas' participation and victory in the 2006 Palestinian Authority elections as a watershed moment in the relationship between Hamas and al-Qaeda. After Hamas' electoral victory, al-Qaeda's criticism increased particularly focused on criticizing Hamas' participation in Western-style elections and the

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[241] Peter G. Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 279.

[242] Ibid., 280.

[243] Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 281.

political compromises Hamas made to gain wider popular support.[244] Since the group came to power in Gaza, other than online debates with jihadist ideologues, Hamas has had little physical interaction with al-Qaeda itself. However, Hamas has dealt with several small Salafi-jihadist cells and opposition groups springing up in the Occupied Territory. A rise in Salafi-jihadist groups in southern Gaza has occurred around the same time that al-Qaeda's influence increased in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. One scholar argues that these groups are opposition groups to Hamas that adopt a Salafi-jihadist ideology to differentiate themselves from Hamas. Aligning with Fatah, a "defeated" secular nationalist group, was no longer a feasible option to garner legitimacy as an opposition group. Disaffected youth and disgruntled families or tribes seem to be establishing Salafi-jihadist groups to oppose Hamas through a lack of other options for opposition.[245]

In 2008, the powerful Dughmush family, upset over Hamas' control and taxation of goods smuggled through the tunnels between Gaza and Egypt, established a militia called *Jaysh al-Islam* with a Salafi-jihadist ideology to give the group more legitimacy in its opposition to Hamas. Hamas' attempts to arrest two of the family members resulted in a violent clash on 15 September 2008, that left 11 of the family dead.[246] In a similar vein, Hamas security forces killed a group of 24 men affiliated with the *Ansar Jund Allah* group on 14 August 2009, in the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque in Rafah, Gaza, demonstrating Hamas' willingness and commitment to eradicate opponents to its dominance in Gaza.[247] The attack followed a sermon by the Ansar Jund Allah's sheikh, Abu Nour al-Maqdisi, declaring Gaza the "Islamic State of Gaza." Hamas' security forces had been tipped to the content of the sermon by a jihadist online discussion forum. One scholar described this incident as "a cold-blooded execution conducted by Hamas leadership to prevent the Iraqization of Gaza by nipping in the bud any attempt to declare an Islamic caliphate in Gaza."[248] Hamas made its point clear: it would not tolerate any competition from Salafi-

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[244] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 205.

[245] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 212.

[246] Ibid., 213.

[247] Ibid., 203.

[248] Ibid., 211.

jihadist groups. Another front in which Salafi-jihadism is growing in popularity among Palestinians is in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon where Hamas does not have a significant presence.[249]

C. AL-QAEDA–HAMAS CRITICISM

Much of al-Qaeda's criticism for Hamas, both published in audio speeches by key al-Qaeda leadership and in online jihadist debates, originates from the two groups' differing ideology and goals. As a nationalist group, Hamas focuses its efforts geographically on the land of Palestine and on the Palestinian people. They seek to create a functioning governance system ("social infrastructure"), liberate Palestine from the Israeli occupation, and creating an Islamic State of Palestine.[250] Al-Qaeda, as the vanguard of global jihad, seeks the destruction of the "far enemy" the United States and its allies, which includes Israel, and an establishment of a pan-Islamic caliphate that replaces nation-state borders. Hamas embraces the nation state system; al-Qaeda rejects it. Additionally, the opposition between Hamas centers on methods. Although both al-Qaeda and Hamas advocate the use of active, violent resistance through *jihad*, Hamas is willing to restrain the use of violence when it best suits the establishment of their political goals while al-Qaeda rejects participation in the international political system and only advocates violence as the legitimate method of resistance. Al-Qaeda criticizes Hamas' version of jihad as being a nationalist jihad for Palestine, not a religious jihad for God.[251]

Accordingly, the list of complaints al-Qaeda has against Hamas is significant. Al-Qaeda often attacks Hamas for: affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas' conception of jihad, historical partnership with Iran and Hezbollah, embracing western-style political institutions, cooperation and support with "apostate" Arab governments, not implementing *shari'ah* law, its limited and pragmatic use of violence and terror tactics against Israel, and its suppression of Salafi-jihadist groups within Gaza. Like the

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[249] Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam among Palestinians in Lebanon*, Harvard University Press, 2007.

[250] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 203.

[251] Ibid., 207.

Brotherhood, Hamas has embraced a bottom up approach of Islamic reform that focuses on indoctrinating the Muslim population and embraces participating within the local government.[252] In contrast, al-Qaeda believes in a top-down approach and calls for radical change to the political status quo.

In the eyes of al-Qaeda, Hamas' participation in the Palestinian Authority's parliamentary elections was particularly anathema. Advice published by al-Qaeda under the supervision of Ayman al-Zawahiri on their rejection of a Wahhabi *fatwa* authorizing parliamentary representation shows the practice of *takfir* as applicable to those who choose to participate in non- *shari'ah* enforcing government. The publication defends its logic as such: "The fact that they are apostates is proved by God's word: 'And if any fail to judge (by the light of) what God has revealed, they are (no better than) wrong doers' What they are doing is the very same thing that caused the revelation: they are abandoning government according to revealed law and creating a new authority imposed on all men, just as the Jews have abandoned stoning and created another legislation."[253]

This discourse is largely directed at the fatwa written by Saudi Arabian cleric Sheikh Bin Baz, but it demonstrates al-Qaeda's belief in *tawhid* and the sovereignty of God and their stance regarding governance that, "Democracy is a new religion."[254] For Hamas, embracing the political system in the Occupied Territory is for pragmatic reasons, such as having political influence within Palestine and garnering international legitimacy as a viable Palestinian political party. In a letter from Israeli prison, Sheikh Yassin approved of Hamas' participation in elections by saying, "I consider it is better to participate than to abstain, providing that the Council be empowered with legislative privileges…why not express our opposition within the legislative institution which will de jure become in the future the authority representing the Palestinian people? [This

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[252] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 205.

[253] Gilles Kepel, Jean-Pierre Milelli, and Pascale Ghazaleh, *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*. Harvard University Press, 2008, 183.

[254] Ibid., 184.

participation] will reassert the strength of the Islamic presence on the arena and will prevent it from losing ground because of its isolation."[255]

D. COMPARISON OF SUPPORT BASES

In 2006, when Hamas won the Palestinian Authority elections, the group won approximately 45% of the vote. A large percentage of that vote may have been a reflection of a widespread protest vote against the secular party, Fatah, but the number gives some idea of the popularity of Hamas in 2006.[256] Hamas has followed the strategic model of the Muslim Brotherhood of establishing an Islamic revolution from the bottom up through a systematic establishment of popular support and indoctrination through what is called the *da'wa* system, a social welfare system.[257] Hamas' support base centers around the poor and middle class that benefit from many of its social services. Hamas supporters tend to be religiously conservative and skeptical of secularization. Compared to the inefficiency and corruption of the PLO and Fatah, Hamas has proven itself trustworthy and committed to "walking the talk" which is increasingly important to the Palestinians considering the ongoing occupation and the crippling economic conditions in Gaza.[258]

Hamas, as a nationalist movement, needs widespread support from the local population and, thus, has avoided taking steps such as imposing *shari'ah* law because of the conceivable local opposition.[259] When the group published its ideology in the Hamas Charter, it carefully framed itself as both Islamist and Palestinian nationalist to keep its ideology from the appearance of undermining ongoing nationalist efforts in Palestine.[260] Although actually quite Islamist in character, Hamas has walked a very intentional middle ground to attract the widest-possible spread of Palestinian supporters.

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[255] Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 292.

[256] Ibid., 285.

[257] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 205.

[258] Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 284.

[259] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 211.

[260] Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 289.

Additionally, Hamas seeks legitimacy and freedom of operation by participating in established local politics, even Western-style elections.[261] As mentioned earlier, election participation was a controversial step for Hamas among jihadist circles; however, it was also a response to pleasing the Palestinian public hoping to take advantage of opportunities for economic development and bargaining with Israel for the release of more prisoners, emblematic of Hamas pragmatic opportunism.[262] Hamas' financial support comes from various sources including local Palestinian donations, sympathetic Islamist movements from abroad (primarily from the Muslim Brotherhood), donations from Hamas-managed foundations and foreign donors, aid from foreign governments, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, and tax revenues from taxation of trade via the smuggling tunnels between Gaza and Egypt.[263]

Al-Qaeda, as a "vanguard" group, really only has a small following within the Islamic and Arab world. What sets the group apart is its radical Islamic ideology and violent jihadist tactics, which it emphasizes to recruit people in Gaza and elsewhere.[264] The group is organized in a cell-based structure in which small groups of people all over the world answer vertically to the al-Qaeda leadership yet do not maintain horizontal relationships with other cells. This structure is largely driven by worldwide counter-terrorism efforts and al-Qaeda's operational security strategy. Al-Qaeda also operates by forming *ad hoc* relationships with other Salafi-Islamists groups recognizing them as al-Qaeda affiliates when they seek allegiance. Al-Qaeda, under Bin Laden, developed an elaborate financial network that combined a need to raise and transfer money internationally. In its early days in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda received considerable funds from various Gulf regimes, but later depended more on charitable foundations and wealthy donors to supply its financial support.[265]

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[261] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 207.

[262] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 218.

[263] Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 282–3.

[264] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 211.

[265] Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 345–6.

According to online jihadist debates, al-Qaeda's goal is not to make Hamas into a global jihadist group, but rather to establish independent jihadist organizations that operate in Palestine targeting Israel, perhaps as an affiliate of al-Qaeda.[266] There is little evidence to show that al-Qaeda has intentionally pursued any kind of physical infiltration of Gaza through the tunnels to establish groups in Palestine, but instead has maintained its common practice of waiting for local groups to adopt its ideology and become affiliates. The lively Internet debates promoting global jihadism while criticizing Hamas may be part of its intentional efforts to get its message to the Palestinian people. This matches al-Qaeda's typical emphasis on spreading its ideology, rather than building organizational infrastructure itself.[267]

E. EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS

Al-Qaeda's pattern of seeking affiliate groups can be seen as a product of increasing external constraints on the organization since post-9/11 efforts by the international community to dismantle the group. Al-Qaeda has lost much of its leadership, infrastructure, training camps, mobility, and financing. An even older ideological shift in al-Qaeda, from striking the "near enemy" to striking the "far enemy," was a development in jihadist ideology that was also a result of Bin Laden's constrained resources and circumstances.[268] Al-Qaeda may want to enter into the Palestine-Israel conflict, but it is externally constrained. This leads al-Qaeda instead to depend on local groups pledging allegiance to it.

In contrast, Hamas is constrained in its actions both internally, by its need to maintain enough popular support to win elections, and externally, by Israel and its desire to be recognized by the international community. Al-Qaeda is also restrained by Hamas' unwillingness to tolerate Salafi-jihadist groups in Gaza and Israeli border security. The Gaza area controlled by Hamas is a society organized around strong clan identities, and likewise, al-Qaeda would have a difficult time infiltrating Gaza without being discovered

[266] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 212.

[267] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 215.

[268] Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 343.

by Hamas.[269] A 2003 poll conducted in Palestine showed wide-spread "confidence" in al-Qaeda leadership with 73% of those Palestinians polled expressing some or much confidence, but in 2011 confidence fell to 34%.[270] Al-Qaeda's diminishing popularity in Gaza could continue to constrain the group's spread.

However, Bernard Rougier, in his landmark research on the spread of Salafi-jihadist ideology in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, offers an interesting counter-argument to the importance of external constraints on the spread of global jihadism. He argues that these movements are primarily fueled, not by the supply networks of transnational jihadist groups like al-Qaeda, but rather by the completely disenfranchised Muslims who have no hope in either Muslim states or regional initiatives to improve the local situation.[271] This theory could lead us to the conclusion that the spread of Salafi-jihadist ideology would be restrained as long as Hamas could offer hope for a political solution in Palestine. Expressed in the negative, Salafi-jihadism could spread if Hamas lost its legitimacy as the defender of Palestinians or if the political situation in Palestine only got worse.

F. THE APPEAL OF THE ISRAEL–PALESTINE CONFLICT

The global jihadist movement is deeply concerned with the Israel-Palestine conflict despite external barriers to active involvement in the conflict. Documents obtained by the U.S. military during the infamous raid of Osama Bin Laden's house in Abbottabad revealed that al-Qaeda, and more specifically Osama Bin Laden, had been encouraging its commanders to emphasize the issue of Palestine more frequently. Hegghammer asserts that this was either because the issue mattered to Osama personally or that there was recruitment value in promoting rhetoric on the Palestine-Israel issue.[272] The Palestine-Israel conflict is one of few consensus issues having both political and

[269] Barak Mendelsohn, "Al-Qaeda's Palestinian Problem," *Survival* 51, no. 4 (2009): 82.

[270] Thomas Hegghammer and Joas Wagemakers, "The Palestine Effect: The Role of Palestinians in the Transnational Jihad Movement," *Die Welt Des Islams* 53, no. 3–4 (2013): 286.

[271] Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, 275–6.

[272] Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 293–4.

religious importance for the Arab world's Muslim population.[273] The Palestine-Israel conflict is one clear example of the global jihadist narrative of a pan-Islamic struggle to free itself from Western oppression. Additionally, in the Arab World, fighting Israel is key to gaining legitimacy. Attacking Israel would give global jihadists more "street cred" than attacks on apostate Arab regimes.[274] For some, the struggle for the liberation of Palestine is even more important than Saudi Arabia because unlike Saudi Arabia that focuses on an internal enemy, Palestine is a clear example of the far enemy, the Judeo-Crusader alliance (the Jews and Americans), occupying Muslim land. Likewise, global jihadist propaganda has often used the images of Palestine and Hamas' religious leaders such as Sheikh Ahmad Yassin.[275] Palestine is also important in jihadist rhetoric because it exemplifies Arab regimes' and other Islamist groups' failure to liberate the Palestinian people.[276]

In 2008, al-Qaeda announced a renewed desire to fight for the liberation of Palestine but contended that the insurgency in Iraq needed to be completed before the organization could focus on the Palestine-Israel front, even encouraging Palestinian refugees to join the fight in Iraq as a first step to liberating Palestine.[277] This announcement affirmed by the Jordanian-Palestinian jihadist ideologue, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, when he published "Jerusalem in our Hearts; Is It Not Time for It to Appear in Our Actions?" in April 2009. He argued that Salafi-jihadists needed to exploit the Hamas era rather than quibble, unite, and fight Israel.[278] One scholar has argued that an increase in al-Qaeda's focus on the Palestinian conflict in 2009 was a publicity campaign by al-Qaeda to show itself as the real defender of the Palestinian people after years of being limited to its operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, declining role in Iraq, and

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[273] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists: Al-Qa'ida and Hamas," 206.

[274] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists," 211.

[275] Ibid., 205.

[276] Mendelsohn, "Al-Qaeda's Palestinian Problem," 82.

[277] Ibid., 76–77.

[278] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists: Al-Qa'ida and Hamas," 216.

inability to successfully carry out attacks in the West. In emphasizing Palestine, al-Qaeda was hoping to recruit more members or affiliate groups and save its reputation.[279]

Hamas has been quite popular in the Islamist world because of its Islamic character distinguishing it from Fatah and the PLO and its willingness to use violence in the first and second intifada against Israel. Al-Qaeda is limited in its attack on Hamas because of its renown as a proponent of jihad and defender of Muslim interests in the Palestine-Israel conflict. For that reason, unlike other rulers in the Islamic world that through al-Qaeda's practice of *takfir* can be expelled from the community of believers and making them open for attack, Hamas is spared from that level of criticism despite pursuing more seats in the PLO-controlled Palestinian National Council and the Palestinian Authority's Legislative Council.[280] In 2008 and 2009, when Israel was using military action against Gaza in Operation Cast Lead, al-Qaeda struggled with how to proceed in its relationship with Hamas. Before that date, al-Qaeda had been more public in its opposition to Hamas, but in the midst of the war in Gaza, sympathy for Hamas in the Arab world increased and al-Qaeda struggled with the need to portray Hamas as victorious against the Israelis. In a similar vein, al-Qaeda's criticism tends to focus on the political leaders and avoid criticizing the militant brigades participating in *jihad* against Israel.

G. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Al-Qaeda and Hamas represent "competing doctrines of militant Islamism" within a developing schism among Sunni Arab Islamists.[281] However, to simplify Hamas under the descriptor of "pragmatic" and al-Qaeda as "intransigent" would be unfaithful to the nuances of how these groups differ and interact. These groups did not appear in a vacuum; each group's historical experience, ideological development, and internal and external limitations play a role in shaping their behavior. Partially, this can be attributed to differences in ideology, but largely it can be attributed to differences in structural

[279] Mendelsohn, "Al-Qaeda's Palestinian Problem," 71, 82.

[280] Paz, "Jihadists and Nationalist Islamists: Al-Qa'ida and Hamas," 206.

[281] Ibid., 203.

limitations on each group. Ideology plays a role in defining or framing a group's strategic goals, but it is not something that makes a group irrational. If global jihadist groups solely related to Islamic nationalist groups such as Hamas on unwavering ideological lines, then they would deem Hamas apostate because of its participation in parliamentary elections. Instead, what we see is al-Qaeda restraining its criticism of Hamas when Muslims in Palestine are in need of Hamas' Islamist resistance, such as during the first and second intifada and Operation Cast Lead, but continuing with criticism in times of Hamas' prosperity when the Muslim community is not under immediate threat. Al-Qaeda's outright rejection of Hamas could undermine its ability to recruit and inspire Muslims to global jihad because of the importance of the Palestine issue in the global jihadist narrative and the popularity of Hamas as a defender of Muslims against Israel.

Unlike in Chechnya, stronger state institutions allow Hamas to detect and eliminate oppositional cells that pledge allegiance to Salafi Jihadist groups. The flow of foreign funds and fighters is also more controllable because of strong border security enforced by Israel and neighboring Arab states. Palestine also has a much longer history of political activism than Chechnya, so it has more established domestic political parties, such as Hamas, which has gained popularity and influence through providing social services consistently for years. Although al-Qaeda or other groups may have great interest in the Palestinian conflict, outside of a few oppositional cells and refugee camps, there is limited space for transnational jihadists to expand in domestic Palestinian politics.

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V. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis analyzed the socio-historical developments in Chechnya from the late 1980s until the start of the second Russo-Chechen War in 1999 to identify how transnational jihadists gained influence in the Chechen separatist project. A survey of relevant secondary literature along with primary sources such as memoirs of Chechen politicians, video footage from Chechnya, and interview quotes from Chechen actors formed the basis of this research. The research began by asking how transnational jihadists co-opted nationalist struggles in the Islamic world, but the findings seem to indicate that radical, local elites played a significant role in co-opting the conflict for the jihadist groups and that weak centralization or "command-and-control" of a nationalist group allowed space for global jihadists to enter local politics. In reverse, the Palestinian case showed how the strong organization of a nationalist group, Hamas, was able to prevent the spread of transnational jihadists in a local arena. This conclusion section will summarize the key findings of each chapter, address the limitations of the research, and propose areas of future scholarship and policy considerations.

A. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter II demonstrated how it is overly simplistic to view Islamic rhetoric or implementation of Islamist policies as a direct symptom of the entrance of Muslim foreign fighters. From the separatist movement's inception, nationalist leaders, such as Dudaev and Yandarbiev, used Islam as an oppositional identity to face the Russians and as an allegiance to a larger Islamic community that could potentially attract the support of Muslim states. Both of these Chechen politicians, though, led the Chechen people at a time when the movement was unified under one leader, themselves, and enjoyed wide popular support under the constant threat of Russia. Under Dudaev, the foreign fighters that came to fight in the first war largely stayed out of local Chechen politics and remained a peripheral fighting force against the Russians.

Looking at the period from 1997 to 1999, Chapter III demonstrated how fragmentation within Chechen politics acted as the catalyst for the increasing

Islamization of the Chechen separatist movement. After the end of the first Russo-Chechen War, Maskhadov struggled to unite the radical field commanders under his authority as they pursued resources to empower themselves by aligning with jihadist groups connected to external funding sources. A broken economy, rampant crime, and a severely limited state budget handicapped Maskhadov's ability to demilitarize Chechnya and re-establish centralized control. Maskhadov, in trying to avoid a Chechen civil war, alternated between taking a strong stance against crime and the fundamentalist groups and attempting to incorporate them into the government through concessions, which included the implementation of many Islamist policies. Additionally, the threat from Islamist-oriented field commanders forced Maskhadov to defend his legitimacy on religious grounds. Although many factors contributed to Maskhadov's inability to centralize control, contentious local politics linked with the presence of transnational jihadists seems to be the venue through which the conflict took on an increasingly religious character.

Chapter IV presented a conflicting case in Palestine where the nationalist movement did not let transnational jihadists gain influence in the conflict. After 2006, Hamas' dominance in the Gaza strip made eliminating Salafi Jihadist-oriented oppositional cells an achievable operation that did not undermine their popular support. Hamas used a heavy hand to eliminate any radical opposition. A direct comparison of Chechnya and Palestine is unfair. First, structural and historical factors between the two conflicts are significant. Hamas' ability to monitor and destroy opposition cells in Gaza is aided by its small territorial size. Instituting control in a small area is much more achievable than in a country like Chechnya where resistance groups have been able to hide in the mountains for centuries. Second, the example of Hamas in the Gaza Strip is limited to a very select period in time when Hamas enjoyed hegemonic power. The broader historical view of the Palestinian conflict had many instances of contentious politics. Arguably, Chechnya's nationalist movement becoming increasingly religious is a shared experience between these two cases. Hamas, an overtly Islamist political party, beat secular opponents and reinforced the religious framing of the conflict.

Hamas' efforts to eliminate radical opposition at their first entrance sets it apart from the case of Chechnya where transnational jihadists were tolerated, yet also manageable, during the first war under Dudaev but played a much larger role in the Chechen political landscape when the Maskhadov Government struggled to control the state and local opposition. Hamas most likely understood what Chechnya's foreign minister under Dudaev said about jihadists in 1995, "Once you let them in, it's hard to get them out."[282] Additionally, Hamas' approach to radical opposition differed from Maskhadov because of issues concerning popular support and legitimacy. Although both were elected governments, Hamas had greater control over its territory and wider popular support than Maskhadov who faced a society falling into warlordism and feared that a heavy hand would break Chechen society apart.

B. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Both Hypothesis 1—religious outbidding for resource mobilization—and Hypothesis 2—the importance of strong institutions and advantage of hegemony—seem supported by the findings of this research. Without the strong hand of Dudaev and the immediate threat of Russia pulling Chechen society together, competing Chechen elite during the interwar period split from the elected president, Maskhadov, and sought alliances with the foreign fighters because of their ability to mobilize resources through transnational networks. This outside support further undermined the weak centralization of the Chechen government because internal competitors, such as Basayev, were able to establish parallel government structures. Additionally, Maskhadov was unable to demilitarize Chechen society after the war and lacked a monopoly over violence—a key indicator of a weak state—leading him to make concession to the Islamist opposition out of fear that he would spark a civil war. In the case of Palestine, Hamas' dominance allowed them to crush radical opposition cells from their start without significant fear of the action undermining Hamas' governance and legitimacy.

[282] Boudreaux, "Faith Fuels Chechen Fighters."

This research also supports Henning Tamm's theory on the effect of external support mentioned in the literature review. In line with Tamm's theory, additional resources and support going to a dominant leader, like Dudaev, reinforced the balance of power in Dudaev's favor, thus solidifying his control over the nationalist movement.[283] Maskhadov experienced the flip side of that dynamic: resources given to his rivals undermined Maskhadov's power and accentuated the rifts that were growing in Chechen society. Hamas seems to have intentionally blocked these actors from undermining its dominance.

In a broader perspective, this research also touches on the debate between the French scholars, Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel, over whether the world has witnessed a radicalization of Islam, Kepel's argument, or Islamization of the radical, Roy's argument.[284] Roy argues that "Islam, after the disappearance of the extreme Left, is one of the few discourses of political contestation available on the market." [285] The other being the anti-globalization movement. This is partially supported by the case of Chechnya. Dudaev cast the conflict in an Islamic framing in order to take an anti-imperialist stance against Russia and gain sympathy from the Islamic world. In this case, Islam functioned as an oppositional identity. Stronger evidence, though, lies in the radical nationalists, including Basayev and Yandarbiev, who found appeal in the Salafi Jihadists ideology, methods, and support networks to oppose both Russia and local opposition. Even in the case of Hamas, this research has shown that allegiance to transnational jihadist organizations appealed to groups who wanted a legitimate and radical platform to oppose Hamas.

[283] Tamm, "Rebel Leaders," 1.

[284] Nossiter, Adam. "'That Ignoramus': 2 French Scholars of Radical Islam Turn Bitter Rivals." New York Times, 12 July 2016.

[285]Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 332.

C. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The complex social and political dynamics that allowed these transnational jihadist groups to influence the conflict in Chechnya reinforces the concept of how political forces internal to a society are key factors in influencing the evolution of conflicts. This research began by asking how transnational jihadists co-opted nationalist struggles in the Islamic world but concludes that local actors co-opted the struggle for the Salafi jihadist agenda. This confirms the importance of maintaining knowledge and intelligence on local politics and considering the local political environment when developing counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies.

The findings in this chapter also offer insight into the potential effect of external support from the United States or any nation in a conflict zone. The case of Chechnya aligns closely with research proposed by Tamm: external support given to a dominant leader reinforces the balance of power in the dominant leader's favor, and, inversely, external support to a competitor will exacerbate cleavages in that society.[286] The United States needs to consider the effects its sponsorship of specific actors will create, which is relevant in the recent debate over which militant group the United States should sponsor in Syria. It is important to ask the questions: Is our aim to strengthen a dominant leader? Or are we trying to undermine a movement or specific leader? It is to be expected that supporting a competing actor will increase local competition, which could mean a longer, bloodier conflict.

Additionally, Maskhadov's frustrating experiences trying to demilitarize a society that had mobilized for war, rebuild an economy still under blockade, and avoid a civil war with local opposition points to the necessity of post-war reconstruction and demobilization. In the case of Chechnya, the international community was hesitant to interfere with the conflict because of the perceived violation of Russia's sovereignty any action would entail. However, effective state building, which requires sufficient funding,

[286] Tamm, "Rebel Leaders," 1.

could have curbed the influence the radical field commanders had on Maskhadov and the trajectory of the conflict.

Finally, the counter example of Hamas' success in opposing emerging radical opposition points to the importance of blocking radical groups from entering a conflict from the outset. Chechen leaders flirted with jihadist groups for the additional resources they brought to the fight against Russia in the short term, but these groups led to the failure of the nationalist cause in the long term. Strong border security, local policing, and monitoring of international financial transactions are a few of many possibilities that could curb the influence of jihadist groups early.

D. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The scope of this research is limited in its ability to address all the factors at play in exploring the intersection between nationalist movements and transnational jihad. All three chapters do not address the role the "occupying" state played in the evolution of the conflict (i.e., Russia, in the case of Chechnya, and Israel, in the case of Palestine). Instead, its emphasis lies in the internal dynamics of a nationalist movement. This research on Chechnya is difficult for two reasons: a language barrier to Chechen and Russian material and biases in reporting. As an English-speaking student, I am unable to read the material in Russian or Chechen, and therefore, I am dependent on what material others have translated and used as the basis for their research. Additionally, both the Russians and the Chechens had reason to frame the conflict for their own benefit to the international community. At times, it is difficult to distinguish what is true, what is exaggerated, and what is disinformation. Although I have done my best to follow the information to its original source, this was not always possible.

E. FUTURE RESEARCH

These limitations can be overcome by future research endeavors. A similar study of these two cases that looks at the effect of external factors such as the occupying state's counterterrorism policies or the degree and methods of repression they used could provide a missing piece of the puzzle described in this thesis. Additionally, the conclusions of this thesis point to a need to consider the effects of a radical flank on a

movement. Applying social mobilization theory on radical flanks would have added a deeper understanding of the causal mechanisms for the Islamization of the Chechen nationalist movement since the radical field commanders played such a significant role. The emphasis on the positive role strong institutions can have to undermine the spread of transnational jihad warrants further research and policy consideration on the role of state building and post-war demobilization. If the Maskhadov Government could have somehow regained a monopoly over violence, it may have been able to curb the influence of the radical field commanders and focus on building viable institutions, as seen in the case of Hamas.

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