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CHECHNYA AND REGIONAL ORDER

THE BEAR AGAINST THE SCIMITAR

Antonio Barrios Oviedo

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CHECHNYA AND REGIONAL ORDER

Could the Chechen war bring Russia to collapse?

*Antonio Barrios Oviedo, M.Sc.**

Summary

The end of the Cold War was inaugurated as a finishing of possible nuclear war between the superpowers as the United States and the Soviet Union. But this new era has begun with an escalation of communal ethnical conflicts in some regions in Europe. The Balkan wars, the problems in Central Asian States, and the Caucasus region are part of dynamic of change and conflict. On the other hand, the post Cold War era has showed us the brutality of war when the mass media has played a key role in transmission of the wars in whole world. So the Chechnya's War begins a new era of armament race in the Caucasus. The main strategy of Russia is not to finish the Chechen war as soon as possible, but to justify its presence in the rest of whole region to avoid the extension of the war outside the frontiers and farther the Caucasus range. This

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motivation surges like a well identified radical groups operating in the zone that have been causing the current instability. This situation joined with the nuclear concerns from Russia and the West has forced them to take the correct measures to assurance the region from a nuclear threat. The Caucasus region is located in a “fault lines” between Christian and Islamic worlds. Besides, there are specific desires from neighboring powers to fill that geographical vacuum or dominate those pivotal states endangering the precarious stability in the region.

The Caucasian region

The war in Chechnya seems to be almost nothing when it is compared with turbulence history of this region. Of course, this war is brutal because it is for independence purposes and also for religious and ethnic issues. To face the Bear (Russia) is very complex and almost suicide when any ethnic group tried to declare the war against the former USSR, nowadays Russian Federation.

Fifty ethnic groups live along the 900 mile-mountain range. At its surroundings, the Caucasus is bordered with emerging nation states as Georgia Armenia, and Azerbaijan. These two first nations have ancient Orthodox Christian cultures and ancient kingdoms as former territorial divisions in the Ottoman period. This heritage became solid through history in mind and lifestyle of Georgian and Armenian people. The third country, Azerbaijan inherited the descendants of Caucasian Albania when this country was in its acme of glory in the Ottoman Empire period. In spite of the collapse of the Turkish rule in Central Asian states and the Caucasian region, Albania was the Turkish platform to enter to Balkans between 1350 and 1475, period needed

by Ottoman forces to domain the main entrance to Europe. "This region is so complex that there were (still are) four forms of civilizations intersect and overlap; that of the Turkish steppe, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus itself. The last is characterized by, among other things, a fierce love of independence and a resourceful warrior tradition that is millennia old."¹

These four civilization confluences represent for a country a very heavy history and very complex to manage, when the ethnic groups tend to claim for their identity, territory and religious issues. Most of the times these claims have finished in brutal ethnic warfare not only with the metropolis, Russia, but also between the main ethnic groups living in a country.

As part of history, the first contacts between Tsarist Russia and the Caucasian region, or in geographical terms known as, North Caucasus region comes from the sixteenth century. During this period was ruling Russia, Ivan the Terrible, who married with a Kabardian princess. With this engagement, Russia could move to the Caucasian region taking it as an integral part of Russia. The enlargement to the southern part of Russia began between the sixteenth and eighteenth century as an imperial strategy. It is well known that the Caucasian region has been for Russian ambitions a very hard zone to conquer. The opposition there had caused terrible wars against Russia; however at the end Russia could dominate the Caucasus forces. However, it does not mean the peace has come to the region. After being totally destroyed, the Chechen republic tends to be more

¹ Current History. A Journal of Contemporary World Affairs. Russia and Eurasia: The war without winners. Vol. 94; N° 594, October 1995. p. 329.

vulnerable to wars due to the misery of its economic, low living conditions of Russian and Chechen people there as well. As in ancient times, the war reached Grozny, today the capital of Chechnya.

Before Chechnya had to suffer its current destruction from Russian forces, there was nothing about the city of Grozny to suggest that it was the capital of a very ancient place for Chechens. It was founded in 1818 by General Alexei Yermolov as one of the fortress of the Cossack line, and served as the Russian headquarters in the campaigns first to contain, and then to conquer and suppress the Chechens. It was named Grozny, meaning “terrible”, or more accurately “formidable”, though a longstanding pun, which needs no explanation, renders it as “Gryazny,” or “Dirty.”²

Of all ethnic groups living in Caucasus region, most of them are through historic affiliated to Sunni Ottoman Empire that have tended (still happens) to see Russia as a permanent enemy. On the other side, the people of Dagestan, known as Chechens have been closer to the Sunni Islam Arab World and they have the same historical opinion about Russia. But at least there is a difference with other ethnic groups in there. For instance, the Circassians or Kabardians, as mountain zone known as the Turk zone, mountain range the Iranians that inherited Persian customs, the Ossetians and Ingush people, have suffered long periods

2 Many of the Russian fortresses of the North Caucasus were named like warships, either with names like “*Defiant*” and “*Vigilant*”, or after Tsars or local commanders. A greater curiosity of the Russian borderlands, and especially the North Caucasus, is the “gender” relations between the different settlements. This is because of the Russian bureaucratic habit of grading them in order of importance. Thus Grozny began as a female, “*Groznaya*”, because a fortress (krepost) in Russian is female, as is a Cossack village or Stanitsa. A village is neuter (selo), as is a fort (ukreplenie). But when a place was promoted by the government to be a town, (gorod), it inevitable became masculine. Taken from Lieven, Anatol, “*Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*”, Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 1998.

of wars and invasions from the Ottoman Empire. Later the imperial Russia performed its own strategy turning these ethnic groups into Moscow allies.

It is not the first time in Russia sentiments that the Caucasus is a region that could post in danger the Moscow's enlargement to the south. Russia considered necessary to "clean" the zone and this cleansing began by considering or classifying all North Caucasian people descent from Turkish history. The North Caucasian community has been considered as the most important one as well as an almost disappeared ethnic diasporas, compared with the Kurdish people, a nation without a State.

From Gorbachov to Dudayev

The different regions in the Caucasus have been submitted into a special autonomy status to make them to organize into different government form. With this they would have the opportunity to keep their traditions, religion, culture, education and other basic forms of survival as an ethnic groups quite different from the Russian. However, the constant surveillance of Moscow, principally after World War II, brought a lot of changes to these people. Stalin's regime began massive deportations to Siberia and to spread these ethnic groups as a strategy to avoid an organization against Moscow. This strategy led Moscow to intervene in any moment to protect its Russian people living there. "This anomaly of Russian rule contributed to a series of Chechen revolts between 1862 and 1942, culminating in Stalin's infamous internal deportations of all the Chechen and Ingush in 1944. While most accounts give Stalin's reasons as Ingush and Chechen collaboration with Nazi German armies advancing on the North Caucasus."³

³ Op cit. p. 331.

This constantly persecution against the Caucasian people has been part of errors in war when anybody could be the enemy. The current instability in the region is not a mystery. However, the most of Russian administrators insist there is a 37 peaceful—period from 1957 to 1994. Here is the year when the problem in the Caucasus region began to flourish again and against the Russian Federation. Why, due to the collapse of former USSR and the massive independence of peripheral territories, the war came only in the Caucasian region? Is there something else than the mere assumption of independence that made Russia to be afraid of? In a general way, the new geo strategic concept in international politics called the “great game” changed everything in that region. Oil, natural gas, Islamic movements, pipelines, territorial dominium, Iran claiming for Persian heritage as well as Turkey and Afghanistan the most instable country in the Arab World called to Islamic Jihad against Russia since 1979. From this year Russia began to dig its own grave. These are just a few and most palpable issues Russia most face everyday while, at the same time, tries to mold its own territory.

The year of 1989 called Russia for deep reforms without renouncing to its ideology. Mikhail Gorbachov government became weak and collapsed internally when hard-liners stopped his reforms. However, Gorbachov considered for the first time in history new wide policies for all republics, provinces and autonomous regions, like North Caucasians were necessary for whole USSR. The pressure inside was impossible to hold anymore. However Gorbachov was aware that independence was a gradual process according reforms in USSR. It was never expected that Islamic movements coming from Central Asia and Gulf countries could cause instability in the region at the

beginning of Boris Yeltsin presidency. Chechnya became the center of Islamic groups defying Russia for a total war as Dagestan was falling too.

In spite of before Gorbachov recognized the languages of regions in the Caucasian regions as natives ones. Other towns in Caucasian region were elevated into provinces after being for many years without any political recognition, in spite of former Soviet administrators always boasted to have given them an autonomous status. With these changes, Gorbachov tried to reconcile peoples as a very urgent necessity to keep, if possible the Soviet Union or the forthcoming Russian Federation founded by Boris Yeltsin.

Unfortunately, nationalism was stronger than Gorbachov's efforts to be closer at the Caucasians. This region began to break down and the first war Russia had to face was in South Ossetia when the collapse of the URSS was going on. The vote as a way to decide to whom belong to, the peoples in South Ossetia decided to secede and join to North Ossetia and create one country. The secessionism everywhere was forcing to Gorbachov to send troops in other places as in the Baltic States.

But the most delicate part was the Caucasus, basically in Chechnya where the guerrilla was disturbing the precarious politics in the country. The main commander of the troops was Dzhokhar Dudayev and he decided not intervene in the Caucasus against the new politics implemented by Gorbachov in the region. Moreover, Dudayev did not intervene in his own born-land, and although he did not sympathized with democratic changes, he was elected as main representative of Chechen people in 1990. Some months later, in August 1991 a military coup

coming from the most conservatives wing at the Soviet Supreme and the highest hierarchies of the militaries, attempted to remove Gorbachov from office. As a consequence, Gorbachov was very weak in his post and Boris Yeltsin took office and became the new president of former USSR.

Under Yeltsin's mandate, the ascendancy of General Dudayev (specialized in Afghan war during Soviet occupation in 1979) in Chechnya was very dangerous for the stability of the region. Yeltsin could notice how far and quickly was going Dudayev in politics. Formally, Dudayev was elected president and in his inauguration day he sworn in on Koran text to govern Chechnya. With this constitutional power, first Yeltsin thought that Dudayev would seek a closer relation with Moscow; however he declared Chechnya and Ingush as independent States facing the power of the Soviet Union. But it is important to clear up that there was a miscalculation of Dudayev because when he declared the independence, it was from the Soviet Union. When the USSR collapsed the independence did not functioned for the new ruling Russian Federation founded by Yeltsin in 1992.

As it happened in the nineteenth century, the Ingush people separated from Chechens, in 1991 the Ingushes voted to continue being part of the Russian republic. The discontent of Chechen kingship made them to trace a frontier, with this Yelstin declared a state of emergency that, according the events in the Chechen republic, he would intervene and reestablish the former order. Dudayev responding to Yeltsin's threats, he emptied Chechen jails and armed all men who wanted to fight against Russia as old times.

The war increased uncontrollable, the political situation in Russia was very complex between those radicals still with Soviet mentality that pressed Yeltsin to invade the Caucasian region, and those ones more democrats that insisted to be more careful for the consequences of a possible war with Chechens. On the other side, Dudayev had to face an enormous problem, first, Chechnya fell under a severe contraction of its economy and the salaries and pensions could not be paid to people for almost two years. After promoting a better political and pluralistic system, the Chechen became discontented against Dudayev, incapable to solve the profound economical situation, highly depended of Russian economy. Any effort was not enough; the skilled Russians and Chechens from Chechnya began to go out the country, particularly fleeing to Russia for better living conditions between 1989, more rapidly when the crisis began in the rebel republic. The second problem was that the oil industry, the main basis of Chechen economy declined suddenly. However, Chechnya continued selling oil to Russia, but Dudayev failed to recover payments. It was a strategic plan from Moscow to block Chechen oil to other markets outside Russia. Dudayev unexpectedly looked to the Muslim governments to his south Muslim countries and Western powers oil industries encouraging them to invest in Chechnya.

Yeltsin ordered a blockade against the Dudayev republic. This behavior forced to Chechen leaders to strengthen close ties with the Muslim world from two sources: The Middle East groups of terrorist nature and mafia coming from the same Russia. Chechnya became the main source of arms, drugs trafficking and money laundering. A miscalculation from Russia could have resolved its mafia problems deporting them to that republic as done before. As quoted Gary Bersch, specialist in conflict resolutions.

“Unfortunately, neither recognition of Chechen independence nor an associated status is politically possible for Moscow. This is not because the Russian people are deeply opposed to Chechen independence. On the contrary, the war was extremely unpopular, and while most Russian are not particularly sympathetic to the Chechens, they have been angered and humiliated by Russia’s military ineptitude and by the decision to wage a brutal and devastating war that was proved to be un-winnable. Nor the Russian believe that Chechnya is a “sacred” Russian territory, and most of them would readily accept Chechnya secession if it means a greater stability and prosperity for Russia.”⁴

However, inside Russia there were stronger discussions not only about the independence of Chechnya, but also the displaced Russian people in Chechnya. Here began a new Russia strategy to justify its intervention in the republic. The constitutional obstacles to Chechen independence or associated status are considerable inside Russia. The Article 65.1 of the Russian constitution identifies “the Chechen Republic” as one of Russia’s twenty-one republics. It means that the constitution does not allow or include anything referring to independence or secession. However, the article 4.1 specifies that the “sovereignty of the Russian Federation extends to its entire territory”, while article 4.3 requires that the Russian Federation must “ensure the integrity and inviolability of its territory.”

But instead of being an observance of constitutional mandates, the war in Chechnya became, not because of independence but the Islamic forces against Russian

4 Berstsch, Gary; Craft, Cassidy, Jones, Scott; Beck, Michael. “Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia”. London, Great Britain, Routledge Publishers, 2000, p.156.

interests in the region. Therefore, the Article 80.2 charges the president to be the "guarantor" of the constitution and is obligated to "take the necessary measures to protect the sovereignty, independence, and state integrity of the Russian Federation and to ensure the action and interaction of bodies of state authority." By that moment Yeltsin was in a crossroad, or he does declare the independence of Chechnya, or he would be vulnerable to an impeachment. The only way to avoid both was making amendments on the constitution that would have never approved by the Duma because those ones would cause a domino effect in all Russian peripheral.

The Russian failures in Chechnya

"The Chechen operations was prepared, planned, carried out and run by inept commanders."

Colonel General Boris Gromov⁵

As New Year's Eve in 1995 was coming in the world, the Russian military gun targeted at the Presidential Palace of Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev. The Russian army, former Red Army, was expected to triumph in Chechen war. Anyway, the former Red Army showed its weakness when the USSR decided to invade Afghanistan in 1979. This powerful army suffered a lot against the Mujhaidin movement. In Chechnya the story was repeated as Dudayev forces advanced over Russian army. By that time former Russian Defense Minister, Pavel Grachev boasted a quickly victory over Chechen rebels as it happened with

5 The Journal of Slavic Military Studies (formerly The Journal of Soviet Military Studies). Quoted in Mark Galeotti, "Decline and Fall-What Went Wrong in Chechnya", Jane's Intelligence Review 7/3 (March 1995). P. 98.

U.S. intervention in Grenada in 1983 and in Haiti in 1994. Here Yeltsin gave the "go-ahead."

However, the real battle had begun three years ago in Grozny when negotiations with Chechen leaders and Russian authorities resulted a stalemate. Yeltsin in advanced took advantage of Dudayev opposition in the Chechen society as the main platform to act in Chechnya. The opposition attacked to Dudayev forces. Yeltsin tried to encourage the opposition by sending arms without being involved directly. But the Russian Federal Counterintelligence Service (RFCS) and the Russian Counter-insurgency communicated him the military situation in the republic.

Analysts studying the Russian rationale for intervening in Chechnya had considered that the situation faced by Yeltsin regime in Grozny responded to one important issue for the Russian security. First, it was confronted with, in Russia's opinion, an illegal government that had failed to negotiate seriously for the past three years. At the same time, Chechnya had transformed itself into a center for terrorist and criminals that bonded with Russian mafia. Under these parameters Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev pointed the Russian state has the right to use the force to restore law and order. The main Russian military operations were to restore the railways lines and oil pipelines that cross Chechnya and welfare of local Russians that could be used as human shield by Chechen forces as revenge. Consequently, Russian had to teach a lesson to Chechnya as the perfect lab in that moment to warn the Central Asian States that Moscow will not think twice to intervene if Russian security is in danger. Inside the same commands in the Russian army there were incongruence.

Being more specifically about the military, "Pavel Grachev himself noted that on November 29 the Russian Security Council with the approval of Yeltsin, had pointed him to lead an elite group that included the Russian power ministers to settle the conflict."⁶

The Caucasus military district with the Colonel General, Alexei Mityukin apparently was following the same addresses from Grachev when the open conflict began in the republic. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the RFCS and an operational group from the Russian General Staff supported Mityukin. There was an apparently insubordination of top commands against the Russian state. This situation attempted against Yeltsin orders. After this Yeltsin and Grachev purged the top military commands in Chechnya. Grachev had to take directly the command of the Chechnya operations. Other military commands in whole Caucasus region were put into surveillance in case of any rebellion.

The Western analysts pointed that this problematic Caucasian command is that really ignores the key role of the General Staff and the operation of the Russian Security Council or Minister of Defense. Besides, Chechnya is considered as the key point where Russian military commands reflected the "disinformation" between the main ministers concerning the Russian security. Moreover, I consider that lack of discipline, competence, congruence, ability, and organization are some only points to describe the Moscow's military failure; instead of thinking that the

⁶ Thomas, Timothy. "The Russian Armed Forces Confront Chechnya: Military-Political Aspects and Military Activities". *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*. Former *Journal of Soviet Studies*, Frank Cass, London. 1995, p. 244.

failure came from the military superiority of Chechen rebels on the ground battle.

Strategically, the Chechen rebels took advantage of this situation to get a better position in the war that forced Russian forces to destroy almost whole republic infrastructure. Of course, religion has had a key factor for Chechen rebels which being supported by Islamic radical countries like Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan tried to nationalize its war. In domestic issues, Russian intervention in Chechnya found its own detractors as Yabloko, Party of Russian Unity and Concord, the Democratic Party of Russia, The Agrarian Party, Women of Russia, and the Communist Party—this last one considering that in times of communism if it were governing would have done the same knowing its historical in the region. Yeltsin just found support from Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, the Nationalist Russian Path and the Liberal Democratic Union on December 1994.

Yeltsin with his ability to get the necessary support from other political parties, declared a moratorium in presidential elections and provoked protests at Duma. After denouncing irresponsible position of the political parties, Yeltsin demanded seriously that the Russian situation in Chechnya was unraveling the security of the region and whole federation. But not only the political parties were against him, but also the 60 per cent of Russian society. The Russian demanded to Yeltsin that current Russian Federation could not continue in military adventures as the one in Afghanistan. "The extreme nationalist opposition, having supported the President's actions in Chechnya, at the same time advocate a more consistent and tougher enforcement of order... There is a great danger of these forces

shifting their political positions from the state idea (which so far agitates the population in the social, not geographic or political sense) to the ethnic (or religious) idea of setting Russians against non-Russians, and the Orthodox against the Muslims.”⁷

Calculus in the Caucasus

In spite the instability in the region, in 1989 was founded the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus (CPC) with the philosophical idea of “reinventing” the Caucasus. This association, according to Paula Garb⁸, to reinventing the region means the join of various groups uniting Circassians and the Association of the Commonwealth of Nations were the leading organizations carry on strong efforts to build a sense of common ethnicity among the diverse people of the Caucasus. This organization is part of an embryonic Pan-Caucasian movement in the region.

In one sense, is like to rescue what was trace by the eleventh-century Georgian historian, Leonti Mroveli, who claimed in his history that almost people in the Caucasus originated from one “ethnarch”, like thinking in a communal Monarchy. But this idea of being part of a common confederation does not come from 1989 but from the nineteenth century. However, the diverse war held on

7 Op Cit. p. 250.

8 Garb is a professor of cultural anthropology and associate director of Global Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of California. She has extensive studies about former Soviet republics, and since 1979 has focused on cultures of the Caucasus, ethnic relations, the role of culture in conflict and conflict resolution. “The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear Diffusion, and Escalation”, by David Lake and Donald Rothchild, 1999.

11

this region split all groups into a profound hatred each other. Neither today the groups have been capable of joining against a common enemy as Russian, according to Chechen leaders. But keeping the people split avoids the conformation of a monolithic ethnical group, taking into account all of them belong to a common region, the Caucasus.

Ruslan Khasbulatov, former chairman at Russian parliament, has pointed out this freedom-loving aspect of the Caucasian ethos; "All the Caucasus peoples, including the Chechens, have an extreme strong sense of freedom. I knew that they would resist if Russian tanks and the army entered the Chechen Republic." Ismail Munayev, a Chechen linguist explained; an every day Chechen greeting to another Chechen is "may you be free." It is like to say "Shalom" in Israel to keep the sense and compromise of peace, in spite of the political instability in the Middle East.

Despite the power of the "Caucasian idea" in building an alliance, in 1994 when the war in Chechnya began, the CPC, the only Pan-Caucasian effort, clearly did not appeared before Moscow as a dangerous movement. First, the CPC has not capable in resolving conflicts between the Ingush and Ossetians. The CPC could not form an alliance with non-Caucasian, especially with the Cossacks. The influence of the CPC is minimal comparing with the strong Russian hand over these ethnic groups. This little power undermines the prestige of the CPC in the region.

Second, the CPC has not overcome the nomenclature and political parties in the republics that keep a strong Moscow's orientation, particularly the republics in the North Caucasian. Moscow uses the strategy of giving the

people of North Caucasian republics high political positions, never imagined for them. With this Russia assures to keep out these northern republics far away from the other rebel republics at Southern part in the Caucasus. Third, the leaders of the Pan-Caucasian movement were not experienced in politics and different ethnic groups did not accept all leaders who can unite people in a idea of an Islamic holy war as did Tamil Assayed, a Digesting leader of the resistance against the Russian conquest at North Caucasus. Although, most Caucasian republics are Islamic with Turkish or Persian heritage, the real union has not yet functioned under religious sentiments.

After all above, the religion and nationalism are two ways that make the Chechen people different from Russians. Moreover, Chechen people feel better being Muslims than any other supposedly Muslim people in the Caucasus. Here begins a rupture of a possible reconcile of the ethnic groups. The leaders in Chechnya consider themselves as better Muslims without any intention to be slaved by Russian Slavs. However, "There are many examples among both, Muslims and Christians nations for religion acting in this way. The process develops over time and goes something like the following: Some forms of ethnos, and of ethno-cultural identity, usually with one formal religious allegiance, emerges over centuries (though this formal religious alignment may well, as in sixteen-century Ireland, the Dutch East Indies or the eighteenth-century Caucasus, cover a host of what are in effect pagan, or national group, with another religion."⁹

9 Lieven, Anatol. *Chechnya: A Tombstone of Russian Power*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London Press, 1998, p. 355-356. "The Prayers of Slaves are not heard in Heaven."

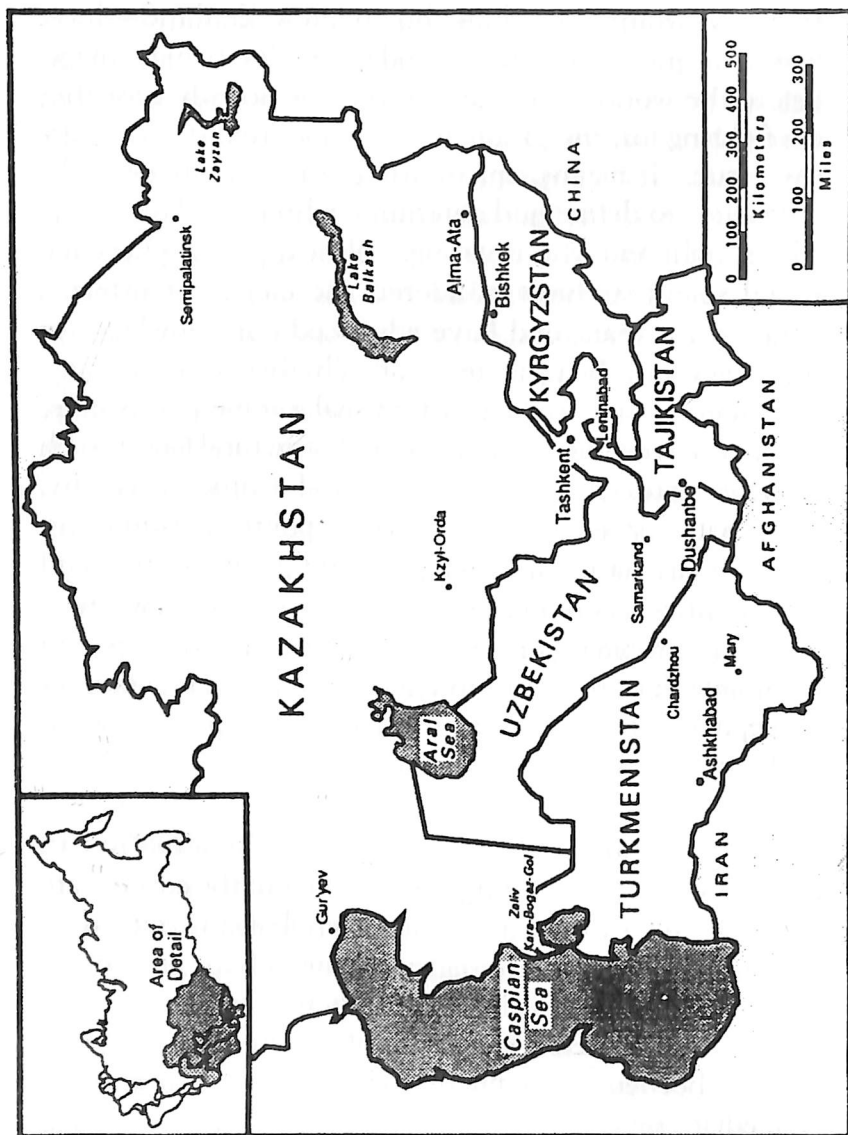
During the latest war, the word “atheist” (or rather “godless”) was often used by Chechens as a term to refer to Russians, not in strict sense but to suggest with the Chechens, the Russians had no personal or national dignity because they want to keep republics against Chechens’ will without respecting religion, traditions, and cultural values. Russia’s exaggeration of the political role of religion has called Chechen rebels as “Muslim fundamentalist”. This intention (very close to the propaganda of the French against the National Liberation Front (NLF) during the Algerian War) has made Russian—to accepted by the West—to move toward three ways to justify its intervention in Chechnya. First, the Chechen war is a crusade against a common Islamic enemy present in the republic and attempt against Christian Orthodox religion; to argue the Chechens are too “primitive”, a wrong called “society” without any experience living peacefully; and to suggest that a simple primitive people has been misled and convinced to act in another way to their own best interests.

Currently, the widely held in policy making and journalistic circles about the causes of internal conflicts—that are catalogued as “ancient hatreds” in many ethnic groups have toward each other—is a perverse and simplistic way to analyze their historical grievances. The simple word “ancient hatreds” used by journalists has become a new fashion word to refer to those new conflicts in the Post-Cold War era. This has been the easiest way to explain a very complex situation to public opinion. Besides, terrible conflicts as in former Yugoslavia, Chechnya, Rwanda and Sri Lanka between the Tamil Tigers and others groups in this country are only some examples. On the other side some other groups—Ukrainians and Russians; Czechs and Slovaks; French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians,

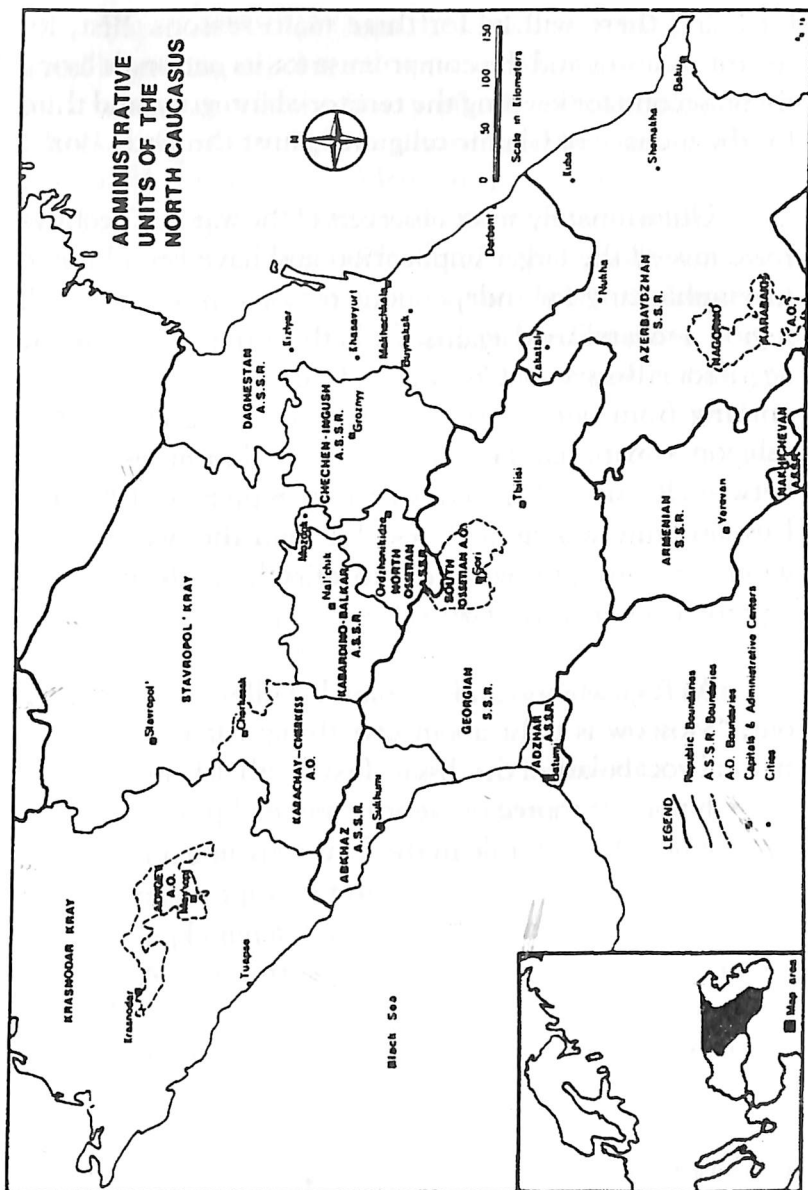
tribes of Maori and Placebo in New Zealand—have historical grievances, ethnic grudges and less benign images before the world. The main problem is not what for they are fighting for; the problem is when journalists demonize the groups. It means, apparently the journalists have the “capacity” to define and determine who is the best group, who is right and who is wrong. Political philosophers and social scientists have pondered the causes of internal conflicts for years, and have advanced our knowledge in important ways. Being more specifically, they have identified four main clusters of factors that make some places more predisposed to violence than others: “Structural factors such as weak states, security concerns, and ethnic geography; political factors such as discriminatory political institutions, exclusionary national ideologies, inter-group politics, and elite politics; economic/social factors such as widespread economic problems, discriminatory economic systems, and economic developments and modernization; and cultural/perceptual factors such as patterns of cultural discrimination and problematic group histories.”¹⁰

If one takes into account about the situation in Chechnya the infiltration Islamic groups in the conflict are part responsible for the instability in whole southern Russian region. The priority of Russian government is the prevention of ethnic or nationalist uprisings where religion has taken a very important element of identification. A six year-war Russo-Chechen is too much time without any solution at immediate sight. Moreover, as the instability goes on due to the operation of Islamic groups, the Russia's justification

10 Brown E, Michael. “The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict”, Massachusetts International Technology (MIT), Cambridge University, *Studies in International Security*. 1996, p. 573.



Central
Asia



Detailed
Map of the
Caucasian
Region.

for being there will be for three main reasons: first, for security reasons and the compromise for its nationals living there, second for keeping the territorial integrity, and third for the menace of Islamic religion against the Orthodox.

Unfortunately, most observers of the war in Chechnya have missed the larger implication and have been limited in emphasizing for independent reasons in a very small region. I mean David against Goliath, at the same time the aggressor is Russia not Chechen radicals, and its other groups coming from outside the country with the element of religion as national flag. In spite of, the last full-scale war between Russia and Chechnya was in September 1999, the Russian army was more successful than the war in 1994 where its officials were demoralized, while political rapprochement is still farther.

As Raja Menno and Graham E. Fuller¹¹ have pointed out, "Moscow is right about one thing: Islam will be the natural vocabulary of the dissatisfied South. Islamic ideology is an important source of identity and mobilized resistance against non-Muslim rule in the Caucasus, and it condemns as illegitimate the ineffective and corrupt regimes of the new Muslim republic. Islamic leaders demand just rule in a region awash with post communist corruption. And sharia (Islamic law) offers a historically respected code of law and social discipline after generations of corrupt socialist rule."¹²

11 Rajan Menon is Monroe J. Rathbone, Professor of International Relations at Leight University and Director of Eurasia Policy Studies at National Bureau of Asian Research. Graham E. Fuller is former Vice-Chairman of the National Intelligence Council and is currently a resident consultant at Research and Development (RAND).

12 Menon, Rajan and Fuller E. Graham. "Russia's Ruinous Chechen War". *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 2000, Vol. 79, N° 2, p. 38.

But in territorial terms the Caucasus region could be a real beginning to bring to Russia to collapse because Russia must make an extraordinary effort to keep the war in Chechen territory. "No territory has the right to leave Russia",¹³ stated Boris Yeltsin in his appearance before Russian Parliament to expose the situation in the Caucasus. Dagestan a neighbor republic to Chechnya, and it is a key factor for stability in the region. If it would fall to Chechnya's pressure, Russia must be obliged regionalized the war, it would a political suicide. Moreover, if Dagestan falls the neighbor republics would find that Moscow too weak to defend them and too poor to reward them in economic terms. It means those republics could blackmail Russia for better conditions. As much the North Caucasus republics—nearer to Russian interests—are poorer, would be better for Islamic groups the regionalized the war in the region and Russia will be more incapable. In spite of the situation in Chechnya, at the end of this what Russia has in its hands is a totally destroyed republic.

In strategic terms, the whole Caucasian region has a very important oil factor for Russia and, moreover, Dagestan is very important for Moscow because it has a port in the Caspian Sea. Even more the oil pipelines go through Dagestan before crossing Chechnya to arrive to the Black Sea. Besides, if whole region comes into total instability, Georgia and Azerbaijan would go out from Russia's orbit. But Armenia that has been a traditional Russian ally and has signed a defense treaty would reorient its foreign policy. These three republics are eager to have nexus with the West. Therefore, "as long as Russia continues to offer little attracts other ex-Soviet states, Moscow's strategic apprehension is

13 President Yeltsin on Russian TV, 27 December 1994

justified. If Russia were a prospering and democratic enterprise, regional states would seek partnership in the project, just like the European Union's neighbors want to sacrifice some sovereignty to a supranational project. But even under the best circumstances, Russia is at least half a century away to form a new, prosperous, and voluntary commonwealth; in spite of the existing Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)."¹⁴

Chechnya is really considered a formal threat for stability in the Caucasus region and Vladimir Putin, current president in Russia, has quoted that if the war had to continue, this will be the Russian policy till the radical groups will be destroyed. On the other hand there is a responsibility from the West that has not recognized the war against Russia in Chechnya begun by Fundamentalist groups. The question is if Russia's policy in the Caucasus is the best or the most adequate according to the circumstances there. If it not means Russia could be accelerating the fragmentation of the region. For example, the frontiers in Georgia and Azerbaijan are poorly guarded with Dagestan and other republics in the region. This situation is repeatedly happening in the weak Central Asian States where Russia has signed defense accords with them to preserve the CIS, but also to defend the region of the instability coming from Chechnya.

Although, the CIS region does not belong to Russian Federation, the region has become a buffer region that keeps the Islamic world from the Russian Orthodox Slavs. However, the CIS is part of the ruinous former Soviet Union. As happened in the North Caucasian states, whose

¹⁴ Op cit, p. 40.

governments are closer to Russian interests, the democracy in the CIS region represents a more flexible system to keep a good relationship with Russia. If Moscow grips the CIS and Caucasian region, these governments will see in Russia an imperial state than a state fighting against radicals, fundamentalists or Islamic groups with their many names given.

It is true that many Islamic groups have different religious allocutions or better said, representatives; there are some of them trying to rescue in their rhetorical, "fight for Caucasian independence after decades and centuries of commissars and tsars domination. But there is a very interested sentiment on today's fighters that have joined on a huge movement Muslims from abroad. Many of them have gained experience from the Soviet war in Afghanistan. As well as many of them prefer to think that it is time for Muslims to take revenge against Russia after trying to dominate Muslim people.

Of course Chechen resistance will never defeat 120.000 Russian troops with higher weapons in conventional battles, but the guerrilla has split Russian army in many parts and increases the economic the Moscow's costs and higher number of Russians dead. The political parties, public opinion and mass media have pressured Russia to intervene in Chechnya since war began. However, Russia has been obliged to its withdrawal as happened with the U.S. intervention in Vietnam War in the 60's and 70's. The war in Chechnya will last many years on, and Chechen resistance can continue fighting against Russian. But what is sure Moscow will never create a stable pro-Moscow government. The seeds of Islamism have always been there underground, when the Chechen resistance appeared from

inside and outside just poured with water to flourish in the society. However, in Chechnya as in some other countries in Central Asian states have flourished the cult of the gun in their holy war not only against Russia, but also against the West considered as the demoniac world.

Regional security in Central Asia

Since the collapse of Soviet Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) European Union (EU), The United States (US) and other organizations as Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Partnership for Peace (PfP) and Russian Federation have tried to search for new mechanism of security in the Post-Cold War Europe. As regional conflicts increased in the last decade, Europe has been promoting democracy without taking care of the profound of a crisis. Democracy is not the magical word to solve everything. There must be a reorientation, basically of post-Soviet states that involves more than the mere assumption of democracy. The conflict in Chechnya and Chechens rebels are not involving democracy as part of their desires, it goes farther.

As has happened in the Balkan region, this conflict has served to Western European interests. I mean, the conflict in former Yugoslavia has been carefully premeditated and controlled by strong forces in Europe to justify intervention. The same in Chechnya, however, Russia has faced not to have the same level of power and control as the West in the Balkan region. From outside powers try to intervene in the Caucasian states internal affairs and this irresponsible position contributes paradoxically to influence in internal and external Russia's foreign policy as an autonomous the region of the federation.

The Caucasian region belongs to Russia Federation, however this region has become very sensitive to external influences, basically religious. The national interest, foreign policy, and security priorities of small states have regional dimensions. Moreover, these three variables are weak when strong powers force in many ways to change, especially in war times. The Caucasus can be seen as a very small in comparison with Russia and its almost 18.000.000 million kilometers-square. But the Caucasus is the main route to engage between Europe and Asia.

But as Gary Berstsche, Cassady Craft, Jones Scott and Michael Beck have quoted that, "a new phenomenon, whose influence is steadily growing and giving a new dimension to the region, is oil pipelines, multinationals. But the current problems in the region, tends to undermine the prosperities of this region in peace times. This region can be defined in this way: a security complex "in formation": the operation of the "security dilemma" mechanism; the revival of the "great game" between Russia and Turkey, and Russia and Western powers; and the involvement and meddling of the regional powers. This region is also characterized by ethnic tensions, claims of self-determination, and inter and intrastate tensions and conflicts. Regional powers, acting responsibly, could not also contribute positively to state-building processes in the region, but also to regional cooperation and security."¹⁴ However, an important question must be taken into account in this analysis: How long would this instability last as to provoke a wide regional dimension over powers' interests?

15 Berstsche, Gary; Craft, Cassady, Jones, Scott; Beck, Michael. "Crossroads and Conflict": "Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia". London, Great Britain, Routledge Publishers, 2000, pp. 52. See, *Caucasia 2*: pp. 24-35.

16 Martin Wright. *Power Politics*, Edited by Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad. London: Leicester University Press, Royal Institute of International Affairs. 1995, p.160.

Is the Caucasus a "buffer zone? Martin Wright¹⁶ has defined it as a "region occupied by one or more powers between two or more stronger powers; it is sometimes described as a "power vacuum."¹⁷

For the Caucasian states being the role of buffer would be an ideal solution at the moment because the stronger neighboring powers perceive that they have vital interests in the region and to try to prevent others from controlling the possible newcomers powers in the region. One the regional power is, Russia that considers its presence in the Caucasus as a vital factor for its national security and cannot accept the influence of others. Moscow fears the vacuum in the region because other powers—hostile to Russia—tends to fill the zone and grab to Russia its "frontier province." The economic weakness of Russia decreases its influence in Caucasus region, remaining impotent before its former Soviet states. In spite of its new-fashion politics, Russia still cannot sell its dividends to CIS and Caucasus region as a new and reliable power. Moreover, the problems in the region are more against Russia than any other powers nearby. To be a buffer is not a blessing for small countries because the region becomes the theater of war. That is happening in the Caucasus and the increasing of "bufferization" that means this region needs a "responsible supervision" of all interested parties (Russia, China, Iran, Turkey and the West). There are some important prospects for regional security in the Caucasus that can be pointed in six factors:

1. Drastic changes within Russia; the coming to power of a "qualitatively" different leadership

17 Op cit. 1995.

- (outright dictatorship, authoritarian democracy, democratic reformers, corporate statism in the service of the leading economic interest groups).
2. A definite solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
 3. A rapid and successful state-building process within Caucasian states by themselves.
 4. A deal between Russia and Western powers on their interests and rights in the Caucasus; setting a certain and clear framework for their cooperation and the economic development of the region.
 5. Dramatic increase in the proven quantity of oil reserves in the Caspian Sea and/or significant rise of oil prices.
 6. A definitive decision on the construction of a main export pipeline from Baku to Calhan.¹⁸

Since rulers in most states have historically not sought to protect minority population, minority-rights guarantees had to operate through the prospect of external sanctions and rewards. When the Westphalian model,¹⁹ failed because rulers considered it very strict and very idealist in keeping the minority rights in other states, it was supplanted by the term "contracting". It meant the rulers commit themselves to certain domestic subject to external rewards or concessions. In case of symmetrical minorities, where the majority or ruling group in one state forms a minority in another state and vice versa, rulers may respect minority rights with the expectation of concessions by their counterparts. However, rulers preferred to assimilate

¹⁸ Op cit, pp. 53-54.

¹⁹ Lake, David, and Rothchild, Donald. *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict*, Princeton University Press, First Edition, p. 229, 1998.



minorities domestically while preserving co-ethnics or co-religionists within the borders of others states, but fear of reprisals limits incentives to defect from a mutual guarantee. During European religious wars of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and during the recasting of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most rulers sought to eliminate minority in their own wars. Nowadays, it is not enough to say that minorities are saved from other strong powers, even there are ethnic strife promoted for a nationalist leader or war comes from opposed leaders to regimes in power.

Therefore, the situation in the Caucasus, has not only ethnical and religious characteristics as part of the instability in the region. The main interest is not based on ethnic reanimation as a way to begin a war, it goes farther: nuclear deposits after former Soviet countries, oil pipelines, and nuclear proliferation in hands of new leaders, ones more radical than others. The continuous instability in the Caucasus but particularly the war in Chechnya has forced to Moscow to increase conventional weapons as great influxes to defend the region from radical groups coming from or financed, according to Russian thesis, by Islamic countries as Arabia Saudi, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan. At about \$1 billion worth of weapons have been transferred to the Caucasus from Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, included high-tech weapons as t-80 main tanks, armored fighting vehicles and weapons of mass destruction, missiles SCUDS-B ballistic missiles and portable delivery systems that are allegedly chemical weapons.²⁰

Besides, the region is recognized as a zone of drugs trafficking and money laundering by the so called, "Islamic

²⁰ Op cit, "Reconciling Disparate Views on Caucasus Security", p. 230.

groups with a strict moral and social code". The same groups that have always boasted that in Islamic governments do not exist corruption. However, Chechen fighters have found necessary to get weapons in anyway, using drugs trafficking and money laundering to finance its "just cause" against Russians. Those pipelines supply of natural gas or oil to Russia. Moscow will never leave Chechnya although the war continues in that destroyed republic.

In Central Asia where the instability is most noticed in the southern part of this region, when Taleban government was in existence. Russia has had a military presence there due to fundamentalist movements supported by neighbor Islamic countries. The vacuum in that region after Soviet Union collapse force to Moscow to sign a new community as a transplantation of former USSR. As was quoted before, it is the current Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In addition, strategically Russia has had to fight against rampant groups and the permanent domination policy in Central Asia and Caucasus. "The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilized states which are brought into contact with half-savage nomad populations possessing no fixed social organizations. In such cases it always happens that the more civilized state is forced, in the interests of security of its frontiers and its commercial relations, to exercise a certain ascendancy over those which turbulent and unsettle character make them undesirable neighbors."²¹

This great game is an integral part of modern Russian foreign policy. The collapse of the USSR, Moscow

21 Prince Gorchakov, Russian Foreign Minister, 1864. Taken from *The New Central Asian Game*, Quoted in Peter Hopkirk, "The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia", New York: Kodansha America, Inc, 1992; p. 304.

immediately labeled Central Asia as totally separate—culturally, racially and religious. The collapse of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union meant that Central Asian leaders had to dissolve their own Communist parties or have their political credibility challenged. Boris Yeltsin called to this CIS, Commonwealth of Independent States, the Central Asian leaders, Commonwealth of Islamic States (CIS) and president Bill Clinton, Newly Independent States (NIS), unknowing the Russian interests in Central Asia. But how can one catalogue this region, a vacuum region as was explained before, or pivotal states? Robert S. Chase, Emily B. Hill, and Paul Kennedy have proposed this framework with American focus, “emphasize specific nations whose future will profoundly affect their surrounding regions.”²² They suggest five criteria to evaluate when selecting pivotal states: population, geographical location, economic potential, physical size, and capacity to affect regional and international stability.

As tends to happen in the Caucasus region, the Russian living in Central Asian states are about 45% in Kazakhstan 22 in Kyrgyzstan, 13% in Turkmenistan, 11%, and 10% in Tajikistan. These Russian people force to Russia to invoke a spirit of continue signing bilateral defense treaties with Central Asian countries, called as Collective Security Treaty. Richard Pipes suggest that a modified Brezhnev Doctrine is in place: Russia sees any country that was once part of The Soviet Union as falling within the sphere of its security interests.²³ As a result, Moscow is weak, frustrated and desperate over her eroding imperial position,

22 “Pivotal States and U.S. Strategy.” *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 1996, p. 33.

23 Pipes, Richard. “Is Russia Still an Enemy?” *Foreign Affairs*, September-October 1997, p.73.

but ultimately sees her real border as that of Central Asia with China, Iran, and Afghanistan.²⁴ The West considers in its own theory that Central Asia will be in a near future a region of high conflicts, decided through NATO's strategy include the zone into the Central Command's Area of Responsibility in 1999. This "intromission"—as Russia qualifies it—NATO seeks to expand its "peace"—keeping forces in a "Centrazbat". From that, Russia tries to revert this Western's strategy increasing its presence in Central Asian countries and the Caucasus. So that, Russia tends to loose an immensely territory before extended from Tsars era to Bolshevik Revolution as its first step; from Bolshevik Revolution to World War II as a second step and from the end of World War II to invasion in Afghanistan 1979, called as the last military adventure and death of Brezhnev Doctrine.

According to expert like A.A. Danilovich²⁵, assumes that "there is no guarantee the CIS (at least in its current form) will be maintained, in as much as the new geopolitical situation in the Commonwealth is extremely unstable. Danilovich quoted that disintegration (centrifugal) processes in Russia and several European and Asiatic countries may become more and more active."²⁶

24 Blank J., Stephen. "Energy, Economics, and Security in Central Asia: Russia and its Rivals" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1995), p. 15.

25 A.A. Danilovich is a retired Colonel General, eminent Soviet military strategist and former General Staff officer, served in a series of distinguished command and staff positions.

26 In Danilovich analysis on New Military Doctrines of the CIS and Russia: specifically, "The Situation Requires New Military Doctrines for the CIS and Russia." *The Journal of Soviet Military Studies*, Frank Cass and Company Limited, London, Vol. 5, Number, 4. December 1992.

Independently the current situation in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the security in the region is (and must be) a historical priority for Russia in turbulent regions where is constantly affected from various radical groups. It is necessary a close cooperation with international security systems: *global*, on a basis of the United Nations; *European*, extending through all European region and related with North Atlantic Treaty Organization's enlargement, with the inclusion of CIS countries (Russia), Eastern European countries and other European states; *Asian Pacific*, with participation of the USA, CIS, China, Japan, and other countries of the Asian—Pacific Ocean Region.

As it continues turbulent, Central Asia and Caucasus regions can be considered more fragmented into small pieces or possible new alliances. There are three variants or hypothetical fragmentation models in the regions.

Model 1: The CIS remains as it is, in its current form will need a lot of political and economic stability. With the creation of joint armed forces in whole Commonwealth, Russia would be the nucleus of the entire CIS security system. Here, Russia would have two ways: to avoid the creation of a CIS's military forces, and the other to justify Moscow's military presence in the region. The first one sounds like an old-fashioned USSR Red Army with whole control over the Central Asia; the second one sounds riskier because Russia's economy is not enough strong as to keep only Russian forces in the region. Now, Russia has rejected to change the Charter of the CIS because new relations in the region would put in danger the integrity of the region.

Model 2: The CIS breaks up into isolated economics, new military relations would destroy the Commonwealth.

New alliances can be formed after a destroyed CIS, for example, a Union of Slavic States headed by Russia; a Union of Central Asian States headed by Kazakhstan, the biggest republic of the CIS; a Union of Central National Republics headed by Russia and Kazakhstan; a Union of North Caucasus States, the nearest states to Russia; or a Union of Caucasian States headed by Chechnya.

Model 3: The CIS breaks up into independent states, with limited cooperation in the economic and partially, military—political spheres. Here can be occurs bilateral rapprochements. Each country would create its own armed forces to ensure its own security. In this model could occur two variants: the first, the Central Asian countries will seek alliance with China, Iran or Turkey, and others may seek join to NATO forces and Atlantic Alliance will enter the region easier. Chechnya, the most radical republic will orientate its politics to Pakistan or Iran. Besides, Turkey is not enough interested in the Caucasus region, moreover when this region belongs to Russian territory.

The Central Asian countries as a powder keg, brings to mind the bloody collapse of former Yugoslavia. The security contention failed and nationalism was stronger than a possible political solution in the region. The complex geographical of Central Asian and the Caucasus countries is multidirectional. For example, the republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan belong to the Central Asia region; at same time Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Azerbaijan y Dagestan belong to the Caspian region and Turkey and Georgia, belong to Black Sea region. However the whole Caucasian region belong to the Black Sea and Caspian regions.



In addition, what would happen if the CIS breaks up into small pieces and the Islamic world led by Arabia Saudi, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan absorb the region? Possibly, the Central Asian states with a strong Turkish and Iranian heritage would incorporate the region—geographically—into the Middle East and religiously into the Islamic world. Nowadays, the strong way taken of the Islamic movements toward the recovery of Islamic countries—once under Soviet Union force— is part of a regional politics of the most powerful Islamic countries. If it happens, there will be a very thin line separating the Christian Orthodox from Islamic religion. In Western Europe the same would happen Catholic religion from Islamic and Orthodox ones. The “buffer regions” like contention zones or the “bufferization” will disappear to bring inevitably closer relations between ethnic and religious groups for the good or the bad. However, there is a question that could be answered properly as events go on in the region. How much importance do strong countries would give to ethnic and religion issues when those regions (Central Asia and Caucasus) will have a dramatic struggle in terms of oil, energy, natural gas, exportation and import, new markets and international investments? Considering this situation, ethnic and religious problems may be reduced into ashes.

CONCLUSION

The war or political instability in Chechnya has been considered as the most serious place of instability for the precarious Russian Federation. In spite of other affected the Russia's stability in the region, those ones was solved quickly. If Russia continues as long as Chechen fighters do, the war will last the time both groups consider necessary. Unfortunately, from Russia and Chechen guerrilla persists

a lack of will to initiate formal peace conversations acceding to end the war. Russia says the negotiation must be take place according to Russian constitution and Chechnya as part of Russian territory. However, Chechen fighters always insisted in getting an independent republic from Russia as historical right. Independently, what both sides want about Chechnya, the republic is whole destroyed, with any infrastructure for industry and economic development for Chechen society where Russian live there too. It means that if it always depended from Russian economy, today's can be more evident. While this occurs there, the Great Game in Central Asian states goes ahead.

The USSR collapsed after dominating Central and East European countries. In the last decade of XX century, Russia has been able in solving other conflicts but Chechnya has been since century XIX a permanent thorn in the heart of Russian pride. Although Vladimir Putin inaugurated his presidency launching a powerful military invasion in Chechnya to control it, in effect it was, however it does not guarantee the war has finished. But it could be possible a realistic engagement or a comprehensive encounter between Chechens and Russians in a near future

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