Vassily Klimentov

Coping with Defeat: The Russian State Duma's Views of Chechnya after the First Chechen War

Abstract: The First Chechen War (1994–96) was a watershed moment in Russian domestic politics. It has greatly influenced the elites' transitions that occurred in the 1990s. Interestingly, the Russian defeat in the war has not, as one might have expected, marginalised the Soviet-era nationalist security elites most responsible for starting and losing the war. Instead, it has reinforced their influence on policy while discrediting the liberals who opposed the conflict. Examining the debates about Chechnya in the State Duma in 1996–97, this article suggests that there are two reasons for this: the continued perception that the liberals and President Boris Yeltsin were responsible for the Chechen War and the controversial Khasavyurt Accord that ended it, and the fear that a weak Russia may collapse due to a separatist domino effect born out of Chechnya.

Keywords: Chechnya, Russia, First Chechen War, State Duma, Imam Shamil

Introduction

The First Chechen War (1994–96, hereafter the Chechen War) was a defining moment in post-Soviet Russian history. More than any other event, it illustrated Russia's difficulty in shedding its imperial legacy after the Soviet collapse. Fearing Chechen separatism, Russian President Boris Yeltsin launched a brutal and indiscriminate war in December 1994 to keep Chechnya inside the Russian Federation. Facing fierce Chechen popular resistance, opposition from Russian public opinion towards the rising number of casualties, and, ultimately, acknowledging its own military's lack of preparation for this type of conflict, the Kremlin eventually appealed for peace with the Chechens.

In August 1996, the on-and-off negotiations led to a settlement signed in the town of Khasavyurt in Dagestan. However, this did not solve the issues of Chechen-Russian relations and simply pushed back the decision

on Chechnya's status to 2001. It also saw the war-torn and bankrupt Yeltsin administration make promises regarding the financing of Chechen reconstruction that it never planned to keep. On the Russian side, security sector and political elites, and even some liberals, saw the Khasavyurt Accord as a retreat, an unacceptable concession made by Russia. Among the former KGB, the military, the nationalist deputies of the State Duma, and the Lower House of the Russian Parliament, such perceptions fuelled a revanchist attitude towards Chechnya. On the Chechen side, amidst competition between nationalist and Islamist leaders, some Chechens similarly saw the accord as a temporary solution that was too accommodating to Russian interests.

In retrospect, the Chechen War was a watershed moment that made the "Chechen factor" central in Russian domestic politics. At the time, whilst the peace achieved in Khasavyurt seemed to vindicate the position of the liberal and pro-Western politicians in Russia who had most strongly opposed the war, it also created a suction effect that led to the strengthening of hard-line politicians and people from the security services. While some of these people had already been integrated into Yeltsin's team before the war (and had been instrumental in starting the war), many security services operators ascended to top positions after the war. As Andrei Kozyrev, Yeltsin's liberal minister of foreign affairs, once remarked, the Chechen War fostered the "revenge of the [Soviet] bureaucracy" (quoted in Aven and Koch, 2013: 194–96). From a broader perspective, it marked the beginning of the Russian authoritarian drift in domestic and foreign policy.

While many scholars have worked on the Chechen War, the historiography has not systematically engaged with the question of why the defeat in Chechnya discredited the liberals and not the security services (on the First Chechen War: Lieven, 1998; Rakhmanova, 2012; Souleimanov, 2007; Trenin and Malashenko, 2004; Wilhelmsen, 2016; Yemelianova and Broers, 2020). This article fills this gap by investigating the discussions on Chechnya at the State Duma in 1996–97 and the proceedings of the "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" conference (hereafter "the conference") organised by the State Duma in October 1997. It argues that at least two factors have led to the liberals' marginalisation and, correspondingly, the rise of the security elites: the continued perception that the liberals and Yeltsin were responsible for both the Chechen War itself and its controversial resolution in Khasavyurt, and the fear that

a weak Russia may collapse due to a separatist domino effect born out of Chechnya.

This article builds on the analytical notes about the North Caucasus produced by various governmental agencies for the State Duma and on the records of the State Duma debates available at the State archive of the Russian Federation (*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, GARF) in Moscow. It also relies on the proceedings of the "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" conference available in GARF.

The article is structured in three parts. The first part offers context about the Russian-Chechen conflict and the elites' transitions in Russia in the early to mid-1990s. The second part is split into three sections and discusses the debates on Chechnya at the State Duma in 1996–97. The final part examines the proceedings of the conference.

Chechnya and the Elites' Transitions in Russia in the 1990s

Following the end of the Soviet Union, Russia witnessed a differentiated transition among its ruling elites. In the Kremlin, a political shift happened. Yeltsin had not been a politburo member since 1987 and had been marginalised from national level politics. After side-lining Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991, he built a team of young liberal reformers centred on Egor Gaidar, who was prime minister from June to December 1992. Many of these people came from outside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Yeltsin and Gaidar selected many collaborators precisely due to their lack of links to the communist elites, especially the security establishment (Aven and Koch, 2013: 17–19). In domestic and foreign policy, the new political elites were initially characterised by staunch anti-communism.

By contrast, although the failed August 1991 coup (engineered by the CPSU hardliners against Gorbachev) discredited the top members of the KGB and the military, the Soviet bureaucracy as a whole thrived in post-Soviet Russia. In the security sector, attitudes and beliefs changed more slowly than in the rest of society (Harding, 2020: 63–83). Likewise, many regional political elites in Russia and in other parts of the former Soviet Union held their power after 1992. Former first secretaries of the local communist parties stayed in power in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan,

Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan. Members of the former communist elites likewise ruled Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Tajikistan. In Russia, the neo-communists also originally stayed in power in the North Caucasus, Tatarstan, and many other republics and regions.

The competition between the new political elites and the old Soviet bureaucracy led to schizophrenic foreign and domestic policies in Moscow. While Yeltsin and Kozyrev pushed to end support for the communists in Afghanistan, the military and the former KGB argued that it was vital to maintain this support (Klimentov, 2022; Lyakhovsky, 1995: 610; Yeltsin, 2008: 109). When Yeltsin and Kozyrev built ties with the Tajik democrats and Islamists, the security elites argued that Russia should ally itself with the neo-Soviet groups in Tajikistan (Spolnikov, 1994).[1] Ultimately, nationalist groups, centred on Yeltsin's vice-president Alexandre Rutskoy who had previously pressured Gorbachev in a similar way (Chernyaev, 2003: Nov 1991), claimed that the Kremlin was not doing enough to defend Russia's interest in Transdniestria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Chechnya. Kozyrev insisted that these "national-patriotic groups" were constantly harassing the Kremlin.[2]

Answering the public backlash provoked by the mounting economic crisis following Gaidar's "shock therapy", Yeltsin integrated nationalist hardliners into the government of Victor Chernomyrdin, a Soviet era administrator from the CPSU, who replaced Gaidar in December 1992. Gaidar, however, remained in various roles in the new government during 1993. A similar shift happened among Yeltsin's advisers when people from the security elites increasingly challenged the liberals. By 1994, these representatives of the security sector would play a central role in pushing Yeltsin to wage a war in Chechnya.

While a detailed analysis of the decision-making process leading to the intervention in Chechnya lies beyond the scope of this article, it is important to underline that the security services faction advocated for it (on the decision-making leading to the war: Aven and Koch, 2013: 245–46; Baturin et al., 2011: 590–600; Lieven, 1998: 56–101; Souleimanov, 2007: 89–125; Zezina et al., 2011: 352). It included Nikolay Egorov, the ex-Governor of Krasnodar Region and Yeltsin's representative in Chechnya,

1 Anatoly Adamishin, interview, Moscow, August 2019.

2 Andrei Kozyrev, "Partiya voiny nastupaet", *Izvestia*, 151, 30 June 1992.

Victor Yerin, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Sergei Stepashin, the head of the Federal Security Service – a successor agency to the KGB, Oleg Lobov, the head of the Security Council, and Alexander Korzhakov, Yeltsin's bodyguard. Pavel Grachev, the minister of defence, had initially urged caution about using force in the North Caucasus, fearing that a war may lead to "the consolidation of the [North Caucasian] Islamic republics in their opposition to Russia" (Aven and Koch, 2013: 245–56, 272–73).[3] However, by 1994 he would change his mind and promise Yeltsin that the Russian forces would capture Grozny in a matter of days. Other politicians, such as Chernomyrdin, provided only lukewarm support for the conflict. Inside Chechnya, Doku Zavgaev and several other pro-Moscow leaders also supported the war. Ultimately, many politicians believed that starting a "small victorious war" in Chechnya was the solution to Yeltsin's decreasing popularity due to the many economic and political issues facing Russia. By contrast, liberals around Gaidar, who was in political opposition by 1994, Anatoly Chubais, the first deputy prime minister, Yuri Kalmykov, the minister of justice, Kozyrev, and most of Yeltsin's advisers opposed the conflict.

The Chechen War upended Russian domestic politics, discrediting many of its instigators. Yerin, Grachev, Korzhakov, and Lobov would be expelled from national politics by 1997. Despite the disaster, compounded by the spectacular hostage takeovers conducted by the Chechens in Budennovsk in Stavropol Krai in June 1995 and in Pervomayskoe and Kyzlyar in Dagestan in January 1996 (Klimentov, 2021: 374–408), and being blamed for starting the war, Yeltsin managed to remain in power. In fact, he was controversially re-elected to the presidency in June 1996 as the conflict was drawing to a close. Multiple irregularities, including a massive media bias in his favour as compared to his main challenger, the communist Gennady Zyuganov, overspending by his campaign beyond the limits authorised by electoral laws, and even fraud on the election day marred Yeltsin's re-election. Yet, Russian liberals, many of them, including Gaidar, by this time in opposition, and the West supported and applauded the re-election. They believed that keeping Yeltsin was still much better than

3 "Dokumenty ob obshchestvenno-politicheskoi situatsii v Severo-Kavkazskom regione", 4 December 1991, *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF), fond (f.) 10026, opis' (o.) 1, delo (d.) 2763, list (ll.) 1–12.

seeing the communists return (on Russia's 1990s politics: Belton, 2020: 50–210; Rakhmanova, 2012: 13–43).

While Yeltsin continued to be seen in Russian public opinion and abroad as a liberal and democrat – a factor that ironically led to the liberals being most blamed for the Chechen War – his actual political ideas and personality had considerably changed by 1996. He was no longer the staunch anti-communist who had prevailed over Gorbachev in 1991 and the A. Rutskoy – Ruslan Khasbulatov duo in 1993. He was a leader beset by health problems and alcoholism. Yeltsin's influence in making policy had been declining while power had passed to "the family", a group of actual relatives, oligarchs, advisers, and politicians around him. To stay in power, Yeltsin and his inner circle had already accepted compromises with hardliners, bringing many of the security elites into power in 1993–94. By 1996, amidst the war in the Balkans, the Chechen War, and the economic crisis in Russia, the Yeltsin administration further reversed course and embraced the neo-Soviet security elites and their agenda.

Hardliners consolidated their influence in the Kremlin. Stepashin, a moderate representative of the security services, was long in line to be Yeltsin's designated successor. The controversial generals Genady Troshev and Vladimir Shamanov, who had commanded Russian forces during the First Chechen War, remained influential in the army, harbouring revanchist attitudes towards the Chechens (Rakhmanova, 2012: 96–99; Troshev, 2017: 44–178). Vladimir Putin would in fact call them back to lead Russian forces during the Second Chechen War in 1999.

Replacing the hardliners discredited during the Chechen War, more people from the security services came to the Kremlin, further challenging the liberal faction. Yeltsin thus co-opted Alexander Lebed, the general who had negotiated the Khasavyurt Accord and who had come third in the 1996 presidential elections. In a matter of months, though, Chubais and the remaining liberals in the Kremlin managed to sideline Lebed. Ultimately, the symbol of the new transition among political elites was the replacement of Kozyrev by Yevgeny Primakov, the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service – another successor agency to the KGB. By 1998, Primakov would replace Chernomyrdin as prime minister, becoming popular in Russia and appearing as another prospective candidate to succeed Yeltsin. Amidst Primakov's rise, the new economic crisis in Russia in 1998 had ended up pushing the remaining liberals, such as Chubais and Boris Nemtsov, the deputy prime minister, out of government (Fishman, 2022: 199–297).

Nationalist and communist groups also saw their influence rise in the State Duma. The elections of 1995 had seen the strengthening of Zyuganov's communists, who tripled their representation compared to the 1993 parliament. In this victory's wake, the communist Gennadiy Seleznyov replaced Ivan Rybkin from the leftist Agrarian Party as chairman of the State Duma in 1996. Meanwhile, the nationalists of Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), who had infamously advocated for an unrestrained use of force in Chechnya,[4] lost seats but remained the third strongest party at similar levels to Yeltsin-Chernomyrdin's "Our Home – Russia" ("*Nash dom – Rossiya*") party. Among Westerners and liberals, the elections completely marginalised Gaidar's "Democratic Choice of Russia" ("*Demokraticheskii Vybor Rossii*") party, which lost most of its seats. Grigory Yavlinsky's "*Yabloko*" party now represented the depleted liberal and democratic opposition. In other words, nationalist forces, including the communists who held the majority with allied leftist groups, dominated the State Duma of the 2nd Convocation (December 1996–December 1999). Conversely, the pro-Yeltsin disparate coalition represented a comparatively smaller force.

Overall, the disastrous Chechen War, despite its rejection in Russian public opinion, had not discredited the patriotic-nationalist elites. Instead of what one might have expected, it had weakened the pro-Western democratic and liberal groups who had always opposed the war in the parliamentary elections in 1995 and the presidential elections of 1996. The nationalists had benefitted from three factors; firstly, people continued to see Yeltsin as the main liberal and blamed him and other liberals for the war; secondly, Yeltsin's administration's mishandling of the economy had overshadowed the war; and, thirdly, Russia's perceived humiliation in Chechnya amidst widespread corruption and dysfunction had led to people wishing for stronger political leaders, such as Lebed or Primakov. In other words, the Chechen War had nurtured nostalgia for the stability provided by Soviet communism.

The next part of this article shows how the debates about Chechnya at the State Duma in 1996–97 help explain the ascendency of the security and

4 Zhirinovsky famously debated with Boris Nemtsov on television during the Budennovsk hostage takeover. "V 1995-m Zhirinovskii oblil Nemtsova apel'sinovym sokom", *Meduza.io*, 29 March 2022.

nationalist elites in Russia in the Chechen War's aftermath. Amidst blame towards Yeltsin for starting the war, criticism of the Khasavyurt Accord, and fear that Chechnya may still destabilise Russia, the deputies of the State Duma, including the liberals, remained ambivalent about the future of Chechen-Russian relations. Strikingly, while the nationalist groups made the argument that Russia had still to protect itself from Chechnya, the liberals and the pro-Kremlin factions, in a minority at the State Duma, failed to present a way forward for the future of Chechen-Russian relations.

The State Duma's Debates about Chechnya in 1996–97

The State Duma of the 2nd Convocation was dominated by opponents of the Kremlin; this was a unique occurrence in Russia's history. This explains why most deputies were critical of Yeltsin's policies. Overall, the State Duma's debates on Chechnya featured three major themes that were often interconnected: (a) Yeltsin was blamed for the war in Chechnya and for the Russian military's poor performance in the war; (b) the reliance on force or on negotiation in dealing with the Chechens; and (c) criticism of the Khasavyurt Accord. Interestingly, the same themes also emerged between the lines in the participants' speeches during the "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" Conference, which is discussed in the final part of this article.

The Responsibility of Yeltsin

Not surprisingly, liberal and nationalist deputies blamed Yeltsin personally for the Chechen War. Their criticism was three-fold. They stressed the Kremlin's responsibility in starting and continuing the war, in the disastrous performance of the Russian military amidst reports of poor material conditions in the army,[5] and for either a too restrictive, or a too permissive,

5 "Dokumenty po voprosam, svyazannym s sobytiyami v Chechenskoy Respublike", January 1996–August 1996, GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1003, l. 95.

use of force. The latter aspect was in turn also featured in the debates at the parliament over the necessity to negotiate with the Chechens as explained below. In an example of the criticism Yeltsin faced, Vladimir Lopatin, the independent liberal deputy from Vologda, argued in March 1996 that "the war in Chechnya was a war between the democratic future and the totalitarian past of Russia".[6] Lopatin stressed that the massive casualties suffered by the Russian army and its unpreparedness had discredited Yeltsin. He had received, he claimed, 12,000 letters from citizens criticising the president and calling to end the war.[7]

Some North Caucasians who addressed the State Duma similarly pictured the events in Chechnya as Yeltsin's war, drawing a line between the Kremlin and the State Duma. In March 1995, Abdullah Khamzaev, a Chechen who had had a distinguished career in the Soviet and Russian ministries of interior affairs, argued to the Committee on Nationalities Affairs that "the so-called expression 'in the interests of preserving the indivisibility of the Russian [*rossiyskogo*] state' is leading to the planned extermination" of the Chechens. Yet, he noted, "as a Chechen, I cannot say which forces are doing that. It is only you, the Russian people, who can picture the President [Yeltsin] in the most negative ways".[8] Other Chechens similarly blamed the Kremlin for the conflict and the Caucasophobia it triggered in Russia.[9]

In January 1996, the Chechen socio-political movement "Islamic Way" ("*Islaman Nek*'"), which opposed Russia, similarly called on the newly elected State Duma to "show wisdom and curtail the actions of … the Kremlin" amidst heated debates over Russia's indiscriminate use of force in Chechnya in response to the attacks in Budennovsk, Pervomayskoe, and Kyzlyar, which the Islamic Way nevertheless condemned. Like the Russian public opinion, the Islamic Way felt that the State Duma could pressure the Kremlin into intensifying negotiations with Dzhokhar Dudayev, the leader of the Chechen separatists, to obtain a ceasefire.[10]

---

6 "Dokumenty po voprosam, svyazannym s sobytiyami v Chechenskoy Respublike", January 1996–August 1996, GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1004, l. 109.

7 Ibid.

8 "Dokumenty po podgotovke i provedeniyu parlamentskikh slushanii", March 1995, GARF, f. 10100, o. 2, d. 1351, ll. 1–11.

9 "Dokumenty po voprosam svyazannym s problemami Severnogo Kavkaza", January 1996–December 1996, GARF, f. 10100, o. 14, d. 488, l. 97.

10 GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1004, l. 98.

These debates show how various forces in Russia and even many Chechens continued to see the Chechen War as Yeltsin's war. This was ironic given that many deputies in the State Duma were more nationalistic than Yeltsin and that even in the Kremlin the decision to intervene had been largely due to Yeltsin's more hawkish advisers from the security sector. Still, this association helps explain why the liberals, represented by Yeltsin for the Russian public opinion, and not the security agencies or the nationalist deputies, ended up being blamed the most for the disaster in Chechnya.

Force or Negotiations

The State Duma increasingly wondered about which strategy to adopt towards the separatists when the Russian army became bogged down in Chechnya. While liberal deputies had already called for negotiations in 1995,[11] the dominant mood in the State Duma remained unclear. Although most deputies hoped for a ceasefire, the nationalists and communists who dominated the Committee on Nationalities Affairs believed that they could not compromise Russia's territorial integrity, even for peace.[12]

By early 1996, these debates took a more pressing turn amidst the hostage takeovers in Budennovsk, Pervomayskoe, and Kyzlyar that humiliated the Russian military, the exhaustion of the Russian forces, and the upcoming presidential election in Russia. At this point, despite the communist domination, the mood started to shift in the State Duma towards more decisive calls for a ceasefire without conditions with the Chechens. In January 1996, the State Duma adopted a resolution that clarified that it wanted the creation of a commission under the president to negotiate an end to the conflict. At the same time, it continued to blame Yeltsin for disregarding its previous "initiatives for a peaceful resolution".[13] The Kremlin was a convenient scapegoat for everything that went wrong in Chechnya.

Specific aspects regarding the Chechen War continued to divide the State Duma. Regarding terrorism, the deputies had condemned the attacks

11 GARF, f. 10100, o. 2, d. 1351, ll. 1–11.

12 "Dokumenty po podgotovke i provedeniyu parlamentskikh slushaniy", March 1995, GARF, f. 10100, o. 2, d. 1352, l. 198.

13 GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1003, ll. 1–2.

in Budennovsk, Kyzlyar, and Pervomayskoe. They overwhelmingly agreed that here too Yeltsin had failed in his policies. In January 1996, the State Duma passed a resolution stressing that "the taking of hostages, principally of women and children, had become the norm of behaviour of Dudayev's band[it] formations". The Chechens' actions, the resolution claimed, "stirred war across the North Caucasus through the use of extreme forms of terrorist acts". While the resolution noted that this "raised the question of how to prevent and adequately answer such bandit activities", it still called on the Russian army to have a "measured reaction" and not resort to indiscriminate attacks.[14]

Beyond this, different political factions offered differing responses to terrorism. Whilst Yavlinsky's liberals recognised that the Chechens had grievances and called for Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin's resignations, the communist and nationalist groups pushed for more forceful military operations. Zyuganov proposed a stronger condemnation of terrorism and accused Dudayev of trying to start "a large-scale war" across southern Russia. To him, the Russian army had to take "harder and more forceful actions against the Chechens".[15] The communists and various far-right groups believed that Yeltsin was not doing enough to win the war, and was too accommodating to the separatists who did not respect the ceasefires with Russia.

The tensions over Chechnya continued into the spring of 1996 amidst the State Duma's renewed call to Yeltsin to end the war and criticism of the Russian army's methods. Interestingly, such calls and criticism had spread across party lines, as even nationalists and communists wished for an end to the conflict. In March, twelve deputies, including representatives of Zhirinovsky's LDPR, communists and leftists, as well as liberals from "*Yabloko*" and Gaidar's party, issued a declaration claiming that Yeltsin's promises to develop "a plan for a peaceful settlement in the Chechen Republic had been a bluff".[16] The deputies further condemned the continuing "barbarian operations" of the Russian military and, in particular, the "'mop-ups" (*zachistki)* – the clearing operations featuring armed patrols and forceful house-to-house searches that primarily affected civilians.

14 Ibid,1–2.
15 Ibid., ll. 3, 8.
16 Ibid., l. 92.

Interestingly, several of the deputies who issued the call were already well-known for their involvement in Chechnya. Viktor Kurochkin and Yulii Rybakov had negotiated the release of hostages in Budennovsk and Arkady Yankovsky had been part of the negotiations on prisoners' exchanges.

That same month, the State Duma saw the return of the fact-finding multi-party mission it had sent to Chechnya. Led by Georgy Arbatov, a military analyst and member of "*Yabloko*", general Eduard Vorob'yev from the "Democratic Choice of Russia", and general Albert Makashov from the Communist Party, the mission presented a damning report about the situation in the Russian army, again criticising Yeltsin for this unmitigated disaster. The military suffered from poor material conditions, the mission's report argued. Diseases and poor hygiene conditions afflicted Russian soldiers who lacked weapons, armoured vehicles, equipment, and medical support. The soldiers' salaries were often unpaid, the families of killed and wounded soldiers waited for months for compensation, and the soldiers did not receive their promised decorations. Furthermore, the report noted, many Russian soldiers wondered about the legal justification for the war and their own status as combatants.[17]

In parallel, the State Duma's mission of Arbatov, Vorob'yev, and Makashov had also assessed the morale in the military, reaching a key conclusion. The deputies, all of whom were prominent specialists in military affairs, argued that the Russian army had divided opinions on a potential ceasefire and on the use of force in Chechnya. The senior officers advocated for forceful actions, including encircling separatist troops, using "mop-ups", and firing without warning on presumed hostile Chechens, in combination with negotiations with the Chechens at village-level. These were the same tactics the Russians had been employing since 1995. By contrast, the junior officers believed that this approach had proved ineffective. They argued instead for either a withdrawal and blockade of Chechnya after evacuating the ethnic Russian population, or for an indiscriminate use of force in Chechnya to combat the separatists.[18] The difference in assessments was striking and showed both the radicalisation but also discouragement of the soldiers and junior officers in the Russian army who had suffered heavy losses in the war.

17 Ibid., ll. 95, 103–12.

18 Ibid.

Beyond this, the mission's report clearly showed that the Russian army's command generally believed that it could still win the war. This helps explain why the military would see the peace in Khasavyurt as a stab in the back from the civilians and harbour revanchist attitudes towards the Chechens. It also explained the disconnection between the military and the civilian authorities in Moscow.

Ultimately, the mission demonstrated how the State Duma had moved towards a multi-party support to unconditional negotiations with the Chechens. A major incentive for peace was by then the fear that the Chechen War may further spread to Russia.[19] In the conclusion of their report, Arbatov, Vorob'yev, and Makashov emphatically argued that "there was no realistic alternative to peace negotiations" in Chechnya. However, they did not explain what the contours of this "peace" should be. As we will see below, this question rapidly shattered the consensus reached at the State Duma.

The Khasavyurt Accord and Its Aftermath

The tension over how to resolve the Chechen War continued after the signing of the controversial Khasavyurt Accord. While deputies across parties wanted the conflict to end, many nationalists and communists were not ready for this end to come at any cost.

Meanwhile, as Lebed and Aslan Maskhadov, who took command of the Chechen forces after the death of Dudayev in April 1996, signed the accord, another high-level political mission returned from Chechnya. General Kim Tsagolov, Chernomyrdin's special envoy to Chechnya who had also been a senior political adviser in Afghanistan, reported his findings to the State Duma. Tsagolov highlighted that violence in Chechnya continued due to "uncontrolled groups of Chechen fighters".[20] Many Chechens still called on Dagestan to rise against Russia, he argued. Tsagolov, unlike other observers, also emphasised the Islamist danger in the North Caucasus,[21]

---

19 Ibid.; and "Porucheniya Pravitel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii po problemam Severnogo Kavkaza", 22 January 1996–20 September 1996, GARF, f. 10121, o. 2, d. 263.

20 GARF, f. 10121, o. 2, d. 263, ll. 86–108.

21 Russian observers emphasised ethnic and national factors as drivers of conflict in the North Caucasus. See the talks at the State Duma's Committee on Nationalities Affairs: GARF, f. 10100, o. 2, d. 1351, ll. 1–11.

although he insisted that ethnic and separatist tensions remained the main drivers of the conflict.

Overall, Tsagolov's report demonstrated how many policymakers believed that the Khasavyurt Accord had not solved the "Chechen problem" in the long term. The rising influence of Muslim countries in the North Caucasus and their support for Islamist forces heightened the threat to Russia according to these policymakers. Some Chechen leaders' provocative statements reinforced their concerns. In Khasavyurt, Shamil Basayev, the infamous Chechen commander, had implicitly threatened an attack on Makhachkala, Dagestan's capital.[22] Likewise, regular Chechen encroachments into Russian territory fuelled the tensions and the belief that Chechnya would remain a security issue for Moscow.

In this context, the Khasavyurt Accord led to controversy in the State Duma. While the deputies ultimately recognised the accord as legitimate, many did so reluctantly, fearing for the future of the Russian population in Chechnya and the security of the Russian regions neighbouring the breakaway republic.[23] Unlike the nationalists and communists, the liberals, alongside the pro-Kremlin party, supported the Khasavyurt Accord. They generally argued that it was a necessary step in normalising Russian-Chechen relations, and that Russia had to re-establish trade relations with Grozny and help the reconstruction of Chechnya. Yet the liberals' support came with reservations. Firstly, most liberals tried to simply move past the Chechen War, arguing that it had produced no winners or losers. They thus denied justice and reparation to the Chechens for the Russian attack and the atrocities of the conflict.[24] Secondly, even the liberals perceived the accord as incomplete and poorly implemented. In December 1996, Yavlinsky protested that the Chechens continued to kidnap and ransom Russian citizens from regions around Chechnya. Exasperated, Yavlinsky threatened Maskhadov with a blockade if he did not address the issue.[25]

22 Aleksandr Budberg, "Za dva dnya ot Basayeva. Voidut li modzhakhedy v Makhachkalu?", 2 October 1996. The article circulated in the State Duma. "Dokumenty k proektam federal'nykh zakonov po Severnomu Kavkazu", 1 October 1996–31 October 1996, GARF, f. 10100, o. 13, d. 1252, l. 35.

23 Ibid., ll. 48, 113.

24 Ibid., ll. 15–22.

25 Ibid., l. 152.

Conversely, resistance to the Khasavyurt Accord was greatest among the army, the communists, and the nationalists as they feverishly denounced the accord at the State Duma and in the media.[26] In a landmark speech and resolution, general Lev Rokhlin, a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya from the pro-Yeltsin party and chairman of the State Duma's Defence Committee, gave massive criticism to the deal. Months before breaking up with Yeltsin, Rokhlin declared that Russia had achieved none of its objectives in Chechnya while leaving behind thousands of hostile Chechen fighters. It had waged an incompetent war, the pinnacle of which had been the loss of Grozny days before the signing of the Khasavyurt Accord, amidst massive Russian casualties.

Strikingly, Rokhlin did not doubt that Chechnya would become independent while remaining a source of security threats to Russia; these threats included kidnapping, smuggling, terrorism, and separatism. Chechnya could mark the "beginning of [Russia's] breakdown", he declared.[27] The Chechens, Rokhlin believed, would train fighters for "liberation wars" against Russia and try to annex territories in the North Caucasus to gain access to the sea. In that, Rokhlin claimed, the Chechens might benefit from further support from Turkey and the Middle East. Ultimately, Rokhlin's apocalyptic speech combined many of the criticism and fears that had accumulated in the State Duma regarding Chechnya. Most importantly, echoing Tsagolov's report, it showed how many deputies, who had been interested in ending the war, felt that the price of peace may ultimately have been too high. As before, such deputies saw Yeltsin and the liberals who had supported the unconditional end of the war as the main culprits for Russia's failures.[28]

Other deputies supported Rokhlin and offered even stronger condemnations of the accord in unpassed resolutions.[29] They complained that it had legitimised terrorism, humiliated Russia, and jeopardised Russia's territorial integrity. The communist Victor Panin meanwhile protested pragmatically that the main problem was Russia's commitment to help Chechnya economically.[30] His colleague Aleksandr Kulikov agreed that Russia should

---

26 Ibid., l. 154. A Cossack colonel from Tomsk published one such piece titled: "Nado Zashchishchat'sya!", *Znamya mira* 11, *Russkiy Vestnik* 35–37, December 1996.

27 Ibid., l. 1.

28 Ibid., ll. 1–11, 122.

29 Ibid., ll. 85–89, 118.

30 Ibid., l. 30.

not provide humanitarian and reconstruction help without ensuring that the Chechen leadership safeguarded the interests of ethnic Russians. He also claimed that Lebed had changed the accord at the last minute to give Chechnya more sovereignty compared to what the military command had originally agreed upon.[31] Zhirinovsky's LDPR even advocated to reject the accord altogether and to arrest Maskhadov for murdering Russians.[32] Even pro-Russian Chechens from the town of Urus-Martan lamented that the deal signed by Moscow had overlooked their interests.[33]

Zyuganov himself published an article in the newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in October 1996 offering blanket condemnation of the accord. Chastising Yeltsin for the war and, particularly, for the peace, the unsuccessful presidential candidate wrote at length about his and others' pervasive fear of a separatist domino effect across Russia and of the kidnappings organised by the Chechens. Crucially, he embraced the army's argument that the politicians had not allowed it to win the war. They had stabbed the army in the back, Zyuganov argued.[34] Such criticism continued in 1997 and shaped the popular negative perception of the Khasavyurt Accord in Russia. Overlooking the fact that the accord had ended the disastrous war, few deputies appeared ready to defend it.

In this context, the State Duma's Committee on Geopolitics organised a roundtable evocatively titled "Chechnya – A New Reality" in February 1997. The LDPR's Alexei Mitrofanov presided at the event, which also included Yury Ivanov from the Communist Party, Anatoly Kotkov from a leftist party, Konstantin Borovoy, an influential independent liberal deputy, Nina Zatsepina, another independent deputy, and several scholars. Overall, the roundtable reflected the same preoccupations about Chechnya in the State Duma as in 1996.

Its participants overwhelmingly agreed that, despite the fact that the Khasavyurt Accord left the issue of Chechnya unresolved, Chechnya's independence had become unavoidable. Most notably, they wondered about how this new situation would impact Russia amidst fears of a domino effect, of the growing influence of Muslim countries in Russia's South, and of the criminality streaming in from Chechnya. Zatsepina, a deputy

31 Ibid., ll. 43–45.
32 Ibid., ll. 15, 28.
33 Ibid., l. 59.
34 Ibid., ll. 32–34.

from the southern Krasnodar region, feared that the regions on the Black Sea may now ask for more autonomy and accused the West of using the Islamism-fuelled instability in Chechnya against Russia.[35] Borovoi similarly feared that Chechnya would continue fuelling instability in the North Caucasus.[36] Kotkov, in turn, reverted to the old argument that Chechnya had not defeated Russia, but that Moscow had decided to leave. After losing Grozny in August 1996, Russian forces could have bombed it and hence put pressure on the Chechen negotiators, he noted.[37] As others at the State Duma, he claimed that Russia should not provide any economic help to Chechnya and establish a *cordon sanitaire* around the republic.

Others made similar arguments by dwelling on the supposed benefits that Chechnya and other peripheral regions had been receiving from Moscow. "If they want to leave, let them leave for good right now – no need for this 5 years transition; and if they leave, we treat them as a hostile state, and limit economic ties with them and support to them … and man our joint border", Ivanov argued.[38] The same went for the rest of the North Caucasus, he believed. Likewise, Mitrofanov noted, Russia should "make all these republics pay to stay in the Russian Federation, and [then] make Chechnya beg to return".[39] Such nationalist sentiments echoed the Russian civilising mission discourse that explained how the Russian conquest had supposedly brought progress and modernity to the Caucasus since the nineteenth century. It also told of the rising Caucasophobia and Islamophobia across Russia in the 1990s.[40]

The roundtable confirmed the dominant mood in Russia in 1997. Many Russian political elites from various parties had not fully accepted the Khasavyurt Accord; they saw Chechnya as an unresolved problem. While some nationalists harboured revanchist attitudes and wanted to accelerate Chechnya's re-integration into Russia, others saw the solution

35 "Stenogramma kruglogo stola 'Chechnya – Novaya Real'not' ", February 1997, GARF, f. 10100, o. 14, d. 5240, ll. 40–43.

36 Ibid., l. 51.

37 Ibid., ll. 52–53.

38 Ibid., ll. 36–40.

39 Ibid., ll. 43–8.

40 "Dokumenty po voprosam svyazannym s problemami Severnogo Kavkaza", January 1997–December 1999, GARF, f. 10100, o. 14, d. 494, ll. 115–124.

in complete isolation. This meant cutting economic and political ties with Grozny and taking no responsibility for the destructions of the war.

At the same time, all deputies remained concerned about the security risk that the instability in Chechnya represented for Russia, a fear fuelled by the security agencies. By 1997, the final draft of the official "Conception of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus" circulated in the State Duma reflected these perceptions. It pictured the rising ethnic and nationalist conflicts in Chechnya, alongside the rising influence of Muslim countries, as major threats for Russia. Beyond this, it presented Islamism and sectarian conflicts as an issue, noting that the "active penetration of Wahhabism represented a real threat to national cohesion" in the North Caucasus and Southern Russia.[41] Additional analysis shared with the State Duma by Russian research centres on the North Caucasus further stressed how "the local authorities [in Chechnya] were often involved in the raising intolerance [towards Russia]".[42]

Yet, while the Conception detailed these threats, it said nothing of a potential response. On Chechnya, it argued that work on a political solution should be initiated by December 2001, as had been agreed in Khasavyurt, and economic support should be provided to the breakaway republic. Such support, the Conception claimed, was necessary to prevent Russia from losing influence in the North Caucasus to other Muslim and Western countries.[43] It was, however, unclear what type of relations Russia and Chechnya may have in the future. *In fine*, such documents demonstrated the ambiguity that prevailed regarding Chechnya in the State Duma. Deputies across factions saw Grozny with anxiety as to the danger it may represent for Russia and held uncertain expectations regarding the future of Chechen-Russian relations.

41 Ibid., ll. 66–91.
42 Ibid., l. 115.
43 Ibid., ll. 74–86.

The "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" Conference

Two-hundred years after his birth, the "Shamil and the Caucasian War. History and Modernity" conference at the State Duma (October 1997) examined the figure of Imam Shamil, the famous military, political, and religious leader of the North Caucasians during the war against the Russian Empire, known as the Caucasian War (1817–1864). Historical debates have focused on Shamil's origins, his political project, and his beliefs as various groups have tried to appropriate his memory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (on Imam Shamil: Perović, 2018: 21–75; Gammer, 1992: 729–77). Crucially, Shamil remains both a divisive and a uniting figure among Russians and Caucasians. After leading the Caucasian insurgency from 1834 to 1859, Shamil surrendered to Tsar Alexander II. The latter showed mercy to the defeated leader and offered him a retirement in exile in Russia. In 1869, Alexander II allowed Shamil to go on *Hadj* to Saudi Arabia where he soon died.

In this context, Shamil's legacy is both seen to represent resistance to Russia's colonial rule and an acceptance of the Russian domination as ineluctable. This duality has rendered Shamil an appealing topic for different political forces. In the State Duma, opposite political factions thus participated in organising the conference. Nadirshakh Khachilaev, a deputy from Dagestan who headed the Union of Russian Muslims and had joined Chernomyrdin's "Our Home – Russia" party, and Dmitri Rogozin, a Russian nationalist from the Congress of Russian Communities party, were the main organisers of the conference. The pro-Kremlin Russian Regions party, the governmental Commission for State Education, and the State Duma Committee on Nationalities also supported the organisation.

The event's participants discussed Shamil's ambivalent legacy and in its wake the Chechen War. Reinforcing this connection between past and present, Vladimir Zorin from the "Our Home – Russia" party who chaired the conference insisted in his opening remark that Shamil's great-great-grandson, Shamil Shafi Ghazi Magum, was attending the event.[44] By

44 "Dokumenty po podgotovke i provedeniyu konferentsii", October 1997, GARF, f. 10100, o. 14, d. 4718, ll. 1–3.

treating the great Caucasian leader's heritage selectively, the participants advanced pro-Russian and pro-separatist arguments. However, while they all condemned the Chechen War, they could not hide strong divergences as to the Russian legacy in the North Caucasus and the future of Chechen-Russian relations. In fact, three ideological groups emerged.

Firstly, several liberal deputies and historians insisted on Shamil's complex legacy and distinguished between the nineteenth century and the present. They struck reconciliatory notes regarding the Chechen War, while insisting on the role Islam had played in Shamil's political project. Khachilaev hence celebrated the "progressist and humanist meaning of *Sharia*". Challenging the discourse on Russia's civilising mission, he noted that Shamil's Imamate incarnated "the best forms of a modern democratic state". At the same time, Khachilaev, taking an almost Marxist stance, claimed that Shamil "did not fight against Russia, [but] against slavery in the guise of the Russian and Caucasian aristocracy, governors, and officials". Khachilaev therefore suggested that the North Caucasus would have no reason to oppose a democratic Russia, especially if it were given the right to embrace Islam. Strikingly, he concluded his passionate speech with "Allahu Akbar".[45]

Several historians similarly insisted on the uniquely democratic nature of Shamil's political project and his complex and difficult relation with Moscow, while also opposing the Russian nationalist scholars at the conference. Besides this, they avoided commenting on the recent Chechen War. Ibragim Khadzhmurat, a historian from the North Caucasus, criticised his fellow academics, such as Vladimir Degoev, who tried "to prove that there had been no Russian-Caucasian War, that there had been no colonial policy of tsarism".[46] Leonid Tsukiyanin, another historian, similarly struck a balance between praising Shamil for building a modern Islamic state in the North Caucasus and also suggesting that it could inspire modern Russia; he avoided, however, the politically sensitive issue of resistance to Russian domination: "It is quite timely and acceptable to talk about the perspective of *Sharia* for the legal system of [Russia], in particular of its Islamic regions", he noted in a sign of how Islamism was still not perceived as a threat by Russian elites.[47]

45 Ibid., l. 10.
46 Ibid., l. 45.
47 Ibid., l. 69.

Secondly, nationalists, communists, and pro-Russian North Caucasians presented Russia's civilising mission discourse about the North Caucasus and downplayed the violent episodes of their shared history. Most of them, as the North Ossetian linguist Magomet Isaev, believed that the North Caucasus was bound to be part of Russia. "To me it is entirely obvious", Isaev argued, "that Shamil … ha[s] tragically come to the actual conclusion that Dagestan, Chechnya, the North Caucasus are inalienable parts of Russia".[48]

Ramazan Abdulatipov, a former Dagestani deputy from the Russian Regions party and now a deputy prime minister, similarly argued in a baroque and ahistorical speech that the "path of Dagestan and the North Caucasus had [always] been leading them to Russia". It would be "humiliating" for the Caucasians to say that Russia had "conquered" them, he noted. In this interpretation, "in no case, should one make it sound as if Shamil had fought against Russia. He defended his fatherland" from an apparently unidentified enemy.[49] Abdulatipov's convoluted speech continued with a claim that one must praise Shamil's reliance on *Sharia* but that, at the same time, the introduction of *Sharia* today in the North Caucasus "did not succeed and would not succeed". The latter comment again demonstrated how Russia's elites had noted Islamism's rise but tended to dismiss it.

In a concluding remark, Abdulatipov clumsily linked Shamil's legacy to the present. "I spoke with Aslan Maskhadov, a very sympathetic person, … with whom you can and should definitely work", he argued. "How is it", Abdulatipov said he asked Maskhadov, "that other peoples have decided to stay with Russia… but our Chechen-brothers have gone into a different direction". According to Abdulatipov, Maskhadov had echoed Shamil by answering that if "he had known this [democratic] Russia, but not these warmongers (*voenshchina*) who had come to the Caucasus, he would have never been at war with Russia".[50] By blaming the army for the Chechen War, and strikingly not Chernomyrdin's government of which he was now part, Abdulatipov seemed to suggest that Chechnya may still want to rejoin Russia if it became more democratic (although he did not say this outright).

48 Ibid., l. 132.
49 Ibid., l. 23.
50 Ibid., l. 23.

Sergei Baburin, a well-known "patriotic" deputy, integrated Shamil into Russia's civilisation at large in his speech. Russia was now "at the epicentre of a spiritual struggle" as it tried to "repel the pressure from an alien [supposedly Western] civilisation", he argued. While even Baburin noted that it would be "wrong to equate the interests of the people of the Russian Federation today with the actions of the presidential authorities in Grozny", his speech was mainly there to celebrate Russia's conquering drive. Even if it had relied "on aggressive colonial policies" in the past, Baburin noted, Moscow "had safeguarded those people who had united [in it], it had created the conditions for the development of the national culture [of those people]". Baburin saw the Chechen War as the result of the Soviet collapse engineered by the West. "It is the tragedy of today that [Russia's] ancestral enemies had managed to cause to quarrel people who used to live peacefully" in Chechnya, Tajikistan, Transdniestria, and Abkhazia.[51] As with other nationalists, he dodged Russia's responsibility for the tragedies incurred during the Chechen War. Ultimately, he suggested that, because foreign forces had provoked the conflict, Chechnya may still return to Russia.

Rogozin, another key Russian nationalist figure, highlighted many of the same ideas. In a more neutral speech (which also did not call outright for Chechnya to re-join Russia), he offered a form of historical relativism where all figures were equivalent. Like Baburin, he believed that, if the State Duma celebrated Shamil, it should also celebrate the general Aleksei Yermolov who had commanded the Russian forces in the Caucasian War. To him, the key issue was for ethnic Russians "to continue being fully fledged members of the dialogue in the North Caucasus". Like the others, he saw the Chechen War as the product of external forces, which had transformed it into a "geopolitical conflict". It would be best, Rogozin argued, if "international organisations from Europe or Turkey, or Iran, or Saudi Arabia" all stayed out of the North Caucasus.[52]

Thirdly, representatives of de facto independent Chechnya, now called the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria", and of some of Russia's Muslim minorities offered a completely different narrative. They pushed against Russian nationalists' civilising mission discourse, insisted on the importance of

51 Ibid., l. 18.
52 Ibid., l. 75.

Islam, and argued that the Chechen War had changed the power balance between Moscow and its peripheries. Their speeches contained, however, different degrees of radicality towards Russia.

Shamil Beno, the head of the department of foreign affairs of the directorate of the Muslims of Chechnya, focused less on denouncing Russia's civilising mission discourse than on tracing a way forward for pacified Chechen-Russian relations. The Chechen War had resembled the colonial Caucasian War, Beno argued, but things had now changed in Russia. The holding of the conference testified to that. Besides, Beno stressed the shift in Russian elites: "[The Chechens] remembered the position of … Chernomyrdin during the conflict in Budennovsk, [they] remembered the drive of the new generation, of the new type of Russian leaders who had appeared on the Chechen-Russian arena in 1995, already after the main tragedy had happened. [Chechens] are happy to work with them and [they] hope that our co-operation and dialogue would continue".[53] Beno thus struck a surprisingly optimistic note as he underlined how Russian leaders, including Yeltsin (whom he said bad advisers had originally misinformed about Chechnya), were able to eventually stop the Chechen War and talk to Maskhadov. For Beno, all Chechens, even Shamil Basayev, were ready to re-establish ties with Russia and were looking forward to participating in more such conferences.

While some representatives of Grozny wanted to normalise relations with Russia after the Khasavyurt Accord, others were more confrontational towards Moscow. Ruslan Kutayev, a special adviser to Maskhadov, thus declared that Chechnya and Dagestan had "united under the flag of Shamil because he had … showed [everyone] the idea of the almighty Allah" and proposed a modern state. "What could have Russia and its serfdom system brought to the free Caucasus, to the free people of Chechnya?", Kutayev asked the previous nationalist speakers. Tracing an almost direct parallel between the Caucasian War and the Chechen War, Kutayev vehemently denounced the Russian "democrats" who had launched the Chechen War, showing again how people still blamed Yeltsin more than the military for the conflict. Testifying to the growing ideological tensions in Chechnya which reignited Russian fears of a domino effect, Kutayev advocated for

53 Ibid., l. 136.

Islam to serve as a unifying factor across ethnic differences in the North Caucasus.[54]

Ironically, the most confrontational speeches did not come from the Russian nationalists or the Chechens, but from representatives of Russia's other Muslim minorities. The latter built on the Chechens' success to advance their own autonomist tendencies. Den'ga Khalidov, a leader of the Union of Russian Muslims and a political figure in Dagestan, thus pointed out how Russia's use of force in the Caucasus had failed. After this, he boldly argued that "after the Chechens had conquered the right [to govern themselves], other peoples in the North Caucasus… had the right to obtain through reforms such a status that would allow them to solve their political and foreign, … and legal issues without [Moscow]".[55]

Fauziya Bairamova, a representative from Tatarstan, went even further in her fiery speech: "There is only one lesson to be learned [from the Caucasian War and First Chechen War]", she argued, "one should never encroach on the territory of another people". Rebuking Baburin and Abdulatipov, she further declared that "Shamil perfectly knew against which Russia he fought because in his memory was the fall of the Kazan Khanate" in 1552. Moving to the present, Bairamova was not scared to profess that "the Tatars would do everything for Chechnya to be independent. … And after the Chechens, [they] would also rise" because they wanted independence.[56]

Bairamova's speech contrasted with the generally conciliatory tone of the conference, forcing Zorin to lament that women were just too emotional. In fact, it testified to the conference's underlying tensions. Kutayev, Khalidov, and Bairamova had vividly reminded the delegates of the enduring danger of a domino effect in Russia following Chechnya. That threat seemed to be especially acute in regions neighbouring Chechnya and in the resource-rich Republic of Tatarstan, which had three years prior to the conference negotiated a wide-ranging autonomy deal with Moscow after having threatened secession. This too reinforced the securitisation of Chechnya promoted by the security elites.

54 Ibid., l. 65.
55 Ibid., l. 92.
56 Ibid., l. 117.

Conclusion

Although the Khasavyurt Accord terminated the Chechen War, it did not address the war's root causes. As is clear from the debates at the State Duma, the accord immediately triggered controversies that were fuelled by communist and nationalist deputies, but which also extended to the weakened liberal and pro-Yeltsin parties. While the heated parliamentary debates and the organisation of the conference in memory of Shamil testified to the State Duma's fundamentally democratic nature, they also showed that Chechnya remained an unresolved issue for Russia.

In this context, the State Duma's debates revolved around at least two major themes that ironically contributed to discrediting the weakened liberal parties and reinforcing nationalist and security circles. Firstly, after having been extensively blamed for starting the war, Yeltsin and the liberals were now largely blamed for accepting the weak peace agreement in Khasavyurt that humiliated Russia and jeopardised its security. The fact that even the liberals from "*Yabloko*" and the pro-Kremlin "Our Home – Russia" parties questioned the implementation of the Khasavyurt Accord reinforced this argument. The communists and the LDPR nationalists meanwhile talked of how civilians had stabbed the Russian army in the back and did not allow it to win the Chechen War.

Secondly, the criticism of the Khasavyurt Accord in the State Duma concentrated in highlighting that, even despite Russia's perceived concessions, Chechnya remained a source of threats for Russia. These threats were both direct, through encroachments of armed groups into South Russia, and indirect, through the example that Chechnya's de facto independence set for other Russian regions. Acutely, many deputies at the State Duma, including among liberal and pro-Kremlin groups, feared a domino effect. In particular, this growing securitisation of Chechnya favoured the nationalist and security elites, at many levels preparing the terrain for the Second Chechen War that was soon to start.

References

Aven, Petr, and Alfred Koch (2013) *Revolyutsiya Gaidara [The Revolution of Gaidar]*, Alpina, Moscow.

Baturin, Yu. M., et al. (2011) *Epokha Yel'tsina [The Epoch of Yeltsin]*, Prezidentskii Tsentr B. N. Yel'tsina, Moscow.

Belton, Catherine (2020) *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

Chernyaev, Anatoly (2003) *The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev*, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

Fishman, Mikhail (2022) *Preemnik*, *Istoriya Borisa Nemtsova i strany, v kotoroy on ne stal prezidentom [The Successor. The History of Boris Nemtsov and the Country Where He Did Not Become President]*, Corpus, Moscow.

Gammer, Moshe (1992) Shamil in Soviet Historiography. *Middle Eastern Studies* 28(4), 729–77.

Harding, Luke (2020) *Murder, Mayhem, and Russia's Remaking of the West*, Harper Collins, New York.

Klimentov, Vassily (2021) Bringing the War Home: The Strategic Logic of "North Caucasian Terrorism" in Russia. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 32(2), 374–408.

Klimentov, Vassily (2022) The Tajik Civil War and Russia's Islamism Moment. *Central Asian Survey*.

Lieven, Anatol (1998) *Chechnya, Tombstone of Russian Power*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

Lyakhovsky, Alexander (1995) *Tragediya i Doblest' Afgana [The Tragedy and Valor of Afghanistan]*, GPI Iskona, Moscow.

Perović, Jeronim (2018) *From Conquest to Deportation, The North Caucasus under Russian Rule*, Hurst, London.

Rakhmanova, Tania (2012) *Au cœur du pouvoir russe [At the Heart of Russian Power]*, La Découverte, Paris.

Souleimanov, Emil (2007) *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective*, Peter Lang, Bern.

Spolnikov, Victor (1994) Impact of Afghanistan's War on the Former Soviet Republics of Central Asia, in *Central Asia, Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects* (ed. Hafeez Malik), Macmillan, London, 96–116.

Trenin, Dmitri, and Alexei Malashenko (2004) *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia*, Carnegie, New York.

Troshev, Gennady (2017) *Moya voyna, Chechenskiy Dnevnik Okopnogo Generala [My War. The Chechen Diary of a General in the Trenches]*, "Veche", Moscow.

Wilhelmsen, Julie (2016) *Russia's Securitization of Chechnya: How War Became Acceptable*, Routledge, London.

Yeltsin, Boris (2008) *Zapiski Prezidenta [Notes of the President*], Rosspen, Moscow.

Yemelianova, Galina M., and Laurence Broers (eds.) (2020) *Routledge Handbook of the Caucasus*, Routledge, London.

Zezina, M.P., et al. (2011) *Chelovek Peremen [The Man of Changes]*, Novyi Khronograf, Moscow.