

## **RUSSIA'S DAGESTAN: CONFLICT CAUSES**

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## **RUSSIA'S DAGESTAN: CONFLICT CAUSES**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The North Caucasus (Russian) Republic of Dagestan has avoided large-scale violence despite its proximity to Chechnya but is now suffering from escalating street warfare. Several hundred local and federal security forces, administrators, politicians, ministers and journalists have been killed since 2003. The militant Islamist organisation Shariat Jamaat is responsible for much of the violence. Some of its leaders fought in Chechnya, but its extremist propaganda is also attracting unemployed Dagestani youth. This home-grown extremism, espousing jihadi theology and employing terrorist methods, is a new phenomenon. Police efforts to end the street war have been ineffective and in some instances counter-productive. While supporting loyal local elites, Moscow can help halt the increase in violence if it implements an efficient anti-corruption policy and reintegrates youth into the economic and political system.

Street warfare has increased since 2003 and has by far surpassed inter-ethnic conflict over land, resources and employment as the main source of violence. In response, the republic's security forces, often with federal reinforcements, are conducting special operations against Islamic militants which result in yet more bloodshed. The cycle of attacks and reprisals has created a spiral of violence, which has grown distinctively worse in the past year.

Dagestan is not a second Chechnya. Secession has no public support, but the porous border between the two republics has contributed to the problems. Their Islamist movements have historically had different agendas, but in the late 1990s links were created between Dagestani and Chechen Islamists, culminating in an August 1999 joint attack in Dagestan and declaration of a unified Chechen-Dagestani Islamic State.

The incident provoked a return to conflict in Chechnya, counter-terrorism operations throughout the North Caucasus and the adoption of an "anti-Wahhabism" law in Dagestan which has in effect criminalised many moderate young Muslims, rather than neutralised jihadi fighters.

Shariat Jamaat has little difficulty recruiting young Dagestanis who are unemployed, traumatised by cruelty endured in jail and motivated by propaganda promoting jihad and armed resistance. Corruption and nepotism exclude many from the economy, feed their grievances and drive them into radical Islamist movements. Corruption is widespread in many regions of the former Soviet Union, but in Dagestan the problem is more severe and coupled with a flourishing black market and clan-based economic system.

Violence in Dagestan today is mainly caused by jihadi fighters, not inter-ethnic tensions. Although competition for land and political appointments often follows ethnic lines, the republic's ethnic complexity has neutralised tensions by encouraging allegiances between groups and has prevented the emergence of a dominant one. Conflict between Avars and Dargins, nevertheless, remains a possibility, especially after an Avar, Mukhu Aliyev, became president. Electoral reforms in 2006 sought to "de-ethnicise" politics by ending ethnic electoral districts and introducing a general voting list. They were put to the test in the March 2007 parliamentary elections and appeared to be a relative success: the elections were less an inter-ethnic competition than a personal duel between Aliyev and Said Amirov, a Dargin, for political and economic power.

**Makhachkala/Moscow/Brussels, 3 June 2008**

## RUSSIA'S DAGESTAN: CONFLICT CAUSES

### I. INTRODUCTION

A republic of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus, Dagestan borders Azerbaijan to the south, Georgia and Chechnya to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east and is one of the oldest Islamised territories in Russia. Its diverse population includes many indigenous ethnic groups – the largest being the Avars – as well as Slavs and Turkic- and Farsi-speaking populations.

There is a common yet erroneous tendency to analyse Dagestan in reference to Chechnya. The two republics share a history of struggle against the Russian Empire's expansion, most importantly during the common resistance led by Imam Shamil in the nineteenth century, which was defeated in Dagestan in 1859. That is where many historical commonalities end, however. Dagestan became an "autonomous" Soviet republic in the 1920s. Russia, first under the Tsars and later in the Soviet era, exerted tighter control over it by playing on the balance between the many ethnic groups and creating local allegiances. Meanwhile, Chechnya endured territorial divisions and mass murders of its population (both during the nineteenth century and the 1944 deportation), which fed a cycle of revolts and sustained independence aspirations.

The relationship between the two republics has been in flux since the mid-1990s, when Chechnya became increasingly unstable. During the first war there (1994-1996), Dagestan welcomed internally displaced persons (IDPs), but Chechens did not receive the same support during the second war, which started after warlords Ibn al-Khattab and Shamil Basaev invaded Dagestan in August 1999. While the incursion showed worrying links between Chechen and Dagestani Islamic extremists, their methods and ideology were unpopular in Dagestan and convinced many that Chechnya was the source of instability and lawlessness in the region.

Unlike in Chechnya, separatism never had great appeal in Dagestan. The project of the "Islamic reformers" (inaccurately called "Wahhabis") in Dagestan was mostly theological. They wanted to live according to Sharia (Islamic law) but generally were not interested

in secession from the Russian Federation. Nor is the scale of violence in Dagestan today comparable to the situation in Chechnya in the 1990s-early 2000s, even if in both militants are killing soldiers and police officers, and the security forces are conducting massive special operations.

Connections between extremist Islamist movements throughout the North Caucasus do appear to be deepening, however. Widespread poverty and resentment against the government's violent anti-Wahhabi campaign since 1999 have created a new group of violent jihadis in Dagestan with links to Chechen fighters. They are mainly associated with the Shariat Jamaat movement created in 1999 by Rasul Makasharipov and a small group of other Dagestanis. Chechen warlord rhetoric has also evolved: under Dokka Umarov's leadership, it now uses pure Islamist ideology and promotes a regional concept of jihad which appeals to young Dagestanis who have joined local Islamist movements. Shariat Jamaat leaders openly pledged allegiance to Umarov in 2007, adopted the goal of establishing a North Caucasian Emirate and joined together in the regional Unified North Caucasian Front in 2005.

This is Crisis Group's first report on a North Caucasus republic. While the broader links between Islamic groups and violence across the North Caucasus are highly significant, extremist movements, such as Shariat Jamaat, and jihadi ideology provide the main tie between Chechnya, Dagestan and other parts of the region. This report focuses on the situation in Dagestan. It provides insight into the three main causes of conflict in the republic today: inter-ethnic tensions; spillover from Chechnya; and the violence engaged in by indigenous jihadi movements. These feed on particular local grievances, as elites in each republic employ their own means to manage relations with Moscow and retain power. Russia's federal authorities retain strong legitimacy and respect in Dagestan and are less frequently the target of attacks. The intent of the report is to provide a better understanding of the root causes of instability and the challenges facing the federal government.

## II. A FRAGILE INTER-ETHNIC BALANCE

Dagestan is the largest republic in the North Caucasus and the most ethnically diverse area in the Russian Federation. Its mainly Muslim population of 2,576,531 includes indigenous Caucasians, who can be divided into those belonging to the Dagestani linguistic family, whose largest groups are the Avars, Dargins, Laks and Lezgins, and the Nakh linguistic family represented by the Chechen-Akkins. There are also Turkic speakers (the Nogais and Kumyks), Persian speakers (Tats) and Slavs (Russians). According to the 2002 census, Avars are the largest ethnic group in the republic (29 per cent, 758,438 people); Dargins are second (17 per cent, 425,526); Kumyks are third (14 per cent, 365,804); Lezgins are fourth (13 per cent, 336,698).<sup>1</sup>

None of these ethnic groups has ever had its own state, but Avar and Kumyk principalities existed before colonisation by the Russian imperial army. Although some ethnic groups live in close proximity, broadly they occupy different parts of the republic. Lezgins are mainly concentrated in the south, on the border with Azerbaijan, as are Tsakhurs, Rutuls and Aguls; Nogais inhabit the northern steppes; Kumyks have historically lived in the central plains; Avars and Dargins live in the mountainous regions, with strong concentrations of the former in the west and south west and of the latter to the south west of Makhachkala; Laks live in the foothills, in the heart of Dagestan; historically, the Chechens were on the republic's border with Chechnya. However, many districts include villages inhabited by entirely different ethnic groups than their majority population.

Ethnic diversity has not meant large-scale inter-ethnic conflict. Tensions between groups emerge at regular intervals, but the last fifteen years have seen no sustained movements for self-determination. Some such movements existed in the early 1990s and called for

the creation or modification of internal borders with a view to creating their own territorial entity, either within Dagestan or separate from it, but they have faded and been replaced by greater commitment to Dagestani unity.

The neutralising effect of several ethnic groups, none of which has a demographic majority or economic dominance, is one reason why Dagestan has developed differently from Chechnya. Unlike those Chechens who see Russia's presence as colonial, many Dagestanis pledged allegiance to the empire and formed alliances among ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> Inter-ethnic competition most frequently arises over state jobs and land. When the republic was led from 1990 to 2006 by a Dargin, Magomedali Magomedov,<sup>3</sup> the Avars, the largest group in the republic, made increasingly spirited demands. Since 2006, the president has been an Avar, Mukhu Aliyev, which has gone some way to appeasing the demand for Avar equality; however, the October 2006 change in the electoral law has again shifted the balance.

### A. INTER-ETHNIC COMPETITION OVER LAND AND STATE POSITIONS

During the Soviet era, formal and informal systems for distributing political positions and respecting ethnic plurality for other important jobs (at universities, state enterprises and in public administration) satisfied the republic's largest ethnic groups.<sup>4</sup> President Mikhail Gorbachev's *Perestroika* and repeal of Arti-

<sup>1</sup> The smallest ethnic groups are the Laks, Chechen-Akkins, Tabasarians, Aguls, Rutuls, Tsakhurs and Azeris. The proportion of Russians in the population has dropped steeply from 9 per cent in 1989 to 5 per cent in 2002. See Appendix C below; also [www.perepis2002.ru](http://www.perepis2002.ru), the official source of the 2002 census; and V. F. Alieva, "Динамика численности и размесения населения Дагестана (по всероссийской переписи населения 2002г)" ["Dynamics of figures and settlement of the population in Dagestan (on the basis of the Russian 2002 Census)"], in Дагестанский социологический сборник [*Dagestan Sociological Survey*] (Makhachkala, 2005), pp. 30-37.

<sup>2</sup> P. Baev, J. Koehler and C. Zurcher, "Ethnic fractionalisation and stability in Dagestan", in *Civil Wars in the Caucasus, Case Studies on The Economics and Politics of Civil Wars*, World Bank Development Economics Research Group (New Haven, 2002), pp. 120-124.

<sup>3</sup> After a career in the Communist Party institutions of his district (Levachinski), Magomedov presided over the republic's Council of Ministers from 1983. In 1987 he was elected president of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Dagestan; in 1990 he was elected president of the Supreme Soviet of Dagestan, and in 1994 he became president of Gossovet, the republic's collegial executive body.

<sup>4</sup> The three key positions – first secretary of the Communist Party, president of the Supreme Soviet and president of the Council of Ministers – were assigned to persons from the three largest national groups: Avars, Dargins and Kumyks, though a Lezgin sometimes took the place of a Dargin. In non-Russian "national" republics, there was an implicit rule that the most important political position would be filled by a national and the second in rank by a Russian or a Ukrainian. "Dual entity" republics, such as Kabardino-Balkaria, had their own rules for distributing positions between the main national groups. Dagestan was an exception since there were a number of relatively numerous national groups.

cle 6 of the Soviet Constitution in 1990 to remove the single party principle changed matters. Avars, who traditionally held the post of first secretary of the Dagestan Communist Party, found themselves deprived of this important job, while development of a free press facilitated expression of ethnic aspirations. Soon afterwards, ethnic tensions began to appear regularly.

Violent clashes between Chechen-Akkins and Laks in the district of Novolakski on 24-25 May 2007 are a recent example.<sup>5</sup> The dispute dates to the 1944 deportation of the Chechen-Akkins (also called Aukhs, from the district's pre-1944 name, Aukhovski). When the victims of political repression were rehabilitated in 1957, they wanted to return to the area, which created fierce tensions with the Laks. To ease them, the Dagestani authorities adopted a series of acts on rehabilitation of Chechen-Akkins and the district.<sup>6</sup> They pledged to build new houses for the Laks in the Novostroi suburbs, north of Makhachkala, but few have been built or families relocated.<sup>7</sup>

Other groups which have clashed over land and territory include: Kumyks and Avars in 1991 and 1995-1996; Kumyks and Laks; Azeris and Lezgins; Avars and Chechens in the district of Khasavyurt; and Kumyks

and Dargins on several occasions. Rivalries between Avars and Chechens resurfaced in August 2007.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1994 and 2006, Dagestan's diversity was managed through an inter-ethnic cohabitation system, including representation of the fourteen most important ethnic groups in an executive body, the Gossovet (State Council). The system was designed to neutralise centrifugal forces, as much as confrontations, by satisfying the aspirations of nationalities. Magomedov was Gossovet's president and head of the republic. Although the introduction of the office of president of Dagestan was rejected in referendums in 1992, 1993 and 1999, it was finally set up in 2003. However, the next year Russian President Vladimir Putin abolished elections for heads of local government throughout the federation.

Even when this cohabitation system was in place, the ruling elite was criticised for "Darginising" the republic, as Magomedov severely diminished the Gossovet's role. In practice, the most important economic clans in the republic, regardless of ethnicity, were able to adapt to the changing rules of the game. Nevertheless, the 2006 nomination of an Avar, Mukhu Aliyev, as president alienated the Dargin economic elite and created grievances.

The trouble that developed in March-April 2007 in the Karabudakhkent district highlighted the significance of ethnic alliances and the damage political appointments that upset the representational balance can do.<sup>9</sup> Clashes occurred between Kumyks – who believe they have been consistently deprived of political jobs – and Dargins over the 25 March 2007 replacement by a Dargin of the local chief of police, a Kumyk. Dargins are only 22.7 per cent of the district population. The Kumyks, who are 64.1 per cent, believed the post was taken away from them to weaken their community and strengthen the Dargins and Avars.

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<sup>5</sup> T. Issaev, "В Дагестане изучают причины конфликта между чеченской и лакской молодежью" ["In Dagestan, the causes of the conflict between Chechen youth and Lak youth are being studied"], *Caucasian Knot*, 8 June 2007, at <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1188892.html>.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular the Dagestan Decree, Council of Ministers, 18 February 1992 and the 17 January 1997 decree of the Dagestan republic on the deadlines for implementing the federal law on rehabilitation of victims of political repression. The acts adopted are reproduced in R. Kurbanov and J.M. Kurbanov, *Дагестан: депортация и репрессия [Dagestan: deportation and repression]* (Makhachkala, 2001), pp. 248-258. On 28 June 2007 the Dagestan parliament approved 443 million rubles (approximately \$19 million) to relocate the Laks in the suburbs of Makhachkala. See "Дагестанский парламент выделил средства на переселение лакцев из воссоздаваемого чеченского Ауховского района республики" ["The Dagestani Parliament has allocated funds to finance the removal of the Laks from the reinstated Chechen Aukh district"], *Interfax*, 28 June 2007, at [www.interfax.ru/r/B/ug/182.html?menu=35&id\\_issue=11778880](http://www.interfax.ru/r/B/ug/182.html?menu=35&id_issue=11778880).

<sup>7</sup> Crisis Group correspondence, December 2007. On 24 December 2007, Deputy Prime Minister Rizvan Gazimagomedov declared that a further 558 families would be resettled over the next four years. While still Dagestan Supreme Council speaker in early 2006, Mukhu Aliyev warned of potential unrest if resettlement took longer than two years. See "Dagestan: Resettlement of Laks Behind Schedule", RFE/RL, 10 January 2008.

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<sup>8</sup> S. Markedonov, "Дагестан: преодоление Малой Ичкерии" ["Dagestan: Overcoming Little Ichkeria"], *Politcom*, 30 August 2008, at [www.politcom.ru/article.php?id=5016](http://www.politcom.ru/article.php?id=5016).

<sup>9</sup> In February 2007 inter-ethnic tensions emerged in Makhachkala upon the appointment of the rector of the University of the State of Dagestan. Kumyk students considered that the implicit rule regarding ethnic quotas in the professions had not been respected. Unhappy about the appointment of a Lezgin, Jafar Mollaev, they protested in the street; violence followed and three police officers were killed. See "В Дагестане национальность ректора ВУЗа поссорила студентов с милиционерами" ["In Dagestan the nationality of the University Rector set students against police officers"], *Caucasian Knot*, 19 February 2007, at <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1177440.html>.

Kumyks organised protest marches, while the inhabitants of the Dargin villages of Gubden and Gurbuki expressed support for the new chief of police, Magomed Isaev. The competing demonstrations, each of about 3,000 people, clashed. Participants were armed with batons, and the violence was hard to contain, but the police intervened and to avoid escalation made use of mediators and examining magistrates who were neither Kumyk nor Dargin.

Dargins responded by demanding creation of a new homeland within Dagestan that would encompass their villages in the Karabudakhkent district. They held a conference on 13 April to announce creation of a "district of Gubden", leading Dagestan's government to confirm that the internal borders were permanent. However, the Dargins refused to back down, and the government, fearful that creation of a new ethnic district would set a dangerous precedent of internal separatism, revoked the Dagestan interior minister's appointment of Isaev. The new police chief was a Russian, which only reinforced the Kumyks' feeling of defeat.

The crisis has now largely subsided,<sup>10</sup> but long-standing rivalries underlay it. The Kumyks, the majority group and which enjoyed significant prestige and status before the 1917 revolution, appealed to their "historic right", arguing that the Dargins had arrived after them. The Dargins viewed Isaev's appointment as both recognition of their political importance in the republic and partial compensation for the loss of the republic presidency in 2006.

## **B. THE 2007 ELECTIONS**

In autumn 2006, a voting list that removed ethnic districts and aimed to "de-ethnicise" politics replaced the old system. The March 2007 parliamentary elections were the first to be held under the new law. Rather than heighten inter-party or inter-ethnic rivalries, the polls became a highly personalised duel between President Aliyev and the mayor of Makhachkala, Said Amirov, for control of the local branch of President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party and economic resources (though Aliyev is Avar and Amirov Dargin).

### **1. Removing inter-ethnic competition from electoral politics**

The new electoral law did not eliminate ethnic rivalries, but it also did not stimulate greater inter-ethnic tensions. United Russia includes mainly both Avars and Dargins. Some smaller parties have loose associations with other ethnic groups. For example, Patriots of Russia is viewed as a Lezgin party (almost all its candidates were Lezgin, including in areas without that ethnic group). These parties were under great pressure during the campaign, but the violence and other electoral abuses generally did not target people by ethnicity.

Under the 2006 electoral code, control of political parties took on new importance. United Russia's powerful local and national position prompted a large migration from the Communist Party, which had maintained broad support in Dagestan until then. To the surprise of many, President Aliyev, a former first secretary of the local Communist Party, joined United Russia. Entire administrations that had been identified as communist or worked for a communist mayor or member of parliament did likewise,<sup>11</sup> something which as recently as the 2003 elections had seemed impossible.<sup>12</sup> Only United Russia posters were seen in Makhachkala before the elections.<sup>13</sup>

The new law created significant obstacles to participation for smaller parties. To be on the ballot a party needed to have at least one candidate in each of the republic's 53 districts. It was difficult to find so many candidates quickly, and those in certain districts were pressured to withdraw. When three of its candidates unexpectedly withdrew in Khasavyurt district, the SPS (Union of Right-Wing Forces), an opposition party whose influence has been steadily eroding at federal level since 2003, was unable to participate.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, five parties contested the March 2007 polls: United Russia, Patriots of Russia, the Commu-

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<sup>10</sup> The situation remained precarious at least through June 2007, Crisis Group email correspondence that month, but had stabilised by January 2008.

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<sup>11</sup> Crisis Group interview, Makhachkala, January 2007.

<sup>12</sup> See O. Glukhova, R. Uzenov, A. Mechiyev, V. Dzutsev, M. Bagayeva, T. Aliyev and N. Agayeva, "North Caucasus: United Russia Has The Power, Parliamentary elections show a dramatic swing in support away from the Communists to Putin's party", Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), 11 December 2003. The article refers to fraud and shows the level of United Russia's penetration of Dagestan during the 2003 federal Duma elections.

<sup>13</sup> Crisis Group observation, Makhachkala, January 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Crisis Group interview, Moscow, April 2007.

nist Party, Fair Russia<sup>15</sup> and the Agrarian Party. The People's National Party, like the SPS, was refused registration for lack of a full candidates list. The effects of the new law and the violence during the pre-election period and the campaign validated President Aliyev's warning that "these elections [could be] the most complicated in Dagestan's history".<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Electoral violence and results

Vote-buying was reported on election day,<sup>17</sup> and widespread fraud was alleged during the counting phase. Although such abuses are common in the North Caucasus,<sup>18</sup> the fever that gripped Dagestan before, during and after the polls showed that the electoral changes had indeed increased tensions.

Amirov's power base is Makhachkala, where one in every six voters lives, and he controls the United Russia branch. To counter Aliyev's control over United Russia in the regions and his links to influential groups tied to his predecessor, Magomedov,<sup>19</sup> he also sought

the support of smaller parties, including the communists, the SPS and the Patriots of Russia (whose major supporters are southern Dagestani business people).

These parties were subjected to strong pressure and violence. The Communist Party was allowed to contest the elections only after the federal Duma intervened. Khidirov, the Patriots of Russia leader, was injured by unidentified attackers and hospitalised on the evening of 14 February 2007. Magomed Omar-magomedov, an SPS candidate in Kizliar district, disappeared on 17 January; his burned-out car was subsequently found in the woods, and a murder inquiry is underway. His disappearance disqualified the SPS, as its list was incomplete. On 2 March, two people were killed and four injured in Urkarah-Kubachi (Dakhadaevski district) during armed confrontations between United Russia and SPS supporters.<sup>20</sup> The day before the election in Dokuzparinski district, a mayor struck the president of the local electoral commission. On election day (11 March), violence and destruction and theft of ballots were reported in several polling stations.<sup>21</sup>

The elections served as a reminder of Dagestan's fragile political fabric and the weakness of its rule of law. The struggle for parliamentary seats, which guarantee immunity, was fierce. Unlike in Russia's thirteen other federal units, ten days elapsed between voting and the announcement of results, due to recounts in seven polling stations (two each in Tsumadinski and Tabasarsanski districts, one each in Akhvakh, Tliaratinski and Buynaksk).

United Russia gained 47 of the new assembly's 72 seats (63.67 per cent of the vote), Fair Russia eight

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<sup>15</sup> This party, created on a federal scale in the autumn of 2006, claims to be the centre-left opposition, though it supported President Putin.

<sup>16</sup> "Муху Алиев: 'Выборы будут самыми сложными в истории Дагестана'" ["Mukhu Aliyev: 'The elections will be the most complicated in Dagestan's history'"], *Caucasian Knot*, 28 February 2007, at <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1178814.html>.

<sup>17</sup> There were also many accounts of early vote-buying. The sum most frequently mentioned was 1,500 roubles per vote (approximately \$63), Crisis Group email correspondence, April 2007.

<sup>18</sup> For the March 2004 federal presidential elections, see the accounts gathered by T. Aliyev, L. Magomedova and V. Dzutsev, "Putin Landslide Raises Eyebrows; Sharp differences between official figures and reported turnout in the presidential election in the North Caucasus", IWPR, 18 March 2004. The Putin tally was between 94 and 99 per cent in these republics, compared to 71 per cent in Russia as a whole. Local elections in North Caucasian republics have often been accompanied by violence, pressure and sometimes disappearances. Chechnya is a special case, but violence was also observed during Karachaevo-Cherkessia's presidential elections in 1999 to 2003, and pressure was put on the opposition candidates during the 2002 presidential elections in Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Adygheia. Since the end of elections for local executive heads in November 2004, Russia's federal units only vote in federal parliamentary and presidential elections, local parliamentary elections and referendums.

<sup>19</sup> While it might appear that there would be a substantial rivalry between Aliyev and the Magomedov clan, Aliyev had conducted his entire political career in his predecessor's shadow. After the latter's departure, Aliyev remained affiliated to Magomedov's group, which remained influential through his son, Magomedislam, who, however, lost his po-

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sition as president of the Dagestani parliament in the 2007 elections.

<sup>20</sup> M. Musayev, "Dagestan's 'Dirty' Election", IWPR, 22 March 2007. See also the series of articles on the 11 March elections in *Caucasian Knot*, at [http://kavkaz.memo.ru/news/?srch\\_section1=news&srch\\_section2=dagestan&srch\\_start=280](http://kavkaz.memo.ru/news/?srch_section1=news&srch_section2=dagestan&srch_start=280).

<sup>21</sup> Unknown people broke into the house of the deputy director of the electoral commission in a village in the district of Babaiurt and stole more than 1,900 ballot papers. In the village of Metrada, six individuals entered the polling station, struck the president of the commission and destroyed 78 ballot papers. The vote in the village of Kamych-Kutan in the district of Khasavyurt was cancelled after armed, masked men broke into the polling station at 4am on 12 March and stole the ballot boxes. In Polling Station No. 20 in Buynaksk, approximately 40 men seized more than 1,000 ballot papers and destroyed them after the polling station had closed. Articles on the 11 March elections in *Caucasian Knot*: [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1181226.html](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1181226.html) and [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1181544.html](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1181544.html).



seats (10.68 per cent), the Agrarian Party seven seats (9.12 per cent), the Communist Party five seats (7.22 per cent) and Patriots of Russia five seats (7.07 per cent). Disputes continued long after the results were announced on 21 March; the village of Sergokala had to hold a new election in late April as a result of post-election violence.

United Russia was strengthened locally, as was the Aliyev clan. Amirov, who failed to become president of the People's Assembly, was weakened. Former President Magomedov and his son were marginalised, with the latter losing his assembly presidency to the mayor of Izberbash, a fellow Dargin, who received 69 votes after negotiation with United Russia in Moscow.<sup>22</sup>

While newspapers such as *Chernovik* deplored Amirov's pressure tactics, his supporters condemned what they called pressure from "Aliyevtsy" (supporters of the republic's president). Russia's federal authorities kept a watchful eye on the elections but generally maintained the stance that as long as the republic did not leave the Russian Federation, its elites could use what tactics they wished to struggle over power and economic resources, including pressure and physical violence.

Violence also plagued Dagestan's 2 December 2007 election for the federation Duma. Farid Babaev, a candidate for the reformist Yabloko group and a human rights defender, was assassinated in Makhachkala on 21 November.<sup>23</sup> On 30 November Dagestani security forces claimed to have dismantled a terrorist plot in Khasaviyurt, and the next day a bomb was discovered in the home of a parliamentarian in the Unstukul district. United Russia took 89 per cent of the votes, in a turnout recorded at 91 per cent.

Large numbers of extra federal police were deployed for the March 2008 presidential elections, which proved much less eventful. Participation was officially 90.4 per cent (compared with 69 per cent federation-wide), with Dmitry Medvedev receiving 91.92 per cent (70.28 per cent throughout Russia). The Russian Communist Party unsuccessfully appealed the 7.24 per cent low total of its candidate, Zyuganov (compared with the 17.72 per cent nationally).<sup>24</sup>

### III. ISLAMISM IN DAGESTAN AND CHECHEN CONNECTIONS

Relations between Dagestan and Chechnya have never been simple, as divergences between their political, military and religious agendas attest. Dagestan's political elite, unlike its Chechen counterpart, has traditionally been loyal to Moscow. The first war in Chechnya only reinforced this trend and weakened separatist aspirations in Dagestan. The August 1999 incursion of Chechen and Dagestani fighters into the Kadar zone radicalised the Dagestani perception of Chechens, tens of thousands of whom had found refuge there during the earlier conflict. Fearful of the effects of Chechen instability on their republic, many Dagestanis increased their support for the local elite's policy of maintaining good relations with Moscow. To further guard against separatism, Moscow began operations in Dagestan, and the local authorities adopted an anti-Wahhabi law. But this law, coupled with heavy-handed repression against moderate Islamists, high youth unemployment and a sense of disempowerment and resentment against elites, has helped radicalise a section of youth which now embraces jihadi ideology and joins extremist groups like Shariat Jamaat.

#### A. CHECHEN AND DAGESTANI ISLAMISTS IN THE 1990S

Islam has facilitated ties between Chechnya and Dagestan, but only to a degree. In the early 1990s and following the end of the first war in 1996, separatist Chechen warlords turned to Dagestan's religious community to help improve their religious knowledge. They believed they needed the theologians' assistance to "re-Islamise" Chechen society and create an Islamic order. Dagestani Islamists – no longer welcome at home – sought refuge in Chechnya during the 1997-1999 interwar period, and ultimately the migration of Islamists between the republics destabilised Dagestan and forged links between rebels committed to spreading jihadi Islam.<sup>25</sup>

Dagestan is the Russian Federation's most Islamised republic. According to the Government Committee for the Religious Affairs of the Republic, there were 1,766 mosques in 2005, including 1,107 cathedral

<sup>22</sup> For more details, see "Клан Магомедовых отстраняют от власти в Дагестане" ["The Magomedov clan removed from power in Dagestan"], *Caucasian Knot*, 9 April 2007, at [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1183756.html](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1183756.html).

<sup>23</sup> For more details, see [www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/1299](http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/1299).

<sup>24</sup> The 2008 Presidential election statistics available on the Russian Electoral Committee website, [www.vybery.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom](http://www.vybery.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom).

<sup>25</sup> See R. B. Ware, E. Kisriev, "The Islamic factor in Dagestan", *Central Asia Survey*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2000).

mosques and 621 neighbourhood mosques,<sup>26</sup> as well as fifteen Islamic institutes and universities. On average 13,000 of the 15,000 Russian pilgrims performing the *Hajj* to Mecca in a year come from Dagestan.<sup>27</sup> The establishment of Sufism – first by Sufi sheikhs in the eleventh century, which led to Tsakhur and Derbent becoming famous Sufi centres – was consolidated during the nineteenth century Caucasus War and is crucial to religious identity in Dagestan.<sup>28</sup>

A religious revival, leading to profound changes in the republic's religious fabric, occurred at the end of the Soviet era. Sufism had been banned, and the government controlled Islamic practice through an official body, the Spiritual Board of Muslims in the North Caucasus. *Perestroika* and open borders not only made it possible to practise Sufi traditions freely but also enabled reformers to demand a "purer" approach to religion. On return home, students who had been sent to Arab universities began to contest the way of praying of Sufis, whom they called "pagans" and "polytheists". In turn, they were labelled "Wahhabis", even though many consider themselves Salafis.<sup>29</sup>

Among the theological reformers promoting an Islam shorn of Sufi rituals in Dagestan, two stood out: the moderate Salafi Akhmad-Kadi Akhtaev and the more radical Bagauddin Kebedov. In 1996 Akhtaev founded an organisation to spread his teachings, Al Islamiya, which advocated the peaceful spread of Islam and the complementarity of Islam and Christianity. Bagauddin, however, adopted a confrontational approach, establishing a Koranic school in Kizilyurt to help create a Sharia society. By 1996 he was calling for a holy war against the infidels, but he was reportedly unin-

terested in waging it himself. He had founded the Islamic Jamaat of Dagestan in 1989,<sup>30</sup> as a platform to spread his jihadi teachings, and he encouraged residents of the villages of Chabanmakhi and Karamakhi in the (ethnic Dargin) Buynaksk district<sup>31</sup> to declare the villages "Sharia mini-states" in 1997 and refuse to recognise secular Russian law.

At the end of 1997, Bagauddin was forced into exile and took refuge in Gudermes (Chechnya), to where he transferred his Jamaat and continued his teachings. In December of that year he reached an agreement with the Chechen "Army D. Dudayev" led by Dudayev's nephew Raduyev. Through this, Chechnya became a breeding ground for Dagestani Islamists, who secured financial support and set up training camps, as Islamists from outside the region – most notably "Emir Khattab", a Saudi Arabian married to a woman from the Kadar zone – had done when they came to Chechnya during the first war.

In 1997 and 1998, Chechen and Dagestani political, military (especially former rebels) and religious figures (Islamists) who were seeking to develop Salafism and establish a Chechen-Dagestani state under Sharia met several times. But their ideology and goals were too dissimilar. Secession of Chechnya from Russia was perhaps the main goal for Chechen rebels, but taking Dagestan out of the federation was not a Bagauddin aim. Islam was instrumentalised to radicalise the movement and prevent support for any pro-

<sup>26</sup> This figure is provided by F. Longuet-Marx, "Dagestan: Popular Islam and Radical Islam", *Cahier d'Etudes sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, no. 38, 2004. See also Z. M. Abdulagatov, "Особенности салафитского движения в Республике Дагестан" ["Specificities of Salafism in Dagestan"], *Дагестанский социологический сборник*, [*Dagestani Sociological Survey*], op. cit., pp. 20-27.

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interview, Dagestan, January 2007.

<sup>28</sup> There are four brotherhoods in Dagestan: Naqshbandiya, which played a very important role in the resistance led by the Imam Shamil during the Caucasus War in the nineteenth century, Shaziliya, Dzhazuliya and Qadyriya.

<sup>29</sup> Wahhabis, unlike Salafis, look to the Hanbali school of law for guidance. See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005. The term "Wahhabi" has been used in the former Soviet Union to designate dissident Islamic trends, however, and is generally mistakenly applied to all Salafis. Baku Salafi community members have a purist approach to Islam but do not consider themselves Wahhabi. See, about the Abu Bakr community leader Gamet Suleymanov, "I am not a Wahhabi", *Today.az*, 30 August 2006.

<sup>30</sup> The term *jamaat* ("community" in Arabic), has had different meanings in Dagestan. Historically, it referred to the village communities that managed local defence and subsistence. In the post-Soviet era, the Arabic term was reinstated in religious language, first with reference to the Islamic organisation created by Bagauddin Kebedov and subsequently to groups of rebels in Chechnya and throughout the North Caucasus attached to the separatist Chechen military leadership. Thus, the Shariat Jamaat in Dagestan (see below), the Ingush Jamaat, the Karachay Jamaat and so on. On the current state of the various *jamaat*, see the following articles in the Jamestown Foundation's *Chechnya Weekly*: F. Tlisova, "Who's Who in the KBR Jamaat", 28 June 2007; M. Vachagaev, "Karachay Jamaat: History, Reality and Perspective", 31 May 2007; M. Vachagaev "Karachay Jamaat: Countermeasures, Connections and Composition, Part 2", 7 June 2007; and M. Vachagaev, "The Ingush Jamaat: Identity and Resistance in the North Caucasus", August 2007; for Dagestani Jamaat, see also M. Vachagaev, "The Dagestani Jamaat (Part I)", 13 December 2007.

<sup>31</sup> In June 1996, the chief of the Karamakhi administration was killed by Wahhabis, as was the Kadar administration chief in July 1996. In May 1997, Wahhabis attacked Sufis in those villages.

jects conciliatory towards Russia.<sup>32</sup> The Dagestanis did not intervene in the July 1998 confrontation in Gudermes between Chechen Salafis and then Chechen President Maskhadov's forces.<sup>33</sup>

## B. THE "HUNT FOR THE WAHHABIS" SINCE 1999

In both Chechnya and Dagestan, radical Islam became the federal government's number one target. But because the tactics used to suppress Islamism differed, so did reactions to Russia. In Chechnya the war resumed in autumn 1999 as an "anti-terrorist struggle". In Dagestan the "hunt for the Wahhabis" was official policy, executed by local authorities with Moscow's support.

In September 1999, the Dagestani assembly adopted a law against Wahhabism,<sup>34</sup> which was part of the general policy to identify and hunt down overly pious youth. Salafism had spread significantly in Dagestan prior to adoption of this law, and various streams existed, but all were grouped together under the official heading of "terrorist Islamism". This perception of an anti-terrorist struggle was shared by large parts of the population because of the traumatic August 1999 incursion and the following month's bombing in Buynaksk.

A union was forged between the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in Dagestan (DUMD in Russian<sup>35</sup>) and the Dagestani political authorities. Sheikh Said-Efendi Chirkejski became (and remains) the most powerful figure in Sufi circles, controlling many mosques and fighting radical Islam. DUMD cooperated with law enforcement, identifying those interested in travelling abroad for religious training or using ancestral texts.

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<sup>32</sup> See A. Malashenko, "Способен ли Ислам консолидировать общество?" ["Can Islam strengthen society?"], in *Исламские ориентиры на Северном Кавказе* [Islamic Factor in the North Caucasus], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> This internal conflict in Chechnya was the result of Islamist opposition to the secularist Chechen president.

<sup>34</sup> The "Law of the Republic of Dagestan on the Prohibition of Wahhabi Activity or any other Extremist Activity on the Territory of the Republic of Dagestan" was adopted on 16 September 1999. Article 14 prohibited all Wahhabi activities and any other extremist activity. The law granted new administrative powers to the republic's traditionalist Muslim organisation, the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Dagestan (DUMD), which was charged with regulating activities connected to Islam in order to control the influence of Wahhabism.

<sup>35</sup> Духовное Управление Мусульман Дагестана [Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Dagestana].

Numerous mosques were closed, Islamist literature destroyed and the most visible religious leaders forced into exile. Bagauddin escaped and is allegedly in Turkey; Adallo Aliyev, who participated in the 1998 meetings to create the Islamic Chechen-Dagestani state, also escaped, but returned in 2006 and is under house arrest.<sup>36</sup> Hundreds of "Wahhabis" were likewise arrested, and many were violently interrogated by the police, whose method for removing the Islamist threat only served to aggravate it. The mistreatment suspects endured under arrest fostered resentment and created many potential recruits for extremist Islamist organisations.

## C. SHARIAT JAMAAT'S GROWING INFLUENCE

The influence of Islamist groups in Dagestan has been downplayed in the past. However, it is increasingly clear that such groups – Shariat Jamaat being the best known – not only persist but are playing an ever larger role in the escalating street war. Shariat Jamaat's recent statement of support for Chechen rebel leader Dokka Umarov's declaration of a North Caucasian Emirate suggests an expanding political agenda. As one researcher noted, "today, the activities of the Jamaat are no longer isolated episodes, but well coordinated elements of a greater struggle executed by a cohesive military and political structure opposed to the republic authorities".<sup>37</sup>

Although multiple Islamist organisations operate underground in Dagestan, Shariat Jamaat is the only one clearly affiliated with the Unified North Caucasian Front created by Abdul Khalim Sadulaev, Maskhadov's successor, in May 2005 to spread armed resistance throughout the entire region. It has claimed responsibility for attacks on senior political figures, most notably the republic's interior minister in February 2007.<sup>38</sup> It is not the first organisation of its

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<sup>36</sup> According to Crisis Group interviews, Radjaddinov, who led the defence of Karamakhi, allegedly sought refuge with his detachment in Chechnya at the end of August 1999, after the Wahhabis' defeat by the Russian army.

<sup>37</sup> M. Vatchagaev, "The Dagestani", op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> "Джамаат 'Шариат' взял на себя ответственность за покушение на главу МВД Дагестана" ["The Shariat Jamaat has claimed responsibility for the attack against Dagestan's Minister of the Interior"], *Caucasian Knot*, 6 February 2007, at <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1176227.html>. Other prominent actions include: the January 2002 assassination of seven soldiers; the May 2002 Kaspiisk explosion, which killed 45 people; the August 2003 assassination of Magomedsalikh Gusaev, Dagestan's ethnic affairs minister; the May 2005 assassination of his successor, Zagir Aruk-

type in Dagestan, however. Bagauddin formed the Dagestani Jamaat in 1990 and received significant external assistance for it.<sup>39</sup> According to a spokesperson, Shariat Jamaat was created in 1999 by only a few dozen people and did not receive external financing.<sup>40</sup> Jennet Jamaat, which was set up in 2002 by Rasul Makasharipov, is a reactivation of Islamist groups from the 1990s and especially active in creating Sharia mini-states in the Kadar zone. It merged with Shariat Jamaat in 2005.

With Bagauddin and Adallo in exile for many years, young people have taken over these organisations. Until his death in April 2006, one of the most visible Dagestani Islamist ideologues was Yasin Rasulov, a doctoral student at the University of the State of Dagestan. He believed the 1999 conflicts were a continuation of the Caucasus War of the nineteenth century, and armed resistance against political authorities allied to the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Dagestan was wholly legitimate. He was killed in a special operation, as police suspected he was the successor of Rasul Makasharipov, the head of the Jennet network and an interpreter for Khattab during the 1999 invasion.<sup>41</sup> Rasulov was then replaced by a Lak,

hov; the April 2005 bombing of the prosecutor's offices in Makhachkala; the August 2006 assassination of Bitar Bitarov, the Buynaksk prosecutor (Adylgirei Magomedtagirov, Dagestan's interior minister, was also injured); the April 2007 assassination of Dagestan's deputy chief prosecutor, Abdu Basir Omarov; the July 2007 assassination of the republic's deputy head mufti (Islamic scholar); and the August 2007 assassination of the deputy chief of police in Buynaksk.

<sup>39</sup> Including from the Salvation, International Islamic Organization, the Benevolence International Foundation (U.S.), Jamaat Ikhia at Turas al-Islami (Kuwait), Lashkar Taiba (Pakistan), Al-Haramain Foundation (Saudi Arabia), an American Islamic Educational Foundation out of Ashland, Oregon, Qatar, Ikraa (Saudi Arabia) and Ibrahim bin Ibrahim (Saudi Arabia). See M. Vatchagaev, "The Dagestani", op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> According to various sources, it allegedly survived on individual donations, particularly from the Middle East, mainly made during the 1990s, Crisis Group interview, Moscow, April 2007. For the historical links between Jennet and Shariat Jamaat, see Andrei Smirnov, "Dagestan insurgents regroup as new 'Sharia Jamaat' organization", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, vol. 2, no. 13 (19 January 2005). Smirnov explained that Rabbani Khalilov, a Dagestani field commander, established the Jennet group in late 2002, with the goal of killing police and Federal Security Service (FSB in Russian) officers so as to weaken Dagestani authorities. Leading the group was Rasul Maksharipov, a Dagestani who had fought with the Chechen militant leader Basaev in August 1999.

<sup>41</sup> The killing of Yasin Rasulov was announced in October 2005. Gadzhi Melikov, one of his successors, was killed in August 2006. See A. A. Yarlykapov, "Separatism and Is-

Rappani Khalilov, whose brigades represented the Dagestani Front of the United Armed Resistance in the North Caucasus created by Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev.<sup>42</sup> Khalilov in turn was killed in September 2007 and replaced by Abdul Madzhid, who proclaimed allegiance to Dokka Umarov.<sup>43</sup>

Shariat Jamaat and other clandestine groups spread Islamist propaganda unhindered on the internet and by word of mouth. Their videos,<sup>44</sup> statements and press releases accuse the authorities of being "under Moscow's thumb". They strongly denounce the anti-Wahhabism law of September 1999 and declare their determination to eliminate "the power of these *munafiks*" (hypocrite in Arabic), "heathen dogs" and *kafirs* (infidels) – all terms applied to the representatives of law enforcement agencies.<sup>45</sup> The authorities label them "terrorists". Most members of Islamist

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lamic Extremism in the Ethnic Republics of the North Caucasus", *Russian Analytical Digest*, 5 June 2007.

<sup>42</sup> The Islamist website [www.kavkazcenter.com](http://www.kavkazcenter.com) has several press releases on this subject. The new Shariat Jamaat website, [www.jamaatshariat.com](http://www.jamaatshariat.com), created in 2007, attests to a certain amount of dynamism at the organisation's core. See also [www.imamtv.com](http://www.imamtv.com); [www.shamilonline.org](http://www.shamilonline.org); and [www.kavkazcenter.org](http://www.kavkazcenter.org).

<sup>43</sup> Madzhid is a Lezgin, although many believe Lezgins have little to do with Islamism in Dagestan.

<sup>44</sup> Several videos can be viewed on [www.kavkazcenter.org](http://www.kavkazcenter.org) and on [www.jamaatshariat.com](http://www.jamaatshariat.com). A number of videos circulate freely in Dagestan among young people. "IWPR saw a videotape discovered inside, which shows a group of young men cleaning automatic weapons inside the apartment and insulting 'cowardly' Muslims who will not stand up to the authorities in Dagestan. A group of them is then shown in a forest brandishing weapons and shouting 'Allahu Akbar!'", R. Alikhanov, "Dagestani Students volunteer for Islamist groups", IWPR, 13 December 2007.

<sup>45</sup> According to a 30 March 2007 interview given by its press secretary to Radio Svoboda ([www.jamaatshariat.com/content/view/full/187/34/](http://www.jamaatshariat.com/content/view/full/187/34/)), Shariat Jamaat seeks to create an Islamic state in the Caucasus. It is a militarised structure from the Caucasian front, whose emir was Rappani Khalilov, and has sworn allegiance to Dokka Umarov. "When we are asked what the goal of our Jamaat is, we answer with the same words that Imam Shamil used to use: when a Russian general asked him what he wanted, he said he wanted nothing else than establishment of Sharia among his Muslim brothers. The only possibility to save the honour and dignity of Muslims is through the jihad". The main goal, according to its press office, is to "free Muslim lands from Russian occupation and build a Sharia-complying state". Accordingly, it is legitimate to target even unarmed members of the police, the ministry of internal affairs (MVD) and the FSB. The spokesperson added: "Islam makes it possible to kill those who oppose the call to Muslims and the establishment of Allah's laws, or those who help the enemy". Shariat Jamaat also regards political negotiations as unthinkable.

groups have spent time in prison and, according to the interior ministry “they are bandits and mercenaries of terrorist organisations, often sympathetic to Wahhabi ideology”.<sup>46</sup>

They come mainly from the Avar, Lak, Kumyk and Dargin ethnic groups,<sup>47</sup> especially in Makhachkala, Khasavyurt, Izberbash and Buynaksk, and particularly the districts of Tsuntinski, Botlikh and Kazbekovski.<sup>48</sup> The most conflict-affected areas are Buynaksk (the Kadar zone, where three villages were briefly functioning under self-imposed Sharia law), Khasavyurt and the capital, Makhachkala. The group operating in Buynaksk is known as Seifullah (the Sword of Allah) and in Khasavyurt, Dzhundullah (the warriors of Allah).<sup>49</sup>

According to several sources, these groups operate with limited funds; an interviewee explained: “Today, financing has been clearly reduced. The Salafi imam is not an easy route, as they have all been arrested: those who remain work underground”.<sup>50</sup> However, weapons (especially guns) are not in short supply. The republic has been awash in them since 1999, when they were widely distributed to the population to resist incursions from Chechnya.<sup>51</sup> A flourishing underground market also meets local demand. New members of radical Islamist groups easily find what they need to act.

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<sup>46</sup> “Голодовка ‘Матерей Дагестана’ продолжается” [“The Hunger Strike of the ‘Dagestan Mothers’ Continues”], *Caucasian Knot*, 3 August 2007, at [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/news-text/news/id/1193660.html](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/news-text/news/id/1193660.html).

<sup>47</sup> M. Vatchagaev, “The Dagestani”, op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> “МВД: в Дагестане действуют четыре группировки боевиков”, [“According to the Ministry of the Interior, four groups of rebels were at work in Dagestan”], *Caucasian Knot*, 25 October 2006, at <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1091740.html>.

<sup>49</sup> M. Vatchagaev, “The Dagestani Jamaat” (Part 2), *Chechnya Weekly*, Jamestown Foundation, 20 December 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interview, Moscow, April 2007.

<sup>51</sup> “You may have whatever you wish – pistols, assault rifles, grenade launchers, even a tank. But come to us and register it”, said the Dagestan interior minister, Adylgirey Magomedtagirov, quoted by Nabi Abdullaev, “A culture of arms prospers in the Northern Caucasus”, *Prism*, Jamestown Foundation, vol. vi, no. 12 (December 2000). “Indeed, on one day in September 1999 the republican MVD distributed 6,000 assault rifles to citizens. In Buynaksk, grenades and shells have become a form of currency, with Russian soldiers from the local base exchanging them for vodka. In Makhachkala, young men walk around with pistols tucked into their blue jeans. This is the local fashion and it’s perfectly legal”, ibid. See also M. Lansky, “Dagestan and Chechnya: The Wahhabi Challenge to the State”, *SAIS Review*, 22 February 2002, pp. 167-192.

The situation in Dagestan strongly resembles the Ingush, Chechen and Kabardino-Balkarian cases,<sup>52</sup> where jihadi ideology has been taking root, causing violence to spread. Taken together, the cases demonstrate a shift from the 1990s, when separatist movements in the North Caucasus were predominantly secular and nationalist; now Islamist militants are increasingly adopting separatist rhetoric and violence. A researcher said:

Today the secular nationalism of [the late Chechen leader] Dzhokhar Dudayev is a distant memory. The main ideology of the separatist movement in the North Caucasus is religious and is frequently called “Wahhabism”.... Currently, we are witnessing a major restructuring of the separatist underground in the North Caucasus that is taking place under the pressure of changing circumstances.<sup>53</sup>

#### D. RENEWED TENSIONS WITH CHECHNYA

Since Ramzan Kadyrov became president of Chechnya in March 2007 with Putin’s backing, relations between Chechnya and Dagestan have become more tense. The youthful president does not conceal his ambition to extend his power beyond his own republic’s borders. He has already hinted at merging some North Caucasian territories.<sup>54</sup> There is little trust between the presidents of Dagestan and Chechnya in the current context of spiralling violence. Aliyev and Kadyrov regularly trade recriminations, both refusing to accept responsibility for kidnappings and other destabilising acts. Kadyrov repeatedly asserts that the “anti-terrorist struggle” in Chechnya is over and insinuates that the threat to Chechen stability now comes from neighbouring republics, including Dagestan.

In turn, Dagestani leaders accuse Chechen authorities of involvement in forced disappearances near the bor-

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<sup>52</sup> For further information on developments in Ingushetia, Chechnya and Kabardino-Balkaria see D. Sagramoso, “Violence and conflict in the Russian North Caucasus”, *International Affairs* vol. 83, no. 4 (2007), 681-705; A. McGregor, “Military Jama’ats in the North Caucasus: A Continuing Threat”, 2006, available at [www.jamestown.org/docs/McGregor-14Sep06.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/docs/McGregor-14Sep06.pdf); and G. Hahn, *Russia’s Islamic Threat: nationalism, Islam, and islamism Conclusions* (Yale, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> A. A. Yarlykapov, “Separatism and Islamic Extremism”, op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> A Voznaya, “The North Caucasus Knot: Adygeya’s and Ingushetia’s Struggle for Autonomy”, *Balkananalysis*, 8 August 2006, at [www.balkananalysis.com/2006/08/08/the-north-caucasus-knot-adygeyas-and-ingushetias-struggle-for-autonomy/](http://www.balkananalysis.com/2006/08/08/the-north-caucasus-knot-adygeyas-and-ingushetias-struggle-for-autonomy/).

der. During an October 2006 meeting in Makhachkala at which the disappearances were raised,<sup>55</sup> Aliyev claimed that 47 men had been kidnapped since 2003. Law enforcement officials present then blamed the *kadyrovtsy* (militias loyal to Kadyrov). A few days later, Dagestan's interior minister, Adylgirey Magomedtagirov, referred to a "third force" in Chechnya which wanted to unsettle Dagestan. He added that Chechen special forces would be refused entry into Dagestan if they did not have his personal authorisation.

#### IV. VIOLENCE AGAINST STATE AUTHORITIES

Since 2003 violence against security forces and figures of state authority has been rapidly increasing, as has the influence of jihadi groups, especially Shariat Jamaat. Young extremists have killed several hundred civil servants, judges, district chiefs, mayors and ministers, but above all police officers and organised crime inspectors.<sup>56</sup> During a June 2007 visit to Dagestan, the federal interior minister, Rachid Nurgaliyev, said police work had become increasingly difficult in the last decade because of "internal separatism and clusters of anti-Russian activity". He estimated there had been 270 attacks on law enforcement agents since 2005, resulting in the death of 80 police – 56 in 2007 alone.<sup>57</sup> Victims have included very senior figures, such as the deputy interior minister of Dagestan, Magomed Omarov, attacked in February 2005.<sup>58</sup>

Most recently, the Avar journalist Gaji Abashilov, head of Dagestan's State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, was killed in Makhachkala on 21 March 2008.<sup>59</sup> Some observers say he was about to complete a TV documentary on the Amirov clan. Evidently he was close to President Aliyev. He also helped the government to obtain the repatriation

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<sup>55</sup> Forced disappearances have become a serious problem in Dagestan. A conference organised on 25 June 2007 in Moscow by human rights groups produced alarming figures. According to the Moscow Helsinki Group, "[i]n Dagestan 68 people were kidnapped in 2006 ... in three months, the federal southern district recorded 63 crimes linked to kidnappings, including fourteen in Chechnya and thirteen in Dagestan", "Twenty kidnappings in Dagestan is a record, even for Chechnya", *Caucasian Knot*, 18 June 2007, at <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1189608.html>. See also "Abductions of people in Dagestan in 2007", in S. Gannushkina (ed.), "On the situation of residents of Chechnya in the Russian Federation, August 2006-October 2007", Moscow, 2007, at [www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/index.htm](http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/index.htm); and "Жители столицы Дагестана обвиняют правоохранительные органы в похищении" ["Inhabitants of Makhachkala accuse police forces of being responsible for abductions"], *Caucasian Knot*, 14 February 2008, at [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207704.html](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207704.html). Their testimony includes the charge that they were transferred to Chechnya and detained there before being released.

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<sup>56</sup> These attacks are documented in various sources. See, for example, *Russian Analytical Digest* (RAD), 22, 5 June 2007, at [www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/details.cfm?lng=en&id=31618](http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/details.cfm?lng=en&id=31618), which provides an overview of attacks and assassinations in 2006-2007 in the North Caucasus, including Dagestan. The website [www.kavkaz.memo.ru](http://www.kavkaz.memo.ru) regularly follows current events and compiles all acts of violence in Dagestan. See similar lists at [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/chronics/id/790621.html](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/chronics/id/790621.html) and [www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/index.htm](http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/index.htm). Dagestani ministers themselves closely follow the statistics.

<sup>57</sup> T. Isaev, "Президент Дагестана обсудил с Бастрыкиным проблему терроризма" ["Dagestani President assessed problem of terrorism with Bastrykin"], *Caucasian Knot*, 14 February 2008, at [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207705.html](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1207705.html).

<sup>58</sup> "Нургалиев: криминогенная обстановка в Дагестане сложная" ["Nurgaliyev: there is currently a complex situation in Dagestan which is conducive to crime"], *Caucasian Knot*, 5 June 2007, at [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/news/?srch\\_section1=news&srch\\_count=20&srch\\_section2=dagestan](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/news/?srch_section1=news&srch_count=20&srch_section2=dagestan).

<sup>59</sup> His death came a day after another journalist from Dagestan, Ilyas Shurpayev, who worked for Russian Channel One television and reported from all over the North Caucasus region, was found dead in his Moscow flat.

of warlord Adallo to Dagestan and in its anti-fundamentalist Islam campaign.<sup>60</sup>

## A. CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE BREEDING EXTREMISM

Shariat Jamaat, which has taken responsibility for much of the violence, is able to attract ever more young people. They are motivated by a mixture of frustration due to widespread corruption, economic exclusion and anger at the impunity police enjoy when implementing the anti-Wahhabism law and carrying out raids against suspected religious extremists.

Already present in Dagestan during the Soviet era, corruption has become ever more widespread. In 2005, a journalist summarised the connection between it and violence:

Terrorism in [Dagestan] is a consequence of total corruption....in a corrupt system, the only business is posts or sharing out the billion dollars given by the federal government....People are divided into four categories: the first receives the posts (and therefore access to the trough); the second buys the posts and extracts money; the third is the "armed follow-up" of the first and second categories; finally, the fourth is made up of young unemployed people who are approached by the Wahhabis, who tell them: "No money? Can't get married? Here, take this money, and go and kill some police officers"....

If you don't earn money, but you share it out, you don't need employees, you need servants....That's how the rule of law disappears, and clan links are strengthened. It's not important whether you are a murderer or not, a Wahhabi or not. What matters is being a member of the right family, a member of the right village.<sup>61</sup>

An active, open black market further aggravates the volatile mix. President Aliyev himself acknowledges that the black market economy is as much as 70 per cent of the republic's total economy – a loss of tax revenue of approximately 6 billion rubles. [approx-

imately \$253 million]<sup>62</sup> During a July 2006 speech at a regional meeting on criminal processes and Dagestan's financial market, he admitted that: "Nearly 40 per cent of the active population works in the unregulated part of the economy, meaning a very large loss of earnings in fiscal terms and a large section of income stemming from illegal activities".<sup>63</sup>

Dagestanis talk freely about corruption and connect it to the high levels of federal subsidy: 92 per cent in 2005, 87 per cent in 2006. In 2008, the Dagestani budget will be 37.7 billion rubles, [approximately \$1.5 billion] of which 30.3 billion will come from the federal budget (80.37 per cent).<sup>64</sup> Dagestanis say, "Moscow is politically dependent on Dagestan; Dagestan is economically dependent on Moscow". Newspapers publish articles openly acknowledging corruption.<sup>65</sup> Dagestan is considered to be Russia's poorest republic. Despite an estimated 96,000 unemployed and the country's lowest gross domestic product (GDP), observations on the ground reveal a dynamic construction market in the Makhachkala suburbs, four-wheel drive vehicles criss-crossing the capital and a rapidly developing service, financial and petrol industry.<sup>66</sup>

Economic wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few figures with powerful positions, whether at republic level or in the main towns. Said Amirov, the Makhachkala mayor, is wealthy, controlling much of the construction business in the city and the wool market.<sup>67</sup> The January 2008 electricity cuts showed that he also controls GERTS, which collects electricity

<sup>62</sup> S. Markedonov, "Северокавказский рентген" ["X-ray of the North Caucasus"], *Politcom*, 4 April 2007, at [www.polit.ru/author/2007/04/04/caucas\\_print.html](http://www.polit.ru/author/2007/04/04/caucas_print.html).

<sup>63</sup> V. Bobrovnikov and M. Roshchin, "Dagestan's Economic Crisis: Past, Present and Future", *Chechnya Weekly*, Jamestown Foundation, 2 November 2006. The Kozak Report, July 2005 (see next section), referred to a black economy of 44 per cent in Dagestan, against an average of 17 per cent in Russia as a whole.

<sup>64</sup> "Народное Собрание Дагестана приняло республиканский бюджет на 2008" ["The Popular Assembly adopted the 2008 budget"], *Caucasian Knot*, 6 December 2007, at [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1203039.html](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1203039.html).

<sup>65</sup> See in particular *Chernovik*, [www.chernovik.net](http://www.chernovik.net), which regularly criticises the economic empires of one or other clan.

<sup>66</sup> According to the journalist I. Pelikhova, car ownership is very high compared to Russia as a whole, as is the number of foreign exchange bureaux, "Фигурный компромисс" ["Difficult Compromise"], *Южный Пенортёр* [Southern Reporter], 21 April 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interview, Moscow, April 2007.

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interview, Gaji Abashilov, Makhachkala, January 2007.

<sup>61</sup> See Y. Latypina, "Сапоги в Дагестане" ["Boots in Dagestan"], *Еженедельный журнал* [Daily Magazine], 18 July 2005, at [www.ej.ru/?a=note&id=1443](http://www.ej.ru/?a=note&id=1443).



payments.<sup>68</sup> The former Prime Minister Khizri Shikh-saidov allegedly created the “Dagestani Investment Fund” while in office to bypass Dagestani and federal budgets and transfer funds directly from off-shore companies.<sup>69</sup> In 2005 one son of former President Magomedov controlled all local bakery production, another the Deneb complex, which produces mineral water and sodas, and the third the centre for oil transfers.<sup>70</sup> According to several sources, the entire Magomedov extended family controls lucrative companies and resources.

In everyday conversations, Dagestanis will enumerate without scruple the going rates for positions: \$3,000 for the regular police; \$7,000 for the traffic police or to join the police training school; up to \$10,000 to study medicine; and \$300,000 for a ministerial post.<sup>71</sup> In addition, there is the necessary “cover” charge for any economic activity. “Any babushka selling sunflower seeds to a police officer, any hairdresser cutting a police officer’s hair is doing this for protection....In a word, the MVD [interior ministry] ‘covers’ the entire economy”.<sup>72</sup> Mukhu Aliyev himself, when president of the People’s Assembly in 2005, openly declared to the press: “No official is appointed to any position here without a ‘brown envelope’ [being exchanged]”.<sup>73</sup>

Corruption and exclusion helps push young people into radical Islamist groups. Many switched from

their moderate Suni beliefs to Salafism because it seemed to offer them an ideological structure which could counter the old, corrupt political elite which monopolises economic resources. According to a local observer, “Islam has become a refuge for these poor people. Those who can’t integrate join the Jamaat”.<sup>74</sup> The armed resistance has become a receptacle for youths who are excluded from an economic and political system controlled by Dagestan’s 200 richest families.<sup>75</sup>

But corruption and nepotism also prevent educated youth from getting jobs. Consequently: “[I]t is not only the uneducated who support these ideas, as earlier, but also those who are intellectually astute and have received a good secular education”.<sup>76</sup> Highly educated militants who have been killed include Abuzagir Mantayev, a young intellectual who graduated from Moscow where he defended his doctorate on Wahhabism, and Makhach Rasulov, a graduate from the Dagestan State University and a religious columnist in the newspaper *Novoe Delo*, who participated in attacks on Dagestani police.

The radical Islamist groups have themselves become increasingly violent after the adoption of the anti-Wahhabism law was followed by government raids against suspected religious extremists. Those raids left deep scars in the memories of young people who were targeted for little more than their desire to develop their knowledge of Islam.

Dagestani rather than federal forces are generally targeted in today’s attacks.<sup>77</sup> Young people seek revenge against local law enforcement for arbitrary arrests, detention abuses and fabrication of evidence. First-hand experience of police brutality and corruption feeds a desire for revenge amplified by Islamist video propaganda inciting people to join the “resistance movement”. Torture by police and other security forces is little documented,<sup>78</sup> in comparison to Chechnya,<sup>79</sup> and

<sup>68</sup> The extent of Amirov’s power was obvious during the recurring January 2008 electricity cuts. GERTS, which is responsible for collecting payment and answers to him, was not paying Dagestenergobyty, the power plant. The resulting outages triggered strong demonstrations in the streets of Makhachkala, demanding the resignation of Amirov, who was suspected of making money from an affair which illustrated the gap between the relatively well-off families, who have their own generators, and the poorer families. The demonstrations were not prevented by a police force whose members were also affected by electricity cuts and sympathised with the protestors. See Y. Latynina, “The Sixteenth Assassination Attempt”, *Moscow Times*, 16 January 2008; and D. Aliev, “Dagestan in Blackout Crisis”, IWPR, 17 January 2008.

<sup>69</sup> See V. Bobrovnikov and M. Roshchin, op. cit.

<sup>70</sup> Y. Latynina, “Canoni”, op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> According to some sources, ministerial posts can be bought directly from Moscow. Crisis Group interviews, Moscow and Brussels, April 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interview, Makhachkala, January 2007.

<sup>73</sup> As soon as Mukhu Aliyev came to power, he tried to make an example of some allegedly corrupt individuals. He removed Asan Amaev, leader of the Nogai district, who was suspected of accepting bribes, and opened an official corruption inquiry on the leader of Kumtorkaliynski district, Sapijulla Karachayev.

<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group interview, Moscow, April 2007.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> A. Yarlykapov, “Separatism and Islamic Extremism”, op. cit.

<sup>77</sup> However, the construction of a federal military base in the district of Botlikh, where land was already in short supply, created tensions and led to altercations between inhabitants and Russian soldiers, Crisis Group interview, Makhachkala, March 2007; and “В Ботлихском районе Дагестана подрались местный житель и российский военный” [“Altercation between an inhabitant from the district of Botlikh and a Russian soldier”], *Caucasian Knot*, 5 May 2007, <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1185779.html>.

<sup>78</sup> See, however, a very detailed description of torture in “В Дагестане сотрудники правоохранительных органов более месяца пытают человека” [“In Dagestan, the police has



law enforcement officials deny they engage in it.<sup>80</sup> The cycle of internal violence perpetuates itself with

been torturing someone for more than a month”], at [www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/index.htm](http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/index.htm), 18 December 2007; see also “Dagestan Mothers inform Prosecutor’s Office about tortures in SIZO of Makhachkala”, *Caucasian Knot*, 21 December 2007. It is difficult to find evidence, as many victims remain silent. However, lawyers confirm that beatings and torture often occur, Crisis Group interview, Makhachkala, January 2007. The “6th section” of the Makhachkala police is known for its involvement and is often mentioned in witness accounts, “Dagestanis Protest Abductions by Police”, *Chechnya Weekly*, Jamestown Foundation, 7 June 2007. This article also mentions a march organised on 28 May 2007 in Makhachkala to protest police kidnappings of civilians. The protesters, including the parents of fourteen young people recently kidnapped, demanded a meeting with President Aliyev. One, Shakhazada Dibirova, said, “they took my son a year ago and we don’t know where he is. After a gathering, he had been freed. And do you know where he had been detained? At the OuBOP (Organised Crime Department) in Section 6. He had been tortured and made an invalid and then he was kidnapped again”. Another marcher added, “we know where they are hiding our sons! The police are waiting for the next special operation to get rid of the bodies of these young people and say they were rebels. That’s why they are kidnapping our children!” Accounts collected in 2004 also mention torture, Aliyev, Magomedova, V. Dzutsev, “Putin Landslide Raises Eyebrows”, op. cit. See also decree no. 90 of 11 February 2006, ratified by President Putin, “On the list of information covered by the State Secret Privilege”, at <http://document.kremlin.ru/doc.asp?ID=032374>, which refers to the possibility of using all possible means during an investigation (Article 98). On 6 February 2008, the organisation Mothers of Dagestan for Human Rights demonstrated against the disappearances, IWPR of that day.

<sup>79</sup> See two recent reports on torture in Chechnya: “Пытки в Чечне стабилизация кошмара” [“Torture in Chechnya: nightmare going on”], joint report by Memorial and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), 2006; and “Widespread Torture in the Chechen Republic”, Human Rights Watch, November 2006. Very few NGOs work in Dagestan. On the June 2005 attack on Borzodinovskaia, when Yamadaevtsy, a Chechen battalion, carried out a special operation leading to the death of eleven people, see “‘Комитет против пыток’: похищенных жителей Борздиновской держали в Шелковском РОВД” [“‘Anti-torture committee’: people kidnapped in Borzodinovskaia detained by Chelkovskaia police”], *Caucasian Knot*, 24 May 2007, at <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/1187498.html>.

<sup>80</sup> For example, Osman Boliev, who ran Romashka, a human rights organisation based in Khasavyurt, had been the driving force behind opening an investigation into the police kidnapping of a Dagestani, by bringing the case to the European Court of Human Rights. On 15 November 2005 he was questioned by traffic police during an inspection of his vehicle on the road from Khasavyurt. They passed him to the OMONs (special units attached to the interior ministry), who took him to Khasavyurt police station, where he was found to be in possession of a grenade and was charged with “par-

arrests of suspected extremists during special operations, their ill-treatment in detention and their eventual liberation, not after a fair trial but after bribes are paid.<sup>81</sup>

## B. THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION’S REACTION

### 1. Law enforcement’s response

The response to attacks on police and others has been extensive special operations carried out by as many as 5,000 law enforcement agents to neutralise the Islamists believed responsible. Large operations began in January and June 2005, conducted by 4,000 to 5,000 federal officers deployed to the republic. In January 2006, the army assisted local law enforcement to root out alleged jihadists near Gimri and Shamil Kala. In 2007, a further seven special operations were conducted. Following the 10 December 2007 murder of a Dagestani parliamentary deputy, Gazimagomed Magomedov, more than 3,500 security personnel equipped with armoured vehicles, including 1,000 Russian troops, encircled Gimri in Untsukul region to conduct a special operation that continued into May.<sup>82</sup> According to officials, 59 residents of Gimri were arrested as terrorist suspects.<sup>83</sup> For example, the following occurred in the first six weeks of 2008:

- 8 January 2008: a special operation was conducted in Tabasaransky district involving the Dagestani ministry of internal affairs, the Dagestani branch of the FSB and the federal defence ministry. Russian and Dagestan interior ministry officials said at least five militants died during the assault on a house in Gelim-Batan village, three of whom have been identified as natives of Derbent. The dead are

ticipation in illegal armed groups”. After the Khasavyurt court acquitted him, he fled to Ukraine, and his brother, Osman, took over the organisation. The FSB has accused him of laundering Western money. See “В Дагестане силовики продолжают преследование правозащитной организации ‘Ромашка’” [“In Dagestan law enforcement agencies continue to persecute the human rights organisation ‘Romashka’”], *Dagestanski rakurs*, 7-22 December 2006.

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Makhachkala, January 2007.

<sup>82</sup> S. Markedonov, “Тимры: затянувшаяся контртеррористическая операция” [“Gimry: a lasting anti-terror operation”], *Politcom*, 20 February 2008, at [www.politcom.ru:80/article.php?id=5754](http://www.politcom.ru:80/article.php?id=5754).

<sup>83</sup> See A. Smirnov, “Russian Forces Face Serious Problems Hunting Rebels in Dagestan’s Mountains”, *Chechnya Weekly*, Jamestown Foundation, 10 January 2008. Gimri has always been a place with strong national customs. The special forces consider it to be an Islamic stronghold, similar to the Kadar zone in 1998. See S. Markedonov, “Gimry”, op. cit.

said to have belonged to a militant group commanded by Elgar Malashilov, a deputy to Rappani Khalilov.

- 11 January 2008: a special operation was conducted in Makhachkala.
- 5 February 2008: a district of Derbent was officially declared an "anti-terrorist zone".
- 7 February 2008: the younger brother of Askhab Bidaev, the leader of the Khasavyurt militants, was killed there. The same day two militants were killed in Avadan, Derbent district.
- 12 February 2008: a special operation began in Babaiurt district with the killing of three militants. The local FSB chief, Dagir Zakariyev, also died.

Official statements after each of these operations often herald their success and suggest that a serious blow has been dealt to the underground groups, but there are always young people ready to join the resistance.<sup>84</sup> Some experts say there seems to be a "hard core of a few dozen people but a reservoir of several thousand young people ready to make the leap into clandestine action at any time".<sup>85</sup> As the specialist Enver Kisriev noted in 2005, "[half the] population could potentially feed the terrorist illegal ground.... No job, no money, no hope.... Each year 10,000 young people complete their education and have no future".<sup>86</sup>

A Russian general in November 2007 called the situation in the North Caucasus unstable and predicted federal troops would remain for a long time.<sup>87</sup> On 30

January 2008 in a speech to FSB officers, President Putin acknowledged that "despite big results, the anti-terrorist operation is not over";<sup>88</sup> a few days prior, a federal deputy minister, Arkadi Edelev, indicated special operations would be carried out until the March presidential elections.<sup>89</sup> Shariat Jamaat has claimed responsibility for many attacks, but the perpetrators of many others remain unknown.<sup>90</sup>

## 2. The Plenipotentiary Representative's anti-corruption effort

Moscow has supported the "traditional" elite, with which it has worked since the Soviet era. Although it has prevented the Chechen conflict from spreading into Dagestan, it has not resolved the republic's deeper problems. Federal policy has increased the gap between Dagestani society and its politicians, consolidating the enjoyment of the republic's economic assets by a small percentage of its population. By ignoring corruption and hoping its chosen partners will maintain a certain degree of stability, Moscow has facilitated the continued exclusion of those on the fringes of society who now express their dissatisfaction through violence. The federal government would do well to promote some redistribution of the repub-

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sian Policy toward the North Caucasus", Jamestown Foundation, September 2006.

<sup>88</sup> See S. Markedonov in *Антитеррорическая борьба: философия российской власти*, ["Anti terror: Russian power's philosophy"], *Politcom*, 5 February 2008, at [www.politcom.ru/article.php?id=5683](http://www.politcom.ru/article.php?id=5683). In February 2008, Kadyrov promised to end the war before spring, M. Vatchagaev, "Counting Chechnya's Rebel Fighters: Kadyrov's Fuzzy Math", *Chechnya Weekly*, Jamestown Foundation, 7 February 2008.

<sup>89</sup> "А. Еделев: спецоперации в Дагестане и Ингушетии могут продолжаться до марта", ["Special Operations in Dagestan and Ingushetiya can be protracted until March"], *Caucasian Knot*, 22 January 2008, at <http://kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1206183.html>.

<sup>90</sup> These include the September 2005 killing of the chief of staff of the Russian interior ministry troops; a December 2005 attempted assassination of the deputy interior minister, Magomed Gazimagomedov; the October 2006 attack against a police station, which killed two officers; the February 2007 deaths of a police investigator attacked in his car, two policemen in Makhachkala and a Makhachkala mosque imam; a November 2007 killing of Nariman Aliev, an academic, and his wife in Derbentsky district; the December 2007 assassinations of Judges Kurban Pashaev (supreme court), and Akhmed Ibragimov (Kaspiisk district court), and parliamentary deputy Gazimagomed Magomedov, a target of six previous attempts (2002-2007); the January 2008 attack on Dagestani parliamentarian Gazi Gaziev; and February 2008 assassinations of two company directors.

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<sup>84</sup> The unemployment rate in Makhachkala is 14 per cent, "В столице Дагестана каждый седьмой трудоспособный житель – безработный" ["In Dagestan's capital, one out seven inhabitants is jobless"], *Caucasian Knot*, 23 January 2008, at [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1206209.html](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1206209.html).

<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group interview, Moscow, April 2007.

<sup>86</sup> E. Kisriev, "Потенциальную базу террористического подполья в Дагестане составляет половина населения республики" ["Half of Dagestan's population offers a potential breeding ground for underground terrorism in Dagestan"], *Gazeta.ru*, 16 November 2005.

<sup>87</sup> General Shamanov who took part in both Chechen wars and became governor of Uliyanovsk's region. "Мы обречены на Кавказ" ["We are condemned to Caucasus"], Southern District Information, 10 November 2007, at <http://southru.info/2007/11/10/my-obrecheny-na-kavkaz.html>. 2006 figures mentioned approximately 70,000 *siloviki* (security services) and 250,000 men drawn from other ministries in the southern federal district. According to J. Dunlop, quoting the Russian federal authorities' plenipotentiary in the Northern Caucasus, Dimitri Kozak, there are about 1,180 *siloviki* for every 100,000 inhabitants, which makes the region one of the most militarised in the world, J. Dunlop, "Putin, Kozak and Rus-

lic's economic assets to ensure youths have jobs and future prospects.

The central authorities have a high degree of control over Dagestan's institutions. In 2000, President Putin's federal reforms created seven super districts overseen by plenipotentiary representatives. Dagestan is in the South Russian super district (YuFO).<sup>91</sup> The primary role of the Moscow-appointed representative in 2000 was to ensure that local constitutions conformed to the federal one and to implement all federal policies in the region. Moscow also passed a law that year granting the Russian president authority to discharge executive heads of the "subjects" (federated entities like Dagestan) and to ask the federal Duma to dissolve their legislative bodies.<sup>92</sup> These measures have curbed republic autonomy to the extent that local politics is largely supervised by the plenipotentiary representative and the Russian president. Plenipotentiary representatives have only limited control of the local economy, which runs largely independently, but they can speak out against corruption.

This is what Moscow attempted with Dimitri Kozak, who was appointed in 2000 the federal government's plenipotentiary representative in the South Russian super district with a specific anti-corruption mandate. He was aware that corruption and criminality were feeding the spiral of violence and both could appear in a variety of forms at all levels in a society where the rule of law was subordinated to the use of force or intimidation. His "Kozak Report" for the federal authorities, supposedly confidential, was leaked to the press in 2005 and provoked a strong reaction.<sup>93</sup> Its analysis of the situation in Dagestan went so far as to consider the risk of the republic's dissolution. Highly critical of the clan-like functioning of local elites and the widespread corruption, it predicted growing instability and cited Dagestan's potential as a breeding ground for extremism.<sup>94</sup> Whether intentional or not,

the leak of this report brought Dagestan's problems into the open.

To avoid the republic's break-up, Kozak proposed the introduction of direct presidential management from Moscow, to which its administration would answer.<sup>95</sup> The idea was strongly criticised in the press,<sup>96</sup> and Moscow retracted it, agreeing instead to the counter-proposal of Dagestani elites that a new republic president be chosen. While Moscow may have realised that ending corruption would not necessarily be easier with a vertical power structure, it did establish at this time a military base in Botlikh and decided to limit the autonomy of the republics based on the size of their subsidies. Kozak's tense relationship with Magomedov hastened the negotiations to bring in as president Mukhu Aliyev, who at a personal level was said to be much less corrupt and seemed more concerned about the issue.

Before he left his plenipotentiary position in September 2007 to become minister of regions, Kozak participated in a Makhachkala conference on combating extremism at which he heavily criticised Dagestan's "ineffective" law enforcement agencies.<sup>97</sup> His successor, Grigori Rapota, initially maintained a low profile. Recently, however, he has spoken out strongly against corruption, most notably during November 2007 and February 2008 visits to Dagestan, but despite his efforts and the republic's much anticipated anti-corruption law,<sup>98</sup> racketeering continues to blossom.

<sup>91</sup> The South Russian super district also includes Adygheya, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkariya, North Ossetia, Ingushetiya and Chechnya), the *krais* (districts) of Stavropol and Krasnodar and the *oblasts* (regions) of Rostov, Volgograd and Astrakhan.

<sup>92</sup> "Проект закона "Об общих принципах организации местного самоуправления в Российской Федерации" принят во втором чтении" ("The draft law "On general principles of local self-government in the Russian Federation" was adopted in a second reading), Duma of the Russian Federation, available at: <http://duma.hro.org/2003/06/11.htm>.

<sup>93</sup> A. Khinshteyn, "Сенсационный доклад Дмитрия Козака" ["The sensational Kozak Report"], *Moskovskiy Komсомолец*, 15 June 2005.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> "Козак нашел узду для Северного Кавказа. Полпред президента в ЮФО предложил ввести прямое федеральное правление в регионах-банкротах" ["Kozak is holding the reins in the North Caucasus. The President's plenipotentiary in the YUFO has proposed the introduction of direct federal administration of failing regions"], 20 July 2005, at <http://lenta.ru/articles/2005/07/20/kozak>.

<sup>96</sup> S. Migalin, "Козак наступает на горло собственной песне. Введение прямого президентского правления в республиках Северного Кавказа может еще больше дестабилизировать обстановку", ["Kozak has fallen into his own trap. The introduction of direct presidential administration of the North Caucasus republics could further destabilise the situation"], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 26 July 2005.

<sup>97</sup> "В своем выступлении на конференции в Махачкале полпред Д. Козак поставил под сомнение эффективность действий власти в борьбе с проявлениями экстремизма", ["In his speech at the Makhachkala conference, the *polpred* D. Kozak called into question the effectiveness of the authorities in the fight against extremism"], YUFO administration, 6 June 2007, at [www.ufo.gov.ru/news/1414.html](http://www.ufo.gov.ru/news/1414.html).

<sup>98</sup> "Народное Собрание Дагестана примет «Закон о коррупции» раньше, чем Госдума" ["The People's Assembly of Dagestan will adopt the 'Anti-Corruption Law' before the

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Large-scale war is unlikely to develop in Dagestan, but violence can be expected to continue to be caused by competition over lands and jobs, spillover from Chechnya and the rise of local jihadi groups. The origins of the present jihadi-inspired violence are in the “hunt for the Wahhabis” carried out by the Dagestani authorities after the 1999 Chechen incursion and the arbitrary persecution of pious youth by local law enforcement officers. The violence in Dagestan’s streets is also fed by the movement of rebels and Islamist militants across the porous border with Chechnya, as well as by the republic’s omnipresent corruption and criminality. Rival clans, led by President Aliyev and Makhachkala’s mayor, Said Amirov, duelled for control of economic and political assets in 2007, as the street troubles intensified.

Reprisals by local and federal security forces have failed to curb the violence; instead they seem to be escalating it. The troubled March 2007 electoral campaign and the growing number of attacks on local officials and assassinations carried out by Islamic militants suggest Dagestan faces a violent future.

**Makhachkala/Moscow/Brussels, 3 June 2008**

## APPENDIX A

## MAP OF THE CAUCASUS REGION



Map No. 4159 UNITED NATIONS  
November 2000

Department of Public Information  
Cartographic Section

## APPENDIX B

### DAGESTAN'S LARGEST NATIONAL GROUPS

**Avars** are the republic's largest ethnic group.<sup>99</sup> With a little over 750,000 members, they were nearly 30 per cent of the population in the most recent census (2002). Inhabiting the high mountains of western Dagestan, they were Islamised in the eleventh century under Arab influence, were subsequently organised into a *khanat* and in 1803 became a principality attached to the Russian Empire in 1803. Despite this, it was an Avar, Imam Chamil, who led the resistance to Russian colonisation under the banner of *muridism*, a spiritual Sufi Muslim movement, and created a Chechen-Dagestani *Imamat*. After Imam Chamil was imprisoned in 1859, Moscow considered the eastern part of the North Caucasus to be conquered. During the Soviet era, the Avars held many powerful positions, particularly the post of first secretary of the republic's Communist Party.

From 1991 to 2006, a period during which a Dargin (Magomedali Magomedov) led the republic, an Avar opposition movement arose, notably under what was called the Northern Alliance, because it was conceived by the mayors of two towns from northern Dagestan, Khasavyurt and Kizliar. This opposition expressed the frustration of the largest ethnic group at no longer leading the republic politically. The appointment in February 2006 of Mukhu Aliyev, an Avar, as Dagestan's president was seen by the Northern Alliance as the correction of an injustice. Many Avars work in the police force and law enforcement agencies, as well as in the oil sector.

**Dargins**, who mainly live in central Dagestan, were 17 per cent of the population in 2002 (a little over 425,000), the second largest ethnic group. They converted to Islam in the eighth century, and their territory was conquered by Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Two ethnic groups speaking very different languages who were merged with the Dargin national group in 1926, the Kaitags and the Kubatchis, demanded separate recognition in 2002. Magomedov, who led the republic from 1990 to 2006 (until 1994 as president of the Supreme Soviet and from 1994 to 2006 as president of Gossovet) is Dargin. Many Dargins work in trade, currency exchange and agriculture. The Makhachkala mayor since 1998, Said Amirov, is also Dargin.

**Kumyks** are the third largest group in the republic, 14 per cent of the population (365,804 individuals in 2002). They are Turkic-speaking in contrast to the other non-Russian groups described here. (Avars, Dargins, Lezgins and Laks speak Caucasian languages in the Dagestani family). The Kumyks, who were established in the central plains as agriculturalists and Islamised in the eleventh century, formed between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a *chamkhalat*, a principality which united several fiefdoms. Their language was long the common one of Dagestan, until it was replaced by Russian at the time of Moscow's conquest. At the end of the 1980s, movements were formed to dispute the continued movement of mountain peoples to the plains under Soviet policy and to demand the creation of Kumykstan. Besides farming, many Kumyks are active in trade and the gas sector. They also form a significant part of the Dagestani intelligentsia.

**Lezgins** are 13 per cent of the Dagestan population (336,698 in the 2002 census), mainly in the south. However, many live outside the republic, in Azerbaijan, which is the basis for demands to join the Lezgin areas on either side of the Samur River. Lezgins were successively conquered by the Ottoman and Persian Empires and were part of the Russian Empire from 1802 to 1804. As the republic's fourth largest ethnic group, they occasionally received senior appointments during the Soviet era.

**Laks** were 5 per cent of the population in 2002 (139,732) people. They live in the central foothills, where they perform various activities, including craftsmanship and seasonal work, and form a not unimportant part of the intelligentsia. They are directly involved in one of Dagestan's territorial disputes: during the deportation of Chechen-Akkins in 1944, Laks were forcibly moved to Aukhovski, a district now named Novolakski (New District of the Laks). At the end of the 1980s, one of the important demands of the Chechen-Akkins was to return to this district; the Dagestani authorities agreed, but implementation of the promise to re-house Laks in the suburbs of Makhachkala is lagging.

**Russians**, whose numbers have dropped steeply since 1989 (when they were 9 per cent of the population), were 5 per cent in 2002 (120,875). During the last decades of the Soviet era, they did not occupy key positions in the same percentage as in the neighbouring

<sup>99</sup> The Avar national group includes various sub-groups.

republics. However, the access of Russians to certain positions under the federal ministries, particularly to jobs which have been decentralised to Dagestan, remains a sensitive issue and one to which Moscow's former plenipotentiary in the North Caucasus, Dimitri Kozak, gave much attention.

Other Dagestani people according to the Constitution of 1994 (Nogais, Chechen-Akkins, Aguls, Tsakhurs, Rutuls, Tabasarans and Azeris) are a small percentage of the republic's population. Nonetheless, in certain situations they can play important roles with respect to access to land, participation in politics and shares in the economy.

## APPENDIX C

### NOTED ATTACKS AND MURDERS BETWEEN 2003 AND 2008

- 11 August 2003** Nadir Khachilaev, former president of the Union of Muslims, former member of the federal Duma and brother of Magomed Khachilaev, the leader of the Lak movement, is killed.
- 27 August 2003** Magomedsalikh Gusaev, minister of nationalities, is killed by a bomb planted in his vehicle.
- 2 December 2004** Akhmed Batalov, the deputy head of Makhachkala's administration for economic and financial affairs, dies in a shooting.
- 4 March 2004** Magomedrasul Alkhaev, head of the Buynaksk administration, is shot dead.
- 30 December 2004** Masked assailants shot at the car of police colonel Gadzhiraman Ramazanov, head of the department of operations from Dagestan's home office, in Makhachkala. He, his wife and one of his colleagues are killed.
- 2 February 2005** The Deputy Home Secretary of Dagestan Magomed Omarov is killed.
- 15 April 2005** Two deputy public prosecutors, Razudin Ramazanov and Abdoulla Magomedov, are killed.
- 17 April 2005** Sharaputdin Musaev, former Head of Dagestan's Pension fund is killed in Moscow.
- 22 April 2005** A gunman shoots at a police battalion and one pedestrian is killed.
- 20 May 2005** Z. Arukhov, Dagestan's minister for nationalities, press and information, is murdered.
- 24 May 2005** Magomed Guitinov, senior detective from the department of internal affairs of Buynaksk, is killed.
- 29 May 2005** Asker Askerov, head of crime detection in Buynaksk district, is killed.
- 2 June 2005** Osman Osmanov, a police lieutenant, is killed.
- 4 June 2005** Zaur Tataev, member of parliament (MP), is murdered.
- 28 June 2005** Magomedzagid Varisov, a political analyst and journalist, is killed.
- 12 July 2005** Chingiz Azadov, assistant to head of police in Khasavyurt district, is murdered.
- 3 September 2005** Alexander Krasnoglazov, major of the home troops of the Russian home secretary, is killed by a bomb.
- 6 October 2005** One of the managers of the branch of the Union of Veterans from the war in Afghanistan, Alan Amirov, is killed at his house in Makhachkala.
- 12 December 2005** MP Magomed Magomedov is a target of an assassination attempt in the suburb of Kizilyurt. His driver dies on the way to the hospital.
- 27 December 2005** A gunman shoots at the car of the Deputy Home Secretary Magomed Gazimagomedov. His son and driver are killed in the attack.
- 20 March 2006** A member of the interdistrict section of UBOP (department fighting organised crime) is killed in Buynaksk.
- 22 March 2006** MP Ruslan Aliev, head of administration in Botlikh, is shot dead.
- 21 June 2006** Saigid-Salim Zabitov, head of the unit fighting organised crime in Khasavyurt, is killed.
- 8 August 2006** Bitar Bitarov, the public prosecutor of Buynaksk, is shot dead.
- 22 October 2006** Two police officers are shot dead while performing regular ID checks.
- 19 December 2006** Magomed Ibragimov, head of the teaching department in the district of Unsukulski, is killed.
- 20 January 2007** Omar Magomedov, the head of the Kizliar administration and candidate for the 11 March legislative elections, disappears – his car is eventually found charred.
- 14 March 2007** Two FSB officers are killed in Khasavyurt by an unknown person.
- 15 March 2007** Four days after the legislative elections, shootings take place in Makhachkala: three members of the law enforcement forces are wounded, and a bystander is killed.
- 16 March 2007** Unknown assailants fire at MVD road patrols. Two policemen are wounded, one is killed.
- 23 March 2007** Chechen leader Ruslan Bashaev is killed in Khasavyurt.
- 1 April 2007** The Deputy Public Prosecutor Abdulbasyr Omarov is killed in Kaspijsk.
- 5 April 2007** A police captain and his wife are killed in Makhachkala.
- 18 April 2007** A policeman is killed in the Karabudakhkent district during an anti-terrorist operation.
- 23 April 2007** Two fighters are killed by law enforcement forces in Per-vomaiskoe.
- 26 April 2007** Two policemen are killed in Iarag-Kazmallar, Magaramkent district, while checking the documents of a driver.
- 25 May 2007** One member of the law enforcement forces is killed and three others wounded after their car is shot at near Buynaksk.
- 14 June 2007** Two local residents are killed during a shootout on Rasul Gamzatov Avenue in Makhachkala.
- 15 June 2007** The Unsukul district police chief, Colonel Magomedali Aliev, and his deputy are killed in Shamilkala near Aliev's house at 6am. Aliev had been nominated head of the district police after the previous police chief was killed during an operation against an armed group.
- 14 July 2007** Local MP Ibragim Ibragimov and a voluntary citizens' patrolman are murdered in Gubden.
- 15 July 2007** A policeman is shot dead in his car in Khasavyurt.
- 18 July 2007** Six policemen die and eight are injured in an explosion at #7 school in Kizilyurt.
- 26 July 2007** Vice *mufti* of the DUMD Kuramagomed Ramazanov and his brother are shot dead in their car in Makhachkala.
- 23 August 2007** A line of Dagestani OMON (Otryad Militsii Osobogo Naznacheniya, Special Purpose Police



- Squad) vehicles is fired at near Gimry. Two OMON soldiers die in the attack.
- 21 September 2007** The body of a forest warden who had been abducted by separatists is found in the woods.
- 25 September 2007** In Gubden, 59-year-old mosque attendant Nurmagomed Gajimagomedov is killed.
- 30 September 2007** In Kizilyurt, the chief of the GUVd (Glavnoe Upravleniye Vnutrennih Del, Main Internal Affairs Directorate) criminal investigation, Magomed Gasanov, is killed. The same day, one policeman is shot in Sergokala, and in Gonoda (Gunib district) nine people are killed, some of whom were members of Interior Minister Magomedtagirov's family.
- 2 October 2007** A police car is shot at in Dagestanskii Ognii, leaving two policemen dead.
- 4 October 2007** Edik Geraev, vice commandant of a battalion in charge of Said Amirov's security, is murdered.
- 6 October 2007** Nabi Gitinomagomedov, chief of Shamil district GIBDD (Gosudarstvennaya Inspekziya Bezopasnosti Dorozhnogo Dvizheniya, State Road Traffic Safety Inspection) is murdered while on his way to an official meeting.
- 8 October 2007** Two policemen are killed in a skirmish between fighters and the police.
- 23 October 2007** Eight taxi passengers are injured and one woman dies during a shootout in the Kazbek district.
- 21 November 2007** Farid Babaev, a federal candidate for the democratic party Yabloko, is wounded in an attack. He dies three days later.
- 26 November 2007** 77-year-old Nariman Aliev and his wife are murdered with a Makarov pistol in Mamedkala (Derbent district). Aliev was a member of the USSR Supreme Soviet and of the Dagestani Popular Assembly.
- 10 December 2007** Two female fortune tellers are shot at in Makhachkala; one of the women dies. Masked aggressors are overheard saying, "fortune telling is opposed to God's will so it deserves death penalty".
- 10 December 2007** Gazimagomed Magomedov, a former member of the Dagestani Popular Assembly from Gimry, is murdered. Ibragim Gadzhidadaev, leader of a Wahhabi group is declared a suspect. Magomedov fought against Basaev in 1999, and against the federal troops in the first Chechen campaign and was allegedly close to Bagaudin. He took part in the negotiations to free Arian Erkel, a Médecins sans Frontières hostage who was detained in Dagestan and freed in April 2004.
- 11 December 2007** Judge Kurban Pashaev of the Dagestani Supreme Court is murdered on the threshold of his house. A Borz rifle is found next to the body.
- 16 March 2008** Gintomagomedibir Gamzatov, a 75-year-old non-traditional medical practitioner, is shot.
- 17 March 2008** Iaragin Vidirpashaev, former president of Mutsalaulski *sovkhos* (Khasavyurt district) is shot in his car.
- 21 March 2008** Gaji Abashilov, director of Dagestan's state television company is shot dead in Makhachkala. On the same day Ilyas Shurpayev, a Dagestani correspondent for Russia's state-run Channel One, is found murdered in his Moscow apartment.
- 24 March 2008** A GIBDD team is shot at by an unidentified group. As a result, inspector of Khasavyurt district DPS OVD (internal affairs) dies and others are injured.
- 2 April 2008** A bomb explosion on the Makhachkala-Kaspiysk road targeting a police car kills a passerby.

## APPENDIX D

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*Crisis Group's International Advisory Council comprises significant individual and corporate donors who contribute their advice and experience to Crisis Group on a regular basis.*

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**SENIOR ADVISERS**

*Crisis Group's Senior Advisers are former Board Members (not presently holding national government executive office) who maintain an association with Crisis Group, and whose advice and support are called on from time to time.*

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