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THE STABILITY OF INSTABILITY IN DAGESTAN***

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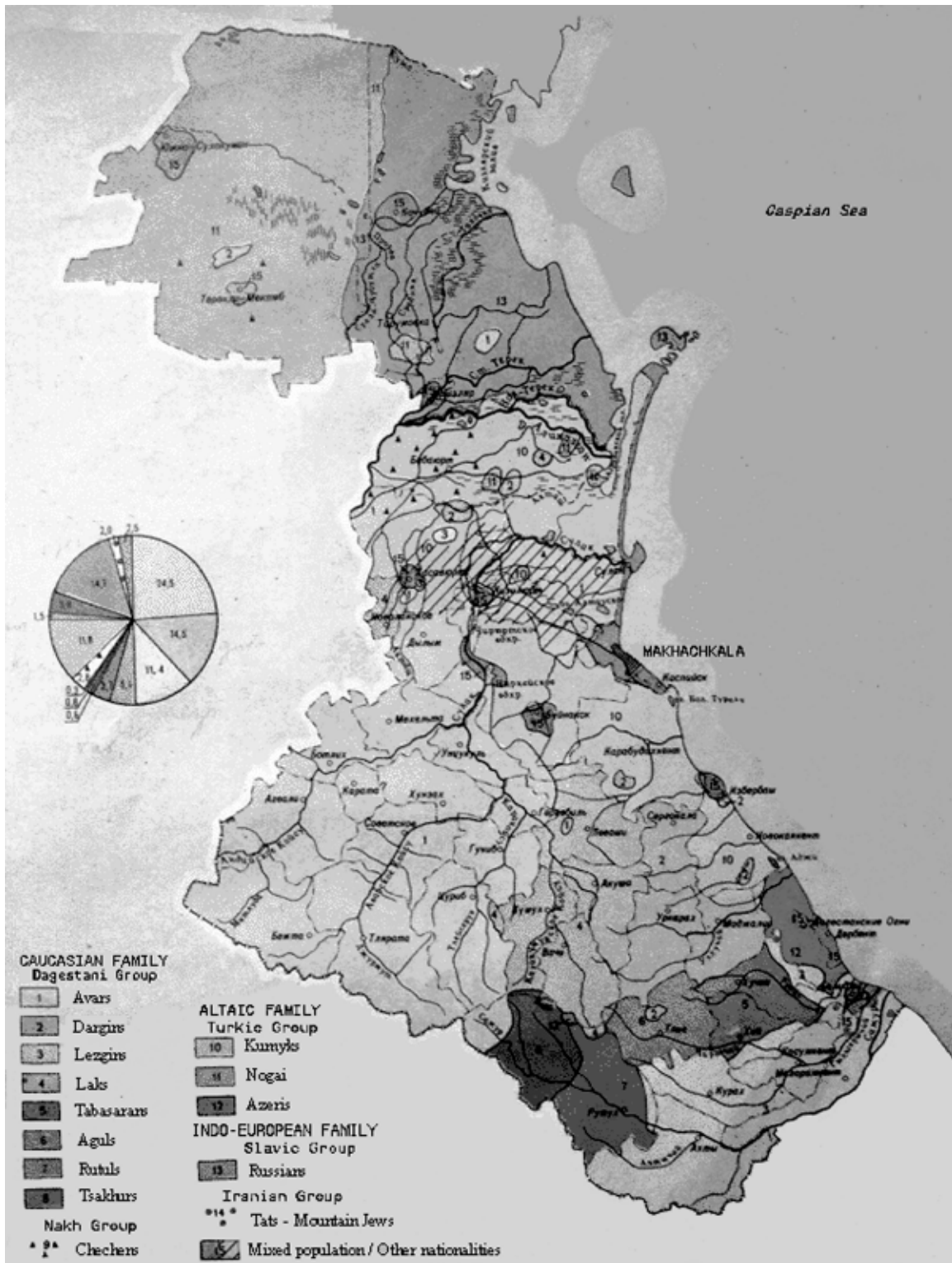
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A color version of this map can be found on the Internet at <http://www.caspian.net/peoples.gif>.

Introduction

In the first week of August 1999, some 1,000-2,000 armed militants entered into the Republic of Dagestan from the breakaway region of Chechnya (Ichkeria) in an effort to “liberate” Dagestan from Russian occupation. Apparently comprised of a mix of Chechens, Dagestanis, and Islamic militants from Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Arab world, and possibly elsewhere, the Chechen-based insurgents were nominally directed by an organization called the United Headquarters of Dagestan Mujahadin and commanded by the Chechen guerilla “field commander,” Shamil Basaev, and his ally, a mysterious Jordanian or Saudi citizen of unknown ethnic background who goes by the name “Khattab.”¹ The previous year, Basaev had been a central figure in the formation of the Congress of Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan (CPCD), the main platform of which was the unification of Chechnya and Dagestan into a single independent Islamic state. Basaev and his allies apparently believed that the incursion would be welcomed by the predominately Avar population in the Tsumadin and Botlikh regions of western Dagestan, where the initial incursion took place. Several days later, a spokesperson in Grozny (Dzhokhar), the nearby Chechen capital, announced the establishment of an “Independent Islamic Dagestan” and the formation of a government headed by a Dagestani Islamic militant, Siradjin Ramazanov.

The August incursion seemed to confirm Moscow’s worst fears about instability in the North Caucasus and Russia’s weakening hold on the strife-torn region. It appeared that, as long predicted, the conflict in Chechnya was spilling over into neighboring republics, threatening to precipitate a general uprising throughout the region that might well lead to the total disintegration of the Russian Federation. Moscow officials were convinced that Dagestan was the key to Russia’s presence in the region – if Russia “lost” Dagestan, it would lose all the North Caucasus, face renewed separatist demands from other “Muslim” republics such as Tatarstan, and lose whatever influence it still had in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Moscow’s concerns about instability in the North Caucasus, where all the sustained political violence that has taken place in Russia since independence has been concentrated, are understandable.² The 1994-1996 war between federal forces and separatists in Chechnya, which was responsible for an estimated 35,000-70,000 deaths and 400,000-500,000 refugees (technically, IDPs—internally displaced persons), has been the most deadly conflict in the former Soviet Union. The Ingush-Ossetian conflict over Prigorodnyi raion, which erupted into violence in late 1992 and caused at least 500 deaths and 43,000-73,000 IDPs, is likewise unresolved and threatens to degenerate into another

¹ While Khattab is usually described as ethnically Arab, there has been speculation that he may be of Chechen or Circassian ancestry. Like radical Muslims elsewhere, however, he considers himself a member of the Islamic community (the *umma*) and above national or ethnic identity. He accordingly refuses to disclose his ethnic background.

² For overviews of political conditions in the North Caucasus, see Helen Krag and Lars Funch, “The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads,” *Minority Rights Group International Report 94/5* (1994); and Fiona Hill, “Russia’s Tinderbox: Conflict in the North Caucasus And Its Implications for The Future of the Russian Federation,” (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, 1995).

round of fighting.³ And across the watershed of the great Caucasus Mountains, wars between newly independent Georgia and the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been ended by precarious cease-fires that have yet to lead to comprehensive political settlements. As for Dagestan, its strategic importance is obvious. Territorially the largest republic in the North Caucasus (50,370 sq. km, roughly the size of West Virginia), it is also the largest in population (an estimated 2.1 million in 1996). The highly mountainous republic (“Dagestan” is a Turkic word meaning “Land of the Mountains”) lies on the eastern edge of the Caucasus range on the Caspian Sea. Makhachkala, the republic’s capital, is Russia’s only year-round warm water port on the Caspian. The republic shares borders with Chechnya to its east, Kalmykia to the north, Stavropol’ krai to the northwest, Georgia to the southwest, and Azerbaijan to the south. While its north forms part of the great Eurasian steppe, its south and west are extremely mountainous, except for a narrow coastal plain between the Caspian and the end of the Caucasus range.

For millennia, Dagestan’s narrow littoral plain has been the principal transportation route between the Eurasian steppes to the north and the Transcaucasus and the fertile and warmer lands to the south. The only other significant transportation arteries between the North and South Caucasus are the Georgian Military Highway, built by the Russians in the nineteenth century through the Darial Gorge and over the Krestovyi Pass in the central Caucasus range, and the Black Sea coastline of Abkhazia, which is even less negotiable than the coastal plain of Dagestan. Both corridors have been severed by conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the railroad line through Abkhazia joining Russia and Georgia is no longer operational. The only railroad connecting Russia to the South Caucasus today passes through Dagestan.⁴ Even more important, at least in the minds of many Moscow officials, is the oil pipeline passing through Dagestan. The existing pipeline has limited capacity and can bring only a small volume of Caspian oil from Baku to the Russian port of Novorossiisk for export to foreign markets.⁵ Moscow

³ For estimates of numbers of casualties and IDPs in the North Caucasus, see Greg Hansen, “Humanitarian Action in the Caucasus: A Guide for Practitioners,” (Providence, RI: Brown University, The Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Humanitarianism and War Project and Local Capacities for Peace Project, 1998). Violence again broke out between Ossetians and Ingush in Prigorodnyi raion in early September 1998 when Ossetians destroyed dozens of Ingush homes after five Ossetian policemen were killed, allegedly by Ingush militants (*RFE/RL Newsline*, 14 September 1998).

⁴ The Russian government completed a 78-kilometer railroad spur between Karlan-Yurt in Stavropol Krai and Kizlyar in Dagestan in July 1997, thanks to which trains from the rest of Russia can now reach Dagestan without passing through Chechnya.

⁵ The current pipeline passes through Dagestan, into Chechnya, and then on to the junction town of Tikhoretsk before reaching Novorossiisk. In 1997, the Russian and Chechen governments, along with the Russian pipeline company Transneft, entered into an agreement giving the Chechen government a share of the transit fees. However, the inability of the Chechen government to prevent the illegal tapping of oil from the pipeline or to provide effective security for Russian maintenance and repair crews meant that the pipeline functioned only intermittently thereafter. Indeed, it was non-operational for most of 1999 even before the Russian invasion of Chechnya in September. Accordingly, most of the Caspian oil making its way through Dagestan in 1999 was moved by train to Novorossiisk. Overall, however, volume was just over one-half of that anticipated in an agreement between SOCAR, the Azerbaijan state oil company, and Transneft (*RFE/RL Newsline*, 18 August 1999). Moscow has indicated that it intends to build a new pipeline that would bypass Chechnya, but doing so will take some time.

officials hope, however, that the existing pipeline will be supplemented by an expanded “main export pipeline” that will carry much larger flows of oil once the expected increase in Caspian oil production takes place in the coming five to ten years.

At the same time, Dagestan is considered highly unstable. Moscow officials have been particularly concerned about a perceived threat from the spread of “Wahhabism,” or fundamentalist and politicized Islam in general, in the republic, which is said to be spreading rapidly with support from militant Islamic groups abroad, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. These concerns were heightened when three highland villages in central Dagestan, some 30 kilometers southwest of Makhachkala, announced in August 1998 the formation of a independent “Islamic territory.”⁶ At the same time, Dagestan is the most ethnically diverse of all the former Soviet autonomies, and many of its 34 officially recognized “nationalities” (*natsional’nosty*) have territorial and other grievances against others. There is also a high degree of cultural distance between many of them in terms of language family, religion, culture, and way of life. Accordingly, there have been frequent predictions that Dagestan is on the verge of widespread interethnic violence that, once underway, will be all but impossible to stop. Dagestan was also the poorest region in Russia in the Soviet period, and with the exception of war-torn Chechnya and perhaps Ingushetia, it remains the poorest of Russia’s “subjects of the federation” today. And finally, the republic has numerous territorial disputes with its neighbors, most notably Chechnya and Azerbaijan, as well as a reputation for being among the most corrupt and crime-ridden of Russia’s republics.

Even before the August 1999 fighting in western Dagestan, then, there were frequent reminders of the potential for large-scale violence in the republic, including widespread kidnappings, assassinations, and terrorist bombings. The region first captured world attention in early 1996, in the midst of the first post-Soviet war in Chechnya, when a major hostage-taking incident took place in the town of Kizlyar. Chechen fighters led by the radical field commander Salman Raduev seized some 2000 hostages in a hospital. Raduev and most of his forces managed to escape after being surrounded and attacked by federal troops in the border village of Pervomaiskoe, but hundreds of Dagestani civilians were killed in the incident. In early 1998, armed supporters of an opposition leader seized and vandalized the main government building in Makhachkala during a confrontation with the republic’s militia. Earlier that year, 60 people were killed in a single blast that destroyed an apartment building in southern Dagestan, and another 18 were killed by a bomb in Makhachkala in September 1998. There have reportedly been ten attempts to assassinate the second most influential politician in the republic, the mayor of Makhachkala, Said Amirov, while in August 1998, the mufti of Dagestan, Said Muhammed-Hadji Abubakarov, was assassinated by a remote-controlled bomb that also killed his brother and driver. Finally, attacks on federal and republic troops in Dagestan are common – in July 1997, a bomb blast in the town of Khasavyurt killed nine policemen and wounded six, while a Russian military base in the suburbs of Buinaksk was attacked in December 1997, allegedly by a group of some 100-120 Wahhabi militants. Clashes involving republic police and federal forces grew more frequent over

⁶ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 20 August 1998, *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* (henceforth, *Current Digest*), vol. 50, no. 33 (1998), 14.

the course of 1999, to the point where early in the summer, for the first time since the end of the 1994-96 war, Russian forces began carrying out retaliatory aircraft and helicopter strikes against alleged terrorist bases on Chechen territory.

Nevertheless, despite these many indicators of an imminent collapse of public order in Dagestan, and despite the destabilizing influence of the chaos in neighboring Chechnya, Dagestan has managed to avoid all-out anarchy and internal ethnic or sectarian war. Episodic violence has not led to large-scale sustained violence. Most notably, the militants who crossed over from Chechnya in August 1999 were met by overwhelming popular hostility – even ethnic Chechens in Dagestan (the Chechen-Akkins, or Aukhovsky Chechens) publicly opposed the incursion.⁷ Instead, local Dagestanis demanded that authorities in Makhachkala and Moscow provide them with firearms and allow them to form volunteer brigades to defend their homes against the invaders. This local response contributed to the morale of the federal and republic troops fighting the militants, and it also helped account for the popular support the operation received throughout Russia – for the first time since World War II, a Russian citizen could say that “our boys” were fighting on the side of the people and against an aggressor.

After three weeks of fighting, federal forces, Dagestani Interior Ministry troops, and local self-defense units managed to force the guerillas to withdraw back to Chechnya. Moscow followed up by launching air strikes against the Chechen towns of Vedeno and Urus Martan, where the militants were allegedly regrouping, which prompted Basaev to announce that his fighters “reserved the right to retaliate throughout Russia.”⁸ The threat (by no means the first) was ignored, and federal forces went on to attack the “Wahhabi” villages in central Dagestan, using artillery and air strikes to empty the villages of both civilians and armed oppositionists. An effort by armed supporters of the villages based in Chechnya to come to their aid was unsuccessful. As this operation was coming to an end, some 1,000 to 2,000 militants from Chechnya entered Dagestan’s Kazbek and Novolaksky raions, where the majority of Dagestan’s Chechen-Akkins reside.⁹ Again, however, the militants received little local support, with Russian and Dagestani forces driving them back into Chechnya by mid-September. Tragically for both Chechnya and Russia, the escalating violence then turned into a full-scale war after a series of terrorist bombings in the Dagestani city of Buinaksk, in Moscow, and in Volgodonsk in Rostov oblast killed almost 300 Russian citizens. With federal officials blaming “terrorists” and

⁷ The National Council of the Chechen-Akkins issued a statement on 11 August 1999 that bluntly asserted, “Armed religious fanatics are trying to seize power . . . the Chechen people definitively condemn such methods of dealing with existing problems” (*Itar Tass*, 11 August 1999).

⁸ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 27 August 1999.

⁹ It appears that the militants involved in the first incursion were more ethnically mixed than those of the second, with the former including larger numbers of Dagestanis and as well as men from outside the Caucasus. Likewise, the location of the two incursions—the first in an area populated primarily by the Andi and Dido subgroups of the Avars (see below), and the second in an area where Chechens were more prevalent – seems to support local reports to this effect, suggesting that the first incursion was more “Wahhabi” while the second was more “Chechen nationalist.” It is important to emphasize, however, that in neither case did the Chechen government endorse the incursions (although neither did the Chechen president publicly insist that the militants withdraw, despite being asked to do so repeatedly by the Dagestani government). Even less is there any evidence that the incursions were supported by a majority of the Chechen people.

“bandits” based in Chechnya for the bombings, the public mood in Russia changed from righteous indignation at the “Chechen invasion” of Dagestan to fear and fury. The Russian government, which in 1994-96 faced widespread popular opposition to the war in Chechnya, was this time under considerable pressure to resolve the “Chechen problem” decisively. The result was another invasion of Chechnya by Russian forces beginning in late September 1999.

The events of August-October 1999 in and around Dagestan led not only to renewed warfare in Chechnya but also contributed to a further deterioration of social conditions inside Dagestan. Authorities in the republic were forced to deal with another flood of refugees, this time from western and central Dagestan, as well as additional refugees from Chechnya itself (although most of the Chechen IDPs fled west into Ingushetia because Dagestani and Russian troops prevented them from entering Dagestan). The fighting also aggravated inter-nationality relations in the republic, above all because of increased hostility towards local Chechens from many of Dagestan’s other national minorities. Still, what is most remarkable is that the republic’s “stable instability” survived the crisis—there has been no general revolt against either Moscow or the regime in Makhachkala, and indeed by all accounts the republic’s leadership, despite its many failings, has retained the support of a significant majority of the Dagestani citizenry.

Part of the objective of this paper, then, is to explain why, despite the many indicators of instability, large-scale and sustained violence has not come to Dagestan.¹⁰ The more challenging objective, however, is to assess whether Dagestan’s “stable instability” will last, and, in particular, whether Basaev or other militants in Dagestan or Chechnya will be able to mobilize support sufficient to overthrow the existing government in Makhachkala and expel Russian forces from the republic. To these ends, I disaggregate the problem as follows. First, I attempt to assess the *general risk* of large-scale sustained political violence by focusing on broad structural factors, stressing in particular the combination of regime type (consociationalism) and the nature of political cleavages in the republic. Second, I try to identify the *issues* that are the most likely to provoke large-scale sustained violence if it does break out, as well as the likely *participants*, by focusing on concrete political grievances and assessing whether those grievances are tractable or likely to intensify. Finally, I try to identify the *early warning indicators and triggers* of impending violence that are most likely to apply in the Dagestan case.¹¹

¹⁰ I will follow the literature on collective political violence and define large-scale violence as more than 1,000 deaths per annum for two consecutive years (Peter Wallensteen and Margarita Sollenberg, “Armed Conflicts, Conflict Termination, and Peace Agreements, 1989-96,” *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 3 (1997): 339-59). For those doing quantitative analysis on violence who need an operationalizable dependent variable, 1,000 deaths per annum is a reasonable, albeit arbitrary, threshold. However, the size of the groups involved obviously matters—1,000 deaths in a year in conflicts between very large ethnic groups is not the same as 1,000 deaths for small ethnic groups in terms of threats to group survival or extent of ethnic mobilization.

¹¹ My approach, which is best described as an analytical framework, is informed by the work of Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr under the “Minorities at Risk” and “Failed States” projects at the University of Maryland. See Ted Robert Gurr and Michael Haxton, “Minorities Report (1): Ethnopolitical Conflict in the

The core argument of the paper will be that, while Dagestan is very likely to remain highly unstable, the nature of its cleavage structure makes it unlikely that, at least for the foreseeable future, chronic instability will result in a violent mobilization of the Dagestani population, either in the form of a sustained internal war between Dagestanis, a war of national liberation against Moscow, or a sectarian *jihad* by Islamic militants. That is, Dagestan's "stable instability," as I will refer to it, will likely last for years. While social conditions inside the republic are deplorable, and militant groups and criminal organizations will certainly find Dagestan fertile ground for recruitment, Dagestani society is deeply pluralist, and appeals to Dagestani civic nationalism, Islam, or pan-Caucasian loyalties are unlikely to overcome the intensity of these local identities. Moreover, it is far more difficult today, after the example of Chechnya, Abkhazia, Karabakh, Transdniestra, and indeed many of the Soviet successor states as well as Afghanistan, for nationalists in particular, but also for Islamic militants, to claim credibly that group interests will be served by militant mobilization and political violence than it was ten years ago. And finally, the apparently "national" character of Chechen irredentism and the "alien" character of militant Islam will make it even more difficult for non-Dagestanis to unite the Dagestani peoples under the banner of Islamic militancy.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting (although this is not the place to elaborate these points in detail) that the Dagestan case has some important implications for theories of nationalism and nationalist conflict. The overwhelmingly dominant paradigm in the field today is constructivism, a school of thought that has emerged, with good cause, in opposition to a host of dubious popular notions about the origins and character of nations, nationalism, and ethnic conflict. These include the supposedly "age-old" character of particular nations or nations in general; the "ancient" quality of most or all interethnic enmities; the supposedly inevitable primacy of ethnicity as the primary determinant of the boundaries of political communities; and the "naturalness" of the nation-state as the predominant form of political organization. In response, constructivists point out, *inter alia*, that the "nation-state" is historically a rare phenomenon and that the most common form of political organization throughout history has been the multinational "empire." Even today, they note, the "nation-state" is relatively rare, if by "nation" one means a politically mobilized ethnic group with collective political aspirations—by this definition, most to the world's states are multi-national. They also react against the teleology of "national" histories written by nationalists, with their implication that their object of study is age-old, immutable, and permanent, and rooted in a common ancestry of a relatively "pure" genetic stock.

In challenging these dubious popular notions and the fallacies of much nationalist historiography, however, many constructivists go too far, not only in making excessive

1990s: Patterns and Trends," (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Minorities at Risk Project, 1996); and Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, "Systematic Early Warning of Humanitarian Emergencies," (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Minorities at Risk Project, 1997). Gurr's work has been directed primarily at cataloguing and explaining ethnic protests, rebellions, and other forms of ethnic "communal" conflict, while Harff attempts to explain state-led policies of genocide and "politicide." Both draw on extensive theoretical literature on revolutions and rebellions, collective political action, and interstate conflict.

claims about the “newness” of nationalism and national identity (not all nations are in fact “modern”), but also (and more clearly) in their commitment to a highly voluntarist understanding of the emergence of national identity and the substance of national mythologies. Taking issue with “primordialist” or “essentialist” claims about the age-old quality of national identities, they claim instead that national identities change easily and are the product of the purposive behavior of a discrete set of individuals – most typically the national intelligentsia but also in some circumstances political elites – who are intent upon “constructing” the nation for their own selfish reasons. Likewise, they claim that ethnic conflict is largely unrelated to deeply rooted and socially reproduced interethnic enmities passed down from generation to generation, typically within the family but also through various forms of public discourse, in the form of stories and myths about other peoples. Rather, they are said to result from the venal acts of self-interested (“rational”) political actors (“ethnic entrepreneurs”) who “play the ethnic card” in an effort to preserve or enhance political power or privileged position.

These claims, and in particular the extreme voluntarism they imply about nation building and ethnic conflict, are overdrawn. To paraphrase Marx, men (or women) may make nations, but they do not make them as they see fit. That is, it may well be true that nations are “socially constructed” and “imagined communities,” as Benedict Anderson famously put it, and that their boundaries and the substance of inter-subjective beliefs about their character and place in history change over time (although how quickly they change is an empirical question – doubtless some national myths change more easily and quickly than others). But structural constraints and contingent events are at least as important as purposive behavior in “constructing” the nation or in confounding the efforts of a national intelligentsia or political elite attempting to create a sense of common nationhood, as Boris Yeltsin discovered after his unsuccessful attempts to “construct” a positive and unifying “National Idea” for Russia today.¹² Indeed, constructivists seem to forget how profoundly difficult it can be to build nations or create positive and plausible national mythologies in many cases. Certainly this has been true in many post-colonial states, most notably in Africa but elsewhere as well, not for want of trying but because of pre-existing ethnic (“tribal”) heterogeneity, the weakness of historical material to draw upon for inspiring national narratives, “traditional” political economies and economic hardships, corrupt and weak states, and relative backwardness in the international system. Moreover, “contingent” events, above all the outcome and character of a particular foreign or civil war, can have entirely unintended consequences for the process of nation building, consequences that “nation builders” cannot control or ignore. These consequences include not only the question of who is considered in or out of the national community but the substance of the national myth (are we heroic victims or triumphant victors, hopelessly incompetent or collective achievers?).

Dagestan, then, is a clear example of a republic where structural constraints will make it very difficult for “political entrepreneurs” or a “national intelligentsia” to build a “Dagestani nation” very quickly. Similarly, structural constraints will make it difficult for political entrepreneurs to mobilize sub-national minorities within the republic (Avars,

¹² George W. Breslauer and Catherine Dale, “Boris Yel’tsin and the Invention of the Russian Nation-State,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 13, no. 4 (October-December 1997), 303-332.

Lezgins, etc.). And finally, structural factors, despite extremely difficult socio-economic conditions, will make it very difficult or militant ideologists to mobilize Dagestanis through appeals to pan-Caucasian, pan-highlander, or Islamic appeals.

Assessing Risks: Structural and Background Factors

Economic factors

Dagestan (after postwar Chechnya and Ingushetia) is the Russian Federation's poorest republic. In 1996, per capita income was one-third that of the average for Russia as a whole. Dagestan had the highest ratio of rural to urban population of all of Russia's regions and republics – only 44 percent of its population was urbanized in 1989.¹³ Its highland peoples were even more rural – 74.6 percent of Avars, 76.8 percent of Dargins, and 83.3 of Lezgins.¹⁴ Of the RSFSR's 21 ASSRs and autonomous oblasts, only Mordovia and Checheno-Ingushetia had a lower percentage of their populations with higher or secondary education (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Higher/Secondary Education in Dagestan, RSFSR, USSR, 1989

	Higher/Secondary	Of which				
	Percent Total	Higher	Higher enrolled	Special secondary	General secondary	Secondary enrolled
Dagestan ASSR	76.0	8.3	1.7	15.7	28.4	21.9
RSFSR	80.6	11.3	1.7	19.2	27.4	21.0
USSR	81.2	10.8	1.7	18.2	30.5	20.0

Source: Uroven' obrazovaniia naseleniia SSSR, Goskomstat SSSR, Moscow, 1990.

Like other regions of Russia, Dagestan has suffered from the inevitable pain of transition from central planning to a market economy, but the peak to trough decline in economic output has been particularly acute, in part because the republic's industry was heavily weighted toward military production, particularly chemicals. Virtually no large or medium sized industries are operational in the republic today.¹⁵ Real unemployment is estimated at over 30 percent, with youth unemployment estimated at some 80 percent. If underemployment were taken into consideration, the figures would be considerably higher. The economy has also been hurt by the out-migration of Slavs, particularly Russians, who had been over-represented in management and other skilled positions. And while Dagestan's economy was in crisis even before the 1994-96 war in Chechnya, the war made matters worse. The external economic links of the republic were interrupted by the closure of its border with Azerbaijan and the intermittent interruption of railroad service, telephone links, and even, on occasion, automobile traffic to the north. The war also drove a large number of refugees from Chechnya into Dagestan, which further strained the Dagestani government's already limited capacity to provide even the most basic social services to its citizens.

¹³ Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 203.

¹⁴ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 212.

¹⁵ *Finansoviye izvestia*, 30 January 1997, *Current Digest*, vol. 29, no. 5 (1997), 16.

Table 2: Higher/Secondary Education, RSFSR AASRs and Autonomous Oblasts, 1989

Yakut ASSR	89.9
Komi ASSR	87.2
North Ossetian ASSR	83.1
Tuvinian ASSR	82.6
Karelian ASSR	82.0
Kabardino-Balkarian ASSR	81.7
Jewish AO	81.7
Buryat ASSR	81.0
Udmurt ASSR	80.7
Tatar ASSR	80.2
Chuvashian ASSR	79.7
Mari ASSR	79.3
Bashkir ASSR	78.8
Khakass AO	78.7
Kalmyk ASSR	78.6
Adygei AO	77.8
Karachai-Cherkess AO	77.5
Gomo-Altai AO	76.3
Dagestan ASSR	76.0
Mordovian ASSR	75.5
Checheno-Ingushetian ASSR	75.0

Source: Uroven' obrazovania naseleniia SSSR, Goskomstat SSR, Moscow, 1990.

The severe economic difficulties of the republic have reinforced, and been reinforced by, widespread crime and corruption. Dagestani officials estimate that violent crimes have increased dramatically since 1991, and Dagestan is regularly cited by Moscow newspapers as having among the highest crime rates in the country.¹⁶ Sturgeon poaching has become particularly endemic, to the point where environmentalists are concerned about the viability of the Caspian sturgeon population and its derivative caviar industry. Unemployment, particularly the very large percentage of unemployed young males, has contributed to the republic's serious crime wave and provides militant leaders with the human resources they need to organize collective political violence.¹⁷

Dagestan's economic prospects are also very poor. Its only significant economic advantages are its access to maritime trade on the Caspian, its rich fisheries (particularly sturgeon), its location as a transit corridor for trade between Russia and the South Caucasus, and the pipeline passing through its territory bringing oil from Baku to the

¹⁶ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 24 October 1997, *Current Digest*, vol. 29, no. 42 (1997), 15.

¹⁷ Separate and well-organized "Mafia" groups reportedly control different parts of the Dagestani economy. The Dagestani press refers regularly to a "caviar Mafia," a "customs Mafia," and an "oil Mafia" in particular. Contract killings have been commonplace in the republic. For example, on 16 July 1998 the director-general of the port of Makhachkala, who was also a deputy in the Dagestani parliament and a leader of the Laks, was assassinated. That same day, the head of Rospechat (Russian Press) in the republic was also murdered, again apparently in a professional hit (*RFE/RL Newslines*, 20 July 1998). According to some accounts in the Dagestani press, the bombing of the housing complex for Russian border guards that killed some 60 people in early 1998 was perpetrated by an organized criminal group that wanted to send a signal to federal border guards not to interfere with its take of customs duties (*Segodnya*, 19 November 1996, *Current Digest*, vol. 48, no. 46 (1996), 15). It is worth noting that organized criminal groups in the republic are apparently only partially organized along national lines – more important are family ties. Family-based criminal groups also frequently make alliances across nationality with other criminal organizations, particularly in urban areas (Sergei Arutiunov, personal communication, UC Berkeley, 13 May 1999).

Russian port of Novorossiisk on the Black Sea.¹⁸ However, its fisheries have been depleted by widespread poaching and industrial pollution, while its role as a transportation link has been undermined by the turmoil in Chechnya. The Chechen war, as well as predictions of an impending breakdown of public order, will also continue to deter foreign investment in the republic. Nor is there evidence of significant natural resources within Dagestan proper or off its coast – despite the large Caspian oil and gas reserves in Kazakh and Azerbaijani territorial waters, there are only very minor proven oil reserves in the republic. Moreover, the government has done little to create the legal and institutional infrastructure needed for a well-functioning market economy – Dagestan, for example, is one of fourteen regions in Russia where it is still illegal to buy and sell land.¹⁹ Perhaps most importantly in the long run, the republic is also very distant from international markets.

As is the case elsewhere in the Russian Federation, agriculture is handicapped by inadequate investment in equipment and fertilization, poor storage and processing capacity, and an inferior distribution system. More fundamentally, the climate and pervasive land scarcity make a substantial revival of agricultural production unlikely. Land hunger in the republic has been aggravated by the high natural rate of population growth – the republic’s population almost doubled between 1959 and 1989 (see Table 3). The forests and small terraces laboriously dug out of the mountainsides for growing fruits, vegetables, and grain were destroyed during the Tsarist military campaigns against the highlanders. Soviet-era collectivization and policies aimed at inducing highlanders to move to the lowlands also disrupted traditional highlander agriculture, increasing the flow of migrants to the lowlands and into towns and cities with inadequate housing.

Dagestan’s economic difficulties have variable implications for the risks of political violence in the republic. On the one hand, the fact that the economic pie was so meager to begin with and has been shrinking since 1990 makes distributional conflicts more intense, aggravating housing shortages and raising the stakes of inter-group conflicts over land. Economic difficulties also make it far more difficult for state authorities to use financial resources to appease aggrieved parties. They have contributed to popular disaffection with the republic’s political elite, and they may lead to the delegitimation of the republic’s regime. The economic crisis has also contributed to the spread of organized crime, which tends to be organized in urban areas along clan (*tukhum*) and lineage (*jin*) lines (see below) and thus reinforces inter-clan and in some cases inter-nationality enmity.

On the other hand, Dagestan’s poverty has some countervailing effects on the risks of sustained political violence. Dagestan is highly dependent on financial support

¹⁸ Financial benefits from the pipeline are often grossly exaggerated and indeed are likely to be quite meager under the best of circumstances, not only for Dagestan but for the North Caucasus in general, and indeed the Russian federal government as well. The cost of prosecuting the war in Chechnya greatly exceeds any possible profit to Russia in the form of transit fees.

¹⁹ *Kommersant*, 11 December 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 50 (1998), 17.

Table 3: Nationalities in Dagestan, 1959-1989

	1959			1970			1979			1989			1959-1989
	Total	% Total	Grwth	Total	% Total	Grwth	Total	% Total	Grwth	Total	% Total	Grwth	Grwth
"Dagestani nationalities" **													
Avars	239	22.5%	-	349	24.4%	146%	419	25.4%	120%	496	27.5%	118%	207.5%
Darghins	148	13.9%	-	208	14.6%	141%	247	15.0%	119%	280	15.5%	113%	189.2%
Kumyks	121	11.4%	-	169	11.8%	140%	202	12.2%	120%	232	12.9%	115%	191.7%
Lezgins	109	10.3%	-	163	11.4%	150%	189	11.4%	116%	204	11.3%	108%	187.2%
Laks	53	5.0%	-	72	5.0%	136%	83	5.0%	115%	92	5.1%	111%	173.6%
Tabassarans	34	3.2%	-	53	3.7%	156%	72	4.4%	136%	78	4.3%	108%	229.4%
Nogais	15	1.4%	-	22	1.5%	147%	25	1.5%	114%	28	1.6%	112%	186.7%
Rutuls	7	0.7%	-	12	0.8%	171%	14	0.8%	117%	15	0.8%	107%	214.3%
Aguls	6	0.6%	-	9	0.6%	150%	11	0.7%	122%	14	0.8%	127%	223.3%
Taskhurs	4	0.4%	-	4	0.3%	100%	5	0.3%	125%	5	0.3%	100%	125.0%
Subtotal	736	69.3%	-	1061	74.2%	144%	1267	76.7%	119%	1444	80.2%	114%	196.2%
North Caucasus nationalities													
Chechens	13	1.2%	-	40	2.8%	308%	49	3.0%	123%	58	3.2%	118%	446.2%
Tats		0.0%	-	6	0.4%	NA	8	0.5%	133%	13	0.7%	163%	
Mountain Jews/Jews		0.0%	-	-	NA	NA	9	0.5%	NA	13	0.7%	144%	
Subtotal	13	1.2%	-	46	3.2%	354%	66	4.0%	143%	84	4.7%	127%	646%
Others													
Azeris	38	3.6%	-	54	3.8%	142%	68	4.1%	126%	75	4.2%	110%	197.4%
Russians	214	20.2%	-	210	14.7%	98%	224	13.6%	107%	166	9.2%	74%	77.6%
Others	61	5.7%	-	58	4.1%	95%	27	NA	47%	32	1.8%	119%	
Subtotal	313	29.5%	-	322	22.5	103%	319	19.3%	99%	273	15.2%	86%	87.2%
Grand Total	1062	100.0%	-	1429	100.0%	135%	1652	100.0%	116%	1801	100.0%	109%	169.6%
Grand Total	1062			1429									
Others	0			0									

* "Dagestani" in the sense of indigenous and without an external homeland

Source: Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia SSR, Goskomstat SSSR, Moscow, 1990.

from Moscow—some 80 percent of its government budget is covered by subventions from the federal government.²⁰ This financial dependency makes it more difficult for separatists in the republic to claim that the republic would be better off economically were it to become independent or split up into two or more autonomies within the Russian Federation. The republic's bleak economic prospects also make it difficult for secessionists or ethnic entrepreneurs to argue that independence would lead to an economic boom.

The Structure of Political Cleavages

Dagestan is the most ethnically heterogeneous region in the former Soviet Union. Its ethnic diversity and the impracticality of creating separate administrative territories for each ethnic group help account for the fact that Dagestan was the only autonomous soviet socialist republic (ASSR) or autonomous oblast (AO) in the USSR not to bear the name of one or two nationalities.²¹ Rather than "belonging" to a particular eponymous (titular)

²⁰ In 1994, for example, 88 percent of the republic's budget revenues were covered by transfer from the federal treasury, a higher percentage than for any other subject of the federation other than Ingushetia (*Segodnya*, 7 June 1995, FBIS-SOV-125-S, 29 June 1995, p. 53).

²¹ The "double" autonomous republics where titular status was shared by two nationalities were Karachai-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Checheno-Ingushetia. The Nagorno-Karabakh AO and the Nakhichevan ASSR, which were administratively part of Azerbaijan, did not have titular nationalities *per se*, although in these cases there were large Armenian populations. The Adzhar ASSR in Georgia was a special case as well. The Adzhars are Muslim Georgians resident in southwestern Georgia who were treated as a separate nationality by Soviet authorities in the 1920s but were then reclassified as Georgians, although Adzharia retained its distinct administrative status as an autonomy. In many respects, the autonomous area most similar to Dagestan in the Soviet period was the Gorno Badashkhan autonomous oblast of Tajikistan. Like Dagestan, it was extremely mountainous with a multiplicity of resident "ethnic

nationality, the republic was represented as a form of collective property that more or less “belonged” to the republic’s ten major “indigenous” (*korennye*), or aboriginal, nationalities – Avars, Aguls, Dargins, Kumyks, Laks, Lezgins, Nogais, Rutuls, Tabasarans, and Tsakhurs.

Table 4: Location of Nationalities in Dagestan, 1989

Dagestani nationalities	Total DASSR	Total USSR	Total RSFSR	RSFSR	DASSR
Avars	496,077	600,989	544,016	90.5%	82.5%
Dargins	280,431	365,038	353,348	96.8%	76.8%
Kumyks	231,805	281,933	277,163	98.3%	82.2%
Lezgins	204,370	466,006	257,270	55.2%	43.9%
Laks	91,682	118,074	106,245	90.0%	77.6%
Tabassarans	78,196	97,531	93,587	96.0%	80.2%
Nogais	28,294	75,181	73,703	98.0%	37.6%
Rutuls	14,955	20,388	19,503	95.7%	73.4%
Aguls	13,791	18,740	17,728	94.6%	73.6%
Taskhurs	5,194	19,972	6,492	32.5%	26.0%
Total	1,444,795	2,063,852	1,749,055	84.7%	70.0%
Total outside DASSR		619,057			
% outside DASSR		30.0%			

Source: *Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR, Goskomstat SSSR, Moscow, 1990.*

nationalities had external homelands outside the North Caucasus, including Russians (9.2 percent, then the lowest figure for all the autonomous republics and autonomous oblasts in the RSFSR, and probably the lowest in Russia today except for Chechnya and Ingushetia) and Azeris (4.2 percent) (see Table 3). The census also revealed that some 30 percent of the “Dagestani” nationalities were resident outside the borders of the Dagestan ASSR (see Table 4).

Linguistically, Dagestan’s ethnic groups fall into three broad groups (see Chart 1). The Northeast Caucasian language group (Nakh-Dagestani) forms one of the three Paleocaucasian language families, which linguists consider among the oldest languages in the world (5000-6000 years in the case of Nakh-Dagestani).²⁴ Nakh-Dagestani languages are spoken mostly in the interior highlands and are completely unrelated to other languages in the republic or anywhere else. They, too, can be further subdivided into over 20 mutually unintelligible languages. Eight of the Nakh-Dagestani languages have literary traditions.²⁵ Until the end of the last century, however, Kumyk was the lingua franca of the region, and most literate Dagestanis read and wrote in Arabic (for reading the Koran), Persian, or Turkish, and, as the nineteenth century advanced, increasingly in

groups” (although not “nationalities”) – Shugnans, Rushans, Yasgulams, Bartangs, etc.— none of which was numerically dominant. The so-called “highlander Tajiks” speak languages with Iranian roots, like the Tajiks proper, but these languages are closer to Pashtun and Baluchi (they are therefore referred to as “Eastern Iranian” languages) than to Persian (unlike Tajik proper). The highlander Tajiks are also poorer than the Tajiks in the valleys, and they are predominately Ismaili rather than Sunni Muslim (again unlike the lowlander Tajiks). Finally, like many Dagestani peoples, they are divided by international borders, with ethnic kin in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China.

²² Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*.

²³ Mountain Jews and Jews were classified as a single nationality in the 1989 census.

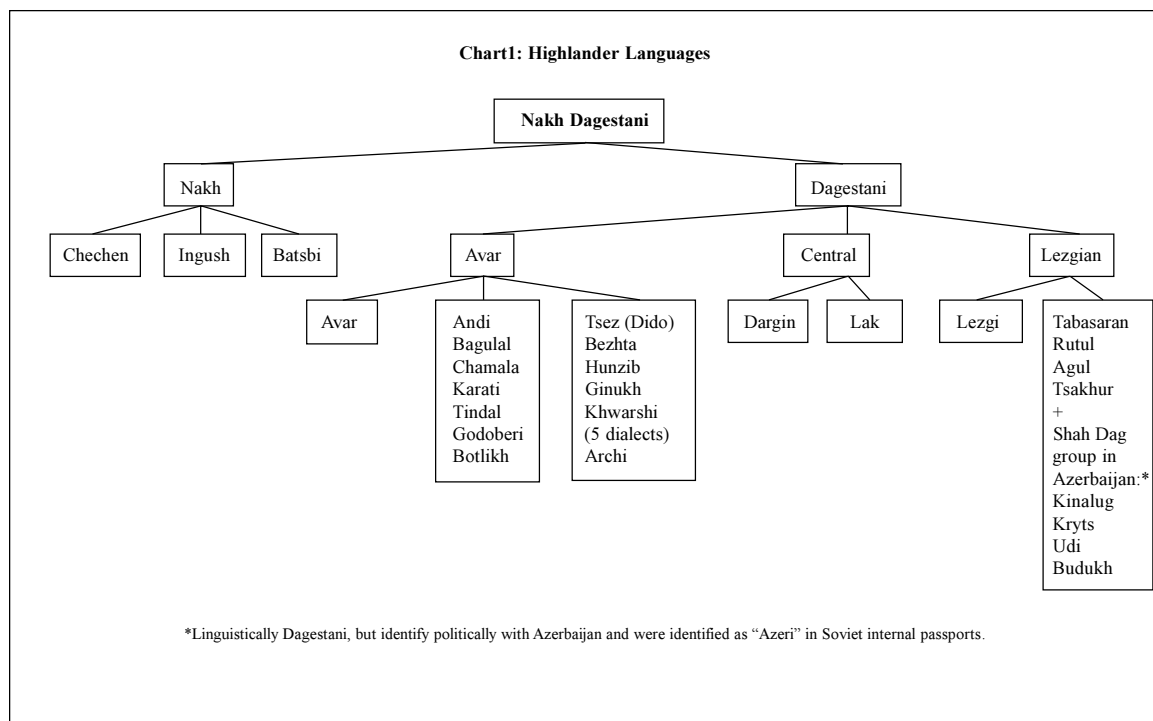
²⁴ Johanna Nichols, “War and the Politics of Non-Natural Language Endangerment in the Caucasus” (paper presented at the conference Institutions, Identity, and Ethnic Conflict: International Experience and Its Implications for the Caucasus, UC Berkeley, May 2-3, 1997), 54-61.

²⁵ The two “Dagestani nationalities” that do not have literary languages are the Aguls and Tsakhurs.

According to the Soviet system of ethnic classification (which experienced frequent changes),²² there were in addition to the ten “Dagestani” nationalities 24 other nationalities resident in the republic in 1989, the year of the last Soviet census. These included four North Caucasian nationalities with external ethnic “homelands”—Chechens, Ossetians, Mountain Jews, and Tats.²³ The remaining

Russian as well.²⁶ Initially, the Soviet regime encouraged the use of Arabic and Turkish in the republic, but after World War II it committed to linguistic russification, a policy that was reinforced by educational reforms adopted under Khrushchev. By the end of the Soviet period, Russian had become a virtually universally spoken lingua franca in the republic. Native language instruction was available only through second or third grades.²⁷ Today, Russian is required at both the primary and secondary school level, although native language instruction is increasingly available in later grades. Most television and radio programming is in Russian, although certain hours (usually off-peak) are reserved for local language cultural programming, primarily in Avar, Dargin, Kumyk, Lezgi, and Lak.²⁸

While roughly two-thirds of Dagestan's citizens were members of Paleocaucasian-speaking ethno-linguistic groups in 1989, most of the remaining one-third spoke either an Altaic (Turkic) or a Slavic language. Kumyk, Nogai, and Azeri are Turkic Altaic languages. Russian and Ukrainian, of course, are Indo-European Slavic languages. The non-Paleocaucasian languages were spoken for the most part in the republic's cities and towns, as well as in the coastal plains and northern steppes. There is



a small community of Jews who speak Tat, an Indo-European language with its own literary tradition that is related to Persian.

²⁶ Being able to speak Kumyk was a status symbol at the time, and it significantly affected a man's prospects of finding a suitable bride (Sergei Arutiunov, personal communication, 28 April 1999).

²⁷ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 258.

²⁸ Sergei Arutiunov, personal communication, 28 April 1999.

The Soviet system of national classification masked the full extent of ethno-linguistic heterogeneity in Dagestan. The republic is home to numerous distinct ethno-linguistic groups (*etnicheskie gruppy*) that were too small to receive recognition as “nationalities” by Soviet ethnographers. These *etnicheskie gruppy* were treated as part of the dominant nationality in their region of residence, and members of those groups were required to list those dominant nationalities in their internal passports. For example, there are 14 mutually unintelligible languages related to “Avar” proper – Andi, Akhvakh, Archi, Bagulal, Beshti/Kaputchi, Botlikh, Chamala, Ghinukh, Godoberi, Gunzbi, Khvarshi, Karati, Tindi, and Tsezi/Dido.²⁹ In many cases, distinct languages are confined

Table 5: Language Use, 1989

	Total Nationality		Native 1st Lang		Russian 1st Lang		Russian 2nd Lang		Russ 1st/2nd
	Total	% Total	Total	% Total	Total	% Total	Total	% Total	
Dagestani nationalities									
Avars	496,077	27.5%	490,468	98.9%	3,456	0.7%	319,923	64.5%	65.2%
Dargins	280,431	15.6%	277,222	98.9%	1,876	0.7%	185,298	66.1%	66.7%
Kумыks	231,805	12.9%	229,436	99.0%	1,748	0.8%	172,315	74.3%	75.1%
Lezgins	204,370	11.3%	200,363	98.0%	1,906	0.9%	139,382	68.2%	69.1%
Laks	91,682	5.1%	89,615	97.7%	1,558	1.7%	71,801	78.3%	80.0%
Tabassarans	78,196	4.3%	76,975	98.4%	564	0.7%	46,769	59.8%	60.5%
Nogais	28,294	1.6%	23,803	84.1%	148	0.5%	21,802	77.1%	77.6%
Rutuls	14,955	0.8%	14,719	98.4%	123	0.8%	9,233	61.7%	62.6%
Aguls	13,971	0.8%	13,585	98.5%	118	0.9%	9,508	68.9%	69.8%
Tsakhurs	5,194	0.3%	5,134	98.8%	38	0.7%	2,722	52.4%	53.1%
Subtotal	1,444,795	80.2%	1,421,320	78.9%	11,535	0.6%	978,753	54.3%	54.9%
Other nationalities									
Russians	165,940	9.2%	165,588	99.8%	NA	NA	NA	NA	
Azeris	75,463	4.2%	73,192	97.0%	1,350	1.8%	54,452	72.2%	73.9%
Chechens	57,877	3.2%	57,083	98.6%	224	0.4%	42,461	73.4%	73.8%
Tats	12,939	0.7%	11,892	91.9%	857	6.6%	10,946	84.6%	91.2%
Jews	9,390	0.5%	7,964	84.8%	1,132	12.1%	7,344	78.2%	90.3%
Mountain Jews	3,649	0.2%	3,264	89.4%	168	4.6%	3,132	85.8%	90.4%
Subtotal	325,258	18.0%	325,258	18.0%	325,258	18.0%	325,258	18.0%	
Total listed	1,770,053	98.2%							
Others	32,135	1.8%							
Grant Total	1,802,188	100.0%							

Source: Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR, Goskomstat SSSR, Moscow, 1990.

to single villages in remote highland areas.³⁰ The second largest nationality in the republic, the Dargins, are comprised of three sub-nationalities – Dargins proper, Kubachins, and Kaitags. In other cases, Soviet ethnographers were accused of creating ethnic cleavages where none allegedly existed – for example, Lezgin nationalists claim that Aguls, Rutuls, Tabasarans, and Tsakhurs are in fact all Lezgins³¹ and that the languages they speak are no more different from Lezgin than, for example, Andi is to Avar.³²

²⁹ There is a disagreement among linguists over whether Inkhuqvari and Khvarshi are separate languages. Some linguists consider Inkhuqvari the largest of five mutually unintelligible “dialects” (alternatively, “languages”) of Khvarshi that are spoken in five separate highland villages.

³⁰ Nichols, “War,” 54-61.

³¹ Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, “Political Stability and Ethnic Parity: Why is There Peace in Dagestan?” (paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Convention, Washington, DC, 30 August 1997).

³² Many nationalists in Dagestan and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union are convinced that the Soviet system of ethnic classification was deliberately designed as a divide-and-rule strategy by the Bolsheviks. I am not aware, however, of any evidence confirming this regarding the North Caucasus. See the discussion in Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame*, London: Sage Publications (1997), 24-43.

There is little evidence that national or even sub-national identities were rapidly weakening in the late Soviet period, except in the case of some very small ethno-linguistic groups facing language assimilation. Native language retention, a critical indicator of the survivability of minority cultures, remained high for Dagestan's major nationalities (see Table 5). For Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, and Lezgins, it was above 98 percent in 1989, with virtually no decline from 1959.³³ Inter-marriage between nationalities within Dagestan was relatively infrequent.³⁴ Particularly infrequent was inter-marriage between the republic's major "civilizational" clusters – Slavs, Altaic peoples, and Paleocaucasians.

There are numerous political identities in Dagestan that go beyond ethno-linguistic distinctions. At the broadest level, residents of the republic in the Soviet period clearly had a measure of loyalty to the USSR, as suggested by the fact that Dagestan voted overwhelming for the preservation of the USSR in the Gorbachev-sponsored referendum in March 1991 – 81 percent, compared to 73 percent in the RSFSR overall and 77 percent USSR-wide. Political identification with the more "Russian" Russian Federation is today is much weaker, despite Russia's formal commitment to multinationalism (*mnogonatsional'nost'*). On the other hand, many Dagestanis assert that there is widespread identification with Dagestan as a multinational political entity. This Dagestani identity is doubtless activated when Dagestanis confront discrimination from Russians, few of whom would know what an Avar was, let alone a Tabasaran – most Russians would identify a Dagestani as a "Caucasian"³⁵ or a Muslim first and only then as a Dagestani.

Below these "civic" orientations are (at least) three cultural clusters (what Samuel Huntington would likely consider "civilizations"³⁶). First and largest is the cluster of highlander peoples speaking Paleocaucasian languages (many of whom have migrated to the lowlands). For them, Islam is an important part of life, although as modified by traditional laws and practices and, in many cases, by pre-Islamic animist beliefs in sacred rocks, trees, or animals, and reverence for mythological figures and legends. Political appeals rooted in highlander (*gortsy*), North Caucasian, Pan-Caucasian, or Islamic loyalties have far more resonance among the highlanders than among other peoples of the republic.

The second group is composed of the lowlander Turkic-speaking Altaic peoples – the Kumyks, Azeris, and Nogais (18.7 percent of the population in 1989).³⁷ These Turkic-speakers (traditionally called "Tatars" by Russians before the Revolution) are culturally very different from the highlanders, despite being traditionally Muslim—except

³³ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 273.

³⁴ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 313.

³⁵ In Russian, *litso kavkazkoi natsional'nosti*, or literally, "person of Caucasian nationality." There is, of course, no such nationality, and the phrase is usually pejorative.

³⁶ Samuel B. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-50.

³⁷ The republic's Turkic-speaking people could themselves be treated as members of separate "civilizations." The Nogais were traditionally nomadic peoples of the steppe, like the Kyrgyz or Bashkirs, while the Kumyks and Azeris were sedentary and more urbanized, with relatively well-established feudal political systems prior to the Russian conquest. See Sergei Arutiunov, "Explaining the Absence of Ethnic Conflict in Russia's Republic of Dagestan" (paper presented at UC Berkeley, 4 March 1996).

for the traditionally nomadic Nogais, they tend to be more urbanized and secularized, and rather than identifying strongly with other North Caucasian peoples, they are oriented more towards fellow “Turks” in Azerbaijan, Central Asia, and even Turkey, with their explicitly secular regimes. Moreover, despite the fact that Kumyks have been present in the republic since at least the thirteenth century and were politically and culturally dominant prior to the October Revolution, highlanders generally do not consider the Kumyks, Nogais, and Azeris as having equal claim to being true Dagestanis, in contrast to the “indigenous” highlanders. Finally, the republic’s Slavs, the great majority of whom are Russian, are oriented both culturally and politically towards Russia to the north.³⁸

There are also important religious cleavages. In 1989, some 90 percent of the population belonged to traditionally Muslim ethnic groups, a figure that has probably grown in the interim as a result of the in-migration of Dagestan’s non-Slavic diaspora and an out-migration of Slavs. Islam arrived in the republic in the seventh to eighth century, but it moved only gradually from the lowlands into the highland areas, spreading in the mid-eighteenth century to the west into what is today Chechnya and then on to the central and western North Caucasus.³⁹ Most Dagestanis are traditionally Sunni Muslims of the Shafi’i school.⁴⁰ Sufism was widely practiced, and the Naqshbandi and Qadirii Sufi brotherhoods (*wierdy*) are particularly influential, as in Chechnya. The Nogais, however, were traditionally Khanafi Sunnis,⁴¹ while many Lezgins and some Dargins were traditionally Shia, as were most of the Azeris in the republic. The great majority of Russians and other Slav minorities was of course traditionally Orthodox Christian. Finally, there is a small population of Jews, including the so-called “Mountain Jews”/Tats.⁴²

The extent to which Muslim religious beliefs and practices were retained during seventy years of Soviet official atheism and repression of religious beliefs and practices is difficult to assess. Before the Revolution, Dagestanis tended to identify first and foremost with their village. Beyond that, they recognized three main groups – “Muslims,” who were necessarily Sunni; “Kadzgars,” who were Shia Muslims (most Azeris and some Lezgins); and all others.⁴³ In the Soviet period, urbanized and better-educated residents in lowland areas were typically more sovietized and secular than rural residents in the highlands. Nevertheless, many Dagestanis, like Muslims elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, were able to adapt Islamic beliefs and practices to Soviet conditions – clerics found ways to represent Islam as politically non-threatening and lay believers

³⁸ Arguably, one could also treat the Cossacks, with their free frontier traditions and long-standing presence in the republic, on the one hand, and the more recent Slavic immigrants, on the other hand, as members of separate “civilizations,” despite the fact that both are Slavic and traditionally Orthodox.

³⁹ Paul B. Henze, “Islam in the North Caucasus: The Example of Chechnya,” (Santa Monica CA: RAND, 1995).

⁴⁰ Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

⁴¹ There are four main legal branches of Sunni Islam – Shafi’i (which is traditionally more accepting of sufism), Khanafi’i, Khanbali’i, and Maliki’i.

⁴² Ronald Wixman, *The Peoples of the USSR: An Ethnographic Handbook* (London: McMillan Press, 1984).

⁴³ Ware and Kisriev, “Political Stability.”

engaged in non-politicized practices of prayer and visiting of shrines.⁴⁴ Moreover, although most mosques were destroyed in the Soviet period, the Muslim Religious Board for the North Caucasus, one of four such institutions in the former Soviet Union, was located in Makhachkala, which had been one of the Russian empire's centers of Islamic learning prior to the Revolution. While the North Caucasus Muslim Religious Board was, like the three other religious boards in the USSR, penetrated and closely monitored by the Soviet political police, its location in Makhachkala gave Islam a visible presence and institutional infrastructure that was absent in most other traditionally Muslim urban areas. As the Soviet regime grew more tolerant of religion in the late 1980s, and continuing into the period since the Soviet dissolution, Dagestan experienced a dramatic Muslim revival that is arguably unmatched in the former Soviet Union. At the beginning of 1999, there were an estimated 1670 mosques in the republic (most villages now have their own mosques), 25 medresses (Islamic schools), and nine Islamic schools of higher learning in the republic. The number of Dagestanis making the *hadj* to Mecca each year is reportedly in the tens of thousands, while the republic has some 3,500 imams and mullahs and over 1000 students in Islamic schools abroad.⁴⁵

Further complicating political cleavages in the republic are very powerful clan, lineage, and family identities. The republic's many nationalities and ethnic groups are variously organized, with different terms used by different groups. However, Dagestani clans (*tukhummy* or *teipy* in the case of Chechens) typically consist of some 60-80 families whose members are related by blood. Clans will often split when they become politically too large and cumbersome. Male members are bound by custom to defend the honor and interests of fellow members and avenge wrongs when necessary, including reprisal killings. Many nationalities also have sub-clan or "lineage" affiliations (*jiny* or *khel*), the members of which are usually from a single family with an identifiable, if sometimes mythical, progenitor and with a common family name. The *jamaat*, on the other hand, is a town-based (hence territorialized, unlike the *tukhummy* or the Chechen *teipy*) political community with its own traditional constitution, customary law, and leadership. Usually a *jamaat* is confined to a single large village or two to three smaller villages. According to one source, much of the political conflict taking place within the republic today is between *jamaaty*, not between nationalities.⁴⁶

The most immediate and visible authoritative body in the everyday life of most highlanders, as well as many lowlanders (particularly those who have migrated recently from the highlands) are the village and *jamaat* council of elders, which regulate relations between clans and sub-clans. The *tukhummy* also have their own councils for regulating intra-clan conflicts. The rules and norms governing intra- and inter-clan disputes are informed by traditional laws and practices (*adat*), to a certain extent by Islamic law (*sharia*), and, when necessary, by recourse to civil (formerly Soviet, now Russian) law and the courts.

⁴⁴ Mark Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs, and Modernity: Reshaping Community in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Edward W. Walker (Berkeley, CA: International and Area Studies, UC Berkeley, 1997).

⁴⁵ *NG regiony*, 27 April 1999.

⁴⁶ Enver Kisriev, "The Historical and Anthropological Roots of Negotiation Culture in Dagestan and Chechnya" (paper presented at the Conflict Management Group Lecture Series, Cambridge, MA, 3 September 1998).

Finally, there is a consciousness of difference between highlanders and lowlanders, between urban and rural residents—in 1989, 56 percent of the population lived in rural areas⁴⁷—and even, on occasion, between classes (especially between educated people in the professional and managerial classes on the one hand, and less-educated, unskilled laborers and rural dwellers on the other).

Dagestani society is thus characterized by a complex set of mostly *nested* cleavages. Unlike, for example, most of the cleavages separating Armenians from Azeris, they are not coterminous. Other than the relatively weak identity of being a citizen of multinational Dagestan, or the even weaker identity of being a citizen of the Russian Federation, few cleavages intersect ethnic, *jamaat*, or family loyalties in ways that would unite, for example, a highlander Avar from a particular *jamaat* with a lowlander Kumyk, let alone an urban Russian.⁴⁸ Instead, salient cleavages are generally nested one within the other, like a Russian *matrioshka* doll – for example, Muslim, highlander, Avar or sub-nationality, *jamaat*, clan, village, and family. Moreover, identities and political loyalties tend to intensify as the unit of identification gets smaller, with most political activity organized around *jamaaty*. As a leading sociologist in Dagestan, Enver Kisriev, explains:

... I am from (the village) of Akhty. ... [Someone from] Akhty would never identify himself as a Lezgin. One could say the same thing about Avars and Dargins. The population of villages that have become known in connection with the recent standoff with Wahhabis – Kadar, Karamakhi, and Chabanmakhi – never identified themselves as Dargins. They belonged to the *jamaat* of Kadar and Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi . . . Magomedali Magomedov, Chairman of the State Council, is a Dargin but he can't do anything with the Dargin villages of Kadar, Karamakhi, and Chabanmakhi.⁴⁹

This complex set of nested cleavages and the intensity of local loyalties make it very difficult to mobilize entire nationalities in Dagestan.⁵⁰ *Jamaaty* have been traditionally more effective in mobilizing local populations for collective political action, particularly for defense against outside incursions, than, for example, the republic government or national movements (see below). Even during the nineteenth century Caucasus war, the charismatic Imam Shamil, who used a combination of religious messianism and coercion to mobilize the highlanders, had to overcome *jamaat*, clan, and

⁴⁷ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 203.

⁴⁸ *Jamaat* and *tukhum* loyalties can be cross-cutting to a degree. Not all members of a particular *jamaat* or village will be from the same *tukhum*, which means that occasionally highlanders are confronted with conflicting loyalties (for example, when a crime is committed by someone in their *tukhum* from outside their *jamaat* against a member of their own *jamaat*). In general, however, the tendency is for those still resident in highland and rural areas to have greater loyalty to territorialized political communities (the *jamaat* and village), while those who have migrated to cities and towns tend to be organized along clan and family lines (Sergei Arutiunov, personal communication, UC Berkeley, 28 April 1999).

⁴⁹ Kisriev, “The Historical and Anthropological Roots,” 4.

⁵⁰ The importance of titular status and the number and relative size of officially recognized nationalities is suggested by recent developments in the North Caucasus republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessia. Until early 1999, the president of the Republic was an ethnic Russian, Vladimir Khubiev, a one-time member of the Soviet nomenklatura who managed to preserve internal order in the republic. However, Khubiev was voted out of office, which has prompted a major conflict between the Karachais on the one hand and the Cherkess and Abazins on the other over his replacement.

village loyalties, and in the case of the Dagestani highlanders (unlike the Chechens) opposition from feudal principalities (*shamkalates* and *khanates*) in his 30-year struggle with the Tsar's armies. Villages, *jamaaty*, and principalities would go over to the Russians, although many would return to Shamil, depending upon the course of the war, the ability of Tsarist generals to coerce or bribe local leaders, and the credibility of Shamil's threats against traitors.⁵¹ Today, the political salience of village loyalties and the *jamaaty* is reinforced by the remoteness of many village communities, the relative ease with which isolated highland villages can be defended, and poor communication and transportation infrastructure within the republic.

Political opportunities, elite incentives, and state capacity

Institutions and elite incentives

In the Soviet period, a complicated and largely informal system of distributing privileges and official positions according to nationality evolved in Dagestan that drew on pre-Revolutionary political practices. This system was reinforced and legitimated by Soviet nationality policies in general, and by Soviet ethnic federalism and *korenizatsiia* ("nativization" – in effect, ethnic affirmative action for titulars in their ethnic homelands) in particular. There were also important economic aspects of Soviet nationality policy. Planners in Moscow would also attempt to balance inter-regional and inter-nationality equity and efficiency considerations when making union-wide investment decisions, ensuring each union republic and autonomous area a "fair" share of the investment pie. Similarly, planners in both Moscow and Makhachkala would distribute capital investment and other public goods to ensure that all nationalities received a "fair" share. New enterprises, particularly those engaged in military production, were thus often located in relatively remote highlander towns and villages, despite the high costs.

At the same time, *nomenklatura* appointments in the USSR's ethnic republic were powerfully influenced by nationality. For example, the first secretaries of union republics and autonomous regions were typically from the titular nation, while second secretaries were typically Slavs. However, the use of informal ethnic quotas was more widely practiced in Dagestan than in any other Soviet union republic or autonomous region.⁵² Informal understandings arose about the ethnic distribution of appointments as mayors, procurators, chiefs of police, judges, and so on at the republic, city/town, and district (*raion*) level.⁵³

⁵¹ Moshe Gammer, "Competing Historical Narratives in Dagestan and Chechnya and Their Use of a 'National Hero'" (paper presented at the Fourth Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, New York, 17 April 1999).

⁵² While affirmative action policies were also important in allocating jobs and privileges in Karbardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia, autonomous republics in the western North Caucasus, the practice was not as intricate or widespread as in Dagestan.

⁵³ Sergei Arutiunov, "Explaining the Absence of Ethnic Conflict in Russia's Republic of Dagestan" (paper presented at UC Berkeley, 4 March 1996); and Robert Chenciner, *Daghestan: Tradition and Survival, Caucasus World* (Curzon, 1996).

These practices not only survived the collapse of Soviet socialism but also became more explicit and formalized. In 1992 and 1993, two referendums were rejected in Dagestan on the establishment of a directly-elected president, with the opposition asserting that a winner-take-all electoral system would render ethnic power-sharing impossible. A similar referendum was rejected again in March 1999. In the aftermath of the referendum defeats in 1992 and 1993, a new Dagestani constitution was adopted on 26 July 1994 that formally entrenched the republic's commitment to multinationalism (*mnogonatsional'nost'*) and ethnic balancing. Article 1 defined Dagestan as a "sovereign united democratic state that expresses the will and interests of all the multinational people of Dagestan." Article 3 asserted, "The bearers of sovereignty and the source of state power in Dagestan are its multinational people." The commitment to *mnogonatsional'nost'* expressed in these provisions was institutionally reflected in the establishment of a collective executive, called the State Council, that would include representatives from 14 different nationalities – the ten "Dagestani" nationalities plus the Russians, Azeris, Chechen-Akins, and Tats. The Council's members are elected by a special Constitutional Assembly made up of the republic's parliamentary deputies as well as representatives of the nationalities. The Assembly was responsible for drafting the new constitution.⁵⁴ In an effort to encourage cross-nationality voting and discourage the election of candidates with appeal to single ethnic constituencies only, parliamentary deputies from the fourteen constitutionally-recognized nationalities would nominate three candidates from their own nationality, but the legislature as a whole would then vote on those three candidates. The assumption was that radical nationalists would be unable to win support from the assembly as a whole, even if they were able to win nomination by deputies from their own ethnic group.

There were other measures to ensure inter-nationality power sharing as well. The new constitution provided that the chair of the State Council – in effect the republic's president – could serve for only a single two-year term. The State Council chair would then be replaced by a member of the State Council from a different nationality. The government, led by a Prime Minister chairing a Council of Ministers, is subordinate to the State Council. The chair of the State Council and Prime Minister cannot be from the same nationality. Magomedali Magomedov, a Dargin who had been chair of the republic's Supreme Soviet in the late perestroika era, became the first chair of the State Council in 1994.

Efforts were also made in the 1994 constitution to ensure inter-nationality balance in parliament. The constitution's drafters consciously rejected the Soviet model of ethnic federalism in which electoral districts were based on national homogeneity and each national group was assigned a single administrative territory. Their fear was that assigning territory to a particular national group would further politicize and radicalize ethnicity and provoke territorial disputes. Electorate districts were instead redrawn to undermine political consolidation and mobilization by nationality. Sixty-six of the 121 districts of the republic were dominated by a single nationality, which meant that major nationalities were broken up into multiple districts. Deputies from these districts were

⁵⁴ Anna Matveeva, "Dagestan," *Former Soviet South Briefing, The Royal Institute of International Affairs: Russia and Eurasia Programme* 13, May (1997).

elected based on a standard majoritarian system requiring a second round in the event no candidate received a first-round majority. The remaining districts were designated as “multinational” and assigned to particular nationalities in order to ensure balanced ethnic representation. Only a representative of the designated nationality could run in those districts. To win an election, therefore, those candidates typically have to win support from other nationalities.⁵⁵

The principle of allocating particular districts to particular nationalities has been generally accepted by the Dagestani electorate as a legitimate means for avoiding inter-nationality conflict. Indeed, by 1994 there was widespread reaction in the republic against the nationalist and exclusionist tone of politics in Georgia, which was still suffering from the legacy of the Gamsakhurdia era, as well as the already deepening anarchy in Chechnya. So, too, was the specific arrangement for allocating top positions to representatives of different nationalities accepted as reasonable.⁵⁶ Whereas Magomedov was a Dargin, the first Prime Minister was a Kumyk (Abdurazak Mirzabekov), while the leader of parliament was an Avar (Mukhu Aliev).

The first parliamentary elections under the new constitution took place in early 1995; the outcome was parliamentary representation that almost exactly matched the share of nationality groups in society. The March 1999 elections led to a similar outcome. Dagestani authorities have on occasion intervened to modify election outcomes that did not reflect the ethnic distribution of particular electorates.⁵⁷ While there have been moments when solidarity among deputies on the basis of nationality have been important (e.g., Avar deputies took the lead in resisting Magomedov’s efforts to amend the constitution to prolong his term of office in 1996 and again 1998), in general the Dagestan political elite has remained committed to the principle of *mnogonatsional’nost’*, and the republic’s deputies have rarely engaged in block ethnic voting.

As others have suggested, Dagestan’s regime generally fits the model of consociationalism elaborated by Arend Lijphart.⁵⁸ Lijphart derived his model inductively to describe non-majoritarian democratic political systems with formal and informal rules for power sharing between ethnic groups, as in the Netherlands, Belgium, and (arguably) Switzerland.⁵⁹ Consociationalism is, however, hardly a silver bullet guaranteeing inter-

⁵⁵ Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, “Dagestan’s Ethnic Electoral System: The Selection of the Second People’s Assembly,” unpublished paper, 1999.

⁵⁶ Matveeva, “Dagestan.”

⁵⁷ For example, in June 1994, just one month prior to adoption of the new constitution, an election took place in Makhachkala for city council in which Avars, who made up only 20 percent of the capital’s population, won 50 percent of the seats. Dargins, on the other hand, won 30 percent with ten percent of the population. The biggest losers were the Russians, who made up 20 percent of the population but won no seats on the council. Dagestani state authorities intervened and organized elections for 10 additional seats, which Avars and Dargins were precluded from occupying. See Ebert Wesselink, *Dagestan (Daghestan): Comprehensive Report* (WRITENET UK, 1998, 23 March 1999); available from <http://www.caspian.net/daginfo.html>.

⁵⁸ Ware and Kisriev, “Political Stability;” and Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, “Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: A Consociational Approach” (paper presented at the Association for the Study of Nationalities, 4th Annual Convention, New York, NY, 15-17 April 1999).

⁵⁹ Arend Lijphart, “Typologies of Democratic Systems,” *Comparative Political Studies* 1, no. 1 (1968): 3-44; Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, CT: Yale

ethnic peace in Dagestan or indeed any other “plural” society, despite the international community’s growing tendency to prescribe it as a panacea for ethnic conflict.⁶⁰ On the contrary, a considerable body of literature in political science holds that consociationalism can be a *cause* of inter-ethnic conflict as often as it is a solution.⁶¹ While “consociational” regimes in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland have survived, they benefit from having long democratic traditions, are located in the heart of Western Europe, and are among the world’s most prosperous societies. Despite these advantages, consociationalism in the Netherlands and Belgium is under considerable strain, while the Swiss political system is more accurately classified as confederal, with a central state with very limited powers. In Lebanon, on the other hand (another frequently cited case), consociationalism broke down entirely, failing to prevent the civil war in the late 1970s, while it has been argued that a deepening of consociational practices in India had the effect of increasing, not reducing, ethnic violence.⁶²

Consociational systems, as these and other cases suggest, are brittle and vulnerable to catastrophic breakdown. Their sustainability depends upon the perception that the allocation system is both fair and effective. The perception of fairness can dissipate for many reasons. Substantial demographic changes may not be reflected in the polity – indeed, changing demographics and the strain they placed on consociational practices was one of the factors usually adduced as a cause of the Lebanese breakdown. An increase in the share of the population by one ethnic group due to different natural growth rates or varying patterns of migration can lead to demands for a greater share of political power on the grounds of proportional representation and democratic equity. Other groups may resist those demands, arguing that any changes in existing arrangements would violate traditional norms. The fact that these latter groups have veto power over significant regime changes allows them to block adjustments, which can induce the former to use force in pursuit of proportional political representation. The perception of fairness can also be undermined if elites attempt to modify existing practices, even if by legal means, in violation of the preferences of groups disadvantaged as a result. Alternatively, elites may make unilateral changes that are clearly illegal or that violate informal understandings about the way that consociational practices can be legitimately changed.

Traditional claims to legitimation of consociational practices can also be undermined on legal-rational grounds. Elaborate power-sharing schemes may make it impossible to govern effectively by blocking needed reforms, particularly economic

University Press, 1977); and Arend Lijphart, “Political Theories and the Explanation of Ethnic Conflict in the Western World,” in *Ethnic Conflict in the Western World*, ed. Milton J. Esman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 55-62.

⁶⁰ Steven Ian Wilkinson, “Consociational Theory and Ethnic Violence” (paper presented at the Association for the Study of Nationalities, 4th Annual Convention, New York, NY, 15-17 April 1999).

⁶¹ Ian Lustick, “Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control,” *World Politics* 31, no. 3 (1979): 325-44; Brian Barry, “The Consociational Model and Its Dangers,” *European Journal of Political Research* 3, no. 4 December (1975): 393-411; Paul R. Brass, “Ethnic Conflict in Multiethnic Societies: The Consociational Solution and its Critics,” in *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, ed. Paul R. Brass (London: Sage, 1991), 333-48; and Wilkinson, “Consociational Theory.”

⁶² Wilkinson, “Consociational Theory.”

reforms (as arguably has been the case in Dagestan), because elites representing different ethnic groups can reach agreement only on the preservation of the status quo. The larger the number of groups with veto power over political initiatives, the more likely this will be the case. Alternatively, consociational arrangements can lose public support because they are seen as unresponsive to popular preferences or as undemocratic. In Dagestan, critics of the regime have argued that consociationalism is an oligarchic and authoritarian arrangement protecting the position of incumbents while masquerading as a means to ensure inter-ethnic harmony.⁶³ They also note that ethnic balancing violated Russia's constitution and its commitment to the liberal principle of "one-person, one vote," advocating instead the adoption of a standard directly elected president and bicameral legislature, as in other Russian republics.⁶⁴

Finally, consociational systems have the effect of entrenching ethnic identities by institutionalizing them. Privileging certain groups politically creates permanent political interests along that particular line of cleavage. They also prejudice certain political cleavages (ethnic) over others (class, religion, region, gender), and inevitably there is an arbitrary quality to what qualifies as a recognized group (in Dagestan, 20 of the 34 nationalities identified in the 1989 census are not constitutionally recognized). And they encourage outbidding by competitors for leadership of particular ethnic groups as politicians seek to outflank rivals by making ever-escalating demands on central authorities for greater ethnic privileges and benefits, thereby contributing to a similar dynamic among other ethnic groups.

Informal mechanisms for conflict resolution

Dagestan's formal state institutions are complemented by informal conflict resolution mechanisms employed by village, clan, and *jamaat* leaders, often with support from government officials, to maintain public order. By some reckonings, these informal mechanisms are rooted in the mountainous topography and land scarcity of the republic and are thus typical of highlander cultures elsewhere.⁶⁵ Dagestan's highlanders were traditionally shepherders who grazed their sheep in highland pastures in the summer and then moved to lowland areas during Dagestan's harsh winters. They would thus frequently cross territory belonging to other *jamaaty* or nationalities, which would lead to occasional disputes. Procedures to resolve these disputes evolved and became deeply entrenched in local cultures.

Kisriev describes these informal mechanisms as follows:

⁶³ Muhammed-Arif Sadyki, "Will the Russian South Explode This Summer?," *NG Tsenarii*, 13 May 1998, 1-3.

⁶⁴ *Segodnya*, 26 June 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 26 (1998), 13.

⁶⁵ Sergei Arutiunov, "Explaining the Absence of Ethnic Conflict in Russia's Republic of Dagestan" (paper presented at UC Berkeley, 4 March 1996).

If there's a conflict inside the *jamaat*, between two different but related clans, the most respected members of this *jamaat* take part in the peace-making process. If there's a conflict between representatives of different *jamaaty*, the most respected leaders of both *jamaaty* [who have not been directly involved in] the conflict engage in peace making. If the conflict is between *jamaaty* of different ethnic groups, which is the most dangerous and complicated conflict, then the political leaders of the government take part in managing this conflict.⁶⁶

As noted earlier, each clan and *jamaat* has its own council of elders for resolving internal and external disputes. Typically, crimes are punished by compensation to victims, with families, clans, or *jamaaty* responsible for payment. If compensation is not forthcoming, members of the victim's family are honor-bound to retaliate against the perpetrator and his family. There is also a tradition of the *kunak*, or "loyal friend/host," who is likewise honor-bound to protect a friend or guest and revenge any wrongs. These "blood feud" or vendetta traditions, it has been suggested, act as a powerful disincentive to violence and help ensure that compensation rulings by elders are complied with. On the other hand, they can also contribute to a prolonged sequence of retaliatory acts of violence.

State capacity: Elite Coherence and State Resources

Whereas nationalist mobilization began in many regions of the USSR in late 1987-early 1988, political assertiveness came late to Dagestan. Dagestan was the last autonomous republic in Russia to declare sovereignty, doing so only in April 1991.⁶⁷ As elsewhere, the meaning of its "sovereignty" declaration was unclear – it was generally understood in Moscow as an effort not to appear backward when compared to other autonomies or to forgo bargaining leverage with Moscow. Indeed, reformers in Moscow viewed Dagestan as perhaps the most conservative region in the RSFSR at the time– anti-perestroika, anti-democratization, anti-marketization, pro-Communist, and pro-union. Their impression was reinforced in the watershed March 1989 elections to the newly established USSR Congress of People's Deputies, and again in elections for the new RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies a year later, when Dagestan voted overwhelmingly for Communist Party candidates. In the vote on the preservation of the USSR initiated by Gorbachev in March 1991, 83 percent of Dagestan's electorate voted in favor of the union, compared to 71 percent in the RSFSR and 76 percent USSR-wide.⁶⁸ And although in the June 1991 RSFSR presidential elections, Dagestan gave Yeltsin 65.9 percent of the vote (Yeltsin received 57.3 percent across the entire RSFSR), two months later Dagestani authorities indicated during the failed coup in Moscow that they would abide by the decrees of the "Emergency Committee" and ignore the counter-decrees of Yeltsin and his allies in the RSFSR government. Finally, Dagestan gave Yeltsin the lowest approval rating (14.2 percent) of all electoral districts in Russia in the April 1993 referendum that Yeltsin sponsored to break the deadlock with his opponents in parliament.

⁶⁶ Kisriev, "The Historical and Anthropological Roots," 6.

⁶⁷ Edward W. Walker, *Sovereignty and the Dissolution of the Soviet Union* (manuscript in progress).

⁶⁸ On the other hand, 70.6 percent of its electorate voted for a Yeltsin-sponsored ballot that same day on the establishment of an RSFSR presidency, the highest figure for any republic participating. Tatarstan, Checheno-Ingushetia, Tuva, and Chuvashia refused to participate in the RSFSR ballot.

Despite being on the losing side in the political struggle in Moscow in 1991, the republic's political elite managed to survive the USSR's dissolution. It made clear that, while it was suspicious of the Yeltsin government in Moscow and generally hostile to its reform program, it would not present the same kind of separatist challenge to the Russian Federation being presented by Chechnya and, to a lesser extent, Tatarstan.⁶⁹ Thus Makhachkala agreed to sign the Federation Treaty sponsored by Yeltsin in March 1991, a treaty that both Tatarstan and Chechnya rejected. It represented itself, with notable success, as the sole guarantor of stability and inter-ethnic harmony in the republic, opposing rapid democratization and marketization on the grounds that radical reforms would upset Dagestan's traditional power-sharing mechanisms. It also appealed to the legacy of Soviet multinationalism (as distinct from internationalism), which observers claim resonated effectively with the public and helps explain its preference for communist (hence traditional) candidates. Accordingly, Dagestan has retained many of the communist symbols of the Soviet period, including a massive statue of Lenin in the central square in Makhachkala. Of the three political parties with significant representation in the legislature – the Communist Party, the Dagestani People's Reform Party, and the Islamic Party – the Communist Party remains the most influential. It is, however, moderate in political orientation and in many respects is closer ideologically to the former federal “party of power” – Nash Dom—Rossiia (Our Home is Russia) – than to Gennadii Zyuganov or the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF).

The pragmatism of Dagestan's political elite, and above all Makhachkala's repeatedly expressed support for the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, helps explain why, despite its seemingly “communist” orientation, Dagestan has received consistent political and financial support from federal authorities in Moscow. As noted earlier, Dagestan is one of the most heavily subsidized of Russia's 89 “subjects of the federation.” In addition, there are some 15,000-30,000 federal troops (mostly from the Interior Ministry and Border Guards) stationed in the republic.⁷⁰ Although their primary mission is to police the border with Chechnya and Azerbaijan and to prevent raids by Chechen militants, federal troops can be called upon by Magomedov to defend the republic's territory and regime, as indeed proved the case, after some delay, in the standoff with oppositions in Makhachkala's main government building in early 1998, and then again more dramatically in August 1999 in response to the incursion from Chechnya.⁷¹ On the other hand, the reliability and professionalism of the federal troops in the republic is doubtful. Most of the Interior Ministry troops are Dagestani conscripts, and they tend to be poorly trained and equipped. They are also reportedly very susceptible to bribes, which many Dagestanis assume accounts for their inability to

⁶⁹ Edward W. Walker, “The Dog that Didn't Bark: Tatarstan and Asymmetrical Federalism in Russia,” *The Harriman Review* 9, no. 4 (1996): 1-35.

⁷⁰ Even before the buildup associated with the renewed war in Chechnya, the precise number of federal troops in Dagestan was difficult to determine – for obvious reasons, federal officials were less than forthcoming on the topic. An article in *Trud* from early 1998 asserted that there were about 20,000 federal troops and 15,000 Dagestani militiamen (*militsii*) in the republic (*Trud*, 9 January 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 2 (1998), 13). Other sources, however, gave lower figures.

⁷¹ Interior Ministry troops, including members of the elite Alpha unit, took up positions around the city during and after the crisis, securing governmental buildings, main roads, and bridges (*Kommersant-Daily*, 23 May 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 21 (1998), 3).

protect Dagestan from regular incursions and kidnapping raids launched from Chechnya before the renewal of the war there.⁷² A partial exception are the troops guarding the border with Azerbaijan, many of whom are Russian *kontraktniki* (professional soldiers) and who are reportedly well-trained and equipped. They are, however, resented by locals, particularly the local Lezgins, who feel that the *kontraktniki* take bribes that locals consider rightfully theirs.

In sum, Dagestan has a reasonably unified political elite with some coercive capacity and financial resources at its disposal to co-opt or repress challengers.⁷³ The Dagestani government also directly controls a substantial portion of the regional media, and there are frequent complaints from the opposition about limits placed on the press by Magomedov and his allies. In crisis moments, Dagestan's elite has responded reasonably effectively. For example, Makhachkala officials were generally credited with playing a constructive role in trying to end the hostage crisis in Kizlyar in 1996,⁷⁴ and they managed to defuse both the takeover of the parliament building in the spring of 1998 and the confrontation with the three "Wahhabi" villages several months later without resort to large-scale violence.⁷⁵ Finally, the current government has been supported for the most part by the republic's religious establishment, which along with its counterparts in North Ossetia, Chechnya, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Ingushetia formed a "Coordinating Council of the Muslims of the North Caucasus" in August 1998 with the mission of promoting Islam while combating "harmful" trends such as Wahhabism.⁷⁶

While the political elite in Makhachkala has remained relatively unified, state capacity in Dagestan is clearly limited by Dagestan's economic crisis and by Moscow's financial weakness. The ability of Moscow to subsidize the government of the republic and promote pragmatic politics has been undermined by the Russian financial meltdown

⁷² Shamil Basaev asserted after his famous raid on Budyonovsk during the 1994-96 Chechen war that he and his men would have gone farther into Russia had they not run out of the money they needed to bribe the Russian Interior Ministry troops and local police who were manning border posts and conducting identity checks along the roads in Stavropol' krai.

⁷³ I do not mean to deny that there are considerable tensions between political factions in Makhachkala, tensions that were highlighted by the controversy over the Kachilaev brothers (see below), and resistance from various parliamentary deputies to Moscow's efforts to crackdown down on crime and corruption over the past year. However, Magomedov has been careful not to directly or openly threaten the privileges and interests of the parliamentary factions and political clans in the republic, which could provide them an incentive to unify in opposition to his leadership. Instead, he has allowed the Russian Prosecutor General's office and the Interior Ministry to take the lead in cracking down on corrupt officials.

⁷⁴ See the account by Enver Kisriev, "Seizure of the House of Government," *Bulletin: Network on Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA, Conflict Management Group, September 1998), 19-26.

⁷⁵ Tensions abated thanks to an agreement with Makhachkala granting the three villages the right to practice their version of Islam and providing them with limited access to television (*Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 3 September 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 35 (1998), 14). Magomedov and several other Dagestani officials visited Buinaksk for talks with the leaders of the villages the following week, and an agreement was reached that reportedly left "the constitutional field" to the local *jamaats* (*Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 3 September 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 35 (1998), 17).

⁷⁶ *Izvestia*, 19 August 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 33 (1998), 14. However, before his assassination in mid-1998, Dagestan's head mufti, Said Muhammed-Hadji Abubakarov, openly expressed reservations about Magomedov. Some of the mufti's supporters later accused Dagestan's government of having ordered Abubakarov's assassination.

in August 1998 and by the federal government's fiscal problems. Makhachkala, on the other hand, is in no position to improve its financial position without Moscow's help – it is almost entirely unable to extract resources from the local economy given the collapse of industry, the size of the informal sector, subsistence agriculture, and importance of small-scale commodity trading in the economy. State autonomy in Dagestan is also limited – in particular, local media claim the government is thoroughly penetrated by organized crime and clan networks. Moreover, whereas higher levels of the executive branch, both in Makhachkala and at the district level, are still dominated by Dagestan's Soviet-era political nomenklatura, clan, nationality, and organized criminal interests are well represented in parliament and in mid- and lower-levels of the executive bureaucracy.⁷⁷

Challengers and the capacity to engage in collective political violence

Nationality-based political organizations

National movements formed late in Dagestan and failed to mobilize a significant portion of their national constituencies. The first to form was the Kumyk movement, Tenglik (Equality), which agitated for the formation of a separate Kumyk union republic, or alternatively for an autonomous republic within the RSFSR in traditionally Kumyk territories. Tenglik was particularly active in 1990-91, and it helped spawn a counter-movement by the Avars, who accused the Kumyks of trying to reestablish their political dominance of the pre-Revolutionary era. Makhachkala made some concessions to the Kumyks, appointing a number to prominent government posts, including Abdurazak Mirzabekov, who became the first Prime Minister of the republic under its new constitution.⁷⁸ Kumyk demands for autonomy subsequently abated.

Other national movements formed in 1990-91, the period of “national romanticism” in the USSR – the Avars formed the People's Front Imam Shamil, the Dargins Sadesh, the Nogais Birlik, and the Laks “Tsubars.” None, however, was able to win sustained support from their national constituencies, as suggested by their failure to place more than a handful of candidates in the parliamentary elections of 1995 and 1999.

A partial exception has been the Lezgin national movement, Sadval, which has organized large demonstrations on occasion in opposition to the closing of the Dagestani-Azerbaijani border. The border issue is of immediate practical concern to the Lezgins, who traditionally herded their sheep across the border and maintained close ties to Lezgin communities across the Samur river (see below). Thus, the issue of an open border with Azerbaijan provides Sadval with an effective mobilizing issue that other national movements lack. Its continued political prominence is also the result of the tense relationship between Russia and Azerbaijan and to Baku's oft-repeated claim that it is being used by Moscow to promote secessionist aspirations among Lezgin communities in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, Sadval has been unable to win enthusiastic support from Lezgins on either side of the border for its program of unification with Lezgin territories

⁷⁷ Matveeva, “Dagestan.”

⁷⁸ The current prime minister, Khizri Sheiksaidov, is also a Kumyk.

in Dagestan and Azerbaijan or the establishment of a separate Lezgin autonomy within Russia.

Supra-national political organizations

The Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus

The founding congress of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples (Highlanders) of the Caucasus, later renamed the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus (CPC), was held in Abkhazia in 1990. The CPC played an important role in mobilizing support in the North Caucasus for the Abkhaz during their war with Tbilisi in 1992-93, organizing a flow of irregular forces and weapons into the breakaway republic. The organization initially established its headquarters in Dagestan, but it proved politically ineffective in rallying the Dagestani peoples, notably failing to organize a general uprising among highlanders against Moscow at the beginning of the Chechen war. Its leader, Musa Shanibov, who was reportedly in poor health, was subsequently replaced by Yusup Soslambekov, and the organization relocated to Grozny (Dzhokhar). Today it plays at best a marginal role in Chechen and North Caucasian politics, having been to a large extent upstaged by the Congress of Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan.

Congress of Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan(CPCD)

Created in April 1998 by then Acting Chechen Prime Minister Shamil Basaev, the CPCD's main goal is the unification of Chechnya and Dagestan in a single Islamic state. It thereafter formed an alliance with an organization known as the "Islamic Shura (Council) of Dagestan," which is led by an Islamic militant from Dagestan, Magomed Tagaev, said to be the ideologue of radical Islam in the North Caucasus. Prior to the CPCD-sponsored incursion into Dagestan in August 1999, however, Chechnya's President Maskhadov expressed his opposition to the CPCD's program, announcing several weeks after its formation that he "deeply respects the choice of the peoples of Dagestan and Ingushetia" to remain within the Russian Federation.⁷⁹ The disagreement contributed to a falling out between Maskhadov and Basaev, who resigned as acting Prime Minister in early July 1998. The CPCD is also opposed by the political elite in Dagestan—in mid-May 1998, the leaders of 20 political and public organizations signed a statement condemning the organization – as well as by the religious establishment. Nor does it seem to have significant popular support. When Basaev announced that CPCD *boeviki* would move into Dagestan to defend the three Wahhabi villages if they were attacked in the late summer of 1998, a leader from one of the villages reportedly stated that Basaev's statement was a "provocation" designed to lead to violence.⁸⁰ Makhachkala also attempted to limit the activities of CPCD leaders in Dagestan, arresting a Basaev deputy in July 1998 on the Dagestani-Chechen border on charges of carrying an illegal weapon. He was released, however, several days later, possibly at the request of Maskhadov.

⁷⁹ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 12 May 1998.

⁸⁰ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 27 August 1998.

Wahhabis

To officials in Moscow and Makhachkala, the most serious threat to stability in Dagestan comes from radical politicized Islam and so-called “Wahhabism” (particularly in alliance with the militants in the CPCD, as occurred in August-September 1999). As noted earlier, most Dagestanis were traditionally adherents of Sufism, a mystical branch of Sunni Islam that entails the “journeying” of a disciple (the *murid*) under the tutelage of an adept (*sheikh, murshid, pir, ustad, or orsha*) toward God.⁸¹ Sufis partially reject *sharia* law and are typically tolerant of local practices and customary law (*adat*). Wahhabis, on the other hand, are new to the North Caucasus. An Islamic puritan movement that emerged in the early eighteenth century on the Arabian Peninsula, Wahhabism was adopted by the Saudi royal family in 1744. It began to establish a foothold in the North Caucasus only after large numbers of Muslims began to make the *hadj* to Mecca in the Gorbachev era. Later, missionaries and mullahs from Islamic countries began to arrive in Dagestan, some of whom may have been practicing Wahhabis. During the war in Chechnya, a limited number of militant Wahhabis and Islamic *mujahadin*, many of whom had fought in the Afghan war against the Soviets, made their way to Chechnya to help the Chechen *boeviki*. Whether they numbered more than several hundred is dubious, however.⁸²

Officials in Moscow and Makhachkala claim that the number of militant non-Chechen Wahhabis, (including those loyal to Khattab, who led a detachment of *mujahadin* during the Chechen war) in Chechnya has increased substantially since the 1994-96 war, particularly after the Taliban took control of Kabul in 1996. These militants, they assert, have established “terrorist” training camps in Chechnya and western Dagestan, are planning a “*jihad*” (holy war) against Russia. They also claim that the foreign Wahhabis are receiving training and material support, in the form of both weapons and money, from Islamic groups abroad, particularly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.⁸³ These claims gained some credibility after Western journalists returned to Chechnya in fall 1999 and reported a significant presence of non-Chechen Islamic militants among the Chechen resistance forces. On the other hand, government officials in Makhachkala claim that no more than five percent of Dagestanis considers themselves Wahhabi.⁸⁴ Moreover, it is unclear just what is meant by “Wahhabism,” either as the term is used by officials to describe certain Muslims or by self-described Wahhabis themselves. While Dagestanis typically refer to Wahhabis using the Russian word, “*Vakhabiti*,” the term is used throughout the former Soviet Union to refer to any kind of politicized Islam. In the Soviet period, “*Vakhabizm*” was used by Soviet officials pejoratively to denote any kind of politicized Islam, especially during the war in Afghanistan. While there are some Muslims in Dagestan who describe themselves as Wahhabis, most apparently prefer the term “Salafites.” Their stronghold has been in

⁸¹ Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

⁸² Carolotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998). Basaev, for example, reportedly received military training before the 1994-96 war in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

⁸³ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 20 August 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 33 (1998), 14.

⁸⁴ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 12 May 1998.

central Dagestan, including the three Dargin villages mentioned earlier – Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, and Kadar.⁸⁵ A journalist visiting the area in early 1998 reported that most men, in accordance with Wahhabi teaching, are fully bearded and that most women go about veiled in public.⁸⁶ It is rumored that these villages in particular embraced “Salafitism” because Khattab is married to the sister of the leader of the local *jamaat*. To the extent that Wahhabism is finding a significant base of social support elsewhere, it appears to be among militant and armed young males, particularly Chechens, who remain loyal to the wartime field commanders and the militia units which provide them with security and a sense of belonging. Lacking employment, they have little to occupy their time other than continuing their armed struggle.

In both Dagestan and Chechnya, Wahhabism is opposed by both the political elite and the traditional Muslim educated clergy, the *ulaama*, who tend to view the Wahhabis as a threat to their influence and position. Moreover, before Wahhabism could become a significant political force in either republic, it would have to overcome seventy years of assertive Soviet atheism and official pressure on religious beliefs and practices. Indeed, in the late 1920s and 1930s, almost all mosques in the republic were destroyed and most of the Islamic clergy imprisoned or shot. Although Islamic beliefs and practices survived in the region,⁸⁷ particularly in rural and highland areas, most Dagestani men drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes, and prayed intermittently at best (although few would eat pork), while Dagestani women rarely covered their faces in public (although they would typically cover their hair with a scarf, particularly in rural areas). Urban Dagestanis in particular find the asceticism of Islamic fundamentalism difficult to accept, while highlanders find it difficult to abandon *adat* in favor of rigid *sharia* law or to foreswear their pre-Islamic traditions and religious beliefs.

Proliferation of weapons

The capacity of anti-system challengers to engage in sustained political violence in the republic is enhanced by easy access to weapons. In the Soviet period, highlanders typically carried their famous long knives (the *kinjal*), possessed swords handed down by their ancestors, and owned hunting rifles. They also prided themselves on wielding weapons with skill. Today, automatic weapons, hand-grenades, anti-personnel mines, and heavy machine guns are readily available for purchase on the black market, and local militants and criminal organizations are typically well armed.⁸⁸ Soviet weapons made their way into private and semi-private hands in 1990-91 and in the early post-Soviet period when the armories of the Soviet forces were raided and looted by irregular forces in Chechnya, Georgia, Abkhazia, and elsewhere in the region. Impoverished Soviet and later Russian soldiers also regularly sold their weapons for profit while reporting them

⁸⁵ Dargins and Laks are reportedly more committed to Islamic practices than are Avars or their related groups (Andis, Tsezi, etc.) (personal communication with Sergei Arutiunov, UC Berkeley, 13 May 1999).

⁸⁶ Igor Rotar, “Islamic Radicals in Dagestan,” *The Jamestown Foundation Prism*, 20 March 1998, no. 6, part 2.

⁸⁷ Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs, and Modernity*.

⁸⁸ The supporters of the Khachilae brothers who marched on Makhachkala in September 1998, for example, reportedly possessed “hundreds” of guns (*Kommerstant-Daily*, 24 September 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 38 (1998), 21).

stolen. The Chechen government also reportedly purchased weapons from abroad, both before and during the war with Moscow. Finally, Chechen *boeviki* captured or purchased a huge supply of weapons from Russian troops during the war.

The large stockpiles of weapons in private hands in neighboring Chechnya, the porous border between Chechnya and Dagestan, the extent of organized crime in the republic, and the presence of Chechen IDPs and irregulars have reportedly contributed to a substantial arming of the Dagestani population. Supporters of Nadir Khachilaev, a deputy in the Russian Duma and the leader of the Union of Muslims of Russia, and his brother, a prominent leader of the Laks, for example, regularly carry automatic rifles in public. During their confrontation with Dagestani troops in March 1998, the Khachilaevs were able to marshal some 2000 armed individuals with automatic weapons and grenade launchers.⁸⁹ Likewise, the “Wahhabis” in Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, and Kadar were armed and capable of a vigorous defense of their highland villages.⁹⁰

External support

The capacity of oppositionists to challenge Makhachkala or to mobilize the Dagestani people to engage in sustained political violence is in part a function of the support they receive from external sources. The ability of Azerbaijan to interfere in the internal affairs of Dagestan, however, is limited by the fact that the Lezgin minority populating the border region is considerably more hostile to Baku than to Moscow or Makhachkala. Moreover, Baku has as much to fear from instability in Dagestan as Moscow. It has to be careful about taking steps that would make the Russian government, with its still very considerable capacity to make mischief in Azerbaijan, even more hostile to Baku. Georgia has similar reasons for not destabilizing Dagestan, and in any case the border between Dagestan and Georgia is essentially impassable to wheeled transport, particularly motor vehicles. Nor is the support of more distant governments particularly likely. The Iranian government, with its Shia orientation and hostility to the Sunni Taliban in Afghanistan, Wahhabism in general, and Pakistan’s efforts to dominate Afghanistan, has made clear that it supports Russia’s territorial integrity, despite Moscow’s war against the Muslim Chechens, and is in informal alliance with Russia, the Central Asian states, Armenia, and (with less enthusiasm) Azerbaijan to counter the Taliban and its efforts to export its form of Islamic militancy into Central Asia and elsewhere. Nor is it very likely that the Saudi or Kuwaiti governments—which are extremely conservative and worry about terrorists threats of their own—are financing Wahhabi militants in the former Soviet Union. Even the Taliban government, which hopes to receive formal recognition from Western governments (indeed to the point where there has been speculation that it will expel Osama bin Laden from Afghan territory), may have second thoughts about openly supporting an insurgency in such a distant location.

The most likely source of external support for anti-system challengers in Dagestan, then, is Chechnya, and through Chechnya, individual radical Islamicists and organizations abroad. However, it will be difficult for Chechens, or for Chechen-based

⁸⁹ *Izvestia*, 22 May 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 21 (1998), 1.

⁹⁰ *Kommerstand-Daily*, 26 May 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 21 (1998), 4.

Islamic militants, to make substantial inroads into Dagestan. Despite predictions in Moscow and elsewhere, the peoples of Dagestan gave little support to the Chechens during the 1994-96 war, although some attempts were made (mostly by Chechen-Akkins) to block Russian units moving into Chechnya from Dagestan in December 1994. However, Russian military commanders managed to avoid bloodshed, and thereafter most Dagestanis tried to isolate themselves from the violence. While many Dagestanis opposed the Russian invasion, there was little sympathy for Dudaev or for Chechen radical nationalism, which at the time had little religious content and was primarily directed against Chechen incorporation in the Russian Federation. Moreover, Dagestanis had been frequent victims of robberies and kidnappings at the hands of Chechens in the years prior to the invasion, particularly on the vital railroad linking Dagestan and Stavropol', which Dagestanis and Azerbaijanis use to bring vegetables and fruits to market in Moscow and other Russian cities. Nevertheless, in part because they wished to avoid provoking the republic's Chechen minority, Dagestani officials were cautious in their response to the war. Officially, Makhachkala took the position that, while the war was deeply regrettable, Moscow's decision to invade was understandable, and it quietly allowed Russian troops to use Dagestani territory to carry out operations in Chechnya without objection. Finally, it took steps to muzzle Dagestanis who advocated armed resistance in support of the Chechens, arresting the parliamentary leader of the Congress of Mountain Peoples and his deputy and suspending publication of the journal *Islamic Way* for reprinting Dudaev's appeals.⁹¹

In the years following the Khasavyurt Agreement in mid-1996, kidnappings, rustling, and raids by criminal groups and militants based in Chechnya became increasingly frequent, and hostility toward Chechens in Dagestan deepened accordingly. These feelings were reinforced by the statements of prominent Chechen politicians and former field commanders, including Basaev, Salman Raduev, and the former Chechen Foreign Minister, Movladi Udugov, who repeatedly called for the unification of Dagestan and Chechnya or the return of traditional Chechen territory to the Republic of Ichkeria. The fact that Maskhadov, as noted earlier, made clear that his government had no territorial claims on Dagestan and tried to open a dialogue with Magomedov and other republic leaders in the North Caucasus had little impact on anti-Chechen sentiments in Dagestan, above all because of the growing fear of hostage-taking and criminal activities by organizations based in Chechnya.⁹² These sentiments were reinforced by the August-September incursions, indeed to the point where there are now considerable concerns among human rights groups about the safety of the Chechen minority within Dagestan.

⁹¹ Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains: Politics and War in the Russian Caucasus* (New York, NY: I.B. Taurus, 1998).

⁹² For example, Maskhadov convened a meeting of leaders of the North Caucasus republics in Grozny in April 1998, where he adopted a relatively moderate position and refrained from any suggesting that the other republics should follow Chechnya's lead and declare independence from Moscow. It was agreed at the meeting that force would not be used in resolving disputes in the region and that surrounding regions would begin to cooperate with Grozny on economic issues (*Segodnya*, 4 April 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 30, no. 14 (1998), 18. Maskhadov's principal interlocutors among the presidents of Russia's republics have been Ruslan Aushev of neighboring Ingushetia and, to a lesser extent, Mintimir Shaimiev of Tatarstan.

Moreover, support for Wahhabism in Dagestan is undermined by the fact that the Wahhabis can be represented as an essentially Chechen *national* phenomenon in Islamic clothing. In fact, it is not clear that Wahhabism has significant popular support within Chechnya. Before the latest Russian invasion, Maskhadov had been outspoken in his opposition to the movement, indeed to the point where, after a clash between Chechen forces and “Wahhabis” in Gudermes in July 1998, he had outlawed it.⁹³ Government officials loyal to Maskhadov and members of the Chechen religious establishment claim that Wahhabism is an intolerant “Arabic” form of Islam that is alien to the traditional “Turkish” orientation and moderate and tolerant Islam practiced by the Chechen people, and they have on occasion portrayed Wahhabis as foreign agents who care little about the interests and preferences of the Chechen people. Maskhadov himself is not known to be particularly religious, and indeed the adoption of Islam as Chechnya’s official religion in 1998 and the commitment to the application of *sharia* law appears in large part to have based on political exigencies and in particular Maskhadov’s need to employ Islam to reconstitute governmental authority in a republic where the state had virtually no writ outside the capital. Moreover, Western reporters in Chechnya reported in the fall 1999 that many of the Chechens with whom they spoke expressed open hostility to Khattab and indeed to Basaev as well, whom many blamed for having provoked Russia into re-invading the republic. The Wahhabis in Chechnya are also engaged for the moment in a struggle for survival in the face of massive assault by the Russian military, which is intent on driving them out of the republic, and they are therefore no longer in a position to carry their armed struggle into Dagestan, particularly in the face of the widespread popular hostility to them in the republic. Nevertheless, the violence and destruction of Moscow’s current offensive, and the fact that economic conditions in the North Caucasus in general and Dagestan in particular are unlikely to improve significantly for years to come, suggests that militant groups and criminal organizations will find it easy to recruit cadres in the republic. And regardless of the outcome of the current war in Chechnya, informal financial and material support for radical Islamicists in the region from wealthy Muslim individuals abroad and possibly even from various governments may well make its way into Dagestan. Likewise, money raised by individual mullahs in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Afghanistan, or other parts of the Islamic world will likely continue to flow into Dagestan and may well reach the hands of Islamic radicals.

Political Grievances, Issues, and Parties

Historical memories and traditional enmities

With the exception of Chechen hostility to Moscow and traditional enmity between Cossacks and highlanders, historical animosities between nationalities in Dagestan are minimal.⁹⁴ Historically, armed conflict in Dagestan was common, but it was typically

⁹³ *Kommersant-Daily*, 17 July 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 29 (1998), 15).

⁹⁴ Although highlanders and lowlanders, including Cossacks, cooperated intermittently during the war, there was significant fighting, with highlanders generally supporting the Bolsheviks and the Cossacks siding with the Whites. After the Whites were defeated, harsh reprisals were carried out by the Bolsheviks against allies of the Whites and other “class enemies” in the North Caucasus, particularly the Cossacks. In many

between *jamaaty*, *shamkalates*, and *khanates*, not between nationalities. Accordingly, “ancient hatreds” between Dagestan’s nationalities – even between highlanders and Turkic-speaking lowlanders – are not effective mobilizers of sustained inter-nationality violence in the republic. Even traditional enmity toward Russians is limited. Contrary to common assumptions, the legend of Shamil and the nineteenth century struggle of the highlanders against the Russian imperial army have an ambiguous legacy today. Shamil was an Avar who managed to unite most of the highlanders in the eastern North Caucasus (and, briefly, Circassians and other highlanders in the western North Caucasus as well) in a war against Russian penetration of the region from 1834 to 1859. His methods of rule, however, were harsh, and he encountered significant popular resistance to his efforts to introduce ascetic Sufism to the highlanders. As noted earlier, he also had to deal with opposition from the traditional feudal aristocracy and with frequent defections of individual villages, *jamaaty*, and clans to the Russians. Thus, while Shamil’s struggle provides the Avars and the Chechens, who together formed the bulk of Shamil’s murids, with a potent mythology of resistance to foreign occupation and domination, as Moshe Gammer has argued, there are multiple Shamil myths that can be, and are being, appropriated by different political actors in the North Caucasus today. Indeed, as noted earlier, official Makhachkala has even used the legend of Shamil, who it claims was tolerant of national differences and at heart a democrat, as a legitimizer of its consociational practices and moderate policies.⁹⁵

Territorial and border disputes

During the Russian civil war (1918-21), the highlander peoples of the North Caucasus took advantage of Moscow’s weakness to establish a weak, territorially ill defined, but putatively independent state, the Mountain Republic (Gorskaia Respublika).⁹⁶ With the defeat of the Whites by the Red Army, the Gorskaia Respublika was dissolved and the Dagestan ASSR established in 1921. Initially, the ASSR comprised most of the territory of the former Dagestanskaia *guberniia* and the Kumyk district of what had been Terskaia *guberniia*. In 1922, traditionally Cossack and Nogai lands in what had been Stavropol’ krai and Astrakhan oblast’ were added to the republic. Some of this territory was returned to Astrakhan in 1938, but there are still some 40,000 self-described Cossacks residing along the left (northern) bank of Terek River in the north-central region of Dagestan. The “Russian” share of the local population, which was a substantial majority in Kizlyar *raion* in 1959, has since fallen, however, to approximately one-half.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, when highlander radicals began to agitate for an independent Dagestan at the end of the Gorbachev era, Cossack communities responded by threatening to secede from the republic.

cases, highlanders participated in these reprisals. The result was not only a reinforcement of the centuries old highlander-Cossack perception of themselves as enemies, but also the loss of Cossack lands.

⁹⁵ Gammer, “Competing Historical Narratives.”

⁹⁶ The Mountain Republic survived for a brief period under Soviet rule as the Mountain Republic ASSR but was subsequently broken up into ethnically-defined autonomous republics and oblasts.

⁹⁷ Wesselink, *Dagestan*.

Other territorial disputes in Dagestan result from the dissolution of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR by Stalin in 1944 and the deportation of the Chechens, Ingush, and other North Caucasus nationalities, allegedly for collaborating with the Germans. Among those deported were approximately 30,000 Chechen-Akkins from the Aukhovskiy (since renamed Novolakskiy) *raion* of Dagestan. The deportations were followed by the dissolution of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, and traditionally Chechen lands were made a part of Dagestan. Much of this land was restored to Checheno-Ingushetia after its reestablishment in 1957, but the Novolakskiy and Khasavyurtskiy raions were not. Moreover, when the rehabilitated Chechens returned to their villages in Novolakskiy raion after 1957, they discovered that their homes had been occupied by Laks, many of whom had been forcibly resettled by Soviet authorities and whose highland villages had been subsequently burned. Predictably, the resettled Laks were unwilling to leave their new homes, having given up their former places of residence. The returning Chechens were therefore forced to find new homes in neighboring Khasavyurt and Khazbekov raions, where most Dagestani Chechens are now concentrated.

Chechen hopes of returning to their original villages were further undermined when thousands of Avars moved into Novolakskiy raion in the 1970s after their traditional homes were destroyed by a powerful earthquake. Nevertheless, encouraged by the 1990 USSR "Law on Repressed Peoples," in the late Gorbachev period Dagestan's Chechen communities began insisting that they be allowed to return to their traditional villages in the region. In 1992, thousands of Chechens moved into the district without official permission, and there were reports in the local media that they were intent upon driving Laks and Avars from the region. Armed clashes between Laks and Chechens broke out in the fall, which prompted a declaration of martial law in the district by the Dagestani government, and federal troops were called in to restore order. Tensions abated after the Dagestani government promised to ease restrictions on residency permits for Chechens in the district, to compensate the Chechens in part for their financial losses, and to provide funds to allow the Laks to resettle elsewhere. However, little if any of the promised financial support was forthcoming, and the plan to resettle the Laks was resisted by Kumyks who claimed that the Laks were being resettled on traditionally Kumyk lands. The first Lak families to relocate returned to Novolakskiy raion almost immediately after local Kumyks placed armed guards around the disputed territory. Few Lak families have left Novolakskiy raion in the period since, and tensions over land between Chechens, Laks, and Avars in the raion and its surrounding regions remain serious.⁹⁸

Other territorial disputes cross Dagestan's borders. Most notably, traditionally Lezgin lands have been bifurcated by the republic's border with Azerbaijan. According to the 1989 census, there were some 205,000 Lezgins in Dagestan and 171,000 in Azerbaijan. However, Lezgin leaders claim that the Soviet census substantially underreported the total number of Lezgins, particularly in Azerbaijan where Lezgins feared job and other forms of discrimination by Azerbaijani authorities and accordingly

⁹⁸ Wesselink, *Dagestan*.

identified themselves as Azeris. The true number of ethnic Lezgins, they assert, may be as high as 600,000.⁹⁹

As noted earlier, the Lezgin national group, Sadval, began calling for the establishment of a united “Lezginistan” as an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation (then the RSFSR) shortly after its establishment in 1991. Convinced that Sadval was being supported by Soviet and Russian secret services, Azerbaijani officials helped create an Azerbaijani counterpart in mid-1991. Called “Samur” (the name of the river running along the Dagestan-Azerbaijan border), the group declared its opposition to any border revisions.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, most Lezgins remain suspicious of Baku, a sentiment that was reinforced by Baku’s efforts to draft Lezgins into the impoverished and generally inept Azerbaijani army and fight in the war in Karabakh.

Relations between Dagestan and Azerbaijan are also complicated by the presence of some 45,000 Avars in northern Azerbaijan. On occasion, Avar leaders have demanded that Avar-inhabited areas of Azerbaijan be united with Avar districts in Dagestan or even that a distinct Avar autonomy be established within Russia. Again, authorities in Baku claim that Moscow is encouraging these irredentist aspirations. A minor clash took place between Azerbaijani troops and Avars in July 1994, heightening tensions and raising fears in Azerbaijan that Russia would attempt to seize Lezgin or Avar lands in their republic by force.

The fact that Lezgins, along with Avars, Dargins, Azeris, and other nationalities, have traditionally passed unencumbered across what is now the international border between Dagestan and Azerbaijan has exacerbated tensions along the Samur. The Russian government attempted to establish full border controls in late 1992, but after Sadval organized protest demonstrations in Dagestan and Azerbaijan, Moscow backed down, establishing a loose customs regime in which locals can cross the border without obtaining a visa. However, as relations between Moscow and Grozny deteriorated, officials in Moscow continued to express concern about the smuggling of drugs and weapons across the border. In April 1994, Moscow set up additional border and customs posts and attempted to control traffic across the border more tightly, which led to clashes between Lezgins, Azeris, and the Dagestani police, resulting in several deaths. When the war in Chechnya broke out in December 1994, Moscow tried, with limited success, to close the border entirely to prevent any flow of weapons and supplies to the Chechens. These restrictions have since been partly lifted, but Lezgins and other peoples in the region continue to resent the disruption of their lives caused by what they consider an artificial and unjust border, and some have even begun to agitate for the establishment of a separate autonomous republic within the Russian Federation that would unite all the peoples of southern Dagestan.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, on the other side of the border Azeri merchants and truck drivers have repeatedly expressed their objections to the need to bribe officials from each of the many Russian organizations involved in monitoring cross-border traffic, including customs officials, border guards, local police, health and

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Fuller, “Caucasus: The Lezgin Campaign for Autonomy,” *RFE/RL Research Report* 1, no. 41 (1992): 30-32.

¹⁰⁰ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 21 July 1992, *Current Digest*, vol. 44, no. 29 (1992), 24.

¹⁰¹ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 6 October 1998, and *TV i Radio monitoring, Politika*, 4 October 1998.

environmental inspectors. They also resent the fact that Azeri citizens, regardless of their nationality, are charged higher customs duties than Dagestanis or other Russian citizens. Finally, Moscow and Baku have been at loggerheads over the management of the water resources of the Samur. Tensions along the border reached a point in late 1998 where the Russian media began to speculate about a possible border war with Azerbaijan.¹⁰²

Demographic pressures

While overall population growth in Dagestan has been high, there has been considerable variation between nationalities, due to out- and in-migration and variations in birthrates and morbidity. Most notably, between 1959 and 1989 the Russian share of the population fell by more than half, from 20.2 percent to 9.2 percent (Table 3).¹⁰³ By 1989, Dagestan was one of only four ASSRs in the RSFSR that did not have a Russian majority in its major cities.¹⁰⁴ In the period since, there has been a steady out-migration of Russians and other Slavs from the republic, particularly of skilled workers, enterprise managers, and technicians from Makhachkala and other urban areas. At the same time, there has been a significant inflow of “Dagestani” peoples, in part because of discriminatory treatment of “Caucasians” in the rest of Russia. Slavs who have remained therefore feel increasingly marginalized.

Despite the continuing exodus of Russians, urban areas in the republic have been, and remain, ethnically mixed, with few compactly settled ethnic neighborhoods. Rural areas, in contrast, tend to be compactly settled. However, demographic changes continue to affect interethnic relations in the republic. The traditional economy of the highlander peoples, with its intense cultivation of very small land plots, was disrupted by forced collectivization under Stalin, which forced many into collective and state farms in lowland areas. Until the 1950s, however, the relocation of highlanders to lowland areas was limited by malaria in Dagestan’s swampy coastal plain.¹⁰⁵ This changed with medical advances against malaria by the end of the decade, which led to an increase in internal migration from highland areas, particularly of Avars and Dargins. The movement was facilitated by Soviet authorities, who remained convinced that traditional highlander ways of life were atavistic and incompatible with modern socialism.

The settlement patterns of Dagestan’s internal migrants were not conducive to assimilation or cultural amalgamation. Highlanders relocating to lowland rural areas tended to remain compactly settled, often dominating entire *kolkhozy* (collective farms) or reconstituting entire village communities. Those who did not relocate typically maintained close ties with their traditional villages. They have thus retained their

¹⁰² Nabi Abdullaev, “Azerbaijan and Dagestan Clash Over Border Issues,” *Institute of East-West Studies Regional Report*, 8 December 1998.

¹⁰³ Until the early 1980s, there was a net in-migration of ethnic Russians to the North Caucasus, in large part because of the climate and resorts on both the Caspian and Black Seas. Many were retired military officers, who were attracted by the climate, excellent and cheap food, and beaches. The rapid outflow of Russians from the region began in the perestroika period and then accelerated as the region became increasingly crime ridden and impoverished with the Soviet collapse and especially after the Chechen war.

¹⁰⁴ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 222-23.

¹⁰⁵ Wesselink, *Dagestan*.

highland traditions, including intensive cultivation, which has threatened the agricultural practices of the sheep and cattle herding Nogai and Kumyks. Moreover, because “indigenous” Avars and Dargins were the particular beneficiaries of Soviet affirmative action policies, in contrast to non-indigenous “Tatars” like the Kumyks, the former came to dominate official positions even in traditionally Kumyk territories. The Kumyks have thus resented their loss of political control in areas where they were previously a majority, which helps explain why Tenglik pressed in 1990-91 for the establishment of a separate Kumyk autonomy.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the Nogais became a small minority in their traditional steppe grazing lands in the north, and Birlik likewise pressed for regional autonomy in the late-Soviet and early post-Soviet period.¹⁰⁷ The fact that the Kumyks and Nogais constituted such small minorities in these areas, however, undermined both the legitimacy and the practicality of their autonomy aspirations, which have since abated.

The most significant destabilizing demographic factor in recent years has been the influx of IDPs into Dagestan from Chechnya. Even in the Soviet period, the number of Chechens in the republic was increasingly rapidly (see Table 3) – from some 13,000 in 1959 to 58,000 in 1989. To this were added some 150,000 Chechen IDPs by mid-1995. While many IDPs have since returned to Chechnya, an estimated 50,000-60,000 remain, which has contributed to housing shortages and inadequate social services in raions with significant Chechen communities. The increase in the number of Chechens has also made more urgent Chechen demands to return to their pre-1944 homes in Novolaksky raion.

Demographic changes have also complicated Dagestan’s relations with its other neighbors. Land scarcity and population growth, along with the republic’s dismal economy, have contributed to the migration not only of many Russians but also of North and South Caucasian peoples to Stavropol’ krai in recent years.¹⁰⁸ The strain this has placed on the Stavropol’ economy and government budget, along with frequent cattle and sheep rustling and kidnappings by Chechen raiders, has contributed to deepening anti-highlander sentiments among Russians in the region, which helps account for the popularity of conservative nationalism and indeed outright fascism in Stavropol’ krai, as well as Krasnodar krai further to the west.¹⁰⁹ Some Moscow analysts have suggested that the reaction of Russians to the influx of migrants from the North Caucasus is helping fascists throughout Russia, and that the North Caucasus republics should be separated from Russia and the border closed.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ From having been close to half the population in Kumyk raions in the early 1960s, Kumyks fell to 20 percent by the early 1990s. See Wesselink, *Dagestan*.

¹⁰⁷ By 1989, there were only some 28,000 Nogais resident in the republic, and while they constitute a substantial majority in Nogai raion itself, they have become a tiny minority in other districts they consider part of their ancestral territory.

¹⁰⁸ *Segodnya*, 6 June 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 30, no. 25 (1998), 14.

¹⁰⁹ For a description of the strength of Cossack groups and the tone of their xenophobic rhetoric, see Magda Opalski, “The Revival of the Russian Cossacks: Rebuilding an Old Identity in a New Russia,” in Magda Opalski, ed., *Managing Diversity in Plural Societies: Minorities, Migration, and Nation-building in Post-Communist Europe*, Forum Eastern Europe, 1998, 75-102.

¹¹⁰ Mikhail Chulaki, “The Swastika and Nationalism,” *Izvestia*, 11 August 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 32, (1998), 6-7.

Ethnic and class inequalities

Economically, Russians, Kumyks, and Nogais have suffered disproportionately in recent decades. However, they constitute a weak and divided minority and thus pose little threat to public order. Indeed, the Russian community in Makhachkala is so small and marginalized that even a strongly nationalist government in Moscow intent upon imposing federal writ inside the republic would find it difficult to mobilize local Russians in an effort to destabilize the Dagestani government.

The most politically significant tensions over group inequality are between Dargins on the one hand, and Avars and Lezgins on the other. The Dargins are widely considered to have disproportionate representation in the republic's executive organs, which is where important decisions are made about appointments and the allocation of government benefits. Magomedov is a Dargin, and so too is Said Amirov, the mayor of Makhachkala, who is generally considered the second most powerful politician in the republic. The Dargins are, however, less numerous than the Avars, and both Avars and Lezgins have made clear that they resent Dargin political domination of the republic. As a result, Avar parliamentary deputies took the lead in opposing the amendments to the constitution allowing Magomedov to prolong his term of office.

Early Warning Signs and Likely Triggers

Political succession

Dagestani consociationalism is different from India's in at least two important respects. First, it is de facto a presidential rather than a parliamentary system. As a result, Dagestani governments do not regularly fall with the breakdown of parliamentary coalitions or after parliamentary elections. Moreover, Dagestan's is a young regime, and it has yet to experience a leadership succession. Magomedov's eventual succession may therefore trigger a succession crisis.

Indeed, the stability of instability in Dagestan is in part tied to Magomedov's skills as a leader. He has *nomenklatura* ties and, like other former communist *apparatchiki* in the Soviet successor states, considerable political skills, particularly in his ability to co-opt much of the opposition by handing out positions and state subsidies. Magomedov has also been very careful to appear balanced on inter-nationality relations and to make clear his commitment to multinationalism. However, his second and final (at least according to the current constitution) term will end in 2002. There is also always a risk that he will be assassinated or die from natural causes in the interim. Regardless, at some point he will leave office, which will immediately raise issues of ethnic balancing and fairness. Replacing him with someone from a different nationality, as the constitution prescribes, risks unsettling the elite and requiring a new pact on the ethnic distribution of power. Replacing him with another Dargin, on the other hand, would be a clear violation of consociational norms and would likely be deeply resented by Avars and Lezgins in particular. If the elite manages to reach an agreement on a successor and a

shuffling of portfolios, the Dagestani people will likely accept it. But if not, elite conflict could lead to a regime breakdown and substantial political violence.

Violation of consociational rules and practices by the Dagestani elite

Serious violations of the principles of consociationalism in Dagestan have already taken place on at least two occasions. As the end of Magomedov's two-year term approached in June 1996, he managed to convince two-thirds of parliament to amend the constitution and extend his term of office to four years. He again lobbied successfully for a constitutional amendment in March 1998, allowing him to serve a second four-year term. Oppositionists vigorously objected to these maneuvers. Popular support for Magomedov appears to be waning for other reasons as well, including the dismal state of the economy. Magomedov is increasingly seen as the leader of a corrupt and exploitative elite who has been ineffective in overcoming the republic's profound problems. There have been episodic anti-Magomedov demonstrations and even marches on Makhachkala demanding his resignation.¹¹¹

Despite his political vulnerability, Magomedov may again violate the informal norms of consociational democracy when his current term ends in 2002. He might even attempt to remain in office illegally should he conclude that the legislature would not approve a constitutional amendment to allow him to serve yet another term. Alternatively, a faction of the political elite in Makhachkala might try to unseat him by illegal means, thereby ending whatever is left of Dagestan's elite consensus. And a leadership crisis in Makhachkala might well lead to mass disturbances and violence in the capital that would spread to other parts of the republic.

The growth of armed militant groups

Currently the principal threat of sustained political violence in Dagestan comes from Islamic militants in the highlands – while criminal organizations in the republic are well armed and capable of single acts of violence, few have political agendas. For the reasons outlined earlier, militant Islamicists are unlikely to persuade a significant portion of the Dagestani population to take up arms and overthrow the government. However, the significance of the threat from these militants would increase should someone come to power in Grozny (Dzhokhar) who articulated territorial claims on Dagestan or otherwise supported Islamic militancy in the republic. Someone less cautious than Maskhadov might well encourage Chechnya's field commanders to intensify their operations against federal troops and republic police in the republic or to engage in a sustained terrorist campaign.

¹¹¹ See, for example, *Kommerstant-Daily*, 24 September 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 38 (1998), 21, for an account on a march on Makhachkala by supporters of the Khachilaev brothers. When Magomedov was reelected president in 1998 by the Constitutional Assembly, his opponent, who received 78 votes to Magomedov's 168, was Sharafutdin Musaev. Musaev is reportedly was a close political ally of Nadirshakh Khachilaev (*Segodnya*, 26 June 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 26 (1998), 13).

Ill-considered policy changes in Makhachkala or Moscow

To date, Magomedov and his allies have been circumspect in dealing with the highlander communities in remote areas that have challenged the authority of the Dagestani government, as demonstrated most clearly by their willingness to negotiate a compromise with the “Wahhabis” in Karamakhi, Kadar, and Chabanmakhi. Makhachkala has also funneled revenue from Moscow directly to local *jamaat* councils in an effort to win their political loyalty and to enhance their ability to preserve local order.¹¹² Rather than being insistent on imposing central writ, then, Magomedov’s strategy has been to control the power ministries in the capital and other urban areas, conceding local officials and traditional leaders considerable autonomy. While the result has been to further undermine Makhachkala’s ability to maintain internal order or implement an effective economic reform program, it has also made it less likely that a unified opposition would emerge and resort to large scale and sustained violence to bring down the regime. This policy of compromise and co-optation will likely persist despite the federal government’s assault on the Wahhabi villages near Buinaksk in September 1999. However, if Makhachkala changes course and is seen as clearly favoring one nationality over another, inter-nationality relations in the republic could well deteriorate.

As for Moscow, its policy toward Dagestan has been driven above all its desire to keep the Chechen conflict from spreading. The early suspicion felt by pro-Yeltsin politicians in Moscow toward the “pro-Communist” political elite in Makhachkala therefore gave way quickly to an appreciation for the traditional Dagestani *nomenklatura* and to Magomedov in particular for his conservative and generally pro-Moscow policies. In the years since, Moscow has helped shore up Magomedov by providing not only substantial financial support to the republic, as noted earlier, but also by making clear that it supports Dagestan’s leader and his “moderate” line. This ongoing support has been interpreted in Makhachkala as a less than subtle warning that should someone take over as Dagestani leader who was openly hostile to Moscow or who advocated secession, then federal aid, and hence the material interests of the Dagestani elite, would be threatened.¹¹³

Indeed, the successive federal governments of prime ministers Viktor Chernomyrdin, Sergei Kirienko, Yevgenii Primakov, Sergei Stepashin, and Vladimir Putin have consistently made clear that Dagestan is a critical, indeed at times even *the* critical, focus of Russia’s “regional policy” – as the then Nationalities Minister, Ramazan Abdulatipov, himself an ethnic Avar from Dagestan, put it in late 1997, Dagestan is “Russia’s main outpost in the south” and the “key to the Caucasus, the Caspian, and the

¹¹² *Itogi*, 31 August 1998.

¹¹³ An example of Moscow’s political support was the visit to the republic by the head of Yeltsin’s Oversight Administration, Vladimir Putin, shortly before Magomedov’s reelection as head of the State Council by the Constitutional Assembly in the summer of 1998. Similarly, then Russian Prime Minister Sergei Kirienko attended Magomedov’s inaugural ceremonies in mid-July (*Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 July 1998). I should note that, in light of the “active measures” undertaken by Russian security forces in Chechnya against Dudaev and governments elsewhere in the Caucasus, the Dagestani elite could expect more than just a reduction of financial support should anti-Moscow forces take power in Makhachkala.

Muslim world.”¹¹⁴ There have, however, been signs of disagreement within the federal government about Dagestan policy, particularly when Anatolii Kulikov, a hard-liner on Russian internal security policy, was head of the Russian Interior Ministry. Supporters of the use of “economic levers” in the Ministry of Nationalities were pitted against supporters of a “firm hand” in the Interior Ministry. These disagreements seemed to be abate, however, after Stepashin took over as Interior Minister in April 1998. Stepashin, like Kulikov before him, had long been involved with the formulation of Russia’s policy in the North Caucasus, and indeed his political reputation had been badly tarnished by his defense of Yeltsin’s decision to invade Chechnya in December 1994. Nevertheless, Stepashin had generally been a moderate on Russian nationality policy. As Interior Minister and later Prime Minister he argued that Moscow should continue to provide financial and political support to regional leaders, but he also urged that it take the lead in cracking down on crime while defending the federal government’s authority when necessary. Federal policy toward Dagestan was explained by Andrei Kokoshin, then Secretary of the Russian Security Council, shortly after Stepashin took over as Interior Minister, as follows: “A settlement in the North Caucasus will be pursued through social and economic measures, combined with a determination to use all the manpower and resources at the state’s disposal to safeguard law and order in the North Caucasus and in Dagestan in particular.”¹¹⁵ This continues to be the policy line espoused publicly by the Putin government, despite the renewed warfare in Chechnya. Indeed, from the Russian federal government’s perspective, the invasion is represented as a painful but necessary effort to restore order and “destroy terrorists and bandits” in the republic.

The federal government has thus continued to provide financial aid to Dagestan while playing a growing role in a crackdown on crime and corruption in the republic. Measures apparently directed at implementing its two-pronged strategy were undertaken immediately upon Stepashin becoming Interior Minister. An operational headquarters was established in Stavropol’ to coordinate federal efforts to “maintain law and order” in the North Caucasus in May 1998, while a commander of the “special administration” was placed in charge of the region’s interior ministry troops, army units, border guards, and all other federal forces in the North Caucasus. Just two months later, this “special administration” oversaw military exercises in Dagestan and other areas bordering on Chechnya by Ministry troops as well as units from the Minister for Emergency Situations, the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Federal Agency for Government Communications and Information, border guards, railroad troops, and even defense ministry troops.¹¹⁶ Stepashin (and later Putin) also encouraged the FSB to become more active in gathering intelligence in the region.¹¹⁷ At the same time, the showdown with the Khachilaev brothers in May 1998 gave federal authorities a convenient excuse to launch a widely-

¹¹⁴ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 9 October 1997. While Abdulatipov vigorously advocated increased federal aid for Dagestan, (despite the fact that he and Magomedov are seen as political rivals), he also pressed for efforts to reduce crime and corruption in the republic. Indeed, he went so far as to suggest that Moscow should declare a state of emergency in Dagestan and other areas bordering on Chechnya (*RFE/RL Newslines*, 18 March 1999).

¹¹⁵ *Segodnya*, 26 May 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 21 (1998), 4.

¹¹⁶ *Izvestia*, 28 July 1998, *Current Digest*, vol. 50, no. 30 (1998), 10.

¹¹⁷ *Izvestia*, 20 May 1999, *Current Digest*, vol. 51, no. 20 (1999), 16.

announced crackdown on crime and corruption in the republic (indeed, there was speculation in Dagestan that the confrontation with the Kachilaevs was deliberately provoked by Moscow).¹¹⁸ A special investigative team led by Deputy Interior Minister Vladimir Kolesnikov was promptly sent to Makhachkala, which ordered the arrest of Magomed Khachilaev for his role in the May events and for possession of two AK-47 automatic rifles, ammunition, five hand-grenades, and pistol with a silencer found in his car at the time of his arrest.¹¹⁹ Additional stockpiles of weapons were later found in his home.¹²⁰ Other prominent Dagestani officials were also reportedly placed under investigation, including not only Nadir Khachilaev but also Gadzhi Makhachev, the republic's vice prime minister and a leader of the Avar national movement; Ruslan Gadzhibekov, the mayor of Kaspiisk near Makhachkala and an ally of Khachilaevs; Esenbolat Magomedov, the director of the Dagestani branch of the Western Caspian Committee on the Fishing Industry; and Sharapudin Musaev, head of the republic's Pension Fund. The investigation of Nadir Khachilaev led the Russian State Duma, for the first time, to lift the immunity of one of its deputies, which prompted Nadir to flee to Chechnya.¹²¹ After expressing his opposition to the August 1999 incursion by Basaev's forces, Nadir reportedly participated in the defense of the Wahhabi villages in September, was wounded, fled to his native Lak region, and was finally arrested by federal authorities.¹²²

Accompanying these “firm hand” measures by Moscow have been additional steps directed at ameliorating the republic's economic crisis. An overall “Program for the Economic, Social, and Political Development of the North Caucasus Region up to 2005” was drawn up in Moscow in 1998, and in the summer of that year the Security Council announced the formation of a special federal agency for coordinating federal social and economic programs in the region under the leadership of then Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Khristenko. Unfortunately, Moscow's ability to continue providing financial support to Makhachkala, let alone increase it, was significantly undermined by Russia's August 1998 financial crisis as well as by the growing financial strain imposed by the

¹¹⁸ “Federal Crackdown in Dagestan Continues,” *Institute of East-West Studies Regional Report*, 11 February 1999.

¹¹⁹ Nabi Abdullaev, “Ethnic Leader's Arrest in Dagestan Causes Popular Disturbance,” *Institute of East-West Studies Regional Report*, 10 September 1998. Supporters of Magomed Kachilaev, who was a deputy in the republic's parliament at the time of his arrest, appealed to the Dagestani constitutional court for the release of Magomed, arguing that the Russian federal constitution affords immunity to deputies to republic parliaments as well as the federal parliament. The Dagestani court rejected the argument, however.

¹²⁰ Nabi Abdullaev, “Dagestani Regime Uses Feds to Undermine Opposition, Faces Protests,” *Institute of East-West Studies Regional Report*, 17 September 1998. Demonstrations in Makhachkala and elsewhere by supporters of the Kachilaevs prompted Kolesnikov to have his prisoner removed from Makhachkala to Pyatigorsk in Stavropol' krai.

¹²¹ Before fleeing to Chechnya, however, Nadir retreated to Novolak, which is controlled by his clan, from where he gave frequent interviews to Russian and Dagestani journalists in an effort to win popular support for the release of his brother. There are frequent assertions in Makhachkala that Moscow's crackdown was in fact directed not so much at crime but at shoring up Magomedov and destroying his political opponents. They assert that no one close to Magomedov has been identified as a subject of investigation.

¹²² Nabi Abdullaev, “Nadir and Magomed Khachilaev: Politicians for the New Russia,” *The Jamestown Foundation Prism*, October 1999, no. 18, part two.

invasion of Chechnya.¹²³ Both the August 1998 financial crisis and the fighting in western Dagestan in August-September 1999 also contributed to Dagestan's economic woes, particularly in the form of worsening shortages of medicines and fears of inadequate food supplies over the winter. Nevertheless, Moscow's financial support to Dagestan has survived, an indication of the priority federal officials place on the republic, and indeed even before the August 1999 fighting, senior federal officials paid frequent visits to the region to affirm their support for Magomedov.

To date, then, Moscow's policy towards Dagestan has been reasonably cautious and balanced. Not only has it provided the republic with substantial financial support, despite its meager means, but it has repeatedly endorsed the leadership of the republic and its moderate policies. Moreover, it has been of some help in combating organized crime in the republic, while its anti-crime campaign has further undermined the opposition to Magomedov. With less fanfare, Moscow has provided Magomedov with crucial coercive assistance, most notably in May 1998. This policy line will likely continue as long as Magomedov remains Dagestan's leader and Yeltsin is Russia's president. If, however, Russia loses its current war in Chechnya, or if extreme rightists or leftists come to power in Moscow, federal policy may well change. Advocates of a "firm hand" may then attempt to limit Makhachkala's autonomy, undermine the fragile political balance in the republic, reduce federal subsidies to the region, or even redraw Russia's internal borders in an effort to eliminate the ethnic republics altogether.¹²⁴ Another financial meltdown in Russia or the aggravation of Moscow's fiscal problems could also force Moscow to limit or even end its financial support for the republic. Such changes, particularly if rapid and obvious, might induce the Dagestani elite to unite in defense of their prerogatives and become openly defiant of Moscow. Alternatively, it might even lead the peoples of Dagestan to take up arms against the federal presence on their territory.

Conclusion

Despite the many sources of instability in and around the republic, Dagestan has managed to avoid sustained large-scale violence on its territory. Its political elite remains relatively united, regime changes have taken place by legal means, and interethnic tensions are modest. On the other hand, the republic has witnessed repeated acts of significant political violence, while elite consensus in Makhachkala has on occasion appeared in danger of imminent collapse, with the attendant risk of a breakdown of the republic's consociational practices and degeneration into anarchy or civil war. At best, this stable instability will persist for years, if not decades, and Russia will have to cope with persistent unrest on its southern border. The Dagestani economy is deeply depressed and is unlikely to recover substantially in the near future. Economic hardship and state weakness will make it very difficult to reduce organized crime. High and variable

¹²³ Radoslav K. Petkov and Natan M. Shklar, "Russian Regions After the Crisis: Coping with Economic Troubles Governors Reap Political Rewards" (paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, New York, 15-17 April 1999, 7).

¹²⁴ I should emphasize, however, that I believe that these outcomes are unlikely. Whatever government is in power in Moscow will probably try to work with the authorities in Makhachkala to preserve order and protect Moscow's limited writ in the republic.

birthrates will strain the Dagestani government's ability to provide adequate public services and minimal social protections, and they will intensify inter-nationality territorial disputes. Finally, the republic's extreme ethnic heterogeneity multiplies the potential conflicts between nationalities, sub-nationalities, clans and sub-clans, *jamaaty*, villages, religious groups, criminal organizations, and other political actors in the republic.

The capacity of the Dagestani government to prevent these conflicts from turning violent through coercion, co-optation, or appeasement will be limited by the economic difficulties in the republic, Makhachkala's difficulties in collecting taxes, its financial dependency on a financially strapped Moscow, and the low professional standards and inadequate resources of the local police and federal and republican troops on Dagestani territory. The weakness of the Dagestani state will also likely deepen as popular support for Magomedov wanes and Dagestanis increasingly view the government as corrupt and inefficient. Those committed to the use of violence for political ends, on the other hand, will have ready access to highly destructive weapons. And, because political order and economic reconstruction are very unlikely to come to Chechnya for the foreseeable future, Dagestanis will likely continue to suffer from episodic violence at the hand of kidnappers, armed robbers, and sheep and cattle rustlers based in Chechnya.

Dagestan's consociational practices alone will hardly guarantee stability in the republic. On the contrary, they will ensure that disputes between nationalities over representation in central institutions remains on the political agenda indefinitely, thereby entrenching ethnic identities. Unequal demographic change will also put pressure on the consociational practices of the republic and risk a regime breakdown. This is not to suggest, however, that some other institutional order would significantly ameliorate interethnic tensions or reduce of the risk of political violence. Dagestan's present consociational practices were largely inherited from the pre-Revolutionary and Soviet past, and they have since acquired considerable popular legitimacy. Abandoning them now, even if it were true that some other institutional arrangement would in the long run be better, would risk popular and elite resistance and even precipitate civil war in the short run. Moreover, no institutional arrangement, whether it be affirmative action, ethnic federalism, autonomy arrangements, or consociationalism, can guarantee interethnic harmony in plural societies – inevitably, elites have to manage inter-communal conflicts that arise over the distribution of valued goods and symbols. Effective management requires responsiveness to changing social norms, demographic conditions, and political preferences, as well as sensitivity to the varying impact of symbolic acts that can either ameliorate or exacerbate conflicts. But even with the best of intentions and concerted effort, elites may well fail to prevent inter-ethnic conflict.

Thus, it is extremely unlikely that the economic and political problems of the republic will be significantly overcome in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, Dagestan will also likely avoid sustained large-scale political violence on its territory. The republic's great variety of national and sub-national groups, as well as the strength of clan, village, *jamaat*, and religious identities, makes it very difficult for pan-highlander, pan-Caucasian, or Islamic appeals to resonate with the Dagestan population.

Even more unlikely is the emergence of a politically potent ideology of Dagestani nationalism that defines as its primary goal the establishment of an independent

multinational Dagestani state. Ten (or fourteen) nationalities, not one, are considered the primary “owners” of the republic, and collective ownership by multiple groups creates significant collective action problems and makes the development of an overarching Dagestani nationalism and legitimation on the basis of “self-determination” very problematic. Nor is it likely that one national group will be able to mobilize its constituency and establish hegemony over the political system. Were such an effort to be made, there would be a countervailing mobilization and balancing alliances among others. To quote Kisriev:

Paradoxically, stability is the product of the plethora of conflicts in Dagestan. The conflict parties or their segments in the system of balance of power [sic] are too small. The units of conflict and therefore of analysis are not Dargins or Avars opposing each other. If it were that way the system would be too fragile to hold. The units of conflict are smaller and on the level of *jamaaty*. This prompts leaders of *jamaaty* to seek alliances constantly. Negotiations, compromise, and search [sic] for common ground are essential for that process. As a result, we have a strange stability with occasional excessive violence . . .¹²⁵

Indeed, Dagestan’s group politics are evocative of the classic balance-of-power system in nineteenth century Europe, with its absence of a third-party enforcer and with Britain playing a balancing role, with the role of balancer played in the Dagestan case, albeit not always effectively, by Makhachkala. And as in India, the great multiplicity of ethnic and religious cleavages may well account for the surprising resiliency of Dagestan’s otherwise brittle consociational system.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, if the best case for Dagestan is stable instability, the worst case – a complete breakdown of public order and sustained large-scale violence – cannot be ruled out. I have identified a number of likely triggers of violence – political succession, a violation of the formal rules or informal practices of consociationalism, an attack on the republic by militants from Chechnya, a sudden and substantial cutback in federal subsidies for Makhachkala, an unsuccessful use of force by Makhachkala to impose its writ on recalcitrant regions, or a ham-handed effort by Moscow to impose “constitutional order” or to lift Dagestan’s autonomy. Any of these developments could provoke large-scale violence. On the other hand, if the elite in Moscow remains reasonably unified and plays by the rules of the consociational game, and if both Makhachkala and Moscow are patient and use political rather than military means to resolve conflicts while defending Makhachkala and government facilities when necessary, then the republic’s stable instability is likely to persist. The least likely outcome for Dagestan, unfortunately, is genuine political stability and prosperity.

¹²⁵ Kisriev, “The Historical and Anthropological Roots,” 5.

¹²⁶ Arend Lijphart, “The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation,” *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (1996): 258-68.