Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics

A publication of the Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics (EGP)

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Scope

The aim of the Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics (EGP), or EthnoGeoPolitics in short, is to further the study of and teaching on the cultural, social, ethnic and (geo-)political characteristics, processes and developments in different areas of the world, at universities, institutes and colleges in and outside the Netherlands. The association's journal, Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics, is above all intended to elicit analytic debate by allowing scholars to air their views, perspectives and research findings— with critical responses from others who may hold a different view or research approach. One can submit manuscripts—main articles (to be peer-reviewed), critical responses (published peer-reviews), short articles and/or book reviews—to info@ethnogeopolitics.org. At www.ethnogeopolitics.org, one can find information about the association's founding, founding members, aims, activities and publications—and particularly the freely downloadable copies of the journal's issues.

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*** Call and Guidelines for Contributions ***

Our journal is ready to receive manuscripts for the next issues next year—from now on also contributions in Russian, German, Spanish and other non-English languages (see further the Editorial of this issue). The Editorial Board does not apply a strict wordlimit, but we prefer full-fledged research articles of no more than 10,000 words. We also welcome short analytical articles, book reviews, review essays, and opinion pieces.

Regular contributors may get a guaranteed space in future issues of our journal, with a recognisable header like ‘Dorsey’s Column’ for James M. Dorsey’s contributions from the Summer 2017 issue onwards. It does not necessarily mean that we approve everything that these contributors may say. The contributors themselves are responsible and accountable for their statements.

Furthermore, we welcome contributions for special issues on common themes, like the one on Human Security in our Winter 2015 issue. The association EthnoGeoPolitics is willing to (re)publish special issues in book form—and publish monographs and other major manuscripts in book form as well.

Research essays—particularly so-called ‘Main Articles’—undergo rigorous peer-review i.e. judgments from at least two peer-reviewers. Extensive (book) review essays that have undergone such (peer-)review as well, are also considered and named as Main Articles.

We also welcome and publish open comments i.e. critical responses—particularly those of peer-reviewers—in order to encourage feedback and debate. These responses can be anonymous if the commentators wish so. Still, we encourage reviewers and other commentators to publicise their names under their contributions, as the latter will thus become better citable, referable and indexable as sources and publications.

Of course we at the Editorial Board decide whether or not publish (excerpts from) peer-reviewers’ comments, based on considerations of utility and usefulness for ongoing debate. However, publishing no peer-reviews and comments does not mean that these do not exist; thus some peer-reviews are not published because their comments have been addressed by the author in his or her contribution. To reiterate, Main Articles have undergone generally two or more peer-reviews.

The Editorial Board may publish some of the later comments on published contributions as critical responses (maximum 3,000 words) in one or more subsequent issues of the journal. Extensive critical responses with source references may be published as full-fledged, separate research articles.

For each submitted manuscript, please supply your name, academic and/or other professional titles and affiliations, office and/or home address and other contact details, as well as your research specialisms and any major publications. Please submit manuscripts and contact details at www.ethnogeopolitics.org/contact-3, or to info@ethnogeopolitics.org.

See for more details on the submission process of main articles, critical responses and other manuscripts www.ethnogeopolitics.org/publications. We therefore encourage and welcome your contributions, ranging from articles to transparent reviews and comments on these articles.


Editorial

Five years Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics

Babak Rezvani

Introduction

It was in 2011 that we in the Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics decided to publish a scientific, peer-reviewed journal. We envisaged that it should be a journal quite different from the existing journals. No longer embedded in the existing templates and conventions, it was and is intended to and should introduce innovative and diverse types of articles. We worked in 2012 on it and in the Spring of 2013 we published the first number of Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics.

In order to mark this achievement, and to reach a wider audience on the Eurasian continent, we have decided to republish here, as a special article in the celebratory issue, the Editorial of the said maiden issue, written by the editor-in-chief and titled “EthnoGeoPolitics and its Forum”, in Russian. Dr. Marat Iliyasov from the University of St Andrews and a new member of our editorial board, has assisted him the Russian translation (this reproduction includes a short Abstract in English).

Although English remains the main language of this journal, we have decided to allow also articles in other languages to be included. From now on we seek to publish one or more Russian-language articles in each number, and we may include articles in other languages as well, such as German, Dutch, Persian or Spanish in our upcoming issues in the future—presuming, of course, that such non-English articles will be submitted in sufficient numbers. Such articles, if submitted and approved for publication, will be provided with short abstracts i.e. summaries in English.

Thanks to the efforts of our editorial board—particularly of Caspar ten Dam, our executive editor, and Arnav Anjaria, our energetic English-language editor—our journal has managed to exist for five years. We aim to be and remain a transparent journal, which means that we prefer to publish comments of peer-reviewers under their own name. However, this is not obligatory as many reviewers prefer to remain anonymous. Many even ask us not to publish their reviews and comments at all.

We should clarify certain issues and address a few questions that we receive quite often. We are a peer-reviewed and open-access journal. However, we do not charge a production fee from the authors. Only the quality of their papers and the originality of their ideas, approaches and arguments are decisive criteria for us to publish their contributions.

Furthermore, the journal is not responsible for any controversial and/or contestable statements done in its articles. Only the authors of these articles are responsible for their statements. Even members of the editorial team may have different views on certain issues.
Everyone is free to express his or her own views. Everyone may comment on any article published in this journal and the authors have the chance to respond. After all, one of the main objectives of the journal has always been to engender academic debate and a fruitful exchange of research findings and ideas. Consequently, when authors may make ‘strong’ statements in their contributions we do not discourage them to make these—as so many other academic journals tend to do in their overly cautious and conservative editorial policies.

In our view, ‘strong’ statements are not necessarily unscientific or unfounded, and can contribute to new understandings and insights even if these turn out to be unfounded or at least contestable—as long as these are thought-provoking and thus at least potentially fruitful.

We appreciate your cooperation with us. We will be glad to review and publish one or more of your articles, and invite other scholars among you to act as (peer-)reviewers. We would also ask funds and private persons to sponsor and keep sponsoring the Association for the Study of EthnoGeoPolitics. Your support enables us to organise seminars and publish journals and books, and remain an independent organisation and publish a good-quality, and politically neutral, journal.

Babak Rezvani, Editor-in-Chief  November 2017

NB: do you have any comments on the editorial? Please send these to info@ethnogeopolitics.org, or through the contact form at www.ethnogeopolitics.org.
Abstract in English

Ethnogeopolitics is a new concept, indicating an emerging multidisciplinary field of research. Its definition and scope of study depends much on those of related (sub-) disciplines, particularly those of geopolitics. There is no general consensus on the definitions of geopolitics and ethnopolitics, and hence ethnogeopolitics also cannot be easily or non-controversially defined. In order to be able to define ethnogeopolitics as an academic field, one has to define what is politics and political science, ethnicity, ethnopolitics and geopolitics.

Мы все, основатели ассоциации "Этническая Геополитика", связаны с академической сферой. Принимая решение о создании этой ассоциации, мы руководствовались идеей предложить новое видение глобальных проблем и, таким образом, расшевелить сферу Геополитики, которая с некоторых пор находится в упадке. Решить эту проблему, по нашему мнению, можно, предложив более динамичную и актуальную область для исследования. Мы считаем, что такой областью может стать Этногеополитика.

Этногеополитика - это новая концепция, которая объединяет разные дисциплины. Определение Этногеополитики и объем исследования, который она предлагает, в значительной степени зависят от связанных с ней (под)дисциплин, в частности, геополитики и этнополитики. Как известно, в академических кругах до сих пор не существует общего консенсуса в отношении определений последних. Соответственно, возникает проблема определения и Этногеополитики, которого не может быть пока не будет четких формулировок касающихся этнополитики и геополитики.

Дефиниции последних выглядят довольно запутанно. Корни этой проблемы находятся в многогранности обеих дисциплин. Они могут быть как чисто научными, так и связанными с практическими решениями действующих политиков. Другими словами, обе дисциплины могут определять и направлять (внешнюю) политику стран, предлагая пути наиболее соответствующие интересам актора.

Несмотря на это, в поисках соответственного определения, мы можем приблизиться к истине, если вспомним, что этнополитика и геополитика могут иметь культурную составляющую наряду с анализом других сфер, например, военной стратегии, экономики и географии. Именно, анализ роли культуры в политике позволяет идентифицировать геополитику как этногеополитику. Таким образом, в узком понимании этого термина, этногеополитика - это дисциплина, которая изучает влияние этнической идентичности на внешнюю политику и безопасность одной или нескольких стран.

Изучение этого влияния делают этногеополитику хорошим инструментом для понимания и объяснения этнических конфликтов, гражданской войны и транснациональных политических вопросов.
В широком смысле, этногеополитика охватывает этногеографию, этнополитику и геополитику, а также сферу этнических исследований, географии и политологии. Каждая из этих дисциплин сфокусирована на широком спектре вопросов, которые зависят от интереса ученых.

Возможно, основное различие между геополитикой и этнополитикой заключается в том, что последняя рассматривает вопросы геополитики на уровне народов, тогда как фокус геополитики направлен на государства и глобальные режимы. Однако, и этногеополитика не исключает анализа процессов на уровне государств. Она скорее концентрируется на анализе взаимодействия последних с народами, что является определяющим аспектом этой дисциплины. Конечно, определение ее может меняться в зависимости от продолжающегося научного диалога и ее масштабов.

Этногеополитика, как и любые другие академические дисциплины, динамична и подвержена изменениям концептуального и методологического толка. Эти изменения будут видны только со временем и мы надеемся, что этот форум будет способствовать развитию дисциплины. Это развитие, по нашему замыслу, будет отображено на созданной для научного диалога площадке, в журнале «Форум этногеополитики». Мы приветствуем новейшие исследования и дискуссии в этой сфере, а также поощряем критические обзоры и комментарии, что положительно отличает наш журнал от других научных журналов. Самый важный критерий для наших публикаций - это польза для развития этногеополитики и смежных дисциплин. Мы особо поощряем статьи, в центре внимания которых находятся мало изученные или "не центральные", с точки зрения внимания ученых, регионы, такие как Центральная Евразия (Кавказ, Центральная Азия и Иранское плато), а также коренные народы Северной Америки. В то же время мы не исключаем исследования, которые сфокусированы на других регионах мира. Все необходимые рекомендации в отношении публикаций и комментариев можно найти на нашей страничке в интернете.

NB: Бабак Резвани защитил докторскую степень 12 февраля 2013 года в Амстердамском университете. Его диссертация «Этнотерриториальный конфликт и сосуществование в Кавказ, Центральная Азия и Ферейдан» была опубликована в том же году Амстердамским университетом.

Babak Rezvani, Editor-in-Chief & Marat Ilyasov, Associate Editor November 2017

Endnotes

NB: do you have any comments on Ilyasov’s (co-)translation of Rezvani’s editorial in our journal’s maiden issue back in 2013? Please send these to info@ethnogeopolitics.org, or through the contact form at www.ethnogeopolitics.org.

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Main Article

The Tibetan Culture Area: Contours and Civilizational Linkages

Arnav Anjaria

Introduction

Caryn M. Berg in the Encyclopaedia of Anthropology, referring to Clark Wissler, defines a Culture Area as a geographical/cultural region whose population and groups share important common identifiable cultural traits, such as language, tools and material culture, kinship, social organization and cultural history (Wissler 2005). Therefore, groups sharing similar traits in a geographical region would be classed in a single culture area. Berg asserts further in the same article that this concept dwells upon identifying and "defining" a cultural core, and thus deliberating into the fragmented or nearby groups that share these traits that the core upholds or adapts or has adapted to.

Thus, within the contours of the same concept, Irving Rouse offers an insight into the reasons that lead to the emergence of a culture area, whereby people who live close by each other tend to influence each other's culture. They are the inhabitants of the same environment and geography so they easily adapt to it, and they also pass on the culture from one generation to another (Rouse 1957).

Guy Mercier, in his article 'The Geography of Friedrich Ratzel and Paul Vidal de la Blache: A Comparative Analysis' originally published in Annales de géographie in French, quotes Ratzel as saying that "in order to understand the role of Man and his destiny", it is necessary "to picture him on the land where is set the scene of his action". Thus, the story of the Tibetan Culture Area or the case study of the Tibetan Culture Area stands much in tune with these famous words of Friedrich Ratzel.

Ratzel, though he made a voluminous contribution to the field of Geography, remains controversial for his linkages with Nazism. He also developed the concept of Lebensraum or the idea of Living Space, which contributed significantly to the expansionist policies of Adolf Hitler. Though there are several notions of Culture Area, the concept is also critiqued as being a by-product of the concept of Lebensraum.

Thus, several scholars have made diverse and different additions to the idea of what a Culture Area is all about, what sort of categorization can take place using this tool of analysis, and if there is a Culture Area or not. Victoria Razzak provides a lucid discussion of several notions of the Culture Area concept given by different geographers in her article (Razzak 2007: 199-212). She defines Culture Area to be a "geographical region with one relatively homogeneous complex of activities, beliefs, values, and customs these traits may be employed to delimit and map a series of divisions of territory in which the occupants of each division are characterized by distinctive cultural features that differentiate them from those in other areas" (Razzak 2007: 199).
Thus as discussed above, a culture area has a certain “Core”, Razak describes this core as “Cultural Hearths” (Razzak 2007: 200). Thus the creation of a culture area is a result of the “diffusion of dominant cultural traits” of the hearth or the cultural centre to other neighbouring regions (Ibid: 200).

Thus, the concept of Culture Area in its articulate attire is a result of Clark Wissler’s study of the American Indian Ethnology (Clark Wissler 2005), according to Razak (Razzak 2007). She also presents the perspective offered by Melville Herskovits in advancing the understanding of the Culture Area concept; Herskovits asserts that “there is a historical connection between places, including many resemblances between the material culture, folklore, religion and social organization” (Herskovits 1924: 50-63).

What Constitutes the Tibetan Culture Area?

Here, in the context of the Tibetan Culture Area, historical connection is of great importance. Some of the landmarks of the historical connection between Tibet and the greater cultural area are people like the Sixth Dalai Lama who happened to be from Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, India, and the Kalmyk monk Agvan Dorzhiev 1 whose activism as a diplomatic genius is of relevance. 2

Even the Cho yon priest-patron relationship between Tibetans and the Mongols is associated with the historical linkage, in the same manner by which the reverence of the present Dalai Lama in all of these places that form a part of the Tibetan Culture Area speaks of the role of history in the formulation of the Tibetan Culture Area, and also in understanding of its present-day viability.

Elizabeth Bacon was one of the first scholars to draw a classification of ten different Culture Areas in Asia; this process of classification of the culture areas stretched over two major articles. The first six classifications are published in an article ‘Asia (Ethnology)’ (Bacon and Hudson: 523-525) in Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1945 and the next four classifications appeared in 1946 in the article “A Preliminary Attempt to Determine the Culture Areas of Asia” (Bacon: 117-132) in the Southwestern Journal of Anthropology. Hence these areas included:

a) The Paleosiberian
b) The South- west Asian Sedentary
c) The Pastoral Nomadic
d) The Chinese Sedentary
e) Southeast Asia and Indonesia
f) The Primitive Nomadic
g) Korean
h) Japanese
i) Indian or Hindu, and
j) Tibetan

Therefore, there is also a perspective that seeks to assert that any classification of a Culture
Area is a time-bound phenomenon and that a Culture Area is not independent of the notions of time and space. In the case of the Tibetan Culture Area, the point of establishing a connection is through mapping the period of the convergence of a particular area with the tenets of Tibetan Buddhism, since it was after the rise of Buddha Dharma that Tibet emerged as a seat of learning and religion, i.e. the Buddhist religion acquired a distinct character.

For example, there are certain tribal groups apart from the Monpas in Tawang who are followers of Theravada3 Buddhism, who do not necessarily constitute a part of the Tibetan Culture Area. Similarly the Lhasa Kachee, who are the Tibetan Muslims, many of whom have migrated to Kashmir and Ladakh, are an integral constituent of the Tibetan culture area, since Tibetan Islam has its own distinct character which is a result of the influence of the Tibetan culture. This also helps elucidate a submission that although the cultural or religious symbolism dominates as far as the Tibetan Culture Area is concerned, the phenomenon and classification is offered through a secular approach.

Buryatia, Tuwa and Kalmykia

Located in the Eastern part of Russia, in Siberia, and bordering Mongolia, Buryatia is an autonomous republic within Russia. The Russian state in the early days treated the Buryat, the people of Buryatia, as outsiders, the provision for which also found a mention in the Speransky Statue in 1822. Owing to the attitude of the Russian state towards the indigenous communities, Buryats enjoyed only limited autonomy due to the interference of the imperialist forces within the Russian state (Andreyev 2003: 6).

The Buryats are part of the vast pastoralist communities in Eurasia. They are of Mongolian origin and are believed to have migrated a few centuries ago from modern-day Mongolia to the peripheries of Lake Baikal. The Buryats are not a single homogenous community but rather a mixture of a few different tribal groups. As in Tibet, the Bon religion flourished before the arrival of Buddhism. Similar to Mongolia where Shamanism predominated, also in Buryatiya and amongst the Buryats elsewhere, Shamanic belief predominated before their convergence with the Buddha Dharma.

Dorzhiev: A legacy unmatched

Born in 1854 in the Russian Empire, Agvan Lobsang Dorzhiev was one of the most influential Buddhists of his time. His vision and his understanding of international politics, geopolitical alliances and the world order was impeccable in a manner that was characterized by a rare combination of theological and political wisdom. Dorzhiev was born to a Buryat couple at a very remote location in Buryatiya. His parents were pastoralists and were engaged in sedentary agriculture and were less into nomadic venturing.

In 1873, Dorzhiev left for Tibet. In the same year, he reached the centre of Mahayana Buddhist learning—Lhasa. As per the norms of the day, it was crucial to apply for the permission to stay and study in Lhasa from a ruling aristocracy.

Tibetans did not often encourage outsiders travelling into Tibet. Therefore, Dorzhiev’s entry
into Lhasa was also a concern to Tibetans as he was a citizen of the Russian Empire. However, Dorzhiev was successful in getting religious training at the Drepung monastery. He returned back to Russia at the age of twenty-one, after two years. He was then ordained into the Dharma as a clergyman. Dorzhiev continued his intellectual exploration and academic deliberation and after about 15 years, he was awarded or bestowed upon him the title of *Tsanit Khenpo* (Master of Buddhist Philosophy).

It did not take a long time before Dorzhiev built a harmonious rapport with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet. He was considered as one of the spiritual and temporal leader’s most trustworthy advisors on matters concerning politics, philosophy, religious matters and foreign affairs. At that time, the British sought to expand the horizons of their empire across Tibet and China regularly transgressed Tibet’s borders and adopted rather an emphatic stand on Tibet.

Hence Dorzhiev, then as the foreign minister of the Dalai Lama, proposed for Tibet to align with Russia and make Russia into Tibet’s protectorate. Thus soon Dorzhiev travelled back to Russia, carrying the plea of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and seeking negotiations with the Russian Tsar. In his meeting with Dorzhiev, the Tsar agreed to initiate diplomatic ties with Tibet and also grant protection to Tibet against the Chinese and the British. This new relationship between Russia and Tibet gave Buddhism a major boost to flourish in Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tuwa.

A significant number of monasteries were built in these regions during this period which also served as centres of learning and spiritual education. Dorzhiev even convinced the Russian imperial authorities to build a Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist Temple in St. Petersburg. Buddhism was already recognized by the Russian imperial authorities as one of the official religions along with orthodox Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

Then mass illness (typhus) gripped Kalmykia. Therefore, Buddhist Lamas advised Kalmyks to withdraw from the collectivized farms in order to contain the spread of disease. This advice did not go too well with the Soviet leadership and was dubbed as a counter-revolutionary act. Hence, large-scale arrests of Buddhist clergymen and nuns took place, especially in the following year in 1935 (Petrova 2013).

Thus Dorzhiev too was transported from Kalmykia to St. Petersburg and eventually arrested in 1937, after being viciously interrogated by the Russian intelligence service for what they perceived as his involvement in an imperialist project against the Soviet Union. He finally died in 1938 in a prison hospital in Leningrad.

**Buddhism in the Soviet Union and beyond**

It seemed that Buddhism in Russia had completely been annihilated, at this time. Monasteries were destroyed, Nunneries decimated, Buddhist schools closed, clergymen arrested, and many religious rituals banned.

Yet Dorzhiev’s struggle to keep alive Buddhism in Russia benefitted from the geostrategical
situation: the large-scale defeats suffered by the Soviets in the Second World War. The Soviets needed to expand their war efforts, increase the public support for the war and mobilized large sections of the Soviet population for the devastating war.

At this point of time, the Soviet government adopted large-scale populist policies in order to win the hearts and minds of the people and garner support. Consequently, they liberalized their stance on Buddhism in the early 1940s. Thus, slowly and steadily Buddhism was once again on the path of revival. In 1946, the Central Buddhist Board of the USSR was set up. All in all, the Dhamma and practice of it was, at least temporarily, not illegal in Soviet Russia.

The geopolitical situation changed after the collapse of Communism; the world order had slowly shifted from a bipolar world towards a unipolar US dominated world. Russia was no longer a force that determined the destiny of nearly half of the globe as it used to do during the Soviet era. Russia seemed to drift toward a silent oblivion during the 1990s. It was within this wave of ‘oblivion’ that Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tuwa revived their age-old legacy and heritage, and the contact with their reference point. For centuries, the place of identitarian, cultural, architectural, and generally indeed civilizational reference for the Burhyats, Kalmyks and the Tuwans was not Moscow or Leningrad but Lhasa and Tibet in general.

Tibetan Buddhism in Exile

Today Lhasa is replaced by Dharamsala in India which is the home to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in Exile. Even today large numbers of Buddhists visit Dharamsala to seek blessings of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the Lama Karmapa. Monasteries in Dharamsala, Byllakuppe and Mundgodhare are nowadays filled with students from Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tuwa.

In addition, large numbers of nuns who too travel to India to gain religious and spiritual education. Every year the Fourteenth Dalai Lama addresses large numbers of Russian Buddhists and provides them with special teachings in Dharamsala.

Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia

Tibetans and Mongols have been a part of the large nomadic empires across a vast stretch of Central Asia. Tibet and Mongolia have distinct if similar cultural characteristics. Nevertheless, it is important to understand how also Mongolia forms a part of the large stretch of the Tibetan Culture Area.

Mongolia and Tibet have been neighbours for centuries; while Buddhism gained momentum in Tibet it remained confined to the borders of Tibet and did not spread across Mongolia. It was only during the time of Godan Khan in 1240 AD, the era of expansionist Mongol policy across Central Asia, that the Mongols first converged with Buddhism. According to Tibetan chronicles, Godan Khan was the first person who invited Sakya Pandita to visit Mongolia.

This visit by Sakya Pandita was deemed an evangelical mission, as the Mongol emperor was convinced of Buddhism and wanted his people to also adhere to the Dhamma (John Powers 2004). Thus, this meeting also marked the beginning of the Priest-Patron relationship between the Tibetans and the Mongols. The Tibetan lamas were given a higher position in the Mongol
king's court as the Mongols considered the lamas as their teachers. Thus, Mongolia became a patron of Tibet while the religious head remained in Tibet.

After Godan Khan passed away, even his later successor Kublai Khan continued the same relationship with the Tibetans. It was in the 16th century AD that the Mongol king Altan Khan granted the title of the Dalai Lama to a Tibetan clergy, Sonam Gyatso. A few centuries later, Younten Gyatso became the fourth Dalai Lama of Tibet and he happened to be the great grandson of Altan Khan, the monarch who initiated this tradition.

Thus, during the initial period of Buddhist influence upon Mongolia, there were about 110,000 members of the Buddhist clergy in Mongolia (Mullin 2012: 188); thus it was only after the Third Dalai and his visit to Mongolia that the first Buddhist monastery was set up: it was enshrined with the name Erdene Zuu which means Hundred Treasures.

The person appointed by the Dalai Lama to supervise the monastic administration of the teaching was Younten Gyatso, a Tibetan clergyman and thus he was later recognized as the Khutukhtu (Sharad K Soni 2013). The tradition of Khutukhtus contributed greatly to the spread and the development of Buddhism in Mongolia. Communism and Buddhism co-existed in Mongolia like in Russia, and the communist tide also made its mark in Mongolia.

This was a time of massive religious suppression and Buddhism also was one of the worst victims of this repression in Mongolia. Stalin's Great Purge has had a heinous effect on the centuries-old Buddhist heritage in Mongolia. The Great Purge destroyed the majority of the monasteries in Mongolia and thousands of Buddhist clergymen were killed (Boldbaatar 2005: 386).

In this context, the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia was led by Lama Kushok Bakula who was also recognized as a Khutukhtu. He was deeply involved in facilitating a revival of the Buddhist tradition in Mongolia and was inclined towards resisting the religious repression. Though neither a Mongolian nor a Tibetan, Lama Kushok Bakula was from the region of Ladakh in India which also forms a part of the larger Tibetan Culture Area. After the collapse of communism in Mongolia, Bakula worked towards rejuvenating the age-old monastic institutions of Mongolia and facilitating their development (Wangyal 2003).

Today, there is a vibrant visibility of Tibetan Buddhist heritage in present-day Mongolia. Its monasteries function as alternative centres of learning and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has made several visits to this region which forms a part of the Tibetan Culture Area.

Ladakh, Lahaul and Spiti

Ladakh has been widely known as "Little Tibet", again for its cultural, ethnic and religious linkages with Tibet. The majority of the ethnic Ladakhi population are followers of Tibetan Buddhism. Even before the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet and the subsequent conversion of Tibetan people from Bon to Buddhism, Ladakh had remained under the influence of the ZangZhung kingdom. ZangZhung as a language is now considered to be extinct.

Geographically, the ZangZhung kingdom is considered to be the Western part of Tibet and it was marked by the prevalence of the pre-Buddhist religion i.e. Bon religion. This was long
before the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet from India. And Ladakh has ever since been under political and cultural influence of Tibet while ecologically too Ladakh forms a part of the Tibetan plateau. The age-old legal mechanism has also been in conjunction with the Tibetan Law, a fact highlighted by Rebecca French in The Golden Yoke: the legal cosmology of Buddhist Tibet (1995), as cited by Fernanda Pirie (Pirie 2007: 10).

A closer look at the Tenth century AD timeline of Ladakh’s history, one is acquainted with the fact that Ladakh was established as a “small principality” after Buddhism re-entered Ladakh under the Dar clan which witnessed increasingly strained relations between Ladakh’s two prominent monasteries belonging to two different schools of Tibetan Buddhism, namely the Drukpa and the Gelugpa.

Thus a history of Ladakh cannot merely be viewed from a singular nation-state perspective but rather a micro-historical approach needs to be adopted in order to read and understand the Ladakh which has had a centuries-old association with Tibet and the Tibetan people. While it is a borderland area for Tibet, it is also a borderland area for India.

But if one were to further ascertain Ladakh’s importance, it can also be viewed as a node that links to major edges, one being India and the other being Tibet. A majority of the Ladakhi people are followers of Tibetan Buddhism, and the architecture in the highlands of Ladakh is reflective of its association with Tibet. For Ladakhis in general, especially the followers of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibet remains a major reference point.

Even the Ladakhi script is very close to the classical Tibetan language, hence strengthening the further association between the two major civilizations. The spread of Buddhism in Ladakh is also associated with the Guru Padmasambhava who is believed to have travelled through Ladakh towards Tibet in about 8th century AD; and thus it was during this time that Buddhism emerged in Ladakh.

But there are also theories which assert that Buddhism also entered Ladakh during the 1st and the 2nd century BC when Ladakh was still a divided polity and different regions within Ladakh were controlled by the leaders of different warring groups, each of whom established an order which could be called a principality. These theories are correct in the sense that this form of Buddhism was largely a result of Ashokan diplomacy while it was Guru Padmasambhava, who as stated earlier, brought Mahayna Buddhism to Ladakh.

Thus after the 2nd century Ladakh largely remained aloof from Buddhist expansion and it was only during the 10th century with the advent of the Namgyal dynasty that Buddhism in Ladakh received state patronage. The state supported the cause of Buddhism in the mountainous region, which by now also was not as divided as it used to be a few centuries earlier.

The architectural reference to the legacy and the contribution of the Namgyal dynasty towards the spread of Buddhism in Ladakh is reflected in the magnificence of the Hemis monastery, which was rebuilt by Singay Namgyal in 1672. Another major monastery in Ladakh is the Thiksey monastery.
Mustang, Nepal

The early imagination of Tibet was characterized as a virgin civilization which stood in oblivion of the modern civilizations beyond its borders; a place in which there was no outside interference. The region of Mustang is representative of that Tibet which lost its glory in 1959. A tiny region in upper Northern Nepal, Mustang was the seat of the Kingdom of Lo, a small kingdom that was a part of the larger Tibetan kingdom and the Tibetan Culture Area.

Thus Mustang also remained a kingdom within the Nepalese monarchy until the time when democratic reforms took place in Nepal whereby Mustang no longer enjoys the autonomy that it used to do in the earlier times.

The Kingdom of Lo was founded by Ame Pal who was also the first monarch of Mustang. He too promoted Tibetan Buddhism and thus Mustang’s historic linkage with Tibet continued. While in areas like Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tuwa, there is revivalist Tibetan Buddhism, the Buddhist culture of Mustang has survived without a hindrance since its foundation. The criticality of Mustang’s geographical position is reflected in the fact that Mustang is the central point in the Himalayas, across the trade route that passes into Tibet.

For centuries, the Mustang king’s revenue was generated by the taxes that were levied upon the goods arriving from and into Tibet. It was only in more recent times that Mustang was annexed by the Nepalese and it became a part of Nepal. Yet according to the agreement made at that time, Mustang for many years enjoyed immense autonomy and Nepal acted as Mustang’s suzerain. It was only in 2008 that Mustang was no longer recognized as an autonomous kingdom and has since then been made into a district within Nepal.

Bhutan

Songstan Gampo, the first King of Tibet somehow remains an omnipresent entity as far as the Tibetan Culture Area is concerned. Bhutan’s own tryst with Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism in particular, begins with the introduction of Buddhism by Songstan Gampo in Bumthang in Bhutan in 7th century AD. Before the arrival of Buddhism in Bhutan, the pre-Buddhist religion was also Bon religion, just as it was the case in Tibet as well.

Bhutan was later annexed by an Indian king called Sindhu Raja in 746 AD, and it was he who invited the Indian saint Guru Padmasambhava to Bhutan. Padmasambhava oversaw the construction of two major monasteries in Bhutan, and is credited with foundation of the Nyingmapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

The region of Bumthang in Bhutan was of great relevance since much of Bhutan was divided into factions and principalities. It was only in the 1870s that Bhutan had a clear centralized leadership with the advent of the king Ugyen Wangchuk. During the colonial era, Bhutan’s foreign policy remained in the hands of the Colonial government in India, as settled by a Treaty of Punakha.

However, later on in 1947, Bhutan recognized India’s independence and accordingly an accord was signed whereby Bhutan gained control of its foreign policy and complete independent action in other areas as well. Even while Bhutan was a monarchy, it had a
National Assembly; but more recently, during the last one-and-a-half decade, the Bhutanese polity has instituted reforms whereby it has embarked upon becoming a constitutional monarchy.

Bhutan is possibly the only country that also recognizes Tibetan Buddhism as the state religion. Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, is also part of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. Therefore, Bhutan forms an integral part of the Tibetan Culture Area.

Sikkim

Home of the Lepcha people, Sikkim, like Mustang, remained an independent kingdom till 1947. As stated earlier, the unitary factor across the Tibetan Culture Area is Tibetan Buddhism and thus Sikkim’s tryst with Tibetan Buddhism began when Guru Padmasambhava introduced Buddhism in Sikkim, in the same way as he had introduced it in Bhutan.

The founding monarch of Sikkim was Phuntsog Namgyal who hailed from Eastern Tibet. He founded the monarchical order in Sikkim in the year 1642 AD. It was also Namgyal who converted the indigenous people of Sikkim, namely the Lepchas, to Tibetan Buddhism. The pre-Buddhist religion of the Lepchas was Shamanism. Though it has also been argued that Lepchas are also settlers in Sikkim and they came and settled from Assam or Burma, another important constituent of the Tibetan Culture Area and region of Sikkim are the Bhutias.

Bhutias are believed to have come from areas that fall in the north of Sikkim, and the Bhutias have traditionally been trading communities. Bhutia society is segregated and stratified on the basis of ownership of land; the most powerful among the Bhutias are those who own the land and they are given the title of Kazis. Yet nowadays, there is large-scale migration of the Nepalese into Sikkim and thus there is greater dominance of the Nepalese in Sikkim. The Nepali migrants, who settled in Sikkim, have also managed to get reservations and affirmative action benefits from the Indian government.

Nevertheless, Sikkim stands as a symbol of Tibetan culture and its civilizational heritage with large and beautiful monasteries. Since after 1959 when large number of Tibetans sought exile in India, the Indian government set up Tibetan refugee settlements across various places in India. One of them was also set up at Dhondupling in Sikkim.

Thus, for a large number of Tibetan refugees Sikkim has served as a refuge where the Tibetan exiled community has set up shops and business establishments. One reason accounting for the flourishing of the Tibetan refugee community is their shared culture, and heritage with the Bhutias and Lepchas of Sikkim, which makes a conducive environment for the Tibetans.

At this juncture, it should also be noted that Tibet still remains a reference point for the Lepchas and the Bhutias and they have also been recognized as Scheduled Tribes by the Indian government. When the 2008 Olympics took place in Beijing, there were large-scale protests inside Tibet.

But there were also protests happening across different parts of the world, many of them being led by the Tibetan Diaspora. In relation with these protests, renowned Indian footballer Bhaichung Bhutia refused to carry the Olympic Torch when invited for the Torch relay, as a
matter of principle and protest against the situation inside Tibet. Such is Tibet's connection with Sikkim and its people.

Tawang

Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh has historically been a part of Southern Tibet. Only in 1914 during the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was Tawang granted to India, the British Raj to be precise, by the delegates of the Dalai Lama at the Simla conference. At this juncture, an agreement was also reached on the location of the Mcmohan Line, which was agreed upon as the boundary between British India and Tibet.

While a closer look at Tawang's history reveals that within the tradition of the Dalai Lamas, even the Sixth Dalai Lama was from the Monpa community which is today recognized within the Indian Constitution as a Scheduled Tribe. Today this region presents an overview of Tibetan culture and tradition devoid of genocidal tendencies unleashed by the Chinese Communists in other parts of the Tibetan region which it claims to have liberated from feudal elements.

Among the people who inhabit the region of Tawang are the Monpas and Sherdukpons, who adhere to the tenets of Mahayana Buddhism. Thus Monpas and Sherdukpen villages are home to some of the most magnificent Buddhist temple architecture which in the colloquial dialect is referred to as Gompas. There is a couplet by the Sixth Dalai Lama in which he requests the White Crane to lend its wings to him whereby he could then travel to a place not so far from Lhasa, to the valley of Siang. The valley of Siang is inhabited by the Membas and the Khampa tribal groups who are also adherents to the Buddhist faith (Sharma 1983:34).

As far as the pre-Buddhist religion in the region of Tawang is concerned, the religion before the arrival of Buddhism was the Bon religion as well. Tawang came in the 11th century under the influence of the Buddha Dharma. Built in the 17th century AD, Tawang is also home to Asia's largest Buddhist monastery. The initial migration into Tawang was made by the followers of Buddhism, who hailed from the bordering regions of Bhutan.

The major religious schools within Tibetan Buddhism, which are largely influential in Tawang, are the Kagyupa, Nyingmapa and the Gelugpa. Although Tawang remains today an integral part of the Republic of India, it has been disputably claimed by the Chinese as part of China since Tawang has historical linkages with Southern Tibet.

Conclusion

As far as Tibet's current condition is concerned, the Culture Area concept has always remained an apt category of analysis to study the Tibetan culture. Though every culture exists in its own context, there is always a reference point, an identitarian reference point.

Thus, to many of those areas that constitute the Tibetan Culture Area, Tibet remains a reference point till this day. As Dawa Norbu has asserted in his work Culture and Politics of Third World Nationalism (N.N Osik 1996: 7-8), that in the case of Tibet, neither modernization nor Communism could separate the people from their primordiality and primordial culture.

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To the same extent, the Tibetan culture is also reflective of the same phenomenon; after years of struggle against Communism and religious repression, there was a revival of the primordial beliefs and culture after the fall of these intolerant regimes. Similarly, this was also the case as far as the Republic of Mongolia is concerned.

Therefore, the analysis of these regions through the Culture Area discourse signifies that it is after all the shared values, history and customs that are dominant in the society and politics of all these regions. Future research shall validate the need for such an extensive discourse approach on the Tibetan Culture Area, as to assert that even newer innovations and developments such as the Tibetan cyberspace are not independent of Tibet's past or present, but is a rather continuation of the struggle and the civilisational attire that has been evolving for centuries.

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Endnotes

1. Dorzhiev (1854–1938) was a Russian Buddhist monk who belonged to the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. He hailed from the Russian Buddhist region of Buryatia.
2. Dorzhiev was instrumental in the signing of the Tibet Mongolia Treaty of 1913 and was an exception in the then Tibetan polity as far as his skills in diplomacy and international relations are concerned.
3. School of Buddhism that draws its scriptural inspiration from the Tipitaka, or Pali canon, which scholars generally agree contains the earliest surviving record of the Buddha's teachings: see Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction (fifth edition) by R.H. Robinson, W.L. Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2005), p.46.
5. Dalai Lama is the title which is granted to the head of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. He occupies a central position within the Tibetan polity and is considered an incarnation of the Avalokiteswara. Thus, the Dalai Lama is also considered as the ruler of Tibet, the reverence for whom transcends the boundaries of sects of schools. There have been thirteen dalai Lamas while the present dalai Lama is the fourteenth in the order of the Dalai Lama and his name is Tenzin Gyatso.
6. Karmapa is the title granted to the head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. Presently there are two individuals who stake a claim as being the authentic Karmapa. This paper essentially refers to Ogyen Trinley Dorje who has been recognized as the Karmapa by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.
7. It was in the fifth century BC that some preliminary Buddhist scriptures were brought to Tibet and the translation of these and the spread of Buddhism in Tibet happened during the reign of Songsten Gampo in about 621 BC.
8. The Drukpa school within Tibetan Buddhism is a part of the larger Kagyu school within Tibetan Buddhism. In Tibetan the word Dugpa means a thunderstorm.
9. The school within Tibetan Buddhism established by Je Tsongkhapa. The institution of the Dalai Lamas belongs to the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism.
10. The Kingdom of Mustang was founded in 1380 by Ame Pal and remained closely connected with Tibet until about 1959.
11. A form of Buddhism which is widely practiced across the Tibetan Culture Area. Another branch of Buddhism being Theravada Buddhism.
12. A school within Tibetan Buddhism. Brought into Tibet by a saint called Marpa.
13. Nyingma is the oldest school within Tibetan Buddhism. The original Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit were translated into Tibetan and these form a part of the Nyingma school.

References—Bibliography


Comments on the paper ‘Tibetan Culture Area’
(Critical Response to Arnav Anjaria’s “The Tibetan Culture Area: Contours and Civilizational Linkages”)

The author has a deep knowledge about the history of the discussed areas .... The author discusses about a historical phenomenon in a vast area. Therefore, such a relatively short paper cannot fulfil such a task in full. However, I am aware of the limitations in word limit and other conventions of publications. This paper deserves publication given that a few points are addressed or corrected .... Despite certain shortcomings, I recommend the publication of this paper.

- Anonymous

Deeper understanding of Buddhism: does it promote peace or is it used instrumentally?
(Editorial Note to Arnav Anjaria’s “The Tibetan Culture Area: Contours and Civilizational Linkages”)

Tibetan or Mongolian Buddhism is a subject that deserves more attention, certainly in the context of current happenings. I believe that Buddhism deserves more in-depth study from scholars. According to my understanding Buddhism has been treated in the West more in an idealistic, romantic way, or as an Eastern philosophy and wisdom distant from society, rather than one with a real impact on a society.

Buddhism has often been regarded as a peaceful religion which commands peace and harmony. It has been the basis of many New Age and hippy alternative philosophies and lifestyles in the West. However, the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Myanmar reveal that also Buddhists can be engaged in conflicts and behave aggressively. Even though it did not have a root in the Buddhist philosophy, the genocide in Cambodia did nevertheless occur in a Buddhist cultural area.

It can be argued that this type of Buddhism has been Theravada Buddhism and that the Tibetan/Mongolian or Vajrayana Buddhism may have been peaceful. Then, how can the aggressive and expansive political behavior of the Mongolian empire under Genghis Khan and his successors be explained? It can be argued that Genghis Khan and his successors were not Buddhists and adhered to their Shamanistic traditions. One could also argue that their adherence to Buddhism or Shamanic tradition may have been irrelevant. In other words, Buddhism, like other religions, may or may not influence human political behavior. This, however, is a legitimate subject to be studied more deeply.

This paper does not discuss the impact of Buddhism in political behavior and conflict. The author never mentions that it is the scope of its paper and therefore it will not be fair to criticize the author in this way. Nevertheless, the author’s initiative to frame this study in geopolitical concepts is applaudable and is a good initiative to bring Buddhist studies under the attention of the social and political sciences.
One does not necessarily have to agree with the author’s delimitation of Tibetan Culture Area. However, the fact that the author dares to conceptualize and approach Buddhism from a non-Western perspective is laudable. There is an urgent need in both the humanities and the social sciences to study Buddhism from different perspectives. The political sciences in particular need a deeper understanding of Buddhism, also as a political and social phenomenon.

A relevant question is whether Buddhism promotes peace or is all too often used as a political instrument to rule a country or mobilize people for a conflict. It can also only serve at least as a denominator of identity and therefore be politically relevant. And assuming that Buddhist teachings have an impact on political behavior, one should investigate to what extent and in which contexts and circumstances they could prevent or resolve tensions and conflicts, and thus promote peace.

The subject and theme of Anjaria’s paper is very relevant to the emerging field of ethnogeopolitics and we would like to invite more contributions on this subject and theme.

- Babak Rezvani, Editor-in-Chief

Author’s Response

I would also assert that the article primarily deals with a certain way of life across a large geographical area and offers a historical analysis of this congenial phenomenon that is spread across two continents, namely Asia and Europe. Certainly Buddhism does emerge as a key linkage, yet the nuances of socio-political behavior and their philosophical concerns are for scholars to further look into.

The paper seeks to highlight the influence of Tibetan Buddhism beyond the contours of Tibet and also the historical role of the institution of Buddhism based in Lhasa. The present-day widespread influence and domination of the Gelug (Dalai Lama’s) school in Mongolia, Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuwa is the result of a historical association of these regions with Lhasa and Tibet in particular. While other regions within the Tibetan culture area identify with different schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the general linkage that draws them together is Tibetan Buddhism.

Thus the general assumption of a single monolithic nature of Buddhism in the popular perception and certain scholarly domains stands challenged by highlighting the diversity of thought and a certain congenial coexistence which remains strongly grounded in the regional particularities of the Tibetan culture area. I appreciate the profound editorial comments and the keen reading.

- Arnav Anjaria

NB: do you have any comments on Arnav Anjaria’s article and/or the Critical Response, the Editorial Note and the Author’s Response to these? Please send your comments to info@ethnogeopolitics.org, or through the contact form at www.ethnogeopolitics.org. Some of the comments on this and any other contribution, we may publish as Critical Responses (maximum 3,000 words) in the next issue(s) of the journal. Extensive critical responses with own source references may be published as full-fledged, separate articles. Please supply your name, contact details, academic and/or other professional titles and affiliations, as well as your specialisms and any major publications.
My new Cartoons and other Illustrations    Caspar ten Dam

In recent years, I am (once more) producing cartoons and other illustrations for customers and clients. I am also experimenting with new cartoons such as the one about the “[Terrorism] Expert”, some examples of which have been reproduced in some more recent issues of this journal. Shown below is a sheet of my experimental, wordless cartoon story “The Encounter”. See for these and other cartoons www.ctdamconsultancy.com and https://stripkunst.wordpress.com.

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Moscow and Kazan are at Loggerheads as Tatarstan’s Nominal Sovereignty remains in Limbo

Rafael Ibrahimov

Abstract

The Tatarstan-Russia relationship has long been seen as a struggling, but still eloquent enough symbol of Russia’s federalist polity. Following the expiry of the Russia-Tatarstan Treaty, which used to grant Kazan some elements of sovereignty, analysts from different political quarters in Russia wonder whether the move will have positive or damaging effects on the long term.

Introduction

Moscow is currently locked in a delicate legalistic quandary with Kazan, the capital of the autonomous region of Tatarstan within the Russian Federation, over the extension of a ten-year-long Federal Treaty with predominantly Sunni Turkic Tatarstan. The shares of Russians and Tatars in the total population of the republic of Tatarstan are 39.7% and 53.2%, respectively, according to the 2010 census.

The matter has not received the coverage it deserves, having been buried under the avalanche of the most pressing news smothering Russia in new American sanctions. The bilateral document of the said Federal Treaty, which expired on 24 July 2017, stood out amongst all other similar treaties because of its salient feature: it endowed Tatarstan with increased sovereignty.

Things are likely to change, however. The Kremlin is allegedly claiming that the extension is currently inexpedient; it certainly seems keen to place Tatarstan on the same footing as the rest of Russia’s federal subjects. Try as Tatarstan would to renegotiate, the distinctly privileged relationship’s revival seems difficult already. Both Moscow’s and Kazan’s Kremlins are reticent about their intended steps while the issue’s possible implications are tacitly seething in Tatarstan.

In political commentators’ views, the reasons behind the Kremlin’s position are as pragmatic as they are politically motivated. Those come down to Russia’s increasing domestic trend for further “verticalization, consolidation and russification” of the country. There are unconfirmed rumours afloat that the Turkic republic may be renamed into Tatarstan Gubernia (governorate)¹, which presages an overly gloomy picture of Moscow-Kazan future ties. But unsubstantiated forecasts apart, Russia’s President Vladimir Putin recently did question the necessity for ethnic Russians to learn local languages of the federal republics they live in.

Russian society is thus split in two camps, those supporting the President’s stance that is implicitly aimed at further russification and others, opposing it and viewing Putin’s comment as a prescient sign that may undermine the multiethnic and federalist foundations of Russia. Some Tatar analysts consider the president’s comments to have been intended exclusively for Tatarstan, where compulsory learning of the Tatar language in schools is construed as “a key element in the ideological make-up of the republic.”²
History of Russo-Tatar Relations

The pinnacle of historical ties between Russians and Tatars—the titular Slavic nation and the largest ethnic minority of Turkic origin respectively—goes back to the 13th century AD. The relationship was not devoid of direct European influence.

Prominent Russian historians maintain that throughout its late medieval history, Russia faced intense attempts from Rome to be coerced to the bosom of the Catholic Church. However, most Slavic rulers vehemently rejected the Pope-Caesarian model under which a pontific granted license to a monarch, thus restricting the royal power. They preferred the Byzantine or Caesarian-Pope principle, enabling monarchs, on the basis of “God-given right”, to appoint the Head of Church accountable to the ruler. This latter peculiarity explains the origin of the Russian Orthodox Church’s most articulate premise of God-bestowed power on the monarch. “All power emanates from God,” declares the Orthodox mantra, purporting total self-subjugation to a sacral monarch. The contemporary “Power Vertical” phenomenon, inherent in Russia, to a certain extent reflects this centuries-long dogma.

Rome’s attempts at bringing Russian rulers to the “true faith” continued incessantly, increasing in intensity amid the looming Tatar invasion in the early 13th century AD. Torn between Rome’s promises of protection on the one hand and Mongol-Tatar descendants of Chengis Khan’s imminent military conquest on the other, the Prince of Novgorod Alexander Nevsky (subsequently elevated to sainthood) preferred a tributary alliance with the Tatars instead of renouncing the Orthodox Church in favour of Catholicism.

Prince Nevsky swore allegiance to the Golden Horde’s Khan, committing himself to all customary requirements flowing thereof, such as payment of regular tribute, allocation of military force and even participation in the liege’s military campaigns of which he partook more than once. He returned from his last trip to the Golden Horde in 1263 AD in very poor health and died a few months later after taking the vows.

A leading Russian medieval history Professor Alexander Ujankov believes that this self-sacrificial political maneuver gave Nevsky’s subjects a thirty-years-long respite from wars allowing him to build the country. Most importantly, the Slavic Prince managed to save a whole generation of Russians, whose lives would have been lost in case of an open warfare against the then invincible Mongol-Tatars.

The Mongol-Tatar rule over Russia lasted from 1237 to 1480 AD and in length of time, the two peoples grew so ethnically mixed with one another that it gave birth to a Russian proverbial saying, “scrape a Russian, and you’ll find a Tartar”. The Russians and the Tatars established close social and commercial links to such an extent that they even came to share many traditions. The Tartar cuisine, traditional dress, ways of government and most attributes of statehood gradually made their way into the Russia’s Slavic population’s life.

Even after the Golden Horde was defeated, the Tatars remained in close contact with the Slavic population, retaining small khanates that posed no risk to Russia’s security. Following the conquest of the Kazan Khanate by Ivan the Terrible in 1552 AD, the Tatars fell under a stronger Russian influence.
Path to Tatarstan’s Sovereignty

Following the USSR's demise in 1991, Russia itself stood at the brink of disintegration. As a matter of fact, President Boris Yeltsin’s proverbial announcement “take as much sovereignty as you can carry” only exacerbated the secessionist aspirations. Over a dozen of Russia's mostly ethno-religious autonomies proclaimed independence. In response, Moscow was quick to either persuade or pressure them all, except Chechnya, into recognizing Russia's sovereignty.

Kazan, for its part, thanks to its peaceful and noiseless assertiveness, proved more tenacious and continued to stubbornly insist on full sovereignty. The local elite went out of their way to preserve their control primarily based on its developed economy and sizeable hydrocarbon resources. Strong ethno-religious aspirations and pro-independence movements active in Tatarstan served as too loud a warning not to be heard in Moscow.

Kazan thus engaged in difficult and little promising discussions with Moscow. In the teeth of every difficulty and following protracted negotiations, political wrangling, a local referendum for independence and temporary disruptions with the Federal Centre in the early 1990s, the region's leader Mr Mintimer Shaymiyev at length succeeded.

In February 1994 the Treaty was signed. The Turkic republic of Tatarstan gained an unprecedented right to conduct its own foreign policy and trade. Crucially, the region’s land and mineral resources were legally recognized as the republic’s property. In return, such attributes of sovereignty as law enforcement, courts, Public Prosecutor's Office and other agencies and functionaries reverted back to Russia’s jurisdiction.

President Putin's focus on his “Power Vertical” resulted in strict centralization of the state. This led to a gradual but noticeable enfeeblement of regional authorities, both financial and administrative.

By 2007 all preferential bilateral treaties between the Federal Centre and its administrative subjects, irrespective of their ethno-religious fabric, were scrapped except for the one with Tatarstan. The renewed arrangement was extended for another ten years till July 2017. Additionally, unlike all other similar subjects of the Federation, whose leaders were self-downgraded to the status of glava respubliki (head of republic) under the presidential term of Dmitry Medvedev, only Tatarstan’s leader preserved a largely symbolic official title of 'president'.

In fact, Tatarstan allegedly simply decided not to participate in that political campaign launched voluntarily by the Caucasus republics’ presidents that momentarily spread all over Russia.

Today, Tatarstan is one of the most economically prosperous republics, boasting a wide range of well-functioning industries such as petro-chemistry, shipbuilding, airplanes and helicopters plants, trucks construction and other enterprises. It is currently estimated that investments in Tatarstan attain $2m per day.
Change of the *status quo*

Commenting on the current stand-off, *Kommersant*'s sources identify Mr Sergey Kiriyenko, Deputy Head of President Putin's Administration, as the principal opponent to the largest ethnic minority's preferential status.

Reportedly, in the early 2000s, Mr Kiriyenko, in his capacity as the President's Representative Plenipotentiary in the Volga region, unsuccessfully endeavoured to incorporate the republic into the ‘Power Vertical’; his attempts were shattered by local leadership's intransigence, greatly buttressed by an existing treaty.

Allegedly, Mr Kiriyenko nevertheless decided to have the mission accomplished once the situation permitted, *Kommersant* reports. In the meanwhile, much to Putin's credit, he has a long record of promoting ethnic Tatars to the highest positions of power. Some of them are still part of the country's top decision-making bodies. His early years in power clearly indicated his appreciation of the importance of the Tatar factor in Russia's domestic politics.

By and large the Tatar republic's relations with the Kremlin were unclouded, except for the fact that Tatarstan remained loyal to its Turkic kin, distancing itself from the anti-Turkish campaign that barged into the Russian internal agenda on the heels of the incident involving the shooting of the Russian jet by Turkey over Syria in November 2015.  

“Almost sovereign but loyal to Russia, Tatarstan was exceptionally important for the Kremlin twenty years ago as a stark alternative for the unbending ethnic separatism reigning in the then Chechnya”, writes Oleg Kashin in *Respublika.ru*.  

However, to see the wood for the trees, one should treat Mr Kashin's latter assertion with utmost caution. Some analysts maintain that once the sovereign status had been achieved the then Tatarstan's leader Mr Shaymiyev did not particularly encourage nationalist movements' activities. Those were vociferous in support of the republic's full independence, thus becoming a hurdle for the local ruling elites.

Therefore, Tatarstan's authorities allegedly saw no need in their further activities, since the nationalists had fully played their role by then. According to some experts, today the field ostentatiously seems to be clear of any pro-independence activists of consequence.

On the other hand, some other commentators believe that the main nationalist groups are still actively organized and remain under the Shaymiyev clan's control. A superficial examination shows that the protest electorate is a mix of nationalist and religious activists.

There are two main opposition nationalist centres of influence, one in Kazan and another in Naberejniye Chelny. The two groups mark their active presence on the ground annually, when they hold a rally across Kazan in commemoration of Ivan the Terrible's conquest of Kazan, crowning the event by prayers in local mosques.

Besides, there were a few cases of ethnic Russians' expressing dissatisfaction over excessive time devoted to the Tatar language in local schools. On one occasion ethnic Russians took to...
the streets in a peaceful protest, demanding the content of the Russian language in Tatarstan's syllabus to be equal and in line with that of other Russian regions. This open polemic resulted in a Tatar journalist's calling the Russians "occupants" in the early 2010s.\(^{15}\)

Kazan's recent claims are forthwith rejected

The World Tatar Congress was held in Tatarstan and gathered over one thousand participants from 41 countries from 2 to 6 August 2017. Typically, congresses like this are usually full of lukewarm discussions on immaterial matters and are never very entertaining in terms of ardent polemics and heated discussions. But contrary to all expectations regardless, from the first day of the gathering the former Tatarstan's leader Shaymiyev, who currently holds a prestigious position as a State Councilor, brought up the painful question. He spoke of the necessity to discuss with the Federal Centre those “things that have relevance to our rights and are reflected in our constitution”.

It is noteworthy that the (post-Soviet) Tatar Constitution was adopted a year earlier than the Russian one. Mr Shaymiyev likened the first Russia-Tatarstan treaty to a “bridge over hell”.

Thus, the Tatarstan authorities effectively declared their intention not to yield to the Kremlin's pressure. It seems that the Tatars are adamant to retain some economic benefits arising from the Treaty, sweetening the pill with an apparent readiness for compromises and concessions regarding some other, less important items from the previous arrangement.

In the meanwhile, Moscow did not tarry to react to Tatarstan's representation by saying that “the Kremlin's position vis-à-vis the treaty has not changed, since a state must not built upon the principle of an arrangement”.\(^{16}\) This appears to put an end to discussions before they even opened, but in reality the process is just entering its first phase.

Although the issue will hardly have repercussions on Russia's territorial integrity in the short term, stripping officially granted traits of sovereignty from assertive Tatarstan will decidedly affect both Moscow and Kazan and have its consequences elsewhere.

Moscow's stance towards Tatarstan met with noticeable concerns from the predominantly Sunni Turkic population, primarily due to economic considerations. For instance, the recent near-demise of the republic's main financial institution Tatfondbank has already had a negative impact on Tatarstan's economy. And the subsequent fate of Tatneft Oil is equally unpredictable. It may follow the example of Bashneft (Bashkortostan's oil company), which was taken over by the Sistema Holding and soon afterwards by Rosneft. This, naturally, came as a hard blow to Bashkortostan's economy.

Conclusion

The outcome of the tacit legalistic confrontation between Moscow and Kazan may engender far-reaching ethnic consequences inside Russia. It is also bound to have an impact on other federal subjects, most of which have their own idiosyncrasies in terms of ethnic and religious profiles. On the other hand, extension of the Treaty in its latest form could raise discontent i.e.
jealousy in other republics of Russia with considerable ethnic and religious minorities. Also it will pose a potential problem for Moscow if other subjects of the federation would line up to be granted a similar status as Tatarstan used to enjoy.

Ethnically still mixed, but predominantly Turkic, Russia's Ural and Volga regions are currently seen as the areas of discontent. The expiry of the Russia-Tatarstan Treaty comes at a time of acute disagreements between the republic and Moscow over Tatarstan's contributions to the Federal Budget and annual allocations it receives from it. Thus, this donor republic began to display a quiet dissatisfaction over the ‘distribution of taxes’ imposed by Moscow.

Notably, months before the Treaty's expiry the Kremlin retorted with a succession of regional governors' replacements, which could not but cause concerns amongst the Tatar population. Consequently a Russian analyst, Mr Ruslan Aysin, defined the Volga-Ural region and the Caucasus as zones of instability fraught with surprises before the 2018 presidential elections in Russia.\(^{17}\)

It is difficult to predict what would be the outcome of Tatarstan's conundrum, should the Kremlin stick to its decision to cancel its partial sovereignty. It should, however, be born in mind that the current status quo between Kazan and Moscow has been in a mutually advantageous existence for over twenty years. This could not but firmly establish a certain pattern of a modus vivendi in this prosperous republic that has always taken pride in religious, cultural and ethnic harmony. Nor is it easy to foresee the reaction at the grassroots level, particularly when the future of an ethnically and religiously different region is in stake.

It could, however, be said with absolute certainty that the Russia-Tatarstan Treaty has been exceptionally useful from the point of view of preventing this economically strong and ethnically sensitive region from any separatist aspiration—and violent secessionism to boot. Should economic realities of this relatively prosperous republic remain unchanged, the lost sovereignty may sooner or later fade and lose its momentum, whereas any deterioration of erstwhile economic stability and welfare may unleash nefarious dynamics that will be difficult to harness.

Rafael Ibrahimov, former Azerbaijani Ambassador to the United Kingdom, has served as the Azerbaijani Head of Mission in London (2001-2007) and Stockholm (2007-2013). Before joining the Foreign Ministry in Azerbaijan in 1993 he served in Yemen (1985-1986) and Algeria (1987-1990) as military interpreter of Arabic, French and Russian. His later ambassadorial postings included Dublin, Oslo and Helsinki. He is a frequent political commentator on the Middle East and the former Soviet Union for BBC World Service, Channel Four, Al-Jazeera, and Channel 5 (UK), and has held a number speaking engagements in leading UK and Scandinavian educational establishments and think-tanks. rivialbrahim@gmail.com

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Dorsey's Column

Trump's Recognition of Jerusalem: Letting a Genie out of the Bottle

James M. Dorsey

US President Donald J. Trump has let a genie out of the bottle with his recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and intent to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In taking his decision, Mr. Trump was implementing a longstanding US policy dating back to the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barak Obama even if none of them were willing to put it into practice.

The key to judging Mr. Trump's move is the politics behind it and the black swan embedded in it. Recognizing Jerusalem formally as the capital of Israel may well kill two birds at the same time: boost the president's standing among evangelists and conservatives at home and give him leverage to negotiate what he has dubbed the ultimate deal between Israelis and Palestinians.

There is no doubt that the move will boost Mr. Trump's popularity among his supporters and financial backers like casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, and allow him to assert that he has fulfilled a campaign promise. Far less certain is whether Mr. Trump will be willing or able to constructively leverage his move to facilitate an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. His move moreover risks sparking an uncontrollable sequence of events.

US officials have been tight-lipped about peace plans being developed by Jared Kushner, the President's son-in-law and the US' chief Israeli-Palestinian negotiator. Almost the only confirmed fact about Mr. Kushner's strategy is that, based on his close relationship with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, he is advocating what he describes as an outside-in approach.1 In this scenario, Saudi Arabia would ensure Arab backing for a peace plan put forward by Mr. Kushner.

Prince Mohammed's United Arab Emirates counterpart, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, working through Egyptian general-turned-president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has helped put a key building block in place by facilitating reconciliation between rival Palestinian factions, Palestine Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's Al Fatah movement and Hamas, the Islamist movement that controlled the Gaza Strip.

The problem with that scenario is that implicit in US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, notwithstanding Mr. Trump's denial, is a rejection of the notion that any Israeli Palestinian peace deal would have to involve either West Jerusalem as the Israeli capital and East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital, or shared control of Jerusalem as a whole that would serve as the capital of both states.

The rejection of that notion would stroke with readouts of a visit to Riyadh last month by Mr. Abbas in which the Saudi crown prince reportedly laid out the peace plan he had discussed.

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with Mr. Kushner. According to that readout by Palestinian officials as well as European and Arab diplomats, East Jerusalem would not be the Palestinian capital.

Moreover, the future Palestinian state would consist of non-contiguous parts of the West Bank to ensure that Israeli settlements in the area remain under Israeli control. Finally, Palestinians would have to surrender their demand for recognition of the right of return for Palestinians who fled Israel/Palestine during the 1948 and 1967 wars.

Beyond the fact that it is hard to see how any Palestinian leader could sign up for the plan, it threatens, coupled with Mr. Trump's recognition of Jerusalem, to inflame passions that Prince Mohammed and other Arab autocrats may find difficult to control.

In a region that increasingly and brutally suppresses any form of dissent or protest, Prince Mohammed and other Arab leaders could risk fueling the fire by seeking to suppress demonstrations against Mr. Trump's decision and what Arab and Muslim public opinion would perceive as a sell-out of Palestinian rights.

The situation would become even more tricky if protests, as is likely, would first erupt in Palestine and be countered with force by the Israeli military. It is a scenario in which anti-US, anti-Israel protests in Arab capitals could quickly turn into anti-government manifestations.

Palestinian groups have already called for three days of rage. Protests would likely not be restricted to Middle Eastern capitals but would probably also erupt in Asian nations like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia.

In some ways, protests may well be the purpose of the exercise. There is no way of confirming whether the readout provided to officials and diplomats by Mr. Abbas of his meeting with Prince Mohammed is accurate. In what amounts to a dangerous game of poker, that readout could well serve multiple purposes, including an effort by Mr. Abbas to boost his position at home by projecting himself as resisting US and Saudi pressure.

Against a history of less than accurate media reporting and official statements often designed to maintain a façade rather than reality, Saudi media reported that King Salman warned Mr. Trump that any decision to move the US Embassy before a permanent peace settlement had been achieved would inflame the Muslim world.

While Prince Mohammed and Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu see eye to eye in viewing Iran rather than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the region's core issue, it is hard to imagine that the Saudi crown prince, a man who has proven that he is not averse to unwarranted risks and gambles, would surrender demands for Muslim control of at least part of Islam's third most holy city. It is equally unfathomable that he would allow for a situation in which the Saudi kingdom's position as the custodian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina could be called into question.

Public Saudi backing for Mr. Trump's recognition and any plan to grant Israel full control of Jerusalem would see the genie turning on the kingdom and its ruling family. Not only with public protests but also with demands by Iran that Saudi Arabia be stripped of its custodianship and that Mecca and Medina be put under some kind of pan-Islamic administration.

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In other words, Mr. Trump and potentially Prince Mohammed, are playing a game that could lead to a second phase of this decade's popular revolts and a serious escalation of an already dangerous Saudi-Iranian rivalry that is wreaking havoc across the Middle East.

With his recognition of Jerusalem, Mr. Trump has likely closed the door on any public or Arab support for a peace plan that falls short of what is minimally acceptable to the Palestinians. Moreover, by allowing speculation to flourish over what he has in mind with his ultimate Israeli-Palestinian deal, Mr. Trump has potentially set a ball rolling that neither he nor Arab autocrats may be able to control.

Postscript  Arab Anger: Governments and Protesters walk a Fine Line

A little noticed subtext to furious protests across the Middle East and North Africa against US President Donald J. Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is simmering anger at Arab governments. The subtext demarcates a delicate balance between Arab youth frustrated with governments that are seemingly unwilling and unable to stand up for Arab rights, and Arab leaders whose survival instincts persuade them to maintain failed policies.

The anger is driven by a continued display of Arab inability to reverse the Israeli occupation of territories taken during the 1967 Middle East war, a readiness to overtly or covertly cooperate with Israel in the absence of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, and, even worse, reports that Gulf states are willing to support a new US peace plan that fails to meet minimal Palestinian demands for an independent state.

Underlying the anger is frustration that Arab regimes, six years after the 2011 popular Arab revolts and amid years of a brutal and violent United Arab Emirates and Saudi-led counterrevolution that has rolled back the achievements of the uprisings everywhere except for in Tunisia, still fail to deliver public services and goods.

The potentially explosive mix is highlighted by the Arab and Muslim world's response to Mr. Trump's move on the status of Jerusalem that amounts to little more than toothless statements and a glaring lack of diplomatic action. 5

Virtually no Arab government has summoned a US ambassador or charge d'affaires to protest Trump's decision on Jerusalem. Nor have Arab leaders sought to pin Mr. Trump down on what his statement, that is riddled with apparent internal contradictions and vague assertions, actually means. Only Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas drew a line by announcing that he would not meet with US Vice President Mike Pence when he visits the Middle East later in December 2017.

The strategy of Arab leaders appears one designed to verbally condemn Mr. Trump's move and hope that pro-longed protests will prove unsustainable. Arab leaders have good reason to believe that maintaining the degree of mobilization on the streets of Jerusalem, Palestinian cities and Arab capitals will prove difficult.

Their repressive policies and the Middle East's dissent into chaos and violence as a result of the counterrevolution has dampened appetite for renewed mass anti-government
protest despite calls for a third intifada or anti-Israeli uprising by groups like Hamas, the Islamist group in Gaza, and Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite militia in Lebanon.

That may be a risky calculation in the medium rather than the short term. If the Arab revolts and the escalation of extremism proved anything, it is that Arab leaders ignore frustration and anger at their peril. Explosions of public anger are more often spontaneous than planned.

Gulf leaders are not wholly oblivious to the threat. Forced by lower oil prices, they have announced reform plans that aim to diversify and rationalize their rentier state economies, loosen social restrictions, and unilaterally rewrite social contracts while tightening political control. Yet, leaders like Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, have yet to deliver jobs and greater economic opportunity.

The question also remains to what degree Gulf leaders have their ear to the ground. Bahrain, a Saudi ally that seldom moves without consulting Riyadh, allowed a 25-member interfaith group to make a rare visit to Israel despite Mr. Trump’s move.

The timing of Bahrain’s decision to violate a 2002 Saudi-driven Arab peace plan adopted by the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that calls for normalization of relations with Israel only when the Jewish state withdraws from territories conquered during the 1967 Middle East war, could not have been worse. It only helps to reinforce a belief among protesters that Arab leaders continue to attribute greater importance to strengthening informal ties with Israel, whom they view as an ally in their efforts to counter Iran, than to protecting Arab and Muslim rights.

While unwilling to risk their relationship with Washington despite deep-seated passions evoked by the controversy over Islam’s third most holy city, Arab leaders, paradoxically, have so far failed to exploit the wiggle room offered by Mr. Trump’s statement.

A careful reading of Mr. Trump’s statement leaves room for interpretation even if there is little doubt that the President has intended to bolster Israel’s position. US officials, including United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley, have struggled to explain how the statement furthers the peace process without alienating Mr. Trump’s domestic base that endorses the Israeli claim to all of Jerusalem.

Mr. Trump has catered to his base by refraining from qualifying his recognition of Jerusalem with a reference to Palestinian claims. Yet, in the statement he asserted that he was not prejudging the outcome of peace negotiations.

The President insisted that the United States “continues to take no position on any final status issues. The specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem are subject to final status negotiations between the parties. The United States is not taking a position on boundaries or borders.”

Arab leaders could project themselves as getting in front of the cart by seeking clarification from Mr. Trump on whether and what limitations he may put on recognition of Israeli
sovereignty over Jerusalem in terms of what that means for the status of the city's Palestinian population and Israeli settlement activity in East Jerusalem.

Former Saudi intelligence chief and ex-ambassador to London and Washington DC Prince Turki al-Faisal appeared to allude to that when he warned in an open letter to Mr. Trump that "your action has emboldened the most extreme elements in the Israeli society ... because they take your action as a license to evict the Palestinians from their lands and subject them to an apartheid state".  

Amid the raw emotions, Arab leaders and protesters are both walking a fine line. Protesters' anger is about more than fury with Mr. Trump. It is about their leaders' multiple policy failures. Arab leaders need to be seen as being on the right side of public opinion while not rocking the boat.

If there is a silver lining in Mr. Trump's move, it may be the Arab leaders' need to bridge the gap between public perception and their survival instinct. Leading the charge in pressuring the US President to clarify his statement is an opportunity Arab leaders have so far failed to capitalize on.

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Opinion

Srebrenica continues to haunt the Netherlands—Impressions of a Mass Burial

Edwin Giltay with Naida Ribić

Over 20,000 people from near and far travelled to the Bosnian mountain town of Srebrenica to attend this year’s genocide commemoration. Every July nth, bodies found and identified over the past year, are buried. This year there are 71: the remains of people massacred after the enclave was overrun by Serbian troops in 1995. Author Edwin Giltay and journalist/interpreter Naida Ribić were present at the ceremony.

Countless times I have heard and read about what happened here: the fall of the town and the murder of over 8,000 men and boys. I know the facts; I know of the unfathomable genocide. And yet I cannot refrain from crying with the mourning crowd. The sorrow is too deep—it overwhelms us all.

Of course, in the bright sunlight and the temperature rising to 95 degrees, no one is quite at ease. But it’s the sadness of the genocide, this inhumane act, that affects us deeply.

The caskets arrive in Srebrenica, 11 July 2017
On top of that, I am ashamed of my nationality. After all, it was the Dutch military that disarmed the Bosniaks in Srebrenica and promised to protect them. Nevertheless, when the Serbs overran the enclave, my compatriots threw them to the mercy of their arch-enemies, without a second thought. The Dutch didn’t fire a single shot. The defence lines, dug out by the Bosniaks, were handed over to Serbian troops just like that. During the commemoration, several youngsters point this out to me most poignantly, in fluent English.

Still, on their own account they put things in perspective: ‘The Serbs are much worse. They will never admit their mistakes, while many Dutch do.’

The teens are right. Two weeks prior to this ceremony, the Court of Appeal in The Hague stated in a historic ruling that the Netherlands is partly responsible for the death of about 300 Bosniaks who were deported from the area on July 13, 1995. Countries are no longer able to hide behind collective responsibility of the United Nations.

Dutchbat, the Dutch UN battalion, was well aware the Bosniaks were doomed and they ought to have provided protection—this they had promised, the judge said in court. Among the attendees were thirty widows.

Prior to court proceedings, Munira Subašić, President of the Mothers of Srebrenica, had given me a white lapel pin symbolizing the suffering. At the Srebrenica cemetery, I wear it on my chest.

As I do not speak Bosnian, I set myself to filming Naida, who interviews a large number of surviving relatives at the vast burial grounds. One woman wears a T-shirt, picturing her deceased husband. She discloses both her husband and son have been murdered. She doesn’t have a single picture of her beloved son. The woman bursts out in tears—Naida consoles her spontaneously. In front of the camera they embrace.

Naida (left) consoles one of the widows
Thousands and thousands of white marble headstones: I nearly curse at the abundance of injustice. But then I hear the Islamic prayer, calling out to all—in an almost magical vein: We are all here as one. This must never be forgotten, in order for it to never happen again.

It seems as if the universal thought of ‘never again’ hovers over the pilgrims, assembled to pay respect to the victims. The sky seems electrified with this one wish.

In order to remember, it is vital to know exactly what happened here. Finding the truth is essential. It may seem self-evident, but unfortunately it isn’t—not when Srebrenica is concerned.

The Serbs tried their utmost to conceal the genocide. With bulldozers, they dug up existing mass graves of the Bosniaks they had executed, to relocate the bodies far away in secret. They also moved swaths of human remains to remote places, and put land mines on top. Hence, 22 years on, remains of many victims have never been found.

The 71 caskets are small. Of several victims, only a single bone fragment has been identified; now laid in nearly empty caskets. A thousand victims may never be found again. In case there are no surviving family members, DNA identification is impossible at any rate.

A giant truck, covered with the Bosnian flag, transported the caskets from the Visoko mortuary to Srebrenica. One of the stops was Sarajevo, on July 9th. I saw women crying in the streets. Hundreds of people paid their respect when the truck stopped in front of the Presidency Building, near the memorial for 1,500 children killed during the siege of the city.

Apart from the Serbs, the Dutch also keep evidence of war crimes under wraps. Think of the infamous ‘Srebrenica film roll’. In 2014, I wrote a book relating to this affair: The Cover-up General. A year after publication, the non-fiction thriller was banned by court order. My freedom of speech was limited as well: I wasn’t allowed to talk about its contents anymore or promote the book.

However, the Court of Appeal in The Hague overturned the verdict: it found that the accuracy of the book is not in doubt, and it has been reprinted since. The initial verdict was so far-reaching, it would have been impossible for me to even write this very article. It could have cost me 100,000 euro in fines.

The withholding of photos also plays a part in the lawsuit by over 200 Dutchbat veterans commenced recently against their former employer. Apart from rehabilitation and compensation for having been equipped with poor weaponry, they demand the pictures and videos they’ve taken in the days after Srebrenica’s fall. It concerns at least eight film rolls, containing sensitive material; such as evidence of war crimes. These were requisitioned by senior officers, and are now held under lock and key—somewhere in military intelligence vaults.

Many former Dutchbat soldiers feel betrayed by the superpowers for not having used air support in Srebrenica. Retired Army Colonel Charlef Brantz—at the time superior officer of Dutchbat-commander Karremans—wrote me that both the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as Dutch NATO representatives were informed about the decision to withhold any requested airsupport, six weeks before the fall of the enclave.
The authorities failed to inform Dutchbat accordingly. In this godforsaken place, our troops were apparently abandoned not only by the superpowers, but by their own top brass as well.

After today's ceremony, Naida and I are invited to the homes of the Srebrenica Mothers. When I mention the veterans' legal proceedings, my compatriots receive some support when it comes to unearthing the photo evidence. Media are also aware of the fact my book will be discussed by the Parliamentary Defence Committee later this year. The country's biggest newspaper, Dnevni Avaz, reported about it only this morning.

Of late, Bosnian media have reported on the countless rapes during the civil war. It has thus tried to break the taboo. A new campaign points out the stigma ought to burden the perpetrators instead of their victims. Women sharing their traumatic experiences are being praised for their courage.

The Mothers of Srebrenica claim some of the Dutchbat veterans also committed rapes. They may not have used force, but all the same it is rumoured they took advantage of women who were scared to death, being coerced by Serbian troops.

The morning after the commemoration, Srebrenica's former mayor, Ćamil Duraković, visits Naida and me at our hotel. As chairman of the memorial organization committee, he has denied access to the burial grounds to anyone who denies the genocide: even his Serbian successor has had to stay away. Duraković considers the measure necessary to safeguard the peace of mind of the survivors who come to bury their loved ones. He stresses there have been no significant incidents this year.

As we leave Srebrenica in the afternoon, I notice the beauty of the landscape. The wooded hills bask in the sunlight. How in God’s name has it come to pass that these hills should be covered with war graves?

Edwin F. Giltay is author of The Cover-up General, in which he uncovers a scandal within the Dutch military secret service regarding the aftermath of the Srebrenica drama: www.thecoverupgeneral.com

His journey to the 22nd annual commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide was made possible by the SGTRS foundation: www.sgtrs.nl/english

This article is a translation of an article published in Dutch on: www.novini.nl/srebrenica-blijft-nederland-achtervolgen-impressie-massabegrafenis
Now second, revised Dutch edition:

**Military intelligence scandal uncovered in Dutch book**

A general sporting three stars on his uniform, commissioning a private spy to nose around in a commercial company. And this is not just anyone: it’s the general’s own wife. A tribal war within the Dutch Military Intelligence Service, with unsuspecting citizens being victimized. One would expect such a modus operandi in North Korea, not in the Low Countries. However, this is what author Edwin F. Gillay experienced — he vividly describes the saga in *The Cover-up General* (Dutch: *De doofpotgeneraal*).

In his book Mr Gillay depicts the rather transparent conduct of secret service agents infiltrating at the internet provider where he was assigned. Initially a spook tried to recruit Mr Gillay as a military analyst. At the same time however, she herself was being monitored. At the root of this tug-of-war within the Military Intelligence Service was the infamous film roll of Srebrenica depicting war crimes, which was misdeveloped by the Dutch Armed Forces. The recruiting officer intended to make public the footage on the film wasn’t at all lost — information that would no doubt have undermined the standing of a certain triple-star general.

*The Cover-up General* delineates this espionage scandal fervently. Mr Gillay recounts the absurd consequences in great detail.

In November 2014, *The Cover-up General* was published in Amsterdam. One year after publication — when it was already sold out — the book was banned. A judge prohibited Edwin F. Gillay to reprint, distribute and even promote his book. The censorship verdict was front-page news in the Balkans, and met with anger and disbelief everywhere.

However, the verdict was resolutely overturned on 12 April 2016. A second, revised edition of *The Cover-up General* by Blauwe Tigger Publishing returned on the market in September 2016.

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The Tragedy of the Chechen Conflict


Caspar ten Dam

This review essay is an adapted version of the one published in the Winter 2016 issue of our journal (see Ten Dam 2016), with more explicit and elaborate attention given to Askerov’s book this time. Moreover, the new version is also written in response to criticisms (i.e. effective, new anonymous peer-reviews) from some colleagues that I should approach the subjects (topics and personalities) under review more critically—by amongst other things applying terms like ‘separatism’ and ‘insurgency’ that imply more critical distance, rather than adopting terms like ‘armed struggle’ and ‘independence struggle’ preferred by the author(s) under review. Therefore, this review essay more closely resembles the one that will come out in the journal Iran and the Caucasus (Brill) in its last issue this year (as announced in Ten Dam 2016: 57).

NB: citations and other references from each of the books under review are indicated by its year of publication and the relevant page numbers, e.g. (2010: p.1); (2013: p.100); etcetera. These references are different in format than the other source references in this review essay.

Introduction

Ilyas Akhmadov’s book *The Chechen Struggle: Independence Won and Lost*—with co-author Miriam Lansky, Director for Russia and Eurasia at the National Endowment for Democracy—is an insightful account of the Chechen insurgencies in the Northern Caucasus.
against Russia after the demise of the Soviet Union. The same is true for Akhmadov's more recent book *Chechnya's Secret Wartime Diplomacy: Aslan Maskhadov and the Quest for a Peaceful Resolution*—with Nicholas Daniloff, a renowned journalist and former Director of the Northeastern University School of Journalism, as the co-author.

Ali Askerov's *Historical Dictionary of the Chechen Conflict* offers a more neutral and broadly oriented account of Chechen insurgencies from the eighteenth century onwards, through a series of over 500 informative and cross-referenced descriptions in alphabetical order of major personalities, concepts, organisations, (violent) events, and cultural, social, economic and other phenomena. For this reason it can serve as a useful counterpoint and counterbalance to Akhmadov's thought-provoking yet arguably more partisan accounts.

As series editor Jon Woronoff stresses, Askerov “has gone to great pains to state facts as clearly as possible without taking sides” (2015: viii). Thus Askerov states that Akhmadov's “criticism of [Chechen] suicide bombings and hostage takings earned him a moderate image” (Ibid: p.36)—without indicating or arguing whether that image is deserved or not.

Askerov, born and educated in Azerbaijan and presently teaching peace and conflict studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), has written multiple other works on related topics, including those directly to do with Chechnya (see References).

Still, most attention is paid here to Akhmadov's *Chechnya's Secret Wartime Diplomacy*, if only because this book reveals new documents that have been generally hidden from view till its publication. It presents in separate chapters the transcripts of twenty-four secretly sent audiotapes by Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov between 1999 and 2003 to Akhmadov as Foreign Minister of the separatist government abroad from 1999 to 2005. The last chapter presents a letter by Maskhadov to the European Union of 25 February 2005 shortly before his violent death on 8 March 2005.

Each chapter ends with a commentary by Akhmadov of each translated audiotape or letter in question. The translations into English of these “surviving tapes” (2013: p.vii, A Note on Translation) have been shortened for reasons of readability, the safety of people concerned, and the book's word limit (Ibid: pp.vii-viii). The full copies of the tapes, 65% in the Chechen language and 45% in Russian (Ibid: p.vii), will become available “for perusal by specialists after a period of at least 15 years” (Ibid: p.viii).

*Wartime Diplomacy* does not clarify the fate of Akhmadov's own tapes to Maskhadov. If many, most or all of these tapes or transcripts have survived, Akhmadov's reticence to publish these may be due to their sensitive content and his own contentious asylum bid in the US at the time. Other audiotapes between Maskhadov and others did exist, though most of these are probably lost or destroyed forever. Maskhadov occasionally refers to these other audiotapes, like those received by and sent to his then Deputy Prime Minister Akhmed Zakaev.

Hopefully other audiotapes by Maskhadov—and others—to other individuals (associates, allies, rivals, etc.) and *vice versa* will resurface, be transcribed, translated in English and published in order to have a more complete understanding of the history of the Chechen insurgencies during the 1990s and beyond.
Particularly in the *Chechen Struggle*, but also in *Wartime Diplomacy*, Ilyas Akhmadov (b. 1960) recounts his own participation in Chechnya's separatist government and his travels as Chechnya's Foreign Minister abroad to defend (the justifiability of) the independence struggle and find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Naturally these books also recount the roles of more well-known figures in that conflict.

The heavy odds arranged against Chechnya's independence from the very start described by Akhmadov roughly correspond to Lanskoys's identification of “five over-arching problems” accounting for “Chechnya’s failure to develop into a functioning state” and “avert the catastrophe of a second war with Russia” by the end of the twentieth century: i) “absence of resources for postwar reconstruction”; ii) “profound confusion about the structure of the new state” mainly due to “surprising and unpredictable combinations of traditional, Soviet, Islamic and democratic norms” (Lanskoy 2003: 187 (quotes) ); iii) “weak political leadership in the person of President Aslan Maskhadov”; iv) the “proliferation of private armies”; and v) “failure in Moscow to undertake constructive policies for building relations with Chechnya” (Ibid: 185 (quotes) ).

**Portraits of Maskhadov and other Figures in the post-1991 Chechen Insurgencies**

Akhmadov's *The Chechen Struggle* and *Chechnya's Secret Wartime Diplomacy*, and Askerov's *Chechen Conflict*, offer insightful portraits of the major figures among Chechnya's separatists. These portraits include those of:

General Johar Musayevich Dudaev (b. 1944), the first elected President of the self-styled Chechen Republic of “Nokhchi” (*Noxçîyn Respublika Noxçîçii*, NRN) or “Ichkeria” in October 1991 until he was killed in April 1996 reportedly by one or more Russian air- or ground missile (2013: p. 64 & note 1 (p.250); 2013: pp.4,18; 2015: p.89);

General Aslan Khalid Maskhadov (b. 1951), chief-of-staff of Nokhchi’s armed forces since March 1994 and Nokhchi’s Interim Prime Minister and Defence Minister after Dudaev’s death, until he was elected President in January 1997; he was killed on 8 March 2005 after Russian forces finally cornered him.

One of the most well-known and controversial figures was Shamil Salmanovich Basaev (b. 1965), commander-in-chief of the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (*Konfederatsiya narodov Kavkaza*, KNK) involved in Abkhazia’s violent separation from Georgia in 1992-1993, and commander of the Abkhaz Battalion in late 1994, playing crucial roles in the defense of Grozny in December 1994 and its recapture in August 1996.

However, Basaev became a ‘Wahhabist’ or rather Salafist notorious for violent acts like the Budennovsk hostage crisis in June 1995 in southern Russia, and the incursion into Dagestan in August 1999. He was killed in July 2006 in Ingushetia, reportedly by an explosive of Russia’s secret service, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (*Federal’naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti Rossïyskoï Federatsii*, FSB)—though different versions of his death exist, including one by “accidental explosion” (Askerov 2015: pp.xxii (quote), 59).

Khattab reportedly participated in major events like Grozny’s famous New Year’s Eve 1994 battle—and led with Basaev the short-lived ‘invasion’ of neighbouring Dagestan in August 1999 in a vain effort to establish a Chechen-Dagestan Islamic republic there. FSB commandos finally managed to track Khattab down and kill him (by poison) on or around 20 March 2002; the precise date of his demise remains contested.

Akhmadov’s Wartime Diplomacy primarily deals with Maskhadov; through this book the reader gets to know him more intimately than through any other published English-language accounts of the Chechen conflict to date.

Thus Maskhadov appears to have attempted to “end the war and find a political solution through negotiations” (2010: p.184) with Russia with help from the West. Akhmadov counts as many as six stillborn peace plans between 2001 and 2003 alone (2013: pp.236-239), most of them proposed by Russian politicians that envisaged Chechen autonomy rather than independence, but also one proposed by Akhmadov himself based on the example of Kosovo: conditional independence through a UN protectorate for an interim period of ten to fifteen years (2010: pp.211-215).

Yet Russian President Vladimir Putin remained unwilling to negotiate with Maskhadov so as to avoid granting any legitimacy to the latter. Maskhadov’s voice—often desperate, isolated and paranoid—is heard loud and clear through the audiotapes. Maskhadov also assigned his successor by decree if he were to be killed or rendered incapable; this he told Akhmadov in his 17th audiotape in November 2001, though he did not divulge the intended successor’s identity. It turned out to be Abdul Khalim Salamovich Saidullaev (b. 1956), but he did not last long: (pro-)Russian forces killed him in June 2006.

Maskhadov probably has made the extensive audio recordings also for posterity’s sake. Yet the tapes sent back and forth became increasingly rare, with an interruption of over nine months between Maskhadov’s 22nd and 23rd transcribed audiotapes from April 2002 till January 2003 due to Akhmadov’s visa problems in the US after Russia had asked Interpol to arrest him.

Maskhadov told Akhmadov more than once that he was “in a terrible condition due to lack of the news from you and impossibility to call you” (2013: p.187). Both of them also had numerous disagreements and misunderstandings on particular texts and policies; the physical distance and consequent perceptual difference between them exacerbated these differences. Still, Akhmadov keeps showing sympathy and understanding for him despite the latter’s often harsh criticism of the former.

Maskhadov also sought to defend through the tape recordings his oft-criticised efforts to work with jihadists, secular militants, bandits and corrupt politicians. Thus he argues that if he had confronted or even sought to isolate and defeat the likes of Shamil Basaev during 1999 or even
earlier, it would have deepened the split in Chechen society between secularists and Islamists and would have weakened its position even further vis-à-vis Russia. That was why he did not condemn people like Basaev, former Information Minister Movladi Udugov and former Vice-President Zelimkhan Yandarbiev (2013: p.12 & note 11, p.259). He even tried in vain to pacify the latter by introducing Shari’a (Islamic law) in February 1999.

Thus according to Akhmadov, Maskhadov repeatedly “employed the same maneuver, and it proved to be fatal. He tried to implement his opponents’ program” (2010: p.99). Indeed as the radicals “did not make similar compromises, his compromises became one-sided concessions” (Ibid: p.78).

Akhmadov's Role in the Chechen Insurgency

The Chechen Struggle and also Wartime Diplomacy offer insightful accounts of Akhmadov’s own role in the Chechen insurgency, and of his ambivalent yet close relationships with some of the major figures in that insurgency.

Thus Akhmadov attained a closer relationship with Maskhadov, and—rather surprisingly—Basaev, than with Dudaev, possibly due to the latter’s oft-reported irascibility and intolerance of other viewpoints. Akhmadov served under each of them in different capacities. He served as a senior civil servant in the Chechen Republic’s Foreign Ministry’s political department under President Dudaev since early 1992 (or late 1991; sources differ or are unclear on this). Then he became a senior aide to Basaev tasked with training, equipment and record keeping in the latter’s Abkhaz Battalion in July-August 1994, until Akhmadov sustained a “knee injury” by “accidentally” stepping in a hole (2010: p.15) at the battalion’s base when Basaev’s main force was attacking one of the anti-Dudaev forces in Argun, those led by Ruslan Labazanov.

Akhmadov received treatment in St. Petersburg and thus was absent when Basaev’s battalion defeated and drove Labazanov’s forces out of Argun in early September 1994. Eventually Akhmadov flew to Rostov, and drove to Grozny with a friend, arriving in the Chechen capital on December 30—right before Russia’s disastrous New Year’s Eve offensive. He “experienced the battle of Grozny as total chaos…. I couldn’t understand what was happening on the next block, or sometimes, in the next building” (2010: p.17). The Russian armed forces eventually occupied the entire city by early March 1995 or at least claimed they had full control over it (2015: p.xvii), but only after massive bombardments and heavy losses on both sides.

When Akhmadov was finally able to meet up with Basaev in February 1995, the latter suggested that he should join Maskhadov’s newly formed general staff then located near Argun and help set up “an analytical or information service” (2010: p.26). At first the commander-in-chief remained quite aloof when Akhmadov first met him. Still, Akhmadov were to increasingly identify himself with Maskhadov, while distancing himself from an increasingly radical and unpredictable Basaev.

During many travails and narrow escapes from Russian bombs and other dangers, Akhmadov stayed in Maskhadov’s general staff as a kind of public affairs chief, at least up to the end of the First Chechen War (1994-1996).
Thereafter, Akhmadov had a short-lived political career as founding chairman of Basaev’s small, “radical separatist” (Sokirianskaia 2009: 223) and unsuccessful Marshonan Toba (Freedom Party)—until he, heavily disillusioned, dissolved the party in the Winter of 1999. Apparently this constitutes the last episode in which he has tried to work with Basaev, the “leader and the inspiration” of Marshonan Toba (2010: pp.94, 141 (quote)).

In the meantime, Maskhadov had been elected as Ichkeria’s new President in January 1997, due to the astounding recapture of Grozny on 6 August 1996 and the signing of the peace accord with the Russian government at Khasavyurt, Dagestan, on 30 August 1996. He eventually appointed Akhmadov as Ichkeria’s Foreign Minister in late July 1999 (confirmed by parliament in September), who left Chechnya the same year to represent and promote the fledgling self-styled state abroad and mainly in the United States until he was finally dismissed sometime in 2005 by Maskhadov’s successor, Abdul Khalim Saidullaev. To this day, Akhmadov—who sought political asylum in the United States in 2002 and eventually received it in 2005—has been unable to revisit his homeland, let alone safely settle there.

As its main foreign representative, Akhmadov had to deal with the persistent isolation of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) abroad, while it was losing the information war against both the Russian state-controlled media and those of internal opponents like Movladi Udugov’s increasingly Islamist Kavkaz Tsentr website at the expense of Akhmed Zakaev’s generally secular-nationalist Chechenpress website. The former website became the main voice-piece of the ‘North Caucasus Emirate’ (later renamed ‘Caucasus Emirate’) declared by Saidullaev’s successor Doku Umarov in October 2007, which effectively abolished the ChRI apart from a residual government-in-exile in London.

Consequently, long before the announcement of the Caucasus Emirate, Akhmadov believes Maskhadov’s refusal to distance himself from Kavkaz Tsentr and shut it down was the latter’s “biggest mistake” of all: “this website destroyed our ability to present ourselves as anything other than radicals and terrorists. Maskhadov should have nipped it in the bud” (2010: p.184 (quotes)).

Above all the frequent kidnappings (including foreigners) in and around Chechnya were mainly blamed on factions, Islamist, criminal-opportunists or otherwise, within or associated with Ichkeria’s government. These kidnappings obviously hurt its authority and credibility, even though many an abduction appears to have been orchestrated by (pro-)Russian actors. In this regard Akhmadov offers an insightful if perhaps contestable analysis of how “the hostage trade grew out of the treatment of prisoners” (2010: p.101) during the First Chechen War—particularly due to the far worse treatment of prisoners on the Russian side at the time.

Ichkeria’s increasing isolation, lack of funds and damaged reputation explains why both Mashkadov and Akhmadov so eagerly embraced and lauded any outside support they received—including from organisations that may have had anti-Russian agendas and outlooks of their own, like the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya, one of whose co-chairs, former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, wrote the Foreword to the Chechen Struggle.

At times Akhmadov rather excessively praises Ichkeria’s rare supporters abroad, like Brzezinski (e.g. 2010: pp.195-196; 2013: pp.62-63); but this is hardly surprising given Ichkeria’s severe predicaments including its factionalism and very survival at home.
Brzezinski’s Committee for Peace in Chechnya actually helped to sustain Western sympathy for the Chechen cause as understood by the proponents of Chechen independence. Yet Akhmadov’s reach remained limited: through Brzezinski’s committee he did have “good access to members of Congress but almost no ability to meet high US officials” (2013: p.114); such meetings were exceptional.

Moreover, there were “only a few hundred Chechens in the United States and I had no means of reaching them” or trying to “mobilize them” (2013: p.185). Doing this would have violated and undermined his precarious status of being a “simple foreign visitor” rather than a “registered foreign representative” (Ibid) in the States—and that of an asylum seeker after he learned in May 2002 that an Interpol arrest warrant had been issued against him on Russia’s request. Thus he decided to “ask for political asylum” while remaining Ichkeria’s Foreign Minister for a considerable while after his asylum had been granted a few years later (2013: pp.248-249 (incl. quote)).

At the time Akhmadov was acutely aware that the United States, despite their criticism of Putin’s authoritarian and arguably brutal policies in Chechnya (and elsewhere), “considered Chechnya to be an integral part of the Russian Federation” and that “the Chechen resistance was unlikely to get any assistance in combating the Russians as the Afghans had received after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan” (2013: p.115). Obviously the US would never contemplate to intervene militarily within the internationally recognised territory of a major nuclear superpower like Russia, or offer military aid to opponents of Russia’s territorial integrity.

The US-led War on Terror in response to ‘9-11’, arguably the most destructive terrorist act to date, effectively dashed any hopes and prospects of substantial US aid to Ichkeria: on 11 September 2001, a dozen members of Osama Bin Laden’s Islamist-fundamentalist Al Qaeda (‘The Base’) network hijacked airplanes and plunged them into the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC, killing 2973 people, almost all civilians, 2749 of them in New York.

Thus Russia’s President Vladimir Putin “understood immediately how he could benefit from Al-Qaeda’s attack” (2010: p.200). Putin had an easy time to convince the West, and the US Administration of President George W. Bush in particular, to consider and ostracise most or all Chechen separatists as Al-Qaeda-like terrorists. Putin’s task was made all the easier as Chechen separatists, increasingly relying on actual terrorism, gangsterism and foreign mujahid assistance, already had made a bad press for themselves.

The post-9-11 world also put Maskhadov in an near-impossible quandary: severing the ties with Basaev, Udugov, Khattab and other ‘terrorists’ as demanded by the US would severely, perhaps fatally weaken the armed struggle and “practically justify the aggression, Russia’s genocide” (2013: p.161) in Chechnya by such an ‘admission of guilt’; but refusing to do so would worsen and solidify Ichkeria’s isolation in the West.

As Maskhadov sought to put Ichkeria’s immediate survival above the improvement of its international standing, he chose to disregard the American demand. Still his decision had detrimental effects on the independence struggle as it gave Putin more free rein in Chechnya than before, with tacit US acquiescence. Akhmadov thus argues that the intensified “Russian-American antiterrorism cooperation” after 9-11 was “short lived, but had ... profoundly negative consequences for the Chechens” (2010: p.200).
Akhmadov’s Analysis of Brutalities during the Chechen Insurgency

Akhmadov's two books contain controversial and counter-intuitive yet thought-provoking observations on the Russo-Chechen conflicts—particularly those on *brutalisation*, a 'degenerative' process of increasing violations of local and/or international norms of violence, given the reviewer's own Brutalisation theory (see Ten Dam 2015a: 5 & note 2; see on older version theory: Ten Dam 2010: 332; see further Ten Dam 2015b: 9-11).

Thus Akhmadov frequently refers to the morally corrosive tit-for-tat retributions, with ever declining respect for the Geneva Conventions and its provisions like decent treatment of prisoners. According to him, this brutalisation particularly took hold since the "Russians introduced cleansing operations, *zachistky*, ostensibly to identify fighters, but they mostly killed and terrorized the population"—while "on the Chechen side this process evolved more slowly and was more a reaction to what was being done to us than a deliberate policy" (2010: pp.38-39). Thus in the Russian "filtration camps" (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Operativynikh Shtabov*, GUOSh) “thousands if not tens of thousands people were tortured and humiliated” (Ibid: p.115).

Thus according to Maskhadov, even special police OMON (*Otrjad Mobilnij Osobogo Naznatsjenija*, Special Purpose Mobility Unit) and military intelligence GRU (*Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye*, Main Intelligence Directorate) forces, as underfunded as ordinary contract soldiers (2013: p.34), looted and demanded bribes from hapless citizens or plundered their belongings after they killed them, especially during cleaning-up operations (Ibid: p.56).

Actually Askerov confirms that “OMON was accused of many human rights abuses in Chechnya such as abducting, raping, torturing, and killing civilians” (2015: p.175)—though he refrains from offering his own assessment of the veracity of these reports and allegations. Yet at his ‘Human Rights’ entry he does state that both “the Russian and Chechen sides have seriously violated human rights throughout the First and Second Chechen Wars” (Ibid: p.117).

Though Askerov does not explicitly assign most weight and blame on one of the warring sides, also his descriptions of Russian brutalities appear to be generally more grave and on a much larger scale than the Chechen-separatist ones (2015: pp.117-118).

Be that as it may, Akhmadov's own observations on violence broadly concord with the reviewer's own conceptions of brutality and brutalisation, and with his own definitions of (atrocious, brutal) violence, like *terrorism* as “sudden lethal violence without preceding warning of the act for whatever purpose against (groups of) unarmed or weakly armed and thereby effectively defenceless civilians, unarmed off-duty security personnel, soldiers and policemen, and other defenceless non-combatants” (Ten Dam 2015a: 16).

For instance Akhmadov argues that he cannot put the June 1995 Budennovsk hostage crisis “in the same category as other acts of terrorism” (2010: p.52), as "there was no cruelty toward the hostages; there were no cases of rape, or other types of abuses" (Ibid: pp.52-53).

Indeed, unlike the hostage crises at Moscow's Dubrovka Theater during the performance of the musical *Nord-Ost* (North-East) in October 2002, and at Beslan's primary (and secondary) school in North Ossetia in September 2004—Basaev claimed responsibility for both, though Akhmadov believes he was only truly responsible for and involved in the latter hostage-taking action (2010:
—“in Budennovsk the hostage-takers took risks to get water” for the hostages as “none was being supplied” from the outside (Ibid: p.53 (quote); pp.224-225).

In contrast, Askerov just states that due to all the mentioned events “where civilians were involved, Basayev was labeled a terrorist” (2015: p.59). At any rate, in both ‘Nord-Ost’ and ‘Beslan’ the Russian responses to ‘neutralise’ the hostage takers showed little if any regard for the well-being of the hostages, with hundreds of casualties among the latter that could well have been avoided.

Conclusion: Causes and Prospects of the Chechen Insurgency

The given of Russia’s political and military superiority vis-à-vis a small nation such as the Chechens, begs the question why so many Chechens were ready to forcibly secede from Russia in the 1990s. At least five interrelated factors appear to account for Chechnya’s extraordinary ethno-territorial conflict:

i) the saliency of historic grievances like the wholesale deportation of the Chechens in 1944 on orders of Stalin;

ii) the still vibrant martial culture of defiance that obliges Chechens to avenge such historical wrongs;

iii) the Chechens being by far the biggest indigenous nation in the North Caucasus, thus having the demographic critical-mass to at least try to secede from a major power like Russia (Ten Dam 2010: esp. 333-334, 345-349; Ten Dam 2011: esp. 247-252); and because Chechnya exhibits the “so-called mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration” of “highly homogeneous pockets of ethnic concentration” (Rezvani 2013: 15) which makes it vulnerable to conflict, especially if combined with

iv) a “politicization of ethnicity” (Rezvani 2013: 55) whereby some ethnicities get more privileges in defined territories than others (Ibid: esp. 116-120).

It is the combination of all these factors that appear to account for the Chechen conflict, as “there are many cases of ethno-territorial groups in the (post-)Soviet space that enjoy territorial autonomy and a dominant demographic position therein, but nevertheless have not waged a war of independence” (Rezvani 2013: 249). One also needs to account for “why an ethno-nationalist conflict emerged in Chechnya, and diffused and transformed into a Wahhabi/Salafi religious conflict” (Rezvani 2014: 871 (quote); see further esp. 886, note 57).

Rezvani acknowledges the relevance of multiple factors accounting for internal armed conflicts—particularly grievances of severe deprivations in the past and demographical size and dominance of the initiating (rebelling) party (Rezvani 2013: esp. 227-249 (Chechnya); Rezvani 2014 (on Chechnya); Rezvani 2015). Yet Rezvani stresses that such factors only make any conflict truly likely, in a time of interethnic tensions and state fragmentation, when the ethnicities concerned live next to each other in concentrated pockets (mosaic configuration) within ethno-politically constructed territories: indeed these are “crucial factors, which in combination can explain the Chechen conflict” (Rezvani 2013: 249; see also Rezvani 2014: 886).

Last but not least, Akhmadov’s expectation that “the Chechens will seek to control their own affairs again” and once more “will seek independence” (2010: p.247), that the “desire for
independence has been pushed underground only temporarily” and will rise again “in 50 years”
time if not sooner (2013: p.240), is not as farfetched as it may seem at first.

Despite the horrors of the first Russo-Chechen War of 1994–1996 and the second Russo-
Chechen War that started in late 1999 and arguably continues to this day, many Islamist and
secularist Chechens refuse to acknowledge defeat. Even those who have laid down their arms
still try to sabotage Russia’s hold over their homeland by any means—and take up arms again
whenever they see the slightest chance to succeed.

Still, many reluctantly accepted the amnesty offer by Chechnya’s President Ramzan Kadyrov
(b. 1976), effectively installed by Putin in 2007. Insurgents had assassinated his predecessor
and father, former Grand Mufti of Chechnya Akhmad Kadyrov (b. 1951), through a bomb blast
in Grozny on 9 May 2004 that killed dozens of people (estimates vary). This lethal bomb attack,
for which Basaev claimed responsibility, was followed by the ‘election’ of Alu Alkhanov as the
new President. Nowadays the latter’s successor, Ramzan Kadyrov, a former warlord notorious
for his ruthlessness, intimidates the populace into submission—for now.

At present, however, “Chechens are exhausted and to survive they have to accept Kadyrov’s
reign, hang his portrait everywhere, and pretend that the conflict is over” (2010: p.246). But
eventually “the spring [toward independence] will uncoil with greater force” (Ibid).

Indeed some analysts refer to a trend of Kadyrovisation, the unintended (side-)effect of Putin’s
so-called Chechenisation policy of installing an indigenous yet pro-Moscow government, by
making the Kadyrovs so powerful locally that even Moscow may eventually be unable to
control them.

The Kadyrovs actually belong to and lead the benoy clan (gar, neqi), which reportedly
“amounts to 15% of the Chechen population” (Sokirianskaia 2005: 456), apparently making it
the largest Chechen clan, as large or larger than many a tuqum or (multi-)tribal union of
multiple clans.7 One reason for the Kadyrov family’s power and influence—and the decision
by Putin to utilise them—appears simply to be the immense size of the clan they belong to.
This very fact, by itself, may paradoxically further Chechen autonomy and even (de facto)
independence on the long term.

As scholars, historians, anthropologists and social scientists in particular, we can and should
try to predict, or at least assess, with our theories, hypotheses and empirical research, which
of the particular observations expressed by Maskhadov, Akhmadov and also Askerov turn out
to be prescient of Chechnya’s seemingly doomed attempt to definitely break away from Russia.
But in the end only the future will tell.

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Endnotes

1. Also called the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ich ker: “place over there” in Kumyk) or ChRI, after the south-eastern ‘heartland’ of Chechnya. The ChRI actually encompasses the entire Chechen region within the former Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) or ASSR Checheno-Ingushetia.

2. Just like Wahhabism, Salafism is a purist version of Islam within the Sunni branch (see on the similarities and differences between Wahhabis and Salafis: Ten Dam 2011: 245-246).


4. Udugov “left Chechnya but remained very influential as the dominant propagandist of the radical wing and force behind the Kavkaz Tsentr website” (2010: p.185). His whereabouts remain unknown.

5. Akhmadov’s account of his injury differs from those of other sources. Thus Waynakh Online claims that “Akhmadov was wounded during the fighting with forces of Ruslan Labazanov in Argun” in August 1994: www.waynakh.com/eng/2008/05/ilyas-khamzatovich-akhmadov/ (acc. 7 April 2014), suggesting that he was in the thick of it. Indeed, according to Askerov, Akhmadov “volunteered in fighting against the Russian forces” (2015: p.36).

6. Reportedly, Akhmadov “retired to private life” (Askerov 2015: p.36) right after the end of the war in August 1996; see also e.g. www.waynakh.com/eng/2008/05/ilyas-khamzatovich-akhmadov/ (last acc. 26 Sep 2016).

7. I “translate gar and neqi as “clan” and teip as “tribe””, and “tuqum (Persian for family, clan) as multi-tribal commune” (Ten Dam 2011: 248, footnote 15). Other scholars apply other translations, definitions and/or classifications of these terms—like Askerov, who translates teip as “clan” (2015: p.222).

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Foundation History of Totalitarian Regimes and their victims. Why?

Dictators who control every aspect of public and private life and who suppress and kill people is a fading memory of the distant past and far away. Fortunately, in The Netherlands this situation ended almost seventy years ago. But not everywhere in Europe people were as fortunate. Take for instance the countries of the former communist bloc in Eastern Europe. For them it is only 25 years ago that they got more freedom. Moreover, not yet everywhere. In Belarus people are still imprisoned – or worse – because they refuse to do what dictator Viktor Lukashenko demands. Elsewhere old communists try to light back.

The foundation ‘History Totalitarian Regimes and Their Victims’ (SGTRS = Stichting Geschiedenis Totalitaire Regimes en hun Slachtoffers) wants to draw attention to this situation. Freedom is not self-evident. One has to light for it. This can be done with words, arguments and by remembering frightening examples from the past. The SGTRS attempts to do so. In particular it wants to raise the awareness among the youth of the dangers of totalitarian regimes, whether they were left or right, communists or fascists.

The SGTRS cooperates with other like-minded organizations in the ‘Platform of European Memory and Conscience’. The SGTRS is founding member of this Platform; a European umbrella organisation which comprises 48 member organizations (this number is growing) from 13 EU countries and Canada, USA, Iceland, Ukraine and Moldova. It is not by coincidence that most members are from countries in eastern Europe. They still have the most vivid memories of totalitarianism.

In its own country the SGTRS is primarily engaged in the dissemination of reliable information, especially in education. In doing so, it draws upon the information from other members of the Platform. After all, we did not live under communist domination – they did! Or,
to put it differently, the SGTRS is the ambassador of the Platform.

In the short existence of the Platform much has already been achieved. In cooperation with other members the Platform has published a reader, ‘Lest we forget’, for pupils in secondary schools. This reader is a book with stories from people who have suffered under two totalitarian dictatorships: national socialism and communism. The SGTRS has also contributed to this reader. The book has been published in English, German, French and Czech. Translations in other languages are in the pipeline. The SGTRS is planning to bring out a Dutch translation.

Furthermore, the Platform, in cooperation with its partners, has organised a traveling exhibition, called ‘Totalitarianism in Europe’. This exhibition consists of show panels with information about numbers of victims (deportations, mass murders) of the two totalitarian regimes: national socialism and communism. Two panels per country. Thus one can see how many victims these regimes have made. In addition, the Platform, aims at exposing the crimes of communism.

What is the purpose of all this? In our country we strive for real European unity. Of course not an imposed one. The SGTRS is convinced that unity based on interest in each others’ history, the recent European history, and particularly the tragic history of the totalitarian powers, leads to real solidarity. Because without history and remembrance no identity! This does not only apply to individuals, but also to societies. Consequently also for Europe. We therefore applaud the program ‘Europe for Citizens’ which attempts to uncover European history with a view to building a European identity.

SGTRS is active in various European networks which are engaged in revealing recent European history. The Platform is such a network.

Finally, the SGTRS is a NGO with a minimal budget. This implies that it depends on donations from people who sympathize with its objectives and activities. Therefore we welcome donations to our foundation. If you would like to become a regular contributor, please contact us via our website (tab ‘contact’) or mail to sgtrs@sgtrs.nl. We will inform you of our activities by e-mail.

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PM,
SGTRS is primarily active in The Netherlands. That is why the website of SGTRS is only in Dutch. Those who can not read this language, we suggest to visit the website of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience (http://www.pemc.eu/).