

## **AFTER THE REFERENDUM: CHANGING TRENDS IN CHECHNYA**

By Enver Kisriev and Robert Bruce Ware

According to the results of a referendum held in Chechnya on March 23, voters overwhelmingly approved a new constitution drafted by Akhmad Kadyrov, the current head of the administration of the Chechen Republic. The referendum took place against a backdrop of Russian military policies that were both highly deplorable and partially effective. In keeping with the relentless paradoxes that characterize this region, it appears that this result may be both fraudulent and legitimate. Finally, there is a clear risk that the new constitution may not resolve, so much as provoke, future conflicts within Chechen society, perpetuating instability in the region and leading to further Russian intervention--and not to the disengagement that is Moscow's goal.

Allegations of electoral fraud in the Chechen constitutional referendum are probably correct, if largely irrelevant. Voter turnout was suspiciously--perhaps impossibly--high. The opportunity for fraud arose after the October 2002 census: Its figure of 1,088,000 clearly over counts the current residents of the republic, but it may approximate the total number of Chechen nationals in all of the Russian Federation. Census procedures permitted each person to record all his or her family members. The actual number of Chechen residents is less than 650,000 and perhaps closer to 550,000. Hence, the current electorate is probably between 250,000 and 350,000. The voter lists, however, included 540,000 people.

Nevertheless, it is likely that most Chechens are, in fact, prepared to support the new constitution. After more than a decade of turmoil, brutal warfare, and abuse by the Russian military, most Chechens are exhausted. They are prepared to accept virtually any authority that is able to provide protection from arbitrary violence and a political structure that brings stabilization to their daily lives. The success of the new constitution depends largely upon the growing desperation of the Chechen majority.

There are grounds for cautious optimism that current Russian policies may consolidate support for the new constitution. These policies involve a decrease in Russian military violence against civilians, including a transition away from *zachistki*, or "cleansing" operations, and a growing reliance upon local officials. The latter policy is sometimes described as the "Chechenization" of the conflict. While these two policies are making some progress, they show signs of triggering further intra-Chechen conflict, and may result in a net increase of violent acts.

Beginning in the autumn of 2002, there was a decrease in forceful actions committed by Russian federal authorities in Chechnya. Responsibility for counter-insurgency and police operations was gradually transferred to the Kadyrov administration. Even as the number of violent federal actions was decreasing in the run-up to the referendum, however, there was a marked increase in the overall number of violent acts committed in the republic. On one side, this was due to efforts by Chechen militants to derail Moscow's plans. In addition, attempts by the federal center to set up reliable partners among the local political elite provoked an uncompromising intra-Chechen political struggle in which the rival sides have frequently resorted to violence. This phenomenon of increased acts of violence as peace appears to draw closer can also be seen in peace making processes elsewhere--for example, in contemporary Palestine or Ireland in the 1920s--where movement toward peace triggers intensified violence within one or both of the warring camps.

In Chechnya, the process of empowering local authorities involves: (1) The transfer of power to the loyal local leader, Akhmad Kadyrov, and the formation of legitimate power structures in the Republic; (2) sequential transfer of punitive and policing functions from the federal level to the local police and special services; and (3) disbursement of the housing reconstruction funds, provision of tangible material assistance to the population, and a speedier reconstruction of the economic and social infrastructure of the Chechen Republic. All three of these strategies are creating new structures of power in the Republic, establishing new patterns of influence and economic distribution, and thereby creating and consolidating new political elites. In particular, it appears that the power-sharing agreement between Chechnya and the federal center will place all of Chechnya's resources under Grozny's control. This, in turn, will intensify

competition among those who hold various forms of power in the Republic, as well as among those who aspire to join them. In this struggle, Moscow evidently has decided to place all of its chips on Kadyrov, and is shaping federal policy accordingly.

This strategy carries great risks when one remembers the traditional structure of Chechen society. In Chechnya, kinship ties are organized within a seven-level hierarchy that begins with the nuclear family, or *dozal*, runs through the extended family, or *dja*, and culminates with the *k'am*, consisting of the entire Chechen people. However, the predominant Chechen social organization is the *teip*, or clan, characterized by its remarkable cohesion and group loyalty. There are some 150 *teips*, whose strong ties extend far back into time and are not diminished by spatial separation. No matter how far apart they may reside, Chechens maintain their *teip* connections. While inter-tribal village relations may also play an important role, the *teip* remains the preeminent social structure.

Chechen society is fragmented among these more than 150 *teips*, and Kadyrov's Benoy *teip* is traditionally among the more powerful clans. But a concentration of power in any single *teip* is likely to provoke tension or conflict among the many equally powerful, if not more powerful, clans that are traditionally viewed as legitimate repositories of power. The administration of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov encountered a similar problem, particularly from 1998-1999, when growing problems with members of other *teips* led him increasingly to rely upon members of his own clan. This practice triggered a downward spiral of de-legitimization.

Whether or not he wishes to do so, Kadyrov may gradually have to rely upon members of the Benoy *teip*, thereby intensifying opposition from other clans. Moreover, the fact that Kadyrov is supported by Moscow may provoke a consolidated opposition consisting of the leaders of many other *teips*. Yet it must be kept in mind that this result would likely have no more to do with antipathy toward Moscow than with entrenched rivalries and the general disdain for any concentration of power that is traditional in Chechen society.

For example, Bislan Gantemirov is from the Chonkhoi *teip*, the Zavgaevs are from the Gendergnoi *teip*, and Avturkhanov was from the Nozhaloi. The Yamadaevs are Benoy as is Malik Saidulaev, Nuzhden Daaev, Musa Doshukaev, Rezvan Lorsanov, and Shamil Basaev. Aslan Maskhadov, from the Aleroy *teip*, declared two years ago that the entire Benoy *teip* was treacherous. The Benoy *teip*, like the others, is divided into multiple sub-clans, or *gars*.

Faced with the traditional fragmentation of Chechen society, it appears unlikely, at least in the short run, that Chechen society will come to terms with the institution of individual executive power prescribed by the new constitution. Ominously, the newly-adopted Constitution of the Chechen Republic, which is supposed to provide for societal accord, may in fact lay the foundation for future intra-Chechen conflict. One can envisage two possible futures. Under the negative scenario, Chechen militants refuse to be sidelined, but lacking genuine military capacity, and with decreasing popular support, they resort to further terrorist acts. The forthcoming elections of the president and Chechen parliament are likely, under this same scenario, to trigger an upsurge of violence, such as assassination attempts against presidential candidates. Neither the Russian federal forces nor militant factions are likely to remain aloof from such developments. An outburst of violence and disorder may trigger additional deployments of the federal military in Chechnya and renewed acts of violence against Chechen civilians. This, in turn, may undermine the current political process, and revive support for Chechen militants in a downward spiral of violence and instability.

Under the positive scenario, Akhmad Kadyrov may succeed in reaching firm power-sharing agreements with the most authoritative leaders of the traditional sub-groups in Chechen society, delimiting their spheres of influence, prior to his election as president. Some militants will be successfully amnestied, while certain of their leaders may emigrate with guarantees of non-persecution. Some current opposition leaders might even be persuaded and allowed to participate in the elections. Thereafter, Moscow could end its counter-insurgency operations in Chechnya, and fulfill its promises of reconstruction, disbursing funds to revive the economy while striving both to limit corruption and sustain the independence of the local authorities. Realization of these measures could help to cement the political loyalty of the Chechen Republic as an autonomous subject of the Russian Federation.

Unfortunately, elements of the negative scenario appear somewhat more probable than elements of the positive scenario, as illustrated by the dramatic increase in terrorist attacks over the last nine months. October 2002 saw the Dubrovka hostage crisis, followed by the December 27 truck bomb outside Kadyrov's headquarters in Grozny, which killed forty-six people. On May 12 of this year, suicide bombers blew up a Chechen government compound in Znamenskoye, killing fifty-nine, and shortly afterwards,

seventeen more died when two women attempted to assassinate Kadyrov at a religious gathering near Grozny. On June 5 a female suicide bomber killed 17 on a bus carrying Russian military personnel in North Ossetia, and two more suicide bombers killed fourteen at a rock concert near Moscow on July 12. But although the recent surge of terrorist attacks would appear to anticipate the negative trend, the most likely outcome is some combination of these two scenarios. It is within the power of leaders in Moscow, and among various groups in Chechnya, to shift the course of events into the more positive track. Yet even in the best possible case, the level of conflict and violence in Chechnya will remain high for the foreseeable future, and will likely include an increase in intra-Chechen conflict.

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