

Chechnya: Human Rights Issues

By Latife Bulur

Chechnya is a country plagued by terrorism and human rights abuses. A primary source of these issues is the unsettled situation between local insurgents and the Russian military. This conflict, increasing in magnitude over time, makes it incredibly difficult to negotiate the terms of Chechnya's independence perpetuating the crisis. Rising violence fuels Russia's frustration in addressing the conflict with Chechen groups. Russia has and continues to employ various tactics to minimize the violence, but such tactics have all so far been unsuccessful.

There is also a debate in Chechnya regarding whether or not these terrorist attacks are motivated by Islam. Some scholars argue that Islamic fundamentalists are using Chechnya as a vehicle for the pursuit of their own goals, while others say that Islam itself is not conflict-generating. Nevertheless, while the conflict continues, so does the violation of Chechen human rights. Many attempts are being made to determine solutions for a more positive future, but perhaps much can be determined by first examining Chechnya's history of conflict with Russia.

Chechnya and Russia's difficult co-existence intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There are various explanations for this tumultuous relationship. One view is that Chechnya took advantage of a weakened Russian state during the fall of the USSR. During the Cold War, the USSR was consumed with national problems, and turned a blind eye to the Northern Caucasus. After dissolution, Chechnya incited a movement to gain independence from the Russian Federation. Many scholars argue that this resistance movement against Russia is the source of tension between Chechnya and Russia today.

Another view is that Russia had been stifling the people of Chechnya, creating the need for a resistance movement. During Joseph Stalin's reign, many Chechen civilians evacuated the Northern Caucasus out of fear of oppression and death. Some scholars argue that this initial mistreatment and the lack of human rights advocacy inspired the Chechen insurgents to begin a resistance movement.

With tensions and conflicts between Russia and Chechnya on the rise, violence continues to erupt between them. Chechen insurgents continue to attack Russian civilians, claiming that their attacks are motivated by mistreatment and human rights violations perpetuated by the Russian military. In retribution for Chechen attacks, the Russian military focuses its efforts in attacking sections of Chechnya, in attempts to quell the insurgents. The quarrels persist cyclically from insurgent attacks to vicious retaliation.

Various tactics of warfare are employed by Russian forces, consisting not only in military means, but also through other influential methods such as media slandering. While attacks on the media have succeeded in tarnishing Chechnya's legitimacy across the globe, the military tactics have done little to reduce the terrorist attacks.

As the attacks continue, large numbers of Chechen civilians are victimized in multiple ways. Many civilians have become refugees and have fled to other countries. Those who stay in the Northern Caucasus are in danger of losing their lives. As demonstrated by the large discrepancies in reports on the number of displaced and dead, the population is under constant threat of human rights infringement.

A tainted image with a reputation for terrorism leaves the Chechnya region without much hope for an immediate resolution. However, many human rights groups and organizations have become involved in Chechnya's cause. Before any refugees are encouraged to come home, something must be done to resolve the tension between the Chechen insurgents and the Russian military. Some solutions involve offering economic and financial support to Russia, which will in turn support Chechnya, while another solution would have Russia rein in its military and provide a safe haven for Chechen civilians. Many recommendations continue to be made—perhaps one of them will lead to a resolution to the endless Russo-Chechen conflict in the future.



History of Russo-Chechen Conflict

Cherasov, A. 2005. "Chechnya: 10 Years of Armed Conflict." *Helsinki Monitor* 16 (2): 143-149.

Annotation: The author compares the past conflict and civilian casualties with the current situation involving the Russo-Chechen conflict. He addresses the negotiations between Chechnya and Russia, emphasizing how they have demonstrated no progress. He also reveals his opinion on the current conflict by mentioning how Russia views activities in Chechnya simply as counter-terrorist operations. The author suggests greater involvement of the international community and organizations in preventing constant human rights violations and securing peace.

Cimbala, S. J. 2007. *Russia and Postmodern Deterrence: Military Power and its Challenges for Security*. Washington: Potomac Books, Inc.

Annotation: This book mainly focuses on the evolution of Russia's military power. The author explores how past experiences have shaped Russia's behavior in current events. The last topic that is mentioned in this book is Chechnya. Points made by the author earlier in the book tie in nicely with the issue of Chechnya. One of the more interesting connections the author makes is between Russia's radical change in military ideology and how it is reflected in the conflict in Chechnya.

Hammerli, A., R. Gattiker, *et al.* 2006. "Conflict and Cooperation in an Actors' Network of Chechnya Based on Event Data." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50 (2): 159-175.

Annotation: The main point of this piece is to develop a network of people involved in the Russo-Chechen conflict. Specifically, the authors want to determine who are the actors contributing to the conflict, the ties between various involved actors, and most importantly, the intensity of involvement between each group. These authors take a scientific and thus methodologically rigorous approach to the conflict. They suggest that in order to resolve the

conflict on the Russian or Chechen side, all the actors involved must make a collective effort to achieve peace.

Herspring, D. R. 2005. Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Annotation: The author of this book gives an account of various past problems and current situations in Russia. In one of the chapters, the author explores the history of Russia and its problem with Chechnya. He begins by delving into the first Russo-Chechen conflict, saying how the Chechens took advantage of a weakened Soviet Union by claiming their right for independence from the Russian Federation. He then goes on to explain more of the history of Russia in regards to Chechnya, eventually arriving at Putin's desire to handle the Chechnya situation without external interference.

Jaimoukha, A. 2005. The Chechens. London: Routledge Curzon.

Annotation: This book is a handbook of sorts, detailing an entire history of Chechnya, from ancient times to its current political situation. The author also provides an easy-reading section on Chechen culture and social structure. The section detailing the current situation sides heavily with Chechnya in regards to the Russo-Chechen conflict. The author mentions a few incidents where Russia failed to address violent insurgencies and human rights violations properly. However, the book provides a concise and quick timeline of events during the conflict.

Rasizade, A. 2005. "Chechnya: the Achilles Heel of Russia - Part One." *Contemporary Review*. 286: 193-197.

Annotation: This piece is the first of three written by this author. In this initial piece, the author delves into the complicated background of the conflict between Russia and Chechnya. The author describes the death of the Chechen resistance leader, Aslan Maskhadov, and how this pivotal moment in time quite possibly acted as a catalyst to the Russo-Chechen conflict. He also explores how Chechnya has received ill-favored media attention after certain terrorist acts.

Sakwa, R. 2005. Chechnya: from Past to Future. London: Anthem Press.

Annotation: The author of this volume attempts to analyze the perspectives of the U.S., Russia, and Chechnya on the Russo-Chechen conflict. In this piece, the author details the conflict, outlining what he believes were the issues contributing to its inception, which include fear of international terrorism, increasing human rights violations, and overall poor conduct in warfare. The author concludes by discussing how Chechnya's fate remains unclear, as resolution of this conflict and achievement of Chechen independence appear distant and, at times, bleak.

Terrorism

Dunlop, J. B. and R. Menon. 2006. "Chaos in the North Caucasus and Russia's Future." *Survival* 48 (2): 97-114.

Annotation: In this piece, the authors address how Russia is losing its power over Chechnya, and has no control over the situation in the Chechen area. They mention that the Chechen insurgency and terrorist activity will most likely spread throughout the region. Without proper application of force from Russia, the conflicts will affect the rest of the region and the region will continue to produce extremists who see violence as their only resource. The piece provides no solution, stating that considering Russia's problematic military tactics and intelligence in the past, the Russo-Chechen conflict will not end.

Fatullayev, A., Y. Vershov, et. al. 2005. "Is N. Caucasus Losing Battle with Muslim Extremists?" *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 57 (5): 5-7.

Annotation: These authors explain how terrorist groups are resisting many counter-terrorist measures initiated by Russia. There are increased occurrences of successful attacks by Muslim extremists. The authors give examples of measures that have been taken, and while some have been more forceful than others, they ultimately have led to failure. The authors conclude by stating that new counter-terror methods need to be established soon, since terrorist activity in the Chechen region seems to be increasing.

Kozenko, A. 2006. "Residents of Chechnya Are Left with the Right to Fear." *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 58 (32): 9-10.

Annotation: This article is an overview of a publication released regarding human rights issues and the citizens of Chechnya over the course of one year. The author of this piece takes information from the article and states that the publication proves the lack of stability and democracy, as well as demonstrating how the Chechen people are in fear of the uncertainty of their government and of attacks by insurgents.

Kramer, M. 2005. "The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia's War in Chechnya." *International Security* 29 (3): 5-63.

Annotation: This article is an assessment of Russia's military tactics in the Russo-Chechen conflict. It describes a brief history of the conflict, followed by the various tactics used by the Chechen guerillas and the response of the Russian military. The author also takes a noted interest in exploring the Russian military failure. He asks why Russian troops, who outnumber the Chechen rebels by more than 50:1, are unable to eliminate the armed resistance. Lastly, the article sums up a total evaluation of Russia and its military efforts in Chechnya.

Meier, A. 2005. Chechnya: to the Heart of a Conflict. New York: Norton.

Annotation: This book is a portrait of Chechnya that takes a more personal approach. The author recounts his experiences from Chechnya, and discusses how the Russo-Chechen conflict impacts the civilians still living there. He also mentions how the death of many has wounded the Chechen people, and that the youth are doomed to take up a war begun by their elders. He includes quotes and phrases used by Chechen civilians, providing the reader with a realistic but also one-sided view of the Russo-Chechen conflict.

Moore, C. 2005. "Post-Modern War, Genocide and Chechnya: The Case of Female Suicide Attacks as a Problem for International Law and International Relations Theory." *International Criminal Law Review* 5 (3): 485-500.

Annotation: The author of this piece explores the ongoing violence in Chechnya, giving a more detailed account of the human rights violations. She argues that there is insufficient sympathy on the part of the public, on behalf of Chechnya's case, likely because there has not been much research done in Chechnya to understand the violence and its roots. She also thinks that this omission is largely due to Chechnya's tainted image, and because of post-September 11th international relations. While she makes strong cases about how Chechnya has been demonized by the media, she does not actually present a feasible and clear solution.

Mukhina, I. 2005. "Islamic Terrorism and the Question of National Liberation, or Problems of Contemporary Chechen Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28: 515-532.

Annotation: The purpose of this article is to prove that Chechen insurgents are not fighting a religious war for independence, despite what scholars in the past have found. The struggle in Chechnya for independence, the author argues, may have nothing to do with religious freedom. The author explains how the rhetoric used by the insurgents is portraying a different image, and that insurgents are easily being labeled as terrorists.

Nivat, A. 2005. "The Black Widows: Chechen Women Join the Fight for Independence – and Allah." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28: 413-419.

Annotation: This author focuses on the role that women have played in various terrorist activities, including the hostage situation in the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow, and at the elementary school in Beslan. She examines the participation of the women who engaged in the hostage taking. The author also explores how women may be engaging in terrorist activities to join the Chechen men, either out of sympathy, or out of a desire for alliance.

Russell, J. 2005. "Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks and Thieves: Russian Demonisation of the Chechens Before and Since 9/11." *Third World Quarterly* 26 (1): 101-116.

Annotation: The author claims that any Chechens who oppose Russian President Vladimir Putin are immediately labeled as bandits and terrorists. After the Nord-Ost theater attack and Beslan school siege, Russia's tasks of demonizing Chechnya are effortless. All the mudslinging done toward Chechnya only serves to justify Russia's war against Chechnya, and causes further difficulties in achieving peace in the Caucasus region. This article provides an interesting view on the conflict, but does not address Russia's perspective on the conflict at all.

Spencer, R. 2005. "Chechens Declare Jihad." *Human Events* 61 (10): 12.

Annotation: This article focuses on terrorist activity and its Islamic ties. The author explores possible reasoning behind the incessant attacks, and examines specifically the Beslan school massacre. The article explains how the Islamic forces engaged in the attack mainly due to the declaration of jihad against Russian forces. While the article describes yet another aspect of the conflict, the author fails to provide any other possible motivation or explanation behind the terrorist activity.

Wilhelmsen, J. 2005. "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: the Islamisation of the Chechen Separatist Movement." *Europe-Asia Studies* 57 (1): 35-59.

Annotation: This article admits to the radicalization and "Islamisation" of parts of the resistance movement in Chechnya. However, this author argues against the idea that Islam is the key contributing factor. The author explores the notion that Islam did play a role in the ideology of some of the separatists. She also analyzes how the moderates lost their ground to the Islamic insurgents and radical separatists.

The Future of Chechnya

Forsberg, T. and G. P. Herd. 2005. "The EU, Human Rights, and the Russo-Chechen Conflict." *Political Science Quarterly* 120 (3): 455-478.

Annotation: The authors of this article explore the E.U.'s involvement and interest in the Russo-Chechen conflict. The E.U. hopes to approach a solution to this conflict by supporting Russia and by encouraging them to implement positive policies to end the conflicts in the Chechen region. The authors also mention how past E.U. engagement has not been very successful. If the E.U. continues its involvement in the Russo-Chechen conflict, a balance needs to be established so that Russia can improve on many fronts, not just that involving Chechnya.

Mendelson, S. E. 2006. "Human Rights Abuse in the North Caucasus." *Problems of Post-Communism* 53 (6): 3-15.

Annotation: The author of this piece states that Chechnya is now a site of one of the worst human rights records in Europe, and that response to this growing case is lacking. The purpose of the article is to educate the reader about Chechnya's lack of external involvement regarding Russia and international organizations. Russia is acting as a superpower, using its force to install peace, while international groups serve little or no purpose in aiding human rights advocacy in Chechnya. The author makes very specific recommendations in increasing the effectiveness of human rights protection in the region.

Rasizade, A. 2005. "Chechnya: the Achilles Heel of Russia - Part Three." *Contemporary Review*. 327-332.

Annotation: This piece completes this author's three-piece series about the Russo-Chechen conflict. He continues the topic by mentioning how the death of the Chechen resistance leader, Aslan Mashkhadov, opens the window for future radical leaders to enter, and for more civil unrest to occur in the region. The author discusses how Russia has become a unifying power in the region, and how with that power, Russia must learn to grow more socially and economically responsible in interactions with neighbors in the region.

Russell, J. 2006. "Obstacles to Peace in Chechnya: What Scope for International Involvement?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 58 (6): 941-964.

Annotation: This article seeks to explore how international groups can get involved in efforts to end the violence in Chechnya. The author makes distinctions between peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding, stressing that subtle differences in all three need to be carefully applied in the Chechen region. Also, he states that not only Chechen civilians, but also Russian civilians are victims of this conflict. A clear system of peacebuilding needs to be established, or Chechnya and Russia will continue to find themselves in an impasse.

Sunderland, W. 2006. "The Caucasian Tangle." *Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7 (1): 111-122.

Annotation: This review provides a glimpse into a few books that address the Russo-Chechen conflict. One view discussed is how Chechens are sometimes viewed as abnormal, and how Russia and the Northern Caucasus are drifting farther apart. He criticizes a couple of the books for presenting the Russian point of view too exclusively, only serving to taint Chechnya's image further. He blames the media for broadcasting one-sided views, and suggests that both sides of the conflict should be portrayed more fairly so that the resolution process comes much more easily.

Vendina, O. I., V. S. Belozerov, *et al.* 2007. "The Wars in Chechnya and Their Effects on Neighboring Regions." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 48 (2): 178-201.

Annotation: The authors of this piece analyze how the conflict in Chechnya is having an impact on the region. The main approach to this topic is an economic one, showing that the conflict not only impacts human rights advocacy, but the financial security of the state, as well. While not providing an immediate solution to the problem, the authors consider whether or not Chechnya and the neighboring regions will once again establish a working relationship with Russia.