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978-0-521-63184-6 - Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict

John B. Dunlop

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## Russia Confronts Chechnya

*Roots of a Separatist Conflict*

In this book John Dunlop provides an understanding of the background to the Russian invasion of Chechnya in December 1994, tracing events from 4,000 BC to the time of the invasion. The historic encounter between Chechens and Russians, first during pre-Petrine and then with imperial Russia, is carefully examined. The genocide and oppression endured by the Chechens under the communists are discussed in detail. The convulsive “Chechen Revolution” of 1991, which brought General Dzhokhar Dudaev to power, is described, as are developments within Chechnya during 1992–94. The author traces the negotiation process between the Russian Federation and secessionist Chechnya, elucidating the reasons for the breakdown of the quest for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

JOHN B. DUNLOP is Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, and a member of the Steering Committee of the Center for Russian and East European Studies at Stanford University. He is the author, editor, or co-editor of eight books, including *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Union* (1993).

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To Maria, John, Olga, Catherine, Bea,  
Jan-Nicholas, and Peter

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[More information](#)

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John B. Dunlop

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

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<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Map 1 The Caucasus region</i>	xii
<i>Map 2 Chechnya and Ingushetiya</i>	xiv
1 The Chechens' encounter with Russia	1
2 Soviet genocide	40
3 The eruption of the "Chechen Revolution"	85
4 Dudaev in power, 1992–1994	124
5 Russia confronts secessionist Chechnya, 1992–1994	164
Conclusion	210
<i>Index</i>	224

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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[More information](#)

## Preface

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There is no more important question in Russia than that of Chechnya.  
It is an open bleeding wound. Lt. General Aleksandr Lebed'<sup>1</sup>

The Russian military invasion of Chechnya, which was launched on 11 December 1994, triggered a harsh, 21-month-long war which constituted, at the least, a serious setback for nascent Russian democracy. How did this bloody war come about, and could it have been avoided? And how did Russia come to find itself facing such a motivated and implacable opponent? Finding answers to these questions will be a major aim of this book.

*Russia Confronts Chechnya* – the first of two projected volumes on the war – traces events from 4,000 BC, when the ancestors of present-day Chechens began to emerge in the North Caucasus region, to the end of November 1994, when the Russian Federation, in the person of its president and his top advisers, set an irrevocable course toward war. Our focus in this study will, rather narrowly, be upon Russian–Chechen relations; the larger geopolitical context of the encounter of these two peoples will be touched upon only briefly.

My intention in this study, which is an essay in contemporary history, has been to cast as wide a net as possible in order to bring together the available source material concerning the decisions and the events which led up to the war. I would have liked to have had greater access to pro-secessionist Chechen sources, but they were not available; interviews with General Dudaev and other Chechen nationalist leaders appearing in the Russian press have been utilized, as have two detailed volumes of memoirs by Dudaev's acting vice president, Zelimkhan (Zelimkha) Yandarbiev. The present book necessarily represents a pioneering effort; I hope that, by taking a first cut through the available source material, I will attract other specialists into looking more closely at the multifaceted causes of a bloody and unnecessary war.

<sup>1</sup> Press conference given by Aleksandr Lebed' in August 1996, in Discussion List about Chechnya, Chechnya@Plearn.EDU.PL, 13 August 1996.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## x Preface

The book's opening chapter treats the fate of the Chechens over the course of their historic encounter first with pre-Petrine and then with imperial Russia, focusing especially upon the hundred years of contact extending from 1817 through 1917. Chapter 2 examines the oppression and genocide endured by the Chechens during the communist period up until the year 1989, in the middle of the Gorbachev years. Over the course of the lengthy Soviet era, the Chechens, as we shall see, lost a quarter of their population and suffered the shock of deportation as a people to remote regions of Central Asia.

Chapter 3 looks at the convulsive "Chechen Revolution" of 1991, which brought the obdurate and intrepid General Dzhokhar Dudaev to power in Chechnya. Chapter 4, entitled "Dudaev in power," scrutinizes largely internal events taking place in separatist Chechnya during the years 1992–94. Dudaev's failed attempt to create a new "Mountain Republic" uniting the Muslim peoples of the North Caucasus is also analyzed. The emergence of a significant political opposition within Chechnya, increasingly aided and abetted by the Russian Federation, is treated as well.

The closing fifth chapter takes a close look at the negotiation process between the Russian Federation and secessionist Chechnya during the years 1992–94. I attempt to discern the key reasons for the breakdown in the quest for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The roles of minister for nationalities and regional policy, Sergei Shakhrai, and of President Boris Yeltsin with respect to the collapse of the negotiations are examined both in this chapter and in the ensuing conclusion section. The conclusion attempts to identify salient lessons to be learned both from the breakdown of the negotiation process and from the outbreak of war in December 1994.

From chapter 3 onwards, I cite and reflect upon the opinions of three leading Moscow-based specialists on ethnic affairs: Valerii Tishkov, director of the Institute of Ethnology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and, briefly, in 1992, chairman of the Russian State Committee on Nationality Affairs (Goskomnats); Sergei Arutyunov (Arutiunov), professor of anthropology and director of the Caucasus Department at the same Institute of Ethnology; and Emil' Pain (Payin), a member of the Russian Presidential Council, who, in September 1996, was appointed Yeltsin's adviser on Chechnya. (A number of Pain's publications were coauthored with another specialist, Arkadii Popov.)

The views of these three scholars – arguably the best-informed specialists in Russia working on the thorny and intractable issue of Russian–Chechen relations – are often cited in this book; in instances where they disagree among themselves, I seek to determine which of them has the

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John B. Dunlop

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

more persuasive arguments. Their criticisms of the views and actions of Nationalities Minister Shakhrai are also a subject of analysis. (It should be noted that while Professor Arutyunov is a “pure scholar,” Tishkov and Pain – and especially the latter – represent what might be called “scholar-politicians.”)

I am indebted to two Bay Area colleagues who cheerfully undertook to read the manuscript in draft form. Norman Naimark, chairman of the Stanford University History Department, took time away from his immensely busy schedule to read through a draft of chapters 1 and 2, and then offered trenchant and helpful comments. Edward (“Ned”) Walker, director of the Berkeley Program in Soviet/Post-Soviet Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, generously read through a draft of chapters 3 through 5, as well as the conclusion, and made a number of pertinent suggestions.

I am also grateful to Fiona Hill, associate director of the Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, and to a second reader who wished to remain anonymous, both of whom evaluated the manuscript for Cambridge University Press. It should be underlined that none of the four specialists mentioned should be held responsible for any failings remaining in the text.

Warm thanks are also due to Lee Schwartz, chief of the Global Issues Division, Office of the Geographer and Global Issues, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, US Department of State, for granting me and the Press permission to use two excellent maps produced by the Office of the Geographer and Global Issues: “The Caucasus Region,” 2762 6-94 STATE (INR/GGI); and “Chechnya and Ingushetia,” 3201 5-95 STATE (INR/GGI).

A debt of thanks is also owed to a number of colleagues at the Hoover Institution. First, I would like most warmly to single out and to thank John Raisian, director of the institution, for his unflagging support and for his continued encouragement of this project. I would also like to acknowledge the unremitting assistance which I have received from my secretary and de facto research assistant, Joyce Cerwin, whose fluent knowledge of Russian and administrative skills were important factors enabling me to finish this study on schedule. I should like, further, to express my gratitude to the talented staff of the Hoover Institution Library for frequent assistance; special thanks, in this regard, are due to Joseph Dwyer, Molly Molloy, and Edward Jajko.

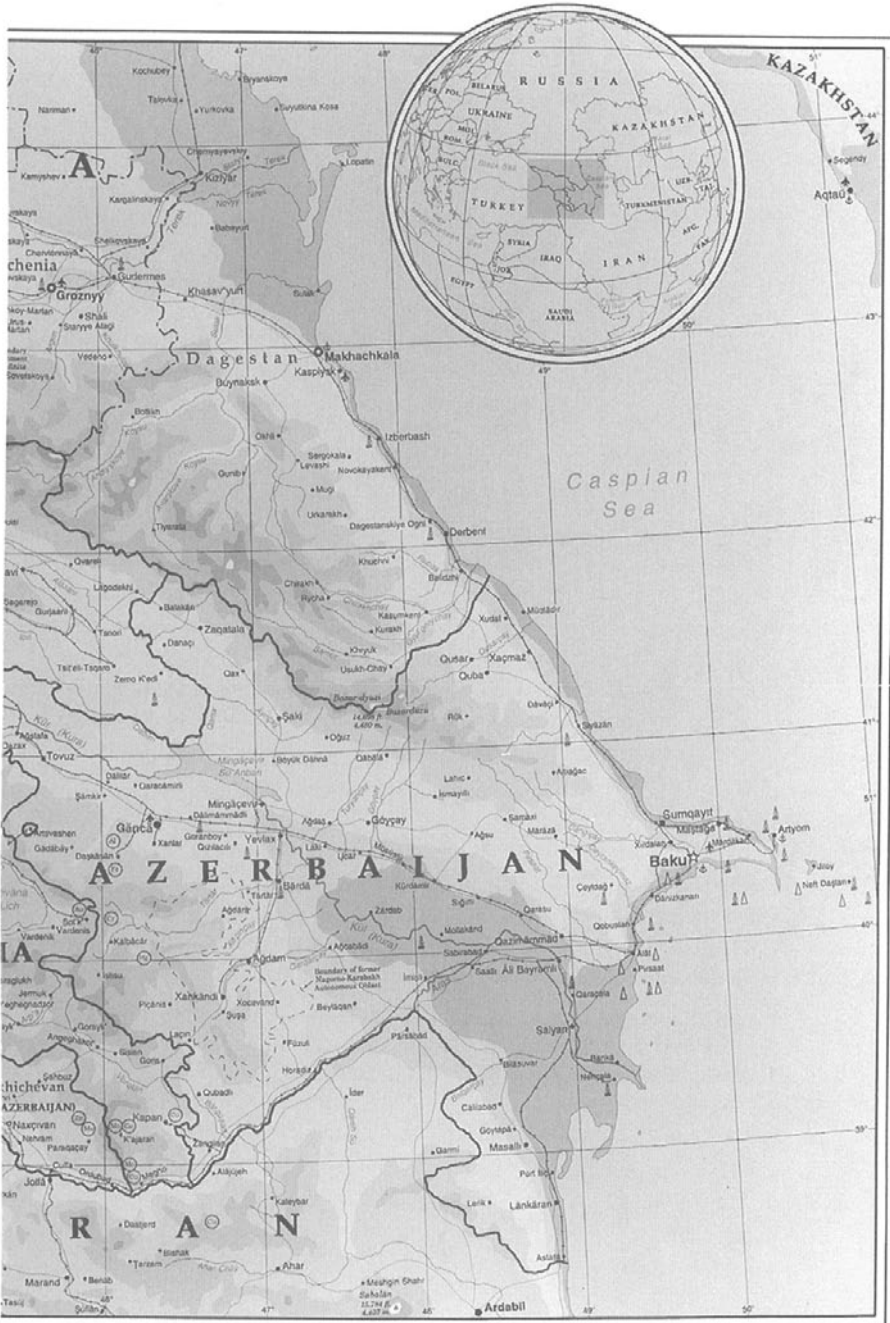
This book is dedicated to my children and to their spouses. A number of them have had the temerity to embark upon teaching and academic careers. May they all flourish, “rightly dividing the word of truth.”

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Map 1 The Caucasus region (from 2762 6-94 STATE [INR/GGI] Bureau of Intelligence and Research,

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Map 2 Chechnya and Ingushetiya (3201 5-95 STATE [INR/GGI])  
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