

Underlying Causes of Terrorism in Russia

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ABSTRACT

Disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991 has come up with several challenges for the Russian authorities. Terrorism being one among them, which proved to be a serious threat for the Russian authorities. There were several reasons responsible for the growth of terrorism in Russia. It was primarily due to the social, cultural and legal transformation in Russia, and also at many instances terrorism and other forms of violence were used by different groups to accomplish their demands. This chapter aims to analyze the factors responsible for the growth of terrorism in Russia. It discusses how religious extremism, ethnic conflict, Ethno-Nationalist Communal Terrorism, Xenophobia and Racist Discrimination contributes in escalating the problem of terrorism in Russia. This article also discusses the problem of insurgency and terrorism in the North Caucasus region of Russia and how it has effected Russia.

Keywords: *Ethnic-conflict, Extremism, Islamic radicalization, Russia, Religious extremism, Xenophobia, Terrorism*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russia faced social, political and economic turmoil. As per Robert Jackson, the year 1991 was for the Soviet Union - 'The Grotian Moment' - the reshuffling of the title of sovereignty (Sakwa 2005:227). The disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in the outbreak of the ethnic cleavages in the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic Russia. This assertion of ethnicity took violent forms especially in the border areas which was a serious threat to the Russian state. Terrorist threat in Russia is a major challenge to its national security and integrity. These challenges are the result of the rise of forces of religious extremism, ethnic conflicts, aggressive nationalism and separatism. President Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first post-Soviet era President, tried to address the situation by allowing greater autonomy to Autonomous Republics demanding for independence from the Russian Federation, in lieu of the commitment to the Russian unity. In the North Caucasus region, Chechnya was one such Republic which declared itself independent from the Russian Federation in 1991. To subdue the violent ethnic assertion in the region, military action was adopted by the Russian Federal government. As a result, the First Chechen war broke out in 1994 and ended in 1996 and second Chechen war in 1999.

This study attempts to analyze the problem of terrorism in Russia. This study focuses on the main causes of terrorism in Russia. The study analyzes different factors responsible for the rise of terrorism in the region.

II. ETHNIC CONFLICT AND TERRORISM

Some scholars and thinkers believe that the political exclusion of Ethnic Minority groups to be a major cause of civil war, rebellions and mass political violence. Gurr (2000) gives a theoretical framework for understanding the causes of Ethno Political Conflict. He has developed an Ethnic Terrorism Model which helps to understand the causes of Ethnic Terror and also helps to examine the relationship between Government Policies and Ethnic Group behaviours. After the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991, the political demands of Ethno Nationalists like the Latvians, Ukrainians, and Armenians were met. At the same time, Ethnic groups began to make political demands in the new republics like Abkhazians in Georgia and Chechnya demanded independence. Several ethnic groups faced economic and political discriminations and human rights violation. "Ethnic groups that are treated unequally resent and repeatedly attempt to improve their condition. In almost all cases, they began with peaceful political protests that sometimes gave way to rioting and terrorism, and in at least 80 cases, escalated into Guerrilla and Civil Wars."

Imam says that the basic cause of terrorism is the dichotomy between the Chechen demand of independence and the Russian anathema to it lest it opens the floodgates of numerous secessionist movements in other parts of Russia. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia was confronted with unprecedented social, economic and political chaos; it also created the ethnic cleavage in the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Russian state. With the disintegration of Soviet Union, Chechnya proclaimed its independence from Russia. Yeltsin considered it as a threat to Russia's territorial integrity which would open the gate of successions for other republics in the Russian Federation.[1] Moreover, the strategic location of Chechnya with its proximity to the energy rich Caspian region was also one of the factors in Yeltsin's consideration. So he ordered the invasion of Chechnya in November 1994 (Renfrew 2011). This war came to an end in 1996 with Khasavyurt Agreement and Chechnya became a de-facto independent state with Aslan Maskhadov as its president.

Some authors and political thinkers like Hughes place Chechen nationalism within the wider movement for national self-determination that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hughes points out that even before the outbreak of war, Dudayev - the president of Chechnya (1991-1996) made it clear that his policy was to use 'terrorist methods' if Russia attacked Chechnya and even raising the possibility of attacks on Russian nuclear power station.[2] The first clear terrorist incident was the hijacking of Russian domestic airlines in November 1991 by Shamil Basaev. After his return to Grozny, he was awarded a rank of colonel in charge of a regiment of special-forces in the newly formed Chechen army by Dudayev (Meyer 2007). Further, a bus was hijacked by armed Chechens in Lermontovin StavropolskiiKrai in the same month.

With the failure of Khasavyut truce, the second Chechen war broke out in October 1999. In the opinion of Hughes - "the renewal of the conflict is attributed by Russia to the failure of the agreement of 1996-2006 and breakdown of the order under President Aslan Maskhadov. But in reality, it was the product of the 'Dual Radicalization' that enveloped politics in Russia and Chechnya. The radicalization in Russia was the direct product of the experience and practice of mindless violence in the first war and the emergence of a new Meta cleavage within the Chechen national movement along a religious fault line. The radicalisation was endogenous to the extent that the experience of the military conflict led to the instrumentalization of Islam as a resource for

the mobilization and for inspiring struggle."An ultra-elite struggle for power within the Chechen national movement was already apparent by the time Russian forces withdrew by the end of 1996. The two leading commanders Basyev and Raduyev operated independently of president Maskhadov control who did not confront them for the fear of provoking a civil war. Under Maskhadov, chaos and lawlessness increased in Chechnya. Sakwa says that the invasion of Dagestan by the Islamic International Brigade in order to liberate the North Caucasus from the Russian Infidels and the series of apartment bombing in the cities of Moscow, Volgograd, and Buinaksk in September 1999 left 293 dead and 651 injured. These two incidents provided Russia with the *Caucus Belli* for a renewed military intervention in Chechnya and hence, Second Chechen War was launched by the Russian Federation in August 1999. President Putin justified it as a 'Counter Terrorist Operation' which was necessary as it threatened the wider destabilization in the North Caucasus.[3]

Since the outbreak of the second Chechnya war, there has been a gradual shift to the tactical use of terrorism by the resistance fighters. This trend intensified with the increasing Islamisation of the whole resistance movement. Through the combination of targeted assassination, suicide bombings, hostage taking, bomb blast and other violent acts, the Chechen guerrillas have sought to destabilize and demoralize the government. One of the features of terrorism in Russia is the use of suicide bombers especially female suicide bombers dubbed by the Russian media as 'Black Widows'.

III. INSURGENCY AND TERRORISM

The North Caucasus region is suffering from the problem of insurgency. The violence has mostly been concentrated in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Kabardino-Balkaria, and an occasional confrontation occurs in the surrounding regions like North Ossetia-Alania, Karachay-Cherkessia, Volgograd Oblast and Stavropol Krai. Chechnya is a semi-autonomous republic in the Northern Caucasus province of Russia. Its populace is largely Muslim, a minority within the Russian Federation. It has been ruled by Moscow for the past two centuries. Since 1991, Chechnya has made several attempts to gain independence from the Russian Federation.[4] Schaefer defines the war in Chechnya as an insurgency and he has associated Insurgency with a revolutionary war.[5]

With the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991, Chechnya declared its independence from Russia. President Boris Yeltsin considered it as a threat to Russia's territorial integrity which would open the doors of secession of other republics in the Russian Federation. One of the reasons for Russian invasion in Chechnya was President Yeltsin's hope to recover Chechnya's valuable oil resources. The strategic location of Chechnya with its proximity to the energy rich Caspian region was an important factor in Yeltsin's deliberation. So he ordered the invasion of Chechnya in December 1994.[6] This war resulted in thousands of casualties and the war ended with the Khasavyurt Agreement of August 1996. Chechnya became a de facto independent state with Aslan Maskhadov as its President.[7] Chechen terrorism gained international notoriety due to the intensification of the violence in the region because of the result of the Russia-Chechen Wars of 1994-1996 and 1999-2006.[8] To combat the Russian invasion, the Chechen rebellion used guerrilla warfare, especially by means of "Asymmetrical and Unconventional Terrorist Tactics." [9]

Dagestan is a federal republic of Russia located in the North Caucasus region. It is the largest republic and an ethnically diverse region, with none of its different ethnicities or subgroups forming a majority. Dagestan has the maximum level of extremism and violence in the North Caucasus region. The conflict in Dagestan is not between the various ethnic groups but Sufism and Salafism. Since a decade, Russian security forces in Dagestan have been fighting an armed insurgency which is carried out by Islamist militant groups (which were supposed to be affiliated to the Caucasian Emirate) but in recent times they are believed to have connections with the Islamic State (ISIS). The insurgents have committed several fatal attacks against civilians, state officials, and security forces.[10] According to Franklin, the main objective of the Salafists is to augment their role in decision making in the republic's Islamic institutions, this influenced the Muslims of Dagestan. Franklin further points out that Sufism is losing its popularity in Dagestan and there is growing radicalization among the young people who are attracted towards Salafists.

In large numbers, young citizens of Dagestan are becoming part of Jihad and many of them have volunteered themselves to fight against the regime of Bashar-Al Assad in Syria. Extremist activity by the radical Muslims in Dagestan is not always directed against the symbols of Russia's rule but Muslim leaders who do not oppose the occupation of the North Caucasus republics by Russia are also targeted. For instance, in July 2012 Muslim terrorists assassinated Said Afendi, who was Dagestan's most esteemed Sufi Sheikh. They have also assassinated various Moscow appointed judicial figures who they believed ignored the demands of the Sharia law and chose man made atheistic legal system. Derbent region in south Dagestan is supposed to have become an epicenter of the Jihadist war against Russia.[11]

After Moscow's declaration to conclude the counterterrorist operations in Chechnya in 2009, the circumstances deteriorated, prompting an increase in suicide bombings and assaults against Siloviki (Power Ministry) targets in Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Chechnya. In 2010, while Ingushetia and Chechnya encountered a noteworthy decrease in the number of violent occurrences, the level of violence achieved new levels in Kabardino-Balkaria and also in Dagestan. Amid the First Chechen War, the insurgents battled against the Russian state essentially for political and nationalist reasons. The foundation of the Caucasus Emirate solidified and made official a radical religious pattern among insurgents that existed since the end of the first Chechen war.

IV. RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

In an article "*Religious Terrorism*" in a website Sagepub, points out that terrorism in the name of religion has become the main model for political violence in the modern world. Religious Terrorism is a type of political violence which is motivated by the belief that "another worldly power has sanctioned and commanded terrorist violence for the greater glory of the faith. Acts committed in the name of the faith will be forgiven by the other worldly power and perhaps rewarded in an afterlife." [12]

There are several instances of brutal terrorist attacks in Russia. The Dubrovka Theatre Siege in 2002 where 53 heavily armed Chechens (including many 'Black Widows') led by Movsar Baraev and Abu Bakr seized the theatre. Television footage captured massive use of Islamic symbolism similar to many Islamic organizations in

the Middle East. Souleimanov (2007) is of the opinion that this was the first time that the Chechen Separatists had demonstrated so clearly their affinity with militant Islam. The other notable terrorist attack was the Beslan school attack in 2004. On September 2004, around 33 heavily armed attackers mostly of Chechen and Ingush origin seized a middle school in Beslan in North Ossetia. The traditional first day of school celebration was under way when terrorists barged in and held up to 1000 people hostage for 52 hours (Karmer 2005). In the opinion of Bobo Lo (2004), the tragic conclusion of the Beslan siege is a watershed in Post-Soviet Russia's brief but troubled history. For Russia, Beslan was a historical moment no less significant than the 9/11 US attack. "It marked a new era in which many norms and values would undergo substantial modification and even transformation. The deliberate targeting of children attending the first day of school, which is considered as important as New Year Day and much more so than Christmas was a desecration of case values and traditions." [13]

V. ISLAMIC RADICALISATION AND TERRORISM

According to S. Chopra, rising religious Islamic fundamentalism is to a large extent responsible for terrorism in West Asia, Russia, Philippines, India, and Indonesia. [14] With the disintegration of Soviet Union, the Muslim population of Russia became a part of the Muslim Umma (World Community), where they got influenced towards its ideological trends and become potential recruits and operatives for the Islamo-Fascist Revolution. [15] Regarding the situation in Russia's North Caucasus, some of the academics, politicians, and analysts are of the opinion that the Islamic factor does not exist in the region; rather the only cause of the Chechen War and Islamist Terror in Russia is the Imperialist nature of Russia. At many instances, it can be seen that the US Policy Makers are advised to ignore the issue and stop believing that both US and Russia share a common enemy of International Terrorism (Bugajski 2005). Hahn (2007) points out that the factors behind the growing Muslim challenge in Russia are: Widespread Poverty in the North Caucasus and the Growing Demographic Challenge to the Ethnic Russian Majority; the Ongoing Chechen War; Infiltration of the Chechen Militants' Revolutionary Network deeper into Russia and Putin's De-Federalizing Counter-Revolution. The leading cause of mounting Islamist Terrorism in Russia is Putin's re-authoritarian counter-revolution. Considering the ongoing Chechen war and the increase of terrorism Putin's administration, it has transformed Russia into a more authoritarian body.

Muslims have spread throughout Russia and they are experiencing discrimination from other citizens and even from the government. Titova (2000) argues that the three main concerns that need to be addressed are: first, government officials who interfere with the operations of Muslim communities increase the likelihood of offending the Muslim population and driving them to extreme movements that vow to exclude government from religious interference. Second, societal attitudes towards Muslims show a lack of acceptance and tolerance that could lead to disruption. And finally, in their attempt to fight terrorism, the Russian government has focused on Wahhabism and Islamic Extremism but trying to eradicate terrorism by denying religious freedoms to certain populations that negatively affects the religious freedom of all Muslims.

VI. XENOPHOBIA AND RACIST DISCRIMINATION

Souleimanov (2007) points out that, a very disturbing phenomenon is the continuing psychological deformation of the consciousness of the Russian society, brought on mainly by the instabilities in the north Caucasus. The dangerous 'Chechen Syndrome' of rampant crime, growing indifferent towards violation of human rights and towards human life and deepening ethnic and religious phobias are negating the recent progress enjoyed by the Russian society.[16] Svirina (2007) is of the opinion that Xenophobic groups in Russia, mainly skinheads, direct their violence mostly at foreign nationals and Caucasians. They are called "black" or "dark" by many Russians and are treated with a lot of hostility. Xenophobia and Racism have become a burning issue in Russia. Souleimanov further points out that in 2004, 44 radically motivated attacks took place in Russia and a year later, they stood at 19. Even the authorities indulge in racial profiling and human rights violation which become severe in the aftermath of a major terrorist attack. It takes the form of routine rounding, arbitrary detentions, torture, false case, beating and other forms of harassment of other ethnic groups. In a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country clearly, such xenophobia has the potential to become an insidious time bomb.

State-sponsored terrorism is government support of violent non-state actors engaged in terrorism.[17] In this connection, Alexander J. Motyl, professor of political science at Rutgers University argues that Russia's direct and indirect involvement in the hostility in Eastern Ukraine qualifies as a state-sponsored terrorism and that those involved qualify as "Terrorist Groups." In an interview to BBC, Dalia Grybauskaitė, the President of Lithuania, criticized the behaviour by Russia with its neighbours and said that "Russia demonstrates the qualities of a terrorist state." [18]

VII. ETHNO-NATIONALIST COMMUNAL TERRORISM

Ethno-Nationalist Communal Terrorism involves conflict between populations that have divergent histories, customs, religious traditions, ethnic traits or other cultural idiosyncrasies. Various adjectives have been used to describe this type of terrorism like separatists, irredentist nationalist, tribal, racial, indigenous or minority.[19] It occurs when one group asserts itself against another usually to defend its cultural and religious identity. This rationale is not uncommon and has been used as weapons of terrorism in Russia in the Chechnya region. In these conflicts, all groups believe they have become vulnerable and use this insight to rationalize their violence. The scale of Ethno-Nationalist Communal violence can vary from region to region, depending on various factors such as unresolved historical animosities, recurrent nationalist aspirations, and levels of regional development.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The main threat of terrorism in Russia arises from insurgency and Islamic groups like ISIS. Ethnic cleavage in the area also contributes towards the increase of the phenomenon. In recent years terrorism which was synonymous with Chechen resistance in Russia has gained even greater dimension and threatens peace and security of the Russian Federation. Russia has been a victim of an extensive number of terrorist attacks and with

continuous destabilization of Northern Caucasus, terrorist attacks are winding up noticeably more violent and lethal. Russia is encountering the start of an Islamist Jihad. Russia's jihadist challenge is no longer constrained to Chechnya. A network of terrorism is expanding all through the North Caucasus especially in the five main Muslim republics: Ingushetiya, Dagestan, Adygeya, KabardiniBalkariya and Karachaevo-Cherkessiya. Russia's Chechen led a network of Islamic-terrorists is not only growing but it is becoming more sophisticated and efficient under the influence of Al Qaeda and other radical Islamic groups. Al Qaeda and its now free system of subsidiaries and self-starter cells demonstrate the viability of such a model in weak and failed states. Regardless of Putin's efforts to recentralize power, Russia remains a frail and a weak state. Unless effective and long term policies are pursued, terrorism will continue to be a severe challenge to Russia's security and integrity.

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