

Kadyrovism: Hardline Islam as a Tool of the Kremlin?



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Summary

This paper analyses the phenomenon of “Kadyrovism” as a relatively coherent ideology which possesses its own internal logic and propaganda tools and which reflects the reality of Ramzan Kadyrov’s rule, based on submission to Vladimir Putin while also being marked by provocative acts directed at the paternal figure of the Russian President. Kadyrovism is defined by two major appropriations: first, of the anticolonial Chechen narrative and its transformation into a Russian patriotic ideology which portrays the Chechens as harbingers of Putin’s successes; second, of a hardline, puritanical, version of Islam inspired by the Gulf States and its inter-breeding with traditional Chechen Islam. Putin’s regime is not a political monolith: many ideological entrepreneurs develop in the “ecosystem” created by the Kremlin, taking advantage of a certain room of manoeuvre whose limits are never clearly defined. Ramzan Kadyrov is one of these entrepreneurs. Thus, like all other ideological constructs in Putin’s Russia, Kadyrovism is in flux, casting uncertainty over the future of the regime and its ideology.

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Introduction

The regime of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov often attracts the attention of Western (and Russian) media for its repeated violations of human rights, but also for its excesses, provocative behaviour and grotesque comments. Nevertheless, academic research on the subject remains relatively scarce. Chechen society and the violent transformations it has suffered since the early 1990s have been relatively well covered, as has the Caucasus Emirate,¹ but the regime's ideology is still poorly understood.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that, leaving aside the strange and sometimes absurd statements by the Chechen authorities and the media personality of Ramzan Kadyrov himself,² we can speak of “Kadyrovism” as a relatively coherent ideology with its own internal logic and propaganda tools. It reflects the reality of Kadyrov's rule, which is based on submission to Vladimir Putin mixed with acts of provocation directed at the paternal figure of the Russian President.³ Kadyrovism is defined by two major appropriations or cooptions: first, the seemingly paradoxical appropriation of an anticolonial Chechen discourse and its transformation into a pro-Russian patriotic ideology, which portrays Chechens as harbingers of Putin's successes; second, the appropriation of a hardline form of Islam, inspired by the Gulf states, and its interweaving with traditional Chechen Islam.

Translated from French by Cameron Johnston.

1. For recent publications, see A. Campana & B. Ducol, “Voices of the ‘Caucasus Emirate’: Mapping and Analyzing North Caucasus Insurgency Websites”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 27, No. 4, 2015, p. 679–700.

2. E. F. Ralph, “Ramzan Kadyrov's 11 Weirdest Instagrams”, *Foreign Policy*, 15 May 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com>.

3. Apart from the secondary sources cited here, this paper is based on a series of interviews conducted in Moscow in June 2016 with members of the Federation Council, the Civic Chamber and other experts. In order to preserve their anonymity, their names are not disclosed. The information gathered in the course of the interviews has served to confirm or invalidate some of the arguments put forward in this paper. My thanks to Jean-François Ratelle, Aurélie Biard and Sophie Hohmann for their comments on the first draft of the article.

This Kadyrovism is an integral part of the “ideological products” tested by the Kremlin in an attempt to maintain its hold over society and to bolster Russia’s soft power abroad. Indeed, it is on the way to becoming a product that Moscow exports to Muslims in other parts of Russia, the “Near Abroad” and the Middle East. Does Kadyrovism pliantly serve the interests of the Russian regime or does it possess its own freedom of movement, at times running counter to the Kremlin’s decisions or placing the Russian authorities in a delicate position, as in the case of the assassination of Boris Nemtsov?

From anticolonial struggle to celebration of Russia

Chechnya has never been a region like any other of Russia. In the nineteenth century, the Russian empire experienced considerable difficulties in conquering Chechnya, which put up more resistance than other regions of the North Caucasus. During the Soviet period, the little republic was again treated differently, not least in the scale of deportations of the “punished peoples”, accused of having collaborated with the Nazi enemy. Even today, the management of memory issues linked to this era remains a matter of extreme delicacy and continues to divide society.⁴

The First Chechen War (1994-1996) confirmed Chechnya’s “exceptionalism” and marked the beginning of a new political trajectory that was unique within the Russian Federation.⁵ The Second Chechen War (officially spanning 1999-2000) was followed by a decade of so-called “normalisation” or “Chechenisation”: Moscow lent its authority to the Kadyrov clan to eliminate its rivals and bring the insurgents to heel. The regime of Akhmad Khadyrov, father of the current President, adopted Putin’s vocabulary by labelling all supporters of separatism as bandits or terrorists;⁶ former fighters and war criminals were reintegrated into security forces that functioned on the basis of feudal loyalty to the President, and a dictatorial, nepotistic regime was constructed, based on a cult of personality surrounding Kadyrov and his family and a monopoly on violence.⁷

4. A. Campana, “Collective Memory and Violence: The Use of Myths in the Chechen Separatist Ideology, 1991-1994”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 29, No. 1, 2009, p. 43-56.

5. L. Vinatier, *Russie : l'impasse tchétchène* [Russia: the Chechen deadlock], Paris, Armand Colin, 2007; A. Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998.

6. J. Russel, “Chechen Elites: Control, Co-optation or Substitution?”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 63, No. 6, 2011, p. 1073-1087.

7. I. Iashin, “Ugroza natsional’noj bezopasnosti. Nezavisimyj ekspertnyj doklad” [A threat to national security. Report by an independent expert], 2016.

This political “normalisation” went hand in hand with an economic normalisation and what many, particularly Chechens, have called a “Chechen miracle”: the republic’s infrastructure was largely rebuilt, and public services (electricity, water, transport, medical services and basic education) were restored. Huge federal subsidies went into supporting this “miracle”: around \$30 billion between 2000 and 2010, or more than \$1,000 in subsidies per person, six times more than the Russian average.⁸ Major Russian companies like Gazprom and Rosneft were also tapped for cash and called on to offer jobs and training, as well as take charge of social programmes, while the oligarchs were strongly “encouraged” to invest in the region.⁹ Grozny, with its flamboyant Dubai-style buildings, thus became the shop window for the whole of the North Caucasus.

Since 2010, however, the balance between Moscow and Grozny has been changing and some readjustments have been made. Against a troubled economic backdrop, the federal authorities are less and less apt to give in to Grozny’s extravagant financial demands. The republic’s restoration programme drew to a close in 2012, for instance, whereas Kadyrov hoped that it would continue until 2017: instead of \$3 billion, Chechnya has had to make do with \$350 million.¹⁰

The Russian federal authorities are seeking to bring the republic back into the national fold and to challenge the extraterritorial status that it acquired de facto in the 2000s. This “normalisation” means that in the long run, Chechnya is supposed to become a Russian region like any other, even if the personal links binding the Kadyrov regime to Vladimir Putin are much stronger and less transparent than the forms of loyalty shown by other local leaders and regional governors towards the Kremlin. The assassination of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov and the “Chechen trail” leading from it¹¹, as well as the criticism directed at Kadyrov during the Stavropol affair¹², revealed just how much tension Kadyrov elicits in the Russian state apparatus.

8. M. Alexseev, “Rubles against the Insurgency”, *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, No. 157, May 2011, www2.gwu.edu.

9. J. Russel, “Kadyrov’s Chechnya—Template, Test or Trouble for Russia’s Regional Policy?”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 63, No. 3, 2011, p. 509-528.

10. “Chechniu lishaiut osoboj gospodderzhki i perezvodiats na obshchefederal’nyj korm” [Chechnya is stripped of special state support and will henceforth be treated like other region], *Regions.ru*, 15 octobre 2012, regions.ru.

11. S. Walker, “Boris Nemtsov Murder: Chechen Chief Kadyrov Confirms Link to Prime Suspect”, *The Guardian*, 8 March 2015, www.theguardian.com.

12. The Russian Minister of Internal Affairs described as “unacceptable” Kadyrov’s statement that his troops would open fire on any Russian security forces operating in Chechnya”. See P. Sonne, “Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov Gives Shoot-to-Kill Order on Outside Forces”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 April 2015, www.wsj.com.

The Chechen regime has had to adapt to this belt tightening and to changes in the unspoken contract that binds it to Moscow.¹³ Ramzan Kadyrov has gradually made it known that he would like to go beyond his status of local leader and become a federal-level politician: except for Mintimer Shaimiev, the former President of Tatarstan, it is rare for regional leaders who belong to ethnic and religious minorities to succeed in doing so. This strategy could be defined as a “russification” of Kadyrovism in that Kadyrov is trying to eliminate the inherent contradiction between the Chechen cause and an affirmation of Russian power. He has transformed the Chechen national discourse, which was hitherto built around anticolonial resistance to Russian domination, into something largely pro-Russian, celebrating the harmonious integration of the Chechen nation into the federation.

Shortly before Kadyrov came to power in 2007, four interpretations of Chechen identity existed within Chechnya: the traditionalists, who were opposed to all modernisation and intent on reviving clan principles and norms, the radical Salafists, the supporters of independence, with their anti-Russian agenda based on anticolonial arguments, and, finally, the pro-Russians, who argued for Chechen cultural autonomy within a greater Russia.¹⁴ In the space of a few years, Kadyrov ensured that this last interpretation would come out on top, creating a consensual narrative that co-opted certain elements of the three competing interpretations: from the traditionalists, he borrowed the idea of reviving traditional clan law, *adat*, from the radical islamists he took elements of Salafism and from the supporters of independence he adopted the celebration of the Chechen nation and its feats of arms.

On the pretext of taking the fight to Salafism and identifying “deviant” types of religion, the Chechen regime has introduced a second “moral and spiritual” passport which records in detail citizens’ clan affiliations (*toukhom* and *teip*) and religious brotherhoods (*vird*). Under Russian legislation, this document is illegal and exists only in Chechnya.¹⁵ At the same time, Kadyrov has rehabilitated Chechen heroes who offered passive resistance to Russia, such as the Sufi leader Kunta-haji Kishiev. In the nineteenth century, Kishiev called on Chechens to accept dominion by the

13. S. Markedonov, “A Patchwork Puzzle”, *The American Interest*, 13 mai 2013, www.the-american-interest.com.

14. Typology developed by A. Campana, “The Effects of War on the Chechen National Identity Construction”, *National Identities*, vol. 8, No. 2, 2006, p. 129-148.

15. A. Shamanska, “Chechen ‘Spiritual-Moral Passports’ Rebranded as Questionnaires”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 3 March 2016, www.rferl.org.

Russian “infidels” in order to guarantee the ethnic survival of the nation which had been threatened by decades of war. Since 2011, the regime has banned commemorations of the deportation of Chechens by Stalin, on the pretext that the date of the anniversary, 23 February, coincides with Defender of the Fatherland Day, a grand Soviet celebration resurrected by Vladimir Putin to cultivate patriotism and the cult of the armed forces. He has suggested that 10 May, the date of his father’s death, could serve as a replacement but his real objective is clearly to avoid the commemoration of a central element of modern Chechen identity that pits the republic against Russia.¹⁶

This discursive strategy has allowed Kadyrov and the elites around him to present themselves both as mouthpieces of a new Chechen nationalism and as Putinist flagbearers. The insertion of Chechen nationalism into a broader pan-Russian nationalism manifests itself in two main ways.

First, Kadyrov peppers his speech with trendy historical allusions that appeal to Russian patriotism; he happily namedrops Russian national heroes (he even dressed up recently as Ilya Muromets, the knight-errant of Russian folktales), makes great play of the Russian flag when communicating on social media¹⁷ and celebrates the capacity of Islam itself to embody the spirituality of the Russian motherland, under the historical leadership of the Orthodox Church. In 2014, Kadyrov was received by Patriarch Kirill at the Danilov Monastery¹⁸; the meeting was a signal that the Chechen President had won recognition for his federal status and was capable of having it validated by the country’s most senior dignitaries. Kadyrov also congratulates Christians on all religious holidays, particularly Easter, and opened a new Orthodox Church on Chechen territory in 2016.¹⁹

This regard for Orthodoxy and symbols of the Russian past is not an invention of the Kadyrov regime. It was already being shown by the long-time head of the Central Muslim Spiritual Directorate, Talgat Tadzhuiddin.

16. P. Goble, “Kadyrov Again Blocks Commemoration of Deportation Anniversary”, *The Interpreter*, 23 February 2016, www.interpretermag.com.

17. K. Avedissian, “Clerics, Weightlifters, and Politicians: Ramzan Kadyrov’s Instagram as an Official Project of Chechen Memory and Identity Production”, *Caucasus Survey*, vol. 4, No. 1, 2016, p. 20-43.

18. “Sostoialas’ vstrecha Sviatejshego Patriarkha Kirilla s glavoj Chechenskoj Respubliki R. A. Kadyrovym” [Meeting between his Holiness Patriarch Kirill and the President of the Chechen Republic, R. Kadyrov], Official site of the Moscow Patriarchate, 21 February 2014, www.patriarchia.ru.

19. S. Emelianova, “Kadyrov otkryl v Chechne pravoslavnyj khram” [Kadyrov has opened an Orthodox church in Chechnya], *Rossijskaia Gazeta*, 24 April 2016, <https://rg.ru>.

Tadzhuiddin has never hidden his friendship with former Patriarch Alexey II, whom he considered “the country’s supreme spiritual leader”.²⁰ He has used the expression “Holy Russia” on several occasions and in 2015, he went as far as to say that “Russia’s Muslims already have a caliphate: Holy Russia”.²¹ In the early 1990s Tadzhuiddin built a “mosque of friendship” containing symbols of the three great monotheistic religions where all believers can pray. This deference towards Orthodoxy has provoked severe tension with a rival organisation, the Council of Muftis of Russia. Kadyrov has therefore picked up tools designed to integrate Muslims into an overarching pan-Russian patriotism, and turned them into instruments of self-legitimation.

Secondly, Kadyrov presents himself as an advocate for modern Russia and for Putin’s ambitions. He has expressed complete loyalty to the Russian president on several occasions, casting himself as a “Kremlin man, a Putin man” [and] “a loyal soldier (*vernyj pekhotinets*) of Putin” who is ready to die for him.²² In 2014, in a stadium in Grozny, Kadyrov made around 20,000 members of the Chechen Special Forces swear a collective oath of loyalty to Russia.²³ He declared, then, that: “For fifteen years, Putin has been helping our people...now, we stand ready to defend Russia, its stability and frontiers, and to fulfil any mission... The Russian people have united around their leader Vladimir Putin, and the Chechen people occupy a central place in this unity”.²⁴

Kadyrov defends all the geopolitical positions adopted by Moscow, often in a provocative way. He stated on Russian television in September 2015, for instance, that if Putin asked, “we [the Chechens] would bring Poroshenko and his whole junta to Moscow”.²⁵ Kadyrov has also distinguished himself with his violent denunciation of opponents of the regime. The turmoil that followed the assassination of Boris Nemtsov did

20. N. K. Gvosdev, “The New Party Card? Orthodoxy and the Search for Post-soviet Russia Identity”, *Problems of Post-communism*, vol. 24, No. 6, 2000.

21. “Talगत Tadjutdin: ‘U rossijskikh musulman uzhe est’ khalifat, imia emu—Sviataia Rus’” [Talगत Tadzhuiddin: “Russian Muslims already have their caliphate: it’s called Holy Russia”], *Islam review*, 11 November 2015, <http://islamreview.ru>.

22. “‘Ja pekhotinets Putina’: rezonansnye zaiavleniia Ramzana Kadyrova”, [“I am a Putin footsoldier”: Ramzan Kadyrov’s sensational statements] TASS, 25 March 2016, <http://tass.ru>.

23. “Spetsnaz Kadyrova po trevoge dal kliatvu Prezidentu Rossii!” [Kadyrov’s special forces have sworn oath of loyalty to the Russian President], *Rossiia 24*, video posted on Youtube on 28 December 2014, <https://youtube>.

24. “Kadyrov: narod Chechnii gotov zashchishchat’ interesy Rossii i eio granitsy” [Kadyrov: the Chechen people are ready to defend Russia’s interests and its borders], 28 December 2014, TASS, <http://tass.ru>.

25. “Kadyrov: Esli budet prikaz to my priveziom Poroshenko so vsej khuntoj v Moskvu” [Kadyrov: if the order comes, we will bring Poroshenko and his whole junta to Moscow], NTV, video posted on Youtube on 21 septembre 2015, <https://youtube>.

nothing to curb his threatening language. In January 2016, for instance, he characterised members of the opposition as “enemies of the people and traitors” who should be prosecuted and sent to a psychiatric hospital—a reference to the Soviet period—where Kadyrov himself would make sure that they were injected with a “double dose” of medicine. He later posted a video showing Mikhail Kasyanov, the former Prime Minister and leader of the opposition party Parnas, and the journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza, who directs Mikhail Khodorkovsky’s movement Open Russia, in a sniper’s crosshairs alongside the comment “Those who didn’t understand will understand now”. The video was later removed from Kadyrov’s Instagram account.²⁶ The Chechen President thus calls openly for violent repression of anyone who challenges Putin’s regime and presents his troops as the obvious armed wing of that regime.

The exaggerated nature of Kadyrov’s support for Putin is similar in many respects to that of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who has built his career since the early 1990s on being a “jester” or sanctioned “madman”, in the medieval sense of the term. Both Kadyrov and Zhirinovskiy fit into a Russian tradition that sets store by the political discourse of “madmen” who flout social norms in a carnivalesque reversal of values.²⁷ Yet his very stridency also places the Russian political class and Presidential Administration in a bind as they worry about his unpredictability.²⁸

26. R. Standish, “Chechen Leader Puts Russian Opposition in the Crosshairs on Social Media”, *Foreign Policy*, 1 February 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com>.

27. See the illuminating work of C. Ingerflom, *Le Tsar c’est moi. L’Imposture permanente d’Ivan le Terrible à Vladimir Poutine* [I am the Tsar. The permanent imposture from Ivan the Terrible to Vladimir Putin], Paris, PUF, 2015.

28. The uneasiness of the Russian political class with Kadyrov was stressed by all the experts consulted in Russia in June 2016.

Kadyrovism, armed wing of Russia's great power

In many ways, Kadyrov perpetuates and amplifies certain traits of the Putin regime. The exaggerated machismo he promotes has also been cultivated by the Russian President since his first term in office. The only difference is that Kadyrov is much more attuned to social media trends than is the Kremlin. For instance, Kadyrov exploited the craze among Instagram users for posing alongside photos of cats and kittens. In essence, Kadyrovism has taken full advantage of the development of social networks to invade the digital domain: the Chechen President has around 300,000 followers on Twitter and more than 350,000 on the Russian equivalent of Facebook, Vkontakte, as well as a page on the Live Journal blogging platform and, most importantly, around two million followers on Instagram, a photo and video-sharing app. In 2015, Kadyrov had more followers than any other blogger in the Russian-speaking world, including the opposition politician Alexey Navalny (who has 1.6 million followers on Twitter).²⁹

The Chechen President also plays on the idea that the power of the nation and its moral superiority are expressed in mastering sports and in international sporting success, a theme that has also been taken up by Putin. During the Rio Olympic Games, Kadyrov presented Grozny as one of the capitals of Russian sport:³⁰ for years, he (like Putin) has promoted boxing and mixed martial arts (MMA), an ultra-violent combat sport that combines striking with grappling and which has long been banned in major international sporting competitions. In October 2016, however, Kadyrov went further than even the Kremlin would allow by filming his own children in a junior MMA fight, provoking fierce criticism from the rest of

29. These figures should be placed in context, however, since Chechen citizens are often forced to join pro-governmental social media sites under threat of repression. See “Kadyrov, Rogozin i Markin po itogam goda voshli v top-10 samikh tsitiruemykh blogerov v RF” [Kadyrov, Rogozin and Markin figure among top ten most quoted bloggers in Russia in 2016], TASS, 23 December 2015, <http://tass.ru>.

30. “Kadyrov: Chechnya Is One of the Capitals of Russian Sports”, *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 24 July 2016, <http://vestnikkavkaza.net>.

the country, including from Fedor Emelianenko, President of the Russian MMA federation and a close associate of Vladimir Putin.³¹

Chechen security forces and private militias make up another crucial element of his support for Putinism. Kadyrov's private army of 20,000-30,000 soldiers is impressive, all of them better equipped in heavy weapons than most federal-level Russian troops.³² The army is made up mainly of soldiers who fought in the First (1994-1996) and Second (1999-2000) Chechen wars, as well as repentant insurgents who were reintegrated into official structures in line with the classic normalisation model for countries that have experienced a civil war. Nevertheless, the return of these fighters to a "normal" status quo ante was limited by the high degree of autonomy and impunity reserved for the Chechen leader and his troops. Kadyrov has been adept at taking advantage of the Russian system of decentralising security structures to "privatise" the forces located on the territory of his republic and to turn them into loyal militias.

Nevertheless, Kadyrov now risks seeing his troops (including the so-called oil regiment (*neftianoj polk*), tasked with patrolling up and down oil pipelines and guaranteeing that they are secure³³) taken under federal control. In April 2016, Vladimir Putin announced that a Russian National Guard would be created by 2018. The official objective is to combine the different security agencies—all interior troops, including OMON (Special Purpose Mobility Unit), SOBR (Special Rapid Response Unit), UVO (Extra-departmental Protection Service of the Chechen Ministry of the Interior)—into a giant force numbering around 250,000 people.³⁴ Institutions which formerly depended on the regional branches of the Ministry of the Interior will find themselves answering directly to the President. The creation of this new federal institution points to the ongoing restructuring of the power ministries and the circles around Putin³⁵ and could allow the federal

31. E. Grynzspan, "Pour son anniversaire, le dictateur tchéchène s'offre un combat d'enfants" [For his birthday, the Chechen dictator treats himself to a childrens' fight], *L'Obs with Rue 89*, 7 October 2016, <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com>.

32. L. Dubrovskaja, "Iashin vystupil s dokladom v SShA: 'Putin stal zalozhnikom Kadyrova'" [Iashin has presented his report in the United States: "Putin has become a hostage to Kadyrov"], *Moskovskij Komsomolets*, 25 March 2016, www.mk.ru.

33. "Spetsial'noe podrazdelenie chechenskoj militsii nazyvaiut neftianym polkom", [Special unit of the Chechen militia is named the oil regiment], *Pervyj Kanal*, 10 November 2013, www.1tv.ru.

34. A. Sukhareno, "Kart blansh. Vserossijskij gorodovoj", [Carte blanche. The Russia-wide policeman], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 7 April 2016, www.ng.ru.

35. The reform represents a challenge to the Ministry of Defence, which sees itself excluded from internal security and now managing only the defence of Russia against external enemies, while it also weakens the FSB, the citadel of Putin's power. Alexander Bortnikov, Director of the FSB, who also heads the National Anti-Terrorism Committee, will also cede some of his power to the National Guard. In addition, two flagship institutions of the 2000s, the Federal Migration Service, led by K. Romodanovsky, and V. Ivanov's Federal Drug Control Service are losing their status as

government to purge the Chechen battalions, since all their members will have to pass before a commission of validation.³⁶

But few experts, either in Russia or the West, subscribe to this optimistic reading of the implications that the creation of the National Guard will have for the “normalisation” of Chechnya. Most agree that, at the very best, Chechen troops will retain their autonomy, despite being placed under the authority of the National Guard: the fact that the “Sever” battalion was integrated into the 46th Separate Operative Brigade of Russian VDV troops did not, we suspect, prevent its men from assassinating Boris Nemtsov. Pessimists take the opposite view and see the formation of the National Guard not as a sign that Chechnya is being normalised but that Russia is being “Kadyrov-ised”. Kadyrov could in fact find himself alongside Viktor Zolotov as one of the main figures in charge of the National Guard. After all, its implicit mission is to protect the regime and suppress internal dissidents,³⁷ a field of activity in which Kadyrov has excelled for many years.³⁸

There is far more at stake, however, in the evolution of Chechnya’s private militias than the creation of the Russian National Guard alone. The future of one of Europe’s largest private armies is in question. Since the 1990s, the mass emigration (more than 130,000 people) of Chechens to Europe has brought with it intra-Chechen conflicts, particularly fights between the troops of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kadyrovtsy, and their various opponents, including men who were forcibly enlisted only to abscond and people who oppose Grozny’s policies. Poland, which has absorbed the greatest number of Chechen refugees (more than 90,000 in twenty years³⁹), has recorded numerous abuses by Kadyrovtsy on its territory⁴⁰, as have France and Austria, two major host countries for the Chechen

independent agencies and becoming branches of the Ministry of the Interior. It appears, therefore, that the MOD and FSB are losing momentum in the face of a high-powered Ministry of Interior. The new Guard is led by V. Zolotov, who for a long time was in charge of Putin’s personal security. See P. Baev, “Newly Formed National Guard Cannot Dispel Putin’s Multiple Insecurities”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 13, No. 70, 2016, www.jamestown.org.

36. E. Milashina, “Kak Putin likvidiroval armiiu Kadyrova” [How Putin liquidated Kadyrov’s army], *Novaia gazeta*, 9 April 2016, www.novayagazeta.ru.

37. A. Bajdakova, “Gennadij Gudkov: ‘Natsional’nuu gvardiiu gotoviat k podavleniiu sotsial’nogo protesta” [Gennady Gudkov: the National Guard is primed to suppress social unrest], *Novaia gazeta*, 6 April 2016, www.novayagazeta.ru and A. Sukharenko, “Vserossijskij gorodovoj” [The Russia-wide policeman], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 7 April 2016, www.ng.ru.

38. Kadyrov’s role in denouncing Putin’s opponents was confirmed by several NGO-based experts interviewed by the author in Moscow in June 2016.

39. K. Stummer, “Forgotten Refugees: Chechen Asylum Seekers in Poland”, *Political Critique*, 11 February 2016, <http://politicalcritique.org>.

40. A. Szczepanikova, “Expert Opinion on the Conditions of Continuing Insecurity of Chechen Refugees in Poland”, *Centre d’étude de la vie politique (CEVIPOL)*, 7 May 2014.

diaspora. The Kadyrovtsy therefore export violence and elements of the shadow economy, including all sorts of illegal trade and human trafficking into the very heart of Europe.⁴¹

What is more, the conflict in Ukraine has violently accelerated the trend for Chechen troops to be formed into militias, with Chechens fighting on both sides of the border. Between 300 and 500 Chechens may have taken up arms with the Ukrainians.⁴² They are divided into two groups, the first named after the original President of the independent Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Dzhokhar Dudayev, and the second named in honour of Sheikh Mansur, one of the leaders of the Chechen resistance to Russian colonisation in the eighteenth century. The Dudayev battalion was led by Isa Munayev, a Chechen Commander in the 1990s who received political asylum in Denmark before taking up arms and being killed at the battle of Debaltseve in February 2015.⁴³ The Sheikh Mansur battalion is apparently under the command of the Ukrainian far-right movement, Pravy Sektor, with which it shares a base⁴⁴, and it fought against the Russians at Mariupol.⁴⁵ Some of its leaders seem to have been trained in Syria alongside Daesh.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, many Chechens are also fighting alongside the secessionists in the Donbas. Although the Russian authorities deny that they are supporting the insurgents and Kadyrov has stuck to the official line, videos of the best-known Chechen battalion, the Death Battalion, are freely available on YouTube. The battalion is made up of around 300 well trained men, most of them former Spetsnaz (special forces) who have worked in various Russian security structures.⁴⁷ Some of them may even

41. L. Vinatier, *Tchéchénes: une diaspora en guerre* [Chechens: a diaspora at war], Paris: Pétra, 2013.

42. “OPD ‘Svobodnyj Kavkaz’ po povodu ‘Chechentsev’, uchastvuiushchikh v vojne protiv Ukrainy”, [The ‘Free Caucasus’ movement on the ‘Chechens’ taking part in the war against Ukraine’], Golos Ichkerii, <http://golosichkerii.com>.

43. “Pogibshij general Isa Munaev sobiralsia prosit’ Poroshenko ob ukrainskom grazhdanstve” [Dead general Isa Munayev intended to ask Poroshenko for Ukrainian nationality], Unian, 2 February 2015, www.unian.net.

44. S. Walker, “‘We Like partisan Warfare’. Chechens Fighting in Ukraine—On Both Sides”, *The Guardian*, 24 July 2015, www.theguardian.com.

45. A. Kramer, “Islamic Battalions, Stocked With Chechens, Aid Ukraine in War With Rebels”, *The New York Times*, 7 July 2015, www.nytimes.com.

46. A. Nemtsova, “Chechen Jihadis Leave Syria, Join the Fight in Ukraine”, *The Daily Beast*, 4 September 2015, www.thedailybeast.com. This information remains to be corroborated by other sources.

47. “Dobrovol’cheskij chechenskij ‘Batal’on smerti’ na zashchite Donbassa” [The “Death Battalion” made up of Chechen volunteers help the Donbas], Euronews, video posted on YouTube on 10 December 2014, <https://youtu.be>.

have been awarded Russian military medals.⁴⁸ The conflict in the Donbas has therefore allowed Kadyrov's troops to show themselves as champions of the Putin regime, not only in speech or on Chechen territory, but also in a foreign warzone.

48. See "Na storone prorossijskikh separatistov v Ukraine voiuet chechenskij 'batal'on smerti'" [Chechen 'Death Battalion' fighting alongside pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine], *Natsional'naia Sluzhba Novostej*, 10 December 2014, <http://rusnsn.info>, and "V Rossii podtverdili uchastie chechenskogo batal'ona 'Smert' v boevykh dejstviiakh na Donbasse" [Russia has confirmed that the Chechen "Death battalion" involved in military operations in the Donbas], *Ekonomicheskie Izvestiia*, 23 February 2016, <http://news.eizvestia.com>.

From Islam of resistance to Islam of state: a Hardline approach disguised as traditional Islam

The second pillar of Kadyrovism is the successful cooption of radical Islam, which was a powerful weapon in the Chechen resistance to Russian domination, and its subordination on the pretext of promoting a “traditional” and “Chechen” form of Islam. Salafism, with all its potential to incite rebellion, was introduced into the North Caucasus by foreign fighters like Ibn al-Khattab and Abu Omar al-Saif⁴⁹ and taken up by local jihadi leaders such as Shamil Basayev, Anzor Astemirov and, later, Said Buryatsky and Dokku Umarov.⁵⁰

Though the Caucasus Emirate (affiliated to Al-Qaeda) continues to profess a Salafist ideology, the group is in steep decline because young fighters prefer to leave for Syria and fight under the flag of Daesh. It is also crucial to acknowledge that the “traditional Chechen Islam” promulgated by Kadyrov has largely succeeded in stealing Salafism’s clothes within Chechnya, be it of the quietist or rebellious variety.

According to Russian legislation, religions are divided into two categories, traditional and non-traditional: so-called traditional religions are recognised and theoretically granted equal rights, even though, in practice, the Russian Orthodox Church enjoys symbolic advantages, while non-traditional religions are being considered foreign sects at best and terrorist groups at worst. The institutions that represent Islam in Russia—the Russian Council of Muftis in Moscow, the Spiritual Administration of

49. Ibn al-Khattab and Abu Omar al-Saif were both of Saudi Arabian origin. They fought first in Afghanistan alongside the mujahideen, then in Tajikistan. During the Civil War, they led the Arab battalions before becoming renowned leaders of the Chechen wars. Al-Khattab was killed by the Russian secret services in 2002, and Al-Saif in 2005, in Dagestan.

50. See S. Dudoignon, “L’islam politique dans le Caucase et en Asie Centrale : chronologie, sociologie, idéologie” [Political Islam in the Caucasus and Central Asia: chronology, sociology, ideology], in M. Laruelle and S. Peyrouse (eds), *Éclats d’empire: L’Asie Centrale et le Caucase contemporains* [Fragments of Empires: Central Asia and the Caucasus today], Paris, Fayard, 2013, p. 66-72.

Russian Muslims, based in Ufa, and the Spiritual Administration of North Caucasian Muslims, based in Makhachkala—embrace this classification and use it in internal struggles to discredit rival movements which they stigmatise as foreign and dangerous.⁵¹ Kadyrov has made this model his own, stating, for instance, that “Traditional Islam is welcome for everyone. We don’t have any other strains and we never will. We don’t accept strains that were not around at the time of the Prophet. Our traditional Chechen, Caucasus, Russian (*rossijskij*) Islam—we are going to stick to it and build our future around it”.⁵²

The brand of Islam promoted by the Kadyrov regime is by no means clear cut, however. Officially, the republic espouses Sunni Islam of the Shafi’i school, which is recognised by the Spiritual Administration of Chechen Muslims. Imams’ sermons are vetted by the Administration and all qadis (magistrates) and other religious figures appear before a state commission to be confirmed in their positions. The regime has embarked on the construction of numerous mosques, including the great mosque of Grozny which was opened in 2008 and which can hold up to 10,000 believers, as well as many smaller mosques in various towns. In 2009, the authorities opened an Islamic university offering a five-year theology course, a centre of Islamic medicine that claims to treat patients by the grace of the Quran⁵³, as well as a Quran school for *hafizs* (those who can recite the whole Quran) in the village where Kadyrov was born, Tsentaroy. The number of Chechen citizens allowed to perform the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, has expanded rapidly from 140 in 2003 to 2,900 in 2013.⁵⁴ Kadyrov himself makes a public display of his devotion to Islam: twice he has visited Mecca and succeeded in having Islam’s most sacred site, the Kaaba, opened up for his family, a privilege which the Saudi royal family, as guardian of the Holy Places, grants only rarely. His Instagram page displays photos of him praying, as well as references to the Quran and Allah.

51. K. Aitamurto, “Protected and Controlled. Islam and ‘Desecularisation from Above’ in Russia”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 68, No. 1, 2016, p. 182-202.

52. Quoted in V. Dubnov, “Proekt ‘Chechnia 2.0’. Ramzan Kadyrov perezakliuchil svoj dogovor s rossijskoj vlast’iu” [Chechnya’s New Contract with the Kremlin], Carnegie Moscow Centre, 17 March 2016, <http://carnegie.ru>.

53. “Centre of Islamic Medicine in Grozny Reports Curing a Thousand”, *Caucasian Knot*, 6 March 2009, www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu.

54. “First Group of Pilgrims from Chechnya Went To Hajj”, *Islam.ru*, 16 September 2014, <http://islam.ru>. Thereafter, the number seems to have dropped somewhat due, in particular, to Riyadh and Moscow’s fears that Chechens will join the Syrian insurgents during the Hajj. See J. Paraszczuk, “Did Riyadh, Grozny Fear Chechen Hajj Pilgrims Would Join IS?”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 20 October 2014, www.rferl.org.

Yet although he is the son of a mufti, Kadyrov's theological knowledge is shallow and grossly simplistic. He claims to promote "traditional" Islam, but in reality it is nothing more than a sketchy and often grotesque reinterpretation of Sufi tradition (from the Qadiriyya brotherhood), coupled with the traditional norms of *adat*. This combination was inherited from the Soviet Union, which regarded religious traditions as hangovers from a past that ought to be left behind, to be tolerated only insofar as they were presented as national traditions or ethnic folklore. This Soviet attitude has been adopted and elaborated upon by the Chechen regime. One presidential decree requires, for example, that theatrical and musical performances "conform to the Chechen mentality and education".⁵⁵ All officials are invited to dress in supposedly traditional clothes, such as the long coat and small hat inspired by the Qadiriyya. Strangely, even prisoners at the Chernokozovo penal colony have been forced to wear a similar uniform.⁵⁶ Public performances of *dhikr*, repetition of the name of God and the surahs (chapters) of the Quran, whether silently, out loud or through dance, are part of the republic's semi-official branding. Religious pilgrimages to the tombs of local saints have been revived, particularly to that of Sufi leader Kunta-haji Kishiev. Kadyrov also promotes syncretic approaches borrowed from Christianity, such as the diffusion throughout the republic of "holy water" taken from a chalice supposedly belonging to the prophet and the exorcism of Djinns (supernatural creatures) with the help of the Quran and traditional medicine.

On the other hand, on the pretext of promoting traditional Chechen Islam, the Kadyrov regime has promulgated a very strict interpretation of the religion. It is not Salafist, in the sense that it does not confine itself to the original texts alone—the Quran and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad—but includes many Islamic elements drawn from local culture, as we have just seen. According to doctrinal Salafism, the cult of saints would be condemned as idolatry (*shirk*). Nevertheless, Kadyrov's brand of Islam is highly puritanical and takes its cue from sharia on issues of manners and mores. Alcohol consumption is strictly monitored, for instance, gambling is officially banned and the broadcasting of Western music on local TV stations has decreased since 2008, while programmes dedicated to Islam have increased.⁵⁷ Restrictions imposed on women have multiplied in recent years. All women who work in the public sector are

55. "Kadyrov's 'Chechen Sufism' Accommodates Christmas Trees, 'Holy Water'", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 16 January 2012, <https://rmsmcblog.wordpress.com>.

56. L. Fuller, A. Doukaev, "Chechnya: Kadyrov Uses 'Folk Islam' For Political Gain", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 6 December 2007, www.rferl.org.

57. T. Balmforth, "Titular Power Vertical", Russia Profile, 17 August 2010, <http://inosmi.ru> (original article unavailable).

obliged to wear the hijab, as are female students. Under a so-called “moralisation” programme, it is now well-nigh obligatory for all women to wear the veil in public places. Kadyrov himself has reminded people that women are inferior to men⁵⁸, and that they should dress “modestly”, in long skirts and sleeves that cover their arms. On several occasions since 2010, groups of men have attacked women who refuse to submit to these strictures and none of them has been prosecuted. On the contrary, Kadyrov has congratulated some of them.⁵⁹ Afterwards, the Chechen President called for honour crimes to be made legal and spoke out in favour of polygamy.⁶⁰ In 2015, he invited Chechen men to keep their wives away from social media.⁶¹

It is difficult to judge what the ultimate goal of this hardline approach may be. Distinguishing how much it owes to a sort of Islamic revival, on the one hand, and how much to a reactionary reinterpretation of local tradition, on the other, is not easy. It is also hard to judge whether it is designed to channel the frustrations of radicals on the fringes of society, who are highly critical of official religious institutions like the Spiritual Administration, or to enlist those who are not yet so critical. Kadyrov has personally carried out public humiliation rituals in the streets of Grozny, lecturing young people who have been tempted by Jihad in front of their families. More recently, however, he has changed tack and stopped criticising those who join Islamic State, whom he now describes as “lost souls” who ought to undergo exorcism in order to return to the right path.⁶²

The new restrictive laws adopted in Chechnya are all in direct opposition to Russian federal law. From 2006 onwards, the republic barred entry to all Danish citizens following the publication of the cartoons of Mohammed by the daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. The regime became even more radical after the terrorist attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015. In

58. L. Bruneau, “Radicalisation de l’islam en Tchétchénie: Kadyrov bafoue les droits des femmes” [Islamic radicalisation in Chechnya: Kadyrov ridicules women’s rights], France Info, 1st June 2015, <http://geopolis.francetvinfo.fr>.

59. “You Dress According to their Rules”, Human Rights Watch, 10 March 2011, www.hrw.org.

60. “Ramzan Kadyrov propose d’introduire la polygamie en Tchétchénie” [Ramzan Kadyrov plans to introduce polygamy in Chechnya], *Courrier international*, 16 January 2006, www.courrierinternational.com and L. Dubrovskaja, “Kadyrov rasskazal pro ‘Chechenskij batal’on’ na Donbasse” [Kadyrov spoke about the “Chechen battalion” in the Donbas], *Moskovskij Komsomolets*, 18 June 2015, www.mk.ru.

61. C. Oberti, “Quand le président tchéchène veut bannir les femmes des réseaux sociaux” [When the Chechen President wants to ban women from social networks], France24, 22 May 2015, www.france24.com.

62. A. Malashenko, “Exorcizing Chechnya. Kadyrov and the Islamic State”, Carnegie Moscow Centre, 16 November 2015, <http://carnegie.ru>. S. Markedonov, “Islamskoe gosudarstvo—ugroza dlja Bol’shogo Kavkaza” [Islamic State—a threat to the greater Caucasus], *Rossiiskij sovet po mezhdunarodnym delam*, 9 November 2015, <http://russiancouncil.ru>.

January 2015, Kadyrov himself led an astonishingly large anti-*Charlie* demonstration, involving 800,000 people—the republic only has 1.2 million inhabitants—which received very extensive media coverage in the Muslim world. He denounced the “insult to the Muslim religion” by the French satirical magazine, implicitly justifying the attack against it.⁶³ What is more, Kadyrov openly threatened violent reprisals against Russia media outlets that might have wished to reproduce the cartoons and called, more or less directly, for the death of Mikhail Khodorkovsky when he stated that he would like to reprint them.⁶⁴

Kadyrov’s penchant for Gulf-inspired Islam can be detected in the actions of his wife, Medni Kadyrova, a discreet woman who suddenly threw herself into Dubai-style Islamic fashion in the early 2010s, featuring veiled women dressed in long, glitzy, gowns. She has started her own fashion house, Firdaws⁶⁵, organises high-end fashion shows attended by Russian state officials and invited guests from Malaysia and the Gulf states, and has presented her collections in Dubai, with the stated aim of targeting the Saudi Arabian market. Here too, there is total confusion over how to classify her fashion: Firdaws claims to design dresses that “respond to Chechen national traditions” but which are also inspired by Quranic motifs.⁶⁶

The stringent puritanism that Grozny promotes is also directed abroad: Kadyrov does not hide his desire to be recognised not only as Putin’s spokesman in the Muslim world but also one of the leaders of the Islamic world. On several occasions, he has sought to burnish the Islamic credentials of the Chechen capital. In 2011, for instance, he arranged for a chalice to be brought from London which had supposedly been used by the Prophet Mohammed and protected by his descendants for centuries before being offered to Kadyrov. The chalice has since been held in the Grozny mosque.⁶⁷ In early 2012, meanwhile, what was alleged to be the hair of the

63. I. Mandraud, “Manifestation monstre en Tchétchénie contre ‘Charlie Hebdo’” [Mass demonstration in Chechnya against “Charlie Hebdo”], *Le Monde*, 19 January 2015, www.lemonde.fr

64. “Russia Update: Reaction to Terrorist Attack on Charlie Hebdo Journalists in Paris”, *The Interpreter*, 8 January 2015, www.interpretermag.com.

65. “Kolleksiia modnogo doma Firdavs i Zarimy Iakhaevoj ‘Ledi Firdavs’. Fotoreportazh Oliega Kacheva” [Collection of the Firdaws fashion house and Zarim Iaraev ‘Lady Firdavs’. Photo report by Oleg Katchev], RIA Moda, 1st November 2012, <http://riamoda.ru>.

66. “Zhena Ramzana Kadyrova otkryla novyj Dvoretz mody v Groznom” [Ramzan Kadyrov’s wife opens new fashion palace in Grozny], *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, 9 September 2014, www.stav.kp.ru.

67. M. Elder, “‘Islamic Relic’ Presented to Chechnya”, *The Guardian*, 22 September 2011, www.theguardian.com.

Prophet was sent to Chechnya from Turkey and deposited in the city's central mosque by Kadyrov's son himself.⁶⁸

The fact that several thousand Chechen insurgents are taking part in the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts, on the side of both Daesh and the Al-Nusra front, and that large Chechen diasporas are present in the region (in Jordan, for instance), helps ensure that the leaders of the Islamic world continue to be interested in Kadyrov's policy. The Chechen leader plays up his aura by presenting himself as a model for other Islamic leaders: he has been able to return thousands of insurgents "to the right path" and transform a revolutionary ideology into a sort of state Salafism. His success in "coverting" jihadists into forces loyal to the regime cannot but pique the interest of many Middle Eastern regimes which regard the violence of the antiterrorist measures carried out in Chechnya, disregarding fundamental freedoms, as being compatible with their political norms. Unlike Western examples, the Chechen model seems to them to be transferable. The Saudis, for instance, have on several occasions expressed their interest in the antiterrorist measures instituted by Grozny, particularly the planned Chechen International Special Forces Training Centre.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, Kadyrov's strategy with regard to Islam also responds to purely political and economic considerations. The Chechen President has met the Saudi and Jordanian royal families, as well as the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas. In 2013, in search of investment into Chechnya, Kadyrov toured the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, the latter clearly getting his preference. Since his nomination as President in 2007, in fact, Kadyrov has never stopped calling for Grozny to become the missing link between Moscow and Riyadh. In 2015, he travelled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia again to scope out potential areas of cooperation and seems to have forged close links with Mohammad Bin Salman, who is seeking to maintain contact with Russia: he was one of the only senior dignitaries to have participated in the St Petersburg international economic forum in 2015.⁷⁰ The Saudi Investment Fund, moreover, has declared its interest in a number of projects that will take place in Chechnya, including a ski resort, the Grozny (Akhmad) tower and the International Special Forces Training Centre.⁷¹ Kadyrov, however,

68. Rossiia 24, "V Groznom musul'mane prikosnulis' k volosu Mukhammeda" [In Grozny, Muslims touched the hair of Mohammed], Video posted on Youtube, 2:23, 27 January 2012, <https://youtu.be>.

69. "Saudi Arabia to Invest in Russia's Chechnya—Kadyrov", RT, 9 May 2016, www.rt.com.

70. M. Vatchagaev, "Moscow Uses Kadyrov in Kremlin Push for Rapprochement with Saudi Arabia", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 24 July 2015, vol. 12, No. 139, www.jamestown.org.

71. D. Sharkov, "Putin-ally Kadyrov Courts Saudi Investment in Chechnya", *Newsweek*, 9 May 2016, www.newsweek.com.

always prone to contradictions, didn't hesitate to strain diplomatic relations between Russia and Saudi Arabia when, in October 2016, he endorsed a fatwa approved by a congress of theologians assembled in Grozny, declaring Wahhabism and Salafism to be dangerous currents foreign to Islam.⁷²

72. I. Subbotin, "Rossiia i Saudovskaia Araviia: neft' Sirii i obmanchivoe partniorstvo" [Russia and Saudi Arabia: oil, Syria and a partnership of deception], *Moskovskij Komsomolets*, 23 October 2016, www.mk.ru.

Conclusion: Kadyrovism, an ideology for export

Kadyrov, like Putin, has been able to capitalise on the financial windfall of the 2000s to boost his political legitimacy and enthrone a dominant discourse. It remains to be seen, however, how the exhaustion of public budgets will affect the societal consensus achieved by the current regime. Whatever the future of Kadyrovism and the personal fate of Ramzan Kadyrov, the “invention of tradition” and the revival of a national genealogy that chimes with Russian patriotism is probably here to stay over the long term. Social and cultural discontent will not coalesce around the anticolonialism of the 1990s but will tend to find expression through hardline pietism or an insurrectionary, radical Islam. Similar trends may be discerned in neighbouring Dagestan, where the spread of Islam is gradually sidelining anticolonial approaches.

What is more, the influence of Kadyrovism could spread beyond Chechnya. The existence of a sizeable Chechen diaspora in several of Russia’s large cities, as well as the massive migration of Dagestani job seekers to other Russian regions, have helped to spread North-Caucasian Islam and its custom of operating in *jamaat* (community) beyond their original homeland. Several Russian experts, including Alexei Malashenko, Denis Sokolov, Vladimir Mukomel and Saodat Olimova have noted, for instance, that a North-Caucasian brand of Islam has spread to the mosques of the Volga-Urals region and among Central-Asian diasporas.

In Central Asia, Kadyrovism is also winning converts. In Tajikistan, some migrants who struggle to articulate their Islamic faith and undying loyalty to Vladimir Putin readily see themselves in the image projected by the Chechen President. In Kazakhstan, too, which has laid host to a large Chechen minority since Stalin’s deportations, Kadyrov has met with some success. His first trip as President, in 2007, was made to Kazakhstan, where his grandfather was buried and where his father was born.⁷³ In 2010, Kadyrov named a street and a school in Grozny after Nazarbayev [the Kazakh President], to which Kazakhstan responded by erecting a

73. Z. Akhmatova, “Kadyrova potianulo k korniam” [Kadyrov returns to his origins], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 5 June 2007, www.ng.ru.

headstone in honour of Akhmad Kadyrov in the province of Karaganda.⁷⁴ The living embodiment of Chechen influence in Kazakhstan is Kenges Rakishev, president of one of the largest banks in the country, Kazkommertsbank, but also son-in-law of the Minister of Defence and former mayor of Almaty and Astana, Imangali Tasmagambetov, and business partner of Timur Kulibayev, oil oligarch and son-in-law of the President. Rakishev bankrolls a sufi brotherhood and is a close associate of Kadyrov. The two men regularly appear in photos together on social media, invite each other to family festivities and organise Islamic charitable activities.⁷⁵ Rakishev promotes Kadyrov's vision of Islam, which unites references to traditional Sufism with hardline Islam inspired by the Gulf states. This ideological pairing is likely to prosper in Central Asia in the coming decades.

Kadyrovism cannot be reduced to a collection of provocative and ludicrous statements made by an eccentric, violent, leader who enjoys unrivalled impunity in Russia. Nor is it a copy of the Putin system on a smaller scale. In fact, Putinism and Kadyrovism differ in certain fundamental respects. If Putinism may be defined as a certain political style, it is driven by multiple contradictory interests, by permanent readjustments—as shown recently by the dismissal of Sergei Ivanov—and it does not possess any coherent doctrine, beyond promoting a Russian patriotism of sorts and Russia's right to great power status. Kadyrovism, by contrast, is more coherent, both in terms of political loyalties, since it rests on longstanding bonds of clan and family loyalty, and in terms of doctrine, since it permits less ideological flexibility and scope for individual autonomy than does Russia.

Kadyrovism should be studied, not simply as a caricatured offshoot of Putinism, but as an ideology in its own right. It attests to several changes that are now underway. Firstly, it bears out the idea that to fight off insurrectionary Salafism, Muslim countries could opt for state Salafism, like Saudi Arabia, on the grounds that the only way of truly combating

74. "Vo imia druzhby kazakhskogo i chechenskogo narodov" [In the name of friendship between the Kazakh and Chechen people], NOMAD Kochevnik, 14 April 2010, www.nomad.su, and E. Belep, "V Kazakhstane otkryli pamiatnuiu stelu Akhmadu Kadyrovu" [Commemorative headstone of Akhmad Kadyrov unveiled in Kazakhstan], Radio Azattyk, 23 August 2012, <http://rus.azattyq.org>.

75. "Prezident Ch.R. Ramzan Kadyrov vstretilsia s Kenesom Rakishevym" [Chechen President R. Kadyrov met Kenges Rakishev], ZonaKZ.net, 5 July 2011, <https://zonakz.net>. A. Bekbasova, "Chechenskij Kniaz' Kenes Rakishev" [Chechen prince Kenges Rakishev], Ratel.kz, 15 July 2015, www.ratel.kz. "Kenes Rakishev byl v chisle gostej na svad'be u plemiannika Ramzana Kadyrova" [Kenges Rachikev invited to the wedding of Kadyrov's nephew], Inform Buro, 2 May 2016, <https://informburo.kz>. "Kak Kenes Rakishev pereshagnul za 'iard'" [How Kenges Rakishev got over a billion], *Kompromat.ru*, 25 May 2016, www.kompromat.ru.

terrorism is to both repress it violently and make a serious attempt to co-opt its ideology. Hardline pietism, which is loyal to existing regimes but fundamentally anti-Western and puritanical, therefore seems likely to prosper.

Secondly, Kadyrovism encapsulates the post-modern character of contemporary ideologies in the sense that it can combine seemingly contradictory elements and accomplish the amazing feat of glorifying Chechen nationalism and Russia's great power status simultaneously. Since Muslims are expected to make up a growing proportion of the Russian population in the years to come⁷⁶, this juggling act should be followed closely, both for its internal cultural implications and for its possible impact on Russian foreign policy.

Thirdly, the existence of a large Chechen diaspora in Europe, as well as the long-term impact of the Ukraine conflict, which serves as a breeding ground for all sorts of extremist militias, would suggest that Europe ought not to be considered immune to the risk of militias forming.

The relationship between Kadyrovism and the Russian Presidential Administration is complex. The Kremlin is not a totalitarian monolith: many ideological "entrepreneurs" develop in the "ecosystem" created by the Kremlin, taking advantage of a certain freedom of movement whose limits are never clearly defined. The relationship between Kadyrov and the Russian executive is that of a vassal to his overlord: the overlord delegates part of his power to the vassal, who is free to act as he wishes in his own domain and may, at times, defy the overlord's expectations by rising up or pledging his loyalty to a rival. Kadyrovism is thus in flux, like all other ideological constructs in play in Putin's Russia.

Ramzan Kadyrov undoubtedly serves as a tool of the Kremlin in its pacification of Chechnya and in projecting Russia's "soft power" in the Muslim world, yet his actions regularly catch the Russian authorities by surprise. He hasn't shrunk from testing Putin's loyalty to him on several occasions, before then reaffirming his total submission. Besides having psychoanalytical implications, the way they interact would suggest that the manipulation cuts both ways. The tension between the course pursued by Kadyrov and that pursued by the Kremlin could, one day, force Moscow to dispense with the Chechen troublemaker. Moreover, the gradual

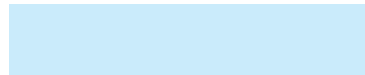
76. There are currently around 15 million Muslims in Russia, 11% of the population, but given the slowing trends for ethnic Russians and the growth of Russia's Muslim population, particularly in the North Caucasus, experts predict that Russian citizens from a Muslim background—not necessarily believers or practising Muslims—will make up at least a third of Russia's population by mid-century.

“normalisation” of Chechnya might eventually mean that Kadyrov could be replaced by a less flamboyant leader, while still upholding the hardline ideology in the making. While Putin’s system can survive without Kadyrov, Kadyrovism is probably unable to withstand the departure of Vladimir Putin.

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