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Defected and Loyal?

A Case Study of Counter-Defection Mechanisms Inside Chechen Paramilitaries

Abstract: Can former insurgents in the service of counterinsurgent paramilitaries be considered a perfectly loyal force? What mechanisms may help to deter subsequent defections of individuals who have already “betrayed” once? Drawing on a unique set of primary data, this article examines the effective counter-defection practices of Chechnya's pro-Moscow paramilitaries toward prospective defectors from among ex-insurgents. It explores three interwoven mechanisms employed with various intensity to avert “double defections” at the peak of the locally fought counterinsurgency in Chechnya from 2000 to 2005. These mechanisms are: (1) extrajudicial executions of recidivists and their relatives, (2) initiatory violence targeting insurgents' relatives and (3) disclosure of the identities of defected insurgents who were responsible for killing insurgents in combat to the families of slain insurgents.

Can former insurgents in the service of counter-insurgency paramilitaries be considered a perfectly loyal force? What mechanisms may help to deter subsequent defections¹ of individuals who have already “betrayed” once? Despite the fact that “double defections”² are a fairly widespread occurrence among paramilitary organizations, few studies have explicitly analysed the phenomenon of defection among insurgents-turned-counterinsurgents. We likewise have a poor understanding of the particular counter-defection measures aimed against side-switchers,³ i.e. insurgents who switch sides to join their former enemies. While some studies have covered counter-defection mechanisms employed by insurgent groups,⁴ no study to date has either empirically or theoretically examined the counter-defection measures used by paramilitaries on side-switchers.

Drawing on the case study of Chechnya, this empirical article starts to fill the gap in the extant scholarship on counter-defection mechanisms aimed at both former defectors and double defectors among counter-insurgent paramilitaries. Relying predominantly on previously unpublished first-hand evidence from the early years of the Second Chechen War, it identifies three unique and interwoven mechanisms employed by pro-Moscow Chechen paramilitary units—known as *kadyrovtsy*—to cement the loyalty of former defectors in order to prevent them from returning to, or supporting, insurgency. The first mechanism is extrajudicial executions of “double-defectors” and their relatives, which were widely practiced by *kadyrovtsy* as a form of intimidation for other

side-switchers among their ranks. The second mechanism was initiatory violence against insurgents' relatives. Finally, by disclosing the identities of defected insurgents deployed in combat against insurgents to the families of fallen insurgents, paramilitaries anticipated that the threat of retaliation would cut off all possibilities of return for side-switchers. The focus of this article is on side-switchers because in the particular context of Chechnya in the early 2000s, this group was the major target of counter-defection efforts exerted by pro-Moscow paramilitaries. While examining the complex phenomenon of defection, this article challenges the established view of insurgents-turned-counterinsurgents as a genuinely loyal force.

To that end, this study proceeds as follows. The first section seeks to provide a basic systematization of what is known about defection and counter-defection in various empirical settings. The concept of the (dis)loyalty of side-switchers is then addressed by exploring the context of counter-defection mechanisms aimed against prospective “double defectors”. The subsequent section offers a robust empirical explanation of the mechanisms on the ground through which the Moscow-backed pro-Russian Chechen authorities forged the loyalty of the former members of the Chechen insurgency who joined *kadyrovtsy* local paramilitary units.

The phenomenon of defection

Defection from armed units, especially those deployed in combat, has been a fairly widespread phenomenon. Indeed, as long as there are armies engaged in armed conflicts, a certain number of troops will for a variety of reasons, such as wartime hardships, ideological incentives, or survival itself, seek to desert or defect, depending on circumstances and/or individual preferences. Together with desertion, defection poses an imminent challenge for any military force—a challenge that cannot be overestimated due to its potential to undermine the military force both physically and psychologically. This holds twice as true for armed units engaged in combat, where defection is an even worse transgression. It involves not only leaving the fighting army and breaking the oath of

loyalty, but also joining the enemies' forces. As such, defection is a move that not only increases a belligerent's numerical capacity; it may also serve as a source of insider intelligence, crucial for the successful conduct of warfare. Both conventional and unconventional armed forces have historically adopted policies and rules aimed at preventing defection among their fighters. In conventional armies, defection—along with collaboration and desertion—has been penalized by either long imprisonment sentences or death, the latter being practiced particularly in wartime.

Apart from formally engrained practices implemented in conventional militaries, a number of informal practices have been applied in unconventional armies, such as insurgent groups, to prevent defection. A voluminous literature on defections has a heavy bias toward examining what induces rebels to defect and join their enemies.⁵ Kalyvas and Lyall have both explored in detail the characteristics of ethnic defections, defined by Kalyvas as “a process whereby individuals join organizations explicitly opposed to the national aspirations of the ethnic group with which they identify and end up fighting against their coethnics.”⁶ Less common are attempts to examine how insurgent groups prevent their members from defecting to their enemies. Summary executions of recaptured defectors or deserters and committing atrocities against the local population in order to deter insurgents from returning to their villages for fear of revenge are among the methods employed by insurgent organizations to ensure the loyalty of their members. During the period 1975–1992, for example, the rebel Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) forced captured children to kill their relatives in front of their villages to make sure the children would have nowhere to return.⁷ The use of psychological pressure, such as cases when insurgents have to witness—or even carry out—executions of recaptured defectors or deserters was also employed as one of the measures to avert defections.⁸ Punishment for defectors is death in the PKK (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*—Kurdistan Workers’ Party), a separatist guerrilla group operating in southeastern Turkey and adjacent areas that advocates for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state.⁹ As detailed by Kalyvas,¹⁰ the PKK murdered thousands of suspected

defectors in order to prevent possible defections in future. Similarly, the Islamic State has also punished defectors with death.¹¹ Allegations have circulated over the Afghan government either sentencing defectors to death or giving them long prison terms accompanied by torture.¹² The Vietcong is also reported to have relied on capital punishment for defectors.¹³

The issue of defection in irregular wars has been an obscure area of study for a number of reasons. First of all, in contrast to conventional warfare, incumbent forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations are not very likely to switch sides to join insurgents. As observed by Kalyvas¹⁴ using the example of the decades-long Turkish counterinsurgency against the PKK, while hundreds of PKK fighters have switched sides during the conflict, “... it would be hard to find ethnic Turks fighting on the side of the PKK.” The example of Cuban soldiers serving General Batista switching sides to join Fidel Castro’s rebel during the Cuban Revolution is one of the few rare examples of members of a conventional force joining a rebel force.¹⁵ Such defections occur more often during conflicts that fit the definition of a civil war¹⁶ than in more asymmetric insurgencies. Cases of defection from government forces to rebel ranks also tend to occur in those irregular conflicts where the conventional army is weak or corrupt. Recidivism remains a serious issue, for example, in the Afghan army, “especially since fighters who do not secure employment frequently return to the insurgency or illicit activity.”¹⁷ In fact, there have been cases in Afghanistan in which members of the local police and army, with earlier defectors among them, opened fire on their fellow or allied troops.¹⁸ Additionally, defected members of insurgent groups are rarely formally incorporated into the incumbent’s armed forces. Such cases as “pseudogangs”—units composed of Mau Mau defectors during the British counterinsurgency in Kenya¹⁹—and *kadyrovsty* forces, which this article discuss in greater detail, are among the few examples of insurgent defectors being organized into separate units.

The most advanced study on the phenomenon so far has been put forward by Eli Berman. Berman formalized an economic model of the defection process in insurgent groups. His model

explains that individual insurgents are rational actors seeking to maximize their well-being (utility) in a given context.²⁰ According to Berman, the trade-off which insurgents face as they are defecting is based on the concept of defection constraint where the well-being associated with defection (payoff) is worth more than remaining loyal to their group. Specifically, Berman's model shows that the payoff to remain loyal starts at a higher value as insurgents appraise more loyalty to peers, friends, their reputation, and being able to live with their family without hiding from their former associates. However, as the payoff for defection increases, it becomes more valuable economically to defect rather than to enjoy the benefits of loyalty, friendship, and family. At the same time, the defection constraint also depends on the individual's potential outside of the insurgent group, as well as on his or her outside options, i.e. education and foreign networks. Insurgents with strong outside options are expected to have a lower defection constraint as they can foresee a prospective future outside of insurgent groups.

Although valuable in the study of defections, this formal model has a number of properties that render it only partially relevant to our article. Firstly, while Berman's model focuses on the motivations of prospective defectors in order to understand insurgent strategies of controlling defection, our article explicitly deals with the incumbent mechanisms to prevent side-switching in prospective defectors. Secondly, Berman's model applies to "standard" defectors, while our article engages with prospective double-defectors. The latter, as we argue throughout the article, appear to be a specific group of a priori less trusted side-switchers. Although data is scarce on prospective double-defectors, in referring to available sources, we assume that more watchful attitudes, compounded with harsher counter-defection mechanisms, are likely to be deployed against this particular group of side-switchers. These essential distinctions notwithstanding, as the subsequent chapters illustrate, we partially build on Berman's concepts of payoff and defection constraint as valuable measures for understanding the general logic of defection and its prevention.

Defection among side-switchers: An obscure research area

Cases of “double defection,” or defection among side-switchers, are not uncommon. For example, during the Iraqi offensive in Basra in March 2008, around 1,000 militiamen, among them earlier defectors, switched sides to join al-Sadr.²¹ In southeastern Turkey, members of the PKK (who previously side-switched to the Turkish military) are known to have defected to the PKK.²² The research on “double defection” is nevertheless scarce. This may be explained by a variety of reasons. The first among these that is the phenomenon of “double defection” is highly controversial. An act of defection among side-switchers casts negative light on the authorities who previously adopted defectors into their force. Unlike defection of demobilized, deserted, and disengaged militants, defection of side-switchers may pose a major security challenge, which could be interpreted as a grave failure on the part of the authorities. Due to the sensitivity of the subject and its serious repercussions, authorities, in an effort to retain credibility and avoid criticism, may be more inclined to conceal such information than they would be otherwise. The second reason, as previously stated, is that in most militaries, severe penalties have been applied to deserters, collaborators, and defectors. More commonly, side-switchers tend to be members of paramilitary forces that largely operate outside established legal boundaries. In addition, side-switchers are usually treated by their commanders and fellow fighters with a great deal of mistrust and scepticism. There is therefore reason to believe that side-switchers—let alone “double defectors”—are more likely than other groups to be subjected to death either in accordance with the legal code or as extrajudicial executions. Finally, determining recidivism is notoriously problematic, particularly when recidivism falls short of taking the form of physical defection, but rather consists of espionage while in the ranks of COIN force. In such cases, it could go on for years without being detected.

Consistent with the “once a terrorist, forever a terrorist” logic, authorities and the local population doubt the intentions of defectors. For example, rumours have circulated in Colombia that

“fake” defectors from guerrilla organizations have infiltrated the national counterinsurgency force.²³ The real motivation of side-switchers is believed by sceptics to be penetration of the COIN force under the pretext of defection, with the ultimate aim of undermining it from within.²⁴ Such widespread rumors may, of course, be explained by the usual paranoia surrounding defectors’ intentions observed among local populations and some authorities. The scarcity of hard data on “double defectors” could, however, be attributed not only to lower rates of recidivism observed in the former group than among demobilized militants,²⁵ but also to the authorities’ efforts not to make such knowledge public, while “double defectors” are subjected to extrajudicial executions.

The scarcity of data on recidivism among defectors may also be explained by the defectors’ perceived loyalty.²⁶ Insurgents most often switch sides after losing faith in the cause of their former comrades-in-arms or due to a non-ideological attempt to settle scores with them.²⁷ Defectors appear to have stronger motivation to refrain from recidivism, which in this article is understood in the narrower sense of rejoining or providing support to insurgent groups, than deserters or those seeking demobilization. Unlike demobilization or desertion—the essentially “neutral” processes of laying down arms and returning to peaceful civilian life without the need to join either side of a conflict—the act of defection itself presupposes a higher degree of commitment from former insurgents to their newly acquired cause. After all, unlike deserters and demobilized insurgents, defectors remain in the armed conflict and risk their lives daily.²⁸ One could therefore conclude that there would be no need to question the good intent of the defectors. Simply put, why defect if you still consider relapsing?

The reality on the ground, however, is far more complex. Many insurgents indeed switch sides out of persuasion and free will and often sacrifice their lives in the service of their newly adopted causes. There does, however, appear to be a segment of those who defect without much enthusiasm, and who rather submit to adverse circumstances for the sake of physical survival, as reported in the case of some insurgents who demobilized, deserted, or disengaged rather

involuntarily.²⁹ Existing empirical evidence suggests that coercion imposed by an incumbent is a strong and common incentive for insurgents to defect to their former enemies.³⁰ Pro-Moscow Chechen paramilitaries, for example, threatened to kill relatives of insurgents in order to coerce them into either demobilization or, more frequently, into outright defection.³¹ In Kenya and Rhodesia, captured insurgents who refused to cooperate, including by participation in combat, “would be turned over to the police, where they faced the possibility of long prison sentences or even hanging.”³² Reflecting on the Kenyan practice of converting former insurgents into counterinsurgents, Kitson³³ observes that, apart from conventional “stick and carrot” approaches, it is important that a defector is “... given a reasonable opportunity of proving both to himself and to his friends that there is nothing fundamentally dishonourable about his action.”

It is hard to overestimate the importance³⁴ of indigenous forces, particularly from among former insurgents, for the success of locally fought counterinsurgencies. The deployment of such forces by the incumbent has often enabled the latter to stem the tide of local conflict due to the acquired access to intelligence, tactical advances, and other advantages of using “former enemy” combatants.³⁵ Against this background, the loyalty of the defectors is the key to the success of counterinsurgency operations. Given that some defectors are individuals who submitted to coercion imposed by authorities at an earlier stage, one is not to exclude the likelihood of them relapsing should the circumstances necessitate.

At this stage, it is important to distinguish between insurgents or conventional COIN forces and paramilitary organizations. The analysis thus far has been about insurgents or conventional COIN forces. This raises the question of how paramilitary organizations, also known as counterinsurgency paramilitaries³⁶ or pro-government militias (PGMs),³⁷ deal with the issue of defectors’ loyalty. With regards to insurgent groups, one of the most significant guarantees of defectors’ loyalty is that defectors who join their ranks from incumbent forces cannot easily switch back for fear of being court-martialled or other legal measures. In reality, however, state laws and

legal codes are of little relevance for paramilitary groups, which operate in gray zones. In contrast to insurgents, paramilitaries often have weak ideological bases, which prevents them from effectively indoctrinating their recruits. They have even less options of ensuring the loyalty of side-switchers. Bearing in mind that paramilitary organizations might offer defectors even less incentives to remain loyal than their previous “employers”—insurgents—“double defections” can easily be a true plague for PGMs. Indeed, the existing empirical evidence suggests that defections, including “double defections”, are a common occurrence among paramilitaries. Jones³⁸ details numerous “double defections,” including high-profile figures among anti-Taliban tribal militias during the mid-2000s. “Double defections” are also known to have affected Colombian AUC paramilitaries. According to Mazzei,³⁹ there were over 800 defected guerrillas among AUC paramilitaries in Colombia. Clayton and Thomson⁴⁰ note that “double defections” were a common phenomenon among Iraq’s anti-Al Qaeda Sunni paramilitary group “Sons of Iraq.” This suggests that, in contrast to both conventional COIN forces and insurgent groups, paramilitary organizations are particularly ill-designed to counter not only ordinary defections, but also “double defections.” The literature to-date on paramilitary groups has little reference as to how such organizations ensure the loyalty of their new members, particularly from among former insurgents. As of this writing, comprehensive empirical accounts on specific mechanisms of preventing side-switchers from defecting among paramilitary groups are notably absent from the literature. This study aims to fill that gap by presenting a micro-level empirical analysis of how the Chechen paramilitary group *kadyrovtsy* employed various mechanisms of ensuring the loyalty of side-switchers.

Data and methods

Empirically, despite episodic journalistic accounts and reports by human rights organizations, Chechnya's pro-Russian authorities' counter-recidivism strategy with respect to defected insurgents remains largely unknown. Absent first-hand data on the subject, we clustered a unique data set of

interviews with former insurgents-turned-counterinsurgents. For purposes of this research, we carried out interviews with former (three) members of pro-Moscow Chechen paramilitaries, *kadyrovtsy*, and Chechnya-based police force. Access to them was obtained through long-term contacts with members of the Chechen insurgency and Chechen diaspora communities scattered across Russia, Europe, and the United States. Interviews with 12 members of Chechen émigré communities scattered around Europe, most of which are current asylum seekers or permanent residents who were selected for interviews on the grounds of their first-hand experience with the researched phenomenon (for instance, being relatives of *kadyrovtsy* or former insurgents) were also conducted. In addition, interviews with scholars (three), human-rights workers (two), and journalists (three) with first-hand knowledge of the researched phenomenon were carried out. Remarkably, the interviews revealed considerable concurrence among the testimonies of all groups of interviewees.

While this sample is not representative, this study still constitutes the only case in the existing scholarship in which former *kadyrovtsy* or members of pro-Moscow Chechen police force have been interviewed. As the following sections will illustrate, it is extremely dangerous for fighters to abandon the ranks of *kadyrovtsy*. Although the strict penalization imposed upon *kadyrovtsy* by pro-Moscow Chechen authorities for leaving their paramilitary formations was somewhat relaxed in the late 2000s, the decision to leave is still far from risk-free.

Due to security concerns, all interviewees consented to be interviewed on the basis of strict confidentiality. For the same reason, interviews were conducted outside of Chechnya in Moscow and in a number of European and Turkish cities, where current or former *kadyrovtsy*, members of Chechen police force, and civilian eyewitnesses were based permanently or temporarily. The interviews spanned the period from 2007 to 2014. To honor interviewees' requests, their true names and identities in this study are concealed, and pseudonyms are used instead. Most interviews took place on a repeated basis and nearly all incidents described by the interviewees relate to the period

2000–2005.

Notes were taken during these semi-structured interviews, as interviewees refused to be audio or video taped. Interviews lasted an average of three to four hours. With the exemption of a single interviewee—a Chechnya-based political scientist who agreed to talk strictly on the basis of confidentiality—the identities of scholars and journalists are disclosed in this study.

The empirical study proceeds as follows: we first provide a brief historical introduction to the Second Chechen War, the counterinsurgency (COIN), and the process of Chechenization. We then identify three unique and interwoven mechanisms employed by *kadyrovtsy* to cement the loyalty of former defectors in order to prevent them from returning to insurgency or providing support to it.

A history of armed conflict in Chechnya

The roots of armed conflict in Chechnya trace back to 1994. At that time, following a three-year period of Chechen de facto independence, the Russian Army marched into the breakaway republic and started a war that lasted nearly two years and claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Chechens, predominantly civilians.⁴¹ Despite Russia's vast military and economic superiority, the local insurgency managed to inflict sensitive blows to the invaders. Consequently, incapable of breaking the backbone of Chechnya's increasingly popular insurgency, Russian troops pulled out of the republic in 1996 in a move that was widely interpreted as Moscow's defeat.⁴²

Post-war Chechnya was a country in ashes, with absolute unemployment and lacking healthcare, education, and social services. Against this background, a three year *intermezzo* of independence recurred, with Chechens proving incapable of establishing a functioning state. Some influential warlords—heroes of the previous war—refused to acknowledge the authority of Chechnya's secular government in Grozny, led by President Aslan Maskhadov. On some occasions, frictions between various camps of veterans escalated into violent clashes. The clashes peaked

during 1998–1999, when the republic's minority, yet increasingly vocal and determined, Salafi-jihadist community led by the infamous Shamil Basayev, sought to undermine Maskhadov's authority on the grounds of its “godless” nature.⁴³ In order to overthrow Maskhadov's rule and establish an Islamic theocracy across the North Caucasus by means of sparking popular anti-Russian rebellion, Basayev-led Chechen-Dagestani jihadist forces invaded neighbouring Dagestan in August 1999. Instead of instigating a pan-Islamic revolt, the jihadist invasion ran aground a unified Russo-Dagestani resistance, and the jihadists were expelled from Dagestan in less than a month.⁴⁴

In September 1999, apartment bombings in Russian cities, widely interpreted as Chechen jihadists' vengeance for their failed incursion, shook Russian society as they left 300 civilians dead. Coupled with the Dagestan invasion, these terrorist attacks were used by Russian authorities as a pretext to launch a renewed war on Chechnya in September 1999, taking hold of Grozny in early 2000 and of the rest of the republic later in the year. The armed conflict did not end, however, and Chechen insurgents—aided by some of the local population—moved to the country's heavily accessible mountainous areas in the south and switched to guerrilla tactics. In the years to come, Chechen insurgents continued to put up a fierce resistance to Russian troops, with the prospect of pacified Chechnya still beyond sight. As the Russian military failed to create its power base within the Chechen population, it lacked necessary intelligence on the identities of insurgents and their local supporters, which made selective targeting difficult. Instead, as in the First Chechen War, the Russian military largely relied on large-scale mop-up operations, known as *zachistkas*, and random shelling of villages allegedly collaborating with the insurgents. As a result, dozens of mass graves containing bodies of hundreds of missing Chechen males, often with signs of severe torture and mutilation, can be found across the republic. Human rights organizations have as a result decried the widespread use of indiscriminate violence by Russian military authorities.⁴⁵ The effect of indiscriminate violence was, however, rather counterproductive. As *zachistkas* turned almost every

Chechen male between the ages of 16 and 60 into suspects, thousands of Chechens, driven by the honour-centred exigency to retaliate, mobilized into insurgency units, while thousands of others sought to aid them.⁴⁶ As a result, and as observed by a Russian combat general who served in Chechnya in 2004, the Russian troops were “so busy just trying to ensure their own security” that they “almost never encounter[ed] the guerrillas.”⁴⁷

In an effort to stem the tide of the local conflict, Moscow delegated increasingly considerable military and political powers to the local pro-Russian authorities established at the turn of the century. Headed by Akhmat Kadyrov, a reputed Sufi cleric and a former high-ranking separatist, a special paramilitary force—*kadyrovtsy*—was established in the early 2000s, with the major task of fighting the local insurgents.⁴⁸ Membership in *kadyrovtsy* units provided many young Chechen males and their families with the guarantee of physical survival against the background of incessant *zachistkas* and other indiscriminate violence deployed by the Russian military. Some *kadyrovtsy* who are former insurgents joined the COIN force out of free will due to ideologically or personally motivated grievances against the insurgents. For others, financial considerations also played a role in a war-torn country where unemployment and poverty were appalling.⁴⁹ Regardless of their motivation, most *kadyrovtsy* were former insurgents.⁵⁰

Importantly, at Moscow’s behest, Kadyrov concentrated on former insurgent leaders as his former comrades-in-arms, who he prompted—through both persuasion and coercion—into demobilization. In fact, Vladimir Putin’s choice of Kadyrov seems to be aimed primarily at utilizing the cleric’s long-standing contacts with insurgent leaders because, as the Russian president admitted at the time, “his [Kadyrov’s] contacts with the people who were still putting up resistance against us in Chechnya [...] will be positive.”⁵¹ To facilitate this process, amnesties were declared by Russian authorities, which then paved—at least on paper—the legal groundwork for the demobilization of former insurgents. These amnesties, and particularly forced demobilizations of insurgent leaders detailed below, proved largely effective in that thousands of insurgents disengaged.⁵²

Upon defection, insurgents often faced the threat of imprisonment and interrogations at the hands of federal authorities. In fact, due to the perplexity of local and federal agencies in early post-war Chechnya,⁵³ the security of individual ex-combatants was difficult to ascertain. Russian army generals were determined to “screen” ex-combatants on the basis of their presumed participation in hostilities or terrorist attacks—activities formally exempt from the amnesties—that caused most concern amongst demobilized or demobilization-seeking Chechens.

Russian military officers were particularly concerned over the high percentage of demobilized insurgents in the newly formed *kadyrovtsy* units and the prospect of continued support that the ex-combatants and particularly *kadyrovtsy* recruits from among former insurgents might have provided to their former comrades-in-arms. In an interview with a Russian daily newspaper in 2001, the country’s deputy prosecutor, General Vladimir Kolesnikov, infamously declared that “the district divisions of the Interior Ministry are often assembled on the basis of teips, i.e. on the principle of family relationships, without doing adequate checks of their membership in illegal armed formations.”⁵⁴ Referring to internal sources, Kolesnikov estimated the percentage of former insurgents in the ranks of the republic’s Interior Ministry in Grozny at 60 per cent. In some districts, that figure was believed to be as high as 80 per cent.⁵⁵ As a rule, the top-down approach prevailed during demobilizations and subsequent recruitments into *kadyrovtsy* units. Insurgent warlords brought with them their foot soldiers, usually members of their clans, which provides context for much of Kolesnikov's quoted statement. The notorious statement in 2000 by the Russian Minister of Interior, Vladimir Rushaylo, upon his inspection of the *kadyrovtsy* paramilitaries in Grozny that “[e]verybody is present here except for Basayev and Khattab,” is also symptomatic.⁵⁶ Skeptical of the ex-insurgents’ true motives, federal authorities disregarded amnesties, sweeping dozens of individual ex-insurgents every month.⁵⁷

Notably, Moscow's deployment of *kadyrovtsy* paramilitaries in the locally conducted COIN operations since the early 2000s helped the incumbent to create its power base in Chechen society.

Following the killings of insurgents, their relatives, and supporters, *kadyrovtsy* and their relatives found themselves in the midst of blood feuds. According to the prevailing custom of blood revenge, insurgents and their families were in a position to retaliate against the relatives of *kadyrovtsy*, which smashed Chechen society into two feuding camps. Indeed, *kadyrovtsy* engaged in grim human rights violations primarily targeting the relatives of insurgents and their supporters, which has been a highly controversial practice.⁵⁸ Against the backdrop of inter-clan infighting or the threat thereof, political issues – support for the idea of Chechen independence or for rejoining Russia – became tangential, if not irrelevant to many.

As of 2002, according to a local observer, “both local and Russian police forces had to be included in carrying out mop-up operations [in Chechnya]. Recently, however, only Chechens tend to be on incursions with divisions of the district military command.”⁵⁹ Around 2005, *kadyrovtsy*, together with other pro-Moscow Chechen units ultimately replaced Russian troops as the main COIN force in the republic.⁶⁰ Pro-Moscow Chechens’ knowledge of the local social terrain and—in the case of recruits who are former insurgents—their knowledge of the identities of current insurgents, their hideouts and *modus operandi*, as well as intelligence stemming from *kadyrovtsy*’s relatives, helped the incumbent to increasingly deploy selective violence. Over time, this raised the cost of pro-insurgent support among the local population, while simultaneously reducing the likelihood of indiscriminate targeting, which helped to isolate Chechen insurgents from their once-strong social base. Faced with severe reprisals, many Chechen civilians eventually turned their back to insurgents in order to save their lives. Besides, around 80,000 Russian troops were stationed in Chechnya. They provided backup to the well-tailored COIN operations conducted by pro-Moscow Chechens, ensuring the incumbent’s enormous superiority over the insurgents. Consequently, in the late 2000s, Chechnya had become one of the North Caucasian republics with the lowest rate of insurgency-related violence, lagging behind Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria.⁶¹

In order to explain the causes of what many have considered a fairly successful COIN, the

literature has focused on the processes of Chechenization, that is, the deployment by the Russian counterinsurgents of indigenous Chechen forces against the Chechen insurgents and the societal implications thereof. Specifically, the literature has focused on the strategies and tactics of the local COIN,⁶² the role of co-ethnic militias or paramilitary forces in relationship to intelligence gathering,⁶³ the “hearts and minds” approach of the incumbent and the cooptation of the Kadyrov clan,⁶⁴ as well as on the long-term effect of the Chechenization policy on Chechen society.⁶⁵ Emphasis has been put on the mechanisms of collective responsibility and civilian victimization deployed by Chechnya’s pro-Moscow authorities, and the efficacy of deploying the *kadyrovtsy* paramilitaries as a committed and experienced force with access to intelligence on the ground and partial local support.⁶⁶

At the same time, the themes of defection and counter-defection in Chechnya and the loyalty of the pro-Moscow paramilitary forces in the ranks of former insurgents have been neglected in the scholarship. The literature has mostly produced descriptive accounts on the establishment of the *kadyrovtsy* units without addressing the puzzling question of their loyalties.⁶⁷ It has been taken for granted that the ever-lasting loyalty of the *kadyrovtsy* units has been based on kinship, greed, or the antagonism of defected ex-insurgents toward their former comrades-in-arms in the ranks of insurgent groups.⁶⁸ Yet while the coercive nature of defections in Chechnya has been a widely known phenomenon, it is surprising that no study as of yet has sought to explore the reasons behind Grozny’s and Moscow’s reliance on these ex-insurgents, and the mechanisms deployed by the incumbent to prevent ex-insurgent defectors from side-switching again. As demonstrated by this brief historical introduction, the ability to deter former insurgents from subsequent defections has greatly contributed to the military successes associated with the process of Chechenization and the COIN in Chechnya.

Our article builds on Berman’s concepts of defection constraint and payoff in that it explores the impact of the three counter-defection mechanisms on the defected ex-insurgents’ willingness to

avoid side-switching. We argue that the deployment by the incumbent of the three intertwined counter-defection mechanisms enormously increased the defection constraint for prospective double-defectors, while reducing the payoff of their prospective side-switching. The extremely rare incidence of side-switching in the ranks of ex-insurgent *kadyrovtsy*, according to our interviewees, implies that these mechanisms have proved effective in deterring side-switching as ex-insurgent *kadyrovtsy* sought to ensure survival for themselves and their families. To do so, the next section examines three main co-constitutive mechanisms put forward by the Kadyrov administration to prevent defection inside its new paramilitary groups: (1) extrajudicial executions of recidivists and their relatives, (2) initiatory violence targeting insurgents' relatives, and (3) disclosing the identities of defected insurgents who are responsible for killing insurgents in combat to the families of slain insurgents.

Mechanism 1: Collective responsibility: Punishing recidivists and their relatives

Inspired by theoretical debates on collective action dilemma and designed around the concept of collective responsibility, the first mechanism imposed by the Kadyrov administration sought to increase the level of defections among insurgents while simultaneously ensuring their loyalty. In order to increase the cost associated with supporting or defecting to join the insurgency, the new pro-Russian forces took advantage of the Chechen clan-based social organization in order to extend defectors' individual responsibility to their relatives⁶⁹. By threatening insurgents' relatives with murder, rape, and torture, the Kadyrov administration sought to instil fear among defectors and also create intra-clan social pressure against recidivism.

Defectors were to guarantee their loyalty by putting not only their own heads on the chopping block, but also those of their relatives. Numerous interviews give evidence to the fact that *kadyrovtsy* retained the right to murder the relatives of defected insurgents, either for rejoining insurgent units or for providing them with any kind of material support such as clothing, shelter,

medicine, food, or even intelligence.⁷⁰ Unlike the Russian forces, pro-Russian Chechen forces could easily identify defectors' relatives and punish recidivism on the basis of collective responsibility. In order to ensure their safety and avoid persecution, former insurgents and warlords rapidly developed self-imposed control as a way of deterring recidivism among demobilized insurgents and precluding acts of recidivism among the members of their clans.⁷¹ The mechanism of recruitment into *kadyrovtsy* units appears to operate on a similar principle, in that:

somebody comes to Ramzan⁷² claiming that he is being hunted by blood enemies and „Wahabbis“, that he doesn't have anywhere to turn and wants to be taken in. Ramzan's people check whether he is lying. If everything checks out and the recruit really is under threat of death, they offer for him to bring along three more people, usually relatives. They give him an ID card, weapon, and often even a car, and tell him: „Nobody will touch you now, but you must obey all of our commands.“ If something doesn't check out, they kill not only the recruit, but also his three relatives.⁷³

Collective responsibility was also used extensively by *kadyrovtsy* to exert pressure on hundreds of insurgents with the aim of forcing them to defect. Insurgent leaders were in charge of groups of dozens or even hundreds of fighters, usually members of their own clans. The Kadyrov clan⁷⁴ therefore focused on coercing insurgent leaders into defection in order to bring about their own foot soldiers' defection as well. Enormous pressure was thus exerted on the relatives of prominent insurgents. Their capitulation would help Grozny to undermine the insurgency psychologically. A typical scenario would involve the capture by *kadyrovtsy* of around 40 relatives of a key separatist leader, General Magomed Khambiyev, who served as Defense minister in Maskhadov's government and was his closest associate. Khambiyev's relatives were then threatened with murder unless the general capitulated. After a period of negotiations with his clan elders and government authorities, Khambiyev eventually surrendered in March 2004.⁷⁵ Another significant case was the capture by *kadyrovtsy* of the relatives of the separatist president Maskhadov himself, including his sisters in their late 70s.⁷⁶ Depending on the individual case, each week or month that passed without capitulating would result in the murder of one relative. While Maskhadov eventually

managed to withstand this pressure, it proved unbearable for many insurgent leaders, who demobilized. Commenting on Khambiyev's capitulation, Memorial—a prominent Russian human rights organization monitoring the violence in the North Caucasus—wrote:

Given the situation that had developed around him, his family, and the dozens or even hundreds of both close and distant relatives, Khambiyev had no other choice [...] a different choice on his part would have been incomprehensible or unacceptable to the Chechen public—buying his own freedom with the freedom and lives of relatives would mean violating unwritten laws and codes of conduct.⁷⁷

Ordinary insurgents were targeted in addition to prominent insurgent leaders in that their relatives were threatened with murder unless their relatives defected. As in the case of prominent insurgents, when *kadyrovtsy* blackmail failed to bear fruit, this eventually led to murders or "forced disappearances" of the defiant insurgents' relatives.⁷⁸

By building on archaic social traditions such as the notion of collective responsibility, the Kadyrov administration was able to create social and individual incentives to deter recidivism among defectors. Consistent with that logic, the second and the third mechanisms could be seen as interwoven into the complex maze of Chechen traditions in that they sought to reinforce the cost of defection as defectors' participation in military activities increased over time. Against this background, absolute loyalty to *kadyrovtsy* and the Kadyrov clan became the only way to survive when facing the threat of retaliation from insurgents and their relatives.

According to our interviewees, the first mechanism was used most out of the three discussed mechanisms deployed by Chechnya's pro-Moscow authorities to deter defection.

Mechanism 2: Initiation killings: "taking blood upon oneself"

Fresh defectors departing *kadyrovtsy* paramilitaries were routinely deployed in retributive assaults against insurgents' supporters and relatives. Mairbek Vatchagayev details the mechanism of recruitment into *kadyrovtsy* units in that "[i]n exchange for your life, you went to the police and had to prove that you parted your ways from the insurgents, you had to take blood on yourself."⁷⁹ The

term *taking blood upon oneself* implied that a new recruit was tasked by authorities to carry out an initiation killing of an (alleged) insurgent or an (alleged) insurgent's family member or supporter. According to interviewees, this practice was particularly commonplace during the early 2000s, when hundreds of defectors were distrusted by federal and local authorities and thus had to demonstrate the authenticity of their intention to switch sides.⁸⁰ Such killings usually took place during mop-up raids or in the detention camps scattered across the republic, where hundreds of Chechen males of conscription age suspected of aiding and abetting insurgent groups were held. Such initiation killings might even happen in a recruit's native village in order to further involve the defector and his relatives, thereby linking the first and the second mechanism.

The persistence of the custom of blood feud in Chechen society catapulted the *kadyrovtsy* into the status of blood enemies of the insurgents and their clans, thereby inevitably burning bridges back to normal life. Faced with such circumstances and in order to survive, paramilitaries and their relatives had to bind their fates even more tightly to Grozny and Moscow. This soon turned them into both the strong advocates of Russia's presence in the troublesome republic and the fiercest opponents of the local insurgency. In addition, scores of new recruits boosted the Kadyrov clan's standing against its rivals in blood feud with insurgents and their clans. The deployment of *kadyrovtsy*—men with various clan backgrounds—in operations leading to extrajudicial killings meant that the recruits became, as Chechens say, “bound by blood” to the Kadyrov clan.⁸¹ This, too, served to minimize the extent of recidivism among defectors.

Interviewees point to initiation killings as an important milestone, as many fresh defectors who switched sides and joined the ranks of pro-Moscow Chechen authorities rather involuntarily initially sought to avoid bloodshed. Among them were those who were still sympathetic to the insurgents and their cause. Others ultimately defected for the sake of securing their relatives' survival and therefore tried not to become entangled in another risky affair that would ultimately endanger their, or their relatives', lives. In this regard, an act of initiation killing was the point of no

return because it inevitably led to blood feud between the culprit' and the offended's relatives.⁸² Over time, this transformed hundreds and perhaps even thousands of Chechen youth into a “class of murders, who have no way back would fight for their rights [and survival] until the very end.”⁸³ Indeed, fresh recruits were routinely deployed in assaults against insurgents' relatives to cement their loyalty to the Kadyrov clan and, indirectly, to Moscow. Following initiatory killings, the *kadyrovtsy* perpetrators found it impossible and, most importantly, needless to return to or support the insurgency. From then on, the individuals themselves and their relatives could be targeted at virtually any time by insurgents, their relatives, or anyone whose relative was offended in a previous act of initiation killing.

More importantly, the pro-Moscow Chechen authorities specifically sought to deprive the fresh defectors of anonymity during initiation killings. As a rule, fresh defectors were compelled not to wear face masks in order not to conceal their identities during mop-ups or while working in detention camps.⁸⁴ As a result, the perpetrators' identities soon became known to the local communities, and thus the relatives of murdered, injured, or otherwise humiliated individuals. According to a former *kadyrovets*, “everyone knows everyone in tiny Chechnya, where people are either relatives or neighbours [...] and it's difficult to conceal something from others, particularly when your son was killed.”⁸⁵ Moreover, the identities of fresh defectors who were forced to kill an (alleged) insurgent in a detention camp were then intentionally leaked to the communities of the murdered through the *kadyrovtsy*'s networks.⁸⁶

Such tactics were also used in counter-insurgent activities in order to finalize the process of building loyalty to Grozny and the *kadyrovtsy*. The fate of all defectors would therefore become inextricably linked to the stability and survival of the pro-Russian administration.

Mechanism 3: Whispering campaigns: Implicating defectors in counter-insurgency killings

After successfully ensuring defectors' loyalty in pre-combat operations, the pro-Russian

administration also developed an in-combat loyalty-building mechanism linking survival to loyalty.⁸⁷ As doubts remain on defectors' loyalty even after "taking blood upon themselves", a third mechanism was introduced in order to reinforce defectors' loyalty as they became increasingly involved in fighting against the insurgents. Out of fear of potential combat defections, Grozny deliberately disclosed the identities of defectors who were responsible for the deaths of insurgents in combat to the families of the slain insurgents. In so doing, the Kadyrov administration effectively sealed the fate of former defectors and insured that their only chance of survival would be through cooperation and dedication to the regime. Interviewees imply that the identities of *kadyrovtsy* who brought about the deaths (or fatal injury) of insurgents were often leaked by pro-Moscow Chechens to the murdered individuals' local communities. According to a former *kadyrovets* (Singular for *kadyrovtsy*):

"they certainly did this intentionally [...] On the one hand, Chechnya is a very small country where information rarely gets lost, so if something happens, you'll sooner or later find out what happened [...] Yet [on the other hand], when an insurgent was killed in combat, Kadyrov's people [*lyudi Kadyrova*] were quick to bring the information to the people about the [identity of] the perpetrator."⁸⁸

This often took on the form of hearsay, common in Chechen society, when fellow villagers disseminated information about a particular significant event in which some member of the local community or clan was involved.⁸⁹ Given the discrete nature of the COIN raids increasingly carried out in the isolated and heavily wooded mountainous areas, such information could only have been leaked deliberately. Although there is a lack of hard data on this controversial subject, eyewitnesses speculate that rumors were instigated and circulated by the local administration and possibly also by locally stationed police garrisons. Given the social climate of post-war Chechnya, where fellow villagers' very survival was often contingent on their timely sharing of information (for instance, regarding mop-ups, shellings, insurgent raids, and so on), information on the identities of *kadyrovtsy* paramilitaries responsible for the murder of their fellow villagers or relatives in the

ranks of insurgents was quick to be passed on.

It was also not uncommon for authorities to publicize this information openly, for instance by giving public credit to the particular *kadyrovtsy* fighters for the liquidation of "important bandits". This praise usually took on the form of distinctions, monetary rewards, allocation of an apartment, and so on. While interviewees are in agreement over this information being related to the liquidation of particularly highly positioned insurgents, many have referred to this as 'the kiss of death', pointing to the high likelihood of such *kadyrovtsy* being assaulted retributively. In contrast to the majority of COIN environments, including the First Chechen War, such instances are not publicized in order to ensure the security of counterinsurgents and their families. In an archaic and traditional society like Chechnya, such leakages could be seen as accidental, but in fact rather represent an intentional and strategic approach to limiting relapse among defectors.

Conclusion

This article set out to explore the counter-recidivism strategy applied by Chechnya's pro-Moscow authorities to counter defectors. Drawing on interviews with former *kadyrovtsy*, former members of Chechen police, eyewitnesses of the Second Chechen War, local journalists, human-rights workers, and scholars in Russia and Chechnya, it identified three main mechanisms employed by Grozny to ensure the loyalty of defectors, i.e. former insurgents, and prevent them from relapsing. A significant number of Chechen fighters who came to form the backbone of the local paramilitary force, *kadyrovtsy*, defected rather involuntarily, having submitted to immense pressures imposed predominantly on their relatives. The task of preventing them from rejoining the insurgency was of particular importance to the Moscow-backed local authorities.

To this end, three interconnected mechanisms were put in place in the early 2000s. First, defectors and their relatives were subjected to extrajudicial executions, which proved effective in deterring recidivism. Defectors in the ranks of *kadyrovtsy* paramilitaries could switch sides and

relocate to the country's mountainous areas—where insurgent groups had been based since the early 2000s—join an insurgent group, and survive for years. The certainty of their relatives being subjected to "forced disappearances", however, compelled defectors to remain loyal to their new cause. Second, fresh defectors were given the task of carrying out initiation violence (killings) against (alleged) insurgents, their supporters, or relatives. Such violence, which the authorities broadcast to the local communities and relatives of the murdered or seriously injured, paved the way for blood feuds in that the "offended" clans were obligated to retaliate. This in turn cemented the defectors' loyalty to the *kadyrovtsy* paramilitaries and, as a result, the incumbent. To ensure survival for themselves and their relatives alike, defectors had to rely on the counterinsurgents—a situation from which there was no escape. As long as defectors were part of the incumbent force, they were unlikely to be targeted by enemies in blood feud. In fact, the "offended", overwhelmed by the Russian-backed *kadyrovtsy's* military superiority, usually refrained from retaliation in an effort to protect their relatives from retributive violence at the hands of *kadyrovtsy*. Authorities were aware of the importance of initiation violence because it was precisely for this purpose that defectors were given firearms and first deployed in combat. Third and relatedly, authorities deliberately disclosed the identities of defectors responsible for the deaths of insurgents in combat to the families of slain insurgents. This, too, initiated the cycle of blood revenge among the insurgents and their relatives on the one hand and defectors on the other hand, which effectively impeded defectors' possible return to insurgent groups. **Taken together, these three mechanisms deployed by Chechnya's pro-Moscow authorities enormously increased the defection constraint, to use Berman's terminology, while reducing the payoff of prospective double-defection. As a result, the researched period was marked by an extremely rare incidence of recidivism in former-insurgents-turned-counterinsurgents, as testified by our interviewees. Consequently, the ability to prevent former insurgents from switching sides greatly contributed to the counterinsurgent's success during the Second Chechen War.**

For a variety of reasons, including the intentional concealing of information by authorities, we lack solid evidence as to the incidence of recidivism in defectors and counter-recidivism approaches applied elsewhere. What we do know is that defectors, be they former insurgents or not, are subjected to long prison sentences or executions. The Chechen case is unique in two fundamental respects. The first of which is that, the permeation of defectors' kinship networks was active rather than reactive as it imposed severe penalization not only on the defectors themselves, but also—and more importantly—on their relatives. The second of which is that would-be "double defectors", and especially their relatives, would be exposed to retributive violence at the hands of the other side. In fact, with defectors' kin engaged in the retaliation scheme through the mechanism of blood feud, its ability to prevent recidivism was explicit. While defectors could switch sides and survive for years without being caught and killed by the incumbent, the fact that their relatives would certainly be targeted by the authorities was a decisive factor in deterring recidivism among defectors.

The Chechen case is rather case-specific. This is conditioned by the semi-archaic organization of Chechen society (clans and extended families) and the prevalence of the principle of collective responsibility, enshrined in the local tradition, that implies that one's family and clan are to be held accountable for the misdeeds of their individual members (retaliation and blood revenge). In other cases void of these properties, retributive violence against the kin of prospective double-defectors may not be deployed. Instead, depending on various contextual circumstances, other mechanisms are likely to be deployed to deter defection and double-defection. On the other hand, as available sources indicate, executions of defectors or double-defectors appear to be standard practice to deter side-switching.

Two major and intertwined factors contributed to the overall effectiveness of the discussed counter-defection mechanisms in Chechnya: community structure and the relative strength of counterinsurgents. The emergence of *kadyrovtsy* and their attacks on insurgents and their relatives

created a civil war-like situation in Chechnya that led to the polarization of the local clan-based society. Against the backdrop of prospective retaliation at the hands of the insurgents and their relatives, *kadyrovtsy's* families started providing support to their kin in the ranks of pro-Moscow paramilitaries. In an attempt to avoid severe reprisals at the hand of Russian military-backed *kadyrovtsy*, many locals chose to refrain from aiding insurgents. To use Berman's concept, the payoff of a prospective double-defection would be highly questionable due to the absent or minimal popular support and the relative weakness of insurgent groups. In other words, a would-be double-defector would have nowhere to hide and no networks to use for him and his relatives to avoid punishment. Under these circumstances, the defection constraint was extremely high.

While this empirical case study does not lay explicit claim to generalizability, it does have implications for future research. Firstly, albeit first-hand data is in short supply on double-defection and double-defectors, this article suggests that counterinsurgents seriously consider the problem of double-defections and deliberately implement mechanisms to prevent recidivism among defected ex-insurgents. Secondly and relatedly, this study challenges the notion of defectors as a perfectly loyal force. While some side-switch out of conviction or to settle scores with former fellow insurgents, there appears to be a segment of insurgents that defect under coercion. Some of the latter category of defectors may actually consider repeated side-switching. This explains the draconian counter-defection mechanisms put in place by the incumbent in Chechnya. Thirdly, understanding these counter-defection mechanisms enables researchers to address the issue of civilian victimization from a novel and under-researched perspective. As we demonstrated in this article, some civilians become entangled in score-settling with defectors as they are held captive for the prospective betrayal of their relatives. In addition, in spite of the scarcity of data on double-defection, we point to the need to carry out further research on this important phenomenon. For example, in conflicts involving numerous rebel groups – such as the Syrian civil war - the issue of double-defections is equally important for both the insurgents and the incumbent. In multi-actor

conflicts, all sides are likely to face the challenge of repeated side-switching. Further empirical research is needed to allow for theorization on the patterns of double-defection and the effectivity of various counter-defection mechanisms aimed against prospective side-switchers in the ranks of those who defected once.

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In this study, defection is defined as side-switching, both physically and in terms of collaboration.

2 “Double defection” occurs when insurgent defectors in the ranks of counterinsurgent forces re-join their former insurgent comrades.

3 According to Oppenheim et al’s definition, side-switching is the process of “leaving an armed group to fight for another group representing a different ideological or ethnic constituency.” See Ben, Oppenheim, Abbey Steele, Juan F. Vargas, and Michael Weintraub. "True Believers, Deserters, and Traitors. Who Leaves Insurgent Groups and Why." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 5 (2015): 795.

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- ²³ Interview with Enzo Nussio (26 February 2015).
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Although general statistics is lacking, recidivism among defectors appears to be considerably less common than recidivism among demobilized or disengaged militants, with the rate of recidivism among the latter around 40 per cent.
- ²⁶ Another reason may be the difficulty of obtaining access to insurgents-turned-counterinsurgents who again side-switched.
- ²⁷ For an excellent study on side-switching or demobilization see, for instance, Oppenheim et al., (see note 4 above).
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- ²⁹ Emil Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, *The Individual Disengagement of Avengers, Nationalists, and Jihadists: Why Ex-Militants Choose to Abandon Violence in the North Caucasus* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
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- ⁴⁰ Clayton and Thomson, (see note 37 above).
- ⁴¹ Jacek Cichocki, *Konflikt rosyjsko-czeczenski, dzieje konfliktu, woyna rosyjskoczeczenska 1994-1996 i obecna sytuacja w Republice Czeczenskiej-Iczkerii*, (The Russian-Chechen Conflict, Its History, the Russian-Chechen War of 1994-1996 and the Overall Situation in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya) (Warsaw: OSW, 1997), 11-12.
- ⁴² For a comprehensive analysis of Russian and Chechen tactics, see, for instance, Olga Olikier, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994-2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2001).
- ⁴³ Emil Souleimanov, "Chechnya, Wahhabism, and the Invasion of Dagestan," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no.4 (2005): 68-100.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ For a comprehensive account of human rights violations perpetrated by Russian and pro-Moscow Chechen authorities, see, for instance, Emma Gilligan, *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
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- ⁴⁷ Quoted in Mark Kramer, "The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia's War in Chechnya," *International Security* 29 (Winter 2004/2005), 9.
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- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 19 September 2001.
- ⁵⁷ Interviews with former insurgents in the ranks of *kadyrovtsy*.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid; see also Tomáš Šmíd and Miroslav Mareš, "'Kadyrovtsy': Russia's Counterinsurgency Strategy and the Wars of Paramilitary Clans," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (2015): 650-677. James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 124-125.
- ⁵⁹ Timur Aliyev, "Chechentsy opasayutsya moskovskikh planov sozdaniya dlya nikh svoey militsii [Chechens Fear Moscow's Plans for Creating Their own Militia for them]." *IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service*, (November 28th 2002).
- ⁶⁰ Souleimanov, "An Ethnography of Counterinsurgency: *Kadyrovtsy* and Russia's Policy of Chechenization" (see note 32 above).
- ⁶¹ John O'Loughlin, Edward Holland and Frank Witmer, "The Changing Geography of Violence in Russia's North Caucasus, 1999-2011: Regional Trends and Local Dynamics in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 52, no.5 (September 2011): 596-630.
- ⁶² Mark Kramer, "Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency and Terrorism in the North Caucasus: The Military Dimension of the Russian-Chechen Conflict," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 2 (2005): 209-290; Monica Duffy Toft and Yuri M. Zhukov, "Denial and Punishment in the North Caucasus: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Coercive Counterinsurgency," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 6 (2012): 785-800.
- ⁶³ Lyall, (see note 5 above); Souleimanov and Aliyev, "Asymmetry of Values, Indigenous Forces." (see note 46 above).
- ⁶⁴ Eugene Miakinkov, "The Agency of Force in Asymmetrical Warfare and Counterinsurgency: The Case of Chechnya," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34, no. 5 (2011): 647-680; Robert W. Schaefer, 2011. *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2011); Younkyoo Kim and Stephen Blank "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Russia: Contending Paradigms and Current Perspectives," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 11 (2013): 917-932.
- ⁶⁵ John Russell, "Ramzan Kadyrov: The Indigenous Key to Success in Putin's Chechenisation Strategy?" *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 4 (2008): 659-687.
- ⁶⁶ See Souleimanov and Aliyev, "Evaluating the Efficacy of Indigenous Forces." (see note 52 above).
- ⁶⁷ Šmíd and Mareš, (see note 58 above). An initial attempt to evaluate the loyalty of *kadyrovtsy* paramilitaries was made in Emil Souleimanov, "Russian Chechnya Policy: "Chechenization" Turning into "Kadyrovization"?" *The Central Asia and Caucasus Analyst* 9, no. 11 (May 2006): 3-5.
- ⁶⁸ Emil Souleimanov, *An Endless War. The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), 202-210.
- ⁶⁹ In Chechnya, an individual is rarely perceived independently of his or her family or clan background. His or her actions always impact the clan, its honour, and its social status inside the Chechen society.
- ⁷⁰ Interviews with former *kadyrovtsy*.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Ramzan Kadyrov is the son of Akhmat Kadyrov and, after his father's assassination in May 2004, has been the de facto (until 2007) and de jure (since 2007) leader of Chechnya's pro-Moscow government.
- ⁷³ Anton Venyaminov, "Zachistki v Chechne ne prekrashchayutsya [Clean-up in Chechnya Does not Stop]." *Russkiy fokus*, (May 17, 2004).
- ⁷⁴ What is widely referred to as the Kadyrov clan is based around the *nekye* called Onzhbi, a subdivision of the Benoy teyp, the largest of Chechen teips with around 80,000 members.
- ⁷⁵ "'Dobrovolnaya sdacha' Magomeda Khambiyeva," Memorial, (March 10, 2004).. Available at: www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2004/03/m13451.htm. (Last accessed November 11, 2013)
- ⁷⁶ "'Vosem' blizkikh rodstvennikov Maskhadova pokhishcheny v Chechne lyudmi Kadyrova," *Newru.com*, January 13, 2005. Available at: <http://www.newsru.com/russia/13jan2005/mashadov.html>. (Last accessed January 23, 2014).
- ⁷⁷ "'Dobrovolnaya sdacha' Magomeda Khambiyeva," Memorial, (March 10, 2004). Available at: www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2004/03/m13451.htm (Last accessed November 11, 2014.)
- ⁷⁸ Interviews with eyewitnesses of the Second Chechen War. See also Souleimanov and Aliyev, "Evaluating the Efficacy of Indigenous Forces in Counterinsurgency."
- ⁷⁹ Interview with Mairbek Vatchagayev (October 18, 2013).
- ⁸⁰ Interviews with former *kadyrovtsy*.
- ⁸¹ From a different angle, the survival of the Kadyrov clan-centred pro-Moscow Chechen authorities became

connected with the success of Russia's counterinsurgency, which cemented the loyalty of the Kadyrov clan to Moscow even further.

⁸² For an analysis of how the custom of blood revenge impacted the political violence in Chechnya, see Emil Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, "Blood revenge and Violent Mobilization. Evidence from the Chechen Wars," *International Security* 40, no. 2 (2015): 158-180.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Interviews with former *kadyrovtsy*.

⁸⁵ Interview with "Aslan", a former *kadyrovets*.

⁸⁶ Interviews with former *kadyrovtsy*.

⁸⁷ During the initial stages, paramilitary units were usually designed in a way that ensured the numerical dominance of experienced fighters over the new recruits.

⁸⁸ Interview with "Rizvan", a former *kadyrovets*.

⁸⁹ This phenomenon is jokingly referred to as "village telephone" in Chechnya and some other areas of the North Caucasus.