

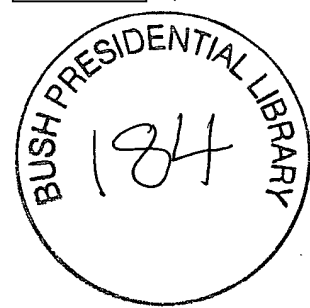
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Directorate of Intelligence
2 April 1992



The Punished Peoples: A Primer on Russia's North Caucasus [Redacted]

Summary

Historical enmities, interethnic rivalries, and territorial disputes have combined to make the North Caucasus currently the most volatile area in Russia. The collapse of central control and the breakup of the union have induced the ethnic minorities of these four autonomous republics and one autonomous oblast to step up demands for redress of their territorial claims and compensation for past repression. Russia is now faced with the twin challenges of containing growing inter-ethnic violence and an increasing threat to the unity of the Federation. [Redacted]

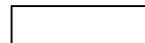
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This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] with a contribution by [Redacted] Office of Slavic and Eurasian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, [Redacted]
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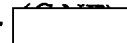


Scope Note: This paper provides background information on the history, ethnography, and politics of Russia's North Caucasus region. It is one of a number of papers now underway in the Office of Slavic and Eurasian Affairs on the different regions of Russia.



The Current Crisis

With the rise of ethnic nationalism and the revival of Islam in the former Soviet Union, the ethnic minorities of the Caucasus region have begun to demand redress of their territorial claims and compensation for their repression. The Russian government is confronted with the dual problems of inter-ethnic rivalries and challenges to Russian authority. Yel'tsin has taken a largely hands off approach in hopes that economic and political realities, continued diplomacy, and progress on a Federation treaty between the Russian government and the autonomous republics will keep regional separatism under control. He remains under heavy fire from nationalist opponents, however, including Vice-President Rutskoy, who charge the government with contributing to the disintegration of Russia.



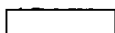
The Foundations of Unrest

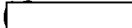
The current unstable situation in Russia's North Caucasus region has its roots in a complex ethnic mix exacerbated by Tsarist Russian imperialism and Soviet nationalities policies. The region encompasses four autonomous republics and one autonomous oblast containing nearly 5 million people, divided into over a dozen distinct ethnic groups. The mountainous, heavily Islamic region was never successfully Russified prior to the Soviet era, and the indigenous ethnic minorities continued to rebel following the 1917 revolution. In an attempt to divide non-Russian ethnic groups and extend central control in the 1920s, Stalin deliberately merged the North Caucasus's nationalities into new administrative regions with dissimilar ethnic minorities. Between 1943 and 1944, Stalin deported the entire Chechen, Ingush, Balkar, and Karachay peoples--some 700,000 people--to Central Asia and Siberia after labeling them Nazi collaborators. Official data now being released shows that in the first five years following deportation at least 25 percent or approximately 145,000 people perished due to starvation, exposure, and harsh treatment. It was not until the mid 1950's that these ethnic minorities were rehabilitated and allowed to return to the area. During their exile ethnic Russians and other local ethnic groups were relocated to the area; on the exiles' return, many found themselves deprived of traditional homelands. All of the region's republics, except Dagestan, now have a substantial ethnic Russian presence of up to one-third of the


Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region

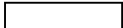




population. Subsequent Soviet regimes continued to suppress ethnic identities and claims of minority rights. 

Today, the people of the North Caucasus continue to resist Russian domination and assimilation. They are buttressed by a strong clan system, still pervasive in North Caucasus society, which shapes regional politics. Recently, the revival of Islam has led to greater political influence of local religious leaders and the use of Islam by nationalists to rally support. For example, Chechen President Dudayev symbolized his break from Russia by taking his oath of office on the Koran, and local Muslim leaders have played an active role in encouraging mediation of local inter-ethnic unrest. Islamic influence is strongest in conservative Dagestan. 

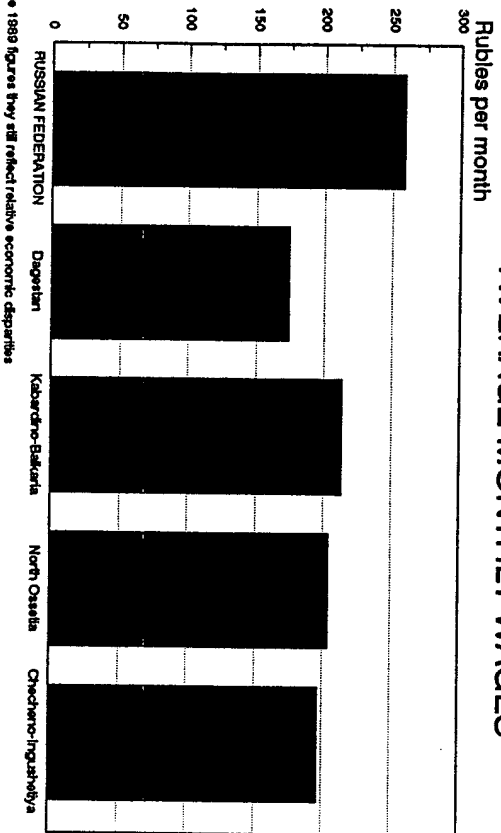
The North Caucasus is probably Russia's most economically depressed and least developed region. As a whole, the region's per capita income is among the lowest in Russia and the standard of living in many of the ethnic autonomous regions is significantly lower than neighboring Russian regions such as Rostov oblast and Stavropol kray. The two autonomous republics with the greatest amount of internal social and political unrest, Checheno-Ingushetiya and Dagestan, rank the lowest on key indicators such as infant mortality and wages. The same two autonomous republics have the lowest levels of urbanization and are the least modernized of the North Caucasus republics. 

Last spring, the Russian legislature responded to pressure by approving the Law on Repressed Peoples which would provide material compensation to deported peoples of Russia and a return of historic lands. In February, Yel'tsin appointed a high-level commission headed by Russian legislator Sergei Shakhrai to examine these claims. So far, however, the Russian government has not acted on the provisions of the law--in part because of the nearly irresolvable nature of many territorial claims. Several Caucasus ethnic groups--including the Ingush and the Karachay--have pledged to take unilateral action if Russia continues to delay implementation. Minority nationalists continue to raise the stakes by increasing their demands and building up military capabilities. Widespread resentment of outside domination, fueled by historic claims and Russia's attempt to intervene militarily against Checheno-Ingushetiya last fall, has led to attempts to build regional coalitions, but these efforts have not developed beyond the talking stage and--barring the emergence of a positive force for unity--the differences between the participants make a strong future association unlikely. 

KEY SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS

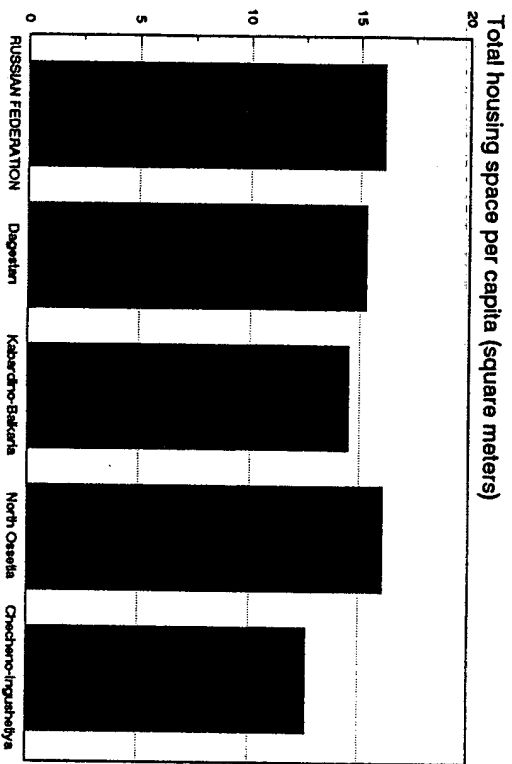
(Based on 1989 Census Figures)

AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGES

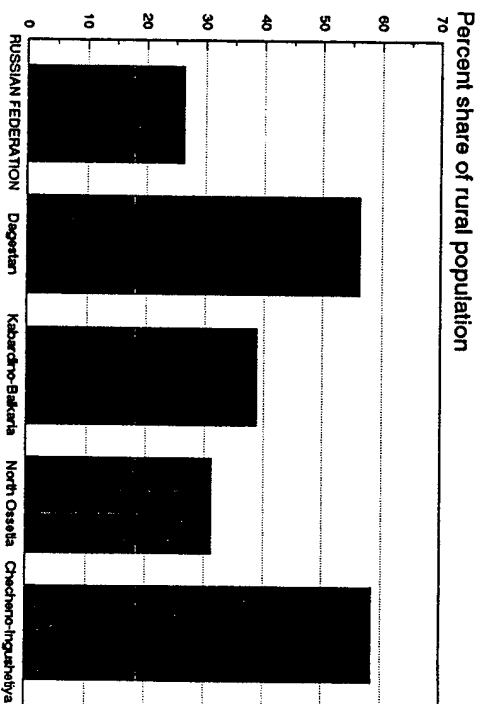


* Although these are 1989 figures they still reflect relative economic disparities

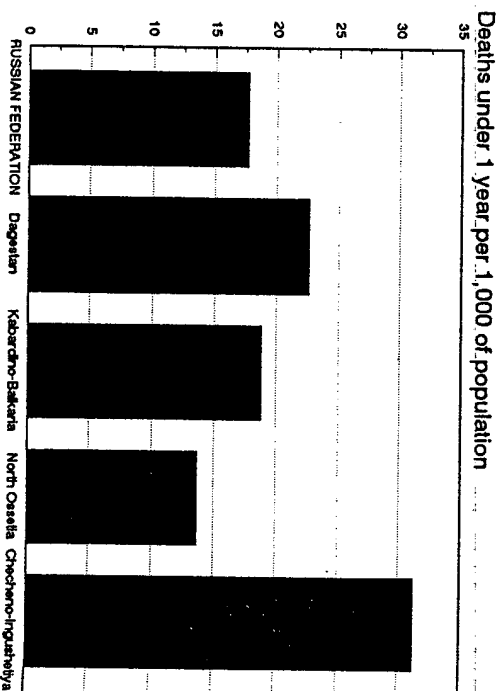
HOUSING



RURAL POPULATION



INFANT MORTALITY






The North Caucasus in Profile

Dagestan


Population = 1.8 million

Avars = 28%	Lezgins = 11%
Chechens = 3%	Kumyks = 12%
Dargins = 16%	Russians = 9%
Laks = 5%	Others = 16%

Background

Dagestan was briefly independent after the breakup of the Russian Empire, but Soviet rule was quickly imposed. A major revolt against Soviet rule broke out from August 1920 until it was finally put down in May 1921. In recent years, an Islamic resurgence has been on the rise in Dagestan where, last June, the Dagestani government declared a state of emergency in the capital after thousands rioted and stormed the Council of Ministers building protesting the high cost of making the pilgrimage to Mecca. The republic also is currently facing a serious battle against organized crime. From 1991 to 1992, nearly 20 assassination attempts have been made against Dagestani political leaders including Prime Minister Abdurazak Mirzabekov. These attacks were likely coordinated by the Dagestani crime syndicate. 


Government


The Dagestani government is the most traditionalist in the North Caucasus and is characterized by intense ethnic lobbying for governmental positions and high levels of corruption. The government is led by an executive committee elected by the Dagestani Supreme Soviet. The number of significant ethnic groups and resentment at the political dominance of the Avar minority have made common action either to reform the government or to press for sovereignty difficult. After prolonged debate, the Dagestani parliament finally passed a sovereignty declaration in May 1991. This delay was caused by widespread concern among the republic's diverse ethnic groups over ensuring minority rights. 

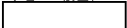
Ethnic and Territorial Issues

The Turkic *Kumyks* have organized a popular front movement, *Tenglik*, and recently staged rallies demanding a sovereign national territory. In October 1991, Kumyk activists blocked railways and roads, demanding the



resignation of the parliament, new elections, and an end to the practice of appointing rather than electing republican leaders. 

The *Lezgins*--a Caucasian group located in Southern Dagestan and Northern Azerbaijan--are demanding the creation of an autonomous Lezgin national homeland which would include territory in both republics. 

Ethnic Chechens--*Chechen-Akins*--who settled just inside the Dagestani border during the repatriation period in the late 1950s continue to be involved in sporadic clashes with *Laks* and *Avars* living in the region despite numerous negotiation attempts. Beginning in 1944 some Laks were relocated from north-central Dagestan and resettled along the Chechen-Ingush border on lands vacated by deported Chechens. In April 1991, Yel'tsin met with Chechen representatives and proposed a Russian parliamentary study of the problem. After continued fighting, Supreme Soviet Chairman Khasbulatov--an ethnic Chechen--traveled to the region in September 1991 and attempted to negotiate a settlement but failed to resolve the issue. 

Checheno-Ingushetiya

Population = 1.3 million

Chechens = 58% Russians = 23% *


Ingush = 13% Others = 6%

* The heavy outflow of Russians from the republic in response to the Chechen nationalist takeover has likely lowered this figure substantially.


Background


The Chechens and the Ingush are of almost identical ethnicity with the distinction between the two dating only from the 18th century Caucasian wars. More than the other Mountain peoples, they resisted both Tsarist Russian and Soviet rule. In 1922, separate Chechen and Ingush autonomous oblasts were created, and in 1934 these were merged to become the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic. In 1944, Chechen and Ingush nationals--then numbering half a million--were both accused of collaboration with the Nazis by Stalin and taken in a surprise deportation to northern Kazakhstan. Those in remote villages were reportedly forced into buildings which were then set on fire. The Chechen-Ingush ASSR was subsequently dissolved in 1946. Under Khrushchev, the Chechens were

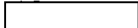


allowed to return to the North Caucasus in 1957. While prior to their deportation they lived in the mountainous region of Chechenya, they were resettled in the foothills and the plains (it was a common practice by the Soviet government to locate ethnic groups away from mountainous regions from which they could mount an armed resistance). Following repatriation, tensions appeared between Chechens, Ingush and other ethnic groups who had been resettled to the region during the deportation period. The most acute conflict is over historic Ingush territory that was ceded to neighboring North Ossetia--including the Prigorodnyi rayon and part of the North Ossetian capital, Vladikavkaz. 

Government

The Chechen government is headed by President Djokhar Dudayev, a former Soviet Air Force General and a member of the Chechen National Congress Movement, who is committed to obtaining full Chechen independence. Dudayev and the new Chechen parliament were popularly elected in October 1991, in proceedings declared illegal by the Russian legislature. These elections followed the resignation--under pressure of mass rallies organized by the Chechen National Congress Movement--of the previous Chechen-Ingush government for supporting the August coup. Dudayev has since ruled the self-proclaimed Chechen republic primarily by executive decree. 

The Chechen parliament declared independence from Russia in the fall of 1991 following the election of president Dudayev. The Chechen government has so far refused to negotiate with the Russian government until its independence is recognized. Since November, the Chechens have been building what appears to be a well-armed republican military and have claimed for themselves all CIS and Russian military equipment stationed in the region and demanded all troops swear loyalty to Dudayev. CIS troops were withdrawn from the region in February 1992. 

The Ingush have no officially recognized governing body apart from the Chechen dominated Supreme Soviet. Their interests are represented by two unofficial bodies--the Ingush Peoples Council and the Ingush Council of Elders. The Ingush voted overwhelmingly in a January referendum to remain part of the Russian Federation as a sovereign republic--to include the disputed territory in North Ossetia. 

Ethnic and Territorial Issues

Ethnic Russians have been leaving the area at a high rate since last fall's declaration of independence due to their fear of inter-ethnic violence.

Russian press reports claim as many as 50,000 refugees have left Checheno-Ingushetiya for neighboring Russian provinces.

In January, the Chechen parliament laid claim to majority Ingush areas by unilaterally voting to extend Chechen territory to the republic's pre-1934 borders--prior to its merging with the Ingush nation--and declaring presidential rule in affected regions. The earlier Ingush decision to remain part of Russia probably contributed to the Chechen claims. This action--nominally disavowed by Dudayev--affects areas heavily populated by Ingush and Cossacks, and if enforced, would wipe most of the traditional Ingush land off the map.

North Ossetia

Population = 632,000

Ossetians = 53%

Russians = 30%

Others = 17%

Background

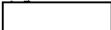
The Ossetians are descendants of the Iranian Alans who were forced into the mountains by Mongol invaders in the 13th century. The Ossetians came under Russian rule in the mid 18th century. In 1936 North Ossetia was upgraded from an autonomous oblast to an autonomous republic and is today Russia's geographically smallest autonomous republic. It has few internal ethnic problems due to the homogeneity of its population and the relatively good relations between Ossetians and Russians. In the summer of 1991, growing Ossetian nationalism spurred the adoption of the traditional name of its capital, Vladikavkaz.

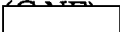
Government

North Ossetia is one of the few Russian autonomous republics that has not yet established a separate post of president, and continues to be governed by an executive committee elected by its Supreme Soviet. North Ossetia's relatively high standard of living, its position as an isolated Christian region surrounded by Muslims, and its need for Russian support against Ingush territorial claims have blunted sentiment for independence.



Ethnic and Territorial Issues

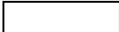
The North Ossetians are becoming increasingly concerned about their territorial dispute with the neighboring Ingush over the eastern region of the republic, including part of the North Ossetian capital, Vladikavkaz. In response to the fear of a forcible takeover of the land by the Ingush, North Ossetia has begun the registration and training of a national guard. 


The region has been under extreme pressure since December 1990 owing to the heavy influx of tens of thousands of Ossetian refugees from the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict. The legislature has called on Russia to consider uniting it with neighboring South Ossetia, which is now part of Georgia. 

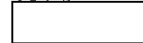
Kabardino-Balkaria

Population = 753,000	
Kabards = 48%	Russians = 32%
Balkars = 9%	Others = 11 %


Background

The Balkars were one of the most resistant ethnic groups to both Tsarist rule and the Soviet occupation. In 1921 they were merged with the ethnically dissimilar Kabard population into the Kabardino-Balkar autonomous oblast, later made an autonomous republic. During World War II, the Kabardino-Balkar ASSR was reduced to the status of autonomous oblast and cut in size. The Balkars, then 40 percent of the population, were deported from the mountainous region of the North Caucasus to Central Asia in 1944. About 3,500 of the over 40,000 who were deported died in transit. The Balkars were repatriated in 1958 to the foothills of a reconstituted Kabardino-Balkar ASSR. The Kabards, who were not deported, have been charged by some Balkars with conspiring in the Balkar deportation so as not to have to share territory with them. 

In November 1991, the first Congress of the Balkar people voted to establish a separate Balkar republic within Russia. This decision was supported by a vote of 90 percent of the Balkar population in a January 1992 referendum. In December 1991, the Kabard Peoples' Congress declared that the Balkar decision was ill-conceived and would lead to worsening ethnic tensions. However, they subsequently voted to restore Kabard statehood and return to its pre-1922 borders, before the merger with the Balkars. 



Government

The parliament of Kabardino-Balkaria adopted a declaration of sovereignty in January 1991 following heated debate over drafts calling for complete independence from Russia and restoration of pre-1944 Balkar borders. The president of the Kabardino-Balkaria republic--elected by popular vote on 6 January--is the former Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. The elections were partially blocked in Balkar populated areas. In response to the rise in separatist sentiments in the region, in November Yel'tsin appointed a presidential representative to the area, Aziratali Akhmetov. Appointment of presidential representatives to autonomous republics was not provided for in the legislation creating these positions. The only other instance of this was the appointment of a Chechen-Ingush representative prior to President Dudayev's election. The Kabardino-Balkar government has begun the formation of a republic army. 

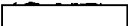
**Karachay-Cherkess
Autonomous Oblast**

Population = 415,000

Karachay = 31% Russians = 42%


Cherkess = 7% Others = 20%

Background

The Karachay's ancestors settled in the region five centuries ago. Their territory came under Russian rule in 1828; the Karachay immediately began a revolt that reached its peak in the 1870s. In 1917, the Karachay enjoyed a brief period of independence. Although Soviet rule was imposed by 1920, the Karachay resistance continued and 3,000 Karachay and Balkars were reportedly shot as a result of an uprising as late as 1929. The Karachay autonomous region was established in 1922 as part of Stavropol Kray. The Karachay were deported from the southern region of the North Caucasus in 1944 to Central Asia. Before their deportation the Karachay numbered over 81,000, but during their fifteen years in exile they experienced a 30 percent net loss in population. In 1956 the Karachay were rehabilitated by decree, but instead of having their autonomous homeland restored, were merged with the Cherkess--who were not deported--into an autonomous oblast and resettled to the foothills in 1958. (The majority of the Cherkess population emigrated to Turkey following an unsuccessful rebellion against Russian rule in the 1860s. 



Government

The Karachay-Cherkess autonomous oblast is under the political authority of Stavropol kray and does not have the developed governmental structure of an autonomous republic. It is one of four autonomous oblasts that are being upgraded to the level of autonomous republic by the Russian government, giving them increased rights including the right to adopt their own constitution. 

Ethnic and Territorial Issues

Both the Karachay and Cherkess in the past six months have stepped up demands for the restoration of individual republics. Ethnic Karachay have been participating in ongoing rallies since November 1991 calling for the return of their republic, and in December 1991, a Karachay peoples congress voted unanimously to support the recreation of a separate national territory. A Cherkess congress proclaimed the creation of a separate republic of Cherkessiya in October 1991. 