



CHECHNYA PEACE FORUM

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Clarity in Chechen resistance

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Russia's extreme atrocities against the Chechen people and oppression over the past fifteen years have, as might have been expected, radicalized parts of the Chechen resistance; religiously, militarily and politically. It is understandable that a people totally haunted and deprived of dignity and human rights seek to extremes for their own defence, especially so, when all reasonable and diplomatic endeavours fail to mobilize the international community to come to their rescue.

However, fundamentalism, extremism and terrorism are not vehicles to resolving a crisis and building a new successful state structure. The crisis in Chechnya does not have a military solution, only a political one, which must be rooted in the Chechen traditions of culture and religion. Hence, responses of the same character as deployed by the occupying perpetrators will not bring about a solution, but rather prolong the conflict – which may well be precisely what the aggressors want to achieve!

Those who have been deeply concerned about the Russian human rights abuses in Chechnya and the world's shameful silence about it, have also been increasingly worried about the radicalization of the Chechen military resistance. Since the murder of the last legally elected president in Chechnya, Aslan Maskadov in 2005, there has been a growing rift in principle between his successors and their international envoy, Akhmed Zakaev, a resident with political asylum in UK.

The legal Chechen Constitution was adopted in peace time in March 1992. Its article 1 reads as follows:

"The Chechen Republic is a Sovereign democratic legal state created as a result of self determination of the Chechen people. It has the supreme right concerning the territory and its national riches; independently determines

external and internal policy, adopts the Constitution and laws governing its territory. The state Sovereignty of the Chechen Republic is indivisible.”

The rest of the Constitution is a rather modern democratic model, defining clearly full equal rights and responsibilities and the protection of individual integrity. It is the duty of the president and Government to uphold the values and virtues of the Constitution. Any change or amendments of principle character – such as the state form – can only be decided by the people in referendum, which again can only take place in normal peace time conditions.

Aslan Maskadov’s successor Abdul-Khalim Sadullaev, who was himself murdered in 2006, made statements to the effect he would change Chechnya from a “democratic” to an “Islamic” state. This rather astounding proposition was largely ignored, because it was completely illegal and without consequence. However, friends of Chechnya were very concerned when he also chose the infamous self-proclaimed terrorist Shamil Basaev to be his vice prime minister. It only got worse when Sadullaev was murdered in June last year and was succeeded by Dokku Umarov, who quickly promoted Basaev to vice president – next in line to the highest office in the land.

The presidency had now fundamentalized, and they acted and expressed their line of vision and policy in sharp contrast to the core values of the Constitution in their care. For Akhmed Zakaev, the Chechen resistance Foreign Minister, this became a huge challenge. Zakaev is a liberal, secular democrat and stands firmly on the defined values of the Chechen 1992 Constitution. When asked how he, with his principles, could continue to serve a presidency adopting opposite and grossly conflicting views on Chechnya’s state form, he would explain:

“Yes, it is a great dilemma for me, and in no way do I accept or side with their statements. But you must remember there is a war going on and there has not been a legal election by the Chechen people for ten years. What we have now is a leadership composed by circumstances of war and murders. It is a coalition Government of widely differing opinions. I represent a moderate, democratic line, and wish to further the role of religion and culture in our true Chechen traditions. I firmly believe we can only achieve a realistic and long term peace by mediation and diplomacy. If I should take the consequences of our differences and resign, I would leave the stage only to the extremists. They would take Chechnya in the wrong direction and I would lose all power of influence in a crucial time for our republic. That is precisely what the Russians would want me to do; and that is precisely what I will not do – unless I can be part of a better solution for our people.”

On 6th October president Dokku Umarov published some rather weird statements. Among them were the renaming of districts in Grozny after Sadullaev and Basaev. Basaev, the dead terrorist was also promoted to

"Generalissimo" post mortem. Arbi Baraev, a notorious bandit, also deceased, was given the title "Brigadier General Emir."

On 23rd October Akhmed Zakaev published an article in Chechenpress highlighting that it had come to his knowledge that president Dokka Umarov had recorded a video announcement in which he declared the whole of North Caucasus "An Islamic Emirate." This, of course, would in actual fact mean the abolition of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria – a cause Chechens have lived and died for throughout the last 400 years.

When sworn in as president, according to article 74 of the Constitution, Dokku Umarov assumed the following duty:

"I solemnly swear to be loyal to the people of the Chechen Republic, to strengthen and defend its sovereignty, to adhere to the Constitution and its laws, to guarantee the rights and freedoms of its citizens, to carry out in good faith the incumbent honourable duties of the President of the Chechen Republic."

Dokku Umarov had been entrusted with the Chechen Republic, its people and their Constitution. By declaring a "North Caucasian Islamic Emirate" he had had in spirit and in deed abolished and abandoned them all.

Dokku Umarov's video was published on Radio Liberty 30th October. It proved in full that Zakaev's allegations were correct. Dokku Umarov also declared himself "Emir" of Caucasus (no borders defined), and the only lawful authority to the mujahedins who had sworn loyalty to him as leader of "Jihad." He naturally declared holy war on the Russian "infidels" – but went on to declare the same on all other nations he considered to be "Allah's enemies", including USA, England and Israel – not exactly the best way to get new friends!

It is clear Dokku Umarov has committed high treason and crime against the Chechen state. By doing so he had in fact relinquished his post as president. There are a number of articles in the Chechen Constitution that dictate this consequence – namely article 74: "The President can be relieved of the post in case of perpetration of crime." The decision here is taken by the Parliament with a two third majority.

The relevant Parliament is of course the remaining members from the last free and fair election in Chechnya which took place in January 1997. Its chairman, Zhalauddin Saralyapov, in his decree 1B of 6th November concluded that the president had resigned (the same applied to his deputy and other staff, because they were appointed by him, not elected by the Parliament). A resistance movement must have a political base, and Saralyapov logically transferred the political authority from the no longer existing presidency to the remaining members of the 1997 Parliament. He conferred with the 21 other members, and with 20 votes for, and 1

abstention, Akhmed Zakaev was appointed Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers. Zakaev has later provided the Parliament with a structure and further cabinet appointments that have been approved.

All of this has been a straight forward, logical and legal procedure in the given circumstances.

Zakaev went on to say that this was the result of a strong manipulated campaign by two extreme islamist half brothers, Isa Umarov and Movladi Udugov. He has later produced evidence of this particular plan in Chechenpress 7th November with copy of a document signed by Movladi Udugov on 4th January 2007. It is interesting to note that the strong influence that Movladi Udugov and Isa Umarov have over Dokku Umarov is common knowledge in the Chechen society.

The plan for a "Caucasian Emirate" suits only one side here: Russia. From their perspective it is ingenious. The destruction of Chechnya, which they never managed to carry out themselves, would now take place under the Chechen resistance leadership. Chechen identity and culture would perish as the so-called Chechen "president" continues to make statements with laced sulphuric religious extremism and declare war on the world.

And how would the world respond? It would turn away of course. Nobody would come to the rescue of fanatics. The stigma would be total and Chechnya would sink into darkness and be lost. Russia would be able to sit back and watch it all, probably getting some international understanding and sympathy - at last, for their "war on international terror." In the darkness they would be able to continue their oppression unnoticed by the world conscience.

For the Russians this plan would also have an interesting side effect. Kosovo may very soon declare independence. It is uncertain how EU and USA will react, it will amongst other things be linked to Serb intention for Republika Srpska in Bosnia. There will certainly be a call for precedent for Abkhasia and South Ossetia in Georgia with these two republics likely to declare annexation to Russia proper.

Symmetrically, for Chechnya this should normally spark the process of referendum, self determination and subsequent declaration of independence. But if Chechnya has simply dissolved itself into some extreme and undefined Caucasian Emirate - there simply would not be any Chechen republic left to exit Russia!

Why would the two half brothers push a plan that so obviously would destroy the Chechen republic - and only serve evil Russian interests? Isa Umarov and Movladi Udugov's relations to the Russians have long been an issue for speculation. I notice that they remain absolutely silent about the allegations of their complicity to a plan to destroy Chechnya.

I also notice with some interest that the person who appears as their spokesperson is Mr. Michael Storsjø, a Finnish citizen who is secretary of the Finnish-Russian Civic Forum. He also operates Movladi Udugov's website Kavkazcenter. This website has been banned a few times for its extremist views but is now harboured by Storsjø for Udugov in Helsinki. Mr. Storsjø with great energy defended the emirate plan on the Kavkazcenter website and in other media. He also tried to ridicule the efforts to avoid Chechnya's destruction through the plan. It is a little unusual to see a Finn advocate so hard the introduction an extreme Islamic emirate anywhere in the world, and I conclude he by so doing also runs the errand of Russian interests.

The remaining legal Parliament of Chechnya rose to the challenge in a moment of crisis. It has performed a first step of establishing a new identity and integrity for Chechen leadership that hopefully will meet with the world's recognition and sympathy and hopefully through mediation and diplomacy will result in a fair and sustainable peace for the tormented Chechen people.

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